Towards a Pedagogy of Peace
Reflections on Faith, Violence & Hope [*]

By
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> *"No lament for the age is needed, no nostalgic moan about deterioration, but a critical analysis of what has engendered it…A diagnosis of the situation must precede any statement of new aims and proposed means."*
> Karl Mannheim

Introduction

To understand the predicaments of our time, we need to understand the historical and social dynamics that shape our contemporary lives. Today, one of the major issues confronting us is on the problem of violence and its relation to religious faiths and of the religious communities. Often than not, religion has been portrayed as one of the sources, if not the main cause, for violence. Perhaps, there are many examples in history that lend support to this perception. The Crusades, which occurred between 1096 CE to 1270 CE, were primarily motivated by religious rivalry between the Muslim world and Christendom. In Muslim history, the early success of Islam was marred by conflicts and battles which eventually split the Muslims into several contending parties and sects. In the contemporary world, we witnessed some of the bloodiest feuds between Muslims and Hindus in Ayodhya, Buddhists and Hindus in Sri Lanka and Christians and Muslims in Nigeria, all of which were apparently fuelled or motivated by religious sentiments, in part or otherwise. The contemporary climate of fear fueled by terrorism, were again generated and couched in the name of religion. Terms like "Islamic terrorism" and "jihadism" leaves little room for a non-perceptive public to imagine factors, other than religion, as motives that gave rise to present acts of violence.

This essay, therefore, is an attempt to discuss the problem of religion and its relation to violence.[1] Before any attempts can be made to offer solutions or point directions to overcome this situation and/or perception, it is necessary to first dissect and diagnose the issues at hand. It is important to note that both, violence and religion do not appear within a trans-historical setting. Religion and violence are grounded in concrete reality. We came to know both through their manifestations in society. Primarily, religion and violence are observable, and thus intelligible, only within a concrete historical and social dimension.

Re-Imagining Violence in Religious Discourses

One of the most important aspects in any analysis on violence is to recognize the complexities that surround the term. There are many dimensions to the word 'violence', just as there are many factors that lead to violence. According to the World Health Organization, violence is defined as

> "The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation."[2]

Thus, violence can manifest in three distinct modes, i.e. (1) self-inflicted, (2) interpersonal, and (3) collective. This comprehensive definition of violence should be taken into account in dissecting the issue of religion and violence. More often than not, violence is understood in a one-dimensional way within the religious discourses. For example, many of the contemporary religious writings addressing violence in society presume only one aspect of violence - collective violence through the use of physical force. Even within this simplistic understanding of violence, there is a further tendency to reduce collective violence into some form of a conflict that arise between two or more religious groups and that these violence are necessarily armed conflicts, open clashes or subversive acts of terrorism.

Rarely do we see religious writings addressing other aspects of violence, such as self-inflicted violence and violence involving interpersonal relationships. For example, in 2000, an estimated 1.6 million people worldwide died as a result of self-inflicted, interpersonal and collective violence. Out of this, nearly half were caused by suicides (49.1%) and almost one third were homicides (31.3%).[3] During the period of 1960 - 1990, Singapore was one of at least 28 nations that saw a rising trend in suicide. In 1998 alone, there were 371 cases of suicide in Singapore.[4] How the various faith communities respond to such issues is crucial in portraying their commitment to eradicate violence and uphold the ethical imperatives that underpins all religious belief-systems. There are many issues that are of direct urgency and constitute some of the most violent forms of dehumanization around the world. Issues such as illiteracy, poverty and hunger, mass unemployment, child abuses, discrimination, corruption and environmental degradation represent aspects of violence that deserve equal, if not more attention than those that are given extensive coverage in medias and State-directed discourses.

The challenge confronting the various religious communities is on how they can engage with such issues at both (1) theological and (2) practical aspects. At the theological level, there is a need to define the commitment that religion shows towards the plight of the needy, oppressed, downtrodden and underprivileged class in society. At the practical level, there is a need to translate that commitment into social programmes. The former requires a re-contextualization of religious faith amidst the realities of life today. The latter requires perceptiveness and commitment.

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Relating Islam to Violence
The Two Common Approaches

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Generally, there are has been two ways in which many religious and non-religious groups address the relation of religion to violence. *The first is to acknowledge that religion supports or indeed justify violence.* For example, an article appeared in The Straits Times, in which two academics wrote that

> "The nature of the terrorist threat is unambiguously Islamic and is not so much a deviation from Muslim tradition than an appeal to it…Regarding classical Islam, the oft-quoted remark that Islam is a religion of peace is false. On the contrary, Islam is linked from the beginning with the practice of divinely sanctioned warfare and lethal injunctions against apostates and unbelievers. Islam experienced no period of wandering and exclusion; from its inception, Islam formed a unitary state bent on military conquest."[5]

In a single breath, the article employed the term "Islam" and "Islamic" as a noun in no less than 12 instances, attaching it to negative connotations such as (1) "Islam's totalitarian turn", (2) "Islam…will never embrace Western secularization", (2) "Islam must place true religious conversion…over territorial conquest", and (3) "Islam needs to restore the legislative authority of communal consensus to allow Muslims to develop along with, rather than against, the future". In no uncertain terms, the writers allude to the idea that 'Islam' constitutes the problem and the main cause for the violence employed by the radical Muslim groups such as al-Qaeda.

Such allusions are not uncommon. Amongst some of the major academics and journalists who faulted religion – in this instance, 'Islam' – as a constitutive element for a whole string of negative attachments, are Bernard Lewis, Daniel Pipes, Robert Spencer and Ibn Warraq[6]. In a recent publication, Warraq portrayed Islam as

> "…a totalitarian ideology that aims to control the religious, social, and political life of mankind in all its aspects; the life of its followers without qualification; and the life of those who follow the so-called tolerated religions to a degree that prevents their activities from getting in the way of Islam in any way. And I mean Islam, I do not accept some spurious distinction between Islam and "Islamic fundamentalism", or "Islamic terrorism". The terrorists who planted bombs in Madrid; those responsible for the deaths of more than two thousand people on September 11, 2001, in New York and Washington D.C.; and the ayatollahs of Iran were and all acting canonically;

their actions reflect the teachings of Islam, whether found in the Qur'an, in the acts and sayings of the prophet, or Islamic law based on them."[7]

Such allusions are bound to produce a counter-reaction that is typically apologetic in nature. If 'Islam' is the problem, then an apologetic response would be 'Islam' has no problem. We find today an abundant proliferation of tracts and literatures that proclaim 'Islam' is perfect and that everything is fine with 'Islam'. *This constitutes the second type of response to the issue of religion and violence.* In the midst of violence perpetrated by Muslims, it is not uncommon to encounter defensive Muslims saying, "You have to separate Islam from the Muslims" or "Islam is a religion of peace, it is the Muslims who are bad." Such apologetic exercise is most commonly found in joint-statements and letters to the media, usually after a major terrorist attack such as the attacks in New York and Washington D.C., the Madrid bombings and the recent London bombings. The rhetoric that dominates such an approach is in itself reactionary, if not a mere exercise in public relations. Observably, there has been little effort done to educate the general public on the issues involved and to distinguish the various factors at play.[8] There are also hardly any serious and sustainable discussions done in the public domain. The role of rhetoric is to pacify, not to educate. As cautioned by Omid Safi,

> "The statement that "Islam is a religion of peace" must not be allowed to become a license to avoid dealing with the grinding realities of social, political, and spiritual injustice on the ground level."[9]

If the first approach demonizes Islam, the apologetic approach obscures and distracts us from dealing with real issues that require an honest inquiry and effort to deal with the situation.

In addition, the rhetorical exercise does not end in claiming the romanticized perfectness of 'Islam'.[10] It attributed radicalism as "deviant", "unIslamic" or "aberration of Islamic teachings". Thus, as much as it pacifies and gave comfort that 'Islam' is a religion of peace, it has created anxiety in general public – "What if my beliefs (or those around me) are *really* deviant?" In any politicized situation, anxiety is a fertile ground for social groups to compete for control and power. In the idiom of religious economy, anxiety brings people to the marketplace of ideas where social groups compete to define what is "authentic/truth" or

what is "aberration/deviant". In the state of anxiety also, expediency is invoked to eliminate discussions that will further "confuse the public". Thus, what emerged are a further consolidation of control and power, and a move towards greater monopolization of ideas – a worrying trend that we see in a post 9/11 religious and political landscape.

Rethinking Religion and Violence:
The Pedagogical Task

The Problem of Representations

To redress the difficulties posed by the above two approaches, we need to re-examine our notion of religion itself. *The most fundamental flaw in the two approaches is that religion is understood in a rigid and monolithic sense.* When we speak of 'Islam' as a monolithic entity, the rule of excluded middle applies – Islam is either against or supports violence. The point of view that 'Islam' is a complex term that denotes over 1400 years of history and consisting of various strands and dimensions hardly occupy the religious imagination of those who faulted or defended Islam apologetically. As queried by Edward Said,

> "How really useful is "Islam" as a concept for understanding Morocco *and* Saudi Arabia *and* Indonesia? If we come to realize that, as many scholars have recently noted, Islamic doctrine can be seen justifying capitalism as well as socialism, militancy as well as fatalism, ecumenism as well as well exclusivism, we begin to sense the tremendous lag between academic descriptions of Islam (that are inevitably caricatured in the media) and the particular realities to be found within the Islamic world."[11]

Thus, any attempts to speak in the name of 'Islam', must necessarily involve the human agency, with all its limitations. According to Said, terms like 'Islam', 'the West' and 'Christianity', function in at least two different ways and producing at least two different meanings. For example, when we say that "Pope John Paul II is a Christian" or that

"Khomeini is a Muslim", we are using the terms 'Christian' and 'Muslim' in a simple identifying function. Said explained that

> "Such statements tell us a bare minimum what something is, as opposed to all other things. On this level we can distinguish between an orange and an apple (as we might distinguish between a Muslim and a Christian) only to the extent that we know they are different fruits, growing on different trees, and so forth."[12]

The second way that labels function is to obscure what one knows objectively or directly. In such instances, 'Islam', 'the West', 'Christianity' and such, came to be used in its most ambiguous way to justify or support a particular proposition or sentiment. Used in such a manner, it produces *representations* – and in Said's analysis, all representations must necessarily come from the position of power.

The tendency to speak of any particular religion in a monolithic sense is not necessarily confined to Islam. In as much as 'Islam' used ambiguously and eventually given a distorted image, some Muslim writings too employed a similar essentialist mode in addressing the Other. One of the most glaring representations of Buddhism can be found in the following passage from a popular Muslim literature available widely,

> "When we consider Buddhism's appearance, its scriptures, general beliefs, style of worship in the light of the Qur'an, we begin to see that its basic philosophy is founded on very deviant doctrines. Indeed, its worship contains strange practices leading its devotees to worship idols of stone and clay. As a belief, Buddhism is contrary to logic and intelligence. Countries where it has been adopted have mixed it with their own idolatrous ideas, traditions and local customs, joining it with myths and deviant ideas until it has evolved into a totally godless philosophy…. Buddhism is not, as it is generally thought to be, a belief that brings contentment. On the contrary, those who are taken into Buddhism are often drawn into a deep pessimism. Even people with a considerable level of education and modern worldview

will become individuals who see nothing wrong with begging with their bowls in hand, who believe that in their next lives, human beings may be reborn as mice or cattle, and who expect help from idols carved from stone or cast in bronze. For these people, Buddhism's deviant beliefs inflict serious psychological damage. In countries where Buddhism is widespread, or in regions inhabited by many Buddhist priests, pessimism and gloominess are clearly prominent."[13]

Given the problematic nature of seeing religion in its monolithic form and using such forms as representations to assert a particular prejudice and perceptions, *it becomes a pedagogical duty for us to address this myth before we can even address the construction of the representations of religion vis-à-vis violence.*

What emerged from this task then is the diversity and complexity underlying many of our religious assumptions. Our whole inquiry will take a different turn. It is no longer religion *per se* but *what type of religion.* This is certainly true of any religious traditions.

The Problem of Religious Orientations

To speak of meaningfully on whether religion is a source of violence, one needs to distinguish between the different religious orientations. Religion does not exist in a vacuum. In Muslim discourses, what we had ever known about 'Islam' is through what humans have ever told us. As put forth by Ebrahim Moosa,

> "God never directly spoke to humans, except to Prophets such as Moses and Muhammad through the medium of revelation (*wahi*). Islam is what a mortal, in his authority as Prophet, told us what it is…In the post-revelatory period, Islam is what the Companions, the imams, the scholars, jurists, and authorities said, practiced, and imagined it is. In short, what we know about Islam is, is and was always the claims made by fellow Muslims, whether they be the Prophet, the Companions, the learned scholars past and present, or

the most humble individual Muslims. Each one expresses what Islam is from their experience as a Muslim. In the language of the modern humanities, these claims *about* authoritative and authentic Islam are called "constructions.""[14]

When dealing with constructions, it is important to note that human character plays a significant role. The manner in which religion manifests itself in society involves the dynamics of social processes. These social processes itself are shaped by individuals operating within a certain psychological context and culture that mould them.[15] Herein lies the problem of religious orientation. By 'orientation', we mean (1) a set of concepts linked together by a coherent worldview, and (2) a specific approach to reality, which (3) tends to influence the method of thinking and the presentation of facts.[16]

Orientation is a style of thinking that imposes itself upon the way we view reality and interpret certain facts. For example, one of the most common styles of thinking observable is fundamentalist thought. Fundamentalist thinking is characterized by an anxiety towards modernity. This is a phenomenon that appeared in many societies as traditional social structures are dismantled as society enters the modern world. Modernity thus is seen as a threat to the integrity and survival of one's traditional faith. As a response to the challenges posed by modernity, beleaguered believers tend to devise a set of strategy or sets of strategies to preserve his or her distinctive identity as a people or group. This identity is fortified by selective retrieval of doctrines, beliefs and practices, which in turn, are refined and modified, and sanctioned them in a spirit of shrewd pragmatism. These selective doctrines, beliefs and practices serve as "a bulwark against the encroachment of outsiders who threaten to draw the believers into a syncretistic, *a*religious, or irreligious cultural milieu."[17]

In its most crude form, fundamentalist style of thinking manifests itself in several modes. Amongst these are (1) supremacist thinking, i.e. constantly upholding the supremacy of one's beliefs and thought and engages in ridicule and/or direct denouncement of the Other; (2) puritanical thinking, i.e. highly rigid in thinking and adheres to strict literal meaning embodied in text and factual data, and puts much emphasis upon external displays or

symbols; and (3) exclusivist thinking, i.e. seeing everything in strict binary mode, with no grey areas in between, and unable to admit any or much good in other systems of thought or way of life.

The most commonly observed manifestation of these styles of thinking are in the way they invoke certain religious texts to prove a point. For example, in the Qur'an, there is a verse which reads

> "O you who believe! Do not take the Jews and the Christians for your friends and protectors: they are but friends and protectors of each other. And he amongst you that turns to them (for friendship) is of them. Verily God guides not a people unjust." (Q 5:51)

A fundamentalist reading of this text will only yield an exclusionary conclusion. Such readings are certain to generate antagonism towards others, and coupled with verses such as

> "Fight those who believe not in God nor the Last Day, nor hold that forbidden which had been forbidden by God and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the religion of Truth, (even if they are) of the People of the Book, until they pay the poll tax with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued." (Q. 9:29)

they are a potent brew to call for a "clash of civilization" anticipated by Samuel Huntington. In dealing with texts, verses that calls for tolerance, mutual respect and compassion are conveniently ignored. In other words, a fundamentalist mind is bent upon an *a*historical and atomistic reading of text.[18] The impetus for this thinking structure is, as previously observed, to defend one's cultural identity that is perceived to be under threat by a seemingly hostile and *a*religious/irreligious world.

Such thinking structure has been at the root of those who call for violence in trying to achieve supremacy and power, although fundamentalist thinking by itself may not necessarily yield violent behaviours. The insights of Khaled Abou Fadl is of most relevant here

"Any text, including those that are Islamic, provides possibilities of meaning, not inevitabilities. And those possibilities are exploited, developed and ultimately determined by the reader's efforts – good faith efforts, we hope – at making sense of the text's complexities. Consequently, the meaning of the text is often as moral as its reader. If the reader is intolerant, hateful, or oppressive, so will be the interpretation of the text."[19]

The Problem of Group Interest

Individuals, in as much they are seen as autonomous in thought, are at the same time, subjected to the dynamics of the group they belong to. In every society, there is competition for space, ideas and positions. As observed by Karl Mannheim,

"Man living in groups do not merely coexist physically as discrete individuals. They do not confront the objects of the world from the abstract levels of a contemplating mind as such, nor do they do so exclusively as solitary beings. On the contrary they act with and against one another in diversely organized groups, and while doing so they think with and against one another. "[20]

The problem that confronts individuals is on how they negotiate between their individual moral conscience and demands of a collective life. In a seminal study on the relationship of individual to collective life, foremost Christian theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, pointed out that there is a notable difference between the moral behaviour of individuals and the behaviour of groups. As explained by Gilkey,

"With communities, the self-interest of the group is inevitably the predominant factor; and many things an individual will not do, a group will do together to further its fortunes and, of course, those of its members. It is, therefore, perfectly possible for the same persons to act quite morally, or respectably, according to the customs and values of their society, and yet, in

relation to persons in other groups and particularly to the other groups themselves, to act very unethically."[21]

The problem of violence then, ought to be given attention within the tension created between individual conscience and group interest. According to Niebuhr,

> "Every group, as every individual, has expansive desires which are rooted in the instinct of survival and soon extend beyond it. The will-to-live becomes the will-to-power. Only rarely does nature provide armors of defense which cannot be transmuted into instruments of aggression. The frustrations of the average man, who can never realize the power and glory which his imagination sets as the ideal, makes him more willing tool and victim of the imperial ambitions of his group."[22]

Power then, becomes a major factor in many attempts to dominate another group. In some instances, this search for power simply degenerates into mindless vent of angst and frustrations; while the power-holders within the group has not lost sight the aim for greater power, the general members of the group engages in senseless and blind acts of rage dominated by fear and reprisal. One of the most unfortunate example happened in the Rwandan genocide in 1994. Numerous Tutsi priests, pastors, brothers, and nuns were killed, often by their own parishioners and sometimes by their fellow clergy.[23] As explained by Mahmood Mamdani,

> "If it is the struggle for power that explains the motivation of those who crafted the genocide, then it is the combined fear of a return to servitude and of reprisals thereafter that energized the foot soldiers of the genocide. The irony is that – whether in Church, in hospitals, or in human rights groups, as in fields and homes – the perpetrators of the genocide saw themselves as the true victims of an ongoing political drama, victims of yesterday who may yet be victims again. That moral certainty explains the easy transition from yesterday's victims to killers the morning after."[24]

This symbiotic relationship between power and fear is what constitute authoritarianism. *This authoritarianism is a fertile condition for violent behaviour to emerge.* In explaining authoritarianism, Erich Fromm observed that

> "His [i.e. the authoritarian personality] love, admiration and readiness for submission are automatically aroused by power, whether of a person or of an institution…Just as his 'love' is automatically aroused by power, so powerless people or institutions automatically arouse his contempt. The very sight of a powerless person makes him want to attack, dominate, humiliate him."[25]

In order to reverse the effect of submissiveness to group interest bred by authoritarianism, one must allow the culture of critical thinking to flourish. Herein lies two types of religious orientations: the *humanistic* and *authoritarian* religion. In all religions, these two orientations had existed side by side throughout history. In the humanistic orientation, religion helps to further man's development and the unfolding of his specifically human powers. His potentialities for productive and creative labour are acknowledged. In the authoritarian orientation, religion paralyzes his power of reason, diminishes his sense of worth, puts fear into his heart and finally constricts his capacity for creative labour. As opined by Erich Fromm,

> "If religious teachings contribute to the growth, strength, freedom, and happiness of their believers, we see the fruits of love. If they contribute to the constriction of human potentialities, to unhappiness and lack of productivity, they cannot be born out of love, regardless of what the dogma intends to convey."[26]

The Problem of False Consciousness

Much of the interest to address the problem of violence emerged from within the middle-class segments in society. Only in rare instances do we observe an interest to discuss violence *as a threat* within the lower segments of society, especially those who belong to the

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poor and oppressed in any society. Once their basic needs are satisfied, the middle-class can afford to think about their quality of life, including means for higher enjoyment and aesthetic pleasures, which their purchasing power and leisure time permits. Terrorism and violence then, becomes a natural threat to their way of life. The idioms employed are thus couched in the language of condemnation such as "evil", "attack against the civilized world" and "barbaric". *The middle-class ethics of peace is not so much a concern for human dignity or lives, but a concern for their own way of life.* Thus, it is not uncommon to observe the utter disbelief whenever an act of violence occurs within a seemingly "civilized" metropolitan center. When the middle-class population discusses violence, little is mentioned as to the structural violence that permeates the every day lives of the poor, the hungry and the oppressed in many Third World countries. The very existence of structural violence is in itself sustained by the middle-class group who forms the basis for consumptive culture that made global capitalism possible. According to the United Nations' *Report on World Social Situation* 2005,

> "Eighty per cent of the world's gross domestic product belongs to the 1 billion people living in the developed world; the remaining twenty per cent is shared by the 5 billion people living in developing countries."[27]

This aspect of structural violence needs to be present within the middle-class consciousness in order to transform *awareness* into *commitment*. Without commitment to assist the lower segments of society to liberate themselves from poverty and suffering, 'talking' violence will be mere verbalism. In verbalism, we are contented that we had addressed "real" issues. In most of these cases, we had not really *addressed* the situation, but merely *talked* about it. Talking, then, becomes a way of consoling our own guilt-consciousness; in actual fact, we will continue to lead a consumptive lifestyle driven by our appetite for buying and consuming. Talking has a therapeutic effect upon the middle-class population who wants to believe that they do not contribute to the problems of the world. Even if they do think that they form part of the problem, they will like to believe that their occasional donations or charity works are their redemptive tickets to absolve themselves from guilt and blame. *This false consciousness that dominates the middle-class thinking is a problem in itself that will obstruct the comprehension of a reality.*

Conclusion:
The Pedagogical Duty

Having deconstructed some of our assumptions concerning religion and violence, how can we know re-envision the role of religion in addressing the issue of violence?

Religion as a Vital Force in Society

Religion, as acknowledged by many social scientists, is an important social institution.[28] Religion plays an important role in shaping the direction of a particular society. In history, we saw how religion is interlinked with culture and the ideals founded on religious values are determinants to the rise and fall of civilizations.[29] These ideals constitute the moral fiber of a society and their sources are, according to Muslims, *transcendental.* This is the general social philosophy found in the Qur'an. As put forth by Fazlur Rahman,

> "…human history basically consists of a constant process of the making and unmaking of societies and civilizations according to certain norms which are essentially moral; their source is transcendental but their application is entirely within collective human existence."[30]

Fazlur Rahman did acknowledge that while religion provides the general values that are universal, it is man that labors to translate these ideals within a human social context. Thus, history is a constant witness to human attempts to come as near as possible to these ideals or to betray these ideals in favour of corruption and subsequent destructions.

On a similar note, a foremost Catholic historian and thinker, Christopher Dawson argued that no culture can truly thrive if it is cut off from its religious roots. According to Dawson,

> "It is the religious impulse which supplies the cohesive force which unifies a society and a culture. The great civilizations of the world do not produce the great religions as a kind of cultural by-product; in a very real sense the great

religions are the foundations on which the great civilizations rest. A society which has lost its religion becomes sooner or later a society which has lost its culture."[31]

It is thus important to first recognize this sociological fact. To argue that religion has no place in modern society is to be historically naïve.

Contextualizing Faith in the Modern World

In recognizing the vital role of religion towards the development of society, one must also address the problem of contextualizing faith. Faith is different from belief. A person who accepts and believes in a set of doctrines and creeds is not necessarily a person of faith. In the Muslim context, genuine faith must work as the most powerful motive that actuates men to good works; otherwise, the faith is not genuine.[32] This faith is what allows the migration of an individual from a stage of *jahl* (ignorance) to a stage of *hilm* (civility). This *hilm* includes characteristics such as forebearance, patience, clemency, and freedom from blind passion. According to Izutsu's analysis, the primary semantic function of *jahl* is to refer to the implacable, reckless temper of the pre-Islamic Arabs. Thus,

> "…the rise of Islam on its ethical side may very well be represented as a daring attempt to fight to the last extremity with the spirit of *jahiliyyah*, to abolish it completely, and to replace it once and for all by the spirit of *hilm*."[33]

It is this ethical dimension of religion, be it Islam or otherwise, that needs to be given prominence and engaged by its believers. In each religion, as previously mentioned, there is a humanistic strand that epitomizes the ethical imperatives that are crucial for every religion. These imperatives are, amongst others: (1) respect for human personality; (2) recognition of man's capability of realizing his full potential, (3) respect for life, (4) high value placed upon reason and intellect by man to determine his well-being, (5) emphasis on social justice and equality in society, (6) recognition of dignity of labour and work, together with emphasis on disciplined and frugal living, (7) a commitment to do charity to those in need, (8) recognizing and respecting of Others, (9) inclusive attitude towards human relations, (10) tolerance for

plurality and respecting differences of opinion, (11) moral courage to speak and act according to the dictates of truth, yet affirming moral restraint and forgiveness in times of provocation, (12) accountability of one's action and opinion, and (13) the primacy of justice for every human being and his social environment.[34]

Recontextualizing faith must first begin by recognition of the intrinsic demands of religion. These intrinsic demands are embodied in the ethical dimension of every religion. It is the same demands that gave every religion its moral basis and its revolutionary nature.

Recontextualizing faith also means addressing present realities. Religion primarily came to address the human condition. The object of Buddha, Jesus and Muhammad's teachings, is man himself. All three walked this earth in a certain period of history. All three struggled against the forces of their time. Gautama renounced his pompous palace life, which is nothing but illusions and deceptions. Jesus spoke against the corruption of the Scribes and the Pharisees and those who took mammon as gods. Muhammad castigated the rich and powerful in defense of the poor, orphans and powerless.

Recontextualizing faith must also include the willingness to suffer together in society. One of the most pervasive facts of human existence is on the existence of suffering. In fact, the beginnings of many of the great religious traditions in history were to provide a response to sufferings. Buddha established his philosophy after the realization of the fact of suffering exemplified in a sick man, a man of old age and death. Christianity was built upon the edifice of the suffering of Jesus Christ who came to bear the burden of sin. Muhammad came with the mission of emancipating humankind and took on the side of those who suffered injustices. *The commitment to transform society must also include the element of willingness to accept suffering as a fact of life.* As put forth by Jacques Maritain,

> "*Living together* does not mean occupying the same place in space. It does not
> mean, either, being subjected to the same physical or external conditions or
> pressures or to the same pattern of life; it does not mean *Zusammenmarschieren*
> (moving forward together). *Living together* means sharing as men, not as
> beasts, that is, with basic free acceptance, in certain common sufferings and

in a certain common task…Given the human condition, the most significant synonym of *living together* is *suffering together*."[35]

Yet, recognition of suffering as a fact of life and acceptance for its existential nature must not be equated with resignation. The very message of every religion points to hope – be it in the hope for enlightenment, salvation or happiness in the hereafter. And it is hope that the world needs in order to confront with courage the constant dehumanization of humanity and his world.

"Surely they that believe, and those of Jewry, and the Christians, and those Sabaeans, whoso believes in God and the Last Day, and works righteousness – their wage awaits them with their Lord, and no fear shall be on them, neither shall they sorrow." (Q. 2:62)

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ENDNOTES

[1] By way of methodology, I am conscious of the fact that I am approaching this issue from the contextual standpoint of my religious conviction as a Muslim. However, this will in no way impede me from employing some of the well-developed conceptual tools in social analysis. At the same time, I shall also allow myself access to the wealth of resources in our common humanistic traditions – be it from the religious or non-religious strands in history. From the standpoint of my conviction as a Muslim, objective truth is *possible*. It becomes my duty therefore to search for that truth and to allow myself access to that truth, regardless of where it comes from. As it is, the problem of violence is a *human* issue that demands the scrutiny of the *human* community, regardless of his or her religious professions.

[2] *World Report on Violence and Health*, (ed.) Ettiene G. Krug *et. al*. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2002. p. 5

[3] Ibid., p. 10

[4] Ibid., p. 187

[5] Phillip Blond & Adrian Pabst, "*Time for an Islamic Reformation*", Straits Times, 1st August, 2005.

[6] For examples, see Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988; Daniel Pipes, *Militant Islam Reaches America*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2003; Robert Spencer, *Islam Unveiled: Disturbing Questions about the World's Fastest Growing Faith*. California: Encounter Books, 2003. Ibn Warraq, *Why I am Not a Muslim*. New York: Prometheus Books, 1995.

[7] Ibn Warraq, in Robert Spencer (ed.), The *Myth of Islamic Tolerance: How Islamic Law Treats Non-Muslims*. New York: Prometheus, 2005. p. 13

[8] Interestingly, despite denouncement after denouncement by the religious community, towards Muslim acts of terror, there is constant call for 'moderate Muslims' to speak up and make their views heard.

[9] Omid Safi (ed.), *Progressive Muslims on Justice, Gender and Pluralism*. Oxford: Oneworld, 2003. p. 26

[10] Examples of such romanticized imagination dominating public discourse on Islam can be found in the popular writings of Harun Yahya. In one such writing, he asserted that "Islam is the only system of belief to offer a just, tolerant and compassionate way of government in the Middle East" and that "it is an indisputably important truth that Ottoman rule was exceedingly humane" (http://www.harunyahya.com/32terrorism_middleeast_soc08.php). Such selective and utopian thinking will only impede any critical engagement with history and force vision away from reality. For a critique of utopian elements in Muslim thought, see Shaharuddin Maaruf, *Religion and Utopian Thinking Among the Muslims of Southeast Asia*. Singapore: Department of Malay Studies, National University of Singapore, 2001. For a more general discussion on utopian thinking, see Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*. San Diego: Harvest, 1985.

[11] Edward Said, *Covering Islam*. New York: Vintage, 1977. p. lv

[12] Ibid., pp. 9-10

[13] Harun Yahya, *Islam and Buddhism*. New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 2003. pp. 14-16

[14] Ebrahim Moosa, "*The Debts and Burden of Critical Islam*", in Omid safi (ed.) op. cited., pp. 114-5

[15] For elaborations on this point, see Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*. London: Routledge, 2002. p. ixff.

[16] See Karl Mannheim, *Essays on Sociology and Social Psychology*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953. p. 165

[17] Martin E. Marty & R. Scott Appleby (eds.), *Islamic Fundamentalism and the Gulf Crisis*. Illinois: The Fundamentalism Project, The American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1991. pp. xii-xiii

[18] For a general discussion of these verses, see Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

[19] Khaled Abou El Fadl, *The Place of Tolerance in Islam*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2002.

[20] Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*. pp. 3-4

[21] Langdon B. Gilkey, in Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man, Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. p. xiv

[22] Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man, Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. p. 18

[23] Timothy Longman, "*Christian Churches and Genocide in Rwanda*", in Omer Bartov and Phyllis Mack (eds.), *In God's Name: Genocide and Religion in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Berghahn, 2001. p. 156

[24] Mahmood Mamdani, *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001. p. 233

[25] Erich Fromm, *The Fear of Freedom*. p. 144

[26] Erich Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978. p. 64

[27] *Report on the World Social Situation 2005: The Inequality Predicament*. Geneva: Department of Economic and Social Affairs, United Nations, 2005.

[28] See, for example, Karl Mannheim, *Diagnosis of Our Time*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966; in particular, the chapter "*Towards a New Social Philosophy: A Challenge to Christian Thinkers by a Sociologist*", pp. 100-165.

[29] Jan Huizinga, for instance, argued that a fundamental feature that allows culture to exist is "a certain balance of material and spiritual values." He also noted out that "the general qualification of a culture as a "high" or "low" culture appears ultimately to be determined by its spiritual and ethical rather than its intellectual and aesthetic value content." (Jan Huizinga, *In the Shadow of Tomorrow*. New York: The Norton Library, 1964. pp.40-1).

[30] Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an*. Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 1999. pp. 51-2

[31] Christopher Dawson, *Progress and Religion: An Historical Enquiry*. Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001. p. 180

[32] Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*. Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2004. p. 214

[33] Ibid., p. 31

[34] Azhar Ibrahim Alwee, *Ethical Dimension in Islam*. Paper presented at the Association of Muslim Professional (AMP) undergraduates' focus group discussion, National University of Singapore. 27th August 2005

[35] Jacques Maritain, *Man and the State*. Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1951. p. 207