

The First Annual **Symposium on Religious Violence and Peacemaking**, sponsored in 2004 by *The Association for Conflict Resolution's* Spirituality Section, sets a goal of potentially great significance for theorists and practitioners of conflict prevention, management, resolution, and reconciliation. The Symposium for 2004 will be a forum for listening and dialogue towards understanding how *authoritative religious texts contribute to conflict or peacemaking* in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These three world religions have been selected not only because of their prominence in current international conflicts, but also because they share a historic reverence for *religious texts* from and upon which each religion's believers obtain guidance for their duties to their God and others within and outside their religious communities.

The general concept for The Symposium sounds beguilingly simple: arrange a meeting of competent spokespersons to represent each religion, charge each one to address his or her own religious textual tradition in a positive and non-polemical manner, compare the information presented, and gain insights into how at least these three religions' texts contribute to their religious communities' understandings and approaches to violence and peacemaking.

Which Versions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam?

According to the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Quran, even when Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, were leading and teaching their followers, there were disagreements and misunderstandings. After the prophets died, their religious communities faced new situations and challenges and they turned to the treasured statements and deeds of their founders for guidance to preserve fidelity to their revelations. The sects continued to grow even to the present day and each sees itself as a central exponent of the true faith, if not its exclusive repository.

The Symposium seeks representatives from major sects within each Book Religion, to the extent they can agree to participate within the strict guidelines described below. There is, however, insufficient space on the program to allow for every group to express its unique point of view regarding violence and peacemaking. Those groups who apply for participation on a "first come, first admitted" basis will be considered first.

All three great religions have a diversity of viewpoints on the subjects of the Symposium. History is replete with examples where Jewish, Christian, and Muslim believers have used violence as a ready tool within their systems of theological ethics, at times also defining "peacemaking" as military pacification or even extermination. While there are fewer historical examples, these religions also have had sects and individual leaders who have worked for peace both within divided sects and in their relationships with persons unaffiliated or even opposed to their religious positions, including persons who have denied the central doctrines associated with their prophets.

This diversity must be included on the Symposium's panel of presenters to the extent possible so the members and guests of The Association for Conflict Resolution can

understand and incorporate same in various programs and initiatives aimed towards conflict management, resolution, and reconciliation.

Requirements for Participation in the Symposium

Persons seeking to participate in the Symposium must submit a written petition to the Chairman that includes a statement of conformity to the following elements.

Positive Presentation of Their Sects' Viewpoints. Representatives have a positive, expository task in this forum: to select the religious texts of greatest import for their own religious group's present viewpoints on these subjects, and to offer these in form and content understandable to persons who are not believers.

Teachings from the Prophets. Representatives selected for participation accept responsibility to restrict their comments on the subjects to *texts of their choosing drawn from the most authoritative teachings or actions of their founding prophets.* This restriction may pose some discomfort for some representatives of faiths where the teachings and actions of Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, are cited as all within the single history of revelation. If this is the case, nevertheless, representatives are asked to present only the viewpoints of the prophet to whom they point as definitive for their religion. Jewish representatives will speak concerning the Hebrew texts and Moses; Christian representatives will speak concerning Greek texts and Jesus; and, Muslim representatives will speak concerning Arabic texts and Muhammad. This admittedly arbitrary linguistic fence is designed to forestall offensive polemics and debates. Since the purpose of the Symposium is positive exposition, it is counterproductive and disrespectful in this forum for a Jew to interpret Jesus or Muhammad, or for a Christian to interpret Moses or Muhammad, or for a Muslim to interpret Moses or Jesus. A time for respectful and reasonable discussion will be set aside after the main presentations so Symposium presenters and participants can discuss and question each other, based on religious texts presented or omitted not the status or priority of any prophet.

Principal Presentations Drawn from Original Languages. Representatives are asked to present their viewpoints based on the Hebrew, Greek, and Arabic languages in which the teachings of their prophets are recorded. Since very few of the Symposium's audience will understand these languages, however, all spokespersons are asked to eliminate unnecessary linguistic points distracting non-specialists from the substantive teachings related to violence and peacemaking. Any necessary discussions of terms, grammar or syntax are to be relegated to endnotes for persons who may wish to explore such matters at a later time. Discussions of historic disagreements *within the sect or religion* on the meaning or application of prophetic teachings or actions are naturally essential to understanding how and why the representative's sect or religion has taken a particular ethical position.

Respect for Other Sect Representatives Present. Representatives selected agree to refrain from disparaging or disrespectful remarks to any doctrinal or exegetical representations made by persons from groups within their religion with whom they have

had long historical debates. The Symposium accepts that major textual disagreements exist, and always will, between the sects of these great religions. Introduction of historic polemics is forbidden and, if initiated, will result in a representative's dismissal from continued participation; that is, in the loss of continued opportunity to present the positive position and insights for understanding sought by the Symposium.

Bona fide Representational Status. Representatives will be invited to participate who have demonstrated leadership and respect within their religion and sect. Resumes must demonstrate positions of responsibility and reflect sustained religious teaching experience in the original languages of their faith. Submission of publications attesting to substantial religious leadership is required, particularly if related to the subjects of the Symposium. Finally, petitions must be supported by official communications from the leadership of principal organizations recommending the prospective representatives as suited and able to participate within the guidelines set forth above.

Prayer for the Symposium. Persons who petition participation in the Symposium are asked to pray and to solicit prayers from their religious communities on behalf of the Symposium's intentions to provide a unique opportunity for communication, listening, dialogue, understanding and, above all, progress for The Association for Conflict Resolution's members and guests in contributing to truthful statements and positive uses regarding the religions, sects, and viewpoints, represented. Truth and healthy relationships are not "relative" (that is, mere subjective constructs of no consequence) or irrelevant. When hatred is reduced and lives are spared so individuals, families, and societies, can live without harm or without harming, this is valuable for all people, religious and irreligious.

Subject Matter for Presentation

The Symposium's very terminology is related to specific concerns of The Association for Conflict Resolution and The Spirituality Section. As such, it is recognized that representatives who participate are being asked to restrict themselves to a rather narrow educational opportunity. Nevertheless, given the state of world affairs, it is hoped that the representatives will view this constricted framework as a valuable teaching moment for their faith to a large group of serious professionals working for a safer global environment.

What is meant by "violence and peacemaking" so that prospective representatives can decide whether or not they desire to participate, and the degree to which their religious texts may speak to the Symposium?

Violence. Naïve definitions of this term extend only to physical aggression such as the infliction of physical pain and death. Mature definitions include the widest range of harms inflicted through psychological, social, economic, institutional, or other means. The prophets of the Book Religions did teach and respond to situations which were violent in this broader sense, i.e., treatment of or by believers that may not have been only physical harm but perceived and real psychological or spiritual harms. So, while a

prophet may not have given teaching on “institutional violence” or “harmful gender roles,” it must be left to the representatives themselves to determine the essence and forms of prophetic teaching within the sacred texts that may address such concepts.

Peacemaking. The same principles apply to this potentially problematic gerund, if left unexplained. “Peace” or the “making of peace” had particular meaning for the prophets of these great religions, and subsequent understandings by later religious teachers also have expanded what may be understood today. Peace is not only the absence of warfare, for example, but can be considered a state of spiritual equilibrium, so to speak, between humankind and God. Nevertheless, since the prophets themselves did address relationships between their followers and God and each another, as well as with relationships with unbelievers or even evil spiritual entities, these religious texts are appropriate for discussion.

Conclusory Remarks by Representatives

The Symposium does not expect representatives merely to exposit their religions’ sacred texts then to sit down without applying them to the contemporary situation. Any responsible religious leader must be incapable of such an assignment on such fundamentally momentous subjects in today’s world. Accordingly, the persons selected to speak on behalf of their religions and sects are requested—by way of a concluding section in their presentations—to offer their thoughts, noting whether they speak for themselves or as representatives of their faiths, on the following themes.

Religious obligations of members of their own religious sect regarding violence, as they define that concept

Religious obligations of members of their own religious sect regarding peacemaking, as they define that concept

Suggestions as to how persons outside their religion can assist the representatives’ abilities to lead within their own religious group to promote a reduction in violence

Suggestions as to how persons outside their religion can assist the representatives’ abilities to lead within their own religious group to promote an increase in non-violent methods for conflict understanding, management, and reconciliation

Deadlines, Submission of Presentations, and Documentation of Symposium Proceedings

Persons petitioning for participation must complete all application processes by June 30 and will be notified of a decision by July 15.

Persons accepted for participation must submit a draft of their presentation by August 15. Drafts that depart from the structure of the Symposium described above will result in a withdrawal of the invitation to participate, without appeal. Invited representatives

who believe the described format is inappropriately restrictive are *invited* to offer reasons and suggested accommodations, which will be considered on their merits. The final decision of the Chair for such suggestions remains with the Chair, without appeal.

Persons accepted for participation agree to abide within the time allotment given for the verbal presentation to the Symposium. If they elect to summarize or expand on the content submitted as the final draft in their presentation, they agree to stay within the boundaries of content submitted—refusing to engage in polemics or other disruptive verbiage.

Persons accepting the invitation to participate automatically grant unrestricted rights of reproduction for their presentations to The Association for Conflict Resolution, and to all co-participants. Reproductions by any parties may be published at will, non-profit or for-profit notwithstanding, in any format, *so long as the publications do not delete or elide any content, including endnotes.*

The Symposium may elect to digitally record the presentations and, if so, will make available at cost to the participants one copy each of the events and proceedings.

Tentative Schedule and Process

Petitioners for participation at the Symposium MUST (1) restrict their statements to their own prophet's teachings or biographical deeds; (2) base their statements on the original texts, put in footnotes for examination and critique; and, (3) not cross into any other religious representative's prophet, i.e., no Jew can quote Moses or Jesus, no Christian may quote Moses or Muhammad, nor can a Muslim quote Moses or Jesus. This is to respect each representative's dignity as an authoritative teacher.

Each participant will be expected to submit his written text by the deadline posted, but at the Symposium itself to speak to the audience in a *persuasive, effective oral presentation*. The presentation must distill or crystallise the written text, not depart into some apologetic platform or polemical assault. Persons who engage in that will be excused from the remainder of the Symposium and will lose the opportunity to finish the event with honor. The texts will be circulated simultaneously to all participants (at a time not yet determined) some time prior to the start of the event, so the participants can read the presentations in context and pose questions based on the textual positions, not summations that elide important matters.

The tentative schedule will be as follows.

Proposed Schedule

Morning

*Welcome, Chairs of the Spirituality Section
Introductions, J. D. Willis
Positive Statements by Representatives*

Speakers will be held to strict time limits. No interruptions will be permitted.

The full texts may be published for the audience to read during the day.

Noon
Afternoon

One Hour Break for Lunch

PART ONE (1-3 p.m.)

Interchanges Between Representatives

Representatives will submit three written questions through the Chair, to be posed:

- A. One question to a selected representative of their own faith;
- B. One question each to representatives of the other faiths present.

These questions will be submitted prior to the Symposium to allow the Chair the ability to coordinate effective answers from the parties or religions addressed.

PART TWO (3-4 p.m.) Interchanges Between Audience and Representatives

Audience members must submit questions in writing, and sign their name. Questions will be divided equally between the religions. If there are 40 questions and 30 are directed to Muslims, 8 to Jewish, and 2 to Christian representatives, then six questions will be addressed: two each to the representatives. However, the Chair will NOT decide which two will be selected from the hypothetical 30, for example, but all will be given to the representatives of the religion, who then will decide upon the two to be addressed. Moreover, if they all want to speak on the same question, the time will be divided among them—and when the time is used, the Chair will stop them at the end of their sentence.

PART THREE (4:30 p.m.)

Thanks and Summation, Chairman Willis

Funding

At this time, no funding exists to pay for any expenses of persons selected to be representatives who, therefore, must assume all financial liabilities incurred as a result of participation.

Inquiries

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