

Religious Peace-Making

By John Edmiston

1. The aim of true religion is to bring humanity into the love of God and to cause us to dwell together harmoniously in a just and good peace.
2. The love of God is best expressed by loving our neighbor. The parable of the Good Samaritan tells us that this love of neighbor is to transcend major religious and cultural differences and that no person should be left “by the side of the road of life” because of their ethnicity, culture or religious belief.
3. The love of God for humanity is analogous to the love of a Father for a prodigal son. God wants us to reconcile with Him and He then wants the “brothers” of the human race to reconcile with each other.
4. The love of God tames our violent and angry instincts and causes us to seek peace, order, justice and tranquility. Thus true religion will always respect the process of law and not engage in extra-judicial violence.
5. The love of God is the love of the Creator of heaven and earth, therefore true religion will respect and nurture what God has made and keep it for Him in gracious stewardship of the environment. True religion will seek peace with the natural order and not support its willful destruction.
6. Because mankind is made in the image of God and is part of His good Creation then true religion shall respect the wonder that each person is. True religion shall not impose a duty to hate or kill someone simply because of their race, culture or religious belief. The minority segments of each of our faiths that hold such views should be seen as in error.
7. While great differences exist between our faiths, and these differences have led to wars in the past, such history must not imprison the future. Each of us should move past resentment to reconciliation and towards a tolerant, peaceful and prosperous nation.
8. Thus there is a need, not to agree on doctrines, which cannot happen without huge compromises, but to agree on what the Philippines will look like when the major faiths within it unite in a common goal of seeing this nation become peaceful and prosperous. We need to unite in a common vision concerning the shape of things to come, the way the world will look when we get it right. A vision of what the Philippines will look like when the religious energies of its people are focused on constructive, good and peaceful ends.
9. I call this “solution-focused peace-making”. It is the opposite of problem-focused fighting. Instead of dwelling on problems and differences and history we choose to focus on solutions and where we can unite and what we can build in the future.
10. Solution-focused peace-making does not ask ‘why are we fighting’ as much as it asks “how can we forge a just peace? “. It does not analyze all the differences but rather builds on common ground. It does not get bogged down in the paralysis of analysis but forges ahead in faith to a positive new future.
11. Much that is not peaceful comes from seeking to meet legitimate human needs in illegitimate ways. Solution-focused peace-making seeks to find the legitimate, creative and good ways that these legitimate needs can be properly met.
12. By focusing on solutions instead of problems we reduce the sense of personal threat. And reducing the sense of personal threat is a key to peace-making. When we focus on problems we activate a whole set of anxieties and responses to threat and danger - but when we focus on solutions we unleash our creativity, intelligence and good-will.

This is not to say that we should ignore the need for justice and for reconciliation – all peace must be based on justice. But that justice should be sought in a positive way with peace and prosperity as the desired outcome not in a vengeful way with retaliation and division as the desired outcome. Therefore I commend solution-focused peace-making, based on a common vision of justice, peace and prosperity - as the way forward.