

FAITH-BASED RECONCILIATION OUTLINE OF NOTES

By
Brian Cox

These are the notes from a presentation given at the International Institute of Islamic Thought in Herndon, Virginia on February 2, 2007.

A. Introduction

1. This paradigm is informed by my active involvement in party politics in the U.S. from 1962 to 1972.
2. I reentered politics in 1985, but from a different perspective, of bringing faith and politics together.
3. This paradigm is informed by my theological training at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. I am an ordained Anglican pastor and have been for over thirty years.
4. This paradigm is informed by my training as a professional in conflict resolution. I teach as an adjunct professor at Pepperdine University Law School in Malibu, California.
5. This paradigm is informed by seventeen years of faith-based reconciliation work in the field in such places as East Central Europe, Kashmir, Sudan and the Middle East. Hence, I speak as a practitioner and not so much as a scholar.

B. Faith-Based Reconciliation In Context

1. From seventeen years of experience in the field I came to realize that traditional diplomacy and conflict resolution models were inadequate to address intractable identity-based conflict. Hence, I developed faith-based reconciliation as an alternative paradigm.
2. In a post 9/11 world we are faced with the growing problem of religious extremism and militancy in all three Abrahamic traditions.
3. From the experience in Kashmir I learned from former militant leaders that it is not enough to take the gun out of a man's hand. You have to deal with the ideology that causes him to pick up the gun in the first place.
4. To deal with the ideology one must present a more compelling alternative.

5. I was told by former militants that faith-based reconciliation represented that compelling alternative because it focused on transformation; changing the heart.
6. From my study of the sacred texts in all three Abrahamic traditions I am absolutely convinced that faith-based reconciliation is the heart of the Abrahamic tradition. It represents a more ancient and accurate understanding of the religion of Abraham.

C. Faith-Based Reconciliation: Eight Core Values

1. Pluralism

a. Definition

Pluralism means that we seek unity in the midst of diversity.

b. Characteristics

- Pluralism as an existential reality vs. a principle or core value.
- Ethnic and cultural diversity should be seen as a gift from God to be a blessing, to be part of the richness of human experience.
- Pluralism means that we show respect for distinctives while we focus on the basis for common ground.
- Pluralism requires the defining of a common ground, a common set of core values.
- We must be honest in saying that diversity has its limits which must be defined by every society in terms of the range of tolerable deviation from the norm.

c. The Jewish perspective on pluralism:

- The creation of man and woman as gender diversity (Genesis 2) is an expression of pluralism.
- The creation of the nations as ethnic diversity (Genesis 10) is an expression of pluralism.

d. The Christian perspective on pluralism:

- Jesus' choice of disciples was a model of an intentional pluralistic community. (Simon the Zealot and Matthew the tax collector)
- The church in Antioch was the model of an intentional multicultural, Jewish/Gentile faith community.

e. The Islamic perspective on pluralism:

- The Quran (Surah 49:13) affirms diversity as a part of God's purpose in creation.
- Muhammed reached beyond his own Quraysh tribe in welcoming people to be Companions of the Prophet in Yathrib. The basis of common ground was the shehadeh.

- f. The means to implementing the building block of pluralism in a community or nation is the concept of building bridges.
 - Building bridges is accomplished through civic diplomacy, chancing the arm and dialogue.
 - These are tools that have a rich potential for enabling pluralism to grow and flourish as a key ingredient in a reconciliation system.

2. Inclusion

a. Definition

Compassionate inclusion means that we seek to overcome hostility by the practice of unconditional love toward others, including one's enemies.

b. Two Considerations:

- Compassionate inclusion involves distinct moral choices on how we relate to “the other.”
- Compassionate inclusion requires a willingness on our part to confront our own hostility toward “the other.”

c. In confronting people and groups who are different than ourselves in terms of ethnicity, class, culture religion or political ideology there are three basic postures that involve distinct moral justices.

- The first posture is exclusion. Exclusion means driving “the other” from our midst by means of social ostracism, economic injustice or ethnic cleansing.
- The second posture is tolerance. Tolerance is a veiled form of indifference. It means “putting up” with the other even when in our hearts their presence is an irritation or imposition.
- The third posture is inclusion or embrace which is based on agape or unconditional love.

d. Love as a political principle:

- In the language of the New Testament there are three Greek words for love.
- *Philia* means friendship or affection within families.
- *Epithumia* means passion or love between sexes.
- *Agape* means charity, compassion, self giving love. It is unconditional love.
- Agape is meant to be a principle by which we deliberately live.
- Agape has to do with the mind and the will rather than the emotions or the passions.
- Agape means reaching into the world of the other person to understand, appreciate and value them.

- e. The Jewish perspective on inclusion:
 - The challenge to Cain (Genesis 4) regarding “who is my neighbor?”
 - The Abrahamic blessing began with one nation (Genesis 12), but would ultimately encompass all nations.
- f. The Christian perspective on inclusion:
 - The radical elevation of unconditional love as a sociopolitical principle may have been unique in Jesus’ message.
 - Jesus repudiated barriers of gender, tribe, religion, class and caste and ideology in establishing a social practice of inclusivity.
 - Jesus demonstrated by compassion toward social outcasts
 - Jesus taught us to love our enemies
- g. The Islamic perspective on inclusion:
 - The Quran teaches inclusivity of all peoples regardless of racial or ethnic origin (Surah 49:13).
 - Muhammed taught that there was no basis for gender, racial or ethnic superiority.
- h. The means to implementing the building block of inclusion in a community or nation is the concept of demolishing walls of hostility.
 - Demolishing walls of hostility is accomplished through the love of enemies, transformation of hate into love, exorcising the demons that we attribute to our enemies, and ethical speech.
 - These are tools that have a rich potential for enabling inclusion to grow and flourish as a key ingredient in a reconciliation system.

3. Peacemaking

a. Definition

Peacemaking means that we seek the peaceful resolution of conflicts between individuals and groups.

b. Four Considerations

- The peaceful resolution of conflicts has three goals: to end the hostilities, bring about a resolution of the issues, and facilitate a restoration of relationships.
- Communities and nations are made-up of weak, fallible, broken human beings who have an inherent tendency toward conflict. It is part of our human nature. Therefore, it is assumed that conflict is an ever present possibility when individuals or communities take sovereignty into their own hands. It is fruitless, unproductive and naïve to ask “How do we avoid conflict?” Instead, we should be asking, “How do we resolve conflict, by violence of words and swords or by peaceful means?”
- In a sense, we don’t want to avoid conflict. Conflict is a healthy expression of wrestling with differences.
- Conflict is an opportunity to go deeper in a relationship.

- c. The Jewish perspective on peacemaking:
 - Abraham pleaded as an advocate and negotiator for Sodom in Genesis 18
 - Moses chose arbitrators in the community of Israel to settle disputes in Exodus 18.
- d. The Christian perspective on peacemaking:
 - In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said “Blessed are the peacemakers”. (Matthew 5:9)
 - Jesus taught and modeled a paradigm of non-violence
 - Jesus taught about the avoidance of conflict in certain situations (Matthew 5:38-42)
 - Jesus taught a dispute resolution process involving negotiation and mediation (Matthew 18:15-18)
- e. The Islamic perspective on peacemaking.
 - Believers are exhorted to make peace between conflicting parties as a means of demonstrating the fear of God (Surah 49:10).
 - During his years in Yathrib (Medina) Muhammed assumed the role of a Hakam (mediator) to settle disputes among the tribes.
- f. The means to implementing the building block of peacemaking in a community or nation is the concept of conflict or dispute resolution.
 - This means peacemaking through faith-based conflict analysis and intervention.
 - These tools have a rich potential for enabling peacemaking to grow as a key ingredient in a reconciliation system.

4. Social Justice

a. Definition

Faith-based social justice means that we seek the common good through transformation of the soul of a community.

b. Six Considerations

- Social justice is the bedrock of any community or nation that seeks to be free of resentment and broken relationships.
- There can be no reconciliation without social justice.
- Social justice is inherently tied to issues of privilege, land and economics.
- Faith-based social justice means that there is a moral grain to the universe established by God which governs human relationships and structures
- Social justice transcends political philosophy and asks the question “What is the common good?”
- Faith-based social justice involves a transformation of the soul of a community

- c. The Jewish perspective on social justice:
 - God expresses concern for the suffering and oppression of people (Exodus 3)
 - The revelation of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20) can be summarized in one word: respect. This is one of the roots of faith-based social justice
 - The Jewish prophets held Israel accountable for the original vision of social justice
- d. The Christian perspective on social justice:
 - Jesus taught the moral absolutes of a just society in the Sermon on the Mount
 - Jesus invited the rich young man to sell his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor
 - The lesson of respect taught to Simon the Pharisee about the sinful woman
 - His solidarity with the poor and outcasts
 - His impartiality of relationships with the powerful and powerless
 - His integrated approach to politics and religion
- e. The Islamic perspective on social justice:
 - Equity under the law is guaranteed by the Quran (Surah 4:58).
 - Muhammed insisted on gender equity in the Ummah at Yathrib.
- f. The means to implementing the building block of social justice in a community or nation is the concept of seeking the common good.
 - This means social justice through the transformation of the soul of a community and the sharing of privilege.
 - These tools have a rich potential for enabling social justice to grow as a key ingredient in a reconciliation system.

5. Forgiveness

a. Definition

Forgiveness means that we exercise forgiveness and repentance as individuals and communities to create the possibility of a better future together.

b. Five Considerations

- Forgiveness is the cornerstone to healing relationships between individuals and communities.
- It is a volitional act of giving up anger and resentment and extending pardon to an offending party.
- The act of forgiveness cannot be earned and is not deserved by the offending party.

- Forgiveness sets an individual, community or nation free from the burden of anger, pain, hatred, resentment and the desire for revenge.
 - Forgiveness is powerful, it changes lives and transforms societies by releasing them from the wounds of the past.
- c. The Jewish perspective on forgiveness:
- Esau forgave Jacob for stealing his birthright (Genesis 33)
 - Joseph forgave his brothers for selling him into Egyptian slavery (Genesis 45)
- d. The Christian perspective on forgiveness:
- Jesus' example from the cross "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."
 - Jesus extended the hand of forgiveness to Judas after betrayal
 - Jesus taught Simon Peter that he must forgive 70 x 7 when he has been caused offense.
- e. The Islamic perspective on forgiveness:
- One of God's attributes is All-Forgiving, Most-Merciful (Surah 24:22)
 - If we expect forgiveness from God we must give it to others (Surah 59:10)
- f. The means to implementing the building block of forgiveness in a community or nation is the concept of healing relationships.
- This means healing relationships through forgiveness, redeeming violence, repentance, burden bearing, confession, apology, and restitution.
 - These tools have a rich potential for enabling forgiveness to grow as a key ingredient in a reconciliation system.

6. Healing

a. Definition

Healing means that we seek to heal the wounds of history through acknowledgement of suffering and injustice.

b. Three Considerations

- Healing wounded communities and nations is a spiritual and sociopolitical process that addresses painful historical memories with an eye toward acknowledgement, grieving, repentance, justice and forgiveness.
- Collective identity is meant by God to create a sense of dignity and belonging for each of us. At the same time it also creates a sense of "otherness" in terms of those who differ in race, ethnicity, culture, language, religion or political ideology.

- The concept of collective identity has important implications in the interpretation and understanding of history. Sometimes people experience and internalize wounds not because they represent a point of personal offense, but because they arise out of their identification with a particular ethnic, social or religious group.
- c. The Jewish perspective on healing historical wounds:
- In Genesis 45 Joseph saw the historical wound in his family as being in the fullness of God's purpose.
 - Moses had a strong sense of identity with his own people even though he was raised with a privileged life in Pharaoh's household.
 - The Passover Seder became a ritual means of understanding God's purposes behind the experience of slavery in Egypt.
 - The Torah was a fresh moral vision given at Mt. Horeb to a people profoundly wounded by four hundred years of slavery and oppression.
 - In II Chronicles 7:14 we are told that God looks with compassion on our collective woundedness and desires to heal our land.
 - The greatest wound in Jewish history is the Shoah or the Holocaust in which some six million Jews perished during the Third Reich.
- d. The Christian perspective on healing historical wounds:
- Jesus had a strong sense of identity with his own people. He described his own ministry as being called to the House of Israel.
 - Jesus saw that in their woundedness his own people Israel had distorted their call as the "chosen people" from one of being a blessing to the nations to one of exclusion and moral superiority.
 - Jesus saw that in their woundedness that his own people had distorted the Abrahamic moral vision into a rigid moralism.
 - The earliest followers of Jesus were Jewish who experienced rejection and persecution by their own people. Later they experienced rejection by the Gentile church.
 - The Gentile church rejected its Jewish roots which gave rise to Christian anti-Semitism, replacement theology and rejection of the Jewish people as the elder brother in the family of Abraham.
- e. The Islamic perspective on healing historical wounds:
- Muhammed had a strong sense of identity with his own people. He understood his own calling initially as a prophetic messenger to the Arab people.
 - Like Jesus, Muhammed in Yathrib sought to restore the Abrahamic moral vision by challenging his followers to grow beyond tribalism to embrace a pluralistic, inclusive community.
 - In 624 C.E. Muhammed instructed the companions of the prophet to pray toward Mecca instead of Jerusalem after his ministry was largely rejected by the Jewish and Christian communities.
 - The Crusades from Europe to the Holy Land between 1099 and 1287 remain as one of the greatest wounds in Islamic history.

- f. The means to implementing the building block of healing historical wounds in a community or nation is the concept of facing the truth about history.
 - This means facing the truth about history through acknowledgement, grieving, identificational repentance, public apologies and restorative justice.
 - These tools have a rich potential for enabling the healing of collective wounds to grow as a key ingredient in a reconciliation system.

7. Sovereignty

a. Definition

Acknowledging God's sovereignty is the bedrock of the faith-based perspective.

b. Five Considerations

- Orientation toward the divine is the heart of the faith-based worldview.
- Faith-based perspective assumes that acknowledging God's sovereignty is the dividing line between a sacred and secular worldview.
- God as supreme authority over people, communities and nations.
- Divine providence or intervention in human affairs
- The basis for unity

c. The Jewish perspective on sovereignty

- God establishes the principle of human limits in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3)
- Cain is held accountable for his actions (Genesis 4)
- Pharaoh is ultimately punished for refusing to submit to God's will (Exodus 11)

d. The Christian perspective on sovereignty

- Jesus modeled dependence on God (raising of Lazarus).
- Jesus bowed to God's will in the Garden of Gethsemane
- Jesus invited people to give their highest loyalty to God rather than the state.
- Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God is the basis of unity
- Jesus had an integrated focus of politics and religion

e. The Islamic perspective on sovereignty

- The word "Islam" means collective submission to God's will.
- The five pillars of Islam are an outward acknowledgement of God's sovereignty.

- f. The means to implementing the building block of sovereignty in a community or nation is the concept of submission to God.
 - This means acknowledging the sovereignty of God as our supreme authority, as active in human affairs, and as the basis of unity.
 - These tools have a rich potential for enabling sovereignty to grow as a key ingredient in a reconciliation system.

8. Atonement

a. Definition

Atonement means that, ultimately reconciliation is the process of finding peace with God.

b. Six Considerations

- To be human is to possess a spirituality.
- To be human is to be on a spiritual quest or journey toward a deeper understanding of three basic questions:
 - ◆ Where did I come from?
 - ◆ Why am I here?
 - ◆ Where am I going?
- This experience is known as spiritual hunger.
- To be human is to experience a fundamental alienation which is at the core or essence of the human predicament; the experience of alienation from God, self and others.
- Atonement is the process of becoming a person of faith by finding peace with God that leads to transformation of the person.

c. The Jewish perspective on atonement:

- Creation and the Garden of Eden make it clear that people are intended to be in relationship and at peace with God. (Genesis 3)
- The reality of human sin is introduced in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3)

d. The Christian perspective on atonement:

- Jesus taught about forgiveness of sin and the gift of eternal life.
- Jesus validated and challenged the spiritual hunger of his day (Nicodemus).
- Jesus recognized human alienation from God as a fundamental problem.

e. The Islamic perspective on atonement:

- One cannot achieve atonement without repentance (Surah 2:160).
- It involves understanding a proper relationship with God and other people (Surah 2:160).

- f. The means to implementing the building block of atonement is the process of finding peace with God.
 - This means acknowledgement of our need for God, repentance, submission to God and transformation of the person.
 - These tools have a rich potential for enabling atonement to grow as a key ingredient in a reconciliation system.

D. A Concluding Thought

The French author Victor Hugo said that there is nothing quite so powerful as an idea whose time has come. Faith-based reconciliation is an idea whose time has come.