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A Semiotic Approach to Conflict Transformation: Can Signs and Symbols Help Make Peace?

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A SEMIOTIC APPROACH TO CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION: CAN SIGNS AND SYMBOLS HELP MAKE PEACE?

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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

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This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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ABSTRACT

Religion has always had the ability to play a major role in peacemaking and conflict transformation. But over the years, the power of religion to engender peace and to have an active voice in community issues has been lost on many secular theorists who see religion as one of the major reasons for lack of peace in the world. So, reclaiming the voice of religion in a pluralistic world is needed. Religious voices could have a positive impact in transforming conflict and bringing peace.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are monotheistic religions that are also the Abrahamic faiths. This is a designation that captures the essence of these faiths, most notably their shared affirmation of a single God. "They characteristically proclaim God as the creator and the sovereign ruler of the universe—its past, present, and future. God not only transcends human understanding, but also uses human language to reveal God's will and ways to us. These religions also proclaim that God speaks through the prophets and set forth the holy books as the treasure chest of their revelations. Not only a belief in one God but faith in the creator God, binds together the Abrahamic religions."[1]

In the context of today's spiritual need and conflicts, the Abrahamic faiths should unite towards peacemaking, setting aside any competition with one another. They must work in harmony, cooperating in the genuine spirit of service to humanity given the common understanding of being heirs of Abraham. Only then can they influence the opinions of the masses and truly educate the people toward peacemaking. Their religious instructions and beliefs continue to remain the lifeblood of society's moral ethos. "Not

[1] Y. Tzvi Langermann, ed., *Monotheism and Ethics: Historical and Contemporary Intersections Among Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, vol. 2 (Leiden, NL: Brill, 2011), 4.

only do these religions teach virtue, but they also have been a bedrock for moral action."[2] As a result, "religion plays an essential role in society and should give attention to the role of being peacemakers. It is certain that Christians, Jews, and Muslims will readily agree that God alone is sovereign;"[3] however, relinquishing the idea of sovereignty to other religions is a bit more complex. For the sake of humanity and the cause of peace, guided by a genuine feeling of love and brotherhood, religious leaders from each of the Abrahamic faiths have to stretch out their hands in friendship to one another and the people of Rockford, Illinois, irrespective of race or creed, with a desire to work for peace in Rockford.

Like other cosmopolitan cities in America and around the world, Rockford's Abrahamic faiths coexist side by side. Much work has been done in Rockford so that they not only coexist, but have taken to making religion a vehicle for peacemaking. Rockfordians did not seek individual or group protection through ironclad religious identities, but have chosen to enjoy a variety of spiritual gifts, focusing on goals, not creeds. While the individual beliefs of each faith are important, one rule—based on the understanding that no one may attack another religion—is honored. Unity exists for the sake of peace.

Such understanding fuels our hopes for working together as diverse religious groups. We might not otherwise have done so since each religion exclusively claims to be the conduit to peacemaking. The Christian tradition makes Abraham the patriarch and

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[2] Mormon News Room, "How Religion Is Vital to Society," The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints Newsroom, March 12, 2012, accessed October 21, 2017, http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/religions-vital-place-society.

[3] Langermann, *Monotheism and Ethics,* 6.

recipient of the original covenant from God, whereas Jesus is seen as the one who makes the second covenant possible. In the Islamic culture and religion, the same Abraham is regarded as a prophet and a messenger of God who had an unwavering faith and steadfast monotheism. Jews attest to the Israelites as the descendants of Abraham, according to their scriptures.

In response to these differences, a Rockford unity group coordinated by the Center for Nonviolence and Conflict Transformation (CNCT) called for a rally that began with Muslims, Christians, and Jews sharing stories from their religious traditions on how peacemaking takes place. These acts of storytelling and listening to each other's stories opened up new vistas for attendees to understand each other. The storytelling sessions went from one house of worship to the other—mosques, churches, and synagogues alike—with several speakers from the diverse backgrounds of these faiths. It culminated in a resolve to work together toward peacemaking and conflict transformation that is backed up by actionable steps.

According to the *New York Times* in November 2016, nationally there has been 67 percent increase in hate crimes against Muslims and Jews.[4] The focus of the unity group is to defeat discrimination against minority groups. The rallies provided the platform for an interface aimed at showing support to all groups that felt threatened, and brought them together regardless of race, ethnicity, or creed.

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[4] Eric Lichtblau, "U.S. Hate Crimes Surge 6%, Fueled by Attacks on Muslims," *New York Times*, November 15, 2016, accessed May 2, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/15/us/politics/fbi-hate-crimes-muslims.html?mcubz=1.

SECTION 1.

THE PROBLEM

Religion has a legacy of peace and violence. These dual natures throughout human history have prompted an examination of how and if strategies of peacemaking could be effective in the current context. The 21st century is faced with struggles on many fronts, including civil war, political uprisings, religious extremism, and so forth. The religious dimension of these struggles seems to be at the forefront of most conflicts. One can see this from the events happening around the globe, such as the rise of political movements, revolutions, and most notably, the events of September 11, 2001. Solidarity in any kind and form is hard to comprehend; however, culture, religion, and theology have provided the conversational phrase of legitimate rage as simply the inability of some to recognize and acknowledge the power of the religion and terrorism.[5] Commentators continue to argue that religious groups use religion only as a cloak to hide systems creating cultures of poverty, oppression, and ignorance, prohibiting free-trade, aid, and economic development that could eliminate current conditions. In spite of the desire to seek practical ways to bridge these gaps, violence and violent conflict is on the rise. What can we learn from these events? Will the study of semiotics help us to understand? If so, how?

Semiotics is a helpful tool in understanding conflict and violence. Semiotics is the study of the interpretation of signs. Beyond this basic definition, there is the broad

[5] J. Bryan Hehir, Michael Walzer, Louise Richardson, Shibley Telham, Charles Krauthammer, and James M. Lindsay, *Liberty and Power: A Dialogue on Religion and U.S. Foreign Policy in an Unjust World* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004), viii.

understanding that "semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign."[6] Semiotic conflict occurs when a symbol can represent multiple thoughts. According to Charles Sanders Pierce, semiotics is "the process, the action of a sign, not a language structure of code."[7] This simply the effect that influences what is involved. As one of the founding fathers of semiotics, Pierce identified three subjects: a sign, its object, and its interpretation. Will the study of violence, conflict and semiotics help us to understand semiotics? If so how?

Description of Violence and Conflict

In this section, I will attempt to describe religious conflict, global terrorism, inner city conflict, and police and community relations as they relate to the semiotics of conflict transformation.

Religious Conflict

Religion does not only inspire and guide people, it also provides them with the necessary tools for developing moral principles and values that are contained in the teachings of their great teacher. For Christians, Jesus is the representation of the incarnate God, in which case Christians adhere to the teachings of Jesus. In Islam, Mohammed is seen as the prophet who helps provide a complete code of law and guidance and the basic teachings and explanations of some terms as described by the Holy Prophet's explanation

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[6] Daniel Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 20.

[7] Robert Hodge and Gunther R. Kress, *Social Semiotics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 20.

of the promised Messiah. Judaism's understanding of God (YHWH) views God as having the absolute ownership over creation. With these three divergent descriptions of God, one can see potential for religious conflict.

While differences in religious beliefs and practices should not hinder religions from working together, beliefs and practices have become the bedrock for conflict. Conflict begins in the minds of people as they seek to dominate one another. Therefore, the world cannot have peace until religious practitioners begin to eschew the tendency to dominate one another.

Global Terrorism

Conflict can be simply described as a dispute arising from the desire to further political or religious ideologies. Global terrorism comes in many forms, such as violence or intimidation that has the purpose of coercing a government, group, or society in general. Global terrorism comes in many forms, such as suicide bombings and attacks on foreign lands. Some examples are the September 11, 2001, attack that saw members of Al Qaeda fly planes into the World Trade Center, the mass abduction of school girls in Nigeria by Boko Haram, the holding of a whole community hostage in Somalia by Al-Shabaab, and ISIS laying claim to a swath of land as their caliphate. Christians are not excluded from this, such as the resurgence of white supremacist groups in American society. The list goes on and on. However, this form of terrorism has some of its roots in the cold war period, a period when the classical tools of diplomacy, which typically

include an exchange of information, are often manipulated on the basis of position and power.[8]

Inner-City Violence

The suburbs of Chicago are full of media outlets that in the summertime are "obsessed with the mounting death toll of young people in inner cities, and these kinds of violence are also found in smaller cities across America. The *Chicago Sun Times* recently had a banner headline, "11 shot, 4 Fatally, in Wednesday Violence in Chicago."[9] Others, like the *Chicago Tribune,* continue to publish painfully graphic photos and essays that chronicle the degree to which violence has shocked and destabilized entire neighborhoods.

Racial Conflict. Racial conflict has continued to be an issue in the United States. "The American Anthropological Association produced a short video providing an overview of how prevailing ideas in science, government, and culture intersected throughout history to shape America's concept of race."[10] But the idea that one racial group or ethnicity is superior to others has existed as long as the history of white people in this country; this has occurred in different forms.

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[8] Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, eds., *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994), 3.

[9] "11 Shot, 4 Fatally, in Wednesday Violence in Chicago," *Chicago Sun Times*, June 29, 2017, accessed July 3, 2017, http://chicago.suntimes.com/news/11-shot-4-fatally-in-wednesday-violence-in-chicago/.

[10] Elaine Baldwin, *Introducing Cultural Studies* (London: UK: Pearson Education, 2004), 102.

One of the United States's founding documents says, "All men are created equal."[11] And yet, in American history, there seems to be some superiority. This superiority was once embedded in the laws of the land. Pressures and protests by groups like the civil rights movement brought down unjust laws that prohibited minority groups from the right to participate in the democratic process. The pressure compelled individuals in power to write new laws and amendments giving everyone equal participation, thereby creating opportunities for all in line with this country's democratic tenets. Despite the changes in the law following the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1965, racial minorities continue to be marginalized and many still wallows in poverty with little or no hope of ever getting out of it. The result is the high rate of violent crime witnessed in the inner cities of America.

Police and Community Relations. Two events—the August 2009 shooting death of Mark Anthony Barmore, "a black young man, by two white police officers in the basement of a black church next door to a day care with about twenty children present,"[12] and the "shooting of Michael Brown, an unarmed black teenager by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, on August 9, 2014 ave brought to the forefront what Larson and Khaula called

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[11] "Creating the United States: Creating the Declaration of Independence," Library of Congress, accessed December 12, 2017, https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/creating-the-united-states/interactives/declaration-of-independence/equal/index.html.

[12] Jeff Kolkey, "Rockford Officer Describes 'Surreal' Scene During Mark Anthony Barmore Civil Trial," Rockford Register Star, March 16, 2016, accessed December 12, 2017, http://www.rrstar.com/article/20160316/NEWS/160319496.

"serious social issues that must be addressed, such as race, class, prejudice, poverty, and inequality; issues that are often difficult for people to talk about.

These issues "underscore the complex nature of policing in communities across the country."[13] The decision of a Rockford, Illinois, and a St. Louis County, Missouri, grand jury to not indict the police officers responsible for Barmore's and Brown's deaths only served to compound these issues. Likewise, a "similar verdict by a Staten Island, New York, grand jury that declined to indict a white police officer in the death of Eric Garner"[14] also inflated racial tensions across the United States.

Stories about the inappropriate use of force by police began grabbing the headlines in 2009 and continued through 2016. In 2017, headlines also indicated a disturbing trend of targeted attacks against police officers. In 2016, America suffered a great loss: "a total of 138 officers who died in line of duty at the time of this writing and of those, 62 were shot and killed, which a 72 percent increase over July 5th, 2017."[15] What made this scary was a disturbing increase in ambush attacks, up about 170 percent from the previous year.

> The months of July and November 2016 were particularly tragic for the law enforcement community. From the news outlets and what is circulating on social media in 2017, police-citizen relations have

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[13] Ibid., 159.

[14] Al Baker, J. David Goodman, and Benjamin Mueller, "Beyond the Chokehold: The Path to Eric Garner's Death," *New York Times*, June 14, 2015, accessed June 1, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/14/nyregion/eric-garner-police-chokehold-staten-island.html.

[15] "2016 Saw Increase in Number of Police Killed in Line of Duty," *CBS News,* December 29, 2016, accessed March 10, 2017, http://www.cbsnews.com/news/police-killed-line-of-duty-increase-2016/.

> plummeted to a level not seen since the civil unrest of the 1960s and 1970s, an era that had its own police-citizen turmoil.[16]

A Semiotic Understanding of Conflict Transformation

So how are we to understand this struggle and envision an alternative? First of all, the semiotics of religion might lead us to a semiotic understanding of conflict transformation. Why semiotics of religion? As the discipline devoted to the study of signs, symbols, and the communication of these signs, a semiotic understanding includes many different disciplines, such as culture, text, language, communication, and gesture. What then is Christian semiotics? "It is a study of symbols of the Christian faith. It is not an ideology, but an attempt to clarify meaning and signification."[17] Simply put, Christian "semiotics is the relation between language and religious faith. To what extent do we depend on the use of language in order to express our religious feelings and beliefs?"[18]

Tools for Understanding Conflict and Transformation

To understand conflict transformation, some key terms are defined to help unpack these concepts. Some words may vary in meaning from one context to another. In this paper, the words *peace* and *shalom* will mean the absence of violence, a seeking of reconciliation, and shall be used interchangeably. Additional terms needing definition are:

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Alex Scott, *Christian Semiotics and the Language of Faith* (New York, NY: Universe Inc., 2007), xiii.

[18] Ibid.

- Sign: A sign can be understood as anything that communicates and points to a meaning. This may not be the sign itself but the interpreter. In this case, one has to memorize the association between the sign and whatever it represents.
- Object: An object is a representational convention that one could imagine. For example, an upside-down light bulb as an icon if abstracted enough could also be semiotically recognized as a raindrop.
- Interpretation: Using a protocol to identify the referent. The protocol could be as simple as the symbol of a dove and olive branch interpreted as a peace symbol.
- Signified: The concept of the "*signified* is the meaning of the thing indicated by the signifier."[19] This may not be a real object but is a "*referent* to which the signifier refers. The signified is created in the perceiver,"[20] which then could be contextual; what might be a signifier in one community might not be applicable to another community.
- Nonviolence: Nonviolence is "revolutionary tactics and a political strategy for the transformation of the world, but it is much more than that. It is a way of life, a principle underlying all human life."[21] This definition "recognizes that violence takes on a never-ending spiral into an ever-deepening division."[22] So,

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[19] Ferdinand De Saussure and Wade Baskin, *Course in General Linguistics [1916]* (London, UK: Duckworth, 2011), 22.

[20] "Signifier and Signified," Changing Minds.org, accessed October 21,2017, http://changingminds.org/explanations/critical_theory/concepts/signifier_signified.htm.

[21] John Dear, *The God of Peace: Toward a Theology of Nonviolence* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2005), 10.

[22] Ibid., 11.

nonviolence steps in to break the cycle simply by refusing to participate in the acts of aggression in problem solving and responding in kind. In doing so, it may mean accepting suffering without retaliation. Nonviolence, therefore, "offers to fight injustice without using violence. It points to the God of peace, expressing unconditional love against a spiral of violence."[23] But at the same time, nonviolence approach opens a space for God to reverse be engage in the process of violence that could lead to a peaceful solution.

Non-violence is a form of passive philosophical belief as well as the understanding that by default, things are allowed to happen without any intervention or interference. Such approach leads to the path of least resistance with the hope that everyone would maintain the status quo, a sort of every car staying in its lane; it could also be called pacifism.

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution focuses on resolving the material or substantive issues in a conflict. However, if there are no relational issues to reconcile, conflict resolution may be adequate. But over time, resolving disagreements without reconciling erodes a relationship. We may solve problems, but trust in each other withers. Without conflict resolution, even the closest of friends eventually identify the other as an opponent and ultimately the enemy and seemingly uncomplicated issues become major battlegrounds. Over the centuries, this very thing has happened among the Abrahamic faiths.

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[23] Ibid., 21.

The Church's Role in Conflict Reconciliation

Although authors differ greatly on a theological definition of reconciliation, it would be appropriate to start with what the church's role is regarding the subject of reconciliation. The church is called to enact reconciliation between humans and God, which is followed by reconciliation of humans with other humans. In Christian terms, reconciliation is seen both as a divine act and a human response to that divine act. Reconciliation involves restoration of relationships. Humans seek to restore relationships by addressing personal issues that create division. "Reconciliation is a term that speaks to men today apart from the Christian gospel because experiences of being unreconciled are particularly widespread."[24] Outside of the church, the pursuit of reconciliation is necessary in daily relationships such as marriage, friendship, business, politics, and international relations.

Conflict Transformation

Conflict transformation can be understood as a moving target; it is "more than just a set of specific techniques, ideas, and concepts."[25] Conflict transformation can best be understood as a way of looking as well as seeing—a looking and seeing that requires a set

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[24] Allen O. Miller, ed., *Reconciliation in Today's World: Six Study Papers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1969), 34.

[25] John Paul Lederach, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*: *Clear Articulation of the Guiding Principles by a Pioneer in the Field* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2003), 9.

of lenses through which to view social context.[26] In sum, conflict transformation "advocates nonviolence as a way of life and work."[27]

Signs of Conflict and Transformation

Conflict transformation has the power to build and also the power to tear apart and destroy people and community. Understanding signs of what transformation could look like is helpful. What then are some signs of conflict and signs of transformation that one could find?

One sign is a change of attitude toward conflict. "Our transformation begins with our attitude towards conflict, the way we look and conflict and respond to conflict."[28] Adopting a constructive attitude and response toward conflict involves understanding conflict as natural and sometimes necessary. Such an attitude is often referred to as the place where the rubber meets the road. It requires knowing the signs of conflict and of transformation.

Conflict

As the American society includes a growing plurality of religious beliefs as well as a growing immigrant population, institutions that were meant to protect the individual can suddenly become hurtful and conflictual. Paying close attention to signs of conflict can then be helpful. Some early symptoms of conflict are subtle. Conflict usually starts

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid., 4.

[28] Thomas W. Porter, *The Spirit and Art of Conflict Transformation: Creating a Culture of JustPeace* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2010), 11.

with an erosion of trust between the parties involved and manifests through communication break downs, seeking someone to blame, and looking for scapegoats. Many signs of existing conflict include:

- demographic changes,
- population displacement,
- rising unemployment rates,
- economic shocks or financial crises,
- destruction or desecration of religious sites,
- discrimination or legislation favoring one group over another,
- government clamp-downs,
- destabilizing an election,
- a rise in intolerance and prejudice, and
- an increase in numbers of demonstrations or rallies.[29]

These signs point to underlying conditions that need to be addressed before they escalate into a full-blown conflict.

Transformation

Conflict is inevitable in society; therefore, it is necessary to explore viable methods of conflict transformation. Humans create conflicts and only they can resolve them. Conflict transformation requires that both sides involved in a conflicting situation not only attempt to resolve, but are also eventually involved in the transformation process, what Lederach calls the "journey towards reconciliation."[30] Conflict transformation necessitates continuous interaction between the groups as a way of transforming hostile relationships and simultaneously creating interaction among people at all levels.

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[29] John Paul Lederach, *The Journey Toward Reconciliation* (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1999), 14.

[30] Ibid., 11.

Lack of Semiotic Approaches to Peacemaking

Throughout history, the development of the major monotheistic religions, Judaism, Islam, and Christianity shows that humans themselves developed religious ideas into institutions with patterns of doctrines that saw each system as separate and unique. In *The Meaning and End of Religion*, Wilfred Cantwell Smith described how the institutions of religion developed as a clear and bounded historical phenomena. Smith explained that the adherents to these three religions "together make up well over half of the world's population."[31] He further shows that "without peace and conflict transformation between these religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace and conflict transformation in the world."[32] Therefore, "the future of the world depends on a common, semiotic understanding of nonviolence and conflict transformation."[33]

The "basis for this semiotic understanding already exists. It is part of the very foundational principles of these faiths: love of the divine and love of the neighbor. These principles are found over and over again in the sacred texts of Islam,"[34]. Christianity, and Judaism. "The necessity of love for this one God and the necessity of love of the

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[31] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1963), 9.

[32] Ibid., 10.

[33] Ibid., 11.

[34] Hillary P. Rodrigues and John S. Harding, *Introduction to the Study of Religion* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2008), 11.

neighbor is thus the common ground between these faiths."[35] Where love exists, violence and conflict tend to disintegrate.

Each of these religions have different symbolic systems that communicate meaning. Religious symbols are never completely arbitrary, suggesting they are a symbolic signifier that sees bonds. Semantically speaking, symbols are typically things with important historical and cultural meanings, such as the "cross for Christians, the star of David for the Jews, or the star and crescent for Muslims."[36] All these symbols have one thing in common—they are tied to the history of each religion and play an important role in the culture of each faith tradition, as well as society in general. The role of religion in conflict transformation is vital if peace is to be attained. It is certainly true that religion and religious beliefs have powerful ingredients in many conflicts that are being underestimated. Religious grounds and ideologies have often helped people to reduce conflict, be it in Europe, Africa, the Middle East, or Asia. Examples of religion as an ingredient in conflict are not limited to interaction between Christians and Muslims, but can be found with other religions as well.[37]

Most religious communities share a language of faith. In that sense, they become members of a linguistic community. To belong to a religious community, people must learn and have a share in the community's faith language. The Abrahamic faiths trace their origin to Abraham and proclaim the doctrine of peacemaking as one of the driving

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[35] Patrick De Leon, "Who You Gonna Serve? Theological Difficulties in *A Common Word Between Us and You*," accessed October 21, 2017, http://www.answering-islam.org/Authors/Deleon/who_you_gonna_serve.htm.

[36] Rodrigues and Harding, *Introduction to the Study of Religion*, 12.

[37] Michael Nazir-Ali, *Conviction and Conflict: Islam, Christianity and World Order* (London, UK: A & C Black, 2006), 33.

forces of these religions. However, these faiths have different attachments to a sign, referent, and signifier to Abraham and to the sign of their religious symbols. They each speak of Abraham in different terms and contexts and assign differing meanings to his story and their place in it. This lack of common reference becomes a problem because theological semiotics is not only the study of signs by which God's existence may be revealed to us, but also the study of signifying practice by which theological ideas may be expressed.

The absence of semiotic approach among the Abrahamic faiths then becomes a challenge. However, the symbol of a dove to signify peace seems to be one that is understood and accepted across these faiths. This truth suggests that emphasis should be placed on the dove as a signifier for peace and conflict transformation. The cross, the crescent moon, and the star of David are signs that are subjective with these religions. On the other hand, I wonder, if these three signs are merged, would it not point to their Abrahamic origins? In asking this question, I am using Peirce's concept of the symbol, that is, "a symbol as a sign which refers to the object that it denotes by virtue of a law, usually an association of general ideas."[38] Simply said, the idea of combining these religious symbols is to establish the fact that the Abrahamic faiths are peace-loving and conflict transforming religions.

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[38] Chandler, *Semiotics: The Basics*, 39.

What Happens When Semiotics Are Not Used

We have thus far learned from semiotics that "we live in a world of signs, and we have no way of understanding anything except through signs."[39] These signs help us make sense of things, as they make us aware of the world around us. So, when we do not use semiotics, we begin to assign different meanings to objects. This tendency has the potential to cause conflict. Also, when semiotics are not used, the ability to do a satisfactory conflict transformation is limited.

1. Conflict Mediation can be seen as the process in which conflicting parties discuss their concern, exploring existing possibilities to arrive at a mutually satisfactory solution to the conflict. However, little effort is given to the addressing of the underlying conditions leading up to the conflict. This process may be problematic in a victim and offender situation because conflict mediation tends to focus on the outcome rather than long-term transformation of the cause of the conflict.
2. Conflict resolution can simply be understood as the way in which conflicting parties find a peaceful solution to a disagreement. So, when a disagreement arises, conflict resolution by way of mediation is often explored to find solution to the problem and end it. The focus is content-centered, and the purpose is to "achieve an agreement and solution to the presenting problem."[40]

[39] Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," *A Postmodern Reader* (1993): 242.

[40] Ibid.

3. Conflict transformation focuses on developing a new set of lenses for the immediate situation as well as the underlying pattern and context in order to develop a conceptual framework that would lead to transformation. Conflict transformation therefore "seeks to create a framework to address the content, in this case the conflict, context, and structure for future and better relationships."[41]

    a. Lederach argued that a development of a conflict framework is needed if a conflict is to be transformed. This framework is contained in three elements: (1) "it sees conflict as a long-term process, which occurs in the context of an ongoing relationship,"[42] (2) the framework has to employ an adequate descriptive language (common semantic), and (3) the framework should also incorporate an appreciation for the people as they seek to understand the peacemaking process.[43]

    b. King's nonviolence approach. When Martin Luther King, Jr. confronted racism in the white church in the South, he called on those churches not to become more secular, but more Christian. King knew that the answer to racism and violence was not less

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[41] John Paul Lederach, *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures*. Syracuse Studies on Peace and Conflict (Ithaca, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1996), 22.

[42] Ibid., 24.

[43] Lederach, *Toward Reconciliation*, 13. Lederach's description of reconciliation expressed the key to understanding conflict transformation and is embedded in language. A common language then becomes the frame of reference that participants can learn to juxtapose personal transformation with systemic transformation. I would say, however, that transformation that is guided and shaped by a religious understanding seems to have a lasting impact on society as a whole.

> Christianity but a deeper and truer Christianity. King gained his inspiration from the one who said that those who follow him must turn the other cheek, love their enemies, and pray for those who persecute them (Mt. 5:38). King's leadership of the civil rights struggle remains an example of love triumphing over hate, costly and courageous resistance of evil, and religiously inspired social action that made the kind of difference that everyone can appreciate.[44]

These ideals are King's expressions of his interpretation and application of the teachings of Jesus from the "Sermon on the Mount found in the gospel of Matthew."[45]

Leadership Development Process as the Problem

Conflict and violence is always present in society, whether in direct form or in a latent form. Recognizing the existence and the need to have religious leaders help religious adherents is key for conflict transformation. Also, the understanding that religion has a role to play in people's pursuit for peace and conflict transformation, religious moral principles and teachings then becomes essential factors for the ultimate eradication of greed, hatred, and all other vices that form the root cause of various violent conflicts, both within and without. Because conflict begins in the minds of people, the aspiration for peace also begins in the minds of people. Religion not only inspires, it

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[44] Martin Luther King Jr, *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story*, ed. Clayborne Carson (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2010), 36.

[45] Ibid.

serves as a guide. Placing importance on religion as a guide and the character of the religious leader is important as well. The differences in religious beliefs should not hinder progress. The call for religious communities to train leaders who will work toward a common cause in peace and conflict transformation is equally important.

Conflict transformation as "a comprehensive term referring to the peaceful resolution of disputes"[46] must be taken into consideration for any leadership development to be effective. The basis for semiotic understanding already exists within these religions. "It is part of the very foundational principles of these faiths: love of the divine, and love of the neighbor. While each of the Abrahamic faiths have avenues for leadership development,"[47] all seem to have areas of concern that leave room for advancement and reflection.

Christianity's Leadership Development Process

The biblical *magna carta* of peacemaking "can be found in the teaching of Jesus from the Sermon on the Mount."[48] "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God" (Mt. 5:9 NIV). "In contrast to the other beatitudes, the term *peacemaker* describes an action of sorts,"[49] not just a recitation, but a doing. The role of peacemaker is not restricted to Christ followers alone. The ideal is that peacemaking is

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[46] Johannes Botes, "Conflict Transformation: A Debate over Semantics or a Crucial Shift in the Theory and Practice of Peace and Conflict Studies?" *International Journal of Peace Studies* (2003): 1-27.

[47] Ibid.

[48] King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 22.

[49] Ibid.

expressed in all circumstances by all peoples. Peace should be seen as a continuum, beginning with a peaceful relationship with God, followed by peaceful relationships with humans, creating an overall nonviolent lifestyle.

The practice of nonviolence among the early Christians has been debated recently. Some scholars suggest that the early Christians refused Roman military service especially because their religious requirements, more than anything, hated the act of killing.[50] Additionally, these scholars describe how early Christians boldly rejected the emperor's violent actions and the Roman society of atheism. Their commitment to nonviolence, which was a threat to Roman society, was rooted in their monotheism. Their refusal to honor the state gods, which were the essence of Roman identity, brought upon them great persecution. Religion and power have always been a tempting mix. Further, Smith-Christopher reiterated how several early Christian martyrs, whose refusals to participate in military service were interpreted as "participation in a rival religion, a religion which mandated violent activities, [were] martyred soon after proclaiming [their] clear perception of the connection of violence with nationalist religious zeal."[51] The emphasis here is to show the need for leadership development.

Regarding Christian nonviolence, Smith-Christopher cited the works of scholars like Engelhardt, who revealed how Christians in the fourth and fifth centuries responded to Christian nonviolence, through "the refusal to be moved by the flag and state [and] the refusal to participate in the liturgies of destruction and in the hymnic glorification of

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[50] Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, ed., *Hatred: The Challenge of Nonviolence in Religious Traditions*, Faith Meets Faith (New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 144.

[51] Ibid.

violence as national epic and identity."[52] Besides the debate about the nonviolence of the earliest Christians, the same message of nonviolence and conflict transformation is also reflected in the teachings of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. These scholars have shown that the gospel teaching of Jesus of Nazareth on violence was consistent with ideas emerging in Judaism, such as quietism and a nonviolent ethos among the early teachers of Pharisaic Judaism.[53]

The antiwar teaching of Jesus is very clear, especially in the context of making ethical decisions when it comes to participating in warfare, per se. For instance, what was a non-question or issue for the Jews of Palestine who were in a territory occupied by Rome was, if they should fight in the military? Instead, the question was about the strategies of resistance to the occupying power. In all of these situations, Jesus' teachings about the notion of loving one's enemy and praying for those whom persecute you applied to all in relations to the occupying power.[54] To the Jews in Palestine hearing Jesus teach "love your enemies" would arguably mean love the Romans, not just the resistance movement. "But I say to you, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you'" (Mt. 5:44 NIV).

What is certainly obvious is the fact that all of Jesus' teachings on nonviolence were understood by early Christians. For instance, when a disciple took a sword to defend Jesus himself, "Jesus commanded that he put the sword away,"[55] forr "all who take up

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[52] Ibid., 145.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Ibid., 146.

[55] John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994), 11.

the sword will perish by the sword" (Mt. 26:52) It is undeniably clear in the teachings of Jesus that his advocacy of peacemaking is tied to his view of the nature of the community he founded. For Smith-Christopher, Christian nonviolence was not a general ethical maxim but a rule for the community of disciples and followers, directing them in the way they were to live in the midst of those who lived quite differently.[56]

Muslim Leadership Development Process

A survey of the Qur'an reveals passages granting legitimacy to armed resistance to oppression, and also a strong admonition against bloodshed and the use of violent force to achieve selfish ends. The Qur'an asserts a moral imperative to protect life. From this standpoint, the Qur'an states that the end does not justify the means; unregulated violence is a source of disorder and moral corruption. Rather, "restraining oneself and meeting indignities with composure is a great moral virtue."[57]

According to Arvind Sharma, Islam was founded by Mohammed, a prophet who doubled as the ruler and commander-in-chief. He was a native son of the Arabian Peninsula. Muhammad was the prophet who preached the word of Allah to the people, and upon conversion, they became Muslims. By the account, Muhammad became a prophet at the age of forty when God sent the angel Gabriel to him. Everything he heard from the angel was written down, and it became the Qur'an. "Islam means peace and security which means that Islam attaches utmost significance to harmony, peace and a

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[56] Ibid., 147.

[57] Nathan C. Funk and Abdul Aziz Said, *Islam and Peacemaking in the Middle East* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009), 180.

smooth running of society."[58] But Islam is rarely associated with nonviolence and conflict transformation in the public mind.

Associating Islam with peace and harmony could be difficult to point out, seeing that most violence in Islam comes from the fact that Islam "does not make a distinction between religion and state. Indeed, the Islamic church and an Islamic state have always been a controversial institution."[59] The result is that Islam makes no distinction between the affairs of the world and religion. According to its teachings, everything is interrelated. Therefore, it seems appropriate to remind the reader of the evidence that the name Allah is "the peace."[60] Invoking this name at the right time connotes the blessing and the mercy of the Almighty.

Some concepts of peace in Islam have been misconstrued and thus serve to confirm the perception and notion that Allah sanctions conflict:

1. Jihad is just to oppose and combat those who disturb the peace of society.
2. Jihad is set to establish a way of securing peace in society. The use of force could only be used for self-defense.
3. Jihad is a way to establish a better understanding of the concepts of the Qur'an.

The belief that violence disturbs serenity and peace in society and that Islam sanctions these three kinds of violence has contributed to fueling the association of Islam with

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[58] Arvind Sharma, ed., *The World's Religions: A Contemporary Reader* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 53.

[59] Smith-Christopher, *Hatred*, 96.

[60] Ibid., 53.

violence. “Thus, these three concepts can be summarized like this: sanction is given to anyone who fights because they have been wronged … permission to fight in self-defense and not for hostility … the third is fighting is a legitimate means of defending the right of the oppressed.”[61]

> Islam’s stated objectives are aimed at promoting a moral value system and the protection of lives and properties of its members in society. Therefore, "life and properties of the citizens are regarded as sacred in Islam, and the murder of one is held tantamount to the massacre of all human beings."[62] These attributes are to serve as a key factor for peace and security in the world. The Qur’an also requires that whenever one speaks, one should speak justly; as the Almighty said, “O my servant! I have forbidden injustice for Myself and forbade it also for you. So, avoid being unjust to one another.” (Qur’an 49:13)

Jewish Leadership Development

The expression of nonviolence in the Jewish texts is interesting. Smith-Christopher, citing the works of Leibowitz, noted how the Hebrew Bible itself does not explicitly demand a completely nonviolent lifestyle.[63] However, the Hebrew Scriptures “command the love of one’s neighbor and see love as the appropriate answer to situations of conflict that breed hatred and revenge”.[64] For instance, Smith-Christopher pointed to the Bible’s clarity when it says, “Do not hate your brother in your heart; reprove him, and be sinless. Do not take revenge or harbor a grudge, rather love your neighbor as yourself;

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[61] Ibid., 52.

[62] Ibid., 53.

[63] Ibid., 128.

[64] Ibid., 172.

I am YHWH (Lev. 19:17-18)."[65] Victor J. Seidler also pointed to the fact that religious traditions "have proved helpful to peacemaking especially where they have been able to acknowledge the violent histories they carry."[66]

It is very clear, regarding nonviolence, that the Hebrew "Bible's desire to limit vengeance is specific in the institution of cities of refuge."[67] According to Smith-Christopher's interpretation of such passages, "These places were created to protect the accidental murderer from being hunted down by avenging relatives. Capital punishment … is virtually eliminated in the first major post-biblical code of Jewish law."[68] As scholars over the years have claimed, Judaism's long-standing denunciation of militarism for every age completely predominates the Jewish texts. According to Smith-Christopher, Deuteronomy 8:11-18 clearly "warns Israel against taking pride in its military successes and imagining them to be independently achieved; it sees these attitudes as the height of human pride and folly and dangerously close to idolatry."[69]

From the forgoing, God obviously needed to fulfill God's promise to the patriarchs, "It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you are going in to occupy their land; but because of the wickedness of these nations the LORD your God is dispossessing them before you, in order to fulfill the promise that the

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[65] Ibid., 128.

[66] Victor J. Seidler, "Religions, Hatreds, Peacemaking and Suffering," in *Can Faiths Make Peace? Holy Wars and the Resolution of Religious Conflicts*, eds. Philip Broadhead and Damien Keown (New York, NY: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 29.

[67] Ibid., 21.

[68] Smith-Christopher, *Hatred*, 129.

[69] Ibid., 130.

LORD made on oath to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (Deut. 9:5 NRSV). For Israel to imagine that it was morally virtuous enough to claim that it deserved the land would be a great mistake. This form of anti-militarist attitude is best reflected in the noted verse from Zechariah, "Not by force or by might, but by my spirit, says the Lord of hosts" (Zac. 4:6 NRSV). This attitude stands "at the core of the nineteenth-century Universalist, pre-Zionist understanding of Hanukkah."[70] Deuteronomy 9:5 and Zechariah 4:6 are yet examples of how the Bible sheds light on Hebrew Scriptures—examples of how "iron sharpens iron" (Prov. 27:17 NRSV).[71]

The book of Exodus admonishes that "if you build an altar to God do not use hewn stones, for your sword will have been raised on it, thereby defiling it" (Ex. 20:25). Rabbinic scholars like Simon ben Eleazar used to say that "the altar is made to prolong the years of man and iron is made to shorten the years of man; it is not right for that which shortens life to be lifted up against that which prolongs life."[72] The ideal of peace and nonviolence is evident here. Iron in the form of a sword clearly has the capacity to shorten the years of humans whenever it is raised up. The alternative is building an altar to God, a form of nonviolence. Nonviolence prolongs life; nonviolence does not delight in killing but in preserving life.

A close look at the book of Isaiah when discussing nonviolence is important. Isaiah 2:4 describes "the ideal of peace, the age of peace"[73] and nonviolence: "He will

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[70] Ibid.,129.

[71] Ibid., 131.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Ibid., 132.

judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore" (NIV). A close look at Isaiah 2:4 reveals that justice and peace are integrally connected to each other. The order of justice and peace is obvious and very critical. Based on these two elements, Smith-Christopher wrote that "justice is established, and only afterward does peace become a reality. The aggrieved party is not expected to give up his claim and be pacified; on the contrary, he has the right and the obligation to demand justice."[74] In addition, Smith-Christopher contended that "peace without justice is surrender, which, when achieved under the guise of peace, is built on the flimsy foundations of falsehood."[75] It only plants the seeds of future oppression."[76] For Smith-Christopher, any "attempts at reconciliation initiated before injustice is addressed can theoretically still lead to nonviolent conflict resolution."[77] The Isaiah 2 text doubtlessly indicates a clear perception of the importance of such sentiments in Jewish life. Therefore, exercising a nonviolent alternative as far as the Jewish zealots were concerned was to not allow anyone to carry either a sword, bow, shield, club, or spear on the Sabbath.

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[74] Ibid.

[75] Oberschall, Anthony. *Conflict and peace building in divided societies: Responses to ethnic violence*. Routledge, 2007. 19.

[76] Ibid., 22.

[77] Smith-Christopher, *Hatred*, 131.

How to Develop Leaders Who See and Understand Signs of Conflict

With an understanding of the call to peace for leaders, several ways of developing leaders who see and understand signs of conflict and nonviolence with a semiotic understanding can be suggested. These leaders can be a part of creating signs of transformation. That is, leaders can develop a general theory of signs as an effective instrument in their endeavor of understanding and interpreting the world around them. This is against the backdrop of the fact that producing and understanding signs and symbols is at the heart of human communication and how meaning is constructed and understood.

This process of leadership development may differ from one generation to another, according to their specific characteristics, because signs and the meanings attached to them also change over time. Also, for leadership development to be successful the culture of the leader needs to be considered. Many cross-cultural literatures have emphasized the connection between culture and leadership development styles and also the use of religious language. Therefore, the need for a semiotic analysis in leadership must look at the associations between the leader and their significant connections to power, status, communications, understanding and misunderstanding, ability to convey messages, human energies, and how their best strengths could be brought out, not only through words but with an entire set of actions.

SECTION 2.

OTHER PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

Introduction: Practicing Peace in Trouble Times

> A future of shared life with enemies requires a long journey of persuasion and transformation of hearts, minds and desires. Such a future may seem unreasonably costly, but Jesus' story is a constant reminder that we live not by logic of cause and effect but … death and resurrection.[78]

War and peace often start in the hearts of individuals. Although all human beings would claim a longing to live in peace, the method of obtaining such peace seems to vary. Such a pursuit can sometimes lead to conflict and war itself. Conflict and war begin when one hardens his/her heart in minor ways, such as hatred and prejudice. I once read a poem that was inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream"[79] speech. In part, it reads:

> All he wished
> Is for whites and blacks
> to be equal when we finished
> He had a non-violent protest
> To put the people to a special test
> So, to racial injustice, to inequality,
> He raised a fist of peace
> and with equal rights,
> America would find release.[80]

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[78] Emmanuel Katongole and Chris Rice, *Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision for Justice, Peace, and Healing* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 33.

[79] Martin Luther King Jr., "I Have a Dream," August 28, 1963, accessed October 7, 2017, https://www.archives.gov/files/press/exhibits/dream-speech.pdf.

[80] Nicole B., Erin R., Amanda B., and April S, "We All Have a Dream," accessed April 30, 2017, http://www.cyberlearning-world.com/nhhs/project/kingpoem.htm.

The writers of this poem desired to soften what seems rigid in our hearts, talking about ending all kinds of racial inequalities that have led to various kinds of conflicts in the United States. Today, we are confronted with a challenge that is similar to the pre-civil rights movements, such as religious wars and racial or religious segregation. These challenges require us doing everything in our power to end them and bring peace. Perhaps Christ's approach offers a useful model. Christ, when persecuted, did not retaliate but rather commanded his disciples to "love your enemies" (Matt. 5:44 NIV). As hard as it may sound, it is possible.

Other than Christianity, in which the peacemaking mandate is clear and has been pursued with frequency, examples of peacemaking in the other Abrahamic faiths are more difficult to find. Perhaps this is due to the poor historical understanding on the part of the followers of these religious faiths, which can often lead to violent conflict. If so, what are some of the historical perspectives that need to be presented?

> Throughout human history, religion appears to have been a major contributor to war, bloodshed, hatred, and intolerance. Religion has also developed laws and ideas that have provided civilizations with a cultural commitment to critical peace-related values. The latter include empathy, an openness to and even love for strangers, the suppression of unbridled ego and acquisitiveness, the articulation of human rights, unilateral gestures of forgiveness and humility, interpersonal repentance and the acceptance of responsibility for past errors as a means of reconciliation, and the drive for social justice.[81]

"In Homer as in the Bible, the vicissitudes of war and peace are unfailingly attributed to divine intervention, though the entire discourse of the classical world was pervaded by Homer's metaphors."[82]

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[81] Marc Gopin, "Religion, Violence, and Conflict Resolution," *Peace & Change,* 22 (1997): 31.

[82] Johnston and Sampson, *Religion*, 8. Despite the prevailing view on religion as a cause for conflict, religion on the other hand continues to play a role in the lives of individuals and societies. That

However, "the relationship between religion and conflict is, in fact, a complex one"[83] as there are several theorists out there on the reason behind the froth relationship. This chapter will be focused on two theories. First, "a vast reservoir in the sacred texts of these religions"[84] on peacemaking and on codes of conduct regarding antisocial behaviors that affect conflict does exist. "These literatures contain a litany of individual struggles with the inner life that have led either toward or away from a violent disposition. What has worked or failed in the past, and why? What can it teach us about the relationship between violence and the religious person in a particular culture?"[85] "The applicability of former methods of conflict resolution or of deterring violence should be a critical concern. Second, religion plays a central role in the inner life and social behavior of over two-thirds of the world's followers of Abrahamic faiths,"[86] any of whom are regarded as active in the struggle to transform their communities and motivate others for a peaceful coexistence.

So, whatever we do today, tomorrow, and every day of our lives until the day we cease to exist, we must continue to sow seeds of peace for our future and the future of the

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understanding should be an asset in any meaning conflict transformation. "There are long traditions of debate and disagreement amongst Christians and others about whether international violence and killings are ever justified. The majority traditions of the church have concluded that war is sometimes justified while minority voice has called the church to Christian pacifism" (Thomas Patrick Murphy, *The Holy War* [Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 1976], 11) The Church of the Brethren, of which I am a member, holds to the traditional belief that all wars are sin.

[83] Jack David Eller, *From Culture to Ethnicity to Conflict: An Anthropological Perspective on International Ethnic Conflict* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 7.

[84] Ibid.,10-15.

[85] Ibid., 9-11.

[86] Elise Boulding, *Cultures of Peace: The Hidden Side of History* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 11.

planet. Some religions teach that the seed of our present-day actions will bear fruits hundreds of years from now.[87] One can think of this as a groundless insecurity or as an endless second chance, but the choice of these alternatives has the possibility to make new things happen, to open up space for understanding. This spaciousness and simplicity could be ongoing and accessible at all times.

"What could it possibly mean then, to practice peacemaking in such a world? To be ambassadors of Christ, in living out the scriptural claim that the message of reconciliation has been entrusted to followers of Christ."[88] The world desperately seeks Christ's followers who can demonstrate by their walk the meaning and interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount, especially in the areas of forgiveness and reconciliation. "Inspiring figures, past and present, have walked the walk and bore a faithful witness nationally and internationally, people like Abraham Lincoln, Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, and Mother Teresa."[89]

"To practice peacemaking, one would need to shift one's default mind-set by participating in activities that help cultivate specific traits."[90]

> Our default mind-set needs to shift from thinking that violence and conflict are the underlying realities of our world, to a Christocentric mind-set that the beginning and end of our world is the story of peace. God seeks to redeem the

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[87] Pema Chödrön and Sandy Boucher, *Practicing Peace in Times of War* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala Publications, 2007), 87.

[88] Miroslav Volf, "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 18, no. 3 (1998): 3.

[89] Susan J. Drucker and Robert S. Cathcart, eds., *American Heroes in a Media Age* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, Inc., 1994), 23.

[90] Carrie J. Menkel-Meadow and Lela Porter-Love, *Mediation: Practice, Policy, and Ethics* (Alphen aan den Rijn, NL: Wolters Kluwer Law & Business Group, 2014), 34.

> world through Christ so we might discover a fresh new life in Christ and the peace that abides.[91]

In *Henry V,* King Henry says to the Archbishop of Canterbury, "For God doth know how many now in health shall drop their blood in approbation of what your reverence shall incite us to. Therefore, take heed how you impawn our person, how you awake the sleeping sword of war" (Shakespeare, Act I, Scene II).[92] "The reign of God, to which we are called to bear witness, points to the fulfillment of God's creation, a time when there will be no more violence, no more suffering, no more tears—for God will be all in all."[93]

Thus, "the need to practice peacemaking in and through particular activities on a daily basis has some tough dynamics. This may mean learning to pray that we could learn to love our enemies while protecting ourselves from harm. Often, it means learning skills that enable one to find a third way beyond my way or the highway or just giving in to the other. On a larger scale, we are called to be peacemakers in our communities."[94]

Conflict Resolution

Conflict resolution goes beyond addressing what caused the conflict in the first place. "Conflict resolution seeks a way for two or more parties engulfed in a conflict to

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[91] L. Gregory Jones, "Practicing Peacemaking," Catalyst: Contemporary Evangelical Perspectives for United Methodist Seminarians, November 5, 2014, accessed October 25, 2017, http://www.catalystresources.org/practicing-peacemaking/.

[92] Johnston and Sampson, *Religion*, 20.

[93] Ibid., 29.

[94] Ibid., 31.

find a peaceful solution to the disagreement among them."[95] Conflict resolution speaks to social restoration and redemption of existential conflict. Abu Nimer, writing about a training model of interreligious peacebuilding in a paper presented on conflict analysis, suggested that a conflict resolution approach must seek to incorporate appropriate and relevant ways for a redemptive transformation to happen, which would involve some religious dimensions. The Christian response to conflict resolution must be understood as beginning at the personal level, while Islam and Judaism approach to conflict resolution begins from a reciprocal approach. [96]

Conflict Reconciliation

As Christ reconciled humanity to God, the "church proclaims and embodies the ongoing story of God's reign revealed through Christ."[97] If Christians, then, are called to be ambassadors of reconciliation, "the church has to be involved in an inward and outward journey of reconciliation."[98] The African concept of *ubuntu*[99] (humanness) is particularly compelling, described by Desmond Tutu "as a person with open availability

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[95] Rebecca Wolff and Jenette Nagy, "Section 6. Training for Conflict Resolution," Community Tool Box, accessed October 25, 2017, http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/implement/provide-information-enhance-skills/conflict-resolution/main.

[96] Mohammed Abu-Nimer, "Conflict Resolution, Culture, and Religion: Toward a Training Model of Interreligious Peacebuilding," *Journal of Peace Research* 38, no. 6 (2001): 685-704.

[97] Leo Hartshorn, "A Theo-Politics of Reconciliation," A Different Drummer, January 3, 2009, accessed October 25, 2017, http://leohartshorn.blogspot.com/2008/01/theo-politics-of-reconciliation.html.

[98] Fikiri Déogratias, "Mercy in a Conflictual Society: An Inward Journey Toward Reconciliation," *Hekima Review* 54 (2016): 15.

[99] Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York, NY: Random House, 2012), 43.

to others, affirming of others and does not feel threatened by others."[100] "The religious dual legacy in human history regarding peace and violence"[101] calls Christian discipleship to be intentional in resolving conflict as it arises, as taught by Jesus in Matthew 18. Conflict resolution theories, to an extent, have done some systematic examination of the "decision-making process of religious actors and leaders in order for strategies of peacemaking to be effective in the relevant contexts."[102]

Some conflict resolution theorists have argued that "the study of religion and conflict resolution will yield new information in their inquiry."[103] They also want to look at:

> (1) the struggle between intra-communal moral values and other traditional values that generate conflict, (2) multi-faith or interfaith dialogue and pluralism as conflict resolution strategies, (3) the impact of religious leadership on conflict generation and resolution, (4) the limited scope of religious ethics in regard to the rejection of nonbelievers and traditional out-groups, and (5) the promising role of interpretation of sacred tradition in generating peacemaking strategies. The peace process can be a way of living and working. The peace process is an open-ended, multilevel political process of continuation.[104]

Lederach calls it a journey towards reconciliation.

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[100] Ibid. "*Ubuntu* is a complex word from the Nguni language with several definitions, all of them difficult to translate into English. At the heart of each definition, though, is the connectedness that exists or should exist between people. Ubuntu is best known outside of Africa as a humanist philosophy associated with Nelson Mandela and Archbishop Desmond Tutu." (Christian B. N. Gade, "What is Ubuntu? Different Interpretations among South Africans of African Descent," *South African Journal of Philosophy* 31, no. 3 [2012]: 484-503.) Ubuntu has become a familiar term "largely through the writings of Desmond Tutu, the archbishop of Cape Town who was a leader of the anti-apartheid movement and who won a Nobel Peace Prize for his work. Tutu, chaired South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission." (Belinda du Plooy, "Ubuntu and the Recent Phenomenon of the Charter for Compassion," *South African Review of Sociology* 45, no. 1 [2014]: 83-100.)

[101] Gopin, "Religion, Violence, and Conflict Resolution," 1-31.

[102] Ibid., 10.

[103] Ibid.

[104] John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 23.

Abrahamic faiths have expressed "through their leaders and thinkers a commitment to the value of peace, from classical texts to modern reformists. … Furthermore, these religious actors continue to play an increasing role in resolving conflicts domestically as well as internationally."[105] These "leaders have successfully intervened in and mediated conflicts in the United States, Africa, Asia, and Latin America. However, a faith-based commitment to peace can be a complex phenomenon,"[106] due to fear and perception of one group proselytizing the other. While some believers "creatively integrate their spiritual tradition and peacemaking"[107] together, "many others engage it in some of the most violent places confronting the global community today."[108]

Conflict resolution practitioners work at "connecting the relationship between religion and conflict resolution strategies in the following ways."[109] Religion "plays a central role in the inner life and social behavior of millions of people, many of whom are actively engaged in the struggle for peace and justice,"[110] with a goal set toward reconciliation. The desire for engagement in the struggle for peace and justice calls for a serious theological conversation among these faiths. For Christians, reconciliation is both

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[105] Robert Jackson, *Classical and Modern Thought on International Relations: From Anarchy to Cosmopolis* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 23.

[106] Ibid.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Gopin, "Religion, Violence, and Conflict Resolution," 12.

[109] Morton Deutsch, Peter T. Coleman, and Eric C. Marcus, eds., *The Handbook of Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice* (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 2011), 121.

[110] Ibid.

a divine act and a human responsibility. For the church, reconciliation is both a gift and a task. "Reconciliation is an ongoing spiritual process involving forgiveness, repentance, and justice that restores broken relationships."[111] Thus, reconciliation defines the entire existence of the church in the world. An understanding of resolution versus reconciliation is needed.

Resolution Versus Reconciliation

What then is "conflict resolution? It is about fixing issues"[112] while "conflict reconciliation is about repairing relationships. While resolving an issue is also about the mind,"[113] going to the heart of addressing policies, structures, laws, and the causes of violence, while reconciliation is about reconciling relationships.[114] Reconciliation is "about the people, the stories, and the history and human impact of violence. The level of violence in society today is so heightened that at times, individuals or communities need to use assertive and direct nonviolent tactics to stop the immediate harm and demand

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[111] Brenda Salter McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness, and Justice* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015), 65.

[112] Ibid.

[113] Douglas P. Fry, "Conflict Management in Cross-cultural Perspective," *Natural Conflict Resolution* (2000): 334-351.

[114] https://www.opendemocracy.net, accessed October 25, 2017.

change."[115] As Marshall Rosenberg, founder of Nonviolent Communication says, "we need to use the minimum amount of force necessary to stop the immediate harm."[116]

"We never think about what the minimum amount of force looks like. But if we stop there, the relationships between the communities are still strained, and fear,"[117] mistrust, and resentment can still remain. For, "if human relationships are not healed, the conflict will resurface around another issue."[118] Even if "short-term gains are achieved, if relationships between people were harmed in the conflict and they are further away from each other as a result, then the gains are not a victory at all."[119] Therefore, resolution and reconciliation go hand in hand. Most especially "when reconciliation is set within the context of God's reign, it becomes the hope for a new reality, the Christian version of a new creation" (2 Cor. 5:17-18).

Conflict Mediation and Management

The field of conflict mediation and management standard "in international conflicts, and mediation has been less successful in that context than in most of the others. In a study of seventy-eight international disputes which occurred between

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[115] Tim Jordan, *Activism! Direct Action, Hacktivism and the Future of Society* (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2002), 5.

[116] Marshall Rosenberg and Deepak Chopra, *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life: Life-Changing Tools for Healthy Relationships* (Encinitas, CA: PuddleDancer Press, 2015), 65.

[117] Ibid.

[118] Christopher Mitchell, "Beyond Resolution: What Does Conflict Transformation Actually Transform?" *Peace and Conflict Studies* 9, no. 1 (2002): 1-23.

[119] Ibid.

1945"[120] and 1986, Bercovitch found that "fifty-six were mediated, but that most of those efforts were unsuccessful. He attributed this lack of success to factors"[121] such as "the complexity and escalation that involves high stakes, which make negotiation and mediation difficult."[122] Also, mediation tends to work best in a preventative way rather than post-conflict, although it is often difficult to ascertain when to begin negotiation before a conflict.

Some other factors that determine a success of a mediation are "the nature of the issues, the parties, and the mediator. The mediator must be skilled, openly transparent, and respected. It often helps if the mediator represents a dominant party who can reward cooperation and punish abstinence."[123] At Camp David, former President "Jimmy Carter, was able to promise U.S. support for Egypt and Israel if they could cooperate by stopping the settlement policy."[124] This is an example of an international conflict between countries.

Variations of mediation are used "according to the needs of the parties and the mediator. In North America, the tendency is for the mediator to be neutral and impartial, which means he or she is not connected to the disputing parties in any way and does not

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[120] Jacob Bercovitch, "International Mediation and Dispute Settlement: Evaluating the Conditions for Successful Mediation," *Negotiation Journal* 7, no.1 (1991): 17-30.

[121] Ibid., 28.

[122] Ibid., 29.

[123] Ibid., 30.

[124] John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York, NY: Macmillan, 2007), ix.

stand to benefit from any particular outcome."[125] Hence, "typical mediators supposedly have no bias toward one party or one solution over another."[126] In other countries such as in Africa, Middle East, and Asia, mediators are often insiders who have been trusted by their communities to represent them. This kind of mediation has a tendency to be smeared with a sense of partiality and often leads to a failed intervention.

But every so often, "communities find mediators who are connected to one side or the other and yet are highly respected by both sides."[127] They might also "have an interest in the final agreement as they tend to be members of the negotiating communities."[128] The role of the mediators is important in the settlement of the disputes, with less emphasis placed on the relationship. The mediator's primary goal should be to empower "both parties to act effectively on their behalf while recognizing the legitimate interests and needs of the other side."[129] Often, by "fostering such empowerment and recognition, the parties can develop a mutually acceptable solution on their own. However, they are not pushed in the direction nearly as much as they might be in settlement-oriented mediation."[130]

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[125] Ibid., 30.

[126] Ibid., 31.

[127] Ibid., 27.

[128] Andrew Moravcsik, "Negotiating the Single European Act: National Interests and Conventional Statecraft in the European Community," *International Organization* 45, no. 1 (1991): 19-56.

[129] Ibid., 56.

[130] Ibid., 58.

Conflict mediation and management's goal is to lead to "resolution, which ranges from the least to the most coercive. Conflicts may be avoided, talked out, negotiated, arbitrated, adjudicated, or resolved by legislation, political action, or violent force."[131] Conflict mediation practice has been and continues to be practiced in various non-Western cultures and has brought resolve to many conflicts and to many communities around the world when parties in conflicts feel the need for a neutral mediator.

The mediator "plays a key role in the mediation process, based on the independence of the mediator and most especially the ombudsman's ability to identify the probable cause of the conflict,"[132] from which a hypothesis can be built on how the conflict can be resolved. A contingent plan may sometimes be used to handle problems that may arise during negotiation.

How then does the mediator get involved in any conflict situation? Mediators are often invited by the involved parties or may be appointed by an official third party. For example, the "South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa was set up by the Government of National Unity to help deal with what happened under apartheid. The conflict during the period of apartheid resulted in violence and human rights abuses on all sides, for no section of society escaped the horrific acts perpetrated by both sides."[133] The goal of the reconciliation process was to give members of the

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[131] Harry T. Edwards, "Alternative Dispute Resolution: Panacea or Anathema?" *Harvard Law Review* 99, no. 3 (1986): 668-684.

[132] Ibid., 669.

[133] Paul Lansing and Julie C. King, "South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission: The Conflict Between Individual Justice and National Healing in the Post-Apartheid Age," *Arizona Journal of International and Comparative Law,* 15 (1998): 753.

"public a chance to express their regrets at failing to prevent human rights violations and to demonstrate their commitment to reconciliation."[134] The commissions were appointed to be neutral parties and were respected by all as being impartial.

The task of the conflict mediator is to set the mediation agenda. The parties involved in the conflict "need to identify the topics of their concern, identify issues of contention, and decide on the order in which issues are discussed."[135] Most "conflicts are either interest-based or value-based. Mediators are to avoid describing the conflict regarding value differences by helping parties frame issues in a way enables problem-solving. Negotiators tend to avoid using adversarial language. Instead, they use neutral terminology in describing problems and disputes."[136]

Mediation and conflict management often run into cultural differences that can affect the development of agendas. Warm climate cultures (Africa & Asia) "prefer a storytelling approach to presenting the conflict's history and issues."[137] Doing that helps to avoid confrontation by describing the conflicts in an indirect way and sometimes using third-person terms. On the other hand, cold climate cultures (the U.S. and western Europe) prefer an explicit enumeration of the issues; that is, addressing the conflict head on. But what about mediation and management among people of a similar culture? Are there pitfalls? If so, what are they?

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[134] Ibid., 750.

[135] Ibid., 751.

[136] Ibid., 752.

[137] Ibid., 753.

One of the primary foci of mediation and management is to encourage the conflicting parties to communicate with each other concerning the conflict. Without an effective channel of communication between the conflicting parties and a commitment to resolving the matter, mediation will most likely fail. When mediation sessions are not going well, conflicting parties often feel discouraged and frustrated, which results in quitting the process. Deadlocks or impasses during mediation process occur when disputing parties are not willing to engage or communicate with each other. Some common reasons that lead to failure include (a) the mediator is chosen by an outside party to mediate a conflict, (b) lack of commitment from conflicting parties to settle the dispute, (c) a court-ordered mediator, (d) a mediator's poor preparation regarding the matter, and (e) poor development of common interest for conflicting parties to see.

Interfaith Dialogue

The word *interfaith* "has become somewhat of a buzzword these days; an interfaith service is becoming more and more common."[138] But many such efforts get stalled after a few token meetings and a few initial forays into interfaith territories because people are at a loss. "I can see clearly the time coming when people belonging to different faiths will have the same regard for other faiths that they have for their own."[139] The best place to begin is with the most influential peacemakers of the previous century. Gandhi, was he right? Has the time come upon us when people of different faiths have

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[138] Don Mackenzie, Ted Falcon, and Jamal Rahman, *Getting to the Heart of Interfaith: The Eye-Opening, Hope-Filled Friendship of a Pastor, a Rabbi & an Imam* (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2010), 5.

[139] Ibid., 15.

the same regard for the other? It is not yet time to argue about it, with the rise of fundamentalism in America, Syria, Iran, Nigeria, and other countries.

Yet, there are signs of hope, often in surprising places. Consider the community market in Rockford. When we walk to the city market, we find people of different creeds and color filled with beauty, and if we look a little further, we see ourselves in the other, most of whom define themselves as seekers, spiritual but not religious. Others among the religious seekers are religiously affiliated and often describe themselves as both religious and spiritual. Simply put, they belong to a particular religious community—Jewish, Christian, or Muslim. Their roots in this community give them wings to fly, but yet are open to relating to the other religions.

All of this suggests that despite the rise of fundamentalism all over the world, a longing and need for hope and peace is apparently growing. At the interfaith council in Rockford, for instance, all religious participants sought to create space for other religions to feel welcome. It was a milestone for religious diversity as people holding these beliefs were offered the platform to express their convictions.

Of course, religious diversity is not something new. It has always existed and will continue to exist. In past practices, each of these diverse religions have stuck with its adherents' point of view on the subject of origin. Scholars, however, have disagreed on how religion began. This has become problematic because the Abrahamic faiths each have a claim to this historical beginning. We can also safely assume that there have been various religions in the world that preceded the calendar we currently use. But there is something new about the practice of interfaith dialogue. The degree and the scope of

awareness has grown among these religions as a result of urbanization and globalization, creating a deeper understanding of each other's practices.

Christians draw great inspiration from Jesus' teachings that seem to welcome the other—as can be seen in his relationships with the Pharisees, Sadducees, and zealots who were always welcomed to join him for dinner. Jesus, through the Scriptures, could be said to be the first practitioner of interfaith dialogue who not only ate with Jews but with Gentiles as well, welcoming all of them into the conversation. "Now the tax collectors and sinners were all gathering around to hear Jesus. But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, this man welcomes sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:1–2 NIV).

"What then is the connection between Christian, Muslim, and Jewish nonviolence and Christian dialogue with other faiths?"[140] "Some Christians believe that true nonviolence is possible only for those whose lives have been shaped by the example and sacrificial suffering of Jesus Christ. In practice, however," [141] Christians have worked alongside Jews during the civil rights movement, with Muslims in the struggle against the Vietnam War, and with Jews, and Muslims in pursuit of peace in the Middle East."[142] "Interfaith dialogue has become an integral part of nonviolence. But what exactly does it mean for Christians, as Christians, to engage in nonviolent social action alongside people of other faiths and ideologies? In the book, *Nonviolence for the Third Millennium*, G. Simon Harak, S.J., offers a wealth of materials from which answers to this question might

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[140] Gopin, "Religion, Violence, and Conflict Resolution," 23.

[141] Walter Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2003), 51.

[142] Mackenzie, Falcon, and Rahman, *Getting to the Heart of Interfaith*, 51.

emerge."[143] Also, Walter Wink, in *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way,* wrote, "The third way is not a perfectionist avoidance of violence but a creative struggle to restore the humanity of all parties in dispute."[144]

At the core of interfaith dialogue is a moving beyond separation and suspicion, for separation and suspicion can be subtle. They often crop up when least expected, in ways that disappoints representatives from other faiths and causes people to close up from each other. Interfaith dialogue happens when there are shared vignettes. At the core of the interfaith journey is the ability to learn the foundations of another's faith, which can lead to a better appreciation of such traditions.[145] "Familiarity with the classical sources might make it possible to distinguish where and when leaders are genuinely expressing their tradition in ways that express its core beliefs and practices."[146] A balanced interfaith approach engages with multiple faith communities, seeking to transform the religious division that drives conflict, which includes religious bias that stymied collaborative peacebuilding.

Restorative Justice

"Restorative justice is concerned with healing victims' wounds, restoring offenders to law-abiding lives, and repairing the harm done to interpersonal relationships

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[143] Ibid., 52.

[144] Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence,* 51.

[145] Mackenzie, Falcon, and Rahman, *Getting to the Heart of Interfaith*, 51.

[146] Gopin, "Religion, Violence, and Conflict Resolution," 1-31.

and the community."[147] Restorative justice "seeks to involve all stakeholders and provide opportunities for those most affected by the crime to participate directly in the process of responding to the harm caused."[148] The

> central premise of restorative justice is that victims, offenders, and the affected communities are all key stakeholders in the restorative process. Victims may include not only those directly affected by the offense but also family members and members of the affected community. The safety, support, and needs of these victims are the starting points for any restorative justice process. Thus, the primary objective is to attend to the victims' needs: material, financial, emotional, and social. To address these requirements, the participation of the community is required.[149]

The crimes or violations that have been "committed against real individuals, rather than against the state. Restorative justice practice, therefore, advocates a restitution to the victim by the offender rather than retribution by the state against the offender. Instead of continuing and escalating the cycle of violence, it tries to restore relationships and stop the violence."[150]

These restorative justice practice process also "aims to empower victims to participate effectively in dialogue or mediation with offenders."[151] "Victims take an active role in directing the exchange that takes place, as well as defining the responsibilities and obligations of offenders. Offenders are likewise encouraged to

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[147] Gerry Johnstone, *Restorative Justice: Ideas, Values, Debates* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2013), 12

[148] Howard Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice: Revised and Updated* (New York, NY: Good Books, 2015),

[149] William Ury, *The Third Side: Why We Fight and How We Can Stop* (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2000), 3.

[150] Ibid., 5.

[151] Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*, 11.

participate in this exchange, to understand the harm they have caused to victims, and to take actual responsibility for its success."[152] This then means "making efforts on their part to set things right and make amends for their violations by committing to certain obligations that may come in the form of reparations, restitution, or community work. While fulfilling these requirements may be experienced as painful, the goal is not revenge, but the restoration of healthy relationships between individuals and within communities that have been most affected by the crimes."[153]

Restorative justice practice "is a forward-looking, preventive response that strives to understand crime in its social context. It also, challenges us to examine the root causes of violence and crime so that these cycles might be broken."[154] Restorative justice approach "is based on the assumption that crime has its origins in social conditions, and recognizes that offenders themselves have often suffered harm. Therefore, communities must both take some responsibility for remedying those conditions that contribute to crime and also work to promote healing."[155] So, healing becomes crucial "not just for victims, but also for offenders. Both the rehabilitation of criminals and their integration into the community are vital aspects of restorative justice."[156] In applying this practice, offenders are treated with the outmost respect, and their needs are addressed. But if all fails, the act of removing them from the community or imposing any other severe

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[152] Ibid., 12.

[153] Ibid., 13.

[154] Ury, *The Third Side,* 34.

[155] Ibid., 5.

[156] Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*, 13.

restrictions is often the last resort. "The best way to prevent re-offending is thought to be re-integration."[157]

Restorative justice, however, has been misplaced in some circles that see it as mediation. Howard Zehr, in *The Little Book of Restorative Justice,* lists the following:

> Restorative Justice is not primarily about forgiveness and reconciliation. Simply put, there should be no pressure to forgive.
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> 1. Restorative justice is not mediation, for restorative programs are planned around the possibility of facilitating between the victim, the offender, and the community through a restorative process.
> 2. Restorative justice is not designed to reduce recidivism, although the restorative process could reduce the number of offenders who reoffend once they have followed through with the process of restoration.
> 3. Restorative justice is not necessarily an alternative to prison.
> 4. Restorative justice is not a new or North American development, but special debt is owed to the native peoples of North America and New Zealand.[158]

Restorative justice at the "national level takes on various forms. Victim-offender mediation is perhaps the most common, which involves face-to-face dialogue between victims and offenders."[159] Victim's "needs, including the need to be consulted in the focus. During victim-offender meetings, offenders have a chance to take active steps to make reparation to their victims."[160]

Offenders also have to "listen to victims' stories and face up to the reality of what they have done."[161] Offenders, are often and deeply affected by this experience and the

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[157] Ibid., 15.

[158] Ibid., 16.

[159] Mark S. Umbreit, Robert B. Coates, and Betty Vos, "Restorative Justice Dialogue: A Multi-Dimensional, Evidence-Based Practice Theory," *Contemporary Justice Review* 10, no. 1 (2007): 31.

[160] Ibid., 39.

[161] Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*, 18.

outcomes have positive impact on them which then motivations to make reparations. Because this process "brings victims and offenders together and enables them to talk with one another, it can allow them to see the other as a person rather than a stereotype."[162]

Restorative Justice and International Practice

Restorative justice has become significant "at the international level, [continuing] to play a major role in responding to severe human rights violations or cases of genocide, such as in Rwanda and South Africa."[163] But the "crucial step toward restorative justice is taken when governments tell the truth about past atrocities carried out by the state, as happened in Rwanda following the 1994 genocide."[164] This process of healing brings to bear these three steps:

1. "remembering the atrocities committed,
2. repenting, and
3. forgiving."[165]

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[162] John R. Gehm, "Victim-Offender Mediation Programs: An Exploration of Practice and Theoretical Frameworks," *Western Criminology Review* 1, no. 1 (1998): 31.

[163] Eugenia Zorbas, "Reconciliation in Post-Genocide Rwanda," *African Journal of Legal Studies* 1, no. 1 (2004): 121.

[164] Mark R. Amstutz, "Is Reconciliation Possible After Genocide? The Case of Rwanda," *Journal of Church and State* (2006): 542

[165] Ibid., 539.

SECTION 3.

THESIS

Introduction

During our face-to-face intensive class time in Portland, Oregon, Leonard Sweet said, "The greater the shoreline of the unknown becomes, the more you know, you don't know."[166] These words have stuck with me throughout my studies and will continue to shape my call to ministry. In studying historical trends, I discovered that when the Roman Empire collapsed, leading to the rise of the Dark Ages, "it was at this point in history that many forms of art works were produced, such as stained-glass masterpieces and stone carvings."[167] What came out of the Dark Ages was amazing. Based on this historical understanding, are we at another moment in human history when something great can come out in relation to the rise in violent conflicts around the globe?

When the cold war ended around the 1990s, a sense of hope rose around the world. Many felt that better days were coming. The end of the cold "war was followed by disarmament treaties, the potential for new cooperation that could set up partnerships,"[168] with fresh stakeholders involved in addressing the pain that had held states and religious institutions hostage. With the overthrow of demagogues, most notably the collapse of communism, opportunities for new partnerships were formed, bringing humanity to a

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[166] Leonard Sweet, Lecture in Portland, Oregon, 2016.

[167] Leonard Sweet, *Me and We: God's New Social Gospel* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014), 92.

[168] Heidi Tworek, "The Creation of European News: News Agency Cooperation in Interwar Europe," *Journalism Studies* 14, no. 5 (2013): 23.

renewed sense of what Pierce's theory of semiotics summarized as "a conceptual progression of signs from indexes, to icons, to human-created symbols."[169]

The question presents itself: could religion play a major role in peacemaking and conflict transformation? Over the years, the power of religion has been rejected by many secular theorists who see religion as only contributing to the lack of peace in the world. This chapter proposes that bringing the Abrahamic faiths of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism back into wider peace conversations and returning to cultural pluralism will have a positive effect on the process of transforming conflict and bringing peace.

The Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are monotheistic religions that share the affirmation of a single God. The proclamation by these faiths of God as creator and sovereign ruler of the universe transcends the Abrahamic faiths. They equally believe that God spoke in the past through his prophets and through the holy Scriptures. "Not only a belief in one God but faith in the creator God, binds together the Abrahamic religions together."[170]

In the today's context of spiritual need and conflicts, the Abrahamic faiths should collaborate toward peacemaking and not compete with one another. They must work together in harmony, cooperating in the genuine spirit of service to humanity with the shared common understanding of being heirs of Abraham. Only then will they be able to influence the opinions of the masses and truly educate the people toward peacemaking. The ethos of the Abrahamic faiths' teachings contains in them some moral virtues that serves as bedrock of action for its adherents. For that reason, paying attention to the role

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[169] Chandler, *Semiotics,* 56.

[170] Langermann, *Monotheism and Ethics*, 4.

religion plays in society is needed. Also contained in their teachings is the belief in the sovereignty of God, which led to a meeting of these faiths to strategize about how to work together in an interfaith manner.

Following the interfaith meeting at Rockford, it was hoped that religious leaders from these diverse faiths would reach out their hands in friendship to one another and the people of Rockford, irrespective of race or belief, in order to create a peaceful Rockford. Unarguably, Rockford is no different from most cosmopolitan cities in America or around the world, where these three religions coexist side by side. In Rockford, however, the three religions not only coexist but has been used as a channel for peacemaking. The understanding is that "Abraham is the central pivotal figure in the shared history of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In the Judaic tradition, he is the original recipient of the original covenant between the Hebrew people and God."[171]

My Story of Conflict Awareness

The proposal for this chapter is based on my life experience and personal history of growing up in Nigeria and my journey in South Africa, which led me to consider the Apostle Paul's conversion. In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul alluded to his life-changing encounter with the resurrected Jesus that occurred on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-16). This encounter became a radically new force in Paul's universe. The emergence of the Centre for Nonviolence and Conflict Transformation (CNCT) to transform conflict is akin to Paul's experience on the road to Damascus. Before my South African experience, I

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[171] Jerald F. Dirks, *The Abrahamic Faiths: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Similarities and Contrast* (Beltsville, MD: Amana Publications, 2004), 25.

thought of reconciliation and transformation exclusively from the religious angle that I had been taught as a child. Experiencing the ramifications of apartheid in South Africa has prepared me for further work in this field.

Nigeria: Emergence of Christian and Muslim Conflict Awareness

I was born in Jos, Plateau State, a middle belt city of northern Nigeria, a city of about 900,000 people. Jos, the administrative, commercial, and tourist center of Plateau State, is known for its tin and columbite mining, which has led to the influx of migrant workers from across the country. The road to leadership was mapped out for me when, as a teenager, I joined to be a member of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). My mentor then was the general secretary for the Youth Wing, and he helped to lay the ground work for what would be my future service to CAN. Nigeria has been and continues to be impacted greatly by fighting between Muslims and Christians. When that fighting reached my city, Jos, which is a fault line between the Muslim majority North and the Christian Majority South, I was encouraged by my youth pastor to join the Christian youth militia. Christian scriptures were used for the justification of violence in the name of self-defense. We were taught that God had used force to defend God's children. We were assured that it was God who instructed the Israelites to go to war, in order to conquer their enemies. This fight became personal for me, when in 1983, a quarrel that broke out between majority Muslims population and minority Christians over control of a market square. Being the minority, Christians were outnumbered by the Muslims during this fight, and more than twenty Christians were killed. Unfortunately, this conflict took the lives of some of my friends; others woke up survivors, only to

discover that their limbs had been severed by machetes and their lives would never be the same.

At the same time in Jos, a young man named Haruna, like me, was encouraged to join the ranks of future leadership in the Muslim militia. Haruna came from a long family line of Muslim scholars. Both of us (Haruna and myself), in our own faith traditions and serving in leadership roles, were instructed to work toward planting seeds among our peers to teach them to defend our religions, even to the point of killing and death. Haruna's mentors used scripture from the Qur'an to justify their acts of violence. Leaders from both religions used their sacred texts to uphold their positions, believing that their interpretations were the only appropriate and right ones in this scenario. But one of Haruna's spiritual mentors, a Sufi hermit, tried to guide him away from an act of senseless violence.

In the early 1990s, Christian militiamen stabbed Haruna's mentor, killing him then throwing his body down a well. Haruna's mission then became one of revenge. He was going to kill any and every Christian that he came across. Then, one Friday at the Muslim worship service, in the sermon, Haruna's imam told the story of the prophet Muhammad, "who had gone to preach at Ta'if, a town about seventy miles southeast of Mecca. Bleeding after being stoned and cast outside the city,"[172] Muhammad "was visited by an angel who asked, if he would like those who mistreated him to be destroyed. Muhammad said no."[173] Haruna felt that the imam was talking directly to him during the sermon. The next time Haruna and I met, Haruna, in tears, reported that he had forgiven

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[172] Yahiya Emerick, *The Life and Work of Muhammad* (London, UK: Penguin, 2002), 11.

[173] Ibid., 12.

the Christian militia that killed his mentor. To prove his commitment to this new way of life, he went to visit the sick and the wounded in the nearby Christian neighborhood. Over time, Haruna and I developed a stronger bond of friendship that surpassed our religious differences.

Even as friends, we both quietly longed for each other to be converted. I wanted Haruna to experience what I had experienced and to know what following Jesus looks and feel like, on the other hand, Haruna, wanted me to experience his faith as well. Above all, though, we remained friends and continued to work toward peace, justice, and reconciliation for all, irrespective of religious affiliation. This journey has left me convinced that peacemaking and evangelism are not mutually exclusive.

South Africa: Race and Apartheid and Scriptural Understanding

Today, millions of people "around the globe have heard the word *apartheid*. Some will describe it as white oppression over blacks or native Africans in South Africa."[174] Perhaps, in a nutshell, that is what it is. Unfortunately, "apartheid played a substantial part in South Africa's history and narrative."[175] Diving into a brief history of apartheid, would grant readers some insight into the country that I eventually came to live in and love, until ultimately becoming a naturalized South African citizen.

Apartheid can simply be described as a word that means the separation and separate development of people based on skin color and ethnic origins. The roots of

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[174] James L. Gibson, "Overcoming Apartheid: Can Truth Reconcile a Divided Nation?" *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 603, no. 1 (2006): 96.

[175] Ibid., 98.

apartheid can be traced to 19th-century colonial development. By the "early 20th century, British colonial administrators decided to adopt a policy of separate development based on the teachings of John Ruskin." Ruskin who was an art critic of the Victorian era, whose writings:

> emphasized the connections between nature, art, and society. His teachings claimed that in an ideal society, the superior white race would assist the other races to work toward the eventual goal of equality and reintegration, all the while maintaining a degree of separation between them. These "lesser" races would be given tasks more suited to their mental and physical progression.[176]

In 1920s, laws were passed to facilitate the legal separation of people by their physical attributes associated with skin color and hair texture. For instance, black South Africans were no longer allowed to enter white urban areas. These practices rendered everyone a prisoner in the country to which they belonged. People of European decent had more rights and enjoyed greater luxury, while black Africans, Indians, and indigenous people of southern Africa (Koisans) were relegated to manual labor for their white counterparts (oppressors). "Not everyone in the country, however, turned a blind eye to the unfairness brought about by this policy, and protests from countries around the world grew steadily. Eventually, economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure forced change."[177] President F. W. de Klerk "responded to the pressure by allowing several political parties to become active again, culminating in the release of Nelson Mandela from prison."[178] Mandela has been imprisoned by the South African government because

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[176] Ibid., 145.

[177] Ibid.

[178] Peter N. Bouckaert, "The Negotiated Revolution: South Africa's Transition to a Multiracial Democracy," *Stanford Journal of International Law* 33 (1997): 375.

his appeal to majority black and marginalized communities was seen as threat to the government, which could lead to an uprising and violence by the citizens.

Mandela's release from prison led to the first truly "free and fair elections in the country. These elections resulted in the African National Congress (ANC) being voted into power and Nelson Mandela taking the seat as president,"[179] rising from prisoner of the system to leading the system. Amazingly, this transition of power occurred peacefully. "The injustices of apartheid were explained away as an experiment that did not work. Although apartheid may no longer be the national policy in South Africa, the system certainly took its toll on the country."[180] There are many long-lasting consequences following the elevation of one race at the expense of others.

While many citizens have moved forward, embracing every "ethnic nationality and race as fellow South Africans,"[181] others still hold the old mindset of racial superiority and rights. Perhaps these very circumstances have made South Africa "one of the world's leaders in dealing with racial issues and political inequities. Whatever the case, the country has become and continues to be unified"[182] by its many colorful people who continue to work toward racial and socio-economic integration instead of being torn apart by its differences.

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[179] Ibid., 280.

[180] Ibid., 295.

[181] Ibid., 296.

[182] Jeremy Seekings and Nicoli Nattrass. *Class, Race, and Inequality in South Africa* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 146.

USA: Systemic Racism and Classism Within a Particular Community

Americans would, "like to think of the founding of the American colonies, and later, the United States, as driven by a quest for freedom, religious liberty, and political and economic independence."[183] However, racial inequality has shaped American history since the arrival of white people in the land. "From the start, American society was founded with systems of domination, inequality, and oppression particularly the denial of freedom for African slaves. One of the great paradoxes of American history is the coexistence of the ideals of equality and freedom with practice of slavery."[184] Today "we live with the ramifications of that paradox,"[185] most clearly seen in our inner cities, where racial divides are drawn and many of the youth feel disconnected.

I am not an expert in the study of racism in American society. My expertise is found in my experience and my story. Currently, I live in Rockford, Illinois, and in my time here I have seen the impact of centuries of racial division in this community. This history and my contemporary experience continue to shape my ministry and call to better understand how racial oppression imposes harm on people. Nevertheless, "to think of racism as something that only affects the lives of African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Latino/as and other racially defined minorities is a mistake."[186] The

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[183] Samuel P. Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity* (Delran, NJ: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 3.

[184] Ibid., 23.

[185] Ibid., 24.

[186] David A. Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (London, UK: Hachette UK, 2006), 570.

American society has been profoundly shaped by race and politics, which has deeply affected both black and white working classes. This shaping has led to an increase in violent conflict. Understanding the historical context helps conflict transformers think of ways they could work at transforming the conflicts.

Learning to Read the Signs of Conflict

The discipline of semiotics involves an understanding of becoming an effective communicator; to do so, one must understand verbal and visual signs. What are signs of conflict? How can one read and interpret them? Conflict does not just occur suddenly. A developing conflict always has signs or warning. Conflict transformers who are able to read these signs are more effective in transforming them.

The problem often arises from the inability to read the signs. What then are these subtle signs of conflict? One common sign to look for is religious nationalism. Religious nationalists "view their religious traditions as so closely tied to their nation state or their land that any threat to one of these is a threat to one's existence, leading to extremist sentiment."[187] Religious nationalism often thrives where a particular faith dominates the others. Another sign to look for is the use of religious symbols. In this context, "it is also likely that religious symbols will be used to forward ethnic or nationalist causes."[188]

Signs of conflicts that occur in the inner city are a bit different. Violent crime rates have declined in the general population across the U.S. but violent conflict and exposure in the inner cities and within families remains a concern. Over the last decades,

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[187] Georgi O. Nodia, "Nationalism and Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 3, no. 4 (1992): 13.

[188] Ibid., 20.

some researchers have continued to investigate the influence of community violence among at-risk youths. However, it is only recently that researchers have turned their attention to inner-city life and experiences. The youth and especially children seem to be particularly vulnerable and susceptible to the damaging effect of violence around them. They are also less able to verbalize their feelings and experiences, causing their distress to go unnoticed by adults, prompting them to seek gang membership. Early signs of conflict in the inner city range from a lack of interest in attending school, public and social gatherings to a lack of interest in what goes on around youth and young adult. The ability ready and identifying these signs would be helpful.

Religion

When Christians, "Muslims, and Jews are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace."[189] These religions are intertwined everywhere as never before. In the city of Rockford alone, the communities are so interwoven that they cannot be differentiated one from the other. Our common future is at stake, "but the common scriptural foundations for Jews, Christians, and Muslims remain the basis for justice and peace in the world."[190] Leaders from these three religions who have worked for peace have worked first of all for justice. Leaders like Pope John Paul and Martin Luther King, Jr. are among countless others who towed this line.

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[189] Jacques Waardenburg, "Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Their Religions," *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 15, no. 1 (2004): 17.

[190] Ibid., 29.

Plurality

The process of transformation is always bigger that we are. Over the past millennia, religion has been the system by which society is oriented; religion has laid the foundation and sanctioned what morality is and should be. Religion has joined the dance for co-creation but non-religious people also have some basic orientation to ethical and moral life. But in today's society, religious and non-religious people are coming together to lead the moral crusade to engender human dignity. According to some understanding, "human dignity includes reason and responsibility. And it is of utmost significance for peace among the people, for international collaboration in politics, economics, and culture and for international organization like the United Nations."[191] These coalitions of believers and nonbelievers work as change agents, working to create change in the global ethics and conflict transformation arena, joining forces to resist cynicism and the social apathy, and creating plurality.

Plurality calls for not just religious collaboration but for strengthening the cultural dialogue, which could take the form of cultural relativism. Plurality also allows the Abrahamic faiths to be agents of education. "Following World War II, Jewish and Christian denominations emerge as vigorous advocates of human rights, issuing bold confessional statements and assigning significant institutional resources to the cause of Jewish NGOs such as the World Jewish Congress."[192] Plurality also calls for the progress

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[191] Perry Schmidt-Leukel, ed., *War and Peace in World Religion*: *The Gerald Weisfeld Lectures 2003* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2004), 186.

[192] R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 124.

in addressing gender-based violence, raising progressive leaders and activists from the differing religions to fight for women's rights, freedom, and responsibility. A "generation of Jews, Christians, and Muslims scholars are advocating to reinterpret what they have judged to be outdated teachings and practices advocated by religious leaders."[193] Plurality creates a space for everyone to make meaningful contribution in conflict transformation.

Diagnosis in Conversation

In Tokyo in 1958, during an international meeting of the Association of Religious History, some of the discussions were centered on the ways that a practical teaching of the religious history of the Abrahamic faiths could be a unifying force for a world peace that transforms conflict. In order to accomplish this goal, the conference emphasized the need to promote better acquaintance between adherents of these religions, highlighting the universal appeal that exists among them, and the result of working for peace together. Each of the Abrahamic faiths believe in the existence of God as creator and their teachings contain similar truths of justice that are vital and important to humanity.

However, this call continues to be met with some forms of resistance from adherents of these religions, which can be attributed to some cultural expressions through the various faith practices, such as a Christian should follow Christianity, a Muslim should follow Islam, and a Jew should follow Judaism. The hope was that in this diffusion, each leader would be comfortable in their religious tradition and yet seek a synthesis of unity from the call to address a common conflict together. In our work in

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[193] Ibid., 133.

Rockford, these faiths continue to offer their approaches of working together, addressing a specific conflict between their different religious groups with a view to finding a consensus on what approach would work best and be practical in any given circumstances of a given conflict.

Learning to See Signs of Transformation

To transform a conflict is to transplant it in a new reality. To "transform a conflict is to transcend the goals of the conflicted parties, define other goals, and lift a conflict the parties have presented so that conflict can to be addressed,"[194] including the discourses that the incompatibility may look insurmountable. In life, conflict is inevitable, but are there ways that one can see signs of transformation in the midst of conflict? In my work in Rockford, some visual cues point to transformation. The community has its share of racial tension between the minority community and law enforcement. The Center for Nonviolence and Conflict Transformation (CNCT) has made use of its mobile tech and art lab. Two thirty-foot trailers, equipped with computers and a music recording studio, to bring the community together to work toward addressing poverty as the root cause of violence and gang-related activities. Although some old and conventional habits are still present, some identifiable changes are noticeable. Trust is being built between the minority community and law enforcement, pointing to some further signs of transformation.

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[194] Ibid., 155.

Religion as a Source for Transformation

If this transformation is to happen, it means all these religious leaders would convey to their followers a message of an abiding hope. But we are "increasingly aware that the way we conceptualize reality shapes the way we approach it. What then can we do in concrete terms when we engage in conflict transformation processes?"[195] In my Christocentric understanding, it as Paul wrote, "be *transformed* by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2 paraphrased). Paul's use of these words is similar to "the word we use for the metamorphosis, the same metamorphosis we see in a butterfly. The change in the end is something completely different from what was before. The total the transformation should be like this when it comes to our thinking because our thoughts determine our actions."[196]

Conflict transformation practitioners "often have a rich set of skills and techniques for dealing with conflict. But are these methods, techniques and skills sufficient, to deal with conflicts of cultural and religious dimensions, or do we need them to be enriched in spiritual skill sets?"[197] It is somewhat difficult for people to change their beliefs and opinions about persons of other religions. Therefore, Paul's admonition to his readers tries to show the possibility of having a transformed mind through Christ; through Christ one's mind becomes brand new. In Christ, we willingly surrender "going through a complete metamorphosis apart from the opinions of other people. When our

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[195] Ibid., 156.

[196] Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1990), 29.

[197] Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice*, 21.

thinking is changed,"[198] our beliefs are changed, our actions are changed, and our lives are changed. My understanding, therefore, is that religion can be a source of transformation like no other. Furthermore, the participating strategies will involve a more collaborative change process that would bring about changes in individual, communities, as well as institutional habits, "if we are to find ways for different religious groups to coexist."[199]

How Do We Educate for Peace in the Abrahamic Faiths?

The Abrahamic faiths are often referred to as the monotheistic religions. This designation captures the essence of these faiths, most notably their shared affirmation of a single God. They characteristically "proclaim God as the Creator, the sovereign of the universe and this world its past, present, and future. God not only transcends human understanding but God also uses human language to reveal God's will and way to us."[200] These religions also proclaim that "God speaks through the prophets, and the holy book is the treasure chest of their revelations, and not only do they believe in one God but faith in a creator God binds together the Abrahamic religions."[201]

In the context of today's spiritual needs and conflicts, the Abrahamic faiths should collaborate toward peacemaking and not be in competition with one another. They must "work in harmony, cooperating in the genuine spirit of service to humanity as well as

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[198] Ibid., 24.

[199] Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred,* 124.

[200] Langermann, *Monotheism & Ethics*, 3.

[201] Ibid., 4.

based on the shared, common understanding of being heirs of Abraham."[202] Only then can they influence the opinions of the masses and truly educate the people toward peacemaking and peaceful coexistence. Their "religious instruction and beliefs continue to remain the lifeblood of society's moral ethos."[203] These religions "teach virtue, they have also become a bedrock for moral action. As such, religion plays an essential role in society,"[204] thereby deserving attention. It is certain that "Christians, Jews, and Muslims will readily agree that God alone is sovereign. It is not so easy though, to see what is involved in relinquishing the idea of sovereignty over other religions."[205]

For the sake of humanity and the cause of peace, religious leaders have stretched out their hands in friendship to one another and the people of Rockford, irrespective of race or creed. Rockford is similar to most cosmopolitan cities anywhere in America and around the world where these three religions coexist side by side. In Rockford, they not only coexist but have taken to applying their religious, interpretive understandings to become a conduit for peacemaking. Rockfordians did not maintain themselves with ironclad religious identities but chose to enjoy a variety of the spirit. Focusing on goals and not creeds is not to say that beliefs are not important, but there was one rule—no attacking other religions. The understanding is based on "Abraham [as] the central pivotal figure in the shared history of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the Judaic

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[202] Ibid., 5.

[203] Ibid., 7.

[204] Ibid., 8.

[205] Ibid., 11.

tradition, he is the original recipient of the original covenant between Hebrew People and God."[206]

This understanding fuels the hope for working together as diverse religious groups, which might not have otherwise happened because each religion has a claim to exclusivity in their practice in peacemaking. The Christian tradition understands Abraham, the famed patriarch, as a recipient of the original covenant from God, whereas Jesus is seen as the one who makes the second covenant possible. In Islamic culture and religion, the same "Abraham is regarded as having an unwavering faith and steadfast monotheism, being a prophet and a messenger of God. And the Jewish tradition within its scriptures attests to Israel as servant."[207] Such understanding led the "19th-century commentator on democracy Alexis De Tocqueville to say, when any religion whatsoever has cast deep roots within a shared understanding of its origins … preserve it carefully as the most precious inheritance."[208]

In response to these, Rockford's Unity Group, coordinated by the Center for Nonviolence and Conflict Transformation, called for a rally at various houses of worship for these three religions. These rallies began at the Muslim Community Center gymnasium, the Jewish Temple Beth-El, and the Christian Church. These rallies in Rockford served as an educational opportunity for people of all races, religions, and ethnicities to come together in a show of solidarity. At a time when polarization in the United States is increasing, we wanted to show unity across our community's diverse

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[206] Dirks, *The Abrahamic Faiths*, 25.

[207] Ibid., 26.

[208] Mormon News Room, "How Religion Is Vital to Society."

population. The rally featured speakers from the different religious groups in the community. According to the *New York Times*, there has been sixty percent increase in hate crime against Jews and Muslims.[209]

Our focus is to defeat discrimination against minorities, with particular attention to Islamophobia and misinformation about Muslims and Jews. America is great because of its diversity and respect for the other. The rally was meant to show support for all groups that feel threatened and to send a message that not only is this unacceptable but our community will stand up firmly against hate. We stand together regardless of race, creed, orientation, citizenship status, or disability, to build peace and transform conflict.

The events kicked off with storytelling. Opportunity was given for Muslims, Christians, and Jews to share stories from their religious traditions about how a peace process takes place. This storytelling and listening to each perspective opened up new vista for attendees to hear others' stories. The storytelling events continued moving to each of the different houses of worship—the mosque, the church, and the synagogue. Several speakers from diverse backgrounds and faiths spent a few minutes talking about the importance of being faithful to the call for justice, equality, and peace. The events culminated with a commitment to work toward peacemaking that is backed up by actionable steps.

Religion as a Positive Force

Gopin observed, "Religion has a dual legacy in human history regarding peace and violence. Conflict transformation approaches must examine more systematically the

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[209] Lichtblau, "U.S. Hate Crimes."

leadership development and decision-making process of religious actors in order for the strategies of peacemaking to be effective in any relevant contexts."[210] This dissertation proposes that the study and understanding of the history of these three religions and their conceptual theological understandings of peace be lined up with their praxis. This provides conflict transformers with a new skill in the field of peacemaking and conflict transformation. Christianity, Islam, and Judaism can act as a positive force for conflict transformation.

Christianity as a Positive Force

The Christian process of being a conduit for peacemaking does not require just a mere belief in Jesus' teachings but it also requires an imitation of his actions. Doing so involves following the footsteps of Christ day by day and moment by moment for "we cannot go back to Jesus if that would mean simply repeating his belief. We can only go forward in a way that somehow corresponds in our time to the meaning of his life and the message for men of his day."[211] The Christian community in Rockford has served as a conduit for peace.

The Christ-centered peacemaking efforts in Rockford have not been distracted by the political rhetoric that associates Islam with violence but instead has sought to work on common grounds with peoples of all faiths. Faith has been put into practice to bring together the communities that were affected by the impact of the police incident with

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[210] Gopin, "Religion, Violence, and Conflict Resolution," 21.

[211] Stamenka Uvalić-Trumbić and John Daniel, "Let a Thousand Flowers Bloom," UNESCO Global Forum (Paris, 2011), 39.

Justin Martin. In these instances of working together, several essential principles emerged as a Christian approach to practical peacemaking. First, peacemakers must choose to be bold and gentle ambassadors of Jesus. Second, the yearnings for peace among the citizens of Rockford had to be recognized. The book, *Evangelical Peacemakers: Gospel Engagement in a War-Torn World*, points to the following as foundation for evangelical peacemaking:

> Christ-centered peacemaking refuses to be distracted by the fractures between Muslims and Christians by opposition, whether the objection comes from fellow Christians or zealous Muslims … principles emerge, such as bold and gentle … confess that Jesus is the ultimate peacemaker and pursue peace. Do acts of loving kindness, and the seed of peace are mostly unnoticed and be ambassadors of Christ.[212]

The willingness of Rockford's Christian community to engage in an interfaith cooperation has become a highly effective means of cultivating a harmonious relationship with the Muslim and the Jewish communities. The Christian approach comes from their faith in Christ, guided by their obedience to the Lord. Christians in Rockford see their journey as including, but not limited to, serving as pastors, missionaries, church planters, evangelists, community development workers, executives, and consultants. This journey is rooted in the scriptural understanding that the faithful church should be involved in the act of peacemaking in Rockford.

The reconciliation and forgiveness of Christ is known not only in the church but outside the walls of the church as well. Christians should therefore be ambassadors of Christ and his kingdom, not representatives of a particular political or national system. As ambassadors, they are not only to rally against law enforcement in instances of injustices

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[212] David P. Gushee, ed., *Evangelical Peacemakers: Gospel Engagement in a War-Torn World* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 65.

but to be “salt and light” within the political systems. This involvement comes through living out the principle and the call to peacemaking. Walter Wink mentioned that "the ultimate religious question today is no longer the Reformation's. But how can I find God in my enemy?”[213]

The Christian community in Rockford demonstrated what it means to be a conduit for peacemaking through their actions. They have not muted their witness but each believes that peacemaking must include space for the other Abrahamic faiths to express their understanding of peacemaking, to bear witness to each other.

Islam as a Positive Force

The Rockford Muslim community’s practical steps to becoming a conduit for peace stem from their theological understanding of unity in diversity between human beings, and their knowledge that although we come from different faiths, we are connected through the oneness of the creator God. So, against this backdrop of essential commonality, Muslims strive to live out the answer this question, "Which can be better in religion than one who submits his whole self to God, does good, and follow the way of Abraham the true in faith? For God did take Abraham for a friend" (Qur'an 4:125).

Muslims in Rockford hold to their scriptural conviction of the oneness of humanity. They do so by organizing outreaches to the community, opening their worship space for other community events, inviting the community to participate and to share in educating their community on assimilation in the American culture and worldview, and becoming a part of the whole community. They are also keen on sharing about the

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[213] Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence*, 59.

"similarities between Islam and the Western system in resolving conflict and building peace, such as communicating with each other and engaging in dialogue, negotiating and compromising and resolving differences peacefully, instead of trying to alter or modify anyone's beliefs and practices."[214]

The Islamic communities contribute to peacemaking efforts through resolving disputes and community development activities in an effort to "maintain a peaceful, healthy, and meaningful relationships with God and with all humanity. No relationship is to be disrupted by conflict,"[215] as in the case of Mark, whose story became a bedrock for peacemaking. Peacemaking, whether interpersonal or communal, can include restoration, which is essential for justice and peace. Peace, in this case, is ultimately tied to justice as a means of preventing reoccurrence and escalation. With "the right kind of leadership, religious leaders can indeed help move communities in the right direction for better understanding, tolerance, cooperation, and love."[216] The call to love one another should not lead to hostility but to brotherly and sisterly kindness, as expressed in Rockford.

Muslims in Rockford expressed a willingness to have such a brotherly and sisterly affection that does not seek judgment in human relationships. Our work together has facilitated a mercy process, using "the following steps: being just and working for group understanding; being fair and working towards mutual appreciation, being patient and working toward brotherly and sisterly fellowship, being kind and enjoy spiritual

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[214] Gopin, "Religion, Violence, and Conflict Resolution," 20.

[215] Ibid., 22.

[216] Ibid., 24.

communion, showing mercy, and enjoying divine harmony."[217] The Qur'an's consistent use of the word "*sulha* in resolving all kinds of conflict only means seeking peace and reconciliation that is backed by some form of settlement."[218]

Muslims use legal "structures and institutions that uses a variety of techniques with a developed justice structure to achieve peace. These structures include the appointment of a justice of the peace, whose role is to oversee the process of mediation, arbitration, and reconciliation."[219] Conflicting parties are often given multiple options to aid in resolving their disputes, including using a third party. In this case, those of other religious perspectives who are considered to be objective listeners and observers are used as the third parties. This may lead to a settlement and compensation that could be in cash and in-kind services of restoration. These procedures and relevant structures are needed to utilize all possible techniques. Because of the diversity of traditions, cultures, and opinions that exist in Islam, Islam can "be used to enrich the possibilities of pursuing peace in any given society."[220] This proved to be true in Rockford. The diversity helped to transform the ensuing conflict.

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[217] Ibid., 26.

[218] Mneesha Gellman and Mandi Vuinovich. "From Sulha to Salaam: Connecting Local Knowledge with International Negotiations for Lasting Peace in Palestine/Israel." *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (2008): 123.

[219] Ibid., 125.

[220] Ibid., 126.

"God Almighty has ordained the differences in human beings in our mental capabilities, languages, skin colors, and perception of thoughts."[221] All these differences serve to show "God's creative power and wisdom; if our lord had so willed, He would have made mankind one people, but they will not cease to differ, except those on whom your Lord and sustainer has bestowed His mercy, and for this did he created them"[222] (Qur'an 11:118-119). These differences could be a positive phenomenon that could be beneficial as Muslims relate to their non-Muslims counterparts.

Muslim scholars "have warned against disagreement in all its forms by emphasizing the need to avoid it. The companion of the prophet, Ibn Masud—may God be pleased with him—said: Discord and compassion require that you eschew disagreement."[223] This teaching is "indicative of the harmful and dangerous nature of discord."[224] As such, the prophet Harum included the fear of division and disagreements among his justified teachings by proclaiming peace with one's neighbor.[225]

Judaism as a Positive Force

The story of humanity begins with God's story of creation, a theme that has become very important for Jews, Muslims, and Christians, "In the beginning said Enuma Elish, the gods emerged to by, to from formless, watery waste a substance which was

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[221] Taha Jabir Alalwani, *The Ethics of Disagreement in Islam* (Herdon, VA: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2011), 17.

[222] Ibid., 18.

[223] Ibid., 17.

[224] Ibid., 18.

[225] Ibid., 19.

itself divine."[226] As a result, the Jew sees the ultimate purpose of the Torah as hinged on its peace position. For God should not be seen as capricious as it reads in the exodus story of war and brutality, but as the peace position of the Jewish elders as written in the Torah to save the Jewish people, for "the laws and rituals are binding upon everybody; even the gods must observe them to ensure the survival of civilization as the Babylonians saw it as well."[227] Deuteronomy Rabah 5:15 proclaims "to Jerusalem that Israel will be redeemed only through peace. Peace as a concept is very important to Judaism; Jews have a religious obligation to pursue it. Seek peace, and pursue it, seek it in your own place, and pursue it even to another place as well" (Lev. Rabah 9:9).

The idea about the shared ancestor Abraham, as well as the longing for peace and unity prompted the Jewish community of Rockford to seek a joint partnership with the other Abrahamic faiths in becoming a conduit for peacemaking. The Jewish community opened their place of worship (temple) for the other faiths to come in to share in the common ancestry, that is, the similarity in the relationship that the three faiths share with God. The Jewish community actively engaged in an effort to interpret the narrative and the laws of their tradition that were similar to those of the Christians and Muslims present. In addition to following Jewish traditions, they desired to resist the danger of injustice such as they face in Rockford, and to give special honor to the value of human life as taught by the Torah. So the killing of an unarmed young adult in the basement of a church became a rallying call for them to stand against injustice by joining forces with Christians and Muslims.

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[226] Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: The 4000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity and Islam* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1993), 7.

[227] Ibid., 9.

Peace as a concept is central to Judaism. “Peace is accompanied with truth and justice, it is one of the three keys of Jewish values. Peace, according to the Jewish sages, is the ultimate purpose of the whole Torah: All that is written in the Torah was written for the sake of peace (Tanhuma Shoftim 18).”[228]

The Torah calls for one to extol the holiness within others and to also cultivate holiness within oneself: “You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy” (Lev. 19:2 NRSV). Humans cannot escape the eye of God, so we are called to always work toward seeking justice and pursuing peace. Unfortunately, seeking justice and pursuing peace can sometimes be paradoxical in the struggle for self-determination, but the Jews in Rockford continuously seek to work with Muslims and Christians to bring justice and peace.

Christocentric Peacemaking

When religious groups focus less on themselves by seeking to understand others and pursue a way to address communal conflict, some pathways to peace become possible. As a follower of Jesus, my Christocentric understanding is that Christ-centered peacemaking refuses to be distracted by the fractures that exist within the different religious groups by choosing to bring my spiritual dimension into the process of peacemaking. This behavior helps to create a deep-seated and productive behavior, enabling opposing parties to own their attitudes. The Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities in Rockford not only analyzed the situation but contributed their religious beliefs and approaches in ways that led to what I have coined *radical peacemaking*.

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[228] Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Z Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*, OUP 2001.9.

Together we were able to develop the following principles that may be helpful in any conflicting situation:

- The recognition of the longing and desire for peace among the Abrahamic faiths.
- God, through Abraham, is the central connection point and point of interest for these religions.
- A recognition of the existence of religious differences, yet choosing to pursue peace together and address a common challenge; in this case, the shooting of an unarmed black man.
- Despite the enormous obstacle that seems to exist in the different religious practices, we were able to birth a new model for interfaith dialogue and a practical, three-dimensional approach to peacemaking.
- The goal for peacemaking should not be to convert the other. None of the participants were converted from their religious practices. Acceptance of the unique peace position that each person holds became a valuable asset.
- The courage to wait. Waiting kills the anger and the reaction that follows immediate response. In waiting, you suppress any knee jerk reaction.

The overall result was the transformation work that is ongoing in Rockford, through the work of the Center for Nonviolence and Conflict Transformation. For a continuation of this work, pastors, imams, and the rabbi need to be open to understanding and listening to how peace is carried out in other Abrahamic faiths.

Stories of Conflict Transformation

This section details the story of an actual conflict transformation and how these three faiths came together to respond to a negative situation. They thus transformed a negative incident by using their peace heritages as a force for good.

Shooting Incident Brings the Three Religions Together

In August 2016, a late morning call to the Rockford Police Department reported a domestic assault that happened the previous night on the west side of the city, a neighborhood with a racially-fueled reputation of crime, gang-related activities, and welfare dependency. The female caller reported that her boyfriend, a man named Mark, had allegedly threatened to slash her throat. According to dispatch records, the woman stated that Mark was sleeping inside the house and that she would wait outside for police officers to arrive. Although officers were dispatched, they arrived on scene about ten to fifteen minutes later, failing to apprehend the perpetrator who had fled through the back door of the residence. A few minutes later, a police dispatcher notified patrol units that a person fitting the description of the suspect was seen walking on the Jefferson Street Bridge, as well as notifying them that the suspect had allegedly tried to intimidate her by pulling a knife at her.

A few minutes later, the dispatcher provided more detailed information to the two officers who had been assigned to respond to the call. The officers were given the name

of the suspect, Mark Anthony Barmore, and his physical description, as well as the information that he had an outstanding warrant and might still be armed with a knife.[229]

After receiving this communication, officers notified the dispatcher that they had Mark in sight in the Winnebago-Woodlawn area. The officers saw Mark standing outside of a local black church, the House of Worship, speaking with a group of people. According to several of these individuals, Mark had come to the church occasionally. They reported that, in the moments leading up to the police officers' arrival, he communicated to them that he was having trouble with the police after an altercation with his girlfriend.

Before Mark saw the police, the church members were encouraging him to stay out of trouble and become involved in a boxing group that the church was soon to begin. When Mark caught sight of the police and realized they were looking for him, he entered the church by slipping in behind a church official who was also entering. To prevent Mark from fleeing the building via other exits, the two officers on scene pursued him on foot. A church official opened the doors to allow them into the building.

As they entered the space, two women told the two officers that the man had gone downstairs and that there were children in a daycare in the basement. The officers went downstairs looking for the suspect. According to one of the officers, he drew his service weapon just before entering the daycare room at the bottom of the basement stairs. Upon entrance to the daycare space, the officers observed that there were eight to fifteen preschool children as well as two adults in the room. An officer asked the adults where the man had gone. One or more children, and possibly the daycare teacher, stated that he

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[229] Words from the 911 call center.

had gone into the boiler closet. Seeing the officer's guns drawn and realizing the danger for the children, the church proprietor and one of the teachers gathered them into the corner of the classroom, opposite the location of the suspect, shielding them with their bodies.

Within moments, an officer ordered Mark to come out of his hiding space in the boiler room with his hands up. Instead, a scuffle ensued. In their reports, the officers claimed that when Mark began to exit the boiler room, he attempted to grab one of the officer's guns. The gun was discharged. The second officer reported that after being shot, Mark continued to move back and then forward again, maintaining his hold on the gun. The officer continued to struggle with the suspect and the gun. Mark and the officer fell against a sink, leaving Mark's back exposed to the second officer. The second officer fired his weapon hitting Mark with six shots in his back. Mark was pronounced dead at the scene. Despite being shielded by the church staff, the children witnessed this horrific event.

The unfortunate result of this incident involving lethal force was a riot in the city of Rockford. The racial division in the city was never seen more clearly. Protest marches sprang up. Reverend Jesse Jackson and local parishioners organized a protest march across the city, culminating in a packed church, praying for peace, and demanding justice. Protesters called for a thorough, independent FBI investigation of the death of Mark.

One week after the first protest march, a second group of protesters marched in solidarity with the police officers. The racial and socioeconomic division of Rockford was on display for all to see: the more affluent, racial majority of the east side versus the

poor, welfare-ridden, racial minority of the west side of Rockford. "The shooting had ignited long-simmering racial tensions in this struggling northern Illinois town, eighty miles from Chicago."[230] What followed after this shooting was an eighteen-month process of training mediators by the Department of Justice, which culminated in no action taken. What was meant to be a process of community building ended up making the divide even wider.

The community division and the justice department's inability to bring unity in this fragile community gave birth to the Center for Nonviolence and Conflict Transformation (CNCT), which became the umbrella organization that worked to bring these three faiths together to work toward the common good for the people of Rockford. CNCT served as facilitator, using its traditional peacemaking tools. We first helped the community to heal from the trauma of this incident, then we worked toward bringing reconciliation through acts of service to the affected family. During this process, these faith communities instructed their adherents to respect the law of the land, to not take actions, to serve, and to pray for those in authority. Furthermore, this community group worked to address social conditions such as poverty and the reason why young minority men drop out of school. It also provided after-school activities for one of the middle schools with a high rate of tardiness and truancy. These religious groups, through working together, learning from each other, and sharing with each other, brought a once-fragile community together.

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[230] Kathryn Anne Schumaker, *Civil Rights and Uncivil Society: Education, Law, and the Struggle for Racial Equity in the Midwest, 1965-1980* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago, 2013), 24.

Why Story Matters

When a story is shared with others, a space is created that allows the listeners to become comfortable and perhaps elicits a story from them. "Anthropologists always knew that storytelling is a universal feature of every country and every culture, even if, for most of the 20th century, storytelling got very little respect."[231] This is why I am sharing the story of our work in Rockford. Our story has inspired other communities to think about conflict transformation as a series of story sharing and telling. I prefer to speak about story sharing, rather than storytelling. It is more than a semantic difference.

Telling sounds impersonal, imperial, and proud. Telling is transactional; it implies a giver and a taker."[232] Telling, carries the potential that the teller is speaking might shut down dialogue, causing the conversation to become one-way communication. *Sharing* offers an invitation to participate in building together, as well as listening to one another in a two-way dialogue and thus creating a shared story. By sharing our stories, we helped people to share their experiences with the community in general. As we shared our stories, we enabled participants to see possibilities, solutions, and their part in them, with every listener and sharer becoming the hero of the story.

The Abrahamic faiths in Rockford saw this as a way to mutually connect with each other; communication helps to advance humanity. "Communication is more than transactional. Communication can be transformative."[233] Our story is not unique, but by

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[231] Steve Denning, "The Science of Storytelling," *Forbes*, March 9, 2012, accessed August 12, 2017, https://www.forbes.com/sites/stevedenning/2012/03/09/the-science-of-storytelling/#4e3c1ad52d8a.

[232] Ibid.

[233] Ibid.

sharing it with others, they too can see the commonality that exists between us all. More specifically, when people experience something with a story at its foundation, whether it entails watching a movie, riding a roller coaster, or using a website, their brains are activated. They are more likely not just to have a good experience, but to:

- remember the experience,
- see value in what was experienced,
- see and find value in what they did during that experience,
- have an easier time doing whatever they were trying to accomplish, and
- want to repeat that experience.

Nonviolence Approach to Conflict Transformation

Conflict transformation pertains to understanding the rise of conflicts and identification of various approaches to managing, resolving, or preventing them. Concepts in peace and conflict are changing rapidly and in response, the use of a nonviolence approach to conflict transformation is another approach that I find to be useful in the field of conflict transformation. These approaches are drawn from the works, sermons, and the writings of Martin Luther King. Jr, during the civil rights movement:

1. Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people. Simply put, nonviolence is a positive force that confronts injustice by utilizing the righteous anger, the spiritual, emotional, and the intellectual capability to bring change and transformation.
2. The beloved community is the framework for the future. To achieve meaningful reconciliation and transformation, raising relationships to the level where justice prevails and everyone has the ability to attain their full human potential is required.
3. Attack the forces of evil, not persons doing evil. In this approach, identify the underlying harmful conditions such as policies and practices rather than reacting to people and personalities.

4. Accept suffering without retaliation for the sake of the cause to achieve the goal. In this principle, self-chosen suffering is seen as redemptive in helping one grow spiritually and also in one's human dimension. Here, the moral authority of voluntary suffering is a goal for addressing the community's concerns.
5. Avoid internal violence of the spirit as well as external physical violence. This provision is of a mirror reflection on the reality of the condition of one's opponent and the community at large.
6. The universe is on the side of justice. Because truth is universal in all of the human society, humans are created and endowed with a sense of justice and doing right. These three religions attest to the sense of justice and peace.[234]

This Kingian nonviolence approach proposes that if diverse groups of people can spend extended time to study these principles together, they will have a common framework from which to work, and their study has the potential to transform their conflicts, and the negative stereotypes they have of each other will gradually decrease and possibly even disappear.

Creating Cultures of Peace: The Beloved Community

Peacemaking should be found in our everyday activities such as how we welcome new people at church, school, and playgrounds, as well as how we deal with conflict among friends and the daily decisions we make about how to react to frustrations and disappointments. Peacemaking should also be applied in small commitments in order to tackle bigger problems we see in the world. In fact, it is not enough to put peace first in your daily life; being a peacemaker means working with others to put these ideas to work toward bigger challenges. I call these efforts peacemaking projects; as such, peacemaking would need more than just talking about peace to engage in active peacemaking.

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[234] Bernard LaFayette and David Jensen, *The Leader's Manual: A Structured Guide and Introduction to Kingian Nonviolence; The Philosophy and Methodology* (Galena, IL: Institute for Human Rights and Responsibilities, 1995), 34.

Peacemaking needs an innovative design that provides "a holistic and practical foundation that is spiritually-grounded, active in interfaith peacemaking, and a direct nonviolent approach."[235] Individuals and communities need "to recognize their own power for making personal and social changes without violence that can improve their skills for respectful engagements with opponents, even in situations of disagreement, instead of confrontation that polarizes and demonizes the other."[236]

Creating a culture of peace provides an opportunity for individuals involved in intentional peacemaking to participate in raising issues that "most concern them, where group disagreement and conflict, neighborhood violence, domestic violence, discrimination, violent video games, peace education, and health-care related challenges are addressed."[237] A culture of peace can provide individuals and the communities with a spiritually-grounded and needed sense of community in times of conflict.

Beloved Community

In Dr. King's famous "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," he wrote, "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly."[238] This truth can be found within the Abrahamic faiths and in many cultures around the world. "The idea of the beloved

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[235] Heon Kim, *A Just World: Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives on Social Justice* (New York, NY: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 2.

[236] Ibid., 4.

[237] Ibid.

[238] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," Stanford University, The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, April 16, 1963, accessed July 15, 2017, http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document_images/undecided/630416-019.pdf.

community is not about loving the people who are easy to be loved. It is about cultivating *agape*, a Greek word for unconditional love for all of humanity, including those who are difficult to be loved."[239]

The beloved community is based on the unwavering faith in human nature, and humans' ability to seek to live in peace, as well as to be in service to each other. The beloved community aims to transform the negative and destructive patterns of conflict that go beyond conflict resolution, conflict prevention, and conflict management by creating a transformational approach with a positive direction and the willingness to engage over a long haul. While relationships can "sometimes be calm and predictable, at other times, events and circumstances generate tensions and instability."[240] The beloved community's view is to always seek "to understand how these particular conflicting patterns are embedded in the greater pattern of human relationships and to bring change as understood both at the level of immediate issues and the broader patterns of interaction."[241] Rather than view "conflict as a threat, the transformative view of the community sees conflict as a valuable opportunity to grow and increase understanding of one's self and others."[242] Relationships are at the heart of conflict; hence, the beloved community works to raise the level of relationships.

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[239] Jeff Ritterman, "The Beloved Community: Martin Luther King Jr.'s Prescription for a Healthy Society," Huffpost, January 19, 2014, accessed November 15, 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeffrey-ritterman/the-beloved-community-dr-_b_4583249.html.

[240] Lederach, *Little Book of Conflict Transformation*, 14.

[241] Ibid., 15.

[242] Karen Margaret Kemp, "Transforming Congregational Conflict: An Integrated Framework for Understanding and Addressing Conflict in Christian Faith Communities," Victoria: University of Wellington, 2010, accessed December 14, 2017, http://hdl.handle.net/10063/1524.

The beloved community then demonstrates an unwavering faith in the nature of the human community and its existence. The beloved community is not the absence of interpersonal conflict, but it recognizes "that conflict is a part of the human experience,"[243] and yet, believes that when conflicts arise, a resolution through a mutually agreed- upon commitment to nonviolence is possible.

[243] Ibid.

SECTION 4.

ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

The previous sections developed a case for the paradigm of story as a framework for thinking about conflict transformation. The proposed artifact is a popular book written for religious leaders entitled *Peacemaking in Action: Stories of Interreligious Reconciliation and Conflict Transformation from a Chicago Suburb*. While this material lends itself to a number of different media, books are still a dominant source of learning for many conflict transformers. The goal of the work is to give religious leaders a compelling vision for what ministry would look like if approached through the lens of story. To accomplish this, the book has several important elements.

The book focuses on my experiences and community organization work that began six months after I moved to Rockford, when an unarmed African American young man was fatally shot by two Rockford Police Department officers from behind as he was fleeing from them, in the basement of a church, in front of a class of preschoolers. This incident sparked protests that were also fueled by layers of historical injustices and racialized tensions. As both a black church planter of a multicultural, urban congregation and the on-duty chaplain for the police department during the days following the shooting, I found myself in the crossroads of the conflict—and in a position to be a bridge builder. The book was born out of this crossroads.

Peacemaking in Action will be nonfiction, not academic in tone. The book will be accessible and fast-paced, without an excess of footnotes or academic jargon. It tells stories and provides examples. Each chapter will highlight key insights by including study questions. These questions could be reviewed individually or discussed in a group.

Each chapter will also include several questions for religious leaders to reflect upon and journal about as they apply the principles of story to their own lives and contexts.

Second, while the book will bend towards a practical approach to studying the problems of violence and conflict, the book will not address this problem directly. The story will address issues of identity and different conflicts as fitting their contexts. The book will work at giving readers a compelling and engaging vision of what a ministry of story could look like.

Third, for this vision to be compelling, the book will dive deeply into how story sharing works. Central to this component is the work on the community's journey and why story sharing follows consistent patterns. Also, critical to the project is an understanding of how people think in story and try to embody story in their lives. This piece is missing in other books about conflict transformation and story. Another unique component is the exploration of the use of story by the Abrahamic faiths. This will help religious leaders see how to think through every day, conflicting situations in story terms. Finally, the book will contain an entire section that applies the principles of story sharing to the specific aspects of conflict transformation.

The book proposal will be offered to traditional publishers before considering self-publishing, though self-publishing is an option. The plan is also to follow up *Peacemaking in Action* with a second book applying these same principles in contexts outside of the United States.

SECTION 5.

BOOK PROPOSAL

Query Letter

InterVarsity Press
PO Box 1400
Downers Grove, IL 60515

Greetings,

Please consider for publication my book *Peacemaking in Action: Stories of Interreligious Reconciliation & Conflict Transformation from a Chicago Suburb*. It is nonfiction, written to inspire community leaders from diverse religious backgrounds to be agents of transformation through the vehicle of stories, and to inspire them to create their own stories. This paradigm for ministry is compelling and energizing, assisting suffering communities with various aspects of conflict. The book is about 60,000 words. A cover letter and book proposal are available as well as the first three chapters of the book.

My book focuses on the experiences and community-organization work that began six months after I moved to Rockford, when an unarmed African American young man was fatally shot by two Rockford Police Department officers from behind as he was fleeing, in the basement of a church, in front of a class of preschoolers. This incident sparked protests that were also fueled by layers of historical injustices and racialized tensions. As both a black church planter of a multicultural, urban congregation and the on-duty chaplain for the police department during the days following the shooting, I found myself in the crossroads of the conflict—and in a position to be a bridge builder.

Since 2009, when the shooting happened in my community, we as a nation have become aware of the commonality of "officer-involved shootings" of unarmed black men. The protests from Oakland to Baltimore, from Ferguson to St. Paul are reminders that this is a nationwide issue and many communities must find a way forward with reconciliation between parties and changing how policing is done. My book will describe the work I was part of immediately following the shooting, when I facilitated community meetings that included the police and organized a Kingian nonviolence training. In addition to continuing my chaplaincy, I led nonviolent community policing trainings for officers and founded The Center for Nonviolence and Conflict Transformation (http://nonviolencect.com/), which in turn has expanded to include a mobile computer lab for at-risk youth, mobile libraries in Nigeria sponsored by the Rockford community, and trainings in other communities experiencing similar issues.

Alongside the story of community work, my book tells the story of growing a multicultural congregation that is rooted in Christ's teachings of peace and reconciliation. I also share the implications of what it means to be a congregation that is part of the Church of the Brethren, an historic peace denomination, but is also unique. Most members were raised in other traditions. We are redefining pacifism for an inner-city context and leading conversations about peacemaking that go beyond tradition and heritage. My work has been affirmed by the wider denomination to the extent that I am the 2017–18 Moderator for the Church of the Brethren. Please let me know if I may send my book proposal.

Sincerely,

Samuel K. Sarpiya

Cover Letter

InterVarsity Press
PO Box 1400
Downers Grove, IL 60515

Greetings,

The world we live in can violent and stressful. So much this violence is caused when people are not able to resist acting on their thoughts and actions by recognizing their human weakness. Thus, violence can also arise from some weak interpersonal relationships in a family and/or community when individuals experience an inability to communicate carefully with each other. Religious communities present particular challenges. Embedded in religion has been a dual, complex legacy with regard to peace and violence. A conflict transformation practitioner must therefore be more systematic in implementing strategies if meaningful transformation is to be useful in certain contexts. However, "policymakers and diplomats, journalists, and scholars who are ready to over-interpret economic causality … are still in the habit of disregarding the role of religion, religious institutions, and religious motivations in explaining politics and conflict."[244] The purpose of this book is to stimulate dialogue in the area of active nonviolence and conflict transformation, especially as it relates to religious communities.

Our use of stories from a Chicago suburb is an attempt to stimulate dialogue among young and old, religious and not so religious, and interreligious dialogues with people caught in the crossfire of violence, thereby missing their potential. In doing so,

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[244] Johnston and Sampson, *Religion*, 8.

this book will show evidence from scholarly research as well as success stories, documented with particular attention to the Chicago suburb that is duplicable in different cities in America and around the globe.

There is a market for stories that provide a template for communities faced with violence. *Story* is also a buzzword in which people are now interested. In researching the book, I have had conversations with religious leaders interested in this topic. I am uniquely positioned to write and sell the book, as I have spent the last nine years in a conflict transformation setting. These stories are a part of my work, alongside the story of the community's work. My book tells the story of growing a multicultural congregation that is rooted in Christ's teachings of peace and reconciliation. I also share the implications of what it means to be a congregation that is part of the Church of the Brethren, a historic peace denomination, but one that is unique, as most members were raised in other traditions. We are redefining pacifism for an inner-city context and leading conversations about peacemaking that go beyond tradition and heritage into direct, practical action.

My work as a peacemaker "requires the strengthening of spiritual lives by prayer, Bible study, and worship in order to connect with Christ, the giver of peace, realizing that apart from Christ we can do nothing."[245] We are called to love our neighbor(s) and our neighbor(s) may be from a different religious tradition recognizing that difference and yet give them their needed space for the sake of unity, not uniformity.

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[245] Franklin M. Segler and Randall Bradley, *Christian Worship: Its Theology and Practice* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2006), 4.

Title and Contact Information

Peacemaking in Action: Stories of Interreligious Reconciliation and Conflict Transformation from a Chicago Suburb

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Rockford IL, 61107
Phone: 808-769-0831
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Website: www.peacemakinginaction.com
Twitter: @samuelsarpiya
FB: https://www.facebook.com/samuel.sarpiya
Instagram: @ssarpiya

Overview

This book narrates stories from my experiences of active peacemaking as a pastor and researcher, impacted by Jesus' teaching on nonviolence and peace. I live out a pastoral presence in the Rockford community, in the area school system, and in equipping and training the local police department's command staff and management in nonviolent principles of community policing. Also, I have trained interfaith and interdenominational community groups from Luton, England, Nigeria, and South Africa. I have partnered with Nigerian Brethren and the John Pofi Foundation in developing a mobile library in intentional conflict transformation and reconciliation used in several camps hosting internally displaced persons across Nigeria.

Alongside the story of community work, my book tells the story of growing a multicultural congregation rooted in Christ's teachings of peace and reconciliation. I also share the implications of what it means to be a congregation that is part of the Church of the Brethren, a historic peace denomination, but one that is unique, as most members

were raised in other traditions. We are redefining pacifism for an inner-city context and leading conversations about peacemaking that go beyond tradition and heritage. My work has been affirmed by the wider denomination to the extent that I am the 2017–18 Moderator for the Church of the Brethren.

Purpose

My goals for this book are to:

- enhance active Christian commitment to nonviolence and conflict transformation,
- promote peace between opposing religions,
- stimulate open and honest conversation among communities that could lead to radical commitment to peacemaking, and
- develop leaders with an ability to listen to each other, even in opposing-view situations.

Promotion and Marketing

Recent crime statistics released by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) showed Rockford to be one of the most dangerous cities in the nation when it comes to being a victim of violent crime. The agency's latest report detailing crime statistics for the first six months of 2015 show that out of every ten thousand Rockford residents, seventy-six were victims of violent crimes. The city ranked fifth overall among cities with more than 100,000 residents in the U.S. By comparison, Chicago's violent crime rate was forty

per ten thousand residents, or about half of Rockford's rate.[246] Thus, in my community of Rockford, where I would have opportunity to promote the book, there is active interest in the subject of conflict transformation.

The book would also be promoted using the following:

- The web address www.peacemakinginaction.com, which has already been purchased.
- Facebook page—Peacemaking in Action
- Twitter—@samuelsarpiya.
- In the weeks before the book release, there would be paid marketing on Facebook.
- In the months before the book release, Samuel would produce a video presentation about the book.
- Samuel has contacts at Bethany Theological Seminary, George Fox Seminary, and University of Rhode Island's Center for Nonviolence and Peace Studies.
- Samuel's denomination publishes a magazine, *Messenger,* and hosts a blog.
- Information about the book will likely spread at various conferences. Samuel's speaking engagements, along with a booth at several conferences, could increase sales.
- Advertising purchased on blogs like Sojourner's Faith in Action (www.sojo.net)

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[246] "FBI Crime Report Ranks Rockford 5th Worst for Violent Crime in U.S.," MyStateline.com, accessed January 20, 2016, http://www.mystateline.com/news/fbi-crime-report-ranks-rockford-5th-worst-for-violent-crime.

Competition

- Johnson, Douglas and Cynthia Sampson. *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Stassen, Glen H. *Just Peacemaking: The New Paradigm for the Ethics of Peace and War*. Boston, MA: The Pilgrim Press, 2008.
- _____. *Formation for Life: Just Peacemaking and Twenty-First-Century Discipleship.* Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013.
- Lederach, John Paul. *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures*. Ithaca, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1995.
- Smith-Christopher, Daniel L., ed. *Subverting Hatred: The Challenge of Nonviolence in Religious Traditions*. New York, NY: Orbis Books, 2007.

Uniqueness

The book will be based on practical experiences of how peacemaking among religious groups worked to transform conflict in a Chicago suburb.

Endorsements

The following authors have agreed to read and endorse my book:

- Leonard Sweet, lead mentor, Semiotics and Future Studies, will write the foreword.
- Scott Holland, professor of peace and culture, Bethany Theological Seminary, agreed to write a paragraph.
- Brian McLaren, author of *New Kind of Christianity*, has agreed to write a paragraph.
- Robert Johansen, founding chair of the Kroc Institute, Notre Dame University, has agreed to write a paragraph.

- Roger Nam, associate professor of biblical studies, George Fox Evangelical Seminary, Portland OR.
- Rabbi Dr. Jonathan Seil
- Debbie Roberts, professor of reconciliation, Bethany Theological Seminary
- Bruxy Cavey, pastor of the Meeting House, Toronto, Canada, and author of *End of Religion and (Re)union*, has agreed to write a paragraph.

Book Format (non-fiction)

Introduction: Today's World

Chapter One: Passageways into Peacemaking

Chapter Two: An Officer-Involved Shooting

Chapter Three: Faith in Action: Practicing What They Preach Separately

Chapter Four: Being on A Mission Together

Intended Readers

This book is written for anyone interested in learning about peacemaking and conflict transformation from a spiritual point of view. The primary audience would be religious leaders, and the secondary audience would be members of the Abrahamic faith community that have been impacted by violent conflict.

Author's Biography

Samuel Kefas Sarpiya is the moderator of the 2018 Church of the Brethren Annual Conference, lead pastor and church planter of Rockford Community Church (Illnois/Wisconsin District), and the co-founder of the Center for Nonviolence and

Conflict Transformation in Rockford, Illinois. As a church planter and community organizer, Samuel is passionate about the intersection between peacemaking and the Gospels as taught by Jesus Christ. He also has training in the principles of nonviolence of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., which inspire Samuel's continued conviction for practical peacemaking.

Drawing from Jesus' teaching on nonviolence and peace, Samuel is making his pastoral presence known throughout the Rockford school system, and by training the local Rockford Police Department's command staff and management in nonviolent principles. With several Rockford community partners, Samuel has developed The Mobile Tech Lab and the Mobile Art, an innovative educational community hub for at-risk youth. Using two travel trailers converted into mobile labs, students receive mentorship, learn about nonviolence, and develop productive skill sets for the future. These labs naturally tap into children's curiosity to explore their potential passions and plant seeds of greatness in them. These skills are important to open opportunities for socioeconomic development in communities that have long trends of violence by breaking the chains of poverty and hopelessness. The Mobile Tech Lab has recently launched a Coding Boot Camp which has once again morphed into something much bigger than originally imagined.

Samuel has expanded this idea to include the International Mobile Libraries Project with the Ekklesyar Yan'uwa a Nigeria (EYN, Church of the Brethren in Nigeria). The International Mobile Library Project was first established to serve children through an educational community hub in impoverished areas of Nigeria. This ministry has grown and is now being utilized in several camps for internally displaced persons in Nigeria to

provide comfort to the countless displaced victims affected by Boko Haram's atrocities. Extending the mobile lab concept to Nigeria is a natural extension of Samuel's experiences since 1994 working with Urban Frontiers Mission (UFM) and Youth with a Mission (YWAM).

For his local and international work, Samuel received the 2016 Jane Addams Peace Award from the Rockford Housing Authority. Samuel is a graduate of the University of Jos, Nigeria, with a Diploma in Social Work, and holds a Masters of Divinity in conflict transformation from Bethany Theological Seminary. Samuel is currently a doctoral candidate in Semiotics and Future Studies at George Fox University in Portland, Oregon. Samuel is married to Gretchen Sarpiya and they are blessed with three beautiful girls, Anna, Ella Joy, and Deborah. Their multicultural family has roots in Nigeria and South Africa and has lived in Hawaii.

SECTION 6.

POSTSCRIPT

"Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend."[247]

Analysis: The Changes Faced by Abrahamic Religions

We stand at a juncture of different perspectives in religious beliefs, practices, and application when it comes to peace and conflict transformation and the awareness that every generation is called to this work. Each generation must address the challenges of its time.

One of the great challenges for this generation is the rise in violence and conflict, especially when such conflict is influenced by religious convictions. The events of the "September 11, 2001, attack on the Twin Towers in New York City,"[248] brought to light what had been simmering over a long period—a perspective of hopelessness that came about as a result of religious disillusionment.

"Where do we go from here? What contribution can religion make, if any, to this state of affairs? Do the Abrahamic faiths need to experience being in relationship—not out of relationship with each other?"[249] he world as we see it today is experiencing a physical collapse of physical, political, and religious boundaries. These religions need to

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[247] Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1963), 122.

[248] Peter L. Bergen, "September 11 Attacks," *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* revised April 5, 2017, accessed December 14, 2017, https://www.britannica.com/event/September-11-attacks.

[249] Ara Norenzayan, "Does Religion Make People Moral?" *Behaviour* 151, no. 2-3 (2014): 366.

experience and share their commonality when it comes to peace and conflict transformation their peace heritages are clearly communicated to their adherents.

Shared experience is necessary if religiously motivated terrorism is to be confronted and suffering alleviated. Finding a counterpoint to lighten the suffering of those who turn to divisive religious belief systems is imperative. A Christian, Muslim, and Jewish response would be important if peace and conflict transformation were to take hold and bring transformation.

The Abrahamic faiths are therefore called to demonstrate a sense of oneness with one another, displayed through:

- compassionate living that draws from their religious traditions of respect and care for the community life. If adherents can rediscover and take hold of that heritage, they can build multi-religious communities that participate in conflict transformation activities together.
- a willingness to critique some of the challenging texts in their scriptures, and to acknowledge tendencies within these religion traditions that lead to a sense of pride and arrogance and having no need for the other. In addressing these issues, leaders and adherents seek to refresh an understanding that embraces the other religions in a spirit of mutuality and partnership.
- simple living. Instead of seeking to dominate one another, develop a spirit of mutual respect, seeking the humility to recognize and accept that other Abrahamic families have special emphases that your tradition does not have, and to accept the others' uniqueness in the spirit of partnership.

- welcoming religious diversity. Such practices will promote peace that results in conflict transformation.

The process of putting these steps into practice may be derived from some common responses to shared human suffering by seeking a common semiotics understanding of conflict and a semiotic understanding of conflict transformation. These terms may need to be developed into an established framework within which a specific semiotic understanding will be carried out.

APPENDIX.

BOOK SAMPLE

"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."[250]

Introduction: Hospitality as Peacemaking in Today's World

One hallmark of the early Christian community, from its inception to the pastoral epistles authored by Paul, was the call for those who show hospitality to be elected to the office of leadership in the faith community. "Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach" (1Tim. 3:2). For the first two centuries of the early church, followers of Jesus met in homes. Hospitality became an important and necessary element in the life of the church.

As Christianity began to spread, moving of homes into buildings, there was a shift in the meaning of hospitality. Not only would the church provide hospitality to one another as followers of Christ, it became a place where people under attack could find refuge or sanctuary. The safety of the building could not be violated by the state. The church's understanding of hospitality began to shift to resemble the offering of a place of safety and refuge. In recent years, the United States of America has witnessed an influx of refugees who are fleeing violence and conflict in their countries and seeking a safe

[250] Martin Luther King Jr., "On Being a Good Neighbor," Extracted from a sermon delivered at the time of the Montgomery bus protest, 1965.

place, while few churches have offered their sanctuaries as places of refuge for immigrants. And yet, some churches and even some cities have begun restoring the image of the church as a sanctuary, offering hospitality to those fleeing conflict and arrest by Immigration and Custom Enforcement (ICE).

In an ever-changing time, when cities like Chicago, New York, Los Angeles, and more are taking the title of Sanctuary City and offering refuge, the church's calling remains to offer the best hospitality. Despite changes within the American church culture, Christian hospitality remains one of the hallmarks of the church. In neglecting to show hospitality to immigrants and refugees, many of whom are fleeing all manner of violence and threat, the church is degrading and rejecting one of its ultimate calls from the Apostle Paul and scripture.

Rockford would do well to stress, once more, a wider sense of care for those affected by violence, not only to refugees from other countries, but also to inner-city youth facing violence. The youth population in Rockford is faced with an unprecedented scourge of violence, as well as the daily pressure to join gangs or else face the wrath of gang leaders. Faith communities in Rockford embark on embracing the Christian heritage of hospitality, seeking to show the world that their actions can restore peace and transform conflict. As people of faith, our actions must move toward portraying a scripturally-based, nonviolent resistance to the violence that is being perpetrated on our young people. Although people may carry old stereotypes of cynicism and suspicion, the hope is that these positive actions will be warmly welcomed within the communities where violence is most overt and prevalent. And we are finding this to be the case.

As we have worked towards unity and solidarity between the Abrahamic faith communities in Rockford, a widespread hunger for a nonviolent approach to conflict resolution has been identified among our youth population. People desire to learn ideas and skills that they can use both individually and communally. The early Christian practice of hospitality is one viable model for a nonviolent approach to solving this problem.

Until recently, the Rockford community's actions following catalytic events, such as gang-related violence, have involved adjusting to new norms that were the consequence of inner-city violence rising increasingly, continuing to take the lives of young black men. Dramatic violence was accepted as normal and people were to adjust their lives to the new norm. In our discussions as a unified group of faith communities wanting to change the reality of our city, it was imperative that we began to rethink our strategy, looking at past hospitality practices that waited for those in harm's way to come to those who could protect. Instead of waiting for those suffering from the violence to come seek refuge within our faith communities, we decided to reorient our practices, going to them to offer refuge or hospitality.

I once heard a story about a white pastor in another city who, just as he was beginning his ministry, experienced something genuinely disruptive to his preconceived beliefs. He had befriended two black students from his youth group. While playing a game of tag one day with these young people, the pastor playfully managed to get one of the boys into a headlock. In that moment, rather than relishing his victory, he immediately released the young man, throwing his hands into the air and shouting the young man's name. Thinking the pastor might be injured, the other young man ran to his

aid. Realizing that he was not injured, the boys stood baffled. Looking at the boy, the pastor said quietly, “You have soft hair.”

Immediately, the young man touched his hair and responded, “Yes, of course.” All three of them stared at each other for a few moments. Then the pastor said, “Do you know what I was told about black people? Do you know what I have always thought? I was told that all black people have hair like steel wool, but yours is soft.”

At that moment, the pastor realized what he had been told his entire life about the hair of black people was wrong. This truth broke through learned falsehoods because he had taken the time to befriend people different than himself and allowed himself to enter their lives, even to the point of touching their hair. From that point on, the pastor had to reexamine whatever else he had been told about others, acknowledging it might not true.

In order to grapple with our reality, people have to, often times, tangibly face truth in order to reorient their way of thinking. Reorientation requires the management of our memories. We easily get stuck on things that have happened to us or to people we have known, holding onto past wounds and history. We see this pattern very clearly when the memories or beliefs are racially or religiously inclined. To move beyond this sort of reaction, as that pastor was able to do, we must do the hard work of managing and reconsidering feelings and assumptions, so that we can be open to a new way of relating with one another. We must unlearn our biases and embedded beliefs by experiencing reality and allowing it to formulate truth.

Leaders from Rockford’s Abrahamic faiths saw the need to change, acknowledging that it was more advantageous to make peace than war. At the very least, the leaders had a willingness to address the needs they saw with unity and peace. In this

case, they saw the need for hospitality to the other, not just to those that they felt connected to, but also to the alien in their midst.

Getting Practical

Should your local church offer sanctuary to anyone who seeks it? Have you offered sanctuary? Describe it.

Does your local church offer sanctuary to undocumented immigrants? If so, how did you make the decision? If you don't, why not? If someone asked for sanctuary, would you grant it?

Objective

The objective of this questions is to allow participants to imagine what it means to be the church for Christians, for Muslims, and for Jews.

Chapter One. Pathways to Peacemaking

"Sometimes the Prince of Peace was a disturber of the peace so that he could be God's purveyor of true peace—the peace that passes all understanding."[251]

—Leonard Sweet

Growing Up

I was born in Jos, Plateau State, a middle belt city of northern Nigeria, a city of about 900,000 people. Jos, the administrative, commercial, and tourist center of Plateau State, is known for its tin and columbite mining, which has led to the influx of migrant workers from across the country. The road to leadership was mapped out for me when, as a teenager, I joined to be a member of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). My mentor then was the general secretary for the Youth Wing, and he helped to lay the ground work for what would be my future service to CAN. Nigeria has been and continues to be impacted greatly by fighting between Muslims and Christians. When that fighting reached my city, Jos, which is a fault line between the Muslim majority North and the Christian Majority South, I was encouraged by my youth pastor to join the Christian youth militia. Christian scriptures were used for the justification of violence in the name of self-defense. We were taught that God had used force to defend God's children. We were assured that it was God who instructed the Israelites to go to war, in order to conquer their enemies. This fight became personal for me, when in 1983, a

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[251] Leonard Sweet, *The Bad Habits of Jesus: Showing Us the Way to Live in a World Gone Wrong* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Publishers, 2016), 59.

quarrel that broke out between majority Muslims population and minority Christians over control of a market square. Being the minority, Christians were outnumbered by the Muslims during this fight, and more than twenty Christians were killed. Unfortunately, this conflict took the lives of some of my friends; others woke up survivors, only to discover that their limbs had been severed by machetes and their lives would never be the same.

At the same time in Jos, a young man named Haruna, like me, was encouraged to join the ranks of future leadership in the Muslim militia. Haruna came from a long family line of Muslim scholars. Both of us, (Haruna and myself) in our own faith traditions and serving in leadership roles, were instructed to work toward planting seeds among our peers to teach them to defend our religions, even to the point of killing and death. Haruna's mentors used scripture from the Qur'an to justify their acts of violence. Leaders from both religions used their sacred texts to uphold their positions, believing that their interpretations were the only appropriate and right ones in this scenario. But one of Haruna's spiritual mentors, a Sufi hermit, tried to guide him away from an act of senseless violence.

In the early 1990s, Christian militiamen stabbed Haruna's mentor, killing him then throwing his body down a well. Haruna's mission then became one of revenge. He was going to kill any and every Christian that he came across. Then, one Friday at the Muslim worship service, in the sermon, Haruna's imam told the story of the prophet Muhammad, "who had gone to preach at Ta'if, a town about seventy miles southeast of Mecca. Bleeding after being stoned and cast outside the city,"[252] Muhammad "was

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[252] Emerick, *The Life and Work of Muhammad*, 32.

visited by an angel who asked, if he would like those who mistreated him to be destroyed. Muhammad said no."[253] Haruna felt that the imam was talking directly to him during the sermon. The next time Haruna and I met, Haruna, in tears, reported that he had forgiven the Christian militia that killed his mentor. To prove his commitment to this new way of life, he went to visit the sick and the wounded in the nearby Christian neighborhood. Over time, Haruna and I developed a stronger bond of friendship that surpassed our religious differences.

Even as friends, we both quietly longed for each other to be converted. I wanted Haruna to experience what I had experienced and to know what following Jesus looks and feel like, on the other hand, Haruna, wanted me to experience his faith as well. Above all, though, we remained friends and continued to work toward peace, justice, and reconciliation for all, irrespective of religious affiliation. This journey has left me convinced that peacemaking and evangelism are not mutually exclusive.

South Africa: Race and Apartheid and Scriptural Understanding

Today, millions of people "around the globe have heard the word *apartheid*. Some will describe it as white oppression over blacks or native Africans in South Africa."[254] Perhaps, in a nutshell, that is what it is. Unfortunately, "apartheid played a substantial part in South Africa's history and narrative."[255] Diving into a brief history of

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[253] Ibid., 255.

[254] Gibson, "Overcoming Apartheid," 83.

[255] Ibid., 98.

apartheid would grant readers some insight into the country that I eventually came to live in and love, until ultimately becoming a naturalized South African citizen.

Apartheid can simply be described as a word that means the separation and separate development of people based on skin color and ethnic origins. The roots of apartheid can be traced to 19th-century colonial development. By the "early 20th century, British colonial administrators decided to adopt a policy of separate development based on the teachings of John Ruskin."[256] Ruskin who was an art critic of the Victorian era, whose writings

> emphasized the connections between nature, art, and society. His teachings claimed that in an ideal society, the superior white race would assist the other races to work toward the eventual goal of equality and reintegration, all the while maintaining a degree of separation between them. These "lesser" races would be given tasks more suited to their mental and physical progression.[257]

In 1920s, laws were passed to facilitate the legal separation of people by their physical attributes associated with skin color and hair texture. For instance, black South African's will no longer be allowed to enter white urban areas. These practices rendered everyone a prisoner in the country to which they belonged. People of European decent had more rights and enjoyed greater luxury, while black Africans, Indians, and indigenous people of southern Africa (Koisans) were relegated to manual labor for their white counterparts (oppressors) "Not everyone in the country, however, turned a blind eye to the unfairness brought about by this policy, and protests from countries around the world grew steadily. Eventually, economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure forced

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[256] Ross, Mager, and Nasson, *The Cambridge History of South Africa,* 143.

[257] Ibid., 145.

change."[258] President F. W. de Klerk, "responded to the pressure by allowing several political parties to become active again, culminating in the release of Nelson Mandela from prison."[259] Mandela has been imprisoned by the South African government because his appeal to majority black and marginalized communities was seen as threat to the government, which could lead to an uprising and violence by the citizens.

Mandela's release from prison led to the first truly "free and fair elections in the country. These elections resulted in the African National Congress (ANC) being voted into power and Nelson Mandela taking the seat as president,"[260] rising from prisoner of the system to leading the system. Amazingly, this transition of power occurred peacefully. "The injustices of apartheid were explained away as an experiment that did not work. Although apartheid may no longer be the national policy in South Africa, the system certainly took its toll on the country."[261] There are many long-lasting consequences following the elevation of one race at the expense of others.

While many citizens have moved forward, embracing every "ethnic nationality and race as fellow South Africans,"[262] others still hold the old mindset of racial superiority and rights. Perhaps these very circumstances have made South Africa, "one of the world's leaders in dealing with racial issues and political inequities Whatever the

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[258] Ibid., 146.

[259] Bouckaert, "The Negotiated Revolution: South Africa's Transition to a Multiracial Democracy," 375.

[260] Ibid., 280.

[261] Ibid., 295.

[262] Ibid., 296.

case, the country has become and continues to be unified,"[263] by its many colorful people who continue to work toward racial and socio-economic integration instead of being torn apart by its differences.

USA: Systemic Racism and Classism Within a Particular Community

Americans would "like to think of the founding of the American colonies, and later, the United States, as driven by a quest for freedom, religious liberty, and political and economic independence."[264] However, racial inequality has shaped American history since the arrival of white people in the land. "From the start, American society was founded with systems of domination, inequality, and oppression particularly the denial of freedom for African slaves. One of the great paradoxes of American history is the coexistence of the ideals of equality and freedom with practice of slavery."[265] Today "we live with the ramifications of that paradox,"[266] most clearly seen in our inner cities, where racial divides are drawn and many of the youth feel disconnected.

I am not an expert in the study of racism in American society. My expertise is found in my experience and my story. Currently, I live in Rockford, Illinois, and in my time here I have seen the impact of centuries of racial division in this community. This history and my contemporary experience continue to shape my ministry and call to better understand how racial oppression imposes harm on people. Nevertheless, "to think of

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[263] Seekings and Nattrass, *Class, Race, and Inequality in South Africa*, 49.

[264] Huntington, *Who Are We?,* xv.

[265] Ibid., 23.

[266] Ibid., 24.

racism as something that only affects the lives of African Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, Latino/as and other racially defined minorities is a mistake."[267] The American society has been profoundly shaped by race and politics, which has deeply affected the white working class as well. This shaping has led to an increase in violent conflict. Understanding the historical context helps conflict transformers think of ways they could work at transforming the conflicts.

Getting the Ball Rolling

The pathways I have traversed in my life, having witnessed religious, racial, and cultural violence as a church planter, grounded me in the theological understanding of reconciliation and peacemaking. I began the process of analyzing and explaining the transformation process as a Master of Divinity student in conflict transformation, with the goal of developing models of peacemaking that could be replicated in American cities and around the world, based on the Church of the Brethren's beliefs and practice of peace. It was not enough to simply document my personal experience alone; I needed to also document the diversity of other participants in this organization. I see myself as a facilitator working toward the goal of the Abrahamic faiths working together.

Because it is crucial to have basic principles undergirding our working together, I developed simple ground rules for us to begin. This process must start with the recognition that Abraham is the patriarch of not just Christianity, but Islam and Judaism as well. Each of these faiths claim Abraham as their father. They theologically agree that

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[267] Hollinger, *Postethnic America,* 4.

God is sovereign and creator of the universe. In this process of working together, agreement that there should be no proselytization of one another is imperative.

As we began working together, I came into contact with the Kingian nonviolence approach to leadership development and in turn introduced these methods of leadership development to the group. The Kingian nonviolence approach is comprised of the simple principles that were developed from Dr. Martin Luther King's work and writings, most especially from his book, *Stride Toward Freedom*.[268] These principles helped to galvanize leadership development during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s:

1. Nonviolence is a way of life for courageous people. Simply put, nonviolence is a positive force that confronts injustice by utilizing the righteous anger, the spiritual, emotional, and the intellectual capability to bring change and transformation.
2. The beloved community is the framework for the future. To achieve meaningful reconciliation and transformation, raising relationships to the level where justice prevails and everyone has the ability to attain their full human potential is required.
3. Attack the forces of evil, not persons doing evil. In this approach, identify the underlying harmful conditions such as policies and practices rather than reacting to people and personalities.
4. Accept suffering without retaliation for the sake of the cause to achieve the goal. In this principle, self-chosen suffering is seen as redemptive in helping one grow spiritually and also in one's human dimension. Here, the moral

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[268] King, Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom,* 35.

authority of voluntary suffering is a goal for addressing the community's concerns.

5. Avoid internal violence of the spirit as well as external physical violence. This provision is of a mirror reflection on the reality of the condition of one's opponent and the community at large.
6. "The universe is on the side of justice."[269] Because truth is universal in all of the human society, humans are created and endowed with a sense of justice and doing right. These three religions attest to the sense of justice and peace. [270]

Coupled with the aforementioned ground rules, these principles provided a model for how we would operate together to address the violent conflict witnessed in our community. These principles need to be developed within us individually and collectively in order to see the systemic change that we hope for, with the expectation that relationships between conflicting parties would be improved. Kingian nonviolence theory proposes that when a diverse group of people spends extended time studying these principles together, the study will enable them to have a common framework from which to work. This framework has the potential to transform their conflict, causing any negative stereotypes they have of each other to gradually decrease and possibly even disappear.

Unlike our work in past group experiences and other contexts, these Kingian nonviolence leadership development principles became a guiding philosophy, and with practical application in our work, they bound us together as a group. It is now my practice

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[269] LaFayette and Jehnsen, *The Leader's Manual,* 44.

[270] Ibid., 45.

to use these six principles as a curriculum for training any new member who seeks to join the group, as well as incorporating them into ongoing monthly refreshers for the existing group. As with any diverse group, not all participants have the same set of social skills, causing me to wonder how I might motivate people to interact or socialize with one another across faith traditions. To remove every barrier that could hinder socialization and group interaction, I invited Dr. David Jensen, a respected civil rights leader from the 1960s, to Rockford. Jenson was one of Dr. King's protégés and remains as a living witness able to share his experiences of working with different religions and denominations during the civil rights movement. In his presentation, Dr. Jensen shared how different religious groups working together helped to galvanize the success of the civil rights movement. He also explained how the six principles were developed as a working guideline for leadership development for those willing to participate in the act of civil disobedience during protest marches.

My life experiences—growing up in Nigeria in a predominantly Muslim community, my friendship with Haruna, and my travel and work in South Africa and now living in Rockford, Illinois, as well as my studies in the academic field of conflict transformation and Kingian nonviolence—have given me a unique skill set, serve as a foundational base to lead these groups, helping them to envision what change could look like for Center for Nonviolence and Conflict Transformation as an organization and for the community of Rockford. I continued to teach the different faith leaders what it means to be a conflict transformer. The teachings shift from interpersonal conflict transformation to accepting the responsibility to become a part of transforming the

community from its religious, racial, ethnic, socioeconomic class, and gender diversity conflicts.

The chief goal for training religious leaders is to activate them to action when acts of violence are committed. Doing this has helped me identify what I call landmarks as signs of transformation, which will produce a lasting change personally and communally. The model I developed is unique in that it goes beyond the historical practice of mediation, restorative justice practice, and conflict reconciliation. These latter strategies have not been very effective in transforming violent conflict. Education and training alone cannot do it either; but an ongoing, nonviolent conflict transformation process is beginning to produce the needed systemic change. The act of bringing the Abrahamic faiths together to work from their peace positions, while adding a layer of Kingian nonviolence conflict reconciliation has helped build a community of reconciled people. CNCT's application of the Kingian nonviolence theory into our community practices. This has included our mobile tech lab and art lab, and combining racial and socioeconomic realities with restoring relationships between police and the community.

Now that you have the overview, I invite you to join me on this pathway to peace. I guarantee there will be some personal as well as systemic transformation in this life-changing process.

Getting Practical

Let's begin with the recognition that our ethnic and religious identities are important to God. Without them, we have a limited background of who God is. Ask one or two people from another Abrahamic faith religion to share their story with you. Listen to their story and their view of God's desire for peace and conflict transformation. If you

don't know someone from one of the Abrahamic faith, read about that faith from a reputable source—not what others say about them, but what they say about their beliefs and practices of peace and conflict transformation.

See if you can find some areas of connection between your religious beliefs. Also, search for some areas of human connection between your faith and theirs, and write them down.

Objectives

This exercise will help participants to learn about the Abrahamic faith tree, by providing the opportunity to ask questions and listen. This exercise has the potential to help learners build coalitions across religious lines. It will also help participants to identify areas of similarity.

Two recommended books are:

- *Radical Reconciliation: Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism* by Alan Boesak and Paul DeYoung (Orbis Books, 2012).
- *Getting to the Heart of Interfaith: The Eye-Opening, Hope-Filled Friendship of a Pastor, a Rabbi, and an Imam* by Pastor Don Mackenzie, Rabbi Ted Falcon, and Imam Jamal Rahman (SkyLight Paths, 2009).

Now that you have read some books and have engaged with someone of the Abrahamic family, do you see areas of synergy? If so, list them.

1.

2.

Do you have suggestion for ways to improve on a working relationship?

Would you be willing to host a community conversation?

Chapter Two. An Officer-Involved Shooting

"The lenses of conflict transformation show the immediate situation, the underlying patterns and contextual conceptual framework."[271]

—John Paul Lederach

Police departments and their officers are given the authority to use force to serve and protect, as well as maintain order. Along with this authority comes responsibility. In keeping with this responsibility, when an officer uses force, particularly force that results in the death of a citizen, the circumstances of the incident can determine whether their authority was exercised appropriately.

In this Incident[272]

In August 2009, a late morning call to the Rockford Police Department revealed a domestic assault that happened the previous night in the west side of the city, a neighborhood with a racially-fueled reputation of crime, gang-related activities, and welfare dependency. The female caller reported that her boyfriend, a man named Mark, had allegedly threatened to slash her throat. According to dispatch records, the woman stated that Mark was sleeping inside the house and that she would wait outside for police officers to arrive. Although officers were dispatched, they arrived on scene about ten to

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[271] Lederach, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation,* 11.

[272] Kari Lydersen, "Shooting by Police Ignites Racial Tensions in Illinois Town," *Washington Post*, October 4, 2009, accessed June 10, 2017, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/10/03/AR2009100302144.html.

fifteen minutes later, failing to apprehend the alleged perpetrator who had fled through the back door of the residence. A few minutes later, a police dispatcher notified patrol units that a person fitting the description of the suspect was seen walking on the Jefferson Street Bridge, as well as notifying them that the suspect had apparently tried to intimidate his girlfriend by pulling his knife on her

A few minutes later, the dispatcher provided more detailed information. The officers were given the name of the suspect, Mark Anthony Barmore, his physical description, as well as the information that he had an outstanding warrant and might still be armed with a knife.[273]

After receiving this communication, officers notified dispatch that they had Mark in their sight in the Winnebago-Woodlawn area. The officers saw Mark standing outside a local black church, the House of Worship, speaking with a group of people. According to several of these individuals, Mark had come to the church occasionally. They reported that, in the moments leading up to the police officers' arrival, he communicated to them that he was having trouble with the police after an altercation with his girlfriend.

Before Mark saw the police, the church members were encouraging him to stay out of trouble and become involved in a boxing group that the church was soon to begin. When Mark caught sight of the police and realized they were looking for him, he entered the church by slipping in behind a church official who was also entering. To prevent Mark from fleeing the building via other exits, the two officers on scene pursued him on foot. A church official opened the doors to allow them into the building.

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[273] Words from the 911 call center.

As they entered the space, two women told the two officers that the man had gone downstairs and that there were children in a daycare in the basement. The officers went downstairs looking for the suspect. According to one of the officers, he drew his service weapon just before entering the daycare room at the bottom of the basement stairs. Upon entrance to the daycare space, the officers observed eight to fifteen preschool children and two adults in the room. An officer asked the adults where the man had gone. One or more children, and possibly the daycare teacher, stated that he had gone into the boiler closet. Seeing the officer's guns drawn and realizing the danger for the children, the church proprietor and one of the teachers gathered them into the corner of the classroom, opposite the location of the suspect, shielding them with their bodies.

Within moments, an officer ordered Mark to come out of his hiding space in the boiler room with his hands up. Instead, a scuffle ensued. In their reports, the officers claimed that when Mark began to exit the boiler room he attempted to grab one of the officer's guns. The gun was discharged. The second officer reported that after being shot, Mark continued to move back and then forward again, maintaining his hold on the gun. The officer continued to struggle with the suspect and the gun. Mark and the officer fell against a sink, leaving Mark's back exposed to the second officer. The second officer fired his weapon hitting Mark with six shots in his back. He was pronounced dead at the scene. Despite being shielded by the church staff, the children witnessed this horrific event.

The unfortunate result of this incident involving lethal force was a riot in the city of Rockford. The racial division in the city was cast in stark relief. Protest marches sprang up involving civil rights leaders and local parishioners organizing protest march

across the city, culminating in a packed church, with people praying for peace and demanding justice. Protesters called for a thorough, independent FBI investigation of Mark's death.

One week after the first protest march, a second group of protesters marched in solidarity with the police officers. The racial and socioeconomic division of Rockford was on display for all to see: the more affluent, racial majority of the east side versus the poor, welfare-ridden, racial minority of the west side of Rockford. The shooting ignited some "long-simmering racial tensions in the struggling northern Illinois town, eighty miles from Chicago."[274]

It was against this backdrop that I sensed a moral imperative for religion to serve as a conduit for peacemaking. The Abrahamic faith traditions, including the religions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, each profess tenets of peace and promote peacemaking in the world. In the midst of differences, religion has the ability to "make a deep contribution to how we understand and see ourselves as human beings."[275] Though admittedly, religion does not always make a positive contribution to society. It can encourage violence, especially when religious practitioners are convinced that their views are being challenged by the other. This distortion of understanding and teaching has led to religious intolerance and the outbreak of many conflicts.

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[274] Schumaker, *Civil Rights and Uncivil Society,* 18.

[275] Johnston and Sampson, *Religion,* 13.

Ready for Reconciliation

Following this incidence, the task of local religious leaders was to create a fertile environment for reconciliation to take place. When we identified what was happening in our context, what historical factors still have influence, and what resources and capacities are present to make change possible, readiness ensued.

This readiness came about because the religious leaders agreed with the following:

- All groups must see the need to change. It has to be more advantageous to restore peace to a divided city than to allow for conflict. At the very least, these leaders saw that need for change and were willing to address it.
- The groups saw the benefit of change. This has become a more-than-normal desire. For any community to thrive, religious leaders must see transformation as their best choice.
- The leaders took stock of the situation, looking at available resources, desires, available training, proper conditions, and political will to pursue this new way of being.

These elements might seem obvious and rudimentary, but make no mistake, there is nothing easy about transformation that comes from a diverse group of leaders coming together. When attempting to build consensus and partnership across religious lines, one cannot avoid following these steps. The goal is to move religious leaders away from the old ideas that have not produced transformation to new concepts that allow transformational change to occur.

What I consider as a final task for this group is restoration, and by this, I mean a simple process of identifying the things we need to do, the activities that would help us to return to the hope and possibility of a transformed community. It is our call as a group to transform our community from a place of hopelessness to a place of hope. Naming things is always helpful in this stage, such as naming injustices of the past and the pain it has caused, and suggesting things to do to remedy the past, such as:

- Lament by accurately naming the situation, for example, in the aforementioned case of the officer-involved shooting, identifying the anger and frustration related to how it happened, when it happened, and why it happened.
- Taking a prayer walk around the community, showing unity, showing signs of God at work in the community, and encouraging the community to see and be aware of these things.
- Organizing an event or rally to meet and learn to know others who are concerned about the incident.
- Preparing a meal together for Muslims, Jews, and Christians to share as a show of unity and oneness.

The options are endless. As a community, we can continue to explore ways to do more than what is listed above. These activities all took intentionality of thought and practice. But it was vital to the task of transformation, transforming what had just happened into a hopeful future for the community toward which we could strive. This also gave people a vision for a non-hostile future for Rockford. The result was an envisioned future that these religions were working toward.

Getting Practical

Describe an experience when you learned something important about religious and racial differences.

- What happened?
- What did you do?
- How did you feel about it?
- What did you learn?

Discuss the following with someone from the Abrahamic faiths:

- Are there people you do not approach because you are afraid and you do not know what to talk about?
- Are there conversations you do not get into because you do not know how to have them or what to say?
- What makes religious issues so hard to talk about?
- What do you fear might happen?

Objectives

Realization is a state of awareness that require a response. Realization creates a readiness for conflict transformation and it causes us to realize at a profound level that things must change. We cannot stand still; we must be engaged.

Chapter Three. Faith in Action:
Practicing What They Preach Separately

"Change must be viewed descriptively and prescriptively."[276]

—John Paul Lederach

Similar and Different

The relationship between Christians, Muslims, and Jews has been divided and shaky for centuries. These religions are locked into competing truths that have often led adherents to resort to force as a way of driving truth home. And yet, these religions proclaim peace as a core tenet of their faiths, and all claim to be the descendants of Abraham. This shows that the Abrahamic family, like any family, is made up of individuals who tell different versions of the same story. Often times, people who grew up in the same house, having attended the same school, and having traveled to the same places together, perceive their experiences very differently. When you ask these members to share their stories and experiences, you will be surprised to find many points of discord in the stories. This is not because they want to disagree with one another, but it is simply a matter of individual semiotics. Robert Yalle, define semiotics as the "discipline devoted to the systemic study of signs, symbols, and communication; it overlaps in its method and subject most directly with language and rhetoric."[277]

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[276] Lederach, *The Little Book of Conflict Transformation*, 24.

[277] Robert A. Yelle, *Semiotics of Religion: Signs of the Sacred in History* (London: A & C Black, 2012), 1.

Therefore, despite the differences in the practices of faith expressions that exist amongst the Abrahamic faiths, they could see the potential for change in working together. Just like, when family stories are shared from different perspectives, it can lead to rage and anger or it can lead to a juicy session of storytelling. Like families, members of the Abrahamic religions continue to argue over who is the most entitled. This book is intended to affirm a weaving together of different strands within the Abrahamic faith. When woven together, these faith traditions can produce an amazing tapestry of peacemaking in action.

In Rockford, this dynamic came into play around the issue of school desegregation. First a bit of history. Advocates seeking to desegregate schools in American cities such as

> St. Louis and San Francisco in the 1990s were surprisingly met with fierce resistance from communities and school boards. The three cases dealing with this issue have reached the Supreme Court this decade. The court has significantly limited the role of federal courts in reforming school districts by focusing almost solely on returning districts to local control as quickly as possible.[278]
>
> In response to these rulings, numerous school districts have successfully obtained findings of unitary status from district courts, thereby being relieved of all court supervision on issues relating to integration. In a number of desegregation cases, lower court judge has tended to move rapidly in dismantling racism with little evidence that those plans succeeded, that the districts would stay desegregated, or even that the school system itself wanted to be freed from judicial control."[279]

According to Shannon Fisk, "one of the main reason for this dismantling of school desegregation is that many segments of the American society have come to

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[278] Caroline Hendrie, "Settlement Ends St. Louis School Desegregation Case," Education Week, March 24, 1999, accessed August 3, 2017, http://www.edweek.org/ew/vol-18/281ouis.hl8.

[279] Gerald N. Rosenberg, *The Hollow Hope: Can Courts Bring About Social Change?* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago, 2008), 45. This argument showed the gains achieved during the desegregation of schools as a result of the action taken by Congress.212.

question the propriety and effectiveness of the efforts. Criticism of school desegregation litigation has three main bases."[280] As Fisk explains, the fact that desegregation is being questioned has harmed the benefits, proven by research, of desegregations. The critics argue that

> neither the harms of segregation nor the benefits of desegregation are as great as often claimed by social scientists. Others question the methods used by the courts, arguing that their plans should be less comprehensive and should focus more on voluntary approaches. Most fundamentally, some question whether courts are the best institutional actors to address these issues, both in terms of the legitimacy and efficacy of such action. One of those school districts that needed to be desegregated was the Rockford School District (RSD).[281]

People Who Care v. Rockford Board of Education School District #205[282] Was an attempt to further the disaggregation of schools that began at the height of the Civil Rights movement. However, that process placed most of the burden on the backs of minority children to enroll in white majority schools. The Rockford school desegregation saga demonstrated the necessity for federal courts in ensuring that schools are desegregated.

According to records from the Regional Historical Center, the *People Who Care v. the Board of Education*, showed that

> Rockford School District was first confronted with evidence of discrimination and opposition to that discrimination in the mid-1960s. Some efforts were made to desegregate in the 1970s, but those efforts failed because of opposition by many school board members, the ineffectiveness of state government to pressure RSD

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[280] Shannon Fisk, "The Importance of Full Court Involvement: A Case Study of the Rockford, IL School Desegregation Efforts," May 15, 1999, accessed May 20, 2017, 3, https://www.clearinghouse.net/chDocs/resources/caseStudy_ShannonFisk_1221018359.pdf.

[281] Ibid.

[282] Amy Cyplick, "People Who Care v. Rockford School District: The Repercussions of Using Legal Means to Right Social Wrongs" (master's thesis, Southern Illinois University Carbondale, 2013), May 15, 2017, http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1444&context=gs_rp.

> to comply with state law, the failure of the federal district court to oversee the district's actions, and budgetary constraints. The record further shows that the initiation of the People Who Care litigation led to some progress but there was evidence that the Rockford School Board was not fully compliant."[283]

Ever since, these findings, the court's "however" has been able to craft remedies that are successful in overcoming the opposition.

> This lawsuit which was filed on May 1989, not only attacked the 1989 Reorganization Plan, but also alleged that the school district historically had engaged in a pattern of intentional segregation and discrimination on a system-wide basis. Court's decisions can be forcedly implemented; however, it does not often bring the systemic change that needs to take place."[284]

In this case, the desire to live in peace among and between racial groups with some religious components. Such was the case in the *People Who Care v. the Board of Education*. Twenty years have passed since the case involving *People Who Care vs. the Board of Education,* a case that began following a meeting of concerned minority community members at the Washington Community Center. The phrase, *people who care*, stuck and was uttered across Rockford for decades "in celebration and frustration as the city's failures to provide quality education for all students became exposed and battled through a race discrimination lawsuit filed on behalf of the group in May 1989."[285]

Despite all of these changes, racial, religious, and now socioeconomic disparity continued to exist within the school district. Based on the court's implementation, the question being asked was: Are the court's applications working? If not, why? And how

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[283] Ibid., 28.

[284] Ibid.

[285] Ibid., 29.

can the Abrahamic faiths help bring desegregation to the Rockford schools, seeing that they are affected one way or the other?[286]

This situation prompted a group of leaders from the Abrahamic faiths to mobilize and organize the Center for Nonviolence and Conflict Transformation, to work toward putting racial, religious, and socioeconomic disparity to rest. But the questions that arose were: How are we going to do that? How will we know that our goal as a group is being achieved? The leaders and I examined the historical situation and initiated what began as an interfaith dialogue with a goal of bringing transformation. More importantly, we articulated some religious foundations for carrying out this dialogue. While we "emphasized the deliberative, formal, and theological nature of interfaith dialogue, distinguishing it from everyday religious encounters and conversations, our notions of dialogue varied."[287]

For example, some "Christian notions of dialogue stress religious witnessing, which is more than a verbal act; it is the co-witnessing of each other's faith for mutual growth and enrichment Witnessing indicates a deeper engagement involving a more spiritual experience than just information gathering."[288] Knowing well that these religious dialogues are not immune to the effects of globalization, such an understanding prompted "these leaders to see the whole world as a community of humanity with a

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[286] Corina Curry, "People Who Care: It All Began 20 Years Ago," Rockford Register Star, February 24, 2009, accessed May 20, 2017, www.rrstar.com/article/20090224/News/302249850.

[287] Mackenzie, Falcon, and Rahman, *Getting to the Heart of Interfaith*, 76.

[288] Turan Kayaoglu, "Preachers of Dialogue: International Relations and Interfaith Theology," *And Peacebuilding* (2007): 147.

shared, physical space."[289] However, globalization posed a few challenges for this group in Rockford. Questions arose from some adherents of these religions regarding the text of scripture to be used as a basis of our reconciliation. As a group, we agreed that the faith of each religion could be articulated and explored through a discussion of texts that build unity for this work.

These forms of engagement, in which the different texts of scriptures from these traditions were discussed, created ways of allowing faith to be central in our work together. Participants were not pressured to come to agreement or consensus, so differences and questions were as welcomed as similarities and differences. Sometimes these questions were left open-ended in the interest of putting into practice each group's faith practices. Even though the practices are preached separately, we could choose to put them into practice corporately.

Sharing this common understanding among the three religions made it easier to build a working relationship, a common understanding for sharing together, a submission to a leading authority (sovereign being), the claims of their scriptural text as a divine revelation that is endowed with absolute authority. Each adherent of these faiths should not view the other as outsider but as bringing a rich tradition that could be helpful to peacemaking and conflict transformation.

Planning for Action

I assigned participants to read the books *Kingian Nonviolence and Leadership Development* and *Stride Toward Freedom* (leaders from the Abrahamic faiths). While

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[289] Ibid., 145.

discussing the books, several of the participants expressed concern about the difficult experiences of the civil rights movement and the racial segregation that had taken place. However, they were hopeful at the same time, as they were able to read how different faith leaders were instrumental in helping to organize the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1965.

Despite the prevailing racial attitude of the Rockford School District, the participants began to see themselves, the community, and the world in new and challenging ways. Over the subsequent months, the group continued their conversation, leading to the adoption of the school that originated the civil law suit. They volunteered as a group, restoring programs that were no longer offered due to budget shortfalls from the state. After-school programs offering reading, math, gardening, cooking, and much more were restored and staffed by volunteers. Through this new partnership, the worldview of Rockford was changing. Participants no longer saw each other as religiously different, but saw their goal of unity as the primary focus. And obviously, friendships were built just as bridges were built across religious lines. This was expressed in the sharing of meals together, caring for each other's well-being, and loving one's neighbor.

Working together in this manner is applicable to individuals as well as community groups focusing on developing a conflict transformation movement within their city. Many people are afraid of taking a step toward reconciliation because of the fear of the unknown. Small steps, like reading and discussing together are very helpful. For this to happen, these steps may need to take place in a participant's life, the first being a

conscious choice to go on the journey of conflict transformation. Doing so means entering into a personal preparation phase and being open and vulnerable.

The old beliefs, patterns, and practices that seemed to have worked in the past may no longer fit. The old patterns of going it alone do not work. We remember what Jesus says in Matthew 9:16–17—one cannot pour new wine into an old wine skin. It may cause a rupture of the old wine skin. A different and new approach is called for but it must be chosen.

The next phase is what I call a second order of change. This requires action steps that are not based on reaction. In this phase, the participant makes the decision to do things significantly different. For example, instead of choosing to protest against the school district, the participants choose to address poverty-related challenges at this school, like fund raising to provide school uniforms for all the students.

The third phase is what I call transformation phase. In this phase, the participant's religious application of peace understanding is put into action. The practice of what is being preached in separate congregations is lived out. Although seen throughout the different phases, in this phase there is an actual sharing in a public gathering of how each participant's religion informed his or her participation in the school's transformation process.

Getting Practical: Counting the Cost

What are some of the costs of pursuing conflict transformation for you and your group?

1.

2.

What are some of the costs of not pursing transformation?

1.

2.

How do you see God at work in the art of practicing what you preach in your separate congregations?

1.

2.

Objectives

The objective of asking questions like these is to help you engage in active conflict transformation that is backed by practical actions.

Chapter Four: Being in Mission Together

"Jesus' subsequent actions demonstrate that God is not confined to linear time line."[290]

—Leonard Sweet

New Community, Brethren Values

I arrived in Rockford, Illinois, in the dead of winter to start planting a church with the Church of the Brethren. Temperatures dipped below zero, making the adjustment to this change more difficult considering I had just moved from Kona, Hawaii. The Church of the Brethren is an historic peace church. The early Brethren were heavily influenced by the Anabaptist and early Pietism movements happening in the late 16th century. As Carl Bowman wrote, "Alexander Mack's Brethren were heavily influence by southern German/Swiss Anabaptists, especially Mennonites with whom they have very close contact."[291] These early Brethren embraced the Anabaptist principles, which are: (1) a commitment to the unadulterated biblical doctrine, (2) devotion to the New Testament, (3) strong observance of the Lord's supper, (4) a commitment to nonviolence resistance, (5) not taking of oaths of allegiance to the state, (6) recognition of the church as a gathered community, and (7) a commitment to freedom in religious worship, etc.[292] In sum, Brethren were molded by a radical Pietist understanding of spirituality as well as an Anabaptist understanding of the church in society.

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[290] Sweet, *Bad Habits*, 16.

[291] Carl F. Bowman, *Brethren Society: The Cultural Transformation of a Peculiar People* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 5.

[292] Ibid.

Building Community Around a Shared Mission

Based on this history, I learned an important principle that has stayed with me. Contrary to popular belief and dependency on self-sufficiency, community stems from shared mission. It is not enough to just be friends or sit and hear someone's story, allowing yourself to feel genuine compassion. These things are certainly helpful, but they are not enough to sustain a group over the long haul and bring longed-for systemic change.

Being new in Rockford, I quickly realized the need for a community that is coalesced around a single mission—a mission that every member who decides to join the community will buy into and be on the mission together. This led to not only gathering people for worship on Sunday, but gathering a community of the Abrahamic faith family to be on a mission together. Soon, we began a group called Rockford Partners for Excellence (RP4E). RP4E's mission was to address the challenges middle-school students were facing in continuing their educational pursuits into high school. Despite our theological differences, we chose to focus our attention on this mission for the community of Rockford.

We explored some existing practices of groups that had been able to build and grow together, in spite of their differences. We noticed that successful groups contained diversity within them. Like United States military chaplains, who have a commitment to work together as diverse religious groups in spite of their differences, we chose to work toward a common mission. Our goal, unlike the military, is conflict transformation, and our mission is working together.

Our teammates might not be like members of a sports team, but our teammates are from the other religions of the Abrahamic family of faiths. Our main connection is our claim to Abraham as our father. Consider your favorite sports team. These teams are successful at building diverse communities because they are on a mission together. We too were on a mission together. We were on a mission to see our public schools and the arising conflicts in our city transformed. I found that having this shared, common mission makes all the difference.

As we began preparing to be radical reconcilers, the story of Jesus in his birth place, Bethlehem, as told in the Gospels comes to mind. Today in Bethlehem, much of the commerce is focused on this claim to prominence. One can visit the Church of the Nativity, which is said to be built on the site of Jesus' birth. The city today is encircled by modern security.

Jesus of Nazareth was an exemplar of mission together on radical reconciliation. Jesus embodies reconciliation even while under a very oppressive condition. Paul's call for a new humanity in Ephesians 2 is about a humanity that embraces both Jews and Gentiles, a new, reconciled humanity in Christ that mirrors what Jesus lived. Jesus was the incarnation of reconciliation. The notion of Jesus as the same yesterday, today, and forever is central to our reclaiming of Jesus as reconciler. Jesus has much to say to us in the context of the exclusion and division that is seen in the 21st century.

Being on a mission together calls Christians in this group to model Jesus' inaugural sermon, declaring the good news for the poor and oppressed. Jesus often spoke in parables and his parables often contained rhetoric that was directed at power structures by shining the spotlight of the prophetic tradition on the injustices of the Roman

occupation. We may not have a Roman occupation today, but the power structures in society represents power structures that are not very different from the Roman occupation of first-century Palestine. Not only did Jesus preach a message of reconciliation and social justice, he actually lived it. We too are called to live that out in Rockford in our work as a team on a mission.

The ministry of Jesus reflected the influence of his Galilean roots. Our team's mission in Rockford must reflect our Rockford roots. Members of our community should be able to read the fruit of our work and see what true reconciliation looks like or should look like. We started by meeting as Abrahamic faith leaders, hearing what hope and vision each of the group leaders has for reconciliation. Stories were shared around the table.

Finding Commonalities

We took time to do a historical study of Jesus, Mohammed, and YHWH, to remind the group about the mission that each of these religions has in respect to peace and conflict transformation. Together we discovered the distinctions between Christians and the other Abrahamic faiths. Our discovery together showed "Jesus did not come from a wealthy, privileged background or from a family of high social standing with powerful political connections."[293] Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Mary and Joseph, was not of the hierarchical priestly class. But from his beginning, Jesus looked at the world through different eyes.

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[293] Ekkehard Stegemann and Wolfgang Stegemann, *Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century* (London, UK: A & C Black, 1999), 22.

This significant development helped our group reorganize, finding a common mission as a team built around an open theological study that juxtaposed Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. We found a common ground as we worked to address the challenges our middle-school students were facing, especially our city's minority middle school students, whose graduation to high school rate was less than sixty percent.

To accomplish this, we set out to discover a deeper dimension of our faith journey, seeking to move beyond the five stages identified by Pastor Mackenzie, Rabbi Falcon, and Iman Rahman:

1. moving beyond separation and suspicion
2. inquiring more deeply
3. sharing both the easy and the difficult part
4. moving beyond safe territory
5. exploring spiritual practices from other traditions[294]

We worked through these stages one step at a time at the onset of our mission together, learning to know each other, building tolerance and bridges. And as we contemplated the meaning of the sacred in spite of the diverse views, the diverse views became the beacon of hope for our work and the school community.

Getting Practical

As you consider the five stages, you may discover that you have already had similar experience in different place with different people. Do any of the steps stand out to you? We invite you to share what faith means to you, sharing it with someone of another faith not by way of proselytizing but as a way of sharing your hope for a transformed world.

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[294] Mackenzie, et al. *Getting to the Heart*, 8.

Ask God for a radical understanding of what it means to be on a common mission, to be in mission with people from other faith traditions.

Pray that you will be able to communicate better with each other.

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