Interfaith Dialogue as Peacebuilding

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The world is like a home where the diversity lives in. Religious plurality is one of integral parts of it. Living in diversity surely is a formidable task. Thorough history we learn that religious diversity might contribute into violent or even bloody conflicts. In this context, we realize that diversity can be both a blessing and a challenge. On the one hand, the positive interface between the cultural practices and faith traditions of the community's diverse inhabitants can enrich community life. But on the other hand, the seemingly irreconcilable religious ideologies of the different faiths can often make it difficult for their adherents to look beyond their differences and search for common grounds upon which a shared community life can be built. Unfortunately, in many parts of the world, differences in religion have been cited as a factor in conflicts between or within states. It is a paradox that historically religions have often been implicated in violence and conflict, either as a direct cause or as an associated factor, but have also contributed to building peace.

Here is a dialogue between differences very important to minimize or eliminate unexpected religious violence occurs. Interfaith dialogue can be an instrument that facilitates the adversaries in conflict to talk and if possible to be reconciled. Interfaith dialogue is a means for achieving this greater goal by persons of different faiths meeting to have a conversation. It is potential to foster peace in the midst of religious diversity by nurturing mutual understanding and tolerance among people of different faiths. Jaco Cilliers sees that a constructive interfaith dialogue requires firmly commitment of the participants to their own faith or religion. Interfaith dialogue is a dialogue between hearts. It is carried out to bridge differences for being able to communicate each one another. And this effort is not easy. There are challenges facing it to get working as supposed.

Firstly, I agree with Cilliers when he identifies that the biggest challenge in doing interfaith dialogue is deconstructing stereotypes of the other found in their religious traditions or communities. Interfaith dialogue encourages us to re-think elements within our religious traditions that call on us to engage in dialogue. It encourages us to breakdown stereotypes we have of the other faiths and reflect critically on the practices of our co-religionists. All participants should remember that dialogue is not debate. The conversation is taken openly and sympathetically. It is supposed to allow all parties in dialogue understanding the other's position as precisely and, as it were, as much from within, as possible. Yes, of course, once again, it is not an easy task. Mohammed Abu-Nimer describes it as a very dangerous business. But, he also believes that interfaith dialogue will give the participants new insights to become more sensitive for language of hatred, exclusion, and prejudice.

Abu-Nimer, based on his experience and studies on conflict resolution, identifies four phases of development in an effective experiment of interfaith dialogue. He suggests that the earlier encounters should focus on individual and group similarities in theologies and scriptures. One example could be to jointly study the sacred texts of each religion. It must be remembered that the goal for these studies is not debate or conversions. The second phase is to deepen the relationship through joint prayers that are not contradictory to the other faith and by participating in the other faith's rituals. Having established trust and an understanding of the other faith, the third phase is to discover and confirm differences in religious values and faith practices. The final step should be exploring the ways in which messages of different faiths can benefit people from other religious traditions in the same community. However, this

thought may not be accepted by all parties. But, it is relevant to give short description about the framework of interfaith dialogue.

Secondly, another big challenge is to maintain the results of interfaith dialogue in the future life of the people to live in peace and to avoid violence. Cilliers outlines several pillars that must be kept and managed well if we want the peacebuilding is sustained. They are justice, reconciliation, forgiveness, and truth. Overall, even there is no easy option interfaith dialogue has played significant role in peacebuilding.

Reference

Cilliers, Jaco. "Buiding Bridges for Interfaith Dialogue". In *Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding,* edited by David R. Smock, (47-60).

Abu-Nimer, Mohammad. "The Miracles of Transformation through Interfaith Dialogue". In *Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding,* edited by David R. Smock, (15-32).