Religious Barriers to World Peace

ABRAHAM O. H. OKAMOTO

One of the most urgent needs in American society, we are told by the behavioral scientists, is to initiate a more profound study of comparative religion at the secondary school level.

If we have learned anything from the traumata of the sixties and early seventies, it is that if we permit interfaith activity to lag and the understanding of the faith of our neighbor to become less than a priority, the entire society retreats into ghettos that not only are self-segregating, but that also diminish the melting-pot activity that has been the traditional beauty of American life.

We should stimulate our children and their teachers to learn more about the various religious persuasions around the globe so that they may develop an understanding of the moral, ethical, and spiritual motivations of people they may never meet, but whose way of life may be understood by the entire human family.

One of the problems of Western man has been his unwillingness to try to understand the Eastern approach to politics, religious life, economics, and social stratification. The Western way has always been (at least to Western man) the most acceptable way, and, therefore, contact between Eastern and Western cultures has not only been slow but, at many levels, has been actually discouraged.

A bridge of understanding between East and West can help to reinforce the faith of each.

What world religions have in common

We are one, under one God. This premise would be generally accepted by most intelligent persons. However, each religious group rephrases concepts of faith to fit its own linguistic style.

For example, we are familiar with the saying, "Love one another as I have loved you." The Hebrew Scriptures would say it as, "Love thy neighbor as thyself for I am the Lord." In the Talmud works it is phrased, "Don’t do to your fellow man what is hateful to yourself." The Moslems would say, "No one is a believer unless he desires for his brother what he desires for himself."

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Across the globe, the Eastern religions would also espouse the same philosophy. Our Hindu brothers express it, “This is the sum of religion, do not to others what causes pain to you.” The Jains and Buddhists would say, “Hurt not others in ways you yourself would find hurt.” The Taoist would teach his children, “Return goodness for hatred,” and Confucius in his beautiful style would say to his students, “Do not unto others what you would not have them do unto you.”

The grouping of religions

If we have established the common ground on which men can understand and love one another regardless of their place or station or geographic location in life, perhaps we can now divide world religions into three main groups.

This is generally believed to be an impossible task, but we will simplify the matter by assigning divisions designated as follows: Alpha, Beta, and Gamma, which refer to the formative periods of religions of the Near East, India, and China, respectively.

In the Alpha group we place Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. The criterion is that each believes the Bible to be the revelation of God, and each is a monotheistic religious expression.

In the Beta group we place Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism, all of which have their roots in Indian soil. Unlike Alpha religions, in which God is believed supernatural, the Beta group are not necessarily “pantheistic” who believe that everything is God (this is an error perpetuated by so-called monotheistic religions) but rather they are “panentheistic”; i.e., they believe that everything is “in the being of God.”

In the Gamma group we place Taoism, Confucianism, and Japanism, Sino-Tibetan, Sino-Korean, and Sino-Vietnamese religions. The traditional Chinese expressions of faith develop in two forms: One is panentheistic; the other is nontheistic, espousing no belief in any godhead whatever.

It may sound contradictory to speak of a nontheistic religion, but by this we mean that there is a direct and distinct form of religious and ethical conduct demanded of every human being without the necessity of mentioning a supernatural being.

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<tr>
<th>Alpha</th>
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<tr>
<td>Judaism</td>
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Common criteria in all religious forms

We are now well into our search for a general understanding of religion as it expresses itself the world over. We can find at least five general areas of