

ABRAHAMIC FAITHS PEACEMAKING INITIATIVE

American Clergy And Religious Activists Who Advocate Peacemaking

Common Themes

1. Peace Through Justice

All three Abrahamic faiths emphasize the interdependence of peace and justice, making justice integral to our understanding of peace. Peace flows naturally from justice, just as enmity, violence and war flow naturally from injustice. In order to affect meaningful peace where enmity and violence have been, one must first establish justice; in order to maintain peace, one must safeguard justice. That the relationship between peace and justice is repeatedly emphasized in the scriptures of all three faiths illustrates the essential nature of this principle.

2. Right Relations with Others

We are encouraged in all three religions to strive for positive relationships in all aspects of our lives – interpersonally and internationally. We all seek to make welcome the other, and we all recognize the multiplicity that is inherent in the unity of God and God’s creation. Honoring the diversity of creation is crucial in the pursuit of just peace. If we do not honor a worldview different from our own, we are collectively unable see beyond our own self-interest. Likewise, if we do not consider the perspective of our neighbors – who may be less powerful, less prosperous or less free than we are – then we cannot properly define what is just, nor can we have the best understanding of God’s presence in this multi-faceted world. Loving our neighbors creates the conditions for us to have just and peaceful outer and inner lives.

3. Sacred Texts Require Interpretation in Context

It is crucial to understand sacred texts in all three traditions through the lens of critical inquiry and contemporary thought. Scholarship and modern theology must be partnered with the rich, long-standing traditional teachings in each Abrahamic faith in order to provide an understanding of our texts' meanings that are relevant for today's practitioners. The over-reliance on past understandings of difficult passages prevents us from living with our texts in an authentic way. Overly literal readings, readings that are inappropriately faithful to traditional teachings without questioning their context, or readings that clearly create discord in our overall understanding of our faith are to be put aside. To apply the interpretive tools of our time to our respective faiths makes each of them stronger and more applicable to our lives.

4. The Limits of War and Just War

Judaism, Christianity and Islam all address the conditions under which war may be waged, and in each case, there were specific geo-political and historical realities that gave rise to these teachings. All three faiths recognize the presence of war in the world and respond with ways to mitigate war's devastation (protection of the environment, safeguarding non-combatants, etc). In this attempt to minimize the damage, each faith acknowledges and laments the gross destruction of war. It is useful to incorporate this deep-seated acknowledgement and lament into a contemporary critique of war.

War, its justifications and its consequences are clearly all around us; we must strive not to be led astray by these forces in our societies. Rather, we must question their efficacy in solving problems and their value as an organizing tool for communities. Further, we must especially strive to incorporate justice and understanding of the other when we clash with our neighbors. Only in this

way can we hope to find solutions to our conflicts that do not involve inflicting or being victimized by gross violence.

5. Self-Examination and Self-Critique

All three faiths demand that in seeking to perfect the world, we must seek to perfect ourselves. Whether as individuals or communities, self-knowledge and the acknowledgment of wrong-doing are crucial to the pursuit of peace. Just as we must know and understand our neighbors, we must know and understand ourselves. We must recognize our inadequacies and errors in order to overcome or correct them. We must be willing to be critical of our own actions if we are to be credible critics of others, including our leaders and our adversaries. Also, in our quest for holiness or closeness to God, an honest accounting of our individual and communal selves lends itself to greater understanding of God's presence within and among us.

6. God's Example of Love, Compassion and Mercy

God is our best example of love, compassion and mercy. God's ability to love humanity, despite our propensity for violence and the difficulty we have changing our self-interested tendencies, is a model for our own actions. We, too, must love others in spite of their shortcomings; we, too, must value every life equally. In each Abrahamic faith, there are rituals or practices or teachings that maximize our ability to mirror God's example of compassionate, merciful love for the entire world. And in each faith, the God of love serves as both a model and a motivation for striving toward increased justice, compassion and peace between humanity and the earth, between warring neighbors and within our individual spirits.

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