

Framework For Religious and Political Reconciliation

Preamble – True Religion And Good Politics

1. The aim of both true religion and good politics is respectively to bring humanity into the love of God and to cause us to dwell together harmoniously in a just and good peace.
2. True religion and good politics are connected in that the love of God is best expressed by loving our neighbor. The parable of the Good Samaritan tells us that this love of neighbor is to transcend major religious and cultural differences and that no person should be left “by the side of the road of life” because of their ethnicity, culture or religious belief.
3. The love of God for humanity is analogous to the love of a Father for a prodigal son. God wants us to reconcile with Him and He then wants the “brothers” of the human race to reconcile with each other in peaceful political processes.
4. The love of God tames our violent and angry instincts and causes us to seek peace, order, justice and tranquility. These goals require good political processes if they are to be achieved. This necessary connection between true religion and politics means that true religion will always respect the democratic process of law and not engage in extra-judicial violence.
5. The love of God is the love of the Creator of heaven and earth, therefore true religion will respect and nurture what God has made and keep it for Him in gracious stewardship of the environment. True religion will seek peace with the natural order and not support its willful destruction. Good politics will legislate to protect what God has made.
6. Because mankind is made in the image of God and is part of His good Creation then true religion shall respect the wonder that each person is. True religion shall not impose a duty to hate or kill someone simply because of their race, culture or religious belief. The minority segments of each of our faiths that hold such views should be seen as in error.
7. While great differences exist between our faiths, creeds and political beliefs and these differences have led to wars in the past, such history must not imprison the future. Each of us should move past resentment to reconciliation and towards a tolerant, peaceful and prosperous nation.
8. Thus there is a need, not to agree on doctrines, which cannot happen without huge compromises, but to agree on what the Philippines will look like when the major faiths, families and political parties within it unite in a common goal of seeing this nation become peaceful and prosperous. We need to unite in a common vision concerning the shape of things to come, the way the world will look when we get it right. A vision of what the Philippines will look like when the political will and religious energies of its people are focused on constructive, good and peaceful ends.
9. I call this “solution-focused peace-making”. It is the opposite of problem-focused fighting. Instead of dwelling on problems and differences and history we choose to focus on solutions and where we can unite and what we can build in the future.
10. Solution-focused peace-making does not ask “why are we fighting” as much as it asks “how can we forge a just peace?”. It does not analyze all the differences but rather builds on common ground. It does not get bogged down in the paralysis of analysis but forges ahead in faith to a positive new future.
11. Much that is not peaceful comes from seeking to meet legitimate human needs in illegitimate ways. Solution-focused peace-making seeks to find the legitimate, creative and good ways that these legitimate needs can be properly met.
12. By focusing on solutions instead of problems we reduce the sense of personal threat. And reducing the sense of personal threat is a key to peace-making. When we focus on problems we activate many anxieties and human responses to threat and danger - but when we focus on solutions we unleash our creativity, intelligence and good-will.

This is not to say that we should ignore the need for justice and for reconciliation – all peace must be based on justice. But that justice should be sought in a positive way with peace and prosperity as the desired outcome not in a vengeful way with retaliation and division as the desired outcome. Therefore I commend solution-focused peace-making, based on a common vision of justice, peace and prosperity - as the way forward.

Twenty Steps To A Just & Solution-Focused Peace

1. Agreement to be Solution-Focused
2. Defining a common vision of the peaceful and prosperous future
3. Reframing the conflict as specific, temporary, and resolvable and not located in the basic nature of the parties involved
4. Agreement to a cease-fire during the peace process
5. Reducing both actual and perceived threat to both parties
6. Tabling the issues of Facts, Feelings, and Identity
7. Working off a common set of well-established facts
8. Establishing areas of common ground
9. Agreeing on the key desires of both sides
10. Creating ways to achieve those desires
11. Establishing what can readily be forgiven and the degree of repentance required
12. Defining the remaining issues of justice
13. Solving the remaining issues of justice
14. Signing a peace treaty at a formal ceremony of reconciliation
15. Begin implementing the common vision of a prosperous future with a set of agreed pilot projects
16. Establish a set of learnings from this about building trust and working together on the common vision
17. Improved cooperation
18. Tackle together larger projects of very significant community impact. Continue to learn and to build trust and cooperation
19. Bring a few large projects to a successful conclusion, begin to achieve genuine prosperity in unity
20. Celebrate peace

Explanation And Comments

The solution-focused peace-making process outlined above aims to unleash creative solutions to intractable problems by being forward-looking, constructive, practical and optimistic. The process is designed to deal with both the justice issues and the construction of a peaceful common future. Solution-focused peace-making avoids focusing solely on “the problems” and points of disagreement and refuses to participate in any desire for revenge. Rather there is a strong emphasis on building a common vision of the future so that participants have a reason to move forward from their conflict. Justice issues are addressed as necessary elements to be resolved in the process of moving towards a better Philippines.

Steps 1 & 2 - Participants must agree to be constructive, forward-looking and solution-focused. A whole day may be spent just on explaining what this means. Then participants should agree on some basic vision of what the desired future will look like – such as peaceful, just, fair, and prosperous or more evocatively in a picture as in Martin Luther King’s “I Have A Dream” speech

Step 3 is from Martin Seligmann’s work on “Learned Optimism” and the changing of perceptions and perspectives. For constructive work on problems and conflicts the problem needs to be reframed so that it is not seen as total, universal and pervasive but as specific or a collection of specific, definable, problems. Secondly, the problem should be reframed so it is not viewed as permanent and abiding but rather as a temporary artifact in a forward moving process; the third reframing is from viewing the situation as impossible and irresolvable to being capable eventually of a constructive solution. Furthermore, the tensions must not be viewed as being located in the fundamental nature of the parties involved “Muslims are always” “Christians are never” “big business is continually” but as resolvable “external” entities.

Steps 4 & 5 – deal with reduction of threat through a cease-fire and the cessation of hostilities and major threats during the period of negotiation. This is essential to building a constructive context for negotiations. (The “cease-fire” may be a legal or political one in cases where armed conflict is not involved.)

Archbishop Capella and Fr. Integan both spoke of **Truth and Reconciliation**

Commissions. I would see such a Commission fitting into the middle of the process in steps 6, 7 (Truth) and 11,12, and 13 (Reconciliation).

As part of this **Step 6** surfaces issues of Facts, Feelings and Identity. This concept is sourced in the research of the Harvard negotiation project’s articulated in the book *Difficult Conversations*. In any difficult negotiation there are always these three elements of facts, feelings and identity. Thus on an issue such as poverty there may be economic facts, social feelings and the deep identity (I am, we are) issues of various disadvantaged groups. By surfacing the emotional and identity issues, and addressing them along with the facts, the “heart issues” that drive conflict are dealt with.

Step 7 stresses the importance of truth and working off a common set of well-established facts. Issues such as the Coco-Planters levy, Marcos wealth, and various allegations of corruption cannot be satisfactorily resolved unless both parties come to a common set of facts. Participants need to be “on the same page” as regards the basic facts before

reconciliation can be achieved. Thus the parties involved need to have a high respect for factuality and truthfulness. Unsubstantiated allegations should not be allowed to enter the process, especially in a disruptive manner. There may need to be an independent court or commission that researches and establishes the facts in major issues.

Steps 8-10 create common ground and a common anticipated future where the desires of both sides can be achieved. This makes reconciliation appear worthwhile and profitable and gives participants the will to move through the process. It also enables the leaders to justify to their constituents, the giving up of certain areas of discontent.

Steps 11-13 deal with issues of repentance, forgiveness and justice possibly through a Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Step 14 is a formal agreement that makes the cease-fire permanent and establishes the reconciliation of the parties as part of their common vision for the future.

Steps 15-19 can be called "learning to live together" and involve slowly building trust and cooperation towards an agreed mutual prosperity. Many of the principles involved in "Learning Organizations" can be applied here.

Step 20 – Celebrate peace – as harmony is achieved peace should be celebrated and announced, people should be "caught doing the right thing" and peace given honor in both formal, informal and ceremonial ways. This reinforces the lessons learned and the desire to continue building the future rather than lapsing back into the old disharmonies.