

# **The Significance of Religions for Social Justice and a Culture of Peace**

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One of the critical elements for a culture of peace is social justice. Perceptions of injustice lead to discontent, non-cooperation, conflict, civil unrest, and war. Religions have a powerful role in shaping ideas of social justice and legitimacy, and also in responding to perceptions of injustice and illegitimacy—e.g., passively accepting human suffering and injustice as the will of God and a badge of moral merit, or actively opposing them, and if so, whether by violent or nonviolent means. One reason that religions are often so powerful in war or peace is that they carry the archetypes, images, and symbols of meaning and identity that inform people's thoughts and actions at deep, often unconscious levels. To maximize the potential of religions to contribute to peace and minimize those that breed war requires understanding these deep, unconscious levels of knowing and cultural formation; this is more elusive and difficult than addressing direct or even systemic forms of violence.

That religions have played a role in conflict and warfare is well known. We have only to

look at current and past wars to see that even when religious differences are not a direct cause, they may play an indirect and interactive role in conflict dynamics.<sup>[1]</sup> But religions have also contributed significantly to the development of more just, humane, and ecologically responsible societies.<sup>[2]</sup>

Thus this paper does not ask whether religions can affect war or peace, but rather why and how? If we understand why and how religions affect war or peace within and between societies, we may be better enabled to engage the strengths and transcend the limitations of religions in developing a sustainable peace.

One reason that religions may have played a powerful role in history is that they often carry the archetypes, symbols, stories, and worldviews through which people shape their identity, designate their deepest questions of meaning, deal with problems of injustice and suffering, and develop codes of morality and conduct to meet the requirements of community life. Because they function at often deep and unconscious levels, people are often unaware of the affect of religious symbols, archetypes and identity systems on their values, choices and behaviors. Nevertheless people are often prepared to die in order to defend or uphold these symbols, meanings, and identity systems.

In addition, through their extensive networks, institutions (e.g., schools, universities, hospitals, social service centers) and worldwide memberships, world religions engage millions of people at local, regional, and global levels and can have a major influence on political, economic, and social policy development. In some countries religious systems are more powerful than political systems, and in others political and religious systems are intertwined.

Indeed, given the importance of religion in many societies, it would be difficult to develop a culture of peace without including religions and the symbols and meanings they hold for peoples as well as the power of their networks. To the degree that religions are part of the problem, they are also part of the solution

## **Definitions, Terms, Approaches**

Before proceeding, it may be helpful to clarify how several terms are being used in this paper, and their significance to the topic.

Religion(s). Because of wide variations among religions it is not practical to speak in the singular as if all religions were the same. Although religions are found in every type of society, geographic region, and historical period, religious experience and practice has varied tremendously. What is essential in some religions is absent or peripheral in others. Belief in gods or God is not universal to all religions, and, although most religions include prayer and rituals, these are not always present or central. Despite the differences, there are some commonly shared aspects of religious experience. The Latin word *religiare*, from which the word “religion” in many Western languages is derived, means “harmony,” “to unify,” “bind together,” “make whole.” In Sanskrit one of the original meanings for *dharma* (eternal religion) is the same: “to bind together as one the whole universe.” Religion has evolved out of a human sense of a reality greater than self or the sum total of measurable physical, economic, political, or social phenomena. It has also been defined as the experience of “the holy” or “whole,” or of the “ultimate,” “sacred,” and “unknowable.” For some religion is an effort to discover order (*cosmos*) in disorder (*chaos*). It has also been described as a means by which societies interpret life and develop and reinforce codes of morality and conduct in keeping with those interpretations and the requirements of community life. And it has been defined as:

[those] beliefs and practices by means of which a group 1) designates its deepest problems of meaning, suffering, and injustice; 2) specifies its most fundamental ways of trying to reduce those problems; and 3) seeks to deal with the fact that, in spite of all efforts to eliminate them, meaninglessness, suffering, and injustice continue.<sup>[3]</sup>

While many aspects of culture and society may be affected by religion (from family life and ethical systems to social stratification and political and economic processes), this paper will focus primarily on the role religion plays in ideas, perceptions, and responses to social justice and injustice. This is because perceptions of injustice—real, alleged, or imagined—are often significant causes of conflict and war, and because ideas and perceptions of justice play a key role in maintaining a stable peace.

Rather than a theological or philosophical approach, this paper will consider the relationship of social justice and religion to war or peace from an operational or social-dynamics point of view. It will draw insights from the social sciences, peace and conflict research, and systems analysis to explore how social justice and religion actually function within a social system to affect war or peace. It will approach the subject not from within a specific religion

and its teachings, and not by comparing a series of specific religions, but rather by viewing religion as a generic phenomenon through which a group considers its deepest problems of meaning, suffering, and injustice in light of its beliefs and practices.

In the limited space of this paper only a few points can be presented, and these only in bare outline. Unfortunately, the necessary omission of nuanced discussion and supporting research may make complex social interactions appear simpler than they actually are. But in other works I have discussed these questions in greater detail, with reference to supporting research and historical examples.<sup>[4]</sup>

**Social System.** By social system is meant a form of social, economic, political, or religious organization or practices, or patterns of human interactions and relationships. It can also refer to the set of doctrines, ideas ideologies, or principles intended to explain the arrangement.

**Social Justice.** The terms “justice” and “injustice” can refer to the actions of individuals, but here they are used as a predicate of societies or social systems and their acts and institutions, thus the phrase social justice.

Concepts have to do with images or ideas about justice and injustice. Perceptions have to do with a sense or judgment that particular activities, behavior, policies, or systems are fair or unfair, just or unjust. Perceptions of social justice or injustice usually have to do with feelings of equitable or inequitable treatment within a social system. These perceptions usually center around questions of 1) authority [Who can make decisions and who must follow them?]; 2) division of labor [Who will do what work and when and how?]; and 3) distribution of goods and services [How are resources, opportunities, duties, rewards, punishments, offices, status, or other things that affect physical, psychological, economic, or social well-being to be allocated within a social system?].

All societies are faced with these problems. The need to resolve them requires a certain amount of social coordination, which in turn leads to moral judgments and moral imperatives, and thence to a sense of justice or injustice. The need for justice and for social coordination is universal among all peoples and societies. However, widespread variations occur in how different societies coordinate or organize themselves to resolve these problems. In turn, these variations give rise to variations in moral codes and concepts and

perceptions of justice and injustice. Perceptions of injustice may vary according to who is making the judgment, based on what moral codes, and also the type of social and economic system being assessed with its particular goals, structures, and historical circumstances. Also, perception of social justice may change as social and economic conditions or systems change. The variations in perceptions of social justice in different or changing social systems contribute to a potential for conflict.

**Conflict.** Conflict and violence are sometimes linked, but most conflict occurs without violence, and violence can occur without overt conflict. Similarly, conflict can refer to warfare, but warfare is only one form of conflict. The word conflict can be used to describe a whole range of actions or psychological states, warfare being at the extreme end of the continuum. As used in this paper conflict refers to incompatibilities, along the lines described by M. Deutsch:

A conflict exists whenever incompatible activities occur. The incompatible actions may originate in one person, group, or nation; such conflicts are called intrapersonal, intragroup, or intranational. Or they may reflect incompatible actions of two or more persons, groups, or nations; such conflicts are called interpersonal, intergroup, or international. An action that is incompatible with another action prevents, obstructs, interferes, injures, or in some way makes the latter less likely or less effective.<sup>[5]</sup>

Conflict is inevitable, and, in an increasingly crowded and interdependent world, it is likely to increase. It cannot be eradicated or long suppressed. Attempts to suppress conflict often merely mask a situation that, left unresolved, may fester and ultimately erupt in violence and warfare and/or destroy a social system. But conflict need not be destructive or negative or lead to war. Conflict can be constructive and creative, leading to positive outcomes.

Some positive functions of conflict include: 1) airing problems so that solutions can be proposed; 2) preventing stagnation and stimulating needed changes in norms or conditions; 3) helping to establish personal and group identity and cohesiveness by clarifying values, interests and goals; 4) testing and assessing one's own and others' capacities (often an enjoyable aspect of conflict); and 5) providing a mechanism for testing and assessing the relative strength of divergent interests within a social system, and for maintaining or adjusting the balance of power.<sup>[6]</sup>

Research by Deutsch shows that although competition produces conflict, conflict need not

be competitive.<sup>[7]</sup> Competition implies incompatible goals, but conflict may occur in a cooperative context, where people agree on the goals but differ on means. The processes for resolving differences are strongly influenced by whether the context is competitive or cooperative.

As will be discussed below, religious beliefs often affect the way people deal with conflict, for example whether they suppress it or try to resolve it, and if the latter, whether they do so cooperatively or competitively, constructively or destructively, nonviolently or violently.

Peace researchers distinguish between types of violence, including behavioral, structural, and cultural. Behavioral (sometimes referred to as direct) violence includes such acts as murder, suicide, street violence, child abuse, vandalism, war, and genocide. Structural violence refers to social, economic or political systems that are inherently unjust or deprive people of basic human needs, rights, and dignity. For example, starvation or malnutrition that results from inequitable world economic systems or repressive political regimes are considered forms of structural violence. Cultural violence is described by Galtung as:

those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence—exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics)—that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence. ... Cultural violence makes direct and structural violence look, even feel, right—or at least not wrong. ... Violence studies are about two problems: the use of violence and the legitimating of that use. The psychological mechanism would be internalization. The study of cultural violence highlights the way in which the act of direct violence and the fact of structural violence are legitimized and thus rendered acceptable in society.<sup>[8]</sup>

Galtung further distinguishes between these types of violence:

Direct violence is an event. Structural violence is a process. Cultural violence is an invariant, remaining essentially the same for long periods. The three forms of violence enter time differently, somewhat like the difference in earthquake theory between the earthquake as an event, the movement of the tectonic plates as a process and the fault line as a more permanent condition.<sup>[9]</sup>

Violence can be seen as a stratum in which cultural violence flows up into structural and then direct violence, says Galtung (1990).<sup>[10]</sup> But it can also be viewed as a triangle with the

three corners being Direct, Structural, and Cultural and the violence able to flow in six directions. Cycles of violence connecting all three may start at any point.

Peace advocates who focus on behavioral or direct violence stress the need to resolve problems of organized violence (e.g., war) first, or there won't be a world left. Structuralists tend to want unjust social structures transformed first, for example to root out the perceived causes of war as a necessary precondition for the abolition of war and maintenance of a stable peace. Those who focus on overcoming cultural violence stress the need to delve deeper into the unconscious and cultural substrata where archetypes, symbols, and belief systems legitimize or give meaning to war and peace and to uncover or develop there the spiritual and cultural foundations for a stable peace. Religions can be included in the purview of all three approaches to ending violence and developing peace, but have special significance for advancing cultural peace.

In this light it is interesting that UNESCO began in the 1990s to give increasing emphasis to developing cultures of peace, including a strong focus on the role of religions. Having been founded at the end of World War II on a vision that wars begin in the minds of men and thus it is in the minds of men that the seeds of peace must be sown, fifty years later UNESCO conceded that "mind" and reason alone was not enough to end the threat of mutual assured destruction, and that deeper, more comprehensive approaches were needed, including finding and sowing peace in the realm of spirit and culture as well as mind. UNESCO's initiatives led the UN to proclaim the first decade of the 21st century the Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence.

**Positive Peace.** Peace as used in this paper means more than the absence of war. Peace scholars have delineated between negative and positive peace. Negative peace is characterized by the absence of a shooting war, but the presence of a high degree of structural and/or cultural violence (see above). Positive peace is characterized by the absence of a shooting war and also the presence of social, economic, and political and cultural (including religious) systems within which people are accorded fair and humane treatment and the opportunity to meet their basic human needs. Unless otherwise specified, "peace" in this paper refers to positive peace.

## The Significance of Social Justice to a System of Peace

This section considers the significance of social justice for a social system in general and, in particular, for a culture of positive peace. Of course, social injustice is only one of a number of possible causes of war, and hence, social justice is only one of a number of elements of a peace system and/or a culture of peace. However, according to many peace scholars, among possible elements of peace, ideas and perceptions of social justice are among the most significant.

Kenneth Boulding, M. Deutsch, E. E. Sampson, and Lerner in Sampson's collection have asserted that the need for justice is universal.<sup>[11]</sup> While ideas and perceptions of what constitutes social justice may vary from one type of social system or culture to another, the need for justice is fundamental in all societies and cultures. Lerner (in Sampson) asserts that the need for justice arises so early and with such primacy that it has a nearly genetic, or natural, base.<sup>[12]</sup>

However, this need for justice can affect individuals and social dynamics in different ways. Because the need for justice is so fundamental, people who perceive that their world is not just may struggle to change or transform it to fit their concept of justice. Such social change efforts may be undertaken violently or nonviolently, through constitutional or revolutionary means. Or, conversely and paradoxically, people who perceive that their world is unjust may deny or repress their sense of injustice, or accept and "justify" a certain amount of oppression for a time, out of conscious or unconscious fears that acknowledging the injustice will undermine not only their worldview, but also their sense of belonging, identity, and self worth. Religion is a powerful cultural force that both informs many peoples' ideas of justice, and also their responses to perceptions of injustice.

One reason that ideas and perceptions of social justice are so significant in the dynamics of war and peace is that they vitally affect a people's sense of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of social structures, and hence their willingness or unwillingness to cooperate with those structures. As Sampson asserts,

Justice takes us to the roots of the social order, in particular to the matter of its legitimacy. Questions of justice and fairness are not simply minor complaints within an individual's psyche; those psychic cries of "unfair!" reveal the fault lines of a given social form.<sup>[13]</sup>

A perception that a system is just contributes to a sense of its legitimacy and thus

strengthens it by enhancing peoples' willingness to support and reproduce it. This support and strength enhances the prospects for a system's survival. A sense that a system is unjust erodes a sense of its legitimacy and, with it, the willingness of people to sustain and reproduce it. If allowed to become too widespread, perceptions of injustice may lead to a crisis of legitimization and undermine the whole social system.

To prevent this, societies develop ideologies and other mechanisms to "justify" existing systems. Here "justice" is viewed as a process rather than a state of being. As a process, justice "addresses itself to the way legitimacy can be achieved in human affairs."<sup>[14]</sup> Ideologies play a central role in legitimating or justifying the existing social formation and in managing potential discontent regarding social structures.<sup>[15]</sup> It can be anticipated that whenever there is a potential for raising questions about the fairness or justice of a system, extensive social mechanisms and ideologies will be brought into play to maintain the legitimacy of the system. Such ideologies are essential to sustaining and reproducing the social order, including its built-in injustices.

An ideology need not be negative. An ideology is defined by Webster as a "systematic body of concepts, especially about human life or culture," or a "manner or the content of thinking characteristic of an individual, group, or culture."<sup>[16]</sup> Ideologies may be secular or religious. Different ideologies may have positive or negative implications for a system of positive peace.

Usually the dominant, ruling group within a social system determines the controlling ideology, which is reinforced in educational, communications, and religious belief systems. Religion, which plays a powerful role in shaping ideas and perceptions of social justice and hence in the legitimization of social systems, may be enlisted as a powerful ally by either the dominant, ruling group, or by oppressed groups seeking liberation from unjust systems, or by both. Dominant and oppressed groups, even those who share one religious tradition, may use different theologies, religious interpretations, or narratives to support or challenge the legitimacy of an ideology.

One reason these legitimization processes are so important and are given so much credence is that they affect a group's chances for physical and social survival. According to Kenneth Boulding, the need for survival poses certain dilemmas for social organization, including the implementation of ideas of justice:

Oppression is perceived when one person or group of persons is seen as becoming better off at the expense of another, dominated group. Domination and submission are perceived as important variables. There is something of a dilemma here as legitimated domination, or legitimated subordination, is essential to any large-scale, hierarchical organization, and how this is legitimated is very important in explaining the dynamics of the society. For instance, this legitimization partially explains the success of the European settlers in America in displacing the Indian population. As a matter of fact, the Europeans brought with them a “habit of subordination,” as Adam Smith called it, which enabled them to form large organizations. The fierce independence of the indigenous inhabitants prevented them from forming organizations much larger than the family or tribe, so they could seldom offer a united resistance.<sup>[17]</sup>

Boulding asserts that societies that fail to legitimize a certain amount of inequity may not survive against an external force. Yet a social system may also be destroyed from within when its members fail to redress gross inequities or perceptions of social injustice.

## **Perceptions of Social Injustice and the Probability of War**

A number of scholars have examined how perceptions of social injustice affect the probability of conflict and war, including Kenneth Boulding, M. Deutsch, Edney in Sampson, Johan Galtung, Ted Gurr, Patricia Mische, Barrington Moore, and E. E. Sampson.<sup>[18]</sup>

Perceptions of the “legitimacy” or “illegitimacy” of different types of wars (e.g., nuclear or conventional, international or civil) may be related to peoples’ perceptions of the ratio between the justice or injustice of the cause, and the amount of destruction to human life and property done in the name of the cause. Many people consider any use of nuclear weapons as unjust because of the millions of deaths and extensive ecological destruction that could result. But they uphold the “just war” concept when it comes to revolt against oppressive regimes. This may be because the weapons used are usually less destructive, and the number of deaths and amount of environmental and property damage is seen as proportionate to the merits of the cause.

This kind of reasoning was used by the U. S. Catholic Bishops in their 1983 pastoral on peace. The Bishops asserted that the use of nuclear weapons is almost never justifiable because of the large numbers of innocent civilians who would be killed. However, they upheld the just war doctrine for “conventional” (non-nuclear) wars under certain conditions. Among these conditions was proportionality: the destruction must not be greater than the good one wants to effect. Furthermore, said the bishops, innocent noncombatants must be protected, and the cause must be “just.”<sup>[19]</sup>

A “just war” concept was articulated as long ago as the first century B.C. by the Roman jurist Cicero, but was rejected by early Christian leaders such as Tertullian, Origen, and Justin as a “pagan” idea that was not compatible with Christianity.<sup>[20]</sup> The pacifist position of the early Christians, and their refusal to serve in the Roman army or obey orders to kill, was one of the reasons Christianity was considered subversive and Christians persecuted under successive Roman emperors. If too many people believed and acted as these Christians, they would undermine the whole system of domination on which the Roman Empire was built. But when Christianity was legalized by Constantine, and Christians began to be accepted and assimilated in the mainstream, a “just war” doctrine began to be accepted and taught by Christian theologians such as Augustine and Ambrose. The idea continues to have wide appeal and acceptance today, not only among Christians, but also in some other religions and cultures.

But what constitutes a “just cause”? While not completely arbitrary, this may vary according to circumstances and perceptions. One person’s terrorist may be another’s freedom fighter. Generally, however, undue suffering and oppression of large numbers of people at the hands of a privileged and elite group would be perceived by many as “just cause” for rebellion or war.

Thus, in Kenneth Boulding’s view, perceptions of justice and injustice can indicate the probability of peace or war within a social system. He uses a strength/stress equation to assess this probability. Depending on the ratio of strengths to stresses, it can be predicted where a society may be located along a war/peace continuum. The continuum includes four possible states: stable peace, unstable peace, unstable war, and stable or continuous war. A stable peace is a situation in which the probability of war is so small it does not really enter into the calculations of any of the people involved. A stable peace is usually maintained when the strengths of a peace system are greater than the stresses it encounters. When the

stresses on the system become greater than the strengths, peace becomes unstable and conflict may spill over into war. In a situation of unstable peace, peace is the norm; war is a temporary breakdown of peace. Further along the continuum, a society may exist in a state of unstable war. Here war is the norm, but is occasionally interrupted by periods of relative peace. At the far end of the spectrum are societies that exist in a state of constant, or near constant, war.<sup>[21]</sup>

Perceptions of justice and injustice are significant in affecting where a given social system may find itself on this continuum because of the way such perceptions affect a sense of the legitimacy of a system and hence strengthen or weaken it. Kenneth Boulding writes:

The perception of justice and injustice clearly form an important aspect of both strain and strength in a war-peace system. A system of peace which is perceived by increasing numbers of its participants to have elements of injustice will be subject to increasing strain.<sup>[22]</sup>

Boulding suggests that most aspects of a system can be characterized as either strains or as strengths. Strains are defined as those elements especially conducive to a phase change. Strengths refer to the capacities to resist and withstand strain, or to resist the breakage that occurs under too much strain. The transition from peace to war occurs when the strains on the peace system are too great for its “peace strengths.” The transition from war to peace occurs when the strains on a war system are too great for its “war strengths.”<sup>[23]</sup>

The phrase “war strengths” does not refer only, or even primarily, to military capability. Rather, it means the strength of the total system to sustain war. This includes the psychological willingness of the members of a society to continue the war. A transition from war to peace may occur when people on one of the sides are no longer willing to continue the war.<sup>[24]</sup> This happened in the United States in the Vietnam War. The United States had the military capability, but as more and more people began to perceive the war as unjust or illegitimate, the psychological support for it was eroded and active opposition and protest mounted. Unless one side or the other comes to a point where it feels war is no longer worth it, a war phase will become a system of stable war.

A widely held sense of injustice erodes the sense of legitimacy and thus weakens a system’s ability to withstand the strains upon it. This increases the prospect for a shift from one state

to another. For example, in a situation of stable peace, a widespread perception of justice reinforces a sense of legitimacy, thus strengthening the system's capacity to resist strains and to maintain a stable peace. In a situation of stable or unstable war, a widespread perception by those involved that the war is unjust undermines a belief in its legitimacy and weakens the capacity of the system to maintain a state of war. But the move from a state of war to a state of unstable or stable peace involves more than a temporary lack of war strengths; it also requires sufficient peace strengths to maintain peace once it has been negotiated.

If perceptions of injustice are not resolved satisfactorily, systems of unstable or even stable peace may eventually erode to the point where strains and conflicts will spill over into rebellion and war. This may not happen immediately. If the dominant party is filled with a sense of its own legitimacy and willing to make and carry out threats or payoffs, a system may remain fairly stable even when there is a strong sense of injustice present. Terror or torture or economic self-interest may make people unwilling to challenge the system, and may even give it a "perverse strength" for a while. But over time resentment builds and is passed on from generation to generation until "the sense of injustice ultimately erodes the whole legitimacy of the system and it collapses," says Kenneth Boulding. He concludes: "Political power that is not built on a profound underlying consent contains the seeds of its own eventual destruction."<sup>[25]</sup>

Thus, what may appear on the surface to be a stable peace because of the absence of immediate, visible, physical violence, may in fact be a system of non-peace when viewed from the framework of underlying structural injustice. The same could be said of deep cultural or religious cleavages. In some cases the situation could be characterized as a war waiting to happen. When feelings of discontent are sufficiently intense and widespread, and when the system no longer has sufficient strengths to contain them, they may erupt in rebellion, civil disorder, or war.

## Variations in Concepts and Perceptions of Justice

Wars and conflicts that arise from a strong sense of injustice may be particularly difficult to resolve if the people involved have quite different concepts of justice. People frequently label an action unjust or just without really thinking about why or what criteria they are using. Often there is an assumption that the perception is shared with others and self-

evident. But concepts and perceptions of justice may vary substantially between people in different cultures, religions, and social systems, or even among individuals and groups within the same system. Depending on their respective socio-historical contexts or belief systems, people have developed different systems to resolve questions of authority, division of labor, and distribution of goods and services. Perceptions of justice and injustice may also vary among individuals within the same system, according to who is making the judgment and their relative status in a system. Such individual differences are especially pronounced between victims and victimizers, or those who perceive themselves as losers and those as beneficiaries within the system. This section looks at these systemic and individual variations more closely, with special attention to the role of religion.

## **1. Variations Between Different Social and Religious Systems**

The meaning of justice, and with it justice motivation, is not developed in isolation, but in social interaction, and is deeply influenced by the meanings prevalent in the larger society. Put another way, the social system, with its symbols and meaning indicators, shapes the way its members interpret different behavior, including whether it should be judged as just or unjust.<sup>[26]</sup>

In order for humans to survive, they must live and cooperate with each other in societies. In turn, this need and capacity to cooperate creates questions and issues regarding how the members of a given society will organize or coordinate their activities and relationships. The resolution of these questions requires a certain amount of implicit or explicit agreement on rules, taboos, norms, ethics, or morality within any given society. Religion is often a key institution for forging and maintaining these agreements.

The need for rules or norms is universal, including norms of justice, but what those rules or norms are, or how these questions of social coordination are resolved, can vary between different groups. In this sense human nature, while having some universal characteristics, is also very “plastic.” This plasticity has contributed to human survival. As Barrington Moore notes: “If human beings had been able to produce only one kind of society and one moral code, the species would have rapidly become extinct. Variability is an essential element in the adaptation to different and changing circumstances.”<sup>[27]</sup>

In Sampson’s view, the concepts of justice that are dominant in any one period or system

are a function of what type of social character is elicited by that period and system.<sup>[28]</sup> For example, the Western, capitalist economic system has fostered a preference for values of equity (associated with a meritarian concept of justice) and agency (e.g., instrumentalism, individualism, and competition). In contrast, earlier, tribal economic systems generally fostered principles of justice rooted in values of equality (e.g., communalism, collectivism, and cooperation). Sampson cites studies showing how concepts of social justice have changed in different societies along with major changes in economic systems. For example, a study by Parkins (1972) of the Giriama of Kenya showed that under their traditional palm-wine economy, Giriama property rights were communal and focused on the sharing or redistribution of wealth. When they changed to a capitalist form based on commercial trade in copra, property rights became private, exchangeable, and focused on the accumulation of personal wealth.

Economic systems do have a powerful affect on ideas, values, and perceptions of social justice. This has been explored by many scholars and social theorists, including Marx, Engels, Habermas and others, and need not be elaborated here. But the social relations of production and exchange do not always, or ever fully, determine what philosophical, political, cultural or religious systems, or what concepts of justice, will prevail.<sup>[29]</sup> Even among groups who share the same or similar economic systems there can be significant variations.

Religion and culture can also make a difference in how groups perceive and respond to injustice. Several cases in the Philippines illustrate this point. In the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, when the Spanish tried to conquer and colonize the various peoples in the islands now known as the Philippines, they were generally met by fierce resistance from the Muslims (or Moros) in the southern islands and from some northern mountain tribes. But they found it much easier to subdue and pacify the non-Muslim populations in the coastal regions. These differences had very little, if anything to do with economic systems, since the economic differences between the groups were not significant. Nor did they have to do with racial or geographic differences, since both the Muslim and the non-Muslim maritime groups were of Malay descent and lived in coastal regions.

What did seem to make a significant difference among these Filipino peoples was culture and religion. The non-Muslim Malays were culturally very vulnerable to divide-and-conquer strategies. Not so the mountain tribes and Moros. The mountain tribes, who were

descended from the original inhabitants and had been driven up into the mountains by the coming of the Malays, had developed cultures of fierce resistance to any further encroachments. For the Moros the source of resistance to Spanish conquest was found in their religion. Unlike their Malay neighbors to the north, who had been converted to Christianity by Spanish traders and missionaries, they had been converted to Islam by Islamic traders and missionaries. Their Islamic creed supported resistance and gave religious meaning to fighting injustice. So did the Islamic memory of humiliation and conquest by the Spanish. Spaniards had driven the Moors from the Iberian Peninsula and subjected them to inquisitions and crusades. Filipino-Muslims saw Hispanic attempts to conquer their areas as yet another conflict between the Cross and the Crescent. They prepared for jihad or holy war to deliver Allah's justice.<sup>[30]</sup> Several centuries later, when the Americans tried to conquer and subdue the Moros and northern mountain tribes, they also met fierce resistance. The same cultural patterns and religious beliefs continued to motivate these groups' perceptions and responses to injustice, despite different time periods and changing economic systems.

Meanwhile, other segments of the Philippine population did periodically rebel. Invariably, these rebellions occurred in situations of extreme deprivation (e.g., when peasants were forced from their rice lands or made to pay too high a share of their rice harvest to owners or tax collectors) and/or strong religious motivation (e.g., when Spanish friars tried to repress traditional religion).<sup>[31]</sup> When large numbers of Filipinos finally rose up and joined nationalist rebels against Spanish rule at the end of the nineteenth century, the precipitating events that motivated them also had strong religious overtones. For years Spanish friars, aligned with the Spanish crown, had angered Filipinos by their abuses of power. The last straw for many already angry Filipinos, was the imprisonment, torture and execution of three Filipino priests, and the subsequent execution of Rizal, a nationalist hero committed to nonviolence who many Filipino Christians identified with Jesus Christ.<sup>[32]</sup>

One reason religion and culture may have such an affect on a society's justice motivation is because they affect people at deep, symbolic levels of meaning and identity, and profoundly touch peoples' concerns about self-presentation and self-image. Religious groups, cultures, and nations, as well as individuals, may have a self-image, or ideal self-concept.<sup>[33]</sup> These images draw upon archetypes, stories, myths and memories of past achievements as examples of the religious, cultural, or national purpose. Religious, cultural, and national

self-images have an integrative function, helping to make an aggregate group of human beings into a collectivity with a common sense of purpose, and imparting identity and meaning to the lives of a people. They are often a people's most sensitive points, something they will surrender other important goals to retain, or even die for.

Thus, says Lebow, these images can be a source of misperception and conflict. Groups and individuals may distort reality to maintain their self-images, sometimes with quite negative consequences.

## **Negotiating Change in Social Contracts and Principles of Justice**

The social coordination involved in resolving problems of authority, division of labor, distribution and other justice issues includes a continual probing or “negotiating” process between members of a society, particularly between rulers and ruled, to arrive at a set of mutual understandings (often unarticulated) or an “implicit social contract” about how these questions are to be resolved.

This negotiation may become especially pronounced in periods when social forms are changing and competing formulations of social reality and social justice vie for dominance. Such negotiation, “is rarely simply a matter of equal partners,” says Sampson.<sup>[34]</sup> Usually it involves power and domination on the side of one of the parties or groups, who may also control education, media, communications, symbols, and meaning systems. Thus, which concepts of social reality and of social justice prevail may be largely determined by the dominant group or system.

Barrington Moore suggests that this negotiating process includes working out as they go along rough principles of social equality or inequality and “teaching each other, with widely varying degrees of success, to accept and obey these principles.”<sup>[35]</sup> There are many ways societies may engage in this educational process, he says, including both coercion and exchange.

The proportions of the two ingredients vary tremendously from case to case. ... They can teach each other that the value of a man's skin has something to do with the color of his skin. Then they can teach each other that this is not the case. In both kinds of teaching, there is a generous dose of coercion. There are limits to which this process of mutual education can go. But it is not very easy to pin down what the limits are.<sup>[36]</sup>

The “coercion” need not include physical force. Usually it is a more subtle form of pressure for social conformity. Kenneth Boulding associates this negotiating or evaluative process with a tendency in all groups with strong interaction “to produce a common ethos which checks nonconformity.”<sup>[37]</sup> This ethical communication goes on all the time in subtle ways, from lifted eyebrows or a slight edge in the tone of voice in response to breaches of etiquette to the less subtle “thunder of the demagogues, the suggestions of the psychoanalysts, and the legal drama of the Naderites.” Intellectuals may underestimate its power, but “it has a profound effect on the learning of evaluations” within a group, which includes their evaluations and perceptions of injustice. At a higher level in the organization of social systems there is the interaction between groups, but the same kind of principles may apply, says Boulding: “A national and even a world society creates pressures to conformity among groups.”<sup>[38]</sup> Religious groups often play a significant role in this ethos-producing and evaluatory process.

Studies by Deutsch and Lerner (in Sampson) suggest that variations in justice principles are affected by a society’s sense of who is and is not part of their community.<sup>[39]</sup> When a society’s sense of community is defined very narrowly (e.g., to include only those who share the same locality, or ethnic, racial, national, religious, or other characteristics) then its sense of who is to be included in the purview of its justice behavior may also be very narrow. It may consciously or unconsciously apply a different standard of justice to those outside its sense of community. Policies of apartheid, “ethnic cleansing,” genocide are more easily “justified.” If, on the other hand, one’s sense of community includes all humanity, or the whole community of beings in nature, then the purview of what constitutes just behavior is applied to this larger community.

Religions, for better or worse, often have a significant role in delineating the extensions of one’s sense of community. While most religions espouse in their core vision and principles a universal sense of community that embraces all humanity, and even all creation, in practice the members of different religions often limit their vision of community to those who accept the same beliefs and ethical principles. It is easier then, to consider the nonbeliever, or the believer in different tenets than one’s own, as being “other” and outside the community, and thus less worthy or even undeserving of equal consideration. Yet the vision of one humanity and one creation—a sense of oneness with all that is—lies at the

heart of all authentic religions, and members of diverse religious traditions can be called to “re-member” and act from this larger sense of community. Such was the spiritual call of many peace visionaries, including Ashoka, Gandhi, Tolstoy, Schweitzer, Einstein, Martin Luther King, and others who worked within and across religious lines from a more inclusive sense of community.

## 2. Individual Variations

Variations may also exist among individuals who were socialized in the same social system. Some of these individual variations are related to gender, race, ethnicity, and class, or to personal preferences in social relations.<sup>[40]</sup>

**Variations Between Victims and Victimizer.** However, in an unjust social system, regardless of other individual variables, the most significant differences in justice perceptions, as far as war and peace are concerned, are those between victims and victimizers, or those who suffer and those who benefit from the system. This is not surprising. But interestingly, there are often also pronounced differences in justice perceptions between different victims in the same system or situation. Even prisoners in Nazi concentration camps who experienced the same brutal treatment and conditions perceived and responded to their suffering differently. And variations also exist between different victimizers or beneficiaries. This section will consider some causes for these different perceptions among victims and victimizers, with special attention to the role of religion.

To say that differences in perceptions of injustice may be particularly pronounced between victims and victimizers may seem at first glance all too obvious. The victim will predictably suffer more, and therefore be more sensitive to injustice than the victimizer. But on further examination the operative psychological processes appear more complex. And in some circumstances “the asymmetry is reversed: the victim identifies with the victimizer and the victimizer identifies with the victim.”<sup>[41]</sup>

Self-esteem plays a role in differential sensitivity. Any threat to self-esteem may be a source of discontent in a social system. Deutsch considers why this may be so and how it accounts for differential sensitivity to injustice among victims and victimizers:

If we accept the notion that most people try to maintain a positive conception of themselves,

we can expect a differential sensitivity to injustice in those who experience pain, harm, or misfortune and those who cause it. If I try to think well of myself, I shall minimize the amount of injustice that has occurred if I cannot minimize my responsibility. On the other hand, if I am the victim of pain or harm, to think well of myself, it is necessary for me to believe that it was not my due: it is not a just dessert for a person of my good character. Thus the need to maintain positive self-esteem leads to opposite reactions in those who have caused an injustice and those who suffer from it.<sup>[42]</sup>

This concern for self-image or self-esteem includes the need for the approval of others as well as of self: “the primary issue in concerns for justice is to be able to justify one’s actions, decision and claims ... in the eyes of others as well as for oneself,” says Mikula.<sup>[43]</sup>

**Variations Among Victims.** Just as self-esteem may be a factor in variations between victimizers and victims, it may also contribute to variations among victims. Variations in levels of self-regard account for a certain amount of unpredictability in the psychological processes of victims of injustice. Victims who view themselves favorably may be outraged by a perceived injustice and try to restore justice and thus self-regard. In the process, however, they may have to challenge the victimizer. Then, if the victimizer is more powerful, and has the support of legal and other social institutions, the victims may conclude it is too dangerous to act on their outrage or even to express it. Under these circumstances, victims may identify with the aggressor, controlling, suppressing, or even denying their feelings of injustice and outrage, “and internalizing the derogatory attitudes of the victimizer” toward themselves. They become self-haters, blaming themselves or their group for their victimization.<sup>[44]</sup> Those who blame their group (whether racial, ethnic, religious, class, gender, or other) often seek to dissociate themselves from it and ingratiate themselves with the victimizer to gain favor and avoid blame.

Such feelings are likely to be inculcated by parents in their children to protect them from harm as well, says Deutsch.<sup>[45]</sup> For example, in the period of slavery, to help their children survive, many African-American parents taught their children to defer to white folks and to view themselves as worthy only to be slaves. Such training for masochistic submission or identification with the oppressor may go on for generations because childrearing practices are slow to change. Today it is becoming less prevalent because oppressed groups have begun to realize that their psychological situation may be “improved by teaching self-

respect rather than self-abasement.”<sup>[46]</sup>

However, in many oppressive systems, when victimized groups try to improve their sense of personal and group self-worth, those in power may perceive it as a threat to their dominant status and increase the repression. For example, the movement of Base Christian Communities (BCC) was labeled “subversive” by many oppressive regimes when poor peasants and workers who were studying the Bible together were inspired by the scriptures to think of themselves as children of God with a right to respect and fair treatment. Their sense of what was their due or entitlement increased with their sense of self-worth. This in turn caused the victimizer to perceive them as a threat to the status quo, and in some cases to try to suppress the groups by making them illegal and/or by harassing, arresting, torturing, or in some cases killing the members.

**Religious Belief and Repression of a Sense of Injustice.** If the need for justice is universal among all people, why do some people acquiesce rather than resist injustice? Barrington Moore did extensive research on this question. He wanted to know what must happen to human beings to make them submit to oppression and degradation. He found that, among other forces, religion can be a strong influence in the self-repression of a sense of injustice. Examples Moore considered included: 1) ascetics who deliberately choose a life of pain and suffering; 2) Untouchables in the Hindu caste system, some of whom appear to take pride in their servile status and degrading work; and 3) some victims in Nazi concentration camps who identified with their tormentors and actually punished fellow prisoners who resisted the authority of the guards. A common thread between these cases, Moore says, is the moral authority these people derived from their suffering and submission. They actually took a certain “pride and pleasure in their pain.”<sup>[47]</sup>

In each case, Moore says, it would be a mistake to view the process as mainly one of destroying self-esteem.

Self-esteem is something that has to be created even if the desire for it may be innate. ... From the standpoint of a dominant group the important task is to inhibit any potentially dangerous form of self-esteem and to deflect any such innate tendencies into sentiments like pride in doing humble work that will sustain the prevailing order. ... A diffuse and informal variety of coercion that begins in early childhood may be the most effective devise for this purpose.<sup>[48]</sup>

**Ascetics.** In the case of ascetics, says Moore suffering is primarily physical, not psychic (i.e., there is no damage to individual esteem). It is also self-chosen, and often self-inflicted (e.g., choosing to sleep on nails or hang over fire). A common goal is to escape from routine burdens of life (e.g., marriage and property) through the repression of desires and instincts.<sup>[49]</sup> There are other themes as well: for example, among reincarnationists, escape from the endless cycles of birth and rebirth; among Christian ascetics, expiation of sin or escape from sexuality; and among some Hindus, aggression against self for the sake of vengeance or control over the outside world (i.e., to conquer the powers of the universe by subduing their affect on one's own essence and by strengthening will power).

**Untouchables.** In the case of Untouchables, membership is hereditary, not self-chosen. People are born into a position of inequality and lower social status, but the dominant castes have made the status appear to be the result of individual acts. Why have so many Untouchables put up with it, asks Moore.<sup>[50]</sup> Military force, torture, and terror are not generally involved; rather, they have internalized the belief that suffering in this life will bring them upward mobility in the next.<sup>[51]</sup> Also, many Untouchables feel there is no realistic prospect for changing the social order, says Moore;<sup>[52]</sup> despite moral campaigns and constitutional efforts to overturn the caste system, it has persisted within the culture.

**Concentration-camp Victims.** In the concentration camps suffering was neither chosen nor a matter of fate but was imposed with violent force. Thus it would seem the suffering should appear to the victims to be more unjust, says Moore.<sup>[53]</sup> However, even here a sizeable number of victims felt their suffering gave them moral authority. What appeared unavoidable must somehow be “just.”

These are extreme, but not the only examples of how religion may contribute to repressing a sense of injustice or give moral authority to suffering. In the Philippines, during two decades of repression under Ferdinand Marcos, a strong current of Christian acceptance of suffering contributed to the perpetuation of injustices. “We are Good Friday Catholics,” some Filipinos explained in response to questions about the tendency in the culture to accept, even elevate suffering.<sup>[54]</sup> Images of a tortured Jesus, crowned with thorns and nailed to a cross, with blood and water streaming from the wounds, are enshrined not only in churches but many homes. Every year on Good Friday (which commemorates the suffering and death of Jesus Christ to atone for human sins) a few Filipinos have themselves

nailed to crosses to identify with the crucified Christ and to atone for their sins. Millions more participate in all-night vigils, processions, and “Way-of-the-Cross” dramatizations re-enacting the suffering and death of Jesus.<sup>[55]</sup>

In identification with this image of the suffering Son of God, many poor Filipinos have come to accept their own suffering as the “will of God.” Similar to the Untouchables they thus obtain a certain moral authority and self-esteem, especially because they believe that those who suffer in this life will be close to God in the next. Although Catholic theology in the Philippines, as elsewhere, long ago moved beyond such a simple, unquestioning theology of suffering, this belief, deeply instilled in the culture from the time of Spanish colonial rule, continues to affect peoples’ spirituality today. Such “Good Friday” spirituality has been particularly strong among the most poor and powerless—often those with the lowest self-esteem and the least means or hope of changing their situation.

**Religion and Resistance to Injustice.** But, just as culture and religion may play a role in repressing a sense of injustice, they can also play a role in awakening a sense of injustice and in resistance to it. For example, Moore found that in Nazi concentration camps those most likely to capitulate were apolitical individuals from the middle class (including assimilationist Jews). In contrast, those most likely to resist and survive were persons with strong political, ideological, or religious convictions (e.g., communists, leftists, and Jehovah’s Witnesses). The communists were strengthened by the fact that they were highly organized. They also had their prior convictions further confirmed in the camps, increasing their sense of moral authority; some even took pride in their imprisonment as a badge of their convictions. Those such as Jehovah’s Witnesses who were arrested as conscientious objectors came with previously developed inner, moral strengths that helped to sustain them psychologically and spiritually.

Similarly in the Philippines, those who initially offered the most resistance to injustice under Marcos had strong political, ideological and religious beliefs. As in the Nazi camps, communists in the Philippines had a highly developed sense of moral authority and a high degree of organization to support their resistance. And some members of Catholic and Protestant religious congregations were moved by their religious and moral convictions to become vocal opponents of Marcos’ policies, some to the point of joining or supporting the guerrillas, others to the point of risking imprisonment, torture, and death as the price of refusing to be silent.

The tide turned in the Philippines when the same religious symbol of Christ dying on the cross that had contributed to a certain acceptance of suffering, was transformed in the eyes of hundreds of thousands (including the large middle class) to a symbol and source of courage for nonviolent resistance. The Catholic Church ultimately used its considerable moral authority (85 percent of Filipinos are Roman Catholic), and its radio and press, to arouse and support mass protest. Hundreds of thousands of ordinary people, led by nuns and priests holding up crucifixes and rosaries, went into the streets and put their bodies in front of advancing tanks. Thus, religion, with its symbols of meaning, can be a force in suppressing resistance to injustice but can also spark fire in the human soul against injustice. Jesus on the cross can be seen as a suffering victim, but also as one who witnessed to love and truth, and who stood strong against powers of evil, even at the risk of torture or crucifixion, so that systems of oppression would ultimately be transformed.<sup>[56]</sup>

**Religion and Ideologies that Justify Oppression.** Thus religion, at conscious and unconscious levels, can be a factor in either repressing or awakening a sense of injustice. As was indicated earlier, religion is one of the main vehicles through which a people or culture define the meaning and causes of human suffering and what they do about that suffering. Since the explanations available within a given culture or religion tend to circumscribe and limit the range of possible responses to suffering within that culture or religion, the importance of these cultural and religious forces should not be underestimated.

In the above cases of asceticism, Hindu caste, identification with a suffering Christ, and to lesser extent the concentration camps, there is what Barrington Moore describes as “a general pattern of cultural explanation that stifles the impulse to do anything about suffering.”

The explanation produces this effect by making the suffering appear as part of the cosmic order, hence inevitable, and in a sense justified. Even more significantly the form of the explanation helps to turn aggressive impulses that suffering and frustration produce against the self. This turning inward of aggression is most noticeable in the case of asceticism. But it is also true of Hindu beliefs about caste in general: failure to show respect to superiors in this life will lead to penalties in the next one. In the concentration camps the same mechanisms appeared among those inmates previously conditioned to accept German law and order without critical questioning who explained their current plight as due to

misunderstandings or mistakes in the way this law and order had been applied to their particular cases.<sup>[57]</sup>

Sampson's reflections on the structures of dominance are also relevant here. "Domination can be based on the use of brute force," he says, but it "can also exist in a more deeply structured, psychological form" through which the people within a given culture or society internalize certain belief systems and actually participate in reproducing the systems that oppress them.<sup>[58]</sup> He writes:

whenever a social system systematically benefits a few at the expense of many and yet does so with the apparent consent of all, we have an instance in which domination has seeped deeply into the consciousness of the culture, including all its structures and relationships.

We are dealing with a case of ideology.<sup>[59]</sup>

As already discussed, ideology need not be negative. But here Sampson uses "ideology" in a negative sense as part of a system of injustice. Ideology should not be viewed as merely a "false consciousness," he says, for it is "a process by which societal meanings are constructed in the first place. ... Ideology fixes or limits the meanings that evolve within a society to certain possibilities rather than others" and "constitutes the forms" within which the members of a given culture or society grasp their reality.<sup>[60]</sup> Ideology helps maintain systems of dominance by establishing the ideas and the self-understandings that "are essential for that system of domination to be reproduced." Relationships of dominance are concealed through ideology because "what now is" is presented "as though it must and ought to be"; this includes values and interests that give advantages to one segment of the population at the expense of another.<sup>[61]</sup>

Successful ideologies so deeply penetrate the consciousness of a culture that people unquestioningly accept their premises without further thought. Such ideologies provide the kind of baseline givens that are never examined.<sup>[62]</sup>

It is the lack of consciousness of the ideologies that affect us that especially concerns Sampson. People are generally "unaware of the ideologies that govern their existence, at least as ideologies." Thus they are not able to talk easily or openly about them or to change them. "The world simply is as it appears to be. Perceptions are real and taken without doubt." In matters involving ideology, he says, "it is not people's perceptions" that are the

real issue, “but rather the shape of the reality within which they live.”<sup>[63]</sup> Genuine autonomy would call for people to become aware of the beliefs and forces that shape them” so that they can act collectively to change them or at least to “govern what governs them.”<sup>[64]</sup>

To build a culture of positive peace, then, requires increased consciousness, not only of the ideologies and systems of injustice that undermine a just and stable peace, but also of those religious and secular ideologies that can help us develop and maintain systems of positive peace.

**Social Mechanisms that Inhibit Resistance to Injustice.** Because of the power of ideology and culture, individual efforts to identify, resist, or redress the causes of social suffering are rarely effective, says Moore; while they sometimes help a few, they rarely change the overall situation. To be effective, efforts to identify, resist, or redress social injustice must be collective. However there are certain tendencies among oppressed groups that inhibit collective identification and responses to injustice and thus add to their sense of the inevitability, and hence the “justice” of their suffering. Among these inhibiting social mechanisms, says Moore, are group solidarity against individual protesters, loss of social support, co-option, fragmentation, and a sense of inevitability.<sup>[65]</sup>

**Group solidarity against individual protesters.** Groups may ignore, ostracize, or punish fellow victims who defy or protest against oppressive systems out of fear of retaliation by those with power against the whole group. Moore cites how in the Hindu caste system lower caste councils would punish their own members for ignoring or defying caste rules.<sup>[66]</sup> Through such actions groups try to avoid making their immediate situation even worse, but in the long run they perpetuate their suffering and the whole system of injustice.

**Loss of social support.** The destruction of prior social ties and support systems can occur as the result of the deliberate policy of oppressors, as in the concentration camps, or of more “diffuse social processes” that include the loss of traditional ways of life and of work. This loss contributes to a sense of isolation or even alienation that inhibits collective responses. Deutsch has shown that disadvantaged persons may be more apt to blame themselves than the situation for their poor outcomes if they perceive themselves to be isolated or powerless. In contrast, when people have a sense of social support and viable options to remedy an injustice, there is a considerable increase in awareness of the unfairness of a situation.<sup>[67]</sup>

This sense of social support may come from outside as well as within an oppressed group.

religious groups can be a very important source of solidarity and support for oppressed peoples. The international networks of most major religions, their access to the international press and media, and their ability to affect national and international forums and policy-making groups, makes them especially important voices for those who have been silenced.

**Co-optation.** Those with power over the media, press, education, and symbols of meaning have tremendous influence on the prevailing ideas and standards of social justice, and may use this power to co-opt or deflect a sense of injustice. Many religious networks have their own press and media, which may be used negatively or positively to reinforce or challenge systems of injustice. In the Philippines, when all of the major secular newspapers and media networks had been effectively silenced or co-opted, the Catholic radio station Veritas kept broadcasting from hidden transmitters, offering not only news of events, but offering people hope and possibilities for action.

**Fragmentation.** The division of oppressed peoples into two or more competing groups, often along class, ethnic, or religious lines, makes it difficult to form ties with others who share the same plight. In this case there is social support, but the support is unsuited to the circumstances and limits effective responses. Religious groups are vulnerable to such divide-and-conquer tactics, as was shown in the former Yugoslavia, but they can work to counteract fragmentation, through a conscientious effort to work across religious divides on a regular basis in inter-religious dialog or shared activities. Such inter-religious initiatives have been growing over the last century, particularly in recent decades, and represent major progress in religious paths to peace.<sup>[68]</sup>

**A Sense of Inevitability.** All of the above psychological, cultural and social processes may work interactively or separately to create a sense that one's suffering is unavoidable, comes with moral authority, and may therefore even be desirable.<sup>[69]</sup> People have the capacity to accept a tremendous amount of pain and suffering and to suppress or sublimate feelings of injustice when they are unable to conceive of anything different, or if they don't believe they can do anything about it, says Moore.<sup>[70]</sup> Therefore, a key to awakening a sense of injustice among victims, and a first step in redressing the social causes of the suffering, is to conquer or overturn this sense of inevitability.<sup>[71]</sup> Again, religion may be a major force in either feeding a sense of inevitability, or in overcoming it with an alternative vision that

offers hope and possibility that what people see now need not be the last word.

### **3. Variations Among Victimizer or Beneficiaries of Injustice**

What then of victimizers—those who perpetrate or benefit from systems of injustice?

Variations in sensitivity and tolerance of injustice also exist among members of oppressor groups. Some are directly and consciously involved in oppressing others; others may be indirect or unconscious participants and beneficiaries of systems of injustice; and still others see and renounce the injustice and identify strongly with the victims. There is not space here to go into all the reasons for these variations, but it is important in considering how to build a culture of peace to include some discussion of why and how victimizers tolerate or “justify” injustice, and how they might be brought to “see” and change their behavior. Here again, religion often plays an important role.

Lerner tried to account for the tolerance of injustice among victimizers and proposed several answers, summarized here by Deutsch:

1) the victimizer may find justification for thinking that the victim deserves his fate, 2) he may think that the victim’s situation is improving and equity will soon be established, 3) he believes that he is doing all he can without making himself into a victim, and 4) he believes that he is doing as much as can be expected of him, equal to or more than others who should be doing at least as much as he.<sup>[72]</sup>

Deutsch adds to Lerner’s list several more possible reasons:

5) the victimizer is ignorant of the injustice experienced by the victim because of his lack of contact with victims, 6) he thinks that the situation is hopeless so that nothing adequate can be done to redress and alleviate the victim’s situation, (7) he excludes the victim from his definition of the community in which his moral standards are applied, 8) he may fear that he may be humiliated or harmed by the victim or by other victimizers if he acts favorably toward the victim, and 9) he may feel that his personal interests and the interests of the victimized are directly opposed. The opposition may be in terms of external, material interests or it may reflect the victimizer’s psychological needs. He may have the need to feel superior or the need to deny any evil in himself by projecting it onto and attacking the victim. In addition, of course, he may not believe in a just world, believing instead that man is inherently amoral: those on top will always take advantage of those on the bottom; the

victims would be victimizers if they had the chance.<sup>[73]</sup>

In effect, says Deutsch, this list is a catalog of the way victimizers resist activating their sense of injustice. It also suggests the psychological obstacles they need to overcome if they are to cooperate in overcoming the injustice. Deutsch suggests ways such resistance could be overcome, depending on which of the above factors is predominant:

Basically, the process of activating the sense of injustice in the victimizer is similar to that of activating it in the victim. It entails removing the victimizer's ignorance of the injustices experienced by the victim through education and contact with the victim; falsifying and delegitimizing the officially sanctioned ideologies and myths that "justify" the injustices through education and governmental action; exposing the victimizer to new ideologies, new models, and new reference groups that support action to undo the disadvantages of the victims; stimulating his hope that he can act effectively to reduce injustice; reducing his fear that his new actions will have costly, harmful consequences for him at the same time that one enhances his prospect of material and psychic gain from a positive change in his relationship with the victim; and increasing his belief that continuation of his old relationship will no longer produce the material benefits or psychic gains he has experienced in the past from it and that its continuation may have costly, harmful consequences for him.<sup>[74]</sup>

Again, religion may play a critical role in these processes, for in essence many are spiritual tasks, requiring a deepened consciousness, conscience, and conversion to new ways of seeing and being in the world.

Taken in total, or even in part, these processes are no small challenge. There can be a stubborn resistance to change on the part of victimizers, even when it may be in their best interests. Deutsch comments:

It is apparent that those victimizers who are content with their superior roles and who have developed a vested interest in preserving the status quo and appropriate rationales to justify it will have to have their interests challenged and their rationalizations exposed as false before their sense of justice will be activated. ... However, even if the victimizer understands how unjust the situation of the victim is and desires to remedy it, he is not likely to be activated to do something unless he sees the possibility of taking actions that

will contribute significantly to correcting the injustice. Even then he is unlikely to act if he thinks that by so doing he will place himself in economic or social jeopardy.<sup>[75]</sup>

In cases where a stubborn refusal by perceived victimizers to redress injustices is met by a growing sense of injustice and discontent on the part of the victims, the situation may become increasingly polarized and conflictive. All the more so if both sides believe they have moral and religious authority or God on their side.

## **Discontent and Revolt**

The discontent can take a “personal or a political direction.”<sup>[76]</sup> In personal discontent the dissatisfaction is directed at one’s place in the society, and not the society or system itself. This drives the individual to seek a new situation within the existing social framework. Any political consequences of personal discontent are indirect. In political discontent the dissatisfaction is directed at the social structures or system. It may be unresolved personal discontent redirected at the social system, or it may come from beneficiaries of an unjust system who identify with the oppressed. This political discontent manifests itself in agitation and struggle for political or social change.

Kenneth Boulding suggests that in rapidly advancing societies “in which individuals can, with little effort, participate in the general wealth, most discontent will be personal.” In contrast, societies that are “stagnant or declining” are more likely to generate political discontent because individuals who are trying to “solve problems by purely personal means will be met with considerable lack of success.” This upsets their self-esteem, which can only be restored by attacking the social framework.<sup>[77]</sup>

Similarly, if people perceive political change within a society to be easy, whether this is so or not, the discontent will more likely take a personal form. If they consider it to be difficult, discontent will take a political form. Thus, in democracies discontent is more likely to take a personal form, or when it is political, to be mild. But in totalitarian or autocratic societies, the very suppression of political activity leads to an intensification of political discontent.

“Any worsening of conditions is likely to increase discontent even if people are well off at the start,” says Boulding.<sup>[78]</sup> This is because people come to think they merit what they are accustomed to. Any worsening of conditions is a serious threat to self-esteem.

The social justice aspects of political discontent can move people to action for social change. The direction of the social change efforts will be based on the object of the discontent. For example, says Boulding, if the object is the rate of economic growth, agitation may be directed toward developing economic programs or political institutions that promote growth. If it springs from restrictions on personal liberties, agitation will be directed toward civil liberties and/or national liberation. And if the discontent arises from perceived injustice in the distribution of privileges and burdens, agitation may be aimed at progressive income taxes, expropriation of property, or some other form of redistribution.<sup>[79]</sup>

Efforts for political and social change can be pursued through constitutional or revolutionary means, says Boulding.<sup>[80]</sup> Constitutional discontent expresses itself within the constitution of a society. It may seek a change in personnel or party, but not in the political system. In contrast, revolutionary discontent despairs of adequate political change within the existing constitution and sets out to change the constitution or system itself. The means chosen may be determined in part by the degree of intensity of the discontent: A mild discontent is likely to express itself constitutionally; a more intense discontent may express itself through revolution. Revolutionary discontent can be expressed nonviolently, or take on a more violent expression in armed rebellion.

The revolt may not be immediate. Even intense political discontent may smolder under the surface for a long time—sometimes for many generations. People may endure a tremendous amount of suffering. But ultimately, there is a bottom line where minimal conditions must be met. Below that line the social system or community will break down and collapse. In this sense justice is absolute as well as situational.

Over time, as people awaken to a sense of injustice, questions begin to build about the legitimacy of the existing social system or implicit social contract until people are no longer willing to cooperate in maintaining the system, and it collapses or explodes in revolt.

The conditions for revolt may build for a long time. Then some precipitating event, often not that large or significant in itself, will be like adding the last straw to a pile ready to topple, or like igniting a match in a room full of kerosene. A revolutionary mass is not essential for revolt to occur.<sup>[81]</sup> Sometimes only a small minority may overthrow a government, or short of that, cause tremendous civil strife.

If not guided properly, moral outrage over injustice can turn toward cruelty, aggression, fascism, or totalitarianism. Social change efforts turned to armed rebellion can become bitter, destructive wars, killing thousands of innocent people in the name of establishing a more just society. Many are the wars fought in the name of justice that unleashed even worse injustices on a people. When religion has been invoked to justify or give moral authority to such wars (as they have been, for example by Al Qaeda to justify terrorism against the U.S. and allied forces, and to a certain extent by the United States when it invoked religious and moral language to justify attacks on Iraq), the violence becomes especially difficult to end.

But revolutionary discontent can also be expressed nonviolently. This was the case in the campaigns Gandhi led against British rule in India. It was also true of the campaign Martin Luther King led for racial justice and civil rights in the United States. It was true of Poland's "Solidarity" movement. And it was true of the 1986 "People Power" revolt in the Philippines. In the latter case, when Marcos blocked constitutional channels for social change by stealing and overturning democratic elections, a large group of highly discontent people did not turn to violence or armed rebellion. Like Gandhi and Martin Luther King, they used strategies of active nonviolence.<sup>[82]</sup>

Active nonviolence is neither a denial or retreat from injustice, nor a quick and easy violent reaction to it. It takes very courageous people and demanding efforts to transform a situation of injustice and hostility toward one of justice and more, the healing of a torn community. It requires a commitment to the truth. It includes naming the injustices that oppress self and others and refusing to cooperate in maintaining them. It involves building self-esteem among an oppressed group and a sense that they deserve better. It includes building a vision of what that other, better world might be. It involves developing a sense of solidarity and personal and group empowerment. It requires tremendous discipline and courage—a certain amount of iron in the human soul—to resist returning violence for violence. It requires accepting the possible costs of trying to change an unjust system, which may include threats to livelihood, imprisonment, or death.

That is why those who lead such nonviolent campaigns, and those who participate in them, so often draw on deep spiritual strengths, and use religious and cultural symbols in their social change efforts. This was certainly true in the nonviolent campaigns led by Gandhi in

India, Martin Luther King in the United States, Lech Walesa in Poland, and the many people who led and contributed to the People Power revolt in the Philippines. Gandhi built his campaign on Hindu teachings of ahimsa (nonharm), and symbolically changed from his British suit to the simple garb of his poorer countrymen. Martin Luther King used both the Bible and the American national symbols to underscore themes of freedom, liberation, and human rights, and his organizing was often done through the churches. Lech Walesa and the Polish “Solidarity” movement looked to the Catholic Church and to other international religious networks for support. And in the Philippines, nonviolent protestors held religious symbols up before armed troops. Many fasted and attended masses and prayer vigils for free and democratic elections and for nonviolence. And they were reinforced in active nonviolence by a series of pastoral letters on justice, peace, and nonviolence from the Catholic Bishops, which were read in all the churches.<sup>[83]</sup> These nonviolent campaigns were relatively successful, in that some social change was achieved with a minimum of violence. If people’s efforts at social change are successful, they will be much less likely to tolerate injustice in the future. However if social change efforts repeatedly fail, people may change their perceptions regarding the injustice, or lower their ideals or expectations, or change their methods. When people abandon hope of influencing or changing the reality that makes them feel a sense of discontent or injustice, they often seek to restore inner peace by changing things inside their head rather than in the outside world. This inner peace comes at a high price: denial helps to maintain and reproduce the systems that aroused the feelings of injustice in the first place.<sup>[84]</sup> And the continuing injustice may fester and spread, only to erupt in violence at another time.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Given the above analysis, what recommendations can be made about the contribution of religion to a culture of positive peace? The following is a beginning but incomplete list of suggestions that also serves as a summary and conclusion to this article. Religious leaders and members who want to contribute to a positive peace can:

- Recognize that social justice is essential to a culture of peace. Peoples’ perceptions of social justice vitally affect their sense of the legitimacy of social structures and their willingness to cooperate, sustain, and reproduce them. A widespread sense that a system is unjust will undermine a sense of its legitimacy, and ultimately lead to its

collapse.

- Recognize that religion has an important role and responsibility in shaping, teaching, and upholding ideas and standards of social justice. This includes the ideas and standards of social justice delineated in international human rights agreements. Many of these rights were prefigured in religious teachings about the inherent dignity of human beings, their cultures, and all creation, and the requirement to treat all with respect and reverence.
- Recognize that religious groups themselves may consciously or unconsciously contribute to social injustice and the breakdown of positive peace through their support of, or failure to question, unjust policies and practices, both within their own structures and within the local, national, and international systems of which they are a part.
- Examine the beliefs, ideas, teachings, and practices of their own religion for ways they enhance or undermine social justice and peace. Affirm and strengthen those that contribute to social justice and peace, and work to change those that undermine it. Doing this in one's own faith community is an important first step toward world justice and peace.
- Help develop a sense of self-worth, self-confidence, self-discipline, conscience, and solidarity regarding social justice and peace among members of one's faith community that will enable them to both resist injustice and oppression and contribute to a culture of peace and nonviolent conflict resolution. Research has shown that those most capable of resisting oppression and contributing to positive peace are people with these traits, and that often these traits are supported by their faith and beliefs.
- Work with victimizers—those who cause or benefit from injustice—to sensitize them to the effects of their actions, and to the ways they can rectify injustices and contribute to systems of justice and peace for all.
- Create cooperative, safe settings where conflicting groups can be brought together to air grievances and problems, and be helped toward creative and cooperative resolution of their conflicts.
- Teach nonviolence—its theory, ethical and religious foundations, practice, discipline, and skills—as a means to change situations of social injustice. Also teach how to use available legal and other systems at appropriate local, national, regional, and global

levels to help resolve grievances and conflicts, and redress problems of injustice without resort to violence.

- Re-examine religious policies that uphold or endorse “just-wars.” Just war theories were developed in the age of bows and arrows, before the invention of gun powder and weapons of mass destruction. Can there really be a “just” war when today’s weapons kill many thousands of innocent people, and destroy economies and environments far out of proportion to the “cause” for which they are waged.
- Help to promote, develop, and strengthen peace systems at international as well as local and national levels, including more just international economic systems, and more effective structures for peace building, peacemaking, peacekeeping, early warning and war prevention, and mediation and the peaceful settlement of disputes.
- Recognize that the major world religions are international networks and actors. Their memberships include many nationalities and races, and are spread across many geographic regions. They can be major actors in promoting and helping to develop more effective global peace systems.
- Help heal hostilities, resolve conflicts, and build peace between people of different religions through interreligious dialog and activities. The aims should include greater understanding, acceptance, and appreciation for differences and similarities in world religious traditions, with special emphasis on moving toward common understandings and standards of social justice and peace, solidarity in speaking out against injustice and violence, and a shared commitment to nonviolence and developing systems of peace.
- Witness for peace and justice in situations of grave injustice, violence, and warfare—especially those situations where the injustice and bloodshed fall along religious lines. Leaders and members of different religions can do much to delegitimize injustice and violence by speaking in a strong, united voice against it. They can go further by jointly becoming a physical and moral presence in such situations, serving as a nonviolent buffer between conflicting groups who would be loathe to attack the symbols and leaders of their own religion, by being a united healing force through joint tending of the wounded, sick, and victims of the violence, and by serving as mediators in peace negotiations.

In these and other ways, members of religious groups can remove their moral support for continued maintenance of systems of war and injustice, and make a significant contribution

to the development of a culture of positive peace.

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