

Deepening CULTURAL DIALOGUE AND UNDERSTANDING



How can we attain the level of international cooperation, particularly between the developed and developing world, which will enable us to meet the challenge of climate change?

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I have been working for 25 years with religious actors in many world conflicts, and several thousand students, studying many religious traditions. In the past five years I have particularly worked in Palestine, Syria and Israel. After all I have learnt from these people, I have realised that most books on world religions are misleading. You can draw out militancy and hatred from any tradition on the face of the planet, especially if the tradition is old and so has many thousands of texts. If you want to make a war from any religion you can always find an appropriate text. The problem is not the religions. The essential problem in the last 50 years is the weaponization of religion by states. In Pakistan if 300 Taliban decide to behead somebody it becomes global news. But when 300,000 Sufi Muslims dance non-violently in Pakistan no one hears about it. Is that a problem with religion or with the weaponization of religion? The weaponization of Jewish settlers by the

Jewish community and by the right wing evangelical community in the US. The weaponization of various Muslim actors. The weaponization of Christian actors.

My colleagues and I have tried to level the playing field by focusing on really courageous people, including clerics, who are standing for something profoundly different, for equality and justice, love and compassion, and caring for the least – which is common to all the great religious traditions. A lot of the talk in the name of religion about justice on one side and peace on the others is not really the issue. Equality has become the means emotionally, psychologically, politically and structurally to bring change to these conflict situations. We have the religious resources to support that but we need states to get out of the way. And stop using religious people as bombs.