

Tolerance, Religious Freedom and Interfaith Solidarity

Sun Myung Moon
September 19, 2014
Compiled by Taekon Lee



Tolerance begins with how we treat people of other faiths. We have gathered passages from the scriptures which urge treating non-believers and believers with equal respect. Religious disputes and doctrinal conflicts are condemnable; they are often motivated by egoism disguised as piety, and by displaying enmity they do not give fitting witness to one's faith.

By extension, governments are to respect religious freedom and avoid any manner of compulsion in matters of faith. Most people think of religious freedom as a feature of modern democracy, emerging as it did after a long period of religious intolerance marked by wars and cruelty—the Crusades, the Inquisition and the 30-Years' War. Still, each of the great civilizations has enjoyed periods of religious tolerance: in India under the tolerant Buddhist King Ashoka (3rd century B.C.) and the enlightened Mughal emperor Akbar (16th century), in 10th century al-Andalus (Spain under Muslim rule), and in Song dynasty China (10th - 13th century). Nevertheless, it was with democracy that the ideal of religious freedom became firmly established as a global value. Father Moon regards the establishment of religious freedom one of the hard-won victories of divine providence.

Beyond tolerance and beyond religious freedom is the higher vision of cooperation and solidarity among religions. This largely modern ideal was born out of people's growing familiarity with the world's religions and the efforts of religious leaders to dialogue with each other in order to resolve disputes and eliminate ancient prejudices. Religious unity has long been advocated by the Baha'i Faith. Relations between Christians and Jews were transformed after the horrors of the Holocaust led to a widespread re-evaluation of Christian doctrines that had overtones of anti-Semitism. Still, until the late 1990s the predominant opinion was that the trend towards secularism would one day make religion—and hence religious intolerance—a relic of the past. Today that view is obsolete. Flare-ups of religious extremism and terrorism have made people realize that interfaith cooperation is a necessary condition for world peace. Yet for more than fifty years, without fanfare, Father Moon has worked for the goal of the unity of religions, regarding it as one of the chief goals of God's contemporary providence.



1. Tolerance towards Believers of Other Religions

Those who praise their own doctrines and disparage the doctrines of others do not solve any problem.
Sutrakritanga 1.1.50 (Jainism)

Do not dispute with the People of the Book but in the fairest manner.
Qur'an 29.46

Maintain good conduct among the Gentiles, so that in case they speak against you as wrongdoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.
1 Peter 2.12

Our rabbis have taught, "We support the poor of the heathen along with the poor of Israel, visit the sick of the heathen along with the sick of Israel, and bury the dead poor of the heathen along with the dead of Israel, in the interests of peace."
Talmud, Gittin 61a (Judaism)

Kapathika: "How should a wise man maintain truth?" Buddha: "A man has a faith. If he says 'This is my faith,' so far he maintains truth. But by that he cannot proceed to the absolute conclusion: 'This alone is Truth, and everything else is false.'"
Majjhima Nikaya 2.176 (Buddhism)

Like the bee, gathering honey from different flowers, the wise man accepts the essence of different scriptures and sees only the good in all religions.
Srimad Bhagavatam 11.3 (Hinduism)

The Jews should not be presented as rejected or accursed by God, as if this followed from the Holy Scriptures. All should see to it, then, that in catechetical work or in the preaching of the word of God they do not teach anything that does not conform to the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of Christ. Furthermore, in her rejection of every persecution against any man, the Church, mindful of the patrimony she shares with the Jews and moved not by political reasons but by the Gospel's spiritual love, decries hatred, persecutions, displays of anti-Semitism, directed against Jews at any time and by anyone.
Vatican II, Nostra Aetate (Christianity)

Teachings of Sun Myung Moon

The ideal of True Parents and the ideal of world peace are directly connected. We guide all nations, peoples, cultures, and religions to harmonize with one another by becoming 100 percent tolerant to one another for the sake of the ideal; this is the way to establish world peace. (205:159, August 16, 1990)

By demonstrating the goodness of their teachings, religions should set the example for all humankind. Instead, religions are fighting one another. Even different denominations within the same religion fight amongst themselves over differences in doctrine. On seeing this, God feels great anguish in His heart. (167:99, June 30, 1987)

We who are in a movement for unity must make efforts to unite with all religions. If possible, we can resolve doctrinal differences through persuasion. Otherwise, with much patience and much tolerance we have to compromise in order to cooperate with them. There are no other ways than these two. (103:125, February 18, 1979).

A religion that can bring peace to the world should not regard itself as important. It should not have self-centered views about its authority or its possessions. If it does, it will not go beyond the level of its own nation and the people who accept its doctrines.

There will be no escape from the history of conflicts and wars as long as our religion follows the conventional path of pursuing self-interest. God knows this; therefore He instructs us to deny and sacrifice ourselves. Even though we believe we have the central role, we should not pursue our own self-interest but rather seek for the welfare of other religious groups. Religions should walk the path of self-denial, self-sacrifice, and service to others. (172:143, January 10, 1988)

God wants to save the world, not just the Presbyterian Church or the Methodist Church or the Holiness Church. God does not live for the sake of any particular church or denomination; He lives for the world. A true church sacrifices itself for the sake of the world. If need be, for the sake of saving the world, a church should be willing even to let itself go out of existence. This is the way of the Principle; we must travel this road to accomplish God's Will.

On the other hand, churches that place themselves above every other church, that regard themselves as absolute while denying the validity of all other churches, will perish. (69:87, October 20, 1973)

In this age, God wants to lead the world through 'parent-level religions'—religions with a parental heart... Religions that put down or are hostile to other religions or denominations are not useful for the realization of world peace or the fulfillment of God's providence. (260:128, May 1, 1994)



2. Freedom of Religion

Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.

United States Constitution, Bill of Rights, Article 1

There is no compulsion in religion.

Qur'an 2.256

Will you then compel mankind, against their will, to believe? No soul can believe, except by the Will of God.

Qur'an 10.99-100

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance.

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18

Whoever honors his own sect and disparages another man's, whether from blind loyalty or with the intention of showing his own sect in a favorable light, does his own sect the greatest possible harm. Concord is best, with each hearing and respecting the other's teachings. It is the wish of the Emperor that members of all sects should be learned and should teach virtue.

Ashoka, Twelfth Rock Edict (Buddhism)

A Pharisee in the council named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, held in honor by all the people, stood up and ordered that [Peter and the apostles] be put outside for a while. And he said to the council, "Men of Israel, take care what you do with these men. For before these days Theudas arose, giving himself out to be somebody, and a number of men, about four hundred, joined him; but he was slain and all who followed him were dispersed and came to nothing. After him Judas the Galilean arose in the days of the census and drew away some of the people after him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered. So in the present case I tell you, keep away from these men and let them alone; for if this plan or this undertaking is of men, it will fail; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them. You might even be found opposing God!"

Acts 5.34-39

When the Messenger of Allah arrived in Medina he made a treaty with the Jews there: "The Jews of the Bani Awf tribe are one community with the Muslim faithful. The Jews practice their religion and the Muslims practice theirs. For them shall be their own wealth, property and persons. Except for he who has committed oppression or transgression."

Hadith (Islam)

The spirit can only acquiesce to that which seem to it to be true; the heart can only love that which seems to it to be good. Constraint will make a hypocrite of man if he is weak, a martyr if he is courageous. Weak or courageous, he will feel the injustice of persecution, and he will become indignant. Instruction, persuasion, and prayer: these are the only methods for the expansion of religion. Any method that excites hatred, indignation, or contempt is impious.

Denis Diderot (Humanism)

Teachings of Sun Myung Moon

Democracy is the system that God laboriously prepared over the last two thousand years. Democracy is the system that respects human rights. Democracy is the system in which a minority group can survive in the midst of a [hostile] majority. Democracy is the system that guarantees freedom— freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of association, freedom of press, and freedom of assembly. America is the representative democratic nation, and in the American Constitution the most absolute among all freedoms is freedom of religion. It states that the Congress and government shall not make any laws that restrict religions. (100:246, October 19, 1978)

God's spiritual providence of restoration during the two thousand years since Jesus' day has prepared a democratic social and legal environment that will protect Christ at the Second Advent. Jesus was killed after being branded a heretic by the Jews and a rebel by the Roman Empire. In contrast, even if Christ at the Second Advent is persecuted as a heretic, in the democratic society to which he will come, such accusations will not be sufficient grounds for him to be condemned to death. (Exposition of the Divine Principle, Moses and Jesus 3.3.2)

I am grateful to God that He is using me as His instrument to ignite a movement to spiritually awaken America, to call her to protect religious freedom in this most difficult time in human history. (133:213, July 19, 1984)



3. Community and Solidarity among Religions

I came to the conclusion long ago... that all religions were true and also that all had some error in them, and whilst I hold by my own, I should hold others as dear as Hinduism. So we can only pray, if we are Hindus, not that a Christian should become a Hindu... But our innermost prayer should be a Hindu should be a better Hindu, a Muslim a better Muslim, a Christian a better Christian.

Mohandas Gandhi (Hinduism)

Basically all major religions of the world carry the same message; therefore harmony between different religions is both important and necessary.

Each system has its own value suited to persons of different disposition and mental outlook. At this time of easy communication, we must increase our efforts to learn each other's system. This does not mean that we should make all religions into one but that we should recognize the common purpose of the many religions and value the different techniques that they have developed for internal improvement.

Tenzin Gyatso, The Fourteenth Dalai Lama (Buddhism)

The Church therefore has this exhortation for her sons: prudently and lovingly, through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, and in witness of Christian faith and life, acknowledge, preserve, and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among these men, as well as the values in their society and culture.

Vatican II, Nostra Aetate (Christianity)

My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.

Isaiah 56.7

And I [Jesus] have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd.

John 10.16

The essential purpose of the religion of God is to establish unity among mankind. The divine Manifestations were Founders of the means of fellowship and love. They did not come to create discord, strife and hatred in the world. The religion of God is the cause of love, but if it is made to be a source of enmity and bloodshed, made to be a source of enmity and bloodshed, surely its absence is preferable to its existence; for then it becomes satanic, detrimental and an obstacle to the human world...

It is our duty in this radiant century to investigate the essentials of divine religion, seek the realities underlying the oneness of the world of humanity, and discover the source of fellowship and agreement which will unite mankind in the heavenly bond of love. This unity is the radiance of eternity, the divine spirituality, the effulgence of God and the bounty of the Kingdom.

'Abdul'l-Bahá, Promulgation of Universal Peace (Baha'i Faith)

Teachings of Sun Myung Moon

As far as I know, God is not sectarian. He is not restricted by minor details of doctrine. We should quickly liberate ourselves from theological conflict which results from blind attachment to doctrines and rituals, and instead focus on living relationships with God. In my view, we urgently need to purify the

religious atmosphere into one in which believers can have living faith and every soul can communicate with God.

In God's parental heart and His great love, there is no discrimination based on color or nationality. There are no barriers between cultural traditions, between East and West, North and South. Today God is trying to embrace the whole of humankind as His children. Through interreligious dialogue and harmony we should realize one ideal world of peace, which is God's purpose of creation and the common hope of humankind. (135:221, November 16, 1985)

Despite all efforts to the contrary, divisions and animosities among various religious groups continue. Religious wars are still being waged, as they have been for centuries. In spite of various ecumenical movements, religious arrogance, intolerance, and bigotry are still prevalent among devout believers. Thus, although most religions have professed the same God and often even the same views for centuries, their adherents have continually persecuted and warred with one another.

God is beyond denomination, doctrine or sect. God's purpose is and always has been to save the entire world, and not merely a certain race, nation, or religious group. As religious people, we cannot help God in the task of salvation as long as we fight among ourselves. Many religious leaders have realized this, but for numerous complex reasons their attempts to solve this problem have been repeatedly frustrated.

One of my essential teachings is that interreligious harmony is a necessary condition for world peace. Since no single religion has manifested God completely, religious differences have been inevitable. Yet because we are all sons and daughters of the same Heavenly Parent, we are all brothers and sisters in one great family. Therefore, conflict and divisive hatred among religions is unnecessary. (133:274-75, August 13, 1984)

Is God alienated from the world? No, God strives to save the world. Nevertheless, each religion cherishes its own believers but does not care so much about other people. Look at Islam: it tries to save the world, but it puts itself first. It is likewise with Buddhism: so far its adherents have not been active in going out to society. (99:17, August 27, 1978)

It was not God's original purpose to establish Hinduism, or Buddhism, or Christianity. God wanted to see from the beginning one family under God. (March 2, 2003)

In the Orient, people go in search of the state of Emptiness or No-self. Therefore, they look for quiet places where they can release their attachments to worldly things. In the West, on the other hand, people make efforts seeking for money and material things. Therefore they want quick results, and their eyes become large... Oriental people are small, with small eyes [that look into the distance], noses and everything. Their legs are short, too. From this, we see that the West is external and the East is internal.

One of Satan's goals is to permanently separate the internal from the external. God, on the other hand, tries to link the internal and external in a harmonious relationship. Thus we can foresee that when the West tries to unite with the East, God's day of fulfillment is near. This is gradually coming to pass. (118:46, May 2, 1982)

The purpose of religion is to lead us to a united world. Although different religions have different names for God and different ways of worshipping Him, the central Being each religion worships is the one and only God. Therefore, the purposes and directions for human life taught by each religion inevitably converge towards one standard. Ultimately, each religion has to manage its own path in order that all religions may enter the era of reformation at the same time. (140:10, February 1, 1986)

With the progress of God's providence, we witness that already in the spirit world there are no barriers between the four major religions at the level of their founders. Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed and Confucius communicate freely with each other and often visit each other's realms. Because I know these things well, I strongly encouraged all clergy... to transcend their denominations and sects and to unite as one. (May 8, 2001)

When all religions are as one family—living in one accord, cooperating as one body and treasuring the same idea—then all will be liberated. In that day, self-cultivation will no longer be necessary. (393:183, October 3, 2002)