Rescue, Recovery, and Religion

Nanzan Symposium 14: Humanitarian Aid and Spiritual Care in a Time of Crisis

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From 27 to 28 February 2009, the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture sponsored an international symposium on "Rescue, Recovery, and Religion," the fourteenth in its series of interreligious symposia. Okuyama Michiaki of the Nanzan Institute, the coordinator for the event, arranged for a number of outstanding scholars in various fields from around the world to come to Nanzan for two days. This was the climax of two years of colloquia on the topic at the Institute.

The basic theme of the fourteenth interreligious symposium sponsored by the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture was an examination of the workings of humanitarian aid and spiritual care in times of crises today. The presentations concerned very specific case studies from certain areas of the world. There were examples from New Orleans, Kobe, Chechnya, Lebanon, and Macedonia, and there were also model cases of avoiding conflicts among the Mardu of Aboriginal Australia and the Semai in Malaysia. There was a total of six lectures by invited guests, grouped according to themes of natural disasters, human tragedies, and others.

Natural Disasters in New Orleans and Kobe

Papers by Catherine Wessinger and Inaba Keishin dealt with religious responses to natural disasters.

First, Catherine Wessinger (Professor, Loyola University, New Orleans, usa) presented a summary of her research on "Religious Responses to Disaster in New Orleans and the American Gulf Coast." She herself is a resident of New Orleans, was a victim of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and produced detailed documentation on what had happened after the tragedy. "The death toll in Mississippi was

236 with 67 people missing, and 65,380 houses destroyed. In New Orleans, the official death toll was given at 1,577 dead with 705 missing. About 500,000 families were displaced, 200,000 homes were lost, 600 congregations were lost, and, ultimately, 220,000 jobs were lost." Wessinger described the huge damage caused by the hurricane. There was also real anomie in the city of New Orleans after the hurricane, with people trying to get what they needed to survive from stores and pharmacies. There were also victims who were shot by vigilantes patrolling their neighborhoods. It was truly chaotic.

Quoting Harold G. Koenig, Wessinger defined "disaster" as a "physical traumatic event that causes major loss of life (to 10 people or more), serious injuries of many more, and/or extensive property damage." And she defines religion as follows:

> I define *religion* here as being about "ultimate concern," that which is the most important thing in the world to the believers. According to this definition, a religion may be theistic, nontheistic or atheistic. An ultimate concern is determined by a worldview that includes a cosmology and an understanding of human nature. A religion also has methods that are practiced to achieve the ultimate concern, as well as sociological and other cultural expressions of human creativity, such as art and music. Ultimate concerns are the goals of religious systems, and those goals are always focused on human wellbeing. Humans are thinking animals, who are able to imagine a world without suffering and disasters, and the human mind rebels as the thought and experience of suffering and death. Therefore religious responses are to be expected in reaction to disastrous events.

The groups of people and their responses, as studied by Wessinger researched, were diverse:

> This survey of religious responses to disaster in New Orleans and the eastern Gulf Coast indicates that there will be personal religious responses to disaster on the part of individuals who are not affiliated with religious organizations; religious responses on the part of people who are loosely affiliated with religious organizations; and a variety of religious responses on the part of individuals who are affiliated closely with religious organizations. There will be religious responses on the part of organized congregations and larger denominations. Religious responses to disasters often take expression in what has been termed *civil religion*, the blending of religious themes and allegiance to a city, region, or nation. Additionally, there are *quasi-religious responses* to a disaster, consisting of events or expressions that are similar to reli-

gious responses, although they are not explicitly religious. I will cite examples of each of these in relation to the Katrina disaster.

There were cases of negative religious coping "in assigning blame to the disaster victims" and positive religious coping "in terms of taking comfort that a higher power or God is in control." Wessinger concludes that "religious responses to disaster that promote empathy and care for others and oneself constitute functional religious coping, as opposed to self-righteous and sometimes violent religious responses that can be associated with negative religious coping."

The second presentation, by Inaba Keishin, associate professor at Kobe University, dealt with "Altruism and Faith-Based Social Services in Japan." Inaba claims that existing government-led systems alone are incapable of coping with various problems facing modern society. He sees the necessity of "a civil society rich in a spontaneous spirit of altruism as well as laws and systems," and a "religious setting is the best environment to nurture altruism." According to Inaba, the social contributions of religion consists of:

> Religious people, religious organizations, or cultures and ideas associated with religion, contribute to the solution of problems in various social areas, and contribute to the maintenance and improvement in the quality of people's lives.

Inaba concluded as follows:

> Social contributory activities, joint operations, and human relationships in religious organizations offer an opportunity to acquire the certainty of contributing to society and to others, and of the reality of

one's own existence, for believers who are "trying to find themselves." In addition to functioning as a practical aid to social welfare, social contributory activities by religious organizations can be said to be a social resource that enables functions that supply a public arena in which to foster a spirit of mutual cooperation and support to be held together.

I was quite struck by the fact that crises today are very diverse: there was hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005, and a large earthquake in Kobe in 1995. We see some hope in the appearance of goodwill to help people in need. There were not only secular motivations, but also religious ones. However, there were also troubling claims from religious leaders, for example in the case of Katrina, that the disaster was God's punishment to unfaithful people. Such claims were absent in the case of Kobe.

Human Tragedies in Chechnya, Lebanon, and Macedonia

As the saying goes, *Homo homini lupus*. In Chechnya, Lebanon, and Macedonia we cannot help but be reminded of this phrase.

First, Khapta Akhmedova, Professor of Clinical Psychology at Chechen State University and head of the Mental Health Center for Peace-building, a non-governmental mental health center that promotes peace-building, presented a paper titled, "The Religious Aspects of Treatment for Psychological Trauma: What is Effective in the War and Terror Environment?" She was born and has lived in Chechnya all her life, where civil war has been going on for many years following the collapse of the Soviet Union and Djovkhar Dudaev's declaration of independence in 1991, and the first Chechen War in 1994.

Khapta has worked as a psychologist in support of a peaceful and democratic solution to the Chechen conflict. Following the first outbreak of anarchism in Chechnya in 1997, she worked for "Medecins du Monde," where she coordinated psychological assistance programs for refugees.

Khapta's case studies are mirrors of a desperate situation in Chechnya. She described how a desperate young person behaved recklessly in front of the Russian occupation army. They blew up the body of a man by handing him a grenade for fun in a crowded street. Nobody except one young man tried to pick up the scattered body parts in front of the occupation army. He was also ready to be a suicide bomber. This young man was put in a refugee camp and assigned to receive Khapta's therapy. He had been indoctrinated with the extreme Islamic ideology of terrorists. She used the standard teachings of Islam as a way to set him free from the extremism of the terrorists. She has developed the practical use of religious Islamic teachings that are standard in the main culture of

Chechnya, where Islam itself is banned by Russia even though it is the norm for Chechens. In this way, she tries to get him to be less suicidal, and to live longer despite this horrible situation.

There is a real irony in this "impossible" situation. It is politically correct for a resident of Chechen to keep a low profile; it seems almost impossible for one to have hope in one's own future. However, Khapta tries her best to help these desperate people adapt to this horrible situation. It is not a matter of morality or ethics, but a matter of survival, where anybody can be killed by the whim of the occupation army.

It was heartbreaking to hear of the tragedy that these people have had to endure. It almost seems that being desperate is a normal reaction to such a horrible situation. It was impossible for me to imagine that such a situation like this really exists today somewhere in the world, but after hearing the story from Khapta, I recognized that the peace given to us here in Japan is a real grace. After listening to the presentations on Macedonia and Lebanon, I realized that the people who live in these "clash of civilizations" situations are not blessed with this peace.

Maja Muhić, Assistant Lecturer, South East European University, Tetovo, Macedonia, then presented a paper titled "Spiritual Assistance during the Kosovo and Bosnian Refugee Crises in the Republic of Macedonia." Muhić worked as the project manager's assistant for multi-ethnic understanding and conflict resolution at the Center for Multicultural Understanding and Cooperation, and the NATO Media Press Center in Skopje, Macedonia, from 1998 to 2000, and she studied in the MA programs of Cambridge University (UK) and Central European University (Hungary). She is now completing her PhD dissertation for Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, Skopje, in the field of interpretive and symbolic anthropology.

As I recall, ancient Macedonia is where Alexander the Great was born, and it has a long history that has encompassed many changes. Macedonia is a country where the Greeks lived a long time ago; after that came the Roman Empire, and then the Byzantine Empire ruled the region, and then it became a Christian area. Slavic influence in the region began to emerge from the beginning of the sixth century, and then in 837 Macedonia was absorbed by the First Bulgarian Empire. From the twelfth century onwards parts of Macedonia were dominated by the Serbian kingdom of Raska, and by the fourteenth century had been completely conquered. In 1371 Macedonia was under the Ottoman Empire, which was Islamic, and it remained a part of that empire for almost 500 years. In the First Balkan War, Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece, and Montenegro occupied almost all Ottoman territories in Europe. In 1913 the whole of Macedonia was assigned to the Balkan League. In 1919 Macedonia became a part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. After 1945 it was a part of the People's Republic of Macedonia within

Yugoslavia. After the breakup of Yugoslavia in 1991, Muhić says, "Macedonia was admitted to the UN on 8 April 1993 as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) until an agreement could be reached with Greece." This short history of Macedonia shows how the country has been involved in Greek, Christian, and Islamic cultures over the years.

Muhić's paper covered two major refugee crises: Kosovo in 1999 and Bosnia from 1992 to 1995. According to Muhić, "the Bosnian crisis brought between 38,000–50,000 refugees to Macedonia, while the Kosovo crisis brought some 360,000 refugees (tantamount to 20 percent of the population) at the gates of the country." Macedonia's population is only 2 million, and so the number of refugees amounted to almost 20 percent of the population. The people who fled to Macedonia were Muslims, although only 29 percent of the population of about 580,000 are Islamic. Muhić explains the situation as follows:

> In the case of Bosnia, it was predominantly the ethnic Bosnian Muslims who were the target of ethnic cleansing. It was dominated by the Muslims of Macedonia (Albanians being the dominant group since they constitute 25 percent of the population and are predominantly Muslim) who helped those refugees. Of these, at the outbreak of the crisis in April 1999, about 65,000 refugees remained stranded in a muddy no-man's-land at Blace (the Macedonian border point with Kosovo), without adequate food and in extremely unsanitary conditions. "This place was hell. Birth and death happened simultaneously there" recalls one of my informants from the NGO who helped alleviate the tragedy of those people.

As those people were persecuted by Greek Orthodox people of their own country, there was a clear division of faith: only the Muslims helped all those refugees. Christians were not helpful to these people either inside or outside of the country.

Muhić pointed out the aims of most of the support organizations:

- to give moral strength to the victims
- to offer an explanation to the otherwise anomalous events in the lives of those people
- to preserve their sense of belonging to a community
- and to give them hope that their lives and their community could and would be reestablished.

Those Islamic aid organizations provide books and pamphlets to refugees. One example of the books provided was on "Teachings about Morals and Submission to God," dealing "with topics regarding patience, love for Mohamed,

gratefulness, hope, justice, the marital duties, as well as improper human charac-teristics, such as greed, hypocrisy, betrayal, violence."

According to one of the NGO leaders, they were also active on several fronts: "providing humanitarian support, promoting multicultural cooperation, and peaceful conflict resolution, as well as civic decision making." Muhić concluded that religious assistance can be (as shown in the case study) distributed in three different spheres of life:

- in the individual-psychological sphere
- in the communal sphere (bringing the sense of belonging to a commu-nity but seen through their relationship with God), and finally
- in between, that is, in the reality of social human life where people func-tion as both individuals and as political and national units

It appears that the barriers between Muslims and Christians are so high within the refugee problems in Macedonia that they cannot be overcome. Only Islamic NGO's are helping Islamic refugees, and this is a problem that cannot be ignored.

Third, Ziad Fahed, Assistant Professor at Notre Dame University, Lebanon, presented a paper titled "Spiritual Care in Times of Crises: The Case of Lebanese Society in Time of Wars and in the After Wars."

As a resident of Lebanon, Fahed reported on the terrible situation there. According to him, "the Lebanese war (over two periods: 1975–1990, and 1990–2006, both fifteen years long) was a multifaceted war. More than 150,000 civilians were killed and injured in those fifteen years of war." In 2008 the population of Lebanon was 4,224,000. This means that 3.6 percent of the population were either killed or injured during those wars. It is beyond imagination that people have been killing each other like this for thirty years in Lebanon. It is within this terrible situation that Fahed feels the need for humanitarian aid and spiritual care to support the civilians.

There are eighteen religious communities in Lebanon. There is a moral pact based on confessional or denominational power-sharing. Inter-confessional living is a must.

Fahed claims that facing sufferance is the common ground and common cause for the people of Lebanon with different religious faiths. Lebanon was governed by warlords because the government was in a deep coma. According to Fahed, they "have kidnapped their own people in the ghettos of fear, ghettos of hate, and the ghettos of ignorance. The continual brainwashing of all the citizens replaced moderation."

There is a large amount of emigration, especially among college graduates, because of political or security problems, a willingness to live abroad, the unavailability of children's education, and so forth.

Fahed showed the result of a questionnaire consisting of 600 university students' evaluation of spiritual and humanitarian aid in times of crises. Students satisfied with spiritual support made up 49.5 percent; those dissatisfied made up 20 percent; and those neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 30.5 percent. Regarding humanitarian support, students satisfied made up 51.7 percent; dissatisfied students made up 20.8 percent, and those neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, 27.5 percent. As can be seen, the results of the survey for both criterion are similar. Fahed then showed that students who practice their own religion are satisfied with the support, about 20 percent more than those students who do not practice religion. Fahed tries to show the difference between Christians and Muslims/Druz. Muslims and Druz are about 10 percent more satisfied than Christians with the spiritual support offered by their own religious group in times of conflict and wars, although the humanitarian support offered by their religious group then gave them almost the same satisfaction as Christians and Muslim/Druz.

Fahed then analyzed the reasons why a large number of young people are not satisfied with the spiritual and humanitarian support offered to them. This is due to the following reasons:

- The negative role conducted by some religious leaders and their relationship with some warlords
- Corruption in the field of humanitarian support
- Disappointment among those of the younger generation
- Discovering that the religious leaders do not have solutions for all kinds of problems
- A very complicated political situation in the country

Fahed has tried to find ways to recover from the state of war. He suggests that they are: (1) a culture of peace counteracts a culture of fear, (2) a dialogue of life, (3) promotion of moral values, (4) truth telling and reconciliation are the two conditions for sustainable peace, and (5) purification of memory.

In conclusion, Fahed noted:

> Could a civil society group start to gain power and mobilize the population or at least the young generations to create a national sense of identity instead of the current sectarianism? Reconciliation, forgiveness, and purification of memory are conditions for achieving the desired peace, and not only in Lebanon. The postwar national suffering of the Lebanese could be a chance to call for national responsibility. [It is important] to move forward in building a sustainable peace instead of the actual pacification (and cease-fire), improving the level of satisfaction and of assistance in times of crises, working at the grassroots level, and increasing awareness among all citizens.

Fahed's positive attitude for peacemaking in the desperate situation in Lebanon was striking. He maintained a positive attitude, that we will not lose hope if we look toward a bright future and work to build a peaceful country out of conflict and war.

Young people in Chechnya with traumatic experiences were filled with hate against the enemy and tried to give their lives in suicide bombings. In Macedonia, refugees from Kosovo were stranded and occupied the country. In Lebanon, confessionalism divides the nation and the young people are fleeing from the country.

On the other hand, people can help other people to deal with these horrible situations. In Chechnya, we can see the therapeutic attempts to help young people value themselves instead of giving their lives in suicide bombings. In Macedonia, we can see the attempts to help the Kosovo refugees by enlightening them with Islamic teachings, and the work of humanitarian aides coming from Islamic ngos. In Lebanon, we can see the attempt to heal the wounds of a divided nation in humanistic ideals.

In summary, it seems to me that in these cases the descriptions of religion were not so much about religious organizations, but about religious ideas and motivations.

Indigenous Ways of Peace-Making

Douglas P. Fry, Professor, Åbo Akademi University, Finland, and University of Arizona, USA, presented a paper titled, "A Cross-Cultural View of Conflict Management: The Mardu and Semai Cases."

Douglas P. Fry teaches in the Faculty of Social and Caring Sciences at Åbo Akademi University in Finland and is an adjunct research scientist in the Bureau of Applied Research in Anthropology at the University of Arizona. He has worked in the field of aggression, conflict, and conflict resolution, for over twenty-five years and has published many articles and books on this subject. His recent works include *The Human Potential for Peace: An Anthropological Challenge to Assumptions about War and Violence* (2005), and *Beyond War: The Human Potential for Peace* (2007).

Fry presented an overview of conflict management approaches. According to Donald Black, there are five approaches to conflict management: avoidance, toleration, negotiation, self redress (also called self-help), and settlement (which involves a third party). The last of those approaches is settlement, and there are also five kinds of settlement: friendly peacemaking, mediation, arbitration, adjudication, and repressive peacemaking.

First, "Avoidance" is ceasing or limiting interaction with a disputant. An example was given through Andaman Islanders where it was pointed out that "direct confrontation is avoided and 'going away'—that is, leaving the source and scene of conflict for a short time—is encouraged." Another example of the Toraja ethnc group of Indonesia was given to point out that, "Toraja villagers generally prefer to avoid the people with whom they are in conflict rather than to confront them directly."

Second, "Toleration" refers to a situation where the "conflict is ignored and interaction continues between the parties." The example of the Piro of Peru was used, where "it is the custom to 'forget' offences..." An example from the Ladakh people gave an example of a case where "Sonam just smiled and shrugged his shoulders…. 'We have to live together.'"

Third, "Negotiation" means that "disputants themselves attempt to reach a resolution." Fry talked about the Tarahumara of Mexico, explaining:

Seleronius once killed a neighbor's cow that had entered his cornfield. Seleronius realized that he had overreacted and went to see his neighbor. He offered his neighbor a burro in compensation, and Seleronius'

neighbor, taking into consideration the initial crop damage, accepted the burro. Through this personal negotiation, the problem was resolved and further trouble between them was averted.

Fourth, "Self-redress" (or self-help) means that "one side takes direct action against the other." It involves violence or the threat of violence. According to Fry, "Taking justice into one's own hands" describes the approach. An example from the Suku of the Congo was explained: A theft is wiped out by a reciprocal theft, an insult returned effaces an insult given, a murder is compensated by a reciprocal murder; in these cases no further settlement is necessary.

Fifth, "Settlement" involves a third party to solve conflicts. "Third parties play various roles such as: *friendly peacemakers* who separate and distract disputants; *mediators* who help disputants negotiate mutually acceptable agreements; and *judges* (*adjudicators*) who hear cases and render enforceable rulings." Fry pointed out, "in the case studies on the Mardu and the Semai, we will see third party involvement in dispute settlement."

Fry also dealt with the cases of the Mardu of Australia and the Semai of Malaysia in detail. In conclusion, Fry said:

> The two case studies show how belief systems, including spiritual beliefs, are intertwined with methods of conflict management. The case studies also illustrate how various, different types of conflict management are used in these two societies… The Mardu are more physically aggressive than the Semai, but like the Semai, the Mardu do not make war or feud.… For whatever combination of reasons, both societies show that warfare is not an inevitable feature of human social life.

There was also discussion about the function of religions, not about established religious groups. In the cases of the Mardu and the Semai we see the absence of religious ideas in peacemaking, although it must be admitted that these people live in so-called "dream time," without a clear distinction between religion and the secular.

Concluding Remarks

There was a sense of satisfaction with the result that understanding each other and sharing problems with an awareness of our own problems is possible, even though we do not share the experiences of the individual cases themselves. There was a consensus that dealing with specific issues in depth will lead to understanding in more general issues. It is to be hoped that at least some of the results of this conference will be published in the future, and that it will reach readers who were not able to attend this conference.