

Essay: Working Model for a World Meta-religion, (WMR).

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File: "Religion essay Meta tenets, etc."

Meta religion. The idea of a world meta-religion (WMR) is to create a simple, unifying religion that the majority of pro-social people around the world can endorse and practice to the benefit of themselves and all humankind. This would not be intended to replace traditional religions but merely to provide a set of auxiliary, simple universal religious principles and practices to unite pro-social persons of all faiths to promote cooperation, friendship and peace.

In this context, the prefix "meta" is used in the sense of "along with" to emphasize an addition to rather than replacement of traditional religions.

Need. A meta-religion is needed to help bridge the differences between peoples of different religious faiths, especially in the 21st century because of rapid increases in cultural stress. Cultural stress is caused by population growth, migrations, spread of communicable diseases, demands on natural resources, rapid international communications, and ever-increasing trade and travel. While these phenomenon are probably inevitable, one can argue that this stress contributes in some cases and to some degree to military belligerence, including terrorism, genocide, and civil and international wars.

Model rationale.

The rationale for the present model is based primarily on research findings by the present author, the details of which will be cited periodically below.

Some religious belief orientations overtly promote terrorism and warfare. It is assumed that the greater the stress on cultures, the greater the motivation for these religious orientations to promote conflict.

One could argue, as Sam Harris has done very thoroughly, that belligerence promoted by some religious beliefs is grounds for dispensing with all religious faith (Harris, 2005). However, it seems unlikely that a rational argument, such as that presented by Harris, will be the end of religious beliefs. They are simply too pervasive and enduring an aspect of human society. Religions are not accepted or rejected on rational grounds but rather on social, emotional and spiritual grounds. Religions meet social, emotional and spiritual needs of humans, not rational needs. The destructive effects of some religious belief systems are of concern and deserve attention.

However, instead of proposing a world void of all religion, an alternative approach is to argue that with increasing cultural stress there is corresponding

need for an overarching religious system that promotes cooperation and peace rather than conflict and war. A meta-religion might meet this need. The objective of the present essay is to create a model for such a meta-religion. Other such models might also be developed. The present meta-religion is termed the World Meta-Religion (WMR).

Mission statement: The mission statement of an organization promoting a meta-religion, in this case the "WMR", might simply be:

To promote a form of religious unity among the pro-social people of the world to the benefit of themselves and all life forms and of the world upon which they and future generations depend. The emphasis is to be on religious beliefs, practices and behaviors that are common enough to all pro-social humans to unite them in constructive, cooperative behavior.

For the purpose of this mission statement, religion is defined broadly as a system of beliefs founded on universal spiritual and ethical principles that unite people in constructive fellowship and service.

The universality or unquestioned authority of religious principles has been justified traditionally and historically by ascribing them to one or another supernatural being or beings. This being is said to have spoken through certain special humans who have written the principles down in the form of religious documents or scriptures.

Alternately, the universality of religious principles can be based on sources that are not supernatural, but carefully crafted human efforts. These can be opinion polls of religious values taken from random samples of people from around the world. Values strongly endorsed across pro-social people of all faiths and cultures can be used as a universal, uniting religious doctrine. This is the recommended source of the core ethics and values of the WMR.

While Harris acknowledges the importance of spirituality and ethics, he equates faith with religions and these with irrational and dangerous mysticism.

He hopes for a rational approach to blending reason, spirituality and ethics. (Harris, p. 221). The present concept of a WMR attempts to do this in its basic design.

The present author's position is that there is nothing necessarily dangerous about beliefs in supernatural origins of religious principles and ethics. However, humans are particularly susceptible to following the prescriptions of authority, seem quite willing to take sides and kill each other when perceived demand outstrips resources, and some religious belief systems, specifically "fundamentalist" or authority-dependent ones, have apparently evolved to

support these two phenomena (McConochie, Publication # 2). This fundamentalist religious orientation *is* therefore dangerous.

However, a second major religious orientation, the kindly religious orientation is peace-promoting (Ibid).

The remedy seems to be to empower and unite persons of the kindly religious orientation from all traditions sufficiently to manage national and international affairs successfully. The specific goals would include:

1. Minimizing undue stress on resources,
 2. Discouraging fundamentalist thinking, behavior and political activity,
- and
3. Promoting good will and peace via political and other activities of peace-loving peoples.

The present model assumes that such an effort can be successful in the form of a world meta-religion that will unite people in such a way that they treat each other and behave in general in ways that inspire trust, kindness and love. This in turn can inspire confidence between members of the WMR organization. This confidence can alternately be termed "faith", faith between members of this world meta-religion that others of the organization will behave in consistently trustworthy, safe and noble ways.

This form of faith is not based on simple trust in authority, as much traditional religious faith has been. It is based on acceptance of the principles of the WMR. These principles do not require belief in supernatural beings or origins of the principles. Thus, one is not asked to accept them simply on faith in authority. One is invited to accept them based on their democratic, secular origin, principally international opinion polls of ethical values. One can also learn to accept and enjoy the principles of the WMR through participation in WMR services, programs and literature, again not dependent on "blind" faith but upon empirical, real-world personal experiences.

In effect, the present model is of a new, pro-social, overarching, form of religion or religious structure or organization, not a repudiation of religion.

A. Desirable features of a meta-religion.

1. Relatively simple. A meta-religion must be simple enough to be easily embraced by persons of many different religious traditions and perhaps also by persons who have not strongly embraced any specific organized or traditional religions.

2. Pro-social in appeal. The tenets of the meta-religion should consist of principles and practices that are congruent with the minds, emotions and attitudes of the majority of specifically pro-social persons in societies around the world.

My research strongly suggests the presence of two types of religious beliefs, fundamentalist (authority-dependent) and kindly. The authority-dependent belief orientation is strongly associated with a variety of anti-social attitudes, including the Eidelson worldviews (seeing the world from a perspective of helplessness, injustice, distrust, vulnerability and superiority), warmongering and denial of a positive foreign policy, sustainable policies and programs and human rights. In contrast, the kindly religious beliefs orientation is pro-social, characterized by tolerance of religious beliefs different from one's own, denial of warmongering and endorsement of human rights, positive foreign policies and human rights. About 6% of adults fall in the former category, 89% in the latter. (See Publications # 2, 3).

My research also shows that authority-dependent religion tends to be associated with denial of meta-religion, while kindly religion is associated with embracing the idea of meta-religion. (See Publication # 6). Thus, to be successful, a meta-religion must be directed primarily at persons of the kindly religious orientation.

Authority-dependent religion is characterized by insularity, thinking that one's own deity is the only one and that anyone who disagrees with this idea is wrong. In contrast, persons of the kindly religious beliefs orientation tend to be tolerant of differences between religions and members of their orientation. Authority-dependent religion adherents tend to use religion as a comprehensive guide to personal behavior and as an explanation for the world and one's place in it. They tend to think much alike in this "value of religion" matter. In contrast, persons of the kindly religious orientation find value in religion in many different ways. They are not all the same in what they value from religion and do not think alike in how they value religion. (See Publication # 6).

3. Broadly inclusive in its principle tenets. A meta-religion should have only a few basic, simple tenets that can unite most pro-social people of the world. Its religious tenets must be general enough to appeal to most or all pro-social persons but independent of specific beliefs or rituals that are not universal across all traditional religions.

Some religions, such as Buddhism and Bahaim, tend to be rather all-encompassing of the tenets of other religions. Hinduism encompasses a great variety of beliefs and practices that are optional, providing great flexibility among followers. Such religions appear rather comprehensive and respectful of a wide variety of beliefs but do not present themselves as meta-religions per se, as defined herein.

4. Respectful of all pro-social traditional religions and beliefs.

Meta-religion is offered not as a replacement of current religions but as an auxiliary, bridging organization. Persons can be members of the new organization while maintaining membership in their current religious organizations.

While a meta-religion will by definition not embrace the detailed doctrines and practices unique to any one traditional religion, it should be compatible enough with the basic pro-social tenets of traditional religions to make it possible for persons of traditional pro-social religions to embrace the tenets of the meta-religion.

In this regard, the meta-religion should not contain tenets that directly disparage or deny key pro-social tenets of any traditional religions. For example, it should not contain the tenets: "Supernatural beings do not exist", "supernatural beings do exist", "there is only one true supernatural being", "there are many supernatural beings that can and do influence human affairs", "the only way to access supernatural beings is through procedures x, y or z.", or "there is only one good major religious tradition").

Because a meta-religion must be respectful of some members who do believe in supernatural beings and some who do not, its basic tenets must be open to explanation as having origins that are either secular or supernatural. For example, it is recommended that the basic ethical and spiritual beliefs of a meta-religion be based on good random polls of persons from around the world and of many different specific religious traditions. It is assumed theoretically that only those principles that are strongly endorsed by the majority of persons from different specific religious traditions will serve to unite all of those persons.

These spiritual and ethical principles will not be based on beliefs in supernatural beings but rather on polling. However, these principles may still be interpreted by individual adherents of the meta-religion as being of supernatural origin. For example, a person might choose to believe that the opinion poll items that were most highly endorsed are those of a supernatural being speaking through the hearts and minds of the people polled. However, out of respect for adherents who do not believe in supernatural origins of the principles, adherents would be asked not to promote their own personal beliefs in this regard, at least within the meta-religion itself.

5. Based on unique and interesting tenets. A meta-religion should incorporate tenets that make the meta-religion unique, interesting, and valuable enough that people will embrace and practice it in meaningful ways. It will advocate universality without undue specificity.

6. Pro-social in emphasis. The meta-religion should emphasize pro-social tenets of international import, particularly as a means of uniting members in activities of international good will, cooperation, friendship, kindness, peacefulness, sharing, protecting and love. The success of Rotary International can serve as an encouraging model for the WMR. RI has member clubs in more nations than belong to the United Nations, is over 1 million members strong and has been functioning successfully for 100 years. It has done good works, including a major portion of the effort to eliminate polio worldwide. Rotary deliberately avoids religion and politics, though it has invocations before weekly meetings and not infrequently has guest speakers who are politicians.

7. Uniquely religious and inclusive in nature. The meta-religion should be religious and inclusive to distinguish it from non-religious international organizations such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the World Court (a division of the U.N.), the International Olympic Committee and organization, and the World Council of Churches (a Christian organization). While the World Council of Churches is a religious organization, it serves exclusively the Christian faith. Not all nations belong to the United Nations. Not all peoples identify strongly with a nation. The WMR would be overtly religious, in contrast to Rotary International.

8. Easily compatible with traditional religious practices of pro-social persons. WMR members could practice the WMR religion simply by having part of one of the regular religious services in their traditional religion monthly schedule explicitly address some of the tenets of WMR. The focus of this part of the religious service could be on the value of international cooperation among all of the peoples of the world, peoples of all religious orientations. This could be scheduled monthly or even quarterly.

Beyond this periodic service, WMR participants could become more intensely involved in WMR activities as they chose, as by sponsoring service projects addressing WMR objectives, building communication networks with other WMR member organizations, especially ones of traditional religious beliefs different from their own, participating in regional and international WMR conferences, and writing and publishing articles in WMR sponsored publications.

B. Suggested Tenets and Hypotheses of what might be termed "The World Meta-Religion", "WMR".

1. Religious beliefs and practices are human activities that can be objectively and constructively studied by scientific principles and methods.
2. Humans differ in their degree of pro-social and anti-social dispositions.
3. Pro-social persons around the world have many pro-social traits in common, such as endorsement of human rights, tolerance of religious differences in

specific beliefs and rituals, endorsement of sustainable policies and programs, endorsement of positive foreign policies in politics and denunciation of warmongering.

Pilot studies by the author suggest that these pro-social traits exist in the above relationships. These studies and another by Hunsberger also suggest that there are a few (about 6%) anti-social persons in virtually all samples of persons from all religious orientations. Further studies with larger and more diverse samples are needed to confirm these findings.

4. These traits tend to motivate these pro-social people to communicate, cooperate and participate in joint efforts to promote the welfare of humans, other species and the world they live on.
5. Basic ethical and related principles can be agreed upon by pro-social persons that will help unite and direct them in constructive mutual activities.
6. These principles can be defined by research, specifically by well-designed polls of random samples of persons from different faiths around the world. These principles can then be written up, published and disseminated to the advantage of participants.
7. These principles will incorporate human rights of wide variety, such as some of those delineated in the U.N. Charter of Human Rights and similar charters by the World Council of Churches and the Earth Charter. Again, initial studies by the author have demonstrated how this can be done. (See Publications # 3 and 4).
8. Persons who participate in local, regional and/or international communications, meetings, services and activities sponsored by the WMR will enjoy a spirit of inspiration, fellowship, motivation and kindness that will give their lives meaning and power perceived by them as meaningful and significant.

This spirit of inspiration may be defined by some participants as "God/god", akin to the "holy spirit" of Christianity and other phenomena of other traditional religions. Furthermore, a member of the WMR might choose to define God/god simply as "the spirit of human goodness and kindness." Other members may choose to retain their traditional definitions of God/god(s).
9. The spirit enjoyed by WMR participants will energize them to behave in ways that positively impress other persons who are not yet WMR members but are of pro-social disposition. This spirit will help recruit new members to the organization.
10. Creating a web site to explain and promote WMR will be an important component to creating and maintaining a successful organization.

11. Invocations, songs, essays, inspirational writings, etc. can be created that are unique to the WMR mission in that they reflect the above principles, e.g. not referring specifically and exclusively to the beliefs, tenets, dogma or rituals of any specific traditional religions and emphasizing the universal mission of WMR or celebrating its accomplishments and benefits. The WMR could solicit sermons from members. These could be edited and disseminated to all members for consideration and use in their local religious programs.

12. To the extent that universal pro-social principles in related fields can be cooperatively endorsed by the majority of WMR members, WMR activities can meld with fields other than religion per se, e.g. politics, art, public media, land-use planning, medicine and literature.

For example, WMR might develop models for sustainable communities, advanced democratic governments, pro-social newspaper features, affordable public health care, or resolving regional water rights conflicts. They could make these models available to interested communities. Their role in this development might be direct, by WMR members themselves, or indirect, by raising funds and sponsoring think tanks or graduate education programs and scholarships or contests that result in the models. For example, the Rotary International organization sponsors graduate university training in peace studies in several major universities around the world.

C. Suggested initial structural elements.

1. A group of persons could develop the first WMR organization as a non-profit corporation serving the public interest (501-c-3, U.S. tax code). They would thus develop articles of incorporation and by-laws.
2. The by-laws could specify conditions for membership, etc.
3. An early project of the WMR should be conducting research to confirm and elaborate on the scientific underpinnings upon which it is to be based, as mentioned above. This research could be conducted over the Internet.
4. Thus, an early project of the WMR should be developing a web site to conduct research, disseminate findings and solicit memberships.
5. The research should be international in scope, tapping key tenets of universal import from various traditional and ethnic religions and polling the endorsements of samples of persons of different religious traditions and faiths from around the world.
6. The WMR should solicit creative ideas from all interested parties, especially in its initial formation and throughout its existence as well. It should operate by

democratic principles, avoiding the "iron law of oligarchy", the tendency of organizations to regress into a few persons controlling policy and programs.

7. The WMR should encourage the development of regional and international conventions and meetings of WMR members.

8. The WMR should develop economical and effective publications, perhaps disseminated largely over its web site.

References:

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