

# A CALL FOR PARADIGM CHANGE IN WORLD RELIGIONS

In this short paper we are appealing to the leadership of religious organizations and institutions of the world's main religions to examine critically their belief systems, to stop being their own "great-great grandfathers", as a means of realizing the kind of reforms which will support peace in the world; so that heretofore no one can include religion as part of a calculus aimed at fostering human conflict and inciting violence.



**Albert Fiorino,**  
KGCHS, PhD, MA,  
PhL, MEd, OCT

© Toronto, Ontario,  
Canada 2014

# A Call for Paradigm Change in World Religions

*We must stop being our own  
'great-great grandfathers'.*

In the introduction to their book *The Morning of the Magicians* (1960), its authors remark that one of major obstacles to social change is the simple fact that we tend “to be our own great-great grandfathers”.\* We tend to view the present through the optics of our forebears. As a result we resist examining new evidence challenging the veracity of our mindsets with any kind of openness and objectivity. In the process we deprive ourselves of the opportunity to shed ideas and belief systems which may be preventing us from meeting challenges in our lives realistically and effectively in the interest of our own well-being and that of those close to us. The same observations apply to groups, organizations, and institutions and their leadership.

In this posting we are appealing to the leadership of religious organizations and institutions of the world's main religions to examine critically their belief systems, to stop being their own "great-great grandfathers", as a means of realizing the kind of reforms which will support peace in the world; so that heretofore no one can include religion as part of a calculus aimed at fostering human conflict and inciting violence.

### **A call for a paradigm change**

A staunch adherence to outworn and in many cases baseless belief systems on the part of world's major religions is a major stumbling block to world peace. The leaders of the religious institutions and organizations which oversee these major religions must urgently take some bold steps by which to surgically remove or at least suspend their belief systems for the sake of peace and, in the end, in the interest of their own survival. Interfaith histrionics: meetings, appeals, pleas, studies, synods, or any public demonstrations of collaboration will no longer do. Such

charades have only served to maintain the *status quo* and create the appearance for the watching world that due diligence was carried out by these leaders.

Throughout the last two millennia there have always been men and women of good will who have sincerely questioned the credibility of these belief systems. During this past century new archeological findings and historical scholarship have further challenged their fundamental tenets as being of divine origin. Advances in science and technology are facilitating the emergence of a new world view about the nature of man and his origins and about the vast multiverse which human beings inhabit. As a result of these key developments modern men and women are also seriously questioning the veracity of these belief systems.

Our intention here is not to deny or minimize the good effects these major religions have had over the centuries in providing comfort and hope to billions of their faithful. However, at the same

time we cannot ignore the proxy role they also played in helping the political regimes in power to maintain control over the people they ruled.

Moreover, most people would not hesitate to acknowledge the fact that the core values shared and promoted by the major religions over the centuries have played a critical role in the creation of civil societies throughout the world, in promoting family values and more positive social intercourse, and in forging and nurturing key political principles such as freedom, right, justice, and the rule of law.

The incontrovertible fact remains, however, that in many parts of the world religion continues to be used as a justification for inciting conflict and for carrying out war. And this is done on the basis of these anachronistic belief systems which we believe, as alluded above, have become dysfunctional in our times.

We have come to the conclusion that the waning credibility in these belief systems combined with the havoc religious fundamentalism and

extremism are causing worldwide constitute sufficient reason to look at alternative ways by which to salvage the essential elements of religious practice as a means of meeting human beings' spiritual needs.

We would not be underestimating the case were we to state that the majority of modern men and women no longer value such belief systems in their own personal or spiritual development or as vehicles for social control or political regulation of the masses. Recent research about the state of religion in the world indicate that over the next thirty-five years the most notable trend will be the increase in the number of people who will no longer be associated with any form of religion.\*\*

The suspension or abandonment of these belief systems should not necessarily involve the abolition of the various forms of worship which these religions have developed over time. Public worship as an affirmation and demonstration of human beings' fundamental status as creatures in relation to the transcendent elements of their

existence, by whatever names we choose to call them, could still remain the cornerstone of the proposed reinvention of the world's main religions and of religious practice in general. With a bit of creative purging of those facets of worship associated with the belief systems, many of the existing liturgies and protocols need not be discarded but could be integrated into a richer practice of worship, prayer, and thanksgiving focusing on shared core values.

As a further argument for a paradigm change, it behooves us to point out the obvious truth about spirituality—seldom acknowledged by those whose stock and trade is the sale of religion for personal gain or vindication, but tacitly affirmed daily in their hearts by most sincere men and women who are genuinely trying to live good lives: ***spirituality is a deeply personal activity; religion is an add-on.***

At the end of the day the spiritual quest, spiritual development is an intensely personal, individual journey. Public demonstrations of one's inner

spiritual convictions and efforts in some formal, institutionalized setting are not necessary requirements for a successful spiritual trek in life. The entire human landscape provides an adequate context in which to engage on such a deeply personal voyage.

From the very beginning community religious leaders and their future counterparts in the world's main religions have always insisted that their intermediary role was necessary for this journey, another belief that in our times has also lost its credibility. No matter how crowded the highways and byways of life may be, no matter how supportive or unhelpful fellow sojourners have been, in the end the individual spirit walks alone along the spiritual path while trying to make sense out of the choices that he or she has already taken and hoping that the choices he or she is about to make are the right ones.

The above existential fact should be sufficient grounds as well for religious leaders worldwide to stop and ponder the value of their belief



systems and their associated organizations and institutions. Any genuine effort at bringing about a religious paradigm change must be driven by this fundamental existential fact. At best their justification for their continued existence and service to humankind must issue from their realization that their religious organizations and institutions are simply resting places along the path on which individuals are living out their very own spiritual journey, rest areas where sojourners can stop to regain their strength so that they can continue with their earthly pilgrimage refreshed and renewed.

## **Final thoughts**

Religious belief systems and their associated organizations and institutions continue to be valued commodities for the priestly classes running them and for the millions of individuals whose livelihood directly or indirectly depends on them. A religious paradigm change would not markedly affect the economic activities of these organizations and institutions. In fact, the transparency

resulting from the paradigm change will have the effect of validating these activities as an integral part of the economic life of a community.

In our times belief systems remain political assets for many a politician who, not unlike his counterpart in more primitive and less informed communities, uses religious beliefs to deceive, arouse, incite, and mobilize the masses to carry out his or her wishes unquestionably.

No belief system is worth the sacrifice or the taking of human life. **A compassionate and loving creator would not want our conceptions, true or false, to be the cause of any kind of human conflict or atrocity.** Those religious leaders who claim otherwise argue their case on the basis of religious texts whose origins have been conveniently attributed to special divine revelations. The argument may have worked on the more malleable and pliable hearts and minds of the millions of helpless men and women of ancient times, for the most part hordes of human beings living nomadic lives and whose main goal in life was their

survival. Such a case cannot be so easily made in our times; at least not to an ever-increasing number of people who are rapidly becoming a majority of humankind.

Sadly there are billions of individuals who are still captive of these ancient belief systems, still living out their spiritual journey through the virtual reality created for them through these ancient texts. The political leadership of these people do know better and are now being urged to undertake the necessary steps to release their memberships from this religious captivity by reinventing their organizations and institutions into instruments of genuine spirituality and religious practice. They are being asked to stop blocking positive change in the human condition and to become vehicles for the realization of greater peace and stability in the world.

The present blog echoes the salient themes of a previously piece on *religious institutions and organizations* posted on August 25, 2014. In that posting we also argue the case for urgent changes

in the prevailing religious paradigm of the world's major religions. As in that previous posting we wish to remind the reader that we can no longer simply delegate the tough choices to future generations. We must make those choices now, before it's too late.

---

\*Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, *The Morning of the Magicians*, trans from the French by Rollo Myers, Stein, and Day, 1963.

\*\*See “The Future of World Religions: Population Growth Projections, 2010-2050.”  
<http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050>.