

## Religion and Peace Building

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### Abstract

This study examines the positive role of religion in peace building, exploring how religious beliefs, practices, and leaders can contribute to healing divided communities and fostering lasting peace. Despite the historical and ongoing association of religion with conflict, this research highlights the significant potential of religious teachings and leaders to promote reconciliation and unity. The study's literature review synthesizes insights from various academic disciplines, including politics, international relations, and peace and conflict studies, to provide a comprehensive understanding of how religion can be leveraged for peace building efforts.

**The objectives** of the study are threefold: to explore how religious teachings encourage peace and forgiveness, to examine real-world examples where religious leaders and communities have successfully fostered unity, and to identify the challenges that these peace building efforts face.

**A qualitative research** approach is employed, involving a review of existing literature on religious peace building practices, case studies of successful interfaith initiatives, and interviews with religious leaders and peace building practitioners. Data is drawn from diverse geographical regions, including Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, offering a broad perspective on religious contributions to peace building.

**The findings indicate** that when religious teachings are embraced with openness and compassion, they can serve as powerful tools for healing divisions and bringing people together. The study presents numerous examples from different regions where religious leaders have played critical roles in mediating disputes and fostering dialogue. However, it also acknowledges the challenges inherent in religious peace building, particularly when religious identity is used to justify exclusion or marginalization.

**In conclusion**, the research underscores the potential of religion to be a significant force for peace, provided its positive aspects are nurtured. Promoting interfaith

dialogue and actively involving religious leaders in peace efforts are essential strategies for harnessing this potential. By focusing on the peace-promoting capabilities of religion, more effective approaches to conflict resolution can be developed, contributing to a more peaceful world.

**Keywords:** Religion, Peace building, Conflict Resolution, Interfaith Dialogue, Reconciliation.

### **Introduction:**

To understand about the role of religions in peace building firstly we need to clarify , what actually peace is? Basically The most meaningful understanding of peace goes beyond simply stopping conflict or war. True peace, known as positive peace, is about building strong, fair societies where people can live together harmoniously. It's not just about the absence of violence; it's about creating environments where justice, equality, and respect for human rights are the norm. According to Johan Galtung, achieving peace means addressing the deep-rooted issues that often lead to conflict, like poverty, inequality, and discrimination. This view of peace isn't just about avoiding war—it's about making sure that everyone has the chance to live a safe and fulfilling life in a community that supports their well-being...(1)

### **Effective role of Religions in Peace Building:**

Religion has the potential to play a powerful role in peace building, helping people reconcile, forgive, and engage in meaningful dialogue. Religious institutions and leaders often hold a unique position of moral authority and trust, allowing them to mediate conflicts, offer guidance, and promote unity. Here are some ways religion can contribute to peacebuilding, along with real-world examples:

#### **1. Building Dialogue and Understanding:**

Religious communities can serve as a bridge between divided groups, fostering interfaith dialogue that builds understanding. Take South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) as an example. Led by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the TRC emphasized the Christian values of truth, forgiveness, and healing. This process helped the country move past the trauma of apartheid, avoiding further conflict and encouraging national reconciliation.

#### **2. Promoting Forgiveness and Reconciliation:**

Many religions teach the importance of forgiveness, which can be a crucial element in post-conflict recovery. In Rwanda, after the horrors of the 1994 genocide, Christian and Muslim leaders played a key role in helping survivors and perpetrators come together. Through community forgiveness campaigns and programs that reintegrated former combatants, religious leaders helped foster reconciliation and healing in deeply divided communities.

#### **3. Mediating Conflicts**

Religious leaders often step in as mediators, using their moral authority to encourage conflicting parties to engage in peaceful negotiations. In Northern Ireland, where Catholic-Protestant tensions led to decades of violence, clergy from both faiths worked behind the scenes to support the peace process that eventually led to the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. Their efforts helped facilitate dialogue between groups long at odds with one another.

#### **4. Providing Moral and Ethical Guidance**

Religious teachings offer a moral compass that can guide individuals and communities toward peace, justice, and reconciliation. In the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, various religious groups have called for peace by emphasizing shared values like justice, mercy, and the sanctity of life. Organizations like Rabbis for Human Rights and the Muslim-Jewish Forum have worked together to promote peace based on mutual respect and coexistence, inspired by their faith.

#### **5. Addressing the Root Causes of Conflict**

Many conflicts stem from deep social injustices, inequality, and exclusion. Religious organizations often address these underlying causes by advocating for social justice and helping marginalized communities. In the Philippines, religious leaders have played a critical role in peace talks between the government and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front, working to protect the rights of Muslim minorities and alleviate poverty. Their involvement contributed to the historic signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro in 2014, which helped resolve a decades-long conflict.

#### **A Real Example: Mindanao, Philippines**

The conflict in Mindanao, involving the Moro Muslim population and the Philippine government, is a powerful example of how religious leaders can bring about peace. Christian, Muslim, and Indigenous leaders worked together to create peace zones and facilitate dialogues between opposing groups. Their joint efforts helped ease tensions and eventually led to the signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro, paving the way for peace after years of unrest. (2)

#### **Role Of Islam In Peacebuilding:**

Islam play a vital role in peacebuilding, emphasizing values such as justice, compassion, and community harmony. Here are some key ways in which Islam contributes to peacebuilding, along with relevant examples:

##### **1. Emphasis on Justice and Equity**

Islam teaches the importance of justice (adl) as a fundamental principle in all aspects of life. The Quran and Hadith emphasize the need to establish justice in society, which is essential for peace. For instance, the Quran states, "O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for Allah..." (Quran 4:135). This commitment to justice encourages Muslims to work towards equitable societies, helping to address grievances that can lead to conflict.

##### **2. Promotion of Forgiveness and Reconciliation**

Forgiveness (maghfirah) is a core tenet of Islam. The Quran and teachings of the Prophet Muhammad encourage believers to forgive others and seek reconciliation. An example of this can be seen in the aftermath of conflicts, where Islamic leaders have facilitated community dialogues aimed at healing and restoring relationships. In many communities affected by violence, initiatives focused on forgiveness and reconciliation have been instrumental in

rebuilding trust and fostering peace.

### **3. Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation**

Islam encourages dialogue with people of other faiths. This principle has led to various interfaith initiatives where Muslims engage with Christians, Jews, and other religious groups to promote understanding and peace. Organizations such as the Muslim World League and The World Assembly of Muslim Youth have participated in interfaith dialogues to foster mutual respect and collaboration on common social issues, such as poverty alleviation and human rights.

### **4. Community Engagement and Social Justice**

Islam places a strong emphasis on community service and social justice, encouraging Muslims to engage in charitable work (*sadaqah*) and support the welfare of their communities. Islamic organizations often play key roles in humanitarian efforts, addressing issues such as poverty, education, and health care, which can reduce social tensions and contribute to peace. For example, during the Syrian refugee crisis, many Muslim charities mobilized resources to provide aid and support, fostering a sense of solidarity and compassion.

### **5. Role of Religious Leaders and Scholars**

Islamic scholars and leaders hold significant influence in their communities and can serve as mediators in conflicts. They often play a critical role in promoting peaceful resolutions and guiding discussions about ethical behavior and moral values. In various conflict situations, such as the Darfur crisis in Sudan, religious leaders have been involved in peace negotiations and reconciliation efforts, using their authority to advocate for nonviolence and cooperation.

### **6. Conflict Resolution Frameworks**

Islamic teachings provide frameworks for conflict resolution that emphasize dialogue and negotiation. The principles of consultation (*shura*) and consensus-building (*ijma*) are essential in Islamic governance and community decision-making. In many Muslim-majority countries, these principles are applied in local governance and community mediation, enabling peaceful resolution of disputes.

#### **Example: The Islamic Peace Conference**

In 2018, an Islamic Peace Conference was held in Malaysia, bringing together scholars, religious leaders, and peace advocates to discuss the role of Islam in promoting peace and preventing violence. The conference focused on the teachings of the Quran and Hadith regarding peacebuilding, reconciliation, and interfaith dialogue, highlighting how Islamic values can guide efforts toward global peace..(3)

#### **Is Religion a source of violence?**

The question of whether religion inherently leads to violence is one that many people grapple with, whether they're critical of religion or deeply faithful. For those who criticize religion, the answer is often a resounding yes, and history seems to support their view. Thinkers like René Girard have pointed to ritual sacrifices as an example of the violent tendencies found in

religions. It's also easy to cite events like the Crusades, the Inquisition in medieval Europe, or jihad movements in Islamic history to argue that religious traditions are fundamentally linked to war, conflict, and persecution. The conclusion drawn by many critics is straightforward: the more religious people are, the more prone they are to violence. The proposed solution, then, is to strip the world of its sacredness—to secularize and modernize religions, thus freeing them from their violent pasts.

On the opposite side, many believers see the notion of religious violence as a contradiction, even a distortion of their faith. They argue that true religious teachings are fundamentally peaceful, aiming to restore the original harmony between heaven and earth, Creator and creation. While violence might be carried out in the name of religion, they contend, it is not condoned by the faith itself. Instead, religious teachings are often exploited for political purposes. Critics, they argue, can only rightly accuse religions of failing to protect themselves against such misuse. As Mark Juergensmeyer's studies have shown, violence isn't confined to any one religion or culture; it can easily infiltrate even the most peaceful of teachings. The real issue arises when religious communities don't effectively promote a culture of peace and non-violence among their followers. Ultimately, it's not religion itself that's to blame, but rather the actions of those who misuse it.

Both of these perspectives offer important insights but also have their limitations. They often rely on rigid definitions of religion and overlook the diversity within religious traditions. Discussions about violence in Islam, Hinduism, or any other faith often involve comparing sacred scriptures with historical events, highlighting discrepancies between the ideals expressed in religious texts and the realities of history. While this approach can be useful, it misses how religious teachings are interpreted and lived out within communities. By separating texts from historical experience, we lose sight of how scripture is continuously reinterpreted and enriched by the lived experiences of believers.

To truly understand the relationship between religion, peace, and violence, we need to look at the broader context. Within the Islamic tradition, for example, there is a wealth of material for addressing issues like peace, religious diversity, and social justice. These are pressing concerns that contemporary Muslim societies must not only tackle internally but also contribute to on a global scale, promoting a culture of peace and coexistence for everyone...(4)

### **RELIGIONS INTOLERANCE, WHY?**

Religious intolerance arises due to a variety of intertwined social, psychological, historical, and political factors. Here are some key reasons behind its occurrence:

1. **Cultural Superiority and Ethnocentrism:** When people perceive their own religious beliefs as superior, it can result in negative attitudes toward other faiths. This sense of cultural dominance often drives intolerance toward those with different spiritual practices.
2. **Fear and Lack of Understanding:** When individuals lack exposure to or understanding of other religions, it can breed fear and misconceptions. This unfamiliarity often leads to stereotyping and prejudice, which in turn fuel intolerance.
3. **Historical Tensions and Rivalries:** Past conflicts between religious groups can leave deep

scars, with discrimination and animosity being passed down through generations. These historical grievances can continue to shape attitudes and behaviors toward certain religions.

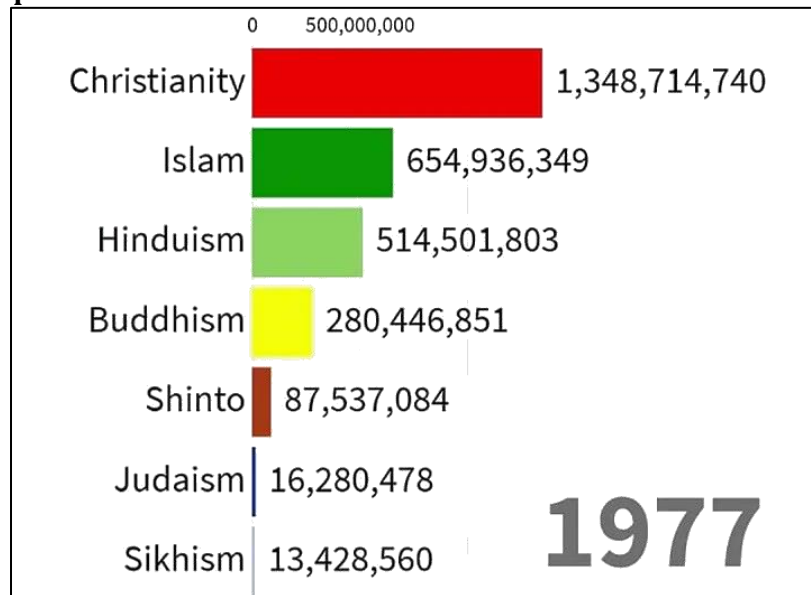
4. **Exploitation of Religious Differences for Political Gain:** Religious divisions are sometimes used as tools by political leaders to create division, consolidate power, or distract from other issues. This manipulation can worsen religious intolerance within societies.

5. **Doctrinal Exclusivity:** Some religions teach that their beliefs are the only path to truth, leading followers to view other faiths as misguided or false. This can create an "us versus them" mentality, fostering intolerance.

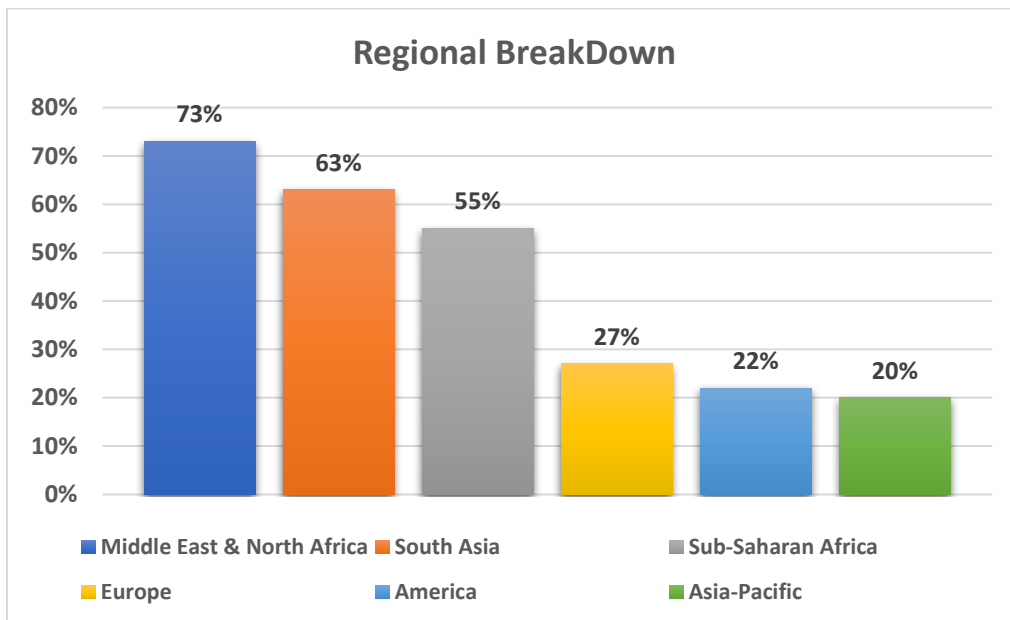
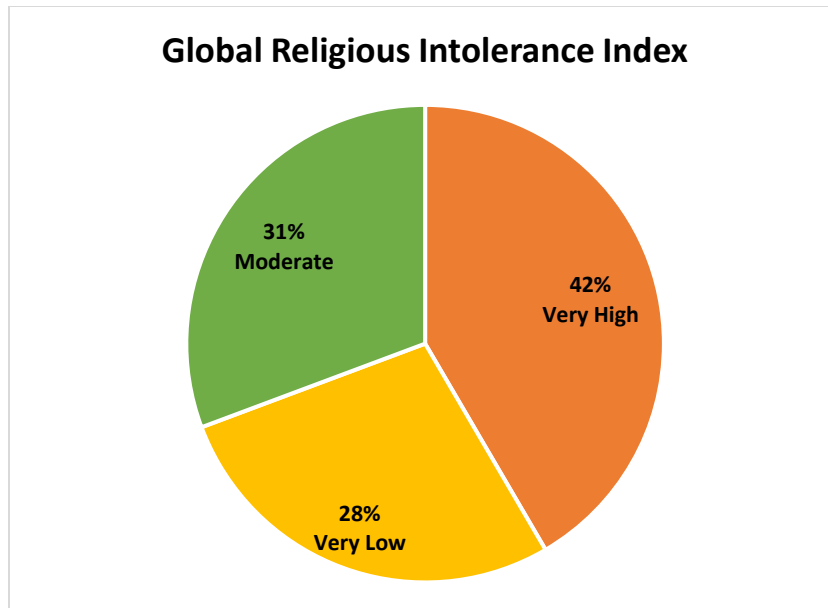
6. **Group Identity and Social Bias:** People often form stronger bonds with those who share similar beliefs. This sense of belonging can result in favoritism toward one's own religious group and negative bias toward others, leading to exclusion or discriminatory behavior.

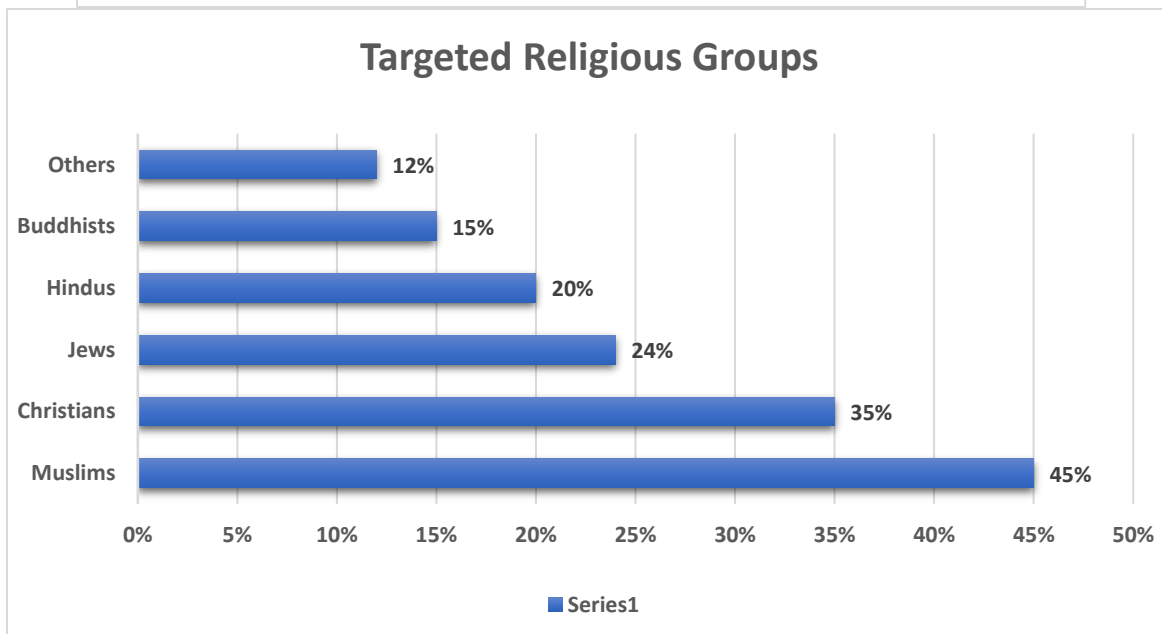
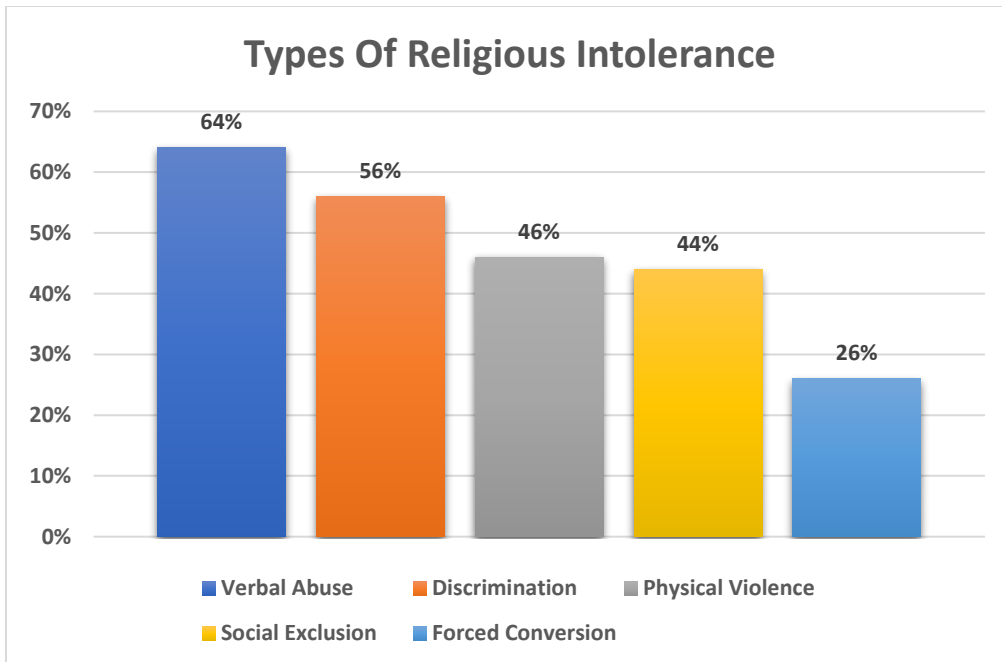
These factors collectively shape the landscape of religious intolerance, influencing how societies perceive and interact with different religious groups.(5)

### Graphical Representation:



**World's Major Religions By Population 1945-2024**





GR By: United States Commission on International Religious Freedom

**PROPHET S.A.W (ROLE MODEL IN PEACEBUILDING):  
SULEH HUDABIYAH..**

The Treaty of Hudaibiyyah was a significant event in early Islamic history. After several failed attempts by the Quraysh to defeat the Muslims, the Muslim community grew stronger.



Following a dream by Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), 1,400 Muslims embarked on a peaceful pilgrimage to Mecca. The Quraysh, however, sent troops to block their entry, prompting the Muslims to change their route and camp at Hudaibiyyah. When negotiations stalled and fears arose about the fate of the Prophet's envoy, Uthman ibn Affan, the Muslims pledged their allegiance to the Prophet under a tree, known as the Pledge of Radwan. Eventually, the Quraysh sent a negotiator, and a treaty was signed, agreeing to a ten-year truce and permitting Muslims to perform the pilgrimage the following year. Although the terms seemed unfavorable to some Muslims, the Prophet (pbuh) accepted the conditions.

The treaty later proved to be a strategic victory, fostering peaceful interactions, strengthening the Muslim community, and attracting many new converts. As a result, the Quraysh eventually allowed Muslims who had fled Mecca to join the Prophet in Medina. The following year, the Muslims performed the pilgrimage in Mecca as agreed, solidifying the treaty's impact.(6)

#### **PROPHET'S S.A.W AFW(IHSAN) WITH ENEMIES..**

Despite all the hardship quraish gave to the prophet (peace be upon him) he did afw( ihsan) with the people of quraish and said,

**"O people of Quraish! surely Allâh has abolished from you all pride of the pre-Islamic era and all conceit in your ancestry, (because) all men are descended from Adam, and Adam was made out of clay."**

He further added:

**"O you people of Quraish! What do you think of the treatment that I am about to accord to you?"**

They replied:

**"O noble brother and son of noble brother! We expect nothing but goodness from you."**

Upon this he said:

**"I speak to you in the same words as Yusuf (the Prophet Joseph) spoke unto his brothers: He said: "No reproach on you this day,"**

[Al-Qur'an 12:92]

**"go your way, for you are freed ones."**

The Prophet (pbuh) entrusted the responsibility of taking care of the Ka'bah and providing water to pilgrims to 'Uthman bin Talhah. He declared that the key to the Ka'bah would remain with 'Uthman and his family for generations to come, ensuring that these duties would stay in their hands forever.(7)

#### **SENSE OF UNITY AMONG THE DIVERSE TRIBE IN MADINA.**

The Constitution of Medina, often referred to as the Charter of Medina, was a groundbreaking agreement established by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) when he arrived in Medina (formerly known as Yathrib) in 622 CE. This document is significant in Islamic history as it is one of the first written agreements that laid the groundwork for a society that included multiple faiths and cultures.

At its heart, the Constitution of Medina aimed to create a sense of unity and cooperation among the diverse tribes and communities living in Medina, including Muslims, Jews, and

various pagan tribes. It was a way to foster a strong sense of community, emphasizing that everyone, regardless of their background, had a place in this new society.

One of the key features of this constitution was the establishment of clear rights and responsibilities for each community. By doing so, it ensured that everyone would be protected and supported, especially during times of conflict. This was crucial for maintaining peace and harmony in a diverse environment.

The document also addressed conflict resolution, providing a framework for how disputes would be handled. It created a governing authority that would apply to all parties involved, ensuring that everyone had a voice in how their community was managed.

Importantly, the Constitution of Medina championed religious freedom. It recognized the right of non-Muslims to practice their faith without interference, allowing for a pluralistic society where diverse beliefs could coexist peacefully. This vision of inclusivity and mutual respect remains a powerful aspect of Islamic teachings today..(8)

### **IMPARTIAL JUSTICE..**

Justice is crucial in building peace because it tackles the underlying causes of conflict and fosters reconciliation, which are vital for lasting harmony. By addressing grievances and holding those who commit crimes or violate human rights accountable, justice helps break the cycles of violence that fuel ongoing conflicts. It also plays a healing role by encouraging truth-telling and reparations, allowing victims to recover, regain their dignity, and rebuild trust within their communities...

Here is the golden example of justice in context of Islam.

The life of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is full of profound examples of justice and fairness. One powerful story highlights his commitment to upholding the principles of justice, regardless of a person's social status.

In Madinah, there was a woman named Fatimah from the noble tribe of Banu Makhzum. When she was found guilty of theft, some people felt uneasy about enforcing the usual punishment, given her family's high status and reputation. They suggested leniency, believing that someone of her background shouldn't face the same consequences as others.

To plead on her behalf, the companions approached Usama bin Zaid, a close and beloved companion of the Prophet, often considered like a son to him. Usama spoke to the Prophet, hoping his influence could persuade him to show leniency. However, upon hearing the request, the Prophet's expression changed, and he addressed the situation sternly:

**"Are you trying to intercede in one of God's prescribed punishments?"**

He then gathered the community and reminded them,

**"The people before you were destroyed because they showed leniency to the noble when they committed crimes, but punished the weak. I swear by Allah, if my own daughter Fatimah had stolen, I would have cut off her hand."**

This incident powerfully illustrates that, to the Prophet, justice was not a matter of social rank or connections. It was a principle that applied equally to all, ensuring that everyone, no matter their status, was treated with fairness. He upheld justice not just as a rule, but as a moral foundation essential to a just society...(9)

Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) was a key figure in promoting peace, focusing on bringing people together through reconciliation, fairness, and compassion. He showed his commitment to resolving conflicts in moments like the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, where he made compromises with the Quraysh to secure a peaceful agreement, even though some of his followers struggled to accept the terms. His dedication to forgiveness was also evident during the peaceful conquest of Mecca, where he chose to pardon his former enemies, setting a powerful example of mercy. In Medina, he worked to create a diverse and inclusive community by introducing the Charter of Medina, which established mutual respect and shared responsibilities for people of different faiths. Through these efforts, the Prophet (s.a.w) showed that peace could be achieved by fostering understanding, engaging in dialogue, and prioritizing justice, creating a foundation for a society where people from various backgrounds could live together in harmony.

### **Conclusion**

Religion and spirituality provide essential, creative tools for fostering peace. Over the past century, religious communities have played significant roles in conflict resolution, and their contributions are becoming even more impactful today. From the nonviolent anticolonial movements led by figures like Mahatma Gandhi and Abdul Ghaffar Khan in the 1920s and 1940s to the growing number of faith-based and interfaith peace initiatives today, the role of religion in peacebuilding is a powerful yet often overlooked story, often overshadowed by political developments.

In the past, religious involvement in peace efforts was more sporadic and unplanned. Now, however, many religious groups and multifaith organizations are making peacebuilding a central focus, establishing systems and structures to support more deliberate and sustained efforts. Religious leaders, laypeople, denominations, commissions, and interfaith organizations have worked together for decades to promote peace, yet the full potential of religion's spiritual and social power in peacebuilding remains untapped.

Today, religious practitioners are engaged at all levels of the peacebuilding process. From high-level negotiations to grassroots efforts, they are actively involved in reconciliation, mediation, healing, and community rebuilding. Their work also extends to peace education and reconciliation efforts in divided communities, demonstrating how religion serves as a deeply personal and transformative force in global peacebuilding.

A significant new trend in interreligious conflict transformation is the increasing integration of spiritual practices—such as prayer, meditation, rituals, and religious dialogue—into peacebuilding processes. These practices are no longer just sources of inspiration; they are becoming integral to dialogue and negotiation, particularly in conflicts where religion plays a major role. This shift underscores the profound influence of faith not only as a motivation for peace but as a key element in the process of achieving it.

Peace isn't just about the absence of conflict; it's about creating a meaningful and lasting state of harmony where people feel content and balanced. While preventing violence, border disputes, or international conflicts is crucial, this "negative peace" alone isn't enough. True peace, or "positive peace," goes deeper. It addresses the root causes of conflict, hate, and violence, and focuses on fostering understanding, justice, and a shared sense of well-being.

As Lee suggests, positive peace provides a framework of values that goes beyond the immediate interests of individuals, communities, or nations. It aims to create a society where justice and harmony are part of everyday life, making peace not just a temporary condition but a lasting way of living together.(10

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