

## INTERFAITH INSIGHT

# Repairing a broken world: The problem of religious violence

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Violence is such a prevalent part of our news and of our lives.

Why do we seem to be caught between our fascination with violence and our desire for peace? At the recent Parliament of the World's Religions, I would go from sessions focused on non-violence, peace and love only to return to my room, turn on the news and hear of violence in Jerusalem, Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan — as well as in America.

Even the local news is filled with shootings, local disputes and car accidents.

I'm not suggesting that the news media is to blame; after all, they know what sells.

The old phrase "if it bleeds, it leads" isn't just a saying, it represents marketing truth. If you are

in doubt, look at the popularity of violent movies and video games.

As a public, we not only want it free on the evening news — we will even pay for it at the theater or video store.



Kindschi

Why does it seem that religion and violence are often mentioned in the same story? Jews and Muslims fighting in Jerusalem, Sunni Muslim members of ISIS burning Shi'a mosques, and violence against churches, mosques, and synagogues around the world.

Is religion to blame? Does religion lead to violence while calling for peace?

These and other questions are being explored at the Jewish/Christian/Muslim dialogue today in Grand Rapids.

Our keynote speakers include Rabbi Dr. Donniel Hartman, president of the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem; Rev. Dr. Cynthia Campbell, former president of McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago; and Dr. Ingrid Mattson, chair and professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Western Ontario.

They will discuss why the great Abrahamic faiths — Judaism, Christianity and Islam — are often seen as a force for evil, but also are seen as a powerful force for good, for repairing a broken world.

Other questions to be explored include:

■ Why do religions seem unable to fulfill their own self-professed mission to create individuals infused with moral sensitivity and societies governed by the highest ethical standards?

■ Does religious devotion blind us to the religious traditions'

core moral teachings?

■ Does selective reading and simplistic interpretation of the Bible and the Qur'an encourage exclusive approaches to faith which denigrate those of a different faith?

■ Why do some people read scripture and find reasons to kill, while others read the same scripture and find reasons to love?

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, in his just-published book "Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence," also addresses many of these issues and concludes that the challenge before us is one of theology.

He writes: "We have not yet done the theological work for a global society in the information age; and not all religions in the world are yet fully part of that conversation. If we neglect the theology, all else will fail. ... We must stand together, people

of all faiths and of none, for we

are all at risk.

"There must be some set of principles that we can appeal to, and be held accountable to, if our common humanity is to survive our religious differences. Religious freedom is about our common humanity, and we must fight for it if we are not to lose it. This, I believe, is the issue of our time."

Our conference pursues the theme, "To Repair the World: How Does Religion Help or Hinder?" and our participants will seek to look carefully and reflect self-critically on both aspects of this topic.

As individuals, we may not be directly involved in violence, but is our silence a part of the problem? Or, do our actions and attitudes about those who believe differently contribute to a community of understanding and respect?

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