Killing In the Name Of God
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# Killing In the Name Of God

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Where are our religious leaders when our need for them is desperate? At the very time when they should be the most vocal, they seem tongue-tied. Since Moses, religious leaders have shown no reluctance in telling politicians what to do. What is called the "prophetic ministry" has often been resented by those of us who are in government, but it has been an important counterbalance to the excesses of power politics. While governments have attended to the practical needs of military strength and factional accommodations, religious groups have insisted on the claims of peace and social justice.

But, rather suddenly, it is the politicians who have championed a just and stable world order, while responsible church leaders have been mute in the midst of truly dangerous religious fanaticism.

Indeed, in most if not all of the world's trouble spots, religious extremism is at the heart of the problem. In Israel, Moslems throw rocks at Jews and Jews shoot back at Moslems. In Northern Ireland. Catholic and Protestant Christians bomb each other as they have for decades. The heretofore secular Saddam Hussein attempts to cast his ambitions as a religious crusade, and Iran's religious leader, the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, calls for a holy war to free the Middle East from the Western infidel. Hindu India and Moslem Pakistan face off against each other, offering the prospect of nuclear weapons if necessary to prove their points. And within India, the Hindus fight the Sikhs. In East Timor, Moslems slaughter Catholics. In Sudan, Christians, Moslems and animists kill each other.

All of this killing is done with the absolute certainty that God wants it so. If thine enemy offends thee, rub him out. Indeed, it is believed that to lose one's life in

God's cause is to die a martyr's death and win a reward in heaven. The notion that God demands blood does not just pop into the head of the average person. Bloodshed is an acquired religious taste. It is acquired because it is taught by the ayatollahs of the world, by the Ian Paisleys and the Meir Kahanes. It is taught, and it can be untaught, but not by silence.

Where are the voices of interfaith reconciliation in all this turmoil? The various faiths remain mute in the face of religiously inspired calamity. As a matter of world necessity, religious leaders must speak loudly and clearly on what their faith demands and what it condemns. One would hope that the most insistent demands from all faiths would be for humility and reconciliation and love. One would hope that the strongest condemnations from all faiths would be for intolerance and hatred and holy wars. Surely religious leaders can devise a forum for a common commitment to religious peace.

Here is one suggestion that may save a lot of lives. The pope should issue an invitation to an interfaith selection of widely recognized religious leaders. He should present a draft document stating that violence in the name of religion is contrary to the will of God. Finally, he should call for the creation of a standing forum of religious leaders to address issues of religious violence. Just as the Security Council addresses political causes of international conflict, so religious causes of conflict could be addressed by a council of religious leaders. Where religion is the problem, it is up to religious people to seek the answers.

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