

Understanding Faith-Based Mediation: A multidimensional model.

This paper reflects on the necessity and efficacy of a Faith-Based Mediation approach for Dispute Resolution, and intends to answer three leading questions: First, why is Faith-Based Mediation necessary for the religious communities and people? Second, what are the fundamental referents of a Faith-Based mediated process? And third, how can a Mediator be useful in Faith-Based Mediation? This essay constitutes a broad view on an alternative conflict resolution method, which is the preferred option for significant numbers of religious communities in different world regions. Even though it reflects primarily the vision from Christian communities in the United States of America, it also considers some references to other cultures, races, and countries.

On The Nature of Conflict in Religious Communities

Conflict means losing something, and the expressed desire to recover it. Conflict is an action-reaction process, is relational in nature. At the time a conflict is recognized, a position of “holding-on” is prevalent over a “letting-go” one. Conservation of Resources Theory predicts that when individuals’ personal (self-perception, self-value), social (friends, support networks), or economic (job, education, housing) resources are threatened, “a response mechanism is triggered to defend against this loss of resources” (Canetti, Hobfoll, Pedahzur and Zaidise, 2010, p. 576). Conflict can be represented as a natural outcome of opposing points of view, competition for scarce resources, demands for full satisfaction of agreements, and a myriad of additional reasons. Conflict derives from being different. Stated in short, the wider the differences between people interests and expectations

(communities or nations), the greater the probability of conflict emergence. Recognizing and respecting other people's right to be different from me, as valuable as my right to be different from them, would build the "peaceful zone" for every relationship. Nevertheless, refraining desires on pretended or actual rights is not one of the pervasive features in human nature; it is a difficult task to accomplish (Ross, 2006).

Dissenting ¹ is a source of conflict too. The dissenter may be a disturbing agent for the shared value system and a potential source for conflict. Freedom to express personal ideas sometimes clash with "mainstream" ideas, leading to differences that may escalate into arguments, disputes, and conflicts. This is commonly seen within religious communities and among them. Stark, in *The Triumph of Christianity* (2012) emphasizes: *"Religious dissent is inevitable because no single religious body can serve the entire spectrum of human religious preferences. In any society, some people prefer a very lax and permissive religion (or not at all); others want a somewhat more vigorous religion; while still others seek an intense and strict religious life."* Flexibility to listen, interpret, and respect dissenting opinions may help to acknowledge differences as such, and to not take them as menaces or attacks to the prevailing belief system.

At the community level, religions and denominations face the challenge of "satisfying divergent markets", dealing with dynamic communities in which people express desires and needs that may be closer or further from orthodoxy and orthopraxis. Different religions and denominations take their place in a continuum of "religious market." A sort of implied

¹ The action of holding or expressing opinions, or acting in ways that depart from the common, officially expressed, or approved doctrines.

agreement results when people commit to participate in a determined religious community, an understanding on the acceptance of general creeds, codes, and practices that lead the life in that community.

Rasul (2009, p. 3) states: *"[R]eligion is a strong basis for identity, particularly when religious difference coincides with other demarcation lines, such as political, ethnic, economic or geographic. Religion is also social, offering the individual a belonging to an experienced sense of community of fellow believers. In this sense, religion is 'a compass' for the individual as well as the religious community; it tells you where you belong and where to proceed. It is this social dimension that allows religion to bring people together, discuss matters that affect their lives and develop processes to address issues and concerns, e.g. peace building processes."* In *Cognitive Science, Religion, and Theology* (2011), Barret holds that religion plays a strong role in group identification, *"through common shared experiences participating in what seem to be profoundly meaningful life-events, and through shared doctrinal beliefs. Note, however, for religious beliefs to serve as group identifiers, they cannot be beliefs that everyone shares, or no one would be set off."*

But human nature is not unique, nor fixed; it is diverse and dynamic, prone to change and adjust. When too much "kinetic" (movement) energy is accrued in a community, some people promote changes and some others resist them (Duffey and Nash, 2008). Managing the energy flow in the system is an important task in the religious leader hands, but sometimes, the energy passes the threshold and conflict arises. "Yeses" and "noes" are heard everywhere.

At the personal level, conflict derives from losing harmony within people, and that condition lead them into a state of being not compatible with the scriptures teaching. From a Christian approach, the church functions as a means of making efficiently present the necessary unity between a worshipping community and the liturgy. In this way, church and its practices function as a reference system for keeping or restoring harmony. John Paul II in *Christifidelis Laici* 55, as cited by Fisher (2013, p. 249), "*suggests a further application of this... characteristic to the church. According to this image, Christ is the vine through which divine life and the power of the Spirit flows, members of the body of Christ are the branches who, drawing upon this power, bear fruit for the benefit of the whole, the Kingdom of God. The individual members exist therefore in unity each other by virtue of their unity with Christ. The Church in its very construction as a mystery of unity, exhibits a realm spiritual truth beyond the reach of observation or reason.*"

Scriptures and worship constantly remember to community members that living peacefully and in harmony with other member of the same group (and with everybody else) is an obligation, not an option. This philosophy is synthesized in two maxims: "*Treat others the same way you want them to treat you*" (Luke 6:31), and "*So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets*" (Matthew 7:12). Conflicting with another community member is more than a mere dispute between equals; it represents a disruptive action against the essence of that community and a factor for distantness in the relationship with God. The believer is not as close as possible to God when battles against other community members: "*Love of God entails loving acts toward our neighbors. And moral behavior resides foremost in acting out of duty, with devotion to and*

love of God. An act is truly moral, then, if it is done for God's sake first." (Corrigan, et al. 2012, p. 245).

Emmanuel Levinas, one the greatest Jewish philosophers of the twentieth century, wrote several essays mainly directed to gentiles and Christians. In *A Religion for Adults*, (p. 13), he states: *"A truth is universal when it applies to every reasonable being. A religion is universal when it is open to all. In this sense the Judaism links in the Divine to the moral has always aspired to be universal. But the revelation of morality, which discovers human society, also discovers the place of election, which is in this universal society, returns to the person who receives this revelation. This election is made up not of privileges but of responsibilities. It is a nobility based not on author's rights [droit d'auteur] or on a birthright [droit d'aînesse] conferred by a divine caprice, but on the position of each human I [moi]... The basic intuition of moral growing-up perhaps consists in perceiving that I am not the equal of the Other. This applies in a very strict sense: I see myself obligated with respect to the Other; consequently I am infinitely more demanding of myself than of others."* (p. 22-24; excerpt from Putnam, 2008).

Following Levinas' reasoning, we human beings have a fundamental obligation to make ourselves available to the needs and suffering of other people, becoming closer, more understanding, and ready to help in their healing process. Thus, for the believer, going into a conflict and keeping on it, become not only a problem to solve, unpleasant and inconvenient in the general sense, but also an additional burden, because of such state imposes another conflict *per se*, from the inability to regain the equilibrium and peace of mind that both the self and the community demand. God is not pleased from fighting acts.

Church intervention in helping the troubled person results as a natural outcome in the religious community. It is not a matter of preference or desire, to ask for or to offer assistance, but a compelling action to follow from the accepted guiding principles in the community, and to help the conflicting parties to restore their relationship with God (Benjamin, 2007, p. 248). Both, religious leaders and community members, have a duty in offering and asking for intervention in searching for harmony restoration (Sobourne, 2003, p. 385). Only through God's intervention internal and community harmony can be reestablished. The principle is present and fundamental in the three major monotheistic religions: "*Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid*" (John 24:17); "*Al-Salâmu `alaykum -- `alaykum al-salâm*"; *Shalom Aleichem, ma'asim tovim, gemilut chasadim*.

Fundamental Referents for Faith-based Mediation

Faith-based actors, interveners or mediators can be characterized as individuals, institutions and organizations who are willing to assist people in conflict, motivated and inspired by their religious traditions, principles and values.

Multiple definitions of Mediation abound in the field literature. Scheb and Sharma (2013, p. 500) define it as: "*an informal, non-adversarial process whereby a neutral third person facilitates resolution of a dispute between parties by exploring issues and settlement alternatives.*" Faith-based mediators face a delicate situation that claims for a different approach. They must show not only a clear disposition and compromise to assist the disputants to find a solution, but also to deeply involve and participate in the new triad that is then formed. Mediating in the faith arena demands caring, loving and compassion, on top

of all the usual knowledge, skills, and experiences that other mediators require. The purpose is not only (and not always) to find a solution, solve a problem, settle an agreement, or go away from the conflict; the main goal is to help people to heal from suffering and pain, to move from a disruptive relation to a new constructive state of mind (Bush and Folger, 1996). Faith-based mediation pursues to reconstruct positive and enduring relationships, whenever it is possible and convenient. The original motivation to intervene is to regain harmony and peace (Newberger, 2013).

Genesis (1:27-30; 2:20-25) depicts God's design for human beings interactions in perfect harmony: the relationship between people and God, between people and each other, and between people and the creation. Conflict arises when these relationships brake (Kasper, D., 2013).

There are several ways to categorize conflicts. Miller and Roloff (2007, p. 292) distinguish three main areas: 1) conflicts that end without resolution; 2) serial arguing; and 3) perpetual problems. The perception of the conflict as resolvable or irresolvable plays a role on the problem dynamics. Individuals that perceive a conflict as irresolvable may be passive in looking for solutions, have a greater resistance for solving a conflict, and show a greater motivation to harm the opponent in the process (Courtney and Roloff, 2006, p. 299).

Most of the time, when a faith-based mediator is called into action, the conflict has overcome the authority and resolution capacity of the immediate leadership in a religious community. Day-to-day conflicts are generally in the domain and control-power of pastors, priests, rabbis, or imams. Is only when the quarrel between people from their communities grows without solution, and the internal efforts to settle are inefficient, that intervention of

an external mediator is necessary. By that time, is frequent to find high-tempered people and high-resistance attitudes for a new approach to solve the conflict.

Communities are intra-culturally diverse. Even though they share a common belief system, individuals in the group have different backgrounds, stories, purposes, and conflict management styles (Kazan, 1999, p. 252). Intra-group conflict can be separated in three categories. The first one, *relationship conflict*, is characterized by interpersonal incompatibilities among group members that are associated with tension, animosity and annoyance. The second one, *task conflict*, refers to disagreements about the content of their decisions and involves differences in viewpoints, ideas, and opinions. The third one is called *conflict labeled process*, and “refers to disagreements among group members about the way that tasks should be accomplished, how responsibilities should be assigned, and how assignments should be delegated” (Vodosek, 2007, p. 346).

From the previous paragraph, is easily understandable that the nature of issues at conflict is diverse. Among the most common ones are those in which people think that their beliefs or opinions are not respected, or even denigrated. At some others, people are perceived as departing from the mainstream and are subject of critics or hostile acts. In those cases, the most common request is to have their views respected or tolerated. Looking for a “settlement” is not the purpose on these differences, but to regain a sense of harmony and peaceful coexistence. But when a dispute has gone for a long time without adequate consideration, usually escalates to a higher intensity and a broader field of issues at matter, and is frequent to observe that it involve other people into the conflict.

According to Jim Van Yperen, author of *Making Peace* (2001) “most Christians hold false notions about conflict.” For “left-handed believers” (those who see God as all-loving and who want to emphasize acceptance and forgiveness, conflict is sin, “*the result of human rebellion in the Garden of Eden. Therefore, all conflict is bad*”). “Right-handed believers”² view conflict in terms of power and control. The former ones, are prone to love and be positive and keep peace “by avoiding, denying or running from conflict.” The latter ones consider themselves as invested of authority through knowledge and “keep peace by reactive, defensive, and aggressive responses.”

Thus, it is important for a community leader to be aware of the relational dynamics in the community, and to be close and open to all the people in need of attention. In multiple cases, an apology –a genuine expression of regret- can be really powerful to open mind and hearts of the disputants and to free the way to healing and reconciliation (Jones and Georgakopoulos, 2009, p. 13). It is not only a matter of righteousness and justice balance seeking; divine forgiveness and human forgiveness are fundamental goals in the conflict resolution expected outcome (Thomas and Sutton, 2008).

Positive effects of religious beliefs in conflict treatment.

Religion leaders and organizations offer credibility as trusted institutions; a respected set of values; moral warrants to oppose injustice; unique leverage for promoting reconciliation among conflicting parties; capability to mobilize community... and a sense of calling that often inspires perseverance in the face of major and otherwise debilitating obstacles (Smock , 2008). Additionally, faith-based mediation helps to protect reputation

² Those who consider God as omnipotent, and are inclined to emphasize truth and authority.

and operates in a way compatible with the general practices of the religious community, the “Church way”:

“...[T]he church, because of its transformative character, has an impact on the commitments and behaviors of those who participate in its life and mission. In the church’s worship, liturgy, proclamation, teachings and outreach, knowledge of God and the divine economy of salvation becomes personally significant; the knower’s relationship with Christ and through Christ with the community of faith becomes highly valued; and acceptance of this truth in faith is expressed through new models of conduct” (Fisher, 2013, p. 241).

Sometimes, mental health issues are present and play a role in the evolution of a conflict (Assari, 2013). Reutter (2012) reported that *“both spirituality and religiosity seem to act as coping resources which mediate and/or moderate the relationship between perceived stress and anxious / depressive symptomatology.”* (op. cit. p. 69). Frequently, high conflict people are participants in disputes, both in the legal court system and in the religious community domain. Borderline, Narcissistic, Antisocial, and Histrionic personalities are highly prone to engage in conflicts and to show a greater persistence in them, usually reaching potentially or factually dangerous behaviors (Eddy, 2008).

From a sociological approach, *“American Culture is considerably individualistic and is characterized by features such as weak family ties, professional relations, result-orientation, and individual independence”* (Hofstede, 2011). Religious community play an important role to counterbalance the general features of the American society: they woven strong family webs, share an additional value system, build active and functional groups, and provide higher goals and values for a meaningful life: *“Since in collectivistic societies loyalty toward a*

group is extremely important, the communication should be in conformity with the group's interests and conventions" (Yeganeh, 2011, p. 227). There is no much room for "outsider mediators" to establish a confident relationship and to lead a "healing conversation" if they "do not speak the same language." When reasoning is proven inefficient, a new type of intervention is necessary. Bede Griffiths ³, (quoted by Gustafson, 2012, p. 231) through his *Christian yoga*, endorses a return to the understanding of the world in a sacramental unity with the divine: "*A mediator is required to move from dualism (determinateness) to unity (consummation)*"; in his view, "*the great reconciler [between a person and God] is Christ.*" In this sense, the role model for faith-based mediators is high, really high.

The need for Church leaders and religious communities to intervene in conflict solution can be essayed as a matter of authority, competence or jurisdiction. In addition to the autonomic character that churches have been invested with in some countries (v. gr., United States of America), some fundamental referents are the following: by definition, believers have surrendered an important segment of their personal will to the Church or religious community and count on divine intervention to ease conflict and pain: Psalms 55:22 - *Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: ...* Additionally, Saint Augustine of Hippo (354-430) reinforced the competence of Church in dealing with subjects perceived or defined as religious. He clearly dealt with Church and state as separate authorities, being the former responsible for the "Heavenly City" and deriving its authority

³ Bede Griffiths [OSB Cam^{\[1\]}](#) (17 December 1906 – 13 May 1993), born Alan Richard Griffiths and also known by the end of his life as Swami Dayananda ("bliss of compassion"), was a British-born [Benedictine monk](#) who lived in [ashrams](#) in South [India](#) and became a noted [yogi](#). He has become a leading thinker in the development of the dialogue between [Christianity](#) and [Hinduism](#). Griffiths was a part of the [Christian Ashram Movement](#). From Wikipedia.

from God. Leighon and López (2013), emphasize: *“both institutions set rules for individuals to live their lives, but only the Church extends its concern to earthly conduct that will get one to heaven as well.”* But, maybe the most known and clearly stated jurisdiction for spiritual competence comes from Luke 20:25 *“And He said to them: “Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.”* Muslim cultures, *“have trusted in their manifest destiny as a community submissive to God” following a defined orthopraxis as the rule of their behavior, both in civil and religious life. No clear distinction is stated under the Shar’*a* supreme authority”* (Corrigan, Denny, Eire and Jaffee, 2012, p. 149).

Ethical living is more than a referent and adherence to rules and living regulations in religious communities. In monotheist religions, ethics is *“interwoven with worship, ritual, authority, community and personal spirituality in the total composition of religious life... It is a kind of piety, a sense of group, and an embrace of tradition, as much as it is a guide to knowledge of duty, justice, and compassion”* (Corrigan, et al., p. 205). Jewish Talmudic tradition (affirmed by Orthodox and Traditionalist communities) asserts that *“the Torah received by Moses and elaborated by the rabbinic sages contains no fewer than 613 covenantal commandments or mitzvoth (sing.: mitzvah)... including 248 commandments to perform certain acts (prescriptions, e.g., to honor one parents’) and 365 commandments to refrain from certain acts (proscriptions, e.g., not to murder).”* (op. cit., p. 210).

In summa, Faith-based Mediation can be represented as a Meta-Mediation process in which at least to belief reference systems and codes are simultaneously acting: the church sacred texts and moral codes in one hand, and the government judiciary system in the other

one. Two domains in a delicate balance within frequently blurred factual community frontiers.

Potentially negative effects of religious beliefs in conflict treatment.

Religious conflicts tend to aggregate civil or “state” elements to spiritual ones. When a conflict arises within a religious community, it is almost impossible to divide those elements from the disputants’ rationales (Svenson, 2007, p. 931). Being a religious community member is defining: it imposes on believers a preconceived way to understand the world as it should be, not as it is; religion is heuristics, hermeneutics and cosmogony at the same time (Corrigan, et al., 2012, p. 175). When religious practices are carried to an extremist level, like in literal and intolerant scriptures adherence, there is a tendency to set fixed disputant positions and little room is available for a shared understanding or alternative outcome (Armstrong, 2002, p. 363).

Race and culture may have an influence in the perception of the problems and the evolution of the disputes. Cohen, et al. (2009) reported a stronger relationship between white American citizens and conservative religiosity and “doctrinal orthodoxy” (the belief that religious text are literally true, immutable, and inerrant), than Latino and Black citizens. For the latter ones, there is a tendency to approach issues from a group interest and social development agenda. Cultural and creed bias may have a strong effect in determining positions and interests in a dispute.

Faith-based mediators are subject to their own interpretation, culture, and belief system or creed, and must deal with their personal bias, by constantly being aware of it and making superior efforts to keep on their facilitator role for the healing and forgiving

process, and not succumb to the temptation to impart justice or decide on the merits of the cause. There might be a certain dogmatic notion on the assumed existence of a humane pathway to conflict resolution, that starts with the sincere and honest repentance of the offender, followed by the forgiveness response from the offended, and the consequent reconciliation between them. This approach is certainly desirable *per se*, but highly idealized and surely less frequently observed than expected.

Conclusions

Dealing with religious conflicts, conventional mediators may face a situation in which their professional background would be not enough to fully understand the parties. Expertise may not compensate the lacking of religious participation and acknowledge of feelings, needs, expectations, and spiritual disturbances on the disputants. Compassion and empathic involvement are generally more useful in religious conflicts, than extensive and intensive legal knowledge. Emotions, creeds, empathy, and deep understanding, are key concepts in this field. Communication is also fundamental to understand the nature of conflict, the issues at conflict, the feelings and desires of the disputants; and for finding paths to allow people to move away from negative-destructive (or conflicting approaches), to positive-constructive (or transformative and self-transcending) ones (Bush and Folger, 1996, p. 66).

The principal role of faith-based mediators is to act as facilitators of positive conversations between the conflicting parties, “*asking proper questions, in the right way, at*

the right time"⁴. The challenge is to be an interested being to assist the troubled persons to reflect and meditate, to understand and empathize, to move from a destructive path to an enriching and transcendent one; to drive suffering and pain to flow away, and fill the void with healing, through forgiveness and reconciliation: *"Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him."* (Luke 17:3). To gain trust from the parties, faith-based mediator must speak truth in love and encourage participants to do so, and exercise imagination in constructing a new and shared story from the joint effort of the disputant parties. Engaging people into a common envisioned understanding - and possible outcome- is a powerful tool for them to move ahead (Nagao and Page, 2005).

According to Justin Barret, author of *Born Believers* (2012), "several studies indicate that commitment to a religious belief system and participation in a religious community is associated with many positive outcomes. Actively religious people have been shown to enjoy more mental and emotional health, recover from trauma more quickly, have longer and happier lives; are more generous, volunteer more, and actively contribute to communities more than nominally religious or nonreligious people do." For religious-community members, dealing with conflicting needs, demands, and desires, keeping in mind that they are members of a religious community, and taking into account the shared reference value-system, promote a well-being status that empower a person to deal with conflict in a more harmonious way. It helps to stay away of conflict in a first level, and to deal with conflict and recover from the stress that it produces, in a better way.

⁴ William Pownall, a deep-faith person, outstanding mediator, and international peacemaker, as professor of Dispute Resolution and Religion course in the Master of Dispute Resolution program. Straus Institute for Dispute Resolution, Pepperdine University, School of Law. Fall 2013.

Faith-based mediation brings freedom to disputant parties, and freedom is one of the most appreciated values for both, a person and a religious community; freedom as the natural state of not having unbearable burden, pain or suffering. *“God wants us to be free because he himself is free. Whatever other benefits mediation may bring, it brings freedom. It is a kind of truth that is making us free, to quote St John: a truth going beyond simple dialectics of right and wrong, justice and injustice, or winners and losers”* (Fielding, 2010).

Additionally, faith-based mediation is especially useful to keep disputes in the private domain; brings a sense of intimacy, understanding, and confidentiality superior to other mediation approaches; fosters openness in communication by offering attentive, active and interested listening; is not driven for a strong commitment to reach a goal, but for seeking the adequate rhythm and pace to keep parties conversant and looking for common ground, and swiftly move ahead. The process itself constitutes a high-value outcome. Looking backwards brings comprehension and clarifies reasons; looking forward draws the pathway to reestablish damaged relationships and heal. Every person is a creature of God and deserves respect for that single notion ⁵.

Abrahamic religions share a fundamental belief in a supreme entity, God, which is the only one, the creator of everything, and the leader of her creatures’ lives. God is the

⁵ In Jewish tradition, there is a commitment (received as a gift), coming from the covenant with God, to establish a system of justice based on dialogue and mutual understanding, avoiding a situation in which a party prevails or wins on detriment of the other, “because that is not good for the community”. The challenge is to build a set of “reasonable rules reasonably enforced”: Elliot Dorff, invited speaker to Dispute and Religion Course. Pepperdine University, School of Law. October 8th, 2013.

pattern, the reference, the moral code, the arbitrator, the final judge. From God to God is the cycle of life. Everything starts with God, in God, and everything returns to him.

Religions and religious communities are social constructs that function as society builders. They link people through a shared belief-system and teach people to behave and function as responsible community members; they help people to bear pain and suffering that comes with life, and assist people in distressing moments. Religious communities are the closest representations of societies, connecting families to states and nations. Through religions commandments and commitments, people can more easily -and clearly- distinguish between right and wrong, and learn to get along and thrive. Faith-based mediation is oriented to a “being” culture, in which peace of mind is cherished, and seeks to regain harmony in the person and the community, not to render a verdict of dominance or victory of one party over the other. The main purpose is to transcend from a “me”-“you” conversation, to an “us” one. It is essentially reunifying in character, getting people back as *one* with themselves, *one* with other community members, and *one* with God. Forgiveness is the source of peace, because is a condition for reconciliation, a source of re-empowering the injured one, and a way to move ahead, overcoming suffering and harm: “*Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.*” (Romans 14: 17-19).

Mediating a conflict in a faith-based environment represents an opportunity, a challenge, and a gift, because the dispute can be converted into a process of revelation and love, as referred by Gustafson (2012, p. 300), quoting the words of the German philosopher

Schelling (1809): *“Every being can be revealed only in its opposite. Love only in hatred, unity only in conflict.”*

Understanding Faith-based Mediation: A multidimensional model.

Faith-based mediation is a complex process that dynamically integrates three dimensions: the technical one, involving knowledge and skills for the mediation element itself; the humane one, which is based on the ability to recognize personal, emotional, and relational elements in the conflict, to promote better understanding between the conflicting agents and foster solutions seeking; and the transcendent one, which relies on the religious belief system and pursues divine intervention into the dispute to move the parties from conflict to reconciliation and peace-making.

The three-dimensional model (3D FB/Med) proposed here is a poly-chronic, multi-active, and high-context one. It is fundamentally supported by a technical platform upon which the humane and transcendent components work and can be successfully used. The necessary triad must be patiently and cautiously built as the process evolves. There is not a single straightforward approach to a faith-based mediation process. This model requires not only knowledge, skills, and experience in the mediation arena, but also a sincere and honest deep-faith nature in the participants. This is the essential component and determining factor for the sought outcomes to reach.

The Technical component.

Based on STAR model developed by Straus Institute for Conflict Resolution at Pepperdine University School of Law, the technical component of the 3D FB/Med can be represented in a matrix of five stages (S) and their associated tasks (T), actions (A), and results (R). The stages are: Convening, Opening, Communicating, Negotiating, and Closing.

The Faith-based mediator can opt to follow the stages in a sequential way or commute among them according to the process evolution, but shall maintain direction and control as to reach the targets. Each stage demands the clear definition of specific tasks to answer a “what” question (the target you are trying to accomplish), and actions, aimed to

determine the “how” element (the way you are to reach your goals). The results to obtain for each stage are the willingness to participate in the mediation process (convening); a sense of safety and hope for reaching a desired result in the opening stage; the right environment and convenient procedure to express every party’s reasons, motives, drivers and expectations from the process in the communicating stage; flexible, creative, and innovative stances for the negotiating one; and, the capacity to make an informed decision in the closing element of the model. Clarifying the issues, interests, and drivers, as well as drawing the navigation chart are the fundamental goals in the technical dimension.

The Humane Element.

Mediating in the Faith-based field is a delicate and sophisticated process that requires artistry to be carried on. The purpose is beyond helping the parties to understand better the nature of the conflict they are living in, or to find solutions and reach a settlement. In Faith-based mediation, the main and most desired outcome is to reconcile people in a transcendent way, moving ahead from conflict and looking forward to a restored relationship, enriched and fortified by the experience.

The mediator is the causal agent to promote a renewed desire in conflicting people to try to understand each other better, and to learn from the other party’s perspective how the conflict was formed and in what ways can be resolved, while both parties grow and thrive from it. The art of sensing and identifying the real, and commonly unperceived or distorted elements in the conflict, helps the mediator to discover what is important for the relationship and what elements must be addressed to promote people’s healing and relationships restoration. The reconciliation outcome is the final goal to achieve. Helping to move suffering people from a damaged relationship towards a solid and long-lasting one needs that people dare to trust again, to believe again that sharing feelings, emotions, stories, and reasons for getting involved into a conflict can be re-interpreted and redirected to a constructive conflict management approach to understand each other, to trust each other, to reunite beyond the dispute.

To be effective, the mediator must promote open and sincere communication, identify the deep causes of the conflict, seek to create a just outcome, ask the disputants to

examine their own contribution to the conflict, and stimulate the offering of sincere and sound apologies to promote forgiveness and reconciliation. The offender and the offended must be helped to reach a sensitive state to honestly connect their feelings, satisfy the need for validation and reassurance, and to move ahead in a new harmonious and restored relationship. Approaching, communicating, and connecting people are the key components in this dimension.

The Transcendent factor.

Religious belief-system in the Faith-based mediation field is the essential and transcendent factor. It serves as the context, the method, and the medium to develop the mediation process. It defines the whole set of values that may move people to know, understand, apologize, forgive, and reconcile.

The mediator in the Faith-based process is necessarily a deep-faith person, with solid and extensive knowledge on scriptures, sacred texts, and religious references to apply for helping the disputants to better understand what the divine expect from them, how the conflict damages the inner self and the relationship to other creatures of God. The mediator is helpful in the process by promoting education and reflection on the necessity of being in full harmony with God and her creation (other people). The mediator is successful when reaching the deepest feelings in the conflicting parties asking them what role's God is in the conflict and how they may invoke his divine intervention to help them to forgive, restore the relationship, and move ahead. The Faith-based mediators are not only third neutral facilitators for settling the dispute; their major role is to serve as a connecting agent between the distressed people in conflict and the divine. The way to promote and reach this goal is by praying, fasting, reflecting, and rediscovering within the disputant parties that God made his creatures to love and thrive, not to fight and annihilate each other.

There is no standard procedure to move people's feelings by touching their hearts, but the Faith-based mediators know that their call is to promote an illuminating process for people living in the darkness of conflict and despair. Compassion, caring for others, loving ourselves and others, are relevant elements in the healing process, but, eminently, loving God is the most solid way to find common ground and surpass the barrier of conflict, a

barrier that prevents people from fulfilling and transcendent lives. Invoking divine participation and enlightening in the process is a fundamental component in seeking for the desired outcomes. Going back to basic texts, commandments, and teachings are powerful tools for better interpreting what conflict means and how it affects divine creation. The fundamental components in the religious belief-system provide not only common ground but also the most meaningful understanding for a shared vision, which commonly opens ways for restoring relationships.

Appeasing primitive emotions, promoting reasoning and fairness, touching hearts, and re-connecting people through the gospel and revealed divine purpose is the way to finally orchestrate a three dimensional dynamic process, which starts with a navigation chart for turbulent waters, moves on to the deeper artistry of understanding people's nature and behavior, and goes higher to reconnect nature and nurture, material and spiritual spheres to the divine creator. Every Faith-based mediator must discover how to approach and touch, how to lead and reach the greatest goals for deep, honest, and sincere believers: be one with the creator and her creatures.

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