İstanbul Üniversitesi
İlahiyat Fakültesi

Din ve Dünya Barışı

Uluslararası Sempozyum

International Symposium on Religion and the World Peace

26–28 Nisan 2007
İstanbul Üniversitesi Rektörlük Binası, Beyazıt, İstanbul

İstanbul 2008
IV. OTURUM (10.00-11.30)

27 Nisan 2007 Cuma/27 April 2007 Friday

IV. OTURUM (10.00-11.30)
A SALONU: Eğitim, Ahlak Ve Barış/Education, Ethics and Peace
Başkan/Chair: Prof. Dr. Halis Ayhan, Marmara Univ., YÖK üyesi

Her Dilde Barış: Hoşgörü Ve Dünya Barışı İçin Din Eğitimi/ Pax Mundi Per Linguas: Religious Education For Tolerance And The World Peace

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This paper will address religious education in Maine within a context of language and recent legal issues raised before the courts. We start with an analysis of existing structures and religious institutions and proceed to ask some fundamental questions such as: How is it possible to combine successfully religious concerns and social activism? How do we educate our children to grow up to be responsible, good citizens who will promote tolerance and world peace? Are there impediments in our modern society that militate against the formation of a religious value system? What role does language play in religious education and world peace? Maine, a rural American state, provides us with a good testing ground for all of these issues. Support for religious education has always been a thorny question and, most recently, the Maine courts have spoken against it. This is indeed a difficult issue and it has divided the federal and the state level. President Bush has not hidden his allegiance to the Christian right, but is being challenged by the courts. At the basis of these
divergent views lies the fundamental, traditional opposition between State and Religion, an opposition that has fueled political rhetoric not only in America, but around the world. Language is thus an inherent element in all of this, and appreciation of cultural diversity *a sine qua non*.

Any discussion of world peace is not only embedded in politics, but also rooted in perceptions of who we are and what we believe, i.e. religion, and thus the very reason for this conference. It is a pleasure to be surrounded by so many religion scholars and their expertise can certainly enlighten us about the potential of world peace, even if such attainment is questionable, given our civilization’s history. Since my own specialty is languages and linguistics, I am certainly not one of these experts. But whatever I have to say, still can throw light on our subject, because the basic nexus of our discussions concerns values that all of us share.

As indicated in the abstract of my paper, I see world peace and religion through the glasses of my particular training in foreign language education and my comments are clearly biased, though tempered by my practical experiences as an International Exchange administrator, Program Director, and Academic Chair. My opinions may thus well need to be modified, therefore *caveat emptor*. Ultimately, having been educated in Europe and in the United States, it should also be noted that I am psychologically the product of international exchange and perhaps even a good example of successful acculturation.

The simple fact that we are here, that we are engaged in multi-layered discussion of world peace and religion, bespeaks serious personal and institutional commitment, bound to be rewarding and bound to bear fruit well into the future. It is particularly gratifying that at this conference we have an audience that does not believe that world peace and religion are mutually exclusive, but instead is convinced that they are indeed intimately linked, and that there are reasons to be hopeful about the future of our world.

To be surrounded here by colleagues who have similar experiences and aspirations, colleagues who have gathered from around the world, colleagues who are also concerned with educating students not merely within the confines of individual disciplines, but truly more important educating for global competence, is a great pleasure and it is good to see this sign of optimism in a world that is bedeviled by strive, conflict, hatred, and war. Indeed, I believe, as perhaps all of us do, that it is exactly the broadening of perspectives—from
individual competence to global competence, from restrictiveness to inclusiveness, and from national concerns to international priorities—that can lead to world peace.

In view of all this, what is language if not communication? Language is culture. Language is the unifying factor that allows us to express our feelings, make judgments, and like sleep, is not a substance, but a complicated process that has inspired innumerable theorists. Its very complexity is in fact its charm and allure. We all speak a language, and it behooves us to analyze it in terms of the subject of this conference. Unfortunately, we are precluded from giving this topic its full due, since all of us have time restrictions for our papers, and I would like to couch my comments within the restricted geographic space of the State of Maine and some of its religious practices.

Whenever people talk about America, one thinks about a whole. In actuality, there are multiple geographic regions, i.e. states and as many concomitant verities. Thus, generalization is always a menace and when speaking about this, or any country, one has to be careful to distinguish between, let’s say the people/situation of Maine or the people/situation of Virginia, etc. Much misunderstanding stems from this simple fact. It is like if one of my students would say, as they often have, “The Parisians are cold people and not very nice.” This generalization obviously stems from hearsay, or from limited observation. In reality, I have found as many helpful, kind people in Paris as in New York, for example.

Cultural misunderstandings and erroneous notions are thus all too often rooted in cultural myopia and shortsighted chauvinism. Another typical student comment I often hear in my language classes is: “How come they (people who speak the target language) don’t say it (some idiomatic expression) like we do?” and the naïve assumption is that what we say is correct and what they say is incorrect. It is thus not surprising that people were dumping French wine into the streets and were calling French fries Liberty fries when France, a few years back, disagreed with American foreign policy. These examples of silly public behavior show our insularity, were short-lived (just to be replaced, in different contexts, by other irrational acts), but illustrate nevertheless how quickly situations can escalate and how language can becomes a weapon that derides and even kills, as we have seen in the logos of Greek culture.
I firmly believe, in view of this, that the study of other languages is consequently a most humanizing process that transmits not only an arbitrary sequence of signs, but more importantly, a more sophisticated awareness of our own culture and that of the target language. This is why, incidentally, my university teaches languages within a context of international exchange that provides for Visiting Professors as well as Teaching Assistants from China, France, and Russia who are annually recruited from sister universities abroad, and why we have an International Studies program that requires that all majors spend at least one semester abroad. In this we are unique in the State of Maine, I am proud to say. Unfortunately, despite our good efforts, it is deplorable that as a result of 9/11, the war in Iraq and in Afghanistan and the many problems in Africa, international educational exchange has not fared better.

Hope can only spring from getting to know each other. At a time when the world seems to be shrinking before our eyes, when global warming can no longer be ignored, when economic markets are obviously interdependent and global, when technological mini-revolutions in communication and information systems have become the norm, international exchange and its ancillary language study is no longer a luxury, but an absolute necessity. But if the rhetoric for internationalizing our universities is great, so far imaginable progress has been disappointingly slim. Unless we confront the factors that militate against international exchange and foreign language acquisition and manage to deal with them effectively, I am afraid that future development may be disappointing.

Maine, a state in the northernmost section of New England that is famous for its natural beauty, its vast forests and a scenic coastline that boasts some of the best seafood—from lobster to shrimps, from sea urchins to haddock—in fact all reasons why I live there, is 338 km wide and 515 km long. Yet despite its size it has only about 1,400,000 inhabitants and a population density of 16 people/km. Istanbul, by comparison, as a city, has almost ten times (officially, unofficially it has apparently many more million people) the population of all of Maine! Historically and culturally linked to Massachusetts (since it became part of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1652) Maine became an independent state in 1820, and during the course of the nineteenth century followed the religious development of many other states.
Maine's Calvinist heritage basically lasted until the Civil War and then developed into different strands, based on the conviction that the Calvinist principles needed to be modified, or discarded. Congregational evangelist soon competed with the Methodists and the Baptist, while in larger urban centers Unitarians predominated. Added to the protestant component was also the Catholic Church, and today we have a large number of denominations that coexist more or less harmoniously. Thus 82% of Maine's population is Christian (Protestants account for 56%), 25% are Roman Catholic, and only 1% follow other religious beliefs. 17%, incidentally, are non-religious. Most numerous among the Protestants are the Baptists (16%) and the Methodists (9%) with the Pentecostals close (6%) and the Lutherans (3%) and the United Church of Christ adherents (3%) trailing. Quakers, Adventists, and similar smaller groups account for 18%. 119 You can see that the religious landscape is rather complex in Maine. The recent influx of Asians, particularly from Cambodia and Vietnam, as well as the arrival of many Somalis in Lewiston and Portland have enriched the existing variety of denominations.

Catholic parochial schools are primarily present in larger urban areas, but are contracting under financial pressures and as a result of more recent internal problems such as the Church's stand on dogma and the continuing issue of pedophile priests and a theocracy that has often ignored to face this problem. Many Catholics have become disenchanted and this in turn has contributed to the general decline of the parochial school system. An additional factor is the concomitant decline of French as a viable second language in Maine. A city like Lewiston, for example, had at one point more than 6,000 parishioners, all of them spoke French and thus were predominantly Catholic, went to French masses, but most of this disappeared as a result of the decimation of the francophone parishioners. Death, linguistic prejudice, pressure to assimilate into American main stream culture, all were of course determining factors.

The St. John Valley, a region on the Canadian border, has managed, more than any other part of Maine, to hold on to French customs, language, and traditions. Given the proximity of Québec, it is not surprising that we have here a francophone bastion. It is also a very rural, impoverished area which has also added to the distinctiveness of the local culture. But here too the decline of the

119 I would like to thank the Reverend Richard Waddell for some stimulating conversations about the current state of religion in Maine.
once thriving Catholic culture, i.e. school systems, is noteworthy and connected to the factors discussed above. The link between language and religion in this case is once more self-evident.

On the other hand, Christian Academies and other independent schools have been flourishing and are found not only in the cities, but throughout the state, particularly in more rural areas. This is partially a result of Maine’s history as well as the development of the public school system that did not penetrate efficiently into more remote districts, thus leaving the initiative to a local population that often was more conservative than its counterpart in the cities. It is also a relatively recent phenomenon.

The Fundamentalist and Pentecostal churches have in fact usurped the Catholics’ initially very successful system of providing its parishioners with a functionally supportive setting that encouraged the transmission of Catholic values by educating its youth. Numerous and diverse, these schools are however united in their determination to resist mainstream American influences. I would like to briefly sketch one Christian Academy that I picked at random, the Greater Houlton Christian Academy as an example of the many other successful schools.

Originally a denominational school, Baptist, it was founded “over twenty years ago...led together by God because they shared the earnest conviction that their children should have a Christian education. They wanted their children taught to see all of life in the light of God’s Word, including academic subjects, music, the arts, athletics and social activities. It was their desire that their children would be educated to do all things as unto the Lord heartily.” In 1993 the school changed its name to the Country Road Christian School, opening its doors to other denominations under the direction of the Country Road Baptist Church. The next step was to become an independent, non-denominational school, changing its name once more to the Greater Houlton Christian Academy. In 1996, they established themselves in a dilapidated building that was offered to them for $1.00 (!) and that was quickly renovated by friends of the school. They had 80 students in 1996, and that figure now totals about 200 students who are in K-12, the full range of pre-university education.

120 www.ghca.com
Several facts are noteworthy: First of all, the relatively recent creation of this school; Second, its swift evolution; and third, it’s morphing from a denominational to a more inclusive non-denominational school. In fact what is surprising is the energy and the vitality of schools like the GHCA. Even if one disagrees with their philosophical stance, one must admire their efficiency.

If we look at the High School curriculum (grades 9-12) we note that “Core courses include Bible, English, Latin, math, science, computer fundamentals, history, government, public speaking, Spanish, physical education and health…”121 More important than the actual subjects, I feel, is their order, in first place Bible, i.e. religion which is no surprise, and in second place Language where English is juxtaposed with the most traditional Christian language, Latin. This ordering is clearly not coincidental, but the product of a conservative, activist Weltanschauung.

In their statement of faith GHCA declares that the school “is based on a God-centered view that all truth is God’s truth, and that the Bible is the inspired and the only infallible authoritative Word of God which contains this truth. God created all this in six, literal 24-hour days and sustains all things…Our aim socially is to provide a Christian perspective on the total world view from which will come a balanced personality and a proper understanding and acceptance of a person’s role in life at home, at work, at play and at worship—all grounded in the Christian concept of love.”122 All this is very nice, but the fundamentalist reading of the “24-hour day” was once more clearly deliberate and significant. Furthermore, the ostensibly inclusive nature of the school is illusory and seems to exclude mainstream Christians who may espouse a different Biblical exegesis. To Hell with, them, literally, is clearly the message to those who disagree with not only GHCA’s principles of faith, but with that of the entire fundamentalist movement.

After a period of empowerment, Christian fundamentalists are now feeling the pressure of a political backlash, as demonstrated by the recent Congressional elections. Not that this fact has diminished their fervor, but it has certainly dampened their influence. And there is also a certain feeling of disappointment and malaise, as a result of contemporary events that have revealed some of their important, visible leaders, or political supporters, to be

121 Ibid.  
122 Ibid.
morally deficient, financially irresponsible, or even to be downright crooks. Add to this the general disposition of the GenExers, this generation born between 1964 and 1984, a generation that grew up with computers and its technological culture, quite different from that of their parents, and you have the makings of a siege mentality among the various Christian Academies. But the young need to be educated and values, whatever they are, need to be transmitted. The problem is that we seem to witness a general shift of the religious experience itself among this generation, away from the certainties of their parents, a religious experience that is not objective, but subjective, and in line with the personal experiences of the generation itself. Dogma, in any form, becomes secondary; the immediacy of experience, primary.

In some way, all of this reminds me of late medieval mysticism, the unio mystica of Meister Eckhart, and particularly other phenomena of the fifteenth century when we as a culture emerged from the Middle Ages into Modernity, with all its accompanying shifts and uncertainties, indeed the transition from a manuscript culture to the culture of print, to mention just one of these technological revolutions, required new reflexes and world views if one wished to be successful.123 The fifteenth century’s fascination with the occult, its intense religiosity, the heightening of emotions as expressed in religious painting of the period, and their embracing of the macabre, all are further

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examples that this was a culture aware that old institutions were disintegrating, and new solutions to its malaise were not yet obvious. Even the continual warring of this period, for example during the reign of Louis XII when the French attempted to appropriate the Italian city states, bears an uncanny similarity to our own area.124

Another blow to the Christian Academies was the Maine Supreme Judicial Court’s decision in 2005 not to fund religious education. In this lawsuit, religious activists tried to gain access to the State’s school vouchers that provided for student to be educated in public schools. At issue however, was discrimination, and the argument was made and prevailed that government has no business in religion. The fear was that once the government funds religious education, it will also regulate it. It is interesting how this argument is linguistically couched.

George Bush’s clearly conservative views have not helped directly the evangelical movement. On the other hand, the legacy of his administration, namely the appointment of conservative judges left and right, on all levels, will clearly determine the structure of America’s social fiber for years to come. Thus American courts have been stacked with conservative judges, a fact that is applauded by the evangelical movement, and deplored by others.

It is particularly significant and appropriate that we discuss religion and world peace in Istanbul, a city that bridges the Western and the Eastern world, a city that saw the clash between two religions in 1453, and I would like to thank the organizers of this conference for the opportunity to contribute to its topic.

124 Johan Huizinga’s classic study The Waning of the Middle Ages (Boston: Beacon, 1955) is always a pleasure to read and is, of course, the source of my appreciation of the fifteenth-century phenomena referred to above. For a more standard historical analysis of this period, see Margaret Aston, The Fifteenth Century: The Prospect of Europe (London: Thames and Hudson); more specialized and analytical is Michel Mollat, Genèse médiévale de la France moderne (Paris: Arthaud, 1977).