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**OVERVIEW OF UNITY-BASED PEACE EDUCATION
AND ITS POSSIBLE IMPLICATONS FOR THE CYPRUS CONFLICT**

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Abstract

This article examines the Unity-Based Peace Education approach as a new solution to the conflict in Cyprus between Turkish and Greek communities. This approach may be helpful to the conflicting parties on the island with its premise that peace building can be reached and practiced through ‘building unity’. This assertion makes the Unity-Based Peace approach unique among other peace/conflict resolution methods. In the first part, the Cyprus conflict will be explained briefly. In the second part, the paper will provide a presentation of the Unity-Based Peace approach and its comprising programs. The paper will conclude with an assessment of possible implications arising from the application of the Unity-Based Peace programs to the Cyprus conflict.

Cyprus Conflict in Brief

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After its independence from Britain in 1960, Cyprus has continually faced problems between Turkish and Greek communities on the island. Both sides have their own opposing stories and opinions regarding the conflict. The Greek side argues that Turkey unlawfully invaded the island in 1974 and illegally captured their territory. Greeks also argue that they have sovereignty over the whole island, including the Turkish administered North, but excluding British sovereign military bases. The Turkish side believes that they were expelled from the administration of the Republic of Cyprus in 1963 by the Greeks. Turks also argue that Turkey legally intervened and saved the Turkish population as a guarantor state against the fascist military Greek regime. Although not internationally recognized the Turks have their own administration in the North.

Given this situation we will focus not on political or military conflicts but on the relationships between the two communities. Turks settled in the island after the 1571 conquest of the Ottoman Navy. Ottoman administration liberated the Greek Orthodox population from the oppression of Catholic administration they were experiencing at that time. It revitalized the Greek Orthodox Church and gave authority to the Church for the administration of the Greek Orthodox population. This administration style is known as the *Millet* system in the Ottoman Empire. Turkish and Greek communities on the island lived peacefully during the Ottoman (1571-1878) and the British (1878-1960) administrated periods. Unfortunately between 1963 and 1974 the situation between the two communities deteriorated and a phase of armed conflicts between civilians began. After the 1974 intervention by Turkey, the Turkish and Greek populations started to live separately on the divided island. It is important to recall that as a result of the Ottoman Millet system the two communities were not integrated. They always had their own schools, education and jurisdiction systems. British administration and the 1960 constitution kept this situation for the sake of maintaining a balance between the two communities. However, Greek and Turkish nationalism was the dominant ideology in the community schools and students were educated according to the dreams of these nationalists. The results were unsurprisingly hatred, armed conflict, mass killings, ethnic cleansing and separatism.

It is important to note that the two communities in Cyprus, and their motherlands, have completely different perceptions of the conflict i.e. ‘the struggle for liberation’ ended in 1974 for the Turkish Cypriots and began then for Greek Cypriots. Since 1974, numerous attempts at mediation by the UN to achieve a reunified state on the island have failed. There is still a deep distrust between the two communities (See Richmond, 1999; Eralp & Beriker, 2005, Hadjipavlou, 2007). Therefore it is proposed that the Unity-Based Peace approach, with its unique worldview approach, may be useful in providing a solution to the conflict.

What is Unity-Based Peace Education?

Unity-Based Peace Education is a model developed by H.B. Danesh (2008)ⁱ which aims to build a “civilization of peace” (p. 147). Defining conflict as “the absence of unity”, Danesh & Danesh 2002 postulate that peace results from a full application of a unity-based worldview to all aspects of life (p. 63).

The Unity-Based Peace Education model offers two critiques of other peace and conflict theories. One is that since most current approaches to conflict “focus on conflict as an inherent and, therefore, an unavoidable and even necessary aspect of human life”... their primary “*raison d’etre*—to study the nature of peace and the dynamics of peace building” is abandoned. (Danesh & Danesh, 2002, p. 64). The second critique is that “most theories of peace do not place adequate emphasis on the process of peace building and the development of the inherent capacities of individuals, institutions, communities, civil society, and governments, both to prevent violence and to create harmonious relationships” (p. 65). Danesh (2006) writes, “We teach our children much more about conflict and war than harmony and peace. Consequently, every new generation repeats the mistakes of former generations, and conflict and violence become permanent facets of human societies” (p. 58).

Basic Premises of Unity-Based Peace Education

There are three basic premises of Unity-Based Peace Education: the concept of unity, worldview, and individual and collective human development (Danesh, 2008).

1-Concept of Unity:

The first premise is that unity, not conflict, should be understood as the main force in human relationships. It is defined as “(...) a purposeful integration of two or more unique entities in a state of harmony and cooperation, resulting in the creation of a new, evolving entity, usually of a higher order” (Danesh & Clarke-Habibi, 2007, p. 4). Unity-Based Peace Education claims that if unity is applied to all aspects of biological, psychological, social, moral, and spiritual life, “conflicts are often prevented or easily resolved” (Danesh, 2006, p. 69).

2-Worldview:

The second premise relates to the role of worldviews in conflict. According to a Unity-Based Peace Education approach, “our worldviews shape how we perceive, interpret, understand and respond to the realities around us. Worldviews shape all that we think, do, or consider to be normal or abnormal and acceptable and unacceptable” (Danesh & Clarke-Habibi, p. 30).

Danesh (2006) states that there are three main worldview categories: the Survival-Based (authoritarian), Identity -Based (adversarial) and Unity-Based (integrative) worldviews. They “are identified within the parameters of psychosocial developmental stages roughly corresponding to those of childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. Both survival-based and identity-based worldviews revolve around the issue of power—dominance and power-struggle, respectively—and are highly prone to conflict and violence” (Danesh, 2008, pp. 5-6).

These two worldviews have predominated in global politics to date and are strongly defended as a necessity by those who adhere to them. They are, however, basically conflictual and foster more conflict, aggression, violence, poverty, and injustice. Therefore, humanity needs a new more mature worldview (Danesh, 2006).

The Unity-based worldview, as its name suggests, considers cooperation rather than conflict to be the fundamental law operating in healthy human relationships. It is based on the underlying belief in the integrity of humanity and, according to Danesh, it symbolizes the age of maturity of human societies and allows them to follow the principle of “unity in diversity”

(Danesh & Clarke-Habibi, 2007, p. 5). It is very rigorous in that it requires the application of universal ethical principles at all levels of governance and leadership, ensuring that the basic human needs are met through the rule of law and moral/ ethical principles. The unity-based worldview creates an environment in which the proper use of power and empowerment of people—both essential for survival and formation of identities—take place within the framework of unified and caring personal and group relationships (see Danesh & Danesh, 2004, pp. 55–84).

3- Individual and Collective Human Development

The third premise of Unity-Based Peace Education is that “human development takes place on the axis of consciousness and matures in response to our ever-increasing understanding about the nature of self and others in the context of life. Consciousness shapes both our worldview and the manner in which we engage in the task of creating a civilization based on this worldview” (Danesh, 2007, p. 14). All human beings and societies pass through the stages of infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood and evolve towards a collective maturity (Danesh, 2007a, p. 15).

According to Danesh & Danesh (2004) conflict, insecurity, power-struggles and competition indicate the early stages in the development of human beings and societies (survival and identity based worldviews). The acquired capacity to create unity in the face of diversity, to establish relationships based on truthfulness and respect, and to provide administration with the aims of service and justice, is indicative of a mature society. With increasing awareness comes the development of more integrative and peace-oriented worldviews. This process alters not only ourselves, but also the nature of all of our relationships. “The Unity-Based (Integrative) Worldview considers unity rather than conflict to be the primary law operating in human life and relationships” (Danesh, 2007a, p. 10), which transforms not only ourselves, but also the nature of all of our relationships. In other words, a peace-oriented worldview requires us to start by establishing peace within ourselves and in our relations with others, in order to be able to contribute constructively to create peace and unity in our cultures and societies.

Why Is Changing Worldviews So Important in the Quest for Peace?

Given that the Cyprus problem seems to be at an impasse due to the intransigence of the two parties and their different perceptions of the problem, it seems that changing the individual and collective worldviews from conflict-based to peace-based orientations needs more elaboration.

Diederik Aerts et al. (2007) defines a worldview as “a frame of reference” (p. 9) that allows us to coordinate different aspects of the world in a meaningful way. It is like “a geographic map” (p. 7), which provides a way for us to act logically and conscientiously in this world. Models have to be built that integrate our values and aspirations with our knowledge of both human nature and the natural world. Where an effort to create integration is not applied, events take their own path, by default, and responsibility for obtaining positive outcomes is effectively abdicated. Such integration of the personal with the political can “also give a new dimension to our emotional, aesthetic and spiritual connection with the whole” (p. 11).

If we look at the twenty three project proposalsⁱⁱ collected by Aerts et al. (2007), we can understand that the construction of worldviews is not an easy enterprise. Worldview construction consists of the attempt to develop worldviews that take into account as much as possible all aspects of our experience. What we also see from such a collection of various worldview construction proposals is that despite pointing in many directions, they “all look for the unity of the universe in order to discover the meaning of life” (Diederik Aerts et al., 2007, p. 40).

According to Danesh & Danesh (2002, p. 67), our worldviews reflect how people, as individuals or groups, “(a) shape the conflicts they experience and (b) impact their behavior and choices in attempting resolution. However we are only partially conscious of them, even though they very much influence everything we think, feel and do”. Van Slyck, Stern and Elbedour (1999 in Clarke-Habibi, 2005) assert that the predominant outlook of most people is conflict-oriented. “Indeed, conflict-oriented worldviews are so firmly positioned as the norm in our societies that they pass undetected even when interwoven into *peace education* lessons, let alone

other issues, discussions and activities that occupy us on a daily basis. The result is a perpetuation of cultures of conflict in which people feel themselves to be conflicted, engage in conflicts at home and at work, prepare themselves and their children for future conflicts, and recount their past conflicts in cultural and historical narratives (Clarke-Habibi 2005, p. 40).

If Turkish and Greek communities want a peaceful outcome to the Cyprus conflict, they must address the issue of their personal worldviews and, more importantly, aim to transform the social and political environment from a conflict-oriented to a peace-oriented one.

How to Change Worldview?

According to G. Bateson (1972), one's worldview transforms through a process of reflection which "question[s] the data and assumptions used to conduct one's life, whether consciously or unconsciously, [in order] to adopt new constructions of reality, life goals, and moral obligations. Such questioning may produce broad changes in a person's life, leading to quite different worldviews. However, frequently people and organizations make changes and adopt new learning without recognition of the process by which they have chosen new worldviews" (cited in Clarke-Habibi, 2005, p. 40).

The challenge of worldview transformation can be both accelerated and facilitated by considering the nature and dynamics of human individual and collective development. "The formation of a worldview is a process that usually takes place at a subconscious level through our life experiences at home, in schools and within our respective cultures. Thus, in every generation the majority adopts the worldview of the previous generation, and only a small percentage of individuals consciously attempt to adopt a different worldview" (Danesh, 2007a, p. 11).

Unity-Based Peace Education offers to change worldviews through two interrelated ways. The first is a process of reflection related to four key elements of all worldviews which is then applied to the four levels of human experience: self, family, society and world. The key questions in the process of reflection are: What is reality? What is human nature? What is the

main purpose of human life? What are the laws governing human relationships? It claims that simple and profound questions that direct the learners to think critically about their identity, purpose in life, assumptions about the world around them, and their role in creating a peaceful civilization will form a foundation for constructive peace building (Danesh & Clarke-Habibi, 2007, pp. 340-346).

The second process is through the implementation of Unity-Based Peace programs (known also as Education for Peace or “EFP” programs) to cultivate the application of a comprehensive unity-based peace vision within a community. Through the International Education for Peace Institute (EFP-International), founded by H. B. Danesh, and its sister institutes, the following four interrelated unity-based programs have been implemented in various contexts since 1997:

a) Conflict-Free Conflict Resolution (CFCR):

“CFCR is a dynamic process that encourages the participants to adopt new thinking and understanding of the nature of conflict along with actions and efforts taken to resolve it peacefully. It is a peace-based, non-adversarial, consultative process of decision-making that moves beyond traditional methods of conflict resolution by fixing unity as its goal” It. (EFP-International, p. 5) It offers training opportunities in the principles and skills of conflict prevention and peaceful conflict resolution for citizens and leaders at local, regional, national, international, and global levels. This peace-based approach to conflict resolution has been implemented in many governmental, non-governmental, and business institutions in Africa, Europe, India, and North America. CFCR has been and is being taught in universities and institutions of higher learning in Austria, Switzerland, Canada, and Bosnia Herzegovina (EFP-International).

b) Education for Peace (EFP):

This program aims to educate current and subsequent generations of the world’s children and youth with the help of their parents, teachers, and other educators (e.g. the media)—to

become peacemakers. It has been implemented in Bosnia-Herzegovina by the International Education for Peace Institute (EFP-International) and its sister agency, the Education for Peace Institute of the Balkans (EFP-Balkans) since June 2000 and has yielded significant positive results (for case studies see Clarke-Habibi, 2005; Danesh, 2007b).ⁱⁱⁱ

c) Leadership for Peace (LFP):

LFP aims to create forums for the leaders at all levels, from local to global, to study and implement the principles of peaceful governance in their respective communities and institutions (EFP-International, p. 2).

This program complements and reinforces the efforts of school communities that are engaged in the Education for Peace Program. It has been used for training of governmental and civic leaders and administrators in Bosnia Herzegovina, Hungary, Canada, Switzerland, and the United States. In 2005, EFP-International together with the UNDP/SACI Program in southern Africa held a number of Executive Leadership Training workshops for middle and high-level officials of the Malawi Civil Service, civic leaders, and elected government representatives at local and national levels (EFP-International, p. 3).

d) Youth Peacebuilders Network (YPN)

YPN is an emerging network of youth, mobilized as leaders to their peers, with the goal of creating violence-free, peaceful schools, neighborhoods, and communities. YPN has been implemented in schools in New York, Washington DC, Boston, Boulder, and Seattle in the United States and Vancouver, Burnaby, Abbotsford, Mission, Victoria, and Iqualuit in Canada (EFP-International, pp. 2-5).

What is unique about these programs (CFCR, EFP, LFP and YPN) is that they fix unity as their ultimate goal by providing participants with new insights and tools founded on worldviews and approaches that are peace-based, non-adversarial, and consultative. In doing so, they move beyond traditional methods of peace creation and conflict resolution (EFP-International, p. 7) and suggest the creation of unique communities characterized by a “*culture of*

peace, healing and excellence” which together comprise the essentials of “a civilization for peace” (Danesh & Clarke-Habibi, 2005, p. 276).

Conclusion

The success of the Unity-Based Peace Education approach so far has been due to its all-encompassing and ambitious aims to work through the process of human development. This perspective is based on what Danesh & Danesh (2002, p. 66) call a “unity paradigm”. A unity-centered paradigm is one that recognizes the truth that “we, as human beings, are simultaneously psychological, social, political, ethical, and spiritual beings; that human nature is essentially developmental; and that the primary challenge of life is to increase our capacity to create unity-in-diversity within ourselves, our relationships and the world-at-large” (Clarke-Habibi, 2005, p. 40).

The comprehensive approach offered by the Unity-Based Peace programs provide a new and promising method to build peace and trust between Greeks and Turks in Cyprus. By transforming personal worldviews through these programs, it opens a new way to look at strategies and solutions which will take all needs, on both sides, into account.

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ⁱ I was honored to be the student of Hossain and Roshan Danesh at European Peace University in 2008 during my Peace and Conflict Studies education.

ⁱⁱ Proposal I: Invariants, Symmetries, and Constants; Proposal II: Variation: The Arrow of Time; Proposal III: Unitary Theories; Proposal IV: Holisms; Proposal V: Pluralisms; Proposal VI: One and Many Systems; Proposal VII: Fundamental Categories; Proposal VIII: Organisation and Self-Organisation. Cybernetics; Proposal IX: Comparative study of Origins: Cosmogogenesis, Biogenesis, and Anthropogenesis; Proposal X: Topology of World Views; Proposal XI: World Views and Value Systems; Proposal XII: Purposes and Externality-Principles; Proposal XIII: Nature and Value; Proposal XIV: Order or Chaos. Determinism or Indeterminism; Proposal XV: Consciousness and Group as Models of Reality; Proposal XVI: World Views and the History of Science; Proposal XVII: Praxiology: Theory and Action; Proposal XVIII: The Control of Complexity; Proposal XIX: The Dialogue of Language Games; Proposal XX: Models of the Future; Proposal XXI: General Anthropology; Proposal XXII: In Search of an Integrated Medicine; Proposal XXIII: Psychiatry and Our Image of Man. For brief explanations see pp.29-39.

ⁱⁱⁱ Education for Peace in Bosnia Herzegovina is has been very successful. “It began its work in June 2000 by launching a two-year pilot project of Education for Peace in three primary and three secondary schools in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), with the participation of more than 400 teachers and school staff, 6,000 students and their parents/guardians. The project had the support of education ministries, municipal leaders, and international authorities. The primary aim of the project was to create a *culture of peace*, a *culture of healing*, and a *culture of excellence* within and among the participating school communities representing the three main ethnic populations—Bosniak (Muslim), Croat (Catholic), and Serb (Orthodox Christianity)—in the highly conflicted post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina. The pilot program yielded significant positive results and gained the recognition and endorsement of all stakeholders: participating school communities, all thirteen Ministries of Education and eight Pedagogical Institutes, as well as the International Community in BiH. Since 2004 several of the EFP Programs have been introduced into schools in both Canada and In the United States: A ministry approved EFP Course for grades 10, 11, and 12 in schools in the Fraser-Cascade School District of British Columbia. “EFP-Comprehensive” Program is being applied to the whole school community in Bolder Prep High School in Boulder Colorado”. EFP Brochure (no date) International Education for Peace Institute (EFP-International), *Towards A Civilization of Peace*, p.2-5.