Interreligious Dialogue

Kenan Çetinkaya
INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR, BAYBURT, TURKEY

What is it?
Interreligious dialogue is a conversation between two or more people with different religious traditions in order to express their opinions freely and to listen to the other respectfully. The primary purpose of such dialogue is for each participant to learn from the other and to recognize why the other holds a particular religious opinion. Interreligious dialogue occurs on four levels: knowledge, action, spirituality, and morality. It is a dialogue on religious subjects by participants who acknowledge one another as part of different religious traditions and groups. In addition to the word “interreligious,” interfaith, inter-worldviews and intercultural dialogue are among the set of widely used concepts to refer dialogue among members of different religious traditions.

Who uses the concept?
All of these terms are used more by theologians than academics. While the Catholic Church prefers to use interreligious dialogue, the Protestant movement mostly uses “interfaith dialogue.” It is also common to use the name of followers of the religions (Muslim-Jewish dialogue or Hindu-Christian dialogue etc.) or name of religions (dialogue between Islam and Christianity, etc.).

Fit with intercultural dialogue?
Interreligious dialogue has social and cultural foundations. Plurality in the world, travel, migration, and communication all bring together people from different religious and cultural backgrounds. Since religions and cultures are so interconnected in many ways, the concept of interreligious dialogue is sometimes used synonymously with intercultural dialogue. Both have significant motivations for developing mutual understanding, correcting stereotypes, searching for similarities or differences, developing ways of cooperation, and solving common humane problems.

What work remains?
Today, many interreligious activities happen in institutional and academic levels. In academia scholars try to understand the differences and commonalities between religions and the challenges to developing cordial relations. Institutions often declare the goal of positive relationships with people of other religious. The majority of the work on interreligious dialogue has focused on theological and theoretical aspects of the concept. Needed are deeper studies on social, moral and spiritual ways of dialogue among people of different religious traditions. These works could help increase the practice of interreligious dialogue around the world, thus reducing interreligious conflict.

Resources
