

IT WAS NOT UTOPIA

A common ideology based on shared moral standards
may yet save the day
by
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My father was a Swiss cotton broker in Egypt and I was born in Alexandria three quarters of a century ago. My mother belonged to a movement that stressed the importance of living absolute moral standards. Listening to the dictates of our conscience as well as to the guidance of God, she used to say, was the prerequisite for a new and effective life of inner freedom. This idea was of Christian origin, but proved to be a superb meeting point, an effective platform linking the three principal religions of the Middle East, in a shared ethical code of common moral imperatives: Absolute honesty, purity, unselfishness and love.

There was an amazing coming together in openness, a sharing of moral shortcomings followed by a cleansing experience after personal changes and restitutions were courageously made in obedience to the promptings of the Almighty. Hatred and mistrust between the representatives of all three religions were openly discussed and sincere, heartfelt apologies were extended. New friendships, based on trust, emerged as members of all three religions asked God for forgiveness and atonement. The dynamic of the will of God expressed in the lives of obedient men and women was at work then. Like water in the desert, it was life-giving, unexpectedly creative and opening historic possibilities as yet unseen. In all sincerity, it was a search for a common destiny, ordained but not yet revealed by our common Creator.

Now all this sounds like a dream, when we face the current situation in the Middle East. But this inter-religious group did in fact exist in Egypt. Unfortunately, its growth and precious potential was misread and quashed by the otherwise brilliant initiator of this ideology of peace.

Yet it was real. It was not Utopia. And the recipe for genuine peace in that part of the world still lies in the hearts, the minds and the resolve of courageous, God-fearing men and women of all the three principal religions of the Middle East. Indeed, there is hope and maybe, there is still time to avert the looming catastrophe facing us today.