

Online Study Materials on
**INTERFAITH DIALOGUES
AND GLOBAL ISSUES**

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**INTERFAITH PRINCIPLES AND BELIEFS:
SPECIAL FOCUS ON PROTESTANT
CHRISTIANITY**

OUR PRINCIPLES

There are seven principles which Unitarian Universalist congregations affirm and promote:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Unitarian Universalism (UU) draws from many sources:

- Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;
- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;
- Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;

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- Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;
 - Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit.
 - Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

HUMANISM

Humanism is a philosophy that stresses the human aspect of life here and now, and puts the responsibility for ethical behaviour upon each individual. Humanism also focuses on rational rather than supernatural religious explanations. Modern-day Religious Humanism is largely derived from the writings of early American Unitarian Humanists, including Joseph Priestley, Thomas Jefferson, and John Haynes Holmes.

Almost half of Unitarian Universalists today define themselves as Humanists. They comprise the largest spiritual identity group within Unitarian Universalism. Given this, it is not surprising that much of Unitarian Universalist faith and worship is grounded in Humanist thought.

Rev. Sarah Oelberg describes her Unitarian Universalist Humanism as this:

“Humanism leads me to find a sense of wider relatedness with all the world and its peoples, and it calls me to work for a sound environment and a humane civilisation... Humanism also makes me aware of the existence of moral dilemmas and the need to be very careful and intentional in my moral decision-making.”

Explore our website, visit a congregation near you and discover Unitarian Universalism. The Unitarian Universalist Association is pleased to offer Unitarian Universalist Perspectives: thoughts from notable Unitarian Universalists on issues at the intersection of religion and society.

PAGANISM

There are many Wiccans, Witches, Pagans, and people with other earth-based spiritualities who lead and worship in Unitarian Universalist congregations. At last count, 19 per cent of our members identified with an Earth/Nature centered faith. This is one of the fastest-growing groups within our faith.

The sources of inspiration for the UU faith are too many to be counted, but delegates from each congregation have agreed that one of the predominant sources of our faith is, "Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature."

In addition to modern Paganism, many Unitarian Universalists find spiritual inspiration in other forms of nature-based spirituality, including simple seasonal reverence, modern Transcendentalism, and other nature-honoring paths.

THEISM / DEISM

Theism is the belief in the existence of a god or gods. The word "theism" does not specify the kind or number of god(s), nor the religious context for that belief. Types of theism include monotheism, pantheism, polytheism, and Deism.

Deism is a specific type of Theism, and is considered to be a separate spiritual path. Deists believe in a God, but believe that logic and reason are the only sources of true knowledge. They also believe that the divine does not intervene in the workings of the world. Deist thought is quite common within Unitarian Universalism.

Most Unitarian Universalists believe in a god or gods, though only 13 per cent identify as Theist/Deist. Other Unitarian Universalists who believe in a god or gods identify as Christians, Jews, Hindus, Pagans, and others.

The opposite of theism is atheism, which is the lack of a belief in a god or gods. Atheism is also welcome within Unitarian Universalism.

CHRISTIANITY

For many Unitarian Universalists, Jesus and Christian teachings provide insight into understanding how to live our lives. One of the shared sources of our faith is "Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves."

As one Unitarian Universalist (UU) wrote: "Jesus' message remains strong in our efforts to create a beloved community here on earth, impelling us to witness to the injustices of this time." (Bruce Southworth) And Rev. Anita Farber-Robertson says, "Jesus [gives us] the strength to fight, the courage to love, and hearts that do not give up on anyone."

The Bible and its many interpretations have largely shaped our Unitarian Universalist history. Today, it is used in most Unitarian

Universalist congregations as one of many sources of inspiration and reflection. To quote one member, "I claim the Bible as one more chapter, among several religious texts, in the Unitarian Universalist guide to living." (Laura Spencer)

This is not the only view of Jesus, the Bible, and Christianity within our faith. Unitarian Universalists can be Christian, Humanist, Pagan, Buddhist, Jewish, atheist, and more. A portion of Unitarian Universalists today identify as Christians, but even some Unitarian Universalists who do not identify primarily as Christians find inspiration in Christian ideas. Because of the freedom within our faith, there are many differing views regarding the role of Christianity in our religious community.

BUDDHISM

Buddhism has come to play a noticeable role in many Unitarian Universalist congregations. An average Sunday service might feature readings from the Dalai Lama, and you might find a meditation workshop or Buddhist book group any evening of the week.

It is not surprising that Buddhism resonates for so many Unitarian Universalists (UUs), given the amount of philosophical overlap between the two religions. The most central ideas that the two religions share are that individuals are responsible for their own spiritual well-being, and that each individual's experiences and thoughts are valid sources of religious authority.

Although at last count only 4 per cent of Unitarian Universalists defined themselves as Buddhists, many more find inspiration in Buddhist thought, practice, and ritual.

JUDAISM

Judaism is increasingly prevalent within Unitarian Universalism. At last count, 1.3 per cent of Unitarian Universalists identified as Jewish, and 25 per cent of Unitarian Universalist congregations reported the presence of a strong Jewish theological perspective.

One of the six sources of faith from which Unitarian Universalism draws is "Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves." This idea of love and action makes Unitarian Universalist Judaism very dynamic and meaningful. As Unitarian Universalist minister Liz Lerner says, "Judaism is filled with morality and visions of justice that are moving and profound."

Even Unitarian Universalists who are not Jewish are often inspired by what Judaism brings to our religious community. Many Unitarian Universalist congregations now celebrate some of the major Jewish holidays. Inter-generational Passover Seders are special favorites, and the High Holy Days (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur) provide a time for all congregational members, Jewish or not, to examine their lives and atone.

HINDUISM

Hinduism is warmly welcomed within Unitarian Universalism. Unitarian Universalism shares ideas found in Hinduism, including the importance of a personal search for Truth, the idea that all things are connected, and a respect for other religious paths. Unitarian Universalism welcomes many ideas about god, including polytheism (the belief in many gods). Most Unitarian Universalist congregations follow a worship service format that is very different from traditional Hindu worship, leaving most Hindu Unitarian Universalists to pursue the ritual aspects of their faith in their own ways. This may be why there are few traditional Hindus who regularly attend Unitarian Universalist congregations. Despite these differences in ritual, our congregations offer a warm welcome to anyone of the Hindu faith.

ISLAM

For some Unitarian Universalists, the Koran and the life and words of Mohammed are an inspiration, offering insight into how to lead their individual lives. Other Unitarian Universalists, coming from other faiths, have no interaction with the Koran or Mohammed, and instead focus on the texts and leaders of their own spiritual traditions.

There are not yet many people who connect strongly with Islam within Unitarian Universalism: only 0.1 per cent of our current members identify as Muslim. Despite these small numbers, our congregations offer a warm welcome to anyone of the Islamic faith.

Because of recent world events, many Unitarian Universalists have sought out more information on Islam, and more Muslims around the world have begun learning about our faith. We are very excited about this exchange, and hope to continue it in the future.

OTHER BELIEFS

Because of the flexibility in our faith, people hold many different views on almost all spiritual issues. Unitarian Universalism accommodates a wide range of beliefs.

God: A belief in God is welcomed but not required within Unitarian Universalism. Eighty-one per cent of Unitarian Universalists believe in God, and 19 per cent do not believe in God. Visit the pages on Atheism, Theism/Deism, and the links on the right for more information.

Afterlife: One theological issue many people are curious about is Unitarian Universalism's view of the afterlife. Historically, Unitarians believed in a traditional Christian Heaven and Hell, while Universalists believed in Universal Salvation; that is, that everyone will go to Heaven. Today, some Unitarian Universalists believe in Heaven, some in reincarnation, and some in no afterlife at all. Unitarian Universalism is primarily directed towards this life, not the next.

Sin: More than 150 years ago our Unitarian forbearers rejected the theological doctrine of original sin. They believed, as we do today, that people are inherently good, and that it is our most precious gift, free will, that allows us sometimes to act wrongly, rather than predestination or external temptation. While the traditional concept of sin is no longer part of Unitarian Universalist theology, a small number of Unitarian Universalists believe that divine consequences attach to all of one's actions. Others believe in general karmic effects or the principle of reciprocity, that all actions have corresponding consequences. Still others find no compelling evidence for any direct, external spiritual repercussions for either good or bad behaviour. Despite these variations in beliefs, all Unitarian Universalists share a deep obligation to act with justice and compassion in accordance with Unitarian Universalist values.

Morality: Many people ask how we can have religious morals without agreeing on whether heaven, hell, judgment, sin, and damnation exist. Most Unitarian Universalists would probably tell you that their own moral code has little to do with their ideas of the afterlife, and more to do with their actions in this life. Unitarian Universalist morality is grounded in our religious principles and the sources of our faith, as well as in each individual's beliefs and experiences.

What we don't believe: Though Unitarian Universalism doesn't tell its members what to believe, not all beliefs are acceptable within our faith. Beliefs that are hateful or go against our principles wouldn't fit within Unitarian Universalism. As Marshall Hawkins writes:

“One could not be considered a Unitarian Universalist and believe that subscription to specific doctrines or creeds are necessary for access to God or spirituality or membership in our congregations. Unitarian

Universalists could not believe that God favors any group of people based on any inherent qualities, such as skin colour, gender, sexual orientation, physical ability, etc., or that any group of people is more worthy of access to opportunities than any other as a result of these qualities. We don't believe that autocratic, undemocratic or overly hierarchical systems are appropriate methods of organising our congregations or the larger society. We don't believe that humanity has the right or moral authority to exploit the environment or other life forms with whom we share this planet."

UNITARIANISM

Unitarian Universalism emerged from two separate denominations: Unitarianism and Universalism.

Originally, all Unitarians were Christians who didn't believe in the Holy Trinity of God (Father, Son, and Holy Ghost). Instead, they believe in the unity, or single aspect, of God. Unitarianism eventually began to stress the importance of rational thinking, each person's direct relationship with God, and the humanity of Jesus.

Unitarians have been very influential throughout American history, especially in politics and literature. Some famous Unitarians include Presidents John Adams and John Quincy Adams, Louisa May Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Paul Revere, President William Howard Taft, and Frank Lloyd Wright.

While Unitarian beliefs have been around since soon after Jesus died, people didn't form religious groups based on the ideas until the middle of the fifteen hundreds in Transylvania and the middle of the sixteen hundreds in England. The religious authorities of the times saw these early Unitarians as heretics and often persecuted them. Important figures from this period in Unitarian history include John Biddle, Francis David, Michael Servetus, King John Sigismund and Faustus Socinus.

Unitarianism flourished in the religious freedom of early America. By 1825 Unitarian ministers had formed a Unitarian denomination called the American Unitarian Association. Speaking out on issues such as peace, education reform, prison reform, orphanages, capital punishment, moderation in temperance, ministry to the poor, and the abolition of slavery, the AUA's liberal voice was soon heard throughout the country. The influential Unitarians from this era included William Ellery Channing, Theodore Parker, Joseph Priestly, and Thomas Starr King, who was also a Universalist.

American Unitarianism went through many changes over the next 150 years, from the introduction of Transcendentalist thought in the middle of the eighteenth century through debates about war and pacifism in the Civil War and the two World Wars to the influx of Humanism in the early 1930s. These changes slowly made Unitarianism a more broad and flexible faith.

After growing increasingly theologically and ethically close, the Unitarian and Universalist denominations consolidated in 1961 to form the new religion of Unitarian Universalism. Unitarian Universalism no longer solely holds traditional Unitarian or Universalist beliefs, but does draw directly on its heritage for much of its inspiration and grounding. There are many Unitarian congregations today outside the United States that are part of the Unitarian Universalist community. The largest concentrations of Unitarians outside the United States are in Transylvania (now part of Romania and Hungary) and India.

There are also Unitarian organisations that are not affiliated with Unitarian Universalism, most of which call themselves Biblical or Christian Unitarians. You can search the internet to find more information on these groups.

Please see "History: Universalism" for the other root of our faith, and "History: Unitarian Universalism" for our history since the consolidation in 1961.

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM

Since 1961, Unitarian Universalism has followed in the footsteps of its Unitarian and Universalist heritages to provide a strong voice for social justice and liberal religion. Some Unitarian Universalists of whom you may already have heard include Tim Berners-Lee, Paul Newman, Christopher Reeve, May Sarton, Pete Seeger, and Kurt Vonnegut.

Within a very few years of the new religion's forming, Unitarian Universalists' voices were already heard nation-wide advocating for the rights of conscientious objectors to the war in Vietnam as well as for voting and civil rights for people of colour in the south.

Many members of our faith responded to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s call to witness and participate in the voting rights march in Selma, Alabama in 1965. Unitarian Universalists James Reeb and Viola Liuzzo were killed because of their participation in this protest, and ended up becoming martyrs of the movement.

Unitarian Universalists deepened our social justice work in the 1970s by actively supporting the rights of gay and lesbian people, publishing the Pentagon Papers, working within our denomination to support feminism and to combat racism and oppression.

The 1980s began more than a decade of denominational spiritual reflection which resulted in reframing our religious principles and acknowledging the shared sources of our faith.

Unitarian Universalists spoke out against our country's aggression when the first Gulf War started in 1991 and again ten years later when the US entered hostilities in Afghanistan and Iraq. Unitarian Universalists continue to protest unjust wars and unnecessary violence today.

2001 marked the point when there were more female Unitarian Universalist ministers than male ministers. Unitarian Universalism continues to encourage women's leadership in our congregations and larger community.

Another issue which remains at the forefront of the Unitarian Universalist community is marriage equality (i.e. same-sex marriage). Unitarian Universalism fully supports the right of all committed couples to marry. Unitarian Universalist congregations, individuals, and the UUA staff continue to work to have these marriages legally sanctioned in every state.

In addition to working on these and other social justice issues, Unitarian Universalism has grappled with a number of spiritual changes over the years since its founding. Some of the major debates have included reframing our religious principles, understanding the changing role of Christianity in today's Unitarian Universalism, acknowledging the sources of our faith and making room in those sources for earth-based spirituality, and coming to understand what religious and spiritual language works best in our congregations.

Unitarian Universalists will undoubtedly continue to work to deepen our faith and improve the world.

OUR STATEMENT

THE IMPORTANCE OF FAITH/BELIEF STATEMENTS

We feel that every denomination, para-church organisation, religious group, and religious website should consider creating a statement of belief or faith and displaying it prominently. This is particularly important among Christian groups who may use the term "Christian"

to refer to only the Roman Catholic Church, or only to Evangelical Protestantism, or to the full range of Christian denominations and beliefs, or to some other subset of the religion. Quite often, when we visit a Christian website for the first time, we have to search around among its articles to find out exactly what Christian belief system they follow and promote on their website.

That said, the following is our attempt at a statement of belief.

OCRT Statement of Belief

We are a multi-faith group. As of 2007-Dec., we consist of one Atheist, Agnostic, Christian, Wiccan and Zen Buddhist. Thus, the OCRT staff lack agreement on almost all theological matters: belief in a supreme being, the nature of God, interpretation of the Bible and other holy texts, whether life after death exists and what form it takes, etc.

We Do Believe

- In the inherent worth of every person. People are worthy of respect, support, and caring simply because they are human.
- In working towards a culture that is relatively free of discrimination on the basis of gender, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, national origin, physical disability, age, etc.
- In the sanctity of the human person. We oppose the use of torture and cruel or unusual punishment including the death penalty.
- In the importance of democracy within religious, political and other structures.
- In the separation of church and state; and the freedoms of speech, association, and expression.
- That the systems of truth in the field of morals, ethics, and religious belief that we have studied are not absolute: they vary by culture, by religion, and over time.
- In the generally positive influence that most religions have had on their followers and on society.
- In the importance of individual believers determining evil influences and policies within their chosen faith group, and strongly advocate for their correction.
- In the importance of education. We believe that people are not truly educated unless they have studied the world's major religions and ethical systems. They need to learn of the good and bad impacts they have had on society.

About Accuracy in Our Essays

We will attempt to overcome our biases on each topic that we describe, by explaining each point of view carefully, respectfully and objectively. To this end, we have many of our essays reviewed by persons familiar with the issues who represent all sides of each topic. We encourage readers to Email us about any errors that they find. We do not regard any essay as fixed or complete.

About Our Use of the BCE/CE Date Notation

We abandoned use of the traditional AD/BC notation for identifying years. After a long debate, we made the decision to use the religiously neutral CE/BCE notation which we feel is less offensive to non-Christians.

Related Essay on this Website

- OCRT purposes, history, etc.
- Who we are; our funding sources; etc.
- Footnotes, mainly about exceptions:
 1. However, like the rest of North American society, we have not been able to reach a consensus about when human life, in the form of a spermatozoon and an ovum, becomes a human person deserving civil rights.
 2. However we have not been able to reach a consensus about the age at which an individual should fully enjoy these freedoms. We also recognize that some of these freedoms should have limits. For example, we do not feel that, in most cases, parents should be allowed to let their children die if medical treatment will assure a cure. We do not feel that individuals should be free to advocate genocide or yell “fire” in a crowded theatre.
 3. We have been criticised for our lack of belief in absolute morality.
 4. Exceptions are:
 - A handful of destructive cults which have that have endangered the lives of their members.
 - Those faith groups who actively promote discrimination and oppression on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, and similar grounds.
 5. They need to understand the religious sources that inspired Gandhi, Albert Schweitzer, and Mother Teresa to commit

their life to the alleviation of human suffering. But they also need to learn the shadow side of religion: how religious beliefs have contributed to hatred, intolerance, unjustified discrimination, as well as:

- Mass murders and genocides in such places as Nazi Germany, Bosnia, East Timor, Kosovo, Northern Ireland, the Middle-East, Sudan and countless other countries.
- Historical support for human slavery, oppression of women, oppression of sexual minorities, female genital mutilation, etc.
- Historical opposition to medical advances.

THE CARDINAL DOCTRINES OF PROTESTANT CHRISTIANITY

OVERVIEW

In this website's section on Christianity, we have attempted to describe the full diversity of beliefs taught by various wings of Christianity. Unfortunately, this might lead our readers to believe that there are few core beliefs that most Christian denominations accept in common.

The Cardinal Doctrines of Christianity are those beliefs which most Protestant denominations accept as forming the foundational teachings of Christianity. Many, perhaps most Christian faith groups feel that all Christians should believe each of these beliefs. Some groups would classify a person as a non-Christian if they rejected even one belief on their own list of Cardinal Doctrines.

There appears to be a general consensus by conservative and some mainline Protestant faith groups that a list of core beliefs might include:

- The Trinity,
- The deity of Jesus,
- Jesus' bodily resurrection,
- The atonement as a result of the life, and particularly the death, of Jesus,
- Personal salvation by grace,
- The inerrancy of the Bible
- God's inspiration of the Bible's authors,
- The virgin birth, and
- The anticipated second coming of Jesus.

But there does not appear to be an agreed upon single list that most Protestant faith groups accept as “cardinal doctrines.”

Beliefs of Non-Protestant Groups

This essay deals with the cardinal beliefs of Protestant groups. However, Protestants do not form the entirety of Christianity. Consider just two other groups:

- It is perhaps ironic that if one considers the very earliest Christian movement—the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem under the leadership of James the “brother” of Jesus and in the period immediately after Jesus’ execution before the arrival of Paul—they might not be considered Christian by today’s standards. That group apparently did not believe in the Trinity, the deity of Jesus, salvation by grace, or the virgin birth. They expected that Jesus’ second coming would occur sometime in the first century CE, not millennia later.
- Roman Catholicism expects its members to believe in a much larger list of cardinal beliefs than is listed above. One example that is not shared by Protestants is the assumption of the Virgin Mary into Heaven at death. Pope Pius XII wrote in *Munificentissimus Deus*:
“... we pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory. Hence if anyone, which God forbid, should dare wilfully to deny or to call into doubt that which we have defined, let him know that he has fallen away completely from the divine and Catholic Faith.”

We will attempt to document the cardinal beliefs of non-Protestant Christians at a future date.

Cardinal Doctrines According to the Niagara Bible Conference

The Bible Conference of Conservative Christians at Niagara, initially known as the Believers’ Meeting for Bible Study, was organised in 1868 and met annually from 1883 to 1897 at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario, Canada. In 1878 they created the “Niagara Creed” — a list of fourteen fundamental points of Christian belief.

Among the fourteen points, the five principal beliefs were:

- The verbal and plenary inspiration of the Bible,

- The total depravity of man, a Calvinist doctrine.
- The necessity of being born again in order to achieve salvation,
- Substitutionary atonement, and
- Pre-millennial return of Christ.

These were later discussed in *The Fundamentals*—a series of pamphlets published between 1910 and 1915. From these pamphlets, the term “Fundamentalism” developed; before that time, Fundamentalists were referred to simply as conservatives.

A Conflict Over Cardinal Doctrines

In 1910, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the USA (PCUSA) derived the following essential tenets from the Westminster Confession of Faith. This is the foundational document that they share with other Reform denominations:

- The inerrancy of Scripture.
- The virgin birth
- The substitutionary atonement
- Jesus’ bodily resurrection
- The miracles generated by Jesus were authentic.

In 1916 and 1923, the General Assembly ruled that all ordination candidates had to agree with all of the above beliefs to avoid rejection by the denomination. A Fundamentalist / Modernist split occurred in the denomination that focused around this requirement for ordination. Some ministers suggested that the Bible was not necessarily inerrant on matters of science and history. Others believed that there were other valid principles by which the functioning of the atonement could be explained.

Debate reached a fever pitch, much like the conflict over ordination of women and ordination of gays and lesbians in loving committed relationships were to generate conflict within some denominations in later decades.

Some liberals in the denomination met at the Auburn Seminary in northern New York state in 1924 and agreed on the Auburn Affirmation. It stated, in part:

“...we are united in believing that these are not the only theories allowed by the Scriptures and our standards as explanations of these facts and doctrines of our religion, and that all who hold to these facts and doctrines,

whatever theories they may employ to explain them, are worthy of all confidence and fellowship.

It asserted that Presbyterians at the time should:

- “Safeguard liberty of thought and teaching of its ministers”;
- Prohibit restricting the church to rigid interpretations of scripture and doctrine; and
- Refuse to rank ecclesiastical authority above the conscience swayed by the [Holy] Spirit.

That document prompted the 1925 General Assembly to form a Special Theological Commission “to study the present spiritual condition of our Church and the causes making for unrest...to the end that the purity, peace and unity and progress of the Church may be assured.” Their report influenced delegates to the 1927 General Assembly to institute a type of local option within the denomination. They declared that it is the individual presbyteries, not the General Assembly, which would determine what their clergy must affirm theologically. A schism occurred later when Fundamentalist members left the PCUSA to form the Orthodox Presbyterian Church in America under leader William Jennings Bryan. A later schism happened later over female ordination. There is a concern that a similar schism may happen in the future to Presbyterian, Methodist and Episcopalian denominations over issues related to homosexuality.

Recent Listings of Cardinal Doctrines by Various Para-church Organisations

The Christian Research Institute lists:

1. The authority of Scripture.
2. The Trinity
3. Man is a physical and spiritual being adversely affected by sin.
4. Christ is fully God and fully man who was sent to save humanity.
5. The church is God’s ordained institution headed by Christ.

Living by the Word differentiates between:

- Five “Essential Christian Doctrines” which one must believe in order to be saved
 1. The deity of Jesus Christ.
 2. Jesus’ bodily resurrection from the dead.
 3. The Trinity.

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4. Christ's vicarious atonement for man's sin.
 5. Salvation by grace alone through faith alone.
 - "Cardinal Christian Doctrines" which may not be required for salvation, but which are extremely important:
 1. The Virgin Birth
 2. Inerrancy of Scripture
 3. The second coming of Christ

Lamb & Lion Ministries lists five "Cardinal Doctrines of the Christian Faith:"

1. The Bible is the divinely inspired inerrant Word of God.
2. The Virgin Birth.
3. Jesus' bodily resurrection.
4. Salvation is a "free gift of God's grace" obtained by trusting Jesus as Lord and Savior.
5. The deity of Jesus Christ.

The Congregational Holiness Church lists as the "cardinal Christian doctrines" that they hold in common with most other Christian denominations:

1. The Trinity.
2. The inspiration of the Scriptures.
3. The Virgin Birth.
4. Jesus' bodily resurrection.
5. The second coming of Christ.

They also hold a key belief that is generally restricted to Charismatic and Pentecostal denominations: the "Baptism of the Holy Ghost with the initial evidence of speaking in other tongues..."

Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry (CARM) lists four beliefs of Christianity which were declared "by scripture to be essential:"

1. The deity of Christ, including belief in the Trinity, monotheism, and Jesus as both God and man.
2. Salvation by grace.
3. Jesus' bodily resurrection.
4. The Gospels' teaching that "Jesus is God in flesh, who died for sins, rose from the dead, and freely gives the gift of eternal life to those who believe."

The Moorings has a study in Bible doctrine which lists basic Christian doctrines as:

1. Inerrancy of the Bible.
2. The Incarnation.
3. Jesus is both God and man.
4. The personhood and deity of the Holy Spirit.
5. The Trinity.
6. Heaven.

Online Christian Discipleship School has a Bible study on "Basic Doctrine of Christianity." They list:

1. The Trinity.
2. The inspiration of the Bible.
3. God created humans in his image and deserves our love and obedience.
4. Sin entered the world through Adam.
5. The atonement.
6. The resurrection.
7. Salvation through trusting Jesus.
8. Spirit possession of believers by Jesus.

Marty Rothwell, an author on a Roman Catholic site "Christ's Faithful People," suggests that prior to the Protestant Reformation in the early 16th century, all Christians were expected to believe in many key doctrines.

Some of these are still shared by most Protestants:

1. "God the Son is of the same substance and nature as God the Father."
2. The Trinity.
3. Jesus is fully God and fully human.

However, there are also beliefs not shared by most Protestants, or not shared to the same extent:

1. The Body and Blood of Christ are present in the Eucharist.
2. The Apostolic Succession.
3. Beliefs are grounded in both the Bible and church tradition.
4. The Holy Spirit guides the Church away from error.
5. The effects of baptism.

6. Believers are saved by Grace and faith.
7. Salvation can be achieved and later lost.
8. Baptism of infants.
9. The Deuterocanonical books / Apocrypha form an integral part of the Bible.
10. Clergy are restricted to males.
11. The Pope is the head of the Christian church.
12. Canonisation and veneration of saints.
13. Effectiveness of the prayers of deceased saints.
14. Confession of sins to a priest.
15. Penance is needed after sinning.
16. Purgatory as the destination of many persons after death.
17. Prayers for the dead are effective.
18. Seven sacraments of: Baptism, Confirmation, Confession, Communion, Marriage, Holy Orders, and Extreme Unction.
19. Veneration of the Virgin Mary.
20. Liturgical worship.
21. Images are useful aids to worship.

Links to Key Doctrines of Christianity

This website has essays on most of the topics that are frequently mentioned above as cardinal doctrines:

- Atonement, "...the central tenet of Christianity"
- Biblical inerrancy
- God's inspiration of the biblical authors
- Heaven and Hell
- Jesus' bodily resurrection,
- Criteria for salvation.
- Origin of sin: Does Genesis 3 represent the fall or rise of humanity?
- The second coming of Christ and the end of the world as we know it
- The virgin birth

To which we would add another belief that runs as a frequently appearing theme throughout the Bible, but is almost never mentioned in sermons or books on theology or apologetics:

- The transferability of sins from the guilty to the innocent.

We plan to write other essays in the future which deal with the Trinity, the deity of Jesus, his ascension to Heaven, Jesus as God and man, the incarnation, and possession by indwelling spirits.

Books on Cardinal Christian Beliefs

- Gilbert Bilezikian: "Christianity 101," Zondervan (1993). "This accessible book presents the eight basic doctrines of the Christian church in plain language for both old and new curious Christians interested in sharpening their understanding and defense of the faith." Read reviews or order this book safely from Amazon.com online book store
- Emmaus Bible School staff, "What Christians Believe: Basic Studies in Bible Doctrine and Christian Living," Moody Publishers, (1951). Read reviews or order this book
- Shirley Guthrie, "Christian Doctrine," Westminster John Knox Press (1994). Read reviews or order this book

BUDDHISM, BASED ON THE TEACHINGS OF SIDDHARTHA GAUTAMA

QUOTATIONS

"Buddhism has the characteristics of what would be expected in a cosmic religion for the future: it transcends a personal God, avoids dogmas and theology; it covers both the natural and spiritual, and it is based on a religious sense aspiring from the experience of all things, natural and spiritual, as a meaningful unity" A widely cited, but apparently spurious quotation attributed to Albert Einstein.

"The greatest achievement is selflessness.

The greatest worth is self-mastery.

The greatest quality is seeking to serve others.

The greatest precept is continual awareness.

The greatest medicine is the emptiness of everything.

The greatest action is not conforming with the worlds ways.

The greatest magic is transmuting the passions.

The greatest generosity is non-attachment.

The greatest goodness is a peaceful mind.

The greatest patience is humility.

The greatest effort is not concerned with results.

The greatest meditation is a mind that lets go.

The greatest wisdom is seeing through appearances." Atisha.

"If you live the sacred and despise the ordinary, you are still bobbing in the ocean of delusion." Lin-Chi.

"Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I vow to cultivate compassion and learn ways to protect lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to condone any killing in the world, in my thinking, and in my way of life." Ven. Thich Nhat Hanh.

"When the mind begins to become still, we then begin to truly see it. When you first try to stabilize and pacify the mind, initially it will become very busy because it's not accustomed to being still. In fact, it doesn't even necessarily want to become still, but it is essential to get a hold of the mind to recognize its nature. This practice is extremely important.... Eventually you will find yourself in a state where your mind is clear and open all the time. It is just like when the clouds are removed from the sky and the sun can clearly be seen, shining all the time. This is coming close to the state of liberation, liberation from all traces of suffering.... The truth of this practice is universal. It isn't necessary to call it a religion to practice it. Whether one is a Hindu or a Moslem or a Christian or a Buddhist simply doesn't matter. Anyone can practice this because this is the nature of the mind, the nature of everyone's mind. If you can get a handle on your mind, and pacify it in this way, you will definitely experience these results, and you will see them in your daily life situation. There is no need to put this into any kind of category, any kind of "ism." Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche

Is Buddhism a Religion?

Whether Buddhism is or is not a religion depends upon how you define "religion."

Government census offices and public opinion pollsters generally recognize Buddhism as a religion. Books that describe the religions of the world generally cover Buddhism along with Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, etc. Even the Boy Scouts of America, who expel Atheists, Agnostics and homosexuals, accept Buddhists as members.

The Drepung Loseling Institute states:

"Like all major religions, Buddhism contains an explanation of the origin of existence, a morality, and a specific set of rituals and behaviours.... Buddhism presents a transformational goal, a desire to improve one's situation, and a distinct moral code.

However, some definitions of “religion” require a belief in the existence of one or more deities. That would disqualify most branches of Buddhism from being considered as religious groups.

OVERVIEW

With about 365 million followers—6 per cent of the world’s population—Buddhism is the fourth largest religion in the world. It is exceeded in numbers only by Christianity, Islam and Hinduism. Buddhism was founded in Northern India by the first known Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama. In the sixth century BCE, he attained enlightenment and assumed the title Lord Buddha (one who has awakened)

Buddhism later died out in India, but had become established in Sri Lanka. From there, it expanded across Asia, evolving into two or three main forms:

- Theravada Buddhism (sometimes called Southern Buddhism; occasionally spelled Therevada) “has been the dominant school of Buddhism in most of Southeast Asia since the thirteenth century, with the establishment of the monarchies in Thailand, Burma, Cambodia and Laos.”
- Mahayana Buddhism (sometimes called Northern Buddhism) is largely found in China, Japan, Korea, Tibet and Mongolia.
- Vajrayâna Buddhism (a.k.a. Tantric Buddhism, Mantrayana, Tantrayana, Esoteric Buddhism, or True Words Sect). Some consider this to be a part of Mahayana Buddhism; others view it as a third Buddhist path.

To these might be added:

- Tibetan Buddhism. This developed largely in isolation from Theravada and Mahayana Buddhism because of the remoteness of Tibet.
- Zen Buddhism. This developed from within the Chinese Mahayana school known as Chan. Zen Buddhism is becoming increasingly popular in the West.

Since the late 19th century:

- Modern Buddhism has emerged as a truly international movement. It started as an attempt to produce a single form of Buddhism, without local accretions, that all Buddhists could embrace.

HINDUISM: THE WORLD'S THIRD LARGEST RELIGION

OVERVIEW

Hinduism differs from Christianity and other Western religions in that it does not have a single founder, a specific theological system, a single system of morality, or a central religious organisation. It consists of *"thousands of different religious groups that have evolved in India since 1500 BCE."*

Hinduism has grown to become the world's third largest religion, after Christianity and Islam. It claims about 837 million followers—13 per cent of the world's population. It is the dominant religion in India, Nepal, and among the Tamils in Sri Lanka. According to the *"Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches,"* there are about 1.1 million Hindus in the U.S. The *"American Religious Identification Survey"* is believed to be more accurate. They estimated smaller number: 766,000 Hindus in 2001. Still, this is a very significant increase from 227,000 in 1990. Statistics Canada estimates that there are about 157,015 Hindus in Canada.

Hinduism is generally regarded as the world's oldest organised religion.

Most forms of Hinduism are henotheistic religions. They recognize a single deity, and view other Gods and Goddesses as manifestations or aspects of that supreme God. Henotheistic and polytheistic religions have traditionally been among the world's most religiously tolerant faiths. However, until recently, a Hindu nationalistic political party controlled the government of India. The linkage of religion, the national government, and nationalism led to a degeneration of the separation of church and state in India. This, in turn, has decreased the level of religious tolerance in that country. The escalation of anti-Christian violence was one manifestation of this linkage. With the recent change in government, the level of violence will diminish.

ISLAM: THE SECOND LARGEST WORLD RELIGION... AND GROWING

QUOTATIONS

"The messenger of Allah said: "Islam is to testify that there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah, to perform the prayers, to pay the zakat, to fast in Ramadan, and to make the pilgrimage to the House if you are able to do so." He said: " You have

spoken rightly”, Jibreel (Gabriel) from Number 2 of “Al-Nawawi’s Forty Hadiths.”

“If anyone harms (others), God will harm him, and if anyone shows hostility to others, God will show hostility to him.” Sunan of Abu-Dawood, Hadith 1625.

“Those who believe (in the Quran), and those who follow the Jewish (scriptures), and the Christians...and (all) who believe in God and the last day and work righteousness, shall have their reward with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.” The Qur’an, 2:62

“Jim Jones, David Koresh and Meir Kahane do not typify Christianity and Judaism in the eyes of the civilised West, but those same eyes are prone to see Osama bin Laden and Mullah Muhammad Omar as typifying Islam,” Richard Bulliet

ABOUT ISLAM

Estimates of the total number of Muslims range from 0.7 to 1.2 billion worldwide and 1.1 to 7 million in the U.S. About 21 per cent of all people on Earth follow Islam. The religion is currently in a period of rapid growth.

Christianity is currently the largest religion in the world. It is followed by about 33 per cent of all people—a percentage that has remained stable for decades. If current trends continue, Islam will become the most popular world religion sometime in the mid-21st century.

Topics Included in This Section

About Islam

- “The Truth About Islam”: A description in about 600 words
- The character and attributes of Allah
- Introduction to Islam:
 - Part 1: Its origin, Muhammad, texts, beliefs, etc.
 - Part 2: Its practices, schools, holy days, etc.
- Comparing the beliefs of Islam and Christianity Comparing their growth rates
- How many Muslims are there in the U.S. and in the rest of the world?
- Muslim books, web sites, and web rings

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- Links to web sites featuring clothing, cards, etc.

Quotations

- Quotations from the Qur'an
- Hadiths: sayings of Muhammad
- Comparison of Qur'an verses with the Hebrew Scriptures' Ten Commandments

Beliefs and Practices

- Apostasy (Irtidād) — abandoning Islam
- The environment and global warming
- The Hajj — pilgrimage to Mecca
 - The significance of Eid-ul-Adha
- Holy days of Islam — seasonal days of observance and celebration
- Homosexuality
 - Reasons why same-sex marriage is bad, given on Aljazeera's website
- The concept of Jihad

Sharia Law Punishment for Non-marital Sex

- Sharia law as practised in Ontario
- When is killing innocent humans permitted? Terrorist attacks and the principle of tattarrus
- Paradise: life after death
- The fast of Ramadan
- Status of women: Female genital mutilation among Animists, Christians, and Muslims
- The role of women in predominately Muslim countries
- Corporal punishment of women
- Tolerance items: Accommodation for and by Muslims in North America
- Islamic prayers in public schools
- Senate/House resolutions promoting religious tolerance towards Muslims.

Why do "they" hate the West?

- "Terror has no faith" An essay by Ibrahim Hooper of CAIR

- Religious intolerance in Florida against Muslims
- Peace: A prayer for peace and unity
- Appeal for peace by Muslim scholars, sent to Christian leaders
- Conflicts: Verbal attacks on Muslims by Fundamentalist and other conservative Christian leaders
- Attacks on Muslims by Roman Catholic leaders
- Beliefs about Islam by the American public
- Is Islam a religion of violence or peace?
- Hate crimes against Muslims and mosques
- A book about Islam on the University of Northern California reading list
- Terrorist attacks in America 2001-Sep.-11, not by typical Muslims, but by extremist, radical, fundamentalist, Muslim terrorists.
- The Washington-area sniper
- Al Qaeda's beheading of Paul Johnson in Saudi Arabia
- An excerpt about Iran from a book by Reza Aslan titled "No god but God"
- A sampling of fatwas and other statements during 2005 condemning terrorist acts
- Radical Muslim group(s) in U.S. Prisons
- 2006 conference in Iran of Nazi Holocaust deniers
- Religious terms: Can a person be both a Christian and a Muslim?
- "Fundamentalism" within Christianity and Islam
- Names given to the "Holy Land"
- Religious terms used to refer to Islam and Muslims
- In addition to the above, we have short passages on:
- Virgin birth of Jesus (pbuh)
- Jesus' (pbuh) sinlessness.

JUDAISM

BELIEFS, PRACTICES, JEWISH-CHRISTIAN RELATIONS, NEWS

Judaism is an Abrahamic religion—faiths which recognize Abraham as a Patriarch. Others include Christianity Islam, and the Baha'i Faith. Although Jews comprise only about 0.2 per cent of the human race, Jewish influence on the world has been vast—far more than their numbers would indicate.

Topics Covered in this Section

Description of Judaism

The Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament):

- Languages, authors, sources, hidden codes... Stories in the Hebrew Scriptures Creation, the fall/rise of humanity, the flood, genocides

Religious groups blending Jewish culture with non-Jewish theology:

- Jewish Humanism—A faith group with Humanist beliefs
- Messianic Judaism—A faith group with an Evangelical Christian theology
- Black Hebrew Israelites—A group believing that African Americans and other inhabitants of North and South America are the twelve lost tribes of Israel

Seasonal Days of Celebration

Jewish beliefs about:

- Abortion
- The environment and global warming
- Homosexuality

Christian-Jewish relations:

- Historical anti-semitism:
 - Are there anti-semitic passages in the Christian Scriptures (New Testament)
 - Who was responsible for Jeshua's (Jesus') execution?
 - History of persecution of Jews
 - Blood libel, ritual murder, host desecration, "The Protocols," and other anti-Judaic hoaxes
 - Mel Gibson's "The Passion of the Christ;" Jewish responses
- Recent interactions:
 - Current Attempts to Convert Jews to Christianity: The Southern Baptist prayer guides
 - Christian apology to Jews and Muslims for the Crusades
 - Dabru Emet: a Jewish statement on Jewish-Christian relations.
 - Christian Zionism: Christian support for the State of Israel
- Shoah (Nazi Holocaust) topics:
 - Admission of governments' complicity in the Nazi Holocaust

- Anti-semitism and the Catholic church
- Financial compensation for Nazi slave laborers
- 2006 conference in Iran of Nazi Holocaust deniers
- Other topics:
 - Bible codes: messages allegedly hidden in the Torah
 - Religious intolerance in Israel
 - Names given to the “Holy Land”
 - Religious hate propaganda: one story; many versions; all false
 - Continually updated list of current Jewish news items



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WORLD RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS, CULTS, SECTS, DENOMINATIONS AND BELIEFNET: AN INDEPTH ANALYSIS

WICCA: A NEOPAGAN EARTH-CENTERED RELIGION

QUOTATIONS

- “We are not evil. We don’t harm or seduce people. We are not dangerous. We are ordinary people like you. We have families, jobs, hopes, and dreams. We are not a cult. This religion is not a joke. We are not what you think we are from looking at T.V. We are real. We laugh, we cry. We are serious. We have a sense of humor. You don’t have to be afraid of us. We don’t want to convert you. And please don’t try to convert us. Just give us the same right we give you—to live in peace. We are much more similar to you than you think.” Margot Adler
- “If you take [a copy of] the Christian Bible and put it out in the wind and the rain, soon the paper on which the words are printed will disintegrate and the words will be gone. Our bible IS the wind and the rain.” Herbalist Carol McGrath as told to her by a Native-American woman.
- “I don’t think witchcraft is a religion. I would hope the military officials would take a second look at the decision they made.” G.W. Bush (R), as Governor of Texas. Interviewed on ABC’s Good Morning America, 1999, Jun-24. He disapproved of Wiccan soldiers being given the same religious rights as others in the military.
- “We should educate people that ‘Witch’ is not evil but ancient and positive. The first time I called myself a ‘Witch’ was the most magical moment of my life.” Margot Adler.

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- “When one defines oneself as Pagan, it means she or he follows an earth or nature religion, one that sees the divine manifest in all creation. The cycles of nature are our holy days, the earth is our temple, its plants and creatures our partners and teachers. We worship a deity that is both male and female, a mother Goddess and father God, who together created all that is, was, or will be. We respect life, cherish the free will of sentient beings, and accept the sacredness of all creation.” Edain McCoy.

RELIGIONS OF THE WORLD: INFORMATION ABOUT FORTY ORGANISED RELIGIONS AND FAITH GROUPS

INTRODUCTORY THOUGHTS

What is Religion?

There are many definitions for the term “religion” in common usage. On this website, we define it very broadly, in order to include the greatest number of belief systems: “Religion is any specific system of belief about deity, often involving rituals, a code of ethics, and a philosophy of life.” Thus we include here all of the great monotheistic religions, Eastern religions; Neopagan religions; a wide range of other faith groups, spiritual paths, and ethical systems; and beliefs about the existence of God(s) and Goddess(es). We recognize that most people define “religion” in a much more exclusive manner.

Christianity

- There are many definitions for this term as well. Again, we use an inclusive definition: “An individual or group is Christian if they sincerely, thoughtfully and devoutly believe that they are Christian.” This generates a lot of angry Emails from some visitors to this site who are insistent on excluding the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Roman Catholic Church, the Mormons and some other denominations as sub-Christian, quasi-Christian non-Christian, or anti-Christian.
- We treat Christianity in greater detail than other religions, simply because about 75 per cent of North Americans identify themselves with that religion. Christians outnumber the next largest organised religions, Judaism and Islam, by about 40 to 1 in the U.S. and Canada. We are not in any way implying that Christianity is superior or inferior to other religions. It is simply much more popular.

Destructive, Doomsday Cults

These are fortunately few in number, and are listed elsewhere. Information for these essays was extracted from reliable sources, and believed to be accurate and reasonably unbiased. Where possible, they have been reviewed by a group (typically 3 or more) of persons who follow the belief before the material is placed online.

“WORLD” RELIGIONS

There are many, long established, major world religions, each with over three million followers. We have shown the five largest North American religions in bold:

- Baha’i Faith
- Buddhism
- Christianity;
- Christian groups, denominations and families (Amish to The Way)
- Confucianism
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Jainism
- Judaism
- Shinto
- Sikhism
- Taoism
- Vodun (Voodoo).

NEOPAGAN RELIGIOUS FAITHS

Neopagan faiths are modern-day reconstructions of ancient Pagan religions from various countries and eras. They experience a high but diminishing level of discrimination and persecution in North America. They were once rarely practised in public for reasons of safety. This is rapidly changing for the better.

- Asatru (Norse Paganism)
- Druidism
- Goddess Worship
- Wicca
- Witchcraft

Notes: Many followers of Asatru regard themselves as “Heathens” rather than “Neopagans.”

Many followers of these religions refer to themselves as “Pagans.” We use the term “Neopagan” because it is less ambiguous. “Pagan” has a variety of unrelated meanings.

Other Organised Religions

These are smaller religions, with a well defined belief in deity, humanity and the rest of the universe. Of the many hundreds of faith groups in the world, we have chosen these because of their historical significance, or because of the massive amount of misinformation that has been spread about them in North America:

- Caodaism
- Damanhur Community
- Druze
- Eckankar
- Elian Gonzalez religious movement
- Gnosticism
- Gypsies
- Hare Krishna—ISKCON
- Ifa, the religion of the Yoruba people of West Africa
- Lukumi
- Macumba
- Mowahhidoon
- Native American Spirituality
- Rom, Roma, Romani, Rroma, (a.k.a. Gypsies)
- Santeria Elian Gonzalez religious movement
- Satanism; The Church of Satan
- Scientology
- Unitarian-Universalism
- The Creativity Movement (formerly called World Church of the Creator)
- The Yazidi branch of Yazdânism
- Zoroastrianism

Related sections and essays in this website:

- Ethical groups, philosophies, spiritual paths, etc. Atheism to Vampirism
- Comparison of beliefs among different religious groups
- General information about religion

- A glossary of religious terms
- A list of books on religion and spirituality
- Selecting holy texts from the world's religions for public meditation rooms, personal library, etc.

CULTS (A.K.A. NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS)

INTRODUCTION

Quotations about Cults

"...one person's cult is another's religion; all religions begin life as cults. An alternative definition is that a cult is a religion which you happen to dislike." Anthony Campbell

"Cult is a word without much use outside the realm of religious mudslinging." Philip Kennicott

"When someone uses the word 'cult,' it usually says more about them than the group," J. Gordon Melton, founder and director of The Institute for the Study of American Religion.

"It's easy to tell the difference—a cult is someone else's religion. Corollary: "A fanatic is someone who believes something more strongly than you do." Jim Heldberg

"I have often thought that the difference between a cult and a religion is an IRS ruling." Ron Barrier

Usage of the Word "Cult:"

The term "cult" is generally used as a hateful snarl word that is intended to intentionally devalue people and the new faith groups that they have chosen to follow. It tends to associate thousands of benign religious groups with the handful of destructive religious groups that have caused loss of life. The term often creates fear and loathing among the public, and contributes greatly to religious intolerance in North America. The word "cult," particularly as used by the media, carries a heavy emotional content. The term suggests that this is a group that you should detest, avoid, and fear.

Who are the True "Cults?"

In reality, the only "crime" of most "cults" is that they they hold different religious beliefs from whomsoever is doing the attacking. For example, many conservative Christian counter-cult groups consider The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS; the main Mormon church) to be a cult that is tinged with Gnosticism and teaches beliefs

which conflict with historic Christianity. Meanwhile, the LDS teaches the Christianity took a wrong turn in the second century CE and abandoned most of the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. They regard their own denomination as the true Christian church. Who is the cult and who is the mainline movement depends upon one's viewpoint.

History

Fear and dislike of new religious movements, coupled with increased respect for established faith groups with a long history, has been with us for at least two millennia.

- During the first century, many people in the Roman Empire rejected Christianity because it was new, and valued Judaism because of its ancient history. Today, some established religions criticize new religions simply because they are new and teach different beliefs.
- During the first century, some politicians spread rumors that Christians engaged in orgies during their love feasts, and sacrificed infants to their God. During the 1980s and early 1990s, many Christians believed that Pagans, Satanists, and other small religious groups engaged in orgies and ritual abuse and human sacrifice.

Meanings of the Word "Cult:"

Individuals and organisations have assigned many meanings to the word "cult." The result is mass confusion:

- The Counter-cult movement (CCM) classifies all non-traditional Christian faith groups as cults simply because their beliefs differ from historical Christian doctrine. The term "cult" has, in many ways, replaced "heretic" or "non-traditional," or "unconventional" within the CCM. Examples of commonly attacked "cults" are: Seventh-Day Adventists and Mormons. In this website, we simply refer to these groups as denominations, or faith groups.
- Some Fundamentalist and other Evangelical Christians describe most non-Christian religions as cults or as Satanic religions, simply because they are non-Christian. Examples are religions as different as Wicca and Hinduism. We simply refer to these groups by name, as alternative religions or as faith groups.
- The largely secular Anti-Cult Movement (ACM) mainly targets religious groups that make high demands on their membership. They are accused of mind control or brainwashing techniques

which reduce their members to near zombie-like status, who are unable to think clearly and become trapped within the group. Examples of religions targeted by the ACM are the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Two-by-twos. Studies by mental health researchers indicate that the charges of the ACM have little or no merit. We simply refer to these groups as high-intensity or high demand faith groups who expect great dedication from their members.

- Many information sources use the term "cult" to refer to the few destructive, doomsday religious groups whose members have been murdered or committed suicide. Examples are The Solar Temple and Heaven's Gate. We do refer to such groups as "cults"

REACTING TO RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY: EXCLUSIVISM, PLURALISM AND INCLUSIVISM

OVERVIEW

According to David Barrett et al, editors of the "World Christian Encyclopedia: A comparative survey of churches and religions—AD 30 to 2200," there are 19 major world religions which are subdivided into a total of 270 large religious groups, and many smaller ones. 34,000 separate Christian groups have been identified worldwide.

These religions and faith groups teach very different belief systems. This naturally raises the question of where religious truth is to be found. Many people regard their own denomination or faith group within their own religion to possess total religious truth; other denominations are seen to exhibit some error; other religions are often considered to be in serious error and are sometimes viewed as in opposition to the truth.

There are three main methods of viewing other denominations and religions:

- **Exclusivism:** One's own group possesses the truth; other religious groups are in serious error, and are placing the latter's membership in grave peril regarding salvation.
- **Inclusivism:** One's own group possesses the truth; other religious groups contain parts of the truth. The latter's believers are less likely to be saved.
- **Pluralism:** All group's beliefs and practices are equally valid, when interpreted within their own culture. Salvation is for all.

Unfortunately, the term “religious pluralism” has other unrelated meanings. The main one is as a synonym for religious diversity: the fact that there exists a variety of religious beliefs in a given country or other geographic area. Thus, religious pluralism in North America — in the sense of the U.S. and Canada being religiously diverse — is a statement of fact. But only a minority of North Americans believe in the other meaning of “religious diversity:” that all religions are equally valid.

Topics Covered in this Section

- The diversity of meanings of the term “religious pluralism”
- Conflicting quotations. How groups cope with religious diversity
- Conflicts involving religious pluralism
- Conflicts involving religious exclusivism
- Christians’ beliefs about other religions
- Can non-Catholics be saved, according to the Roman Catholic church?

CULTS, SECTS AND DENOMINATIONS

QUOTATIONS

“...if you believe in it, it is a religion or perhaps ‘the’ religion; and if you do not care one way or another about it, it is a sect; but if you fear and hate it, it is a cult.” Leo Pfeffer. A humorous quotation, but one that is uncomfortably close to reality.

“Cults are claimed to be deceitful. They are claimed to be harmful to their members. They are claimed to be undermining American values. Cults are claimed to be just about every bad thing in the book these days, and with the pervasive images of Manson and Jim Jones hanging over us, any group that is called a cult is immediately associated with those two people.” J. Gordon Melton.

“My working definition of a cult is a group that you don’t like, and I say that somewhat facetiously, but at the same time, in fact, that is my working definition of a cult. It is a group that somebody doesn’t like. It is a derogatory term, and I have never seen it redeemed from the derogatory connotations that it picked up in the sociological literature in the 1930s.” J. Gordon Melton.

“A cult is a church down the street from your church.” Anon

Meanings of the Word "Cult"

Many common religious terms lack a generally accepted, single, current definition. This leads to confusion over the meanings of certain religious terms, such as Christian, cult hell, heaven, occult, Paganism, salvation, Witch, Witchcraft, Unitarian, Universalist, Voodoo, etc. A reader must often look at the context in which the word is used in order to guess at the intent of the writer.

In the newsgroup alt.usage.english, terms like this one are often called "skunk words." They have diverse meanings to different people. They have so many meanings that they often cause misunderstandings wherever they are used. Unfortunately, most people do not know this, and naturally assume that the meaning that they have been taught is the universally accepted definition of the term.

The term "Unitarian" is a good example:

- Pre-1776 CE: Belief in a single God and the rejection of the Christian concept of the Trinity.
- Post-1775: A creedless and dogma-free religious organisation. The Unitarian Universalist Association, (UUA) is an association of Unitarian congregations.

Utter confusion reigns when an author is using one definition of "Unitarian," while a reader assumes the other meaning. Misunderstandings also happen when an author assumes that both definitions refer to the same organisation or belief.

One of the most confusing and dangerous religious term is "Cult". The word is derived from the French word "culte" which came from Latin noun "cultus." The latter is related to the Latin verb "colere" which means "to worship or give reverence to a deity." Thus, in its original meaning, the term "cult" can be applied to any group of religious believers: Southern Baptists, Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Roman Catholics, Hindus or Muslims. However, the term has since been assigned at least eight new and very different meanings. The original meaning of "cult" remains positive; more recent definitions are neutral, negative, or extremely negative:

Positive Meaning

Theological usage: Oxford English Dictionary defined "cult" as: "worship; reverential homage rendered to a divine being or beings"

"a particular form or system of religious worship; especially in reference to its external rites and ceremonies devotion or homage to a particular person or thing."

This is the historical meaning of the word, but is rarely today heard outside of religious circles. A reference to the “Cult of Mary” appeared in a newspaper report on the Pope’s 1999 visit to the Americas. It simply means that the Pope devotes special attention to the Virgin Mary.

Cultural usage: The word is often associated with cult films, cult bands, or cult TV programmes. Here, the term “cult” refers to a small but devoted following of a movie, entertainment group or television programme. Avid supporters of Star Trek may be referred to as devoted cultists.

Neutral Meanings

Sociological usage: A small religious group that exists in a state of tension with the predominant religion. Hinduism might be considered a cult in North America; Christianity might be considered a cult in India.

Additional sociological usage: An innovative, fervent religious group, as contrasted with more established and conventional sects and denominations.

The Observer: An English newspaper seemed to use the term to refer to any small religious group, no matter what its age or teachings.

General religious usage: A small, recently created, religious organisation which is often headed by a single charismatic leader and is viewed as an spiritually innovative group. A cult in this sense may simply be a new religious movement on its way to becoming a denomination. The Christian religion, as it existed in 30 CE might be considered a cult involving one leader and 12 or 70 devoted disciples as followers. The Mormon denomination was started in the 19th century by Joseph Smith and a few followers; it met this definition of “cult” but has since grown to become an established denomination of about 15 million members.

Negative Meanings

Evangelical Christians and Counter-Cult Movement (CCM) usage: They define a cult as any religious group which accepts most but not all of the key historical Christian doctrines (e.g. the divinity of Jesus, virgin birth, the Trinity, salvation by faith, not works, etc.). The implication is that the cult’s theology is invalid; they teach heresy. Under this definition, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the

Mormons), Unification Church, Jehovah's Witnesses, and many others would be cults. But the CCM would not classify Wicca as such, because it is not associated with Christianity. The earliest use of this meaning of the word "Cult" is believed to be a 1938 book "The Chaos of the Cults" by J.K. VanBaalen. On the other hand, new religious groups such as the Mormons, Unification Church and Jehovah's Witnesses generally regard themselves to be the true Christian church. They view all other denominations as being in error. Thus, one group's true church is another group's cult. One group's heresy is the other group's orthodoxy.

Fundamentalist Christian usage: Some Fundamentalists would accept the Evangelical definition of cult defined above. Others brand any religious group which deviates from historical Protestant Christian beliefs as a cult. This definition would include the LDS Church, Wicca, mainline and liberal Christian denominations, Islam, Hinduism, and all of the other religions of the world. The vast majority of humanity would belong to cults, by this definition.

Anti-cult movement usage: The anti-cult movement (ACM) attempts to raise public consciousness about what they see as dangerous and authoritarian mind control cults and doomsday cults. Most do not care about the faith group's theology. They target only what they see as deceptive practices, and dangerous psychological pressure techniques, such as brainwashing. The ACM appears to hold opinions about the effectiveness of brainwashing that are not shared by the mental-health community generally. They see mind control/doomsday cults as a widespread social problem.

Very Negative Meaning

Popular, media usage: A cult is considered a small, evil religious group, often with a single charismatic leader, that engages in brainwashing and other mind control techniques, believes that the end of the world is imminent, and collects large amounts of weaponry in preparation for a massive war. The earliest use of this meaning of the word is believed to have been in a 1965 book by Walter Martin "The Kingdom of the Cults"

We have seen "cult" used to refer to Evangelical denominations, the Roman Catholic Church, Unification Church, Church of Scientology, United Church of Christ, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Wiccans, other Neopagans and many other faith groups. The term is essentially meaningless.

Past uses of the term “cult”:

The original meaning of the word “*cult*” was to define a form or style of worship, as described above. It is still used in this way within theological circles.

During the 1920s and 1930s, sociologists who were studying religion started to use it to refer to those faith groups that were not full denominations or sects. According to J. Gordon Melton, “*They were a group that just didn’t fit, and they were termed cults. They were treated primarily as esoterica in American religion.*” During the 1930s, the Christian counter-cult movement (CCM) used the term mainly to describe two groups of faith groups: Those who were non-Christian. Those who deviated from conservative Protestantism. This was the most common use of the term until the 1970s.

ALLEGATIONS OF BRAINWASHING IN NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS (SOMETIMES CALLED “CULTS”)

QUOTATIONS

“An estimated 5,000 economic, political, and religious groups operate in the United States alone at any given time, with 2.5 million members. Over the last ten years, cults have used tactics of coercive mind control to negatively impact an estimated 20 million victims in the last ten years. Worldwide figures are even greater.” Dr. Margaret Singer, “Cults in Our Midst.” Ref A

“Given the problematic nature of scientific support for brainwashing based theories as they are applied to participants in new religions, it is reasonable to ask why such evidence was ever admitted [into court testimony], and why it is sometimes still admitted. The most plausible answer has to do with the operation of biases, prejudices, and misinformation in these cases that involve controversial parties and issues or, as Kassin and Wrightsman (1988) say: cases ‘involving emotional topics over which public opinion is polarised’.”

OVERVIEW

During the 1980s and early 1990s, groups in the Anti-cult Movement (ACM) promoted the belief that cults were engaged in advanced forms of psychological manipulation of their members. Their techniques were called brainwashing, thought reform, coercive persuasion, totalism, and mind control. ACM groups taught that cults were entrapping their members so that they could not escape, and reducing them to near zombie-like status.

The following essay was originally written in 1997 when:

- Anti-cult Movement (ACM) groups were particularly active,
- Some groups forcibly kidnapped members of NRMs and attempted to deprogram them, and
- Charges of brainwashing were very common.

Since then, the credibility of the ACM has dropped precipitously for various reasons:

- Some ACM groups were involved in criminal acts committed during attempts to deprogram people who were in NRMs.
- The public has largely concluded that brainwashing is a hoax.
- Professional religious and mental health associations have issued statements denying the reality of mind control by NRMs.

We will use the term “NRM” (new religious movement) in place of “cult” in this essay, because of the high negative emotional content and multiplicity of definitions of the latter term.

Beliefs Promoted by the Anti-cult Movement

Many individuals in the Anti-cult Movement (ACM) have attempted to raise public consciousness about what they perceive to be a major public threat, mainly to youth and young adults. They believe that many NRMs are profoundly evil. These groups, which they call “cults” are seen as:

- Recruiting large numbers of young people into their religious groups, by using deceptive techniques.
- Subjecting them to severe mind-control processes that were first developed in communist countries, and subsequently developed by NRMs to a much higher level of refinement.
- Destroying their followers’ ability to think critically and to make independent decisions.
- Endangering their followers. Many groups have induced their members to commit suicide.

Many in the ACM see NRMs as being particularly efficient in attracting normal, intelligent older teens and young adults, and convincing them to:

- Donate major amounts of time and effort to the group,
- Uncritically accept its teachings,
- Conform to their behavioural restrictions and
- Make a permanent commitment to remain in the NRM.

Extensive confirmation for these beliefs has come from disillusioned former NRM members. A small minority of those psychologists who specialize in the mind-control field also support the ACM's conclusions.

ACM beliefs have been widely accepted by the general public and the media. Some small surveys of public opinion in the mid-1990s found that:

- Among a sample of 383 adults from a western U.S. state, 78 per cent said that they believed that brainwashing exists. 38 per cent agreed that "brainwashing is required to make someone join a religious cult."
- Among a sample of 1,000 residents of New York state taken before a high-profile tax evasion case involving Reverend Moon and the Unification Church, 43 per cent agreed that "brainwashing is required to make someone change from organised religion to a cult."
- Among a random sample of Oregonians who had been exposed to media reports on the Rajneesh group, 69 per cent agreed that members of that group had been brainwashed.

ACM beliefs mesh well with the mind-control themes seen in *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962; remake 2004) and similar horror movies. Many people uncritically accepted these works of imaginative fiction as representing reality. The public has also absorbed misinformation about the efficiency of brainwashing techniques used by the communists during the Korean War, and allegedly used subsequently by the CIA. James T. Richardson comments:

"These techniques included physical coercion and, taken together, can be labeled 'first generation' brainwashing. Now these techniques are being used, it is claimed, against young people in Western countries by unscrupulous cult leaders...When questioned about the obvious logical problem of applying these theories to situations lacking physical coercion, proponents have a ready, if problematic, answer. They say that physical coercion has been replaced by 'psychological coercion,' which they claim is actually more effective than simple physical coercion. According to brainwashing proponents, this 'second generation' brainwashing theory incorporates new insights about manipulation of individuals...The assumption is that it is not necessary to coerce recruits physically if they can be manipulated by affection, guilt, or other psychological influences. Simple group pressures and emotion-laden tactics are revealed as more effective than the tactics used in the physically coercive Russian, Chinese, and Korean POW situations."

ACM beliefs are also reinforced some feminists, conservative Christians and others who still believe in the widespread existence of Satanic Ritual Abuse (SRA). SRA promoters claim that secret, underground Satanic cults exist on a local, state, national and international level. The anti-SRA movement teaches that Satanists ritually kill tens of thousands of infants every year in the U.S. Other infants and children believed to be programmed to respond as robots without any degree of self-will. Their victims can allegedly be triggered at a later date by sounds, words, images, colors etc. to mindlessly perform pre-arranged acts in support of the Satanic cult. By the mid-1990s, investigators had not been able to uncover hard evidence proving the existence of SRA even after a decade and a half of study. By the end of the century, belief in SRA had largely collapsed, and continues to decline. Some parents of adult children who have joined NRMs take comfort in ACM theories because they absolve the parents from any feelings of personal guilt. They can blame the NRM and its leaders for engaging in criminal acts and capturing their children.

With the decline in belief about mind-control by NRMs, ACM groups have largely abandoned their deprogramming in favor of exit counseling programmes.

Beliefs Promoted by Other Groups

Mental health professionals and academics who study religions have formed a near consensus that this type of mind-control cannot be achieved by psychological means. They observe people entering NRMs because of the emotional support and certainty of belief that the religious groups supply. Almost all later leave the group of their own volition, when their continued membership is no longer a positive experience. The average length of membership is probably less than two years. Some statements by mental health and religious communities follow:

The Society for the Scientific Study of Religion

Ronald Enroth of the Christian Research Institute Journal wrote in 1994 about a court case involving the Unification Church (Molko v. Holy Spirit Association). It involved allegations of 'coercive persuasion' or 'brainwashing' in connection with the denomination's conversion practices. He wrote:

"The Society for the Scientific Study of Religion and the American Sociological Association became signatories in 1989 to the *amicus curiae*

[friend of the court] brief that was put before the U.S. Supreme Court when the Molko case advanced to that judicial level. The brief concluded that allegations of 'brainwashing' constitute a 'devastating infringement' of the petitioner's religious practices and threaten 'the integrity of scientific research'."

In 1990, after having received many requests to evaluate the practicality of brainwashing by religious groups, the Society passed a resolution:

"This association considers that there is insufficient research to permit informed, responsible scholars to reach consensus on the nature and effects of non-physical coercion and control. It further asserts that one should not automatically equate the techniques involved in the process of physical coercion and control with those of non-physical coercion and control. In addition to critical review of existing knowledge, further appropriately designed research is necessary to enable scholarly consensus about this issue."

THE AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION (APA)

Philip G Zimbardo, PhD wrote an article during 1990 for the APA Monitor titled: "What messages are behind today's cults?" He is professor of psychology at Stanford University and a former APA president. Some excerpts from his article are:

- "Cult methods of recruiting, indoctrinating and influencing their members are not exotic forms of mind control, but only more intensely applied mundane tactics of social influence practised daily by all compliance professionals and societal agents of influence."
- "...cult leaders offer simple solutions to the increasingly complex world problems we all face daily. They offer the simple path to happiness, to success, to salvation by following their simple rules, simple group regimentation and simple total lifestyle. Ultimately, each new member contributes to the power of the leader by trading his or her freedom for the illusion of security and reflected glory that group membership holds out."
- "Cult mind control is not different in kind from these everyday varieties, but in its greater intensity, persistence, duration, and scope."

Ronald Enroth wrote in 1994:

"The American Psychological Association, along with nearly two dozen individual scholars and behavioural scientists, filed an amicus [friend

of the court] brief in 1987 in behalf of the Unification Church in the California Supreme Court.... The APA and its co-amici argued that there was little scientific support for 'brainwashing' theory. Both the National Council of Churches and the Christian Legal Society filed briefs in this same case."

Analysis by Answers in Action

Bob and Gretchen Passantino of the conservative Christian group "Answers in Action" have analysed the ACM belief systems about NRM brainwashing and have found them lacking in credibility:

- Brainwashing experiments have all been unsuccessful. The CIA used drugs and electroshock during their investigations into mind-control. "Their experiments were failures; they failed to produce even one potential Manchurian Candidate, and the programme was finally abandoned." The brainwashing attempts by Communist military organisations during the Korean war also failed. They were forced to use torture to supplement their mind-control techniques and were able to obtain success in only a few cases. However, ACM promoters appear to believe that modern forms of mind-control within religious organisations represent a major advance over earlier primitive brainwashing techniques. The Passantinos question how relatively uneducated NRM leaders could succeed when highly trained experts had earlier failed.
- They wonder how NRMs can brainwash recruits in a week, while professionals failed after years of indoctrination. They quote the writings of sociologists Bromley and Shupe which point out how absurd this idea is: "...the brainwashing notion implied that somehow these diverse and unconnected [religious] movements had simultaneously discovered and implemented highly intrusive behavioural modification techniques. Such serendipity and coordination was implausible given the diverse backgrounds of the groups at issue. Furthermore, the inability of highly trained professionals responsible for implementing a variety of modalities for effecting individual change, ranging from therapy to incarceration, belie claims that such rapid transformation can routinely be accomplished by neophytes against an individual's will."
- The ACM movement has collected some information to support its belief that religious groups successfully employ mind-control techniques. But the data is unreliable. The information typically

represents a very small sample size. It is not practical to obtain information before, during and after an individual has been in a NRM. Often, their data is disproportionately obtained from former members of a religious organisation who have been convinced during ACM counseling that they have been victims of mind-control.

- One good indicator of the non-existence of mind-control techniques is the ineffectiveness of NRM recruitment programmes. "Eileen Barker documents that out of 1000 people persuaded by the Moonies [Unification Church] to attend one of their overnight programmes in 1979, 90 per cent had no further involvement. Only 8 per cent joined for more than one week..."
- Another indicator of the non-existence of mind control is the high turnover rate of members. Eileen Barker mentions that there is a 50 per cent attrition rate during the members' first two years.
- The opinions of former NRM members who have left on their own are clear. Barker comments: "...those who leave voluntarily are extremely unlikely to believe that they were ever the victims of mind control."

The Passantinos conclude: "...the Bogey Man of cult mind control is nothing but a ghost story, good for inducing an adrenaline high and maintaining a crusade, but irrelevant to reality."

Analysis by The Institute for the Study of American Religion

J. Gordon Melton is the author of the three-volume set "The Encyclopedia of American Religions." He directs The Institute for the Study of American Religion. The Cult Awareness Network quotes him as saying:

"Slowly, the collapse of the brainwashing hypothesis in relation to the new religions is being brought to Europe, though as in America it will be some years before the strong prejudice against the new religions which has permeated Western culture will be dissolved."

Analysis by the Association of World Academics for Religious Education

The new Cult Awareness Network quotes "AWARE" as stating:

"Because of its vested interest in maintaining the conflict, the anti-cult movement has been unresponsive to objective scholarly studies, and has proceeded with business as usual, as if these studies were non-existent. Scholars whose work directly challenges the 'cult' stereotype

are dismissed as either naive or as being in collusion with the cults. Rather than responding directly to mainstream social science, a small band of anti-cultists with academic credentials have instead conducted research on their own terms, and have created alternative periodicals which featured studies supporting the worst accusations against NRMS.”

“... Without the legitimating umbrella of brainwashing ideology, deprogramming—the practice of kidnapping members of NRMs and destroying their religious faith—cannot be justified, either legally or morally. While advocates claim that deprogramming does nothing more than reawaken cult members’ capacity for rational thought, an actual examination of the process reveals that deprogramming is little more than a heavy-handed assault on deprogrammers’ belief systems. The vast majority of deprogrammers have little or no background in psychological counseling. They are, rather, ‘hired gun’ vigilantes whose only qualifications, more often than not, are that they are physically large or that they are themselves ex-cult members.”

Analysis by James T. Richardson

Dr Richardson is a Professor of Sociology and Judicial Studies, University of Nevada, Reno. He has written extensively on NRMs and brainwashing. In the mid-1990s, he claimed that:

- Modern brainwashing theories misrepresent earlier academic work on coercive processes developed in Russia, China and Korea. Those techniques were “generally rather ineffective.”
- More recent studies have shown that:
 - NRMs seem to have a generally positive impact on most of their followers.
 - Many participants actually seek out the NRMs “in order to learn about them and experiment with different lifestyles.”
- If the NRMs had access to powerful brainwashing techniques, one would expect that:
 - NRMs would have high growth rates. In fact, most have not had notable success in recruitment.
 - NRMs would be more successful in retaining members. In fact, most adherents participate for only a short time.
- He said that many legal cases have been based on brainwashing theories, and have often been successful.

“Thus, the past two or three decades have seen the development of a very powerful “social weapon” to use against unpopular groups (both political and religious) within America.”

- He said:
“Brainwashing claims...have been used to justify in part some quite dramatic actions (or inactions) by authorities around the world. It may be months or years before the authorities find out that they cannot substantiate such claims and the situation is rectified. Meanwhile, adults may spend months in prison,... have their children retained by authorities for some time, or be placed in a mental institution for ‘deprogramming’ against their will.”

ANTI-CULT MOVEMENT

Academics (and others) use the term “anti-cult movement” (ACM) to refer to a perceived collectivity of groups and individuals which oppose cults and new religious movements. Sociologists David G. Bromley and Anson Shupe initially defined the ACM in 1981 as a collection of groups embracing brainwashing-theory, but later observed a significant shift in ideology towards a “medicalisation” of the memberships of new religious movements (NRMs).

Publications of the International Cultic Studies Association have disputed the appropriateness of the term “Anti-cult movement”; (see for example Kropveld) with one writer preferring the label “cult critics” rather than “anti-cult” activists.

THE CONCEPT OF AN ACM

Advocates of the idea of an anti-cult movement usually conceptualize it as a collection of individuals and groups, some of them formally organised, who oppose new religious movements (or “cults”). This countermovement has allegedly recruited from family members of “cultists”, apostates, church groups (including groups from Jewish religious organisations), and associations of health professionals. Although a trend exists towards globalisation of the movement, the social and organisational bases of the ACM vary significantly according to the social and political opportunity structures across countries.

As with many concepts in the social sciences, exact definitions of the movement vary, and a significant minority opinion suggests that analysis should treat a (secular) anti-cult movement separately from religious (mainly Christian) counter-cult responses.

A typical conceptualisation of the anti-cult movement distinguishes four strands of organisational carriers of the movement:

- secular counter-cult groups;
- Christian evangelical counter-cult groups;

- cult-specific groups;
- organisations that offer some forms of exit counseling.

As typically occurs in social and religious movements, no unified ideology exists. But most if not all groups expressing opposition to cults and to new religious movements posit potentially deleterious effects of some or all New Religious Movements.

HISTORY

In the first half of the 20th century, some conservative Christian scholars, mostly Protestants, conducted apologetics defending what they saw as Christian mainstream theology against the teachings of perceived fringe groups. More-or-less mainstream churches and groups continue this activity continues today on various levels of theological expertise, collectively described as the Christian countercult movement. Members of this movement normally defined a “cult” as any group which provides its own, unconventional, translation of the Bible or which regards non-canonical writings as equivalent to Biblical teachings. (Such groups included Seventh-Day Adventists, Mormons, Christian Scientists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and their splinter-groups, such as the Branch Davidians.) Most proponents of the Christian countercult movement keep a distance from secular opposition to new religious movements.

The modern era of opposition to cults and new religious movements started in the United States. In the 1960s and early 1970s, middle-class youths and older adults started to follow new religious movements and other groups (then—as now—usually lumped together as “cults”), such as the Children of God, the Unification Church, the Hare Krishnas, the Divine Light Mission, Scientology, Synanon, the Charles Manson family and the Love Family. These movements often stood at odds with traditional middle-class values and ideas. The families of these young people became worried about the behaviour of their children, and about what they (the families) considered bizarre belief-systems. They started to organize themselves into grassroot movements, some of which merged and became regional or national organisations. One of the first such organised groups in the USA, FREECOG, originated in 1971 with parents whose children had become involved in the Children of God group.

In its early days, some such groups lobbied for conservatorship-laws to forcibly “treat” cult members. They tried (and failed) to legalize this practice by lobbying for deprogramming laws.

The opposition to cults soon consisted not only of concerned parents but of a range of people. Protagonists of the 1970s and 1980s included psychiatrists John Gordon Clark and Louis Jolyon West, psychologists Margaret Singer and Michael Langone, congressman Leo J. Ryan, deprogrammer Ted Patrick, and lawyers Kay Barney and Herbert Rosedale, as well as former members like Steven Hassan.

Public opposition to NRMs grew after the mass-suicide of members of the Peoples Temple at Jonestown in 1978.

The cult-controversies in the 1960s and 1970s also resulted in growing interest in scholarly research on alternative religions, and in the setting-up of academic organisations for their study.

The controversy divided scholars into two opposing camps:

1. The first camp Langone describes as a “religion coalition”, which defended the right of (new) religions and religious groups to continue with their beliefs and practices. This coalition consisted mainly of scholars of religion.
2. The second camp comprised the “individual rights coalition”, which defended the rights of individuals against abuse by religious or non-religious groups and individuals. This coalition consisted mainly of psychologists and psychiatrists. Sociologists surfaced in both camps.

Each camp has in the last twenty years produced not only scientific works but also polemics, and some proponents still regard the “other” camp as unscientific. In recent years, though, some scholars in each camp have sought some understanding with the opposing position.

TAXONOMIES

Religious and Secular Critics

Commentators differentiate two main types of opposition to cults:

- religious opposition (related to theological issues).
- secular opposition (generally more concerned about emotional, social, financial, and economic consequences of cultic involvement, where “cult” can refer to a religious or to a secular group). For this type of opposition against cults (which covers a wide variation of backgrounds and motives), Bromley and Hadden coined in the 1980s the designation anti-cult movement (ACM). Secular critics of cults realize the diversity of the groups popularly filed under the “cult” label and do not express concerns with all of

those groups, but differentiate (for example) between harmful and harmless “cults”, using allegations or evidence of communal totalism, authoritarianism, charismatic leadership, manipulative and heavy-handed indoctrination, deceptive proselytisation, violence and child-abuse, sexual exploitation, emotional intensity in group life, and the use of mind-control. Some individual groups get criticised for alleged tax-privileges, public solicitation, faith-healing and rejection of modern medicine, mental health jeopardy to participants, and corporal punishment.

Barker’s Five Types of Cult-Watching Groups

According to sociologist Eileen Barker, cult-watching groups (CWGs) disseminate information about “cults” with the intent of changing public and government perception as well as of changing public policy regarding NRMs.

Barker has identified five types of CWG:

1. cult-awareness groups (CAGs) focusing on the harm supposedly done by “destructive cults”
2. counter-cult groups (CCGs) focusing on the (heretical) teaching of non-mainstream groups
3. research-oriented groups (ROGs) focusing on beliefs, practices and comparisons
4. human-rights groups (HRGs) focusing on the human rights of religious minorities
5. cult-defender groups (CDGs) focusing on defending cults and exposing CAGs

Barker is an active participant on the subject of cult watching groups.

Hadden’s Taxonomy of the Anti-Cult Movement

Jeffrey K. Hadden sees four distinct classes in the organisational opposition to cults:

1. Religiously grounded opposition
 - opposition usually defined in theological terms
 - cults viewed as engaging in heresy
 - sees its mission as exposing the heresy and correcting the beliefs of those who have strayed from a truth
 - prefers metaphors of deception rather than of possession

- opposition serves two important functions:
 - o protects members (especially youth) from heresy
 - o increases solidarity among the faithful
- 2. Secular opposition
 - regards individual autonomy as the manifest goal — achieved by getting people out of religious groups.
 - identifies the struggle as about control, not as about theology.
 - organised around families who have or have had children involved in a “cult.”
 - has a latent goal of disabling or destroying NRMs organisationally.
- 3. Apostates
 - apostasy = the renunciation of a religious faith
 - apostate = one who engages in active opposition to their former faith
 - the anti-cult movement has actively encouraged former members to interpret their experience in a “cult” as one of being egregiously wronged and encourages participation in organised anti-cult activities.
- 4. Entrepreneurial opposition
 - individuals who take up a cause for personal gain
 - “ad hoc alliances or coalitions to promote shared views
 - broadcasters and journalists as leading examples.
 - a few “entrepreneurs” have made careers by setting up organised opposition.

CULT-WATCHING GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS, AND OTHER OPPOSITION TO CULTS

Some critics of cults differentiate between “cults” and “legitimate religious groups” — distinguished not by belief but by the actions of a group. Such observers define cults as groups which exploit and abuse their members, often centering around an unreliable charismatic leader and which may use deceitful ways of recruiting and retaining members.

Most critics of cults share the belief that the public merit warning about the actions of such groups and that current members should

become as well fully informed on the negative sides of their group so that they can make an informed choice about staying or leaving.

Family-Members of Adherents

Some opposition to cults (and to new religious movements) started with family-members of cult-adherents who had problems with the sudden changes in character, lifestyle and future plans of their young adult children who had joined NRMs. Ted Patrick, widely known as “the Father of deprogramming”, exemplifies members of this group. The former Cult Awareness Network (old CAN) grew out of a grassroots-movement by parents of cult-members. The American Family Foundation (today the International Cultic Studies Association) originated from a father whose daughter had joined a high-control group.

Psychologists and Psychiatrists

From the 1970s onwards some psychiatrists and psychologists accused cults of harming some of their own members: accusations sometimes based on observations on therapy, sometimes related with research regarding brainwashing or mind-control. Examples include John Gordon Clark, Louis Jolyon West, Robert Cialdini, Louise Samways and Margaret Singer.

Former Members

Some former members have taken an active stance in opposition to their former religion/group. Some of those opponents have “affiliated” with the ACM. Some have founded cult-watching groups (often with an active presence on the Internet), made their experiences public in books and on the Internet, or work as expert witnesses or as exit counselors. Most of them have associations with cult-awareness groups, for example:

- Steven Hassan
- Arnie Lerma
- Robert Vaughn Young
- Lawrence Wollersheim
- Jan Groenveld (deceased), heading the Cult Awareness and Information Centre
- Roger Gonnet

Some apostates operate in the counter-cult movement, such as Edmond C. Gruss and J. P. Moreland.

Cult-watching groups often use testimonies of former members of cults. The validity and reliability of such testimonies can occasion intense controversy amongst scholars:

Anson Shupe, David G. Bromley and Joseph Ventimiglia coined the term *atrocities tales* in 1979, which Bryan R. Wilson later took up in relation to former members' narratives. Bromley and Shupe defined an "atrocities tale" as the symbolic presentation of action or events (real or imaginary) in such a context that they come flagrantly to violate the (presumably) shared premises upon which a given set of social relationships should take place. The recounting of such tales has the intention of reaffirming normative boundaries. By sharing the reporter's disapproval or horror, an audience reasserts normative prescription and clearly locates the violator beyond the limits of public morality. Massimo Introvigne argues that the majority of apostates hold no strong feelings concerning their past experiences, while apostates who dramatically reverse their loyalties and become "professional enemies" of their former group form a vociferous minority. The term "atrocities story" has itself become controversial as it relates to the opposing views amongst scholars about the credibility of the accounts of former cult-members.

Phillip Charles Lucas came to the conclusion that former members have as much credibility as those who remain in the fold. Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, a professor of psychology at the University of Haifa, argues that in the cases of cult-catastrophes such as People's Temple, or Heaven's Gate, allegations by hostile outsiders and detractors matched reality more closely than other accounts, and that in that context statements by ex-members turned out more accurate than those offered by apologists and NRM-researchers.

Mainstream Religion

A somewhat similar movement, generally not considered part of the ACM, exists within a recognised religion: the Christian countercult movement (CCM). The CCM offers two basic arguments for opposition to cults and new religious movement: one based mainly on theological differences; the other based on defending human self-determinism and targeting mainly groups (religious and non-religious) with alleged cultic behaviour (according to the definition of the secular opposition to cults).

The trend focusing on theological differences has a very long tradition in Christian apologetics. Since the 1970s, "countercult apologetics" has developed, out of which the Christian countercult

movement grew. The “CCM” label does not actually designate a movement but a conglomerate of individuals and groups of very different backgrounds and levels of scholarship. Other designations include *countercult ministries*, *discernment ministries* (mainly used by such groups themselves) or “heresy hunters” (mainly used by their critics).

Countercult ministries mainly consist of conservative Christians – the majority of them Protestant, but also including Catholics and Orthodox. They express concerns about religious groups which they feel hold dangerous, non-traditional beliefs, especially regarding the central Christian doctrines (which they define according to conservative views in their respective denomination. These ministries appear motivated by a concern for the spiritual welfare of people in the groups that they attack. They believe that any group which rejects one or more of the historical Christian beliefs poses a danger to the welfare of its members. Such ministries include:

- Reachout Trust
- Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry
- Probe Ministries
- Watchman Fellowship
- Walter Martin

National and International Entities

The secular opposition to cults and to new religious movements operates internationally, though a number of sizable and sometimes expanding groups originated in the United States. Some European countries, such as France, Germany, Belgium and Switzerland, as well as China, have introduced legislation or taken other measures against cults or “cultic deviations”.

Cult-Watchers

Cult-watchers include Rick Ross, Andreas Haldal-Lund, Hank Hanegraff, and Tilman Hausherr, as well as anti-cult organisations such as Infosekta in Switzerland, UNADFI (National Association for the Defense of Families and Individuals Victims of Cults) in France, and the AGPF (Action for Mental and Psychological Freedom) in Germany.

Specific cult-watching government agencies exist (for example) in France (MIVILUDES) and in Belgium (CIAOSN: Centre d’information et d’avis sur les organisations sectaires nuisibles).

CONTROVERSIES

Polarised Views Among Scholars

Social scientists, sociologists, religious scholars, psychologists and psychiatrists have studied the modern field of cults and new religious movements since the early 1980s. Cult debates about certain purported cults and about cults in general often become polarised with widely divergent opinions, not only among current followers and disaffected former members, but sometimes even among scholars as well.

All academics agree that some groups have become problematic and sometimes very problematic; but they disagree over the extent to which new religious movements in general cause harm.

Scholars appear among all five groups of cult watchers: most of them sociologists, psychologists, or researchers in the field of science of religion. Some like John Gordon Clark, Margaret Singer, Stephen A. Kent and David C. Lane operate in the cult-awareness field, others like J. P. Moreland or Edmond C. Gruss in the counter-cult field, Eileen Barker, Benjamin Beith-Hallahmi, Benjamin Zablocki, Michael Langone and Philip Zimbardo have a research-orientation. Jeffrey Hadden and Douglas E. Cowan focus on the human rights of members of religious groups, while J. Gordon Melton researches movements like Scientology and the Unification Church and publishes encyclopedias on new religious movements. Other scholars studying and researching NRMs (and often defending religious movements) include Irving Hexham, James R. Lewis, Anson Shupe and David G. Bromley.

Several scholars have questioned Hadden's attitude towards NRMs and cult critics as an excessively one-sided view in the scholarly field. This also applies to Barker, whom many of her critics regard as a "cult apologist" (the Scientology-run "new Cult Awareness Network" has listed her as a professional referral.)

Scholars in the field of new religious movements confront many controversial subjects:

- the validity of the testimonies of former members
- the validity of the testimonies of current members
- the validity of and differences between exit-counseling and coercive deprogramming
- the validity of evidence of harm caused by cults, for example: post-cult trauma
- ethical concerns regarding new religious movements, for example: free will, freedom of speech

- opposition to cults vs. freedom of religion and religious intolerance
- the objectivity of all scholars studying new religious movements
- the acceptance or rejection of the APA taskforce on Deceptive and Indirect Techniques of Persuasion and Control report (Amitrani & di Marzio, 2000, Massimo Introvigne), see also Scholarly positions on mind-control

Janet Jacobs expresses the range of views on the membership of the perceived ACM itself, ranging from those who comment on “the value of the Cult Awareness Network, the value of exit therapy for former members of new religious movements, and alternative modes of support for family members of individuals who have joined new religions” and extending to “a more critical perspective on [a perceived] wide range of ACM activities that threaten religious freedom and individual rights”. Compare conspiracy-theory.

Brainwashing and Mind-Control

Both sympathizers and critics of new religious movements have found the topic(s) of brainwashing or mind-control extremely controversial. The controversy between sympathizers and critics of new religious movements starts with discrepancies regarding the definition and concept of “brainwashing” and of “mind-control”, extends to the possibility or probability of their application by cultic groups and to the state of acceptance by various scholarly communities.

Deprogramming and Exit-Counseling

Some members of the secular opposition to cults and to new religious movements have argued that if brainwashing has deprived a person of their free will, treatment to restore their free will should take place — even if the “victim” initially opposes this.

Precedents for this exist in the treatment of certain mental illnesses: in such cases medical and legal authorities recognize the condition(s) as depriving sufferers of their ability to make appropriate decisions for themselves. But the practice of forcing treatment on a presumed victim of “brainwashing” (one definition of “deprogramming”) has constantly proven controversial, and courts have frequently adjudged it illegal. Human-rights organisations (including the ACLU and Human Rights Watch) have also criticised deprogramming. While only a small fraction of the anti-cult movement has had involvement in deprogramming, several deprogrammers (including a deprogramming-pioneer, Ted Patrick) have served prison-terms for the practice, while courts have acquitted others.

The anti-cult movement in the USA has apparently abandoned deprogramming in favor of the voluntary practice of exit counseling. However, this remains a subject of controversy between sympathizers and critics of new religious movements, who continue to debate deprogramming's basic assumptions and its relation to rights of freedom of religion.

Reaction of the Anti-Cult Movement

Some sociologists and scholars of religion use the term *anti-cult movement* as an expression covering the whole secular opposition against cults and/or the phrase *anti-cult activist* to classify anyone opposing cults for secular reasons. The term, coined by David Bromley and Anton Shupe in the 1980s, has since proven useful mainly to people criticising the opposition against cults. Often the expression "anti-cultist" occurs as well, which makes opposition to cults sound like a cult itself.

The indiscriminate use of this expression for any and all opposition to cults makes a very varied collective of independent individuals and groups look like an organised group or like organised groups.

On the other hand, the people criticising the opposition against cults or sympathising with cults get called cult apologists in a similarly indiscriminate manner. Scholarly cooperation between the two groups seems virtually non-existent.

The allegations the two groups fling against each other have many parallels. Sometimes the other side disputes the allegations; in other cases they defend their practices as the only "right" way to address the matter. For example:

- anti-cultists do not trust information stemming from the leadership of "cult" groups and believe that the only reliable direct information comes from disaffected former members.
- cult-apologists buy only information from the leadership of those groups and deny that any valid information comes from disaffected former members.
- the anti-cult movement has generalised inappropriately, lumping together relatively harmless groups with groups that turn out dangerous, such as the Peoples Temple;
- cult-apologists generalize inappropriately, lumping together dangerous groups with relatively harmless groups.

- anti-cultists create a moral panic and witch hunt through exaggeration of the harm and dangers of new religious movements;
- cult-apologists play down any real harm and dangers of new religious movements
- the anti-cult movement endorses pseudoscientific theories regarding brainwashing and mind-control;
- cult-apologists deny evidence regarding mind-control.
- the anti-cult movement has infringed religious freedom through deprogramming;
- cult-apologists deny freedom of expression to former members and critics
- the anti-cult movement polarizes the debate over new religious movements due to its focus on the negative aspects of these groups. (In the book “Why Waco?: Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America” James Tabor and Eugene Gallagher assert that the anti-cult movement has exacerbated the fanatical reaction of destructive cults by encouraging a cult-phobia among the public and authorities, one that helped to precipitate mass tragedies like Jonestown, Waco, and Heaven’s Gate.)
- cult-apologists turn a blind eye to real abuses by cults and thus make tragedies like Jonestown, Waco, or Heaven’s gate possible.
- the anti-cult movement constitutes the main force behind purported discriminative measures promulgated against minority groups in France, Germany, and China.
- cult-apologists work together with cults to attack countries who take measures to prevent abuses and exploitation by groups using the cover of religion.
- a few members of the anti-cult movement have a vested interest in maintaining the conflict in that they earn money because of it.
- certain cult-apologists have a vested interest in defending cults because cults fund them, at least in part.

Responses of Targeted Groups and Scholars

Supporters of Scientology have waged a campaign of their own to label former members and critics as “anti-religious” —to the point where they publish literature and develop websites dedicated to attacking these disaffected persons.

The Foundation against Intolerance of Religious Minorities, associated with the Adidam NRM, sees the use of terms “cult” and “cult leader” as detestable and as something to avoid at all costs. The Foundation regards such usage as the exercise of prejudice and discrimination against them in the same manner as the words “nigger” and “commie” served in the past to denigrate blacks and Communists.

CESNUR’s president Massimo Introvigne, writes in his article *“So many evil things: Anti-cult terrorism via the Internet”*, that fringe and extreme anti-cult activists resort to tactics that may create a background favorable to extreme manifestations of discrimination and hate against individuals that belong to new religious movements. Critics of CESNUR, however, call Introvigne a cult-apologist who defends harmful religious groups and cults. Professor Eileen Barker asserts in an interview that the controversy surrounding certain new religious movements can turn violent by a process called deviancy amplification spiral.

In a paper presented at the 2000 meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Anson Shupe and Susan Darnell affirm that although the International Cultic Studies Association (ICSA, formerly known as AFF or American Family Foundation) has presented “slanted, stereotypical images and language that has inflamed persons to perform extreme actions”, the extent to which one can classify the ICSA and other anti-cult organisations as “hate-groups” (as defined by law in some jurisdictions or by racial/ethnic criteria in sociology) remains open for debate.

ACADEMIC STUDIES OF NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS (A.K.A. CULTS)

University professors who study new religious groups are often referred to disparagingly by those in the anti-cult movement as “cult apologists.” This is not a good term:

- The term “cult” is generally interpreted by the press and the rest of the public to refer to dangerous, doomsday destructive religious groups. The vast majority of new religious groups are benign.
- The term “apologist” refers to an individual who defends a belief system. Academics rarely defend the beliefs of new religious groups. They generally defend only the right of those groups to practice their faith without harassment.

There are a number of professional groups, mailing lists, journals and Websites that promote study of the new religious movements (NRMs):

ACADEMIC ORGANISATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS WHICH CONCENTRATE ON NRMS

The American Academy of Religion's New Religious Movements Group "seeks to enhance understanding of New Religious Movements (NRMs) past and present."

Center for the Study of New Religions (CESNUR) at <http://www.cesnur.org/> "is an international network of associations of scholars working in the field of new religious movements." Its original aim was directed at scholars who "specialised in religious minorities, new religious movements, contemporary esoteric, spiritual and gnostic schools, and the new religious consciousness in general." They became alarmed at misinformation being disseminated both by the Anti-cult movement (ACM) and by some new religious groups. They have since become actively involved in spreading "reliable and responsible information" on NRMs. They are concerned that the anti-cult and sect panic in some countries in Europe may lead to special legislation against cults or "brainwashing," thus threatening religious freedom.

The Department of Religious Studies at the University of Sterling (UK) has a "New and Alternative Religions Page" at: <http://www.stir.ac.uk/departments/arts/ReligiousStudies/links/newreligions.html>

The Institute for the Study of American Religion (ISAR) was founded in 1969. Its collection of NRM literature, the American Religious Collection, is located in the Davidson Library at the University of California in Santa Barbara. Some of its main projects are:

- The Encyclopedia of American Religions. Gale research, Detroit MI, (1996). Read reviews and/or order this book from Amazon.com A previous edition listed some 1,500 different religious bodies.
- Descriptive material on many "controversial religious movements, which are popularly labeled as cults;
- The International Religions Directory Project which will include "a comprehensive country-by-country directory with a complete listing of the headquarters of each separate denomination and religious group and each interfaith and ecumenical organisation in each country."

JOINING A "CULT"

RELIGIOUS CHOICE OR PSYCHOLOGICAL ABERRATION?

I. Introduction

America has always been fertile ground for a multiplicity of religious groups, whether homegrown sects like Mormons, Shakers, and Jehovah's Witnesses, or immigrants from abroad like Mennonites, Quakers, and Jews. In the 1970s and 1980s we saw an explosion of new religious groups in America, many of which came to be labeled by their detractors as "cults." The groups were based on a variety of ideologies drawn from Eastern and Western religious traditions and were organized in different ways, but they shared some basic characteristics:

- all were relatively "high demand" religions, requiring much more of their followers than weekly church attendance and a nominal tithing;
- all had a charismatic leader; most involved communal living as at least an option and very often a requirement.
- Further, since these were truly new religious movements, they all needed to grow and therefore to make converts, and they concentrated their conversion attempts upon young, idealistic, mostly white, and middle-class Americans. That, of course, brought them into conflict with the since these were truly new religious movements, they all needed to grow and three young people's parents, who tried to bring legal pressures to bear against the new religions.

The parents of these converts, as well as the defenders of mainstream religions from whom the young people were defecting, had some hurdles to overcome in their fight against the "cults." The young converts were almost always legal adults, and the parents—much less the mainstream religious leaders—could hardly claim to be against religious commitment *per se*, so on what grounds could they forcefully object to their children's new allegiance? The answer they found was to claim that these were not "genuine" religious movements—i.e., not worthy of tolerance and respect—and the converts' choices were not actually free choices at all, but the result of "brainwashing," sometimes called "*coercive persuasion*," "*thought reform*," or "*mind control*." Thus, the parents were not interfering in the converts' right to choose their religion, but rescuing their adult children from the clutches of evil people who had rendered them powerless.

The “brainwashing” theory has important legal implications. After all, the religion clauses of the First Amendment forbid government from preferring some religions over others, and from interfering in a person’s religious practice without a compelling reason. Thus, if parents are to have the law on their side while engaging in activities that are normally illegal—e.g., kidnapping and imprisoning an adult in order to “deprogram” her—they have to find a way to describe these “cults,” and the conversion experience, as completely divorced from our usual understanding of religion.

Two 1980s cases highlight the importance of the “brainwashing” theory:

- In 1989, Robin George and her mother brought suit against various groups and individuals associated with the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), claiming, among other things, that they had falsely imprisoned Robin. Since Robin appeared to have had run away from her parents’ home of her own free will and was never physically restrained during the nearly two years she spent in the movement, it would have been impossible to sustain the false imprisonment claim (for which a jury initially awarded Robin five million dollars) without the argument that Robin had been “*brainwashed*” and her “*will... overborne*” by the defendants.
- Similarly, in 1986 David Molko and Tracy Leal, former members of the Unification Church, claimed that they were falsely imprisoned, despite their ostensible freedom to leave at any time, because “*agents of the Church had gained control of their minds,*” “*stripped them of independent judgment,*” and thus rendered them “*incapable of resisting the inducement to join the Church and work diligently to further its purposes.*”

In this article, I will analyze the different theories about “cult” membership and conversion, specifically focusing upon whether or not conversions to cults ought to be respected by the law in the same way that the law respects conversion to and membership in, mainstream religions.

- In section II, I attempt (unsuccessfully) to define a “cult.”
- In section III, I discuss the civil liberties issues surrounding “cults” and the public furor they have engendered.
- Section IV deals with medicalising of a political issue.

- In section V, I discuss the different and competing theories about why young people join “cults,” and the implication of those theories for public policy responses.
- Finally, in section VI, I conclude that none of the arguments which attempt to draw distinctions between “cults” and mainstream religions are solid enough to ground legal interventions against those who choose to join new religious movements.

II. What is a “Cult”?

According to the anti-cult Cult Awareness Network, a cult is “*a closed system whose followers have been unethically and deceptively recruited through the use of manipulative techniques of thought reform or mind control.*” Probably the best definition comes from sociologists Melton and Moore, who explain, only somewhat tongue-in-cheek, that “*cults are religions that espouse an alien belief system that deviates strongly from the traditional faiths with which most people have grown up.*” For sociologists, a cult is the starting point of every religion, at the stage where there is simply a charismatic leader and an enthusiastic band of followers, who have not yet developed anything more than the simplest organisational structure. Most cults die before they get beyond this stage; others become more bureaucratized, as happened to Christianity. However, when the term cult is used today, we know that the subject is a controversial “high demand” religion, or some other group which has come to be associated with the term in the minds of the media. As we shall soon see, there is much disagreement even among the most strident anti-cultists as to which groups fit the category. Leo Pfeffer suggests: “*if you believe in it, it is a religion or perhaps the religion; and if you do not care one way or another about it, it is a sect; but if you fear and hate it, it is a cult.*” Meanwhile, social scientists proffer phrases such as “*alternative religions,*” “*marginal churches,*” “*new religious movements,*” and so on.

Groups that have commonly been identified as cults include those with non-Western flavors such as the ISKCON, the Divine Light Movement (DLM), and the Unification Church (“Moonies”); Christian groups such as the Way International and the Children of God; self-help movements such as Synanon and the Church of Scientology. Robbins and Anthony list six attributes shared by almost all groups which are labeled as cults. These groups are:

1. authoritarian;
2. communal and totalistic;

3. aggressive in their proselytising;
4. systematic in their programmes of indoctrination;
5. relatively new in the United States;
6. middle-class in their clientele.

Interestingly, the three recent religious groups whose stories have ended in tragedy—the People’s Temple, the Branch Davidians, and Heaven’s Gate—do not fit the usual profile of a “cult” which attracts primarily young and single adherents. The Heaven’s Gate group, thirty-nine of whom committed suicide in March of 1997, included someone who had joined the group when he was nineteen and remained for twenty-two years, but also a seventy-two-year-old grandmother. Particularly striking were the converts who had left spouses and young children behind.

Cult membership raises important ethical, medical, and civil liberties questions. Courts must decide whether or not parents will be granted “conservatorship” over their adult children who have joined new religions, and whether to convict parents whose adult children charge them with kidnapping and false imprisonment. On the public policy level, the issue seems to have been decided by default, as legislators have failed to design laws that would attack cult membership and still be Constitutional. For example, the law passed twice in New York State but vetoed by the Governor (who went on record as being sympathetic to the bill’s goals, but convinced that this particular bill would not stand up in court), reads in part:

“The Supreme Court and the county courts outside the city of New York, shall have the power to appoint one or more temporary conservators of the person and the property of any person over fifteen years of age, upon showing that such person for whom the temporary conservator is to be appointed has become closely and regularly associated with a group which practices the use of deception in the recruitment of members and which engages in systematic food or sleep deprivation or isolation from family or unusually long work schedules and that such person for whom the temporary conservator is to be appointed has undergone a sudden and radical change in behaviour, lifestyle, habits and attitudes, and has become unable to care for his welfare and that his judgment has become impaired to the extent that he is unable to understand the need for such care.”

After reading *The Seven Storey Mountain* it is hard to see why, using these guidelines, writer and philosopher Thomas Merton should not have been put under conservatorship when he first joined the

Trappist monks in his mid-twenties. The odd hours at which he was awakened to chant on a nightly basis, the sparse diet and uniform clothing, the restrictions on reading matter and visitors, and, most of all, the “no talking” rule, are certainly open to the interpretation of mind control. As far as “deception” is concerned, that is very much in the eye of the beholder; certainly the claims of any church to sacerdotal efficacy, the importance of prayer and meditation, etc., have no provable connection to the palpable world.

III. The Civil Liberties Issues

The danger to civil liberties, especially to the religion clauses of the First Amendment, can be summed up briefly under five headings.

First, there is the straightforward claim that every adult has the right to join any religion he wishes, no matter how obnoxious it may appear to others, and that those religions which are currently under pressure are no different with respect to the First Amendment than any other. To quote Leo Pfeffer:

“The purpose of the first amendment’s guarantee of freedom of religion was and is the protection of unpopular creeds and faiths. It needs no constitution to assure security for the Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians, or other well-established and long-accepted religions. The heart of the first amendment would be mortally wounded if the religions we now call cults were excluded from the zone of its protection because of their disfavor in the eyes of government officials or of the majority of Americans.”

Second, even if one posited that there could be a demonstrable theoretical difference between exercising one’s “religion” and joining a “cult,” in practice it turns out that one person’s cult is another’s valid religion. Therefore, anti-cult legislation, even if it could be valid in and of itself, inevitably encroaches on “legitimate” denominations as well. For example, according to the *Union of American Hebrew Congregations*, *Jews for Jesus* and *Hebrew Christians* constitute two of the most dangerous cults, and its members are appropriate candidates for deprogramming. Anti-cult evangelicals, not surprisingly, while vociferous against groups such as the DLM and the “Moonies,” protest that “aggressiveness and proselytizing... are basic to authentic Christianity,” and that *Jews for Jesus* and *Campus Crusade for Christ* are not to be labeled as cults. Furthermore, certain Hassidic groups who physically attacked a meeting of the Hebrew Christian “cult” have themselves been labeled a “cult” and equated with the followers of Reverend Moon, by none other than the President of the *Central Conference of*

American Rabbis. Also, as we shall discuss later, family dynamics are so crucial to who is identified as a “cult victim,” that what may prove more important than the objective criteria for a cult is the extent to which the convert violates family values.

Third, we see in the history of anti-cult activism a disturbing erosion of due process and of the role of police as protectors of citizens. Conservatorships are frequently granted in hearings in the judge’s chambers from which the potential conservative and his legal representative are excluded; the Vermont senate passed a bill empowering judges to issue conservatorships without adversary hearings. Deprogrammer Ted Patrick gleefully recounts many instances in which police, after being appealed to by adult victims of kidnapping and enforced detention, not only turned a blind eye, but actually helped the deprogrammers.

Fourth, and as a consequence of all of the above, we see a slippage from abduction and deprogramming of members of groups which do function as total institutions, to using these same techniques on those who are merely different. Given the passionate belief in “mind control” which is so crucial to the anti-cult movement, this slippage seems inevitable—a Svengali does not need to have his victim literally under his eye twenty-four hours a day. Ted Patrick claims to see “*not a brown penny’s worth of difference[s]*” between such a diverse list as Hare Krishna, The Divine Light Mission, the New Testament Missionary Fellowship, Brother Julius, Love Israel, and the Children of God, for example. Although some accounts of deprogrammings speak of “rescue” from cults which exist in total isolation behind barbed wire encampments, other situations are more ambiguous.

In January of 1973, for example, Ted Patrick abducted and deprogrammed a young man named Wes Lockwood, member of a group called The New Testament Missionary fellowship, led by Hannah Lowe. Patrick told Lockwood’s father, “*you have to understand,... you’re not dealing with your son anymore. You’re dealing with a robot. A zombie. You can’t reason with him. He’s beyond reasoning. The only way you can get him is to take him out bodily.*” But even using Patrick’s account of the case, we see that Lockwood had been a member of the group for two-and-a-half years, and that during that time he had continued to live in the Yale dormitory, to hold down a part-time job (the proceeds of which went primarily to the group), and to attend and pass his classes. (When Patrick later made an unsuccessful attempt to snatch another member, Dan Voll, and he and Voll’s parents were tried on

charges of “*unlawful restraint and imprisonment;*” they were acquitted on the grounds that the parents’ concern and actions were “justified.” As Patrick said, “*it was the cult that was on trial, not me.*”

In February 1982, *The Washington Post* ran a three-day description and analysis of the case of a Silver Spring couple who had tried and failed three times to “*successfully deprogram*” their daughter, and who finally pleaded guilty in court to charges of unlawful imprisonment. The subject was Emily Dietz, an intelligent girl from a moneyed and sophisticated background, who became interested in the DLM at age fifteen. Again we see that, despite her increasing involvement with the group, she graduated from high school in the top three per cent of her class, went on to Hampshire College, and remained there for three years before leaving to become a full-time member of the DLM. Until the first abduction attempt, she occasionally returned home for visits.

To quote the Post, “*in an unregulated practice that often involves kidnapping and imprisonment, even defenders of deprogramming deplore its abuses. A Roman Catholic, a lesbian, even a thirty-one-year-old woman whose mother did not care for her fiancée have been targets of deprogramming.*” Theologian Harvey Cox calls deprogrammers “*hired guns,*” and charges that some have “*gladly deprogrammed people in the Episcopal and Catholic churches, depending on the preferences of those who wanted them deprogrammed.*”

Fifth, the current situation threatens the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. The current understanding of this clause is that any statute related to religion, if it is to be constitutional, “*must have a secular legislative purpose;... its principal or primary effect must be one that neither advances nor inhibits religion... [and it] must not foster an excessive government entanglement with religion.*” Courts and legislatures, if they attempt to make distinctions between “*destructive cults*” and “*genuine religions,*” must necessarily monitor their activities to the extent of fostering “*an excessive government entanglement.*”

IV. Medicalising a Political Issue

So strong is the tradition of freedom of religion in this country that few suggest that adults can be removed from religious groups simply because the latter are destructive to the members’ physical health, offensive to the majority, and so on. Although there are other reasons for the wholesale adoption of the “brainwashing” theory, certainly the strongest is that it justifies a hair-raising variety of coercive interventions by claiming that the subject is so non-autonomous as to

be almost literally “not there.” This maneuver has a number of results, not all of them consciously intended. First, it takes activities, such as forcible restraint of adults, that would normally be classified, ethically and legally, as harms and injuries, and reclassifies them as helpful and benign, even necessary, if done as part of a “deprogramming” attempt.

Second, by medicalising a political issue, it attempts to move the locus of debate from freedom of religion and association, subjects which invite the active involvement of all citizens, to definitions and diagnosis of mental illness, a topic on which a tiny percentage of the population can claim an intimidating amount of mysterious expertise.

Third, by changing the definition of the arena from political/legal to medical, anti-cult activists take advantage of a tendency already present in our society to strip people of their legal protections by claiming to be acting in their best interests. Our democracy, and the many fences erected by our legal structure to guard our individual freedoms, has been traditionally understood as a defense primarily against a government wishing to do us harm by safeguarding or enriching itself at our expense; that was the background of the American Revolution and of the philosophical thinking which grounded the Constitution. We are much more poorly defended against those who would do us good.

But is such a shift of ground appropriate? Are members of cults indeed brainwashed victims of sophisticated mind control? In the next pages we will look at six different (though not mutually exclusive) ways of understanding the phenomenon of conversion to cults.

CULTS MENU

DOOMSDAY, DESTRUCTIVE RELIGIOUS CULTS

Overview

We define Domsday/Destructive/Apocalyptic cults to be religiously based, very high intensity, controlling groups that have caused or are liable to cause loss of life among their membership or the general public. It is important to realize that out of the tens of thousands of new religious groups worldwide, only a very few meet these criteria.

We do not include terrorist groups in the above definition, because their goals are primarily political, not religious. However, groups like Al Qaeda (The Source) do have some points of similarities with destructive religious cults.

What is Behind the Death of Members of Destructive Cults?

No consensus exists concerning the motivation for the loss of life within this handful of cults:

- Some in the Anti-Cult Movement claim that much of this loss of life among cult members was the result of mass suicides ordered by the group leadership. That opinion fits well with their now-discredited belief that cult memberships have been the victims of mind control techniques. Having little self-will, they have been willing to follow any order from the leadership—even one leading to self-destruction.
- The loss of life by the Heaven's Gate membership was definitely a suicide. The members were convinced that they would be transported, at death, to a space ship where they would evolve to a higher level of existence. There is overwhelming hard evidence that all of the deaths within the Ugandan Movement for the Restoration..., and many of the Solar Temple deaths were actually murders to cover financial fraud by the leadership. This may have been the motivation for the Jeffrey Lundgren murders as well. All of the Branch Davidian victims appear to have been murdered by their leaders—either by being shot or as a result of the arson-set fire. Many, perhaps most, of the People's Temple victims were also murdered. Details are sketchy because of the advanced state of decomposition of the bodies when investigators arrived.

Details of Destructive Doomsday Cults

Homicides directed against the public:

- Aum Shinri Kyo
- The Family (Charles Manson)

Suicides or homicides of their own members:

- Branch Davidians
- Heaven's Gate
- Jeffrey Lundgren
- Movement for the Restoration of the Ten Commandments of God (Uganda)
- The People's Temple (Jim Jones)
- Solar Temple

Religious Groups with the Possible Potential to be Destructive

- Concerned Christians
- House of Yahweh

White Supremacist Groups

These do not fit the mold of the destructive cults listed above. However, they do preach hatred of gays, lesbians, African-Americans, communists and other minorities. Even though the group may preach non-violence, their message of hate appears to inspire some of their members to commit murders and serious terrorist acts:

The Creativity Movement (formerly called the World Church of the Creator).

Essays on the Aryan Nation and similar white supremacist groups will be described at a future date.

FBI PROJECT MEGIDDO, ABOUT DOMESTIC TERRORISM

OVERVIEW

On 1999-Oct-20, The FBI announced a report called "Project Megiddo". It is intended to alert U.S. law enforcement to what they describe is "the potential for extremist criminal activity in the United States by individuals or domestic groups who attach special significance to the year 2000." An accompanying FBI statement mentioned that "The threat posed by extremists as a result of perceived events associated with the Year 2000 (Y2K) is very real. The volatile mix of apocalyptic religious and (New World Order) conspiracy theories may produce violent acts aimed a precipitating the end of the world as prophesied in the Bible..." Their concept is that by creating widespread instances massive destruction, violence, and death, that the end of the world will be precipitated. This is not a new phenomenon within Christianity. Very similar beliefs were held during the time of the Roman Empire.

Data for the report were collected over a nine-month period of intensive intelligence gathering by the domestic terrorism unit of the FBI, The report is "considered so sensitive and secret that it will not be made public." Fortunately, the Center for studies on New Religions (CESNUR) obtained a copy and placed it on the Internet.

We were surprised that the FBI included a hyperlink to our essay "Factors commonly found in doomsday cults."

The FBI report's executive summary follows:

For over four thousand years, Megiddo, a hill in northern Israel, has been the site of many battles. Ancient cities were established there to serve as a fortress on the plain of Jezreel to guard a mountain pass. As Megiddo was built and rebuilt, one city upon the other, a mound or hill was formed. The Hebrew word "Armageddon" means "hill of Megiddo." In English, the word has come to represent battle itself. The last book in the New Testament of the Bible designates Armageddon as the assembly point in the apocalyptic setting of God's final and conclusive battle against evil. The name "Megiddo" is an apt title for a project that analyses those who believe the year 2000 will usher in the end of the world and who are willing to perpetrate acts of violence to bring that end about.

Executive Summary

The year 2000 is being discussed and debated at all levels of society. Most of the discussions regarding this issue revolve around the topic of technology and our society's overwhelming dependence on the multitude of computers and computer chips which make our world run smoothly. However, the upcoming millennium also holds important implications beyond the issue of computer technology. Many extremist individuals and groups place some significance on the next millennium, and as such it will present challenges to law enforcement at many levels. The significance is based primarily upon either religious beliefs relating to the Apocalypse or political beliefs relating to the New World Order (NWO) conspiracy theory. The challenge is how well law enforcement will prepare and respond.

The following report, entitled "*Project Megiddo*," is intended to analyze the potential for extremist criminal activity in the United States by individuals or domestic extremist groups who profess an apocalyptic view of the millennium or attach special significance to the year 2000. The purpose behind this assessment is to provide law enforcement agencies with a clear picture of potential extremism motivated by the next millennium. The report does not contain information on domestic terrorist groups whose actions are not influenced by the year 2000.

There are numerous difficulties involved in providing a thorough analysis of domestic security threats catalysed by the new millennium. Quite simply, the very nature of the current domestic terrorism threat places severe limitations on effective intelligence gathering and evaluation. Ideological and philosophical belief systems which attach importance, and possibly violence, to the millennium have been well-articulated. From a law enforcement perspective, the problem therefore

is not a lack of understanding of motivating ideologies: The fundamental problem is that the traditional focal point for counter-terrorism analysis—the terrorist group—is not always well-defined or relevant in the current environment.

The general trend in domestic extremism is the terrorist's disavowal of traditional, hierarchical, and structured terrorist organisations. Even well-established militias, which tend to organize along military lines with central control, are characterised by factionalism and disunity. While several "professional" terrorist groups still exist and present a continued threat to domestic security, the overwhelming majority of extremist groups in the United States have adopted a fragmented, leaderless structure where individuals or small groups act with autonomy. Clearly, the worst act of domestic terrorism in United States history was perpetrated by merely two individuals: Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols. In many cases, extremists of this sort are extremely difficult to identify until after an incident has occurred. Thus, analysis of domestic extremism in which the group serves as the focal point of evaluation has obvious limitations.

The Project Megiddo intelligence initiative has identified very few indications of specific threats to domestic security. Given the present nature of domestic extremism, this is to be expected. However, this is a function of the limitations of the group-oriented model of counter-terrorism analysis and should not be taken necessarily as reflective of a minor or trivial domestic threat. Without question, this initiative has revealed indicators of potential violent activity on the part of extremists in this country. Militias, adherents of racist belief systems such as Christian Identity and Odinism, and other radical domestic extremists are clearly focusing on the millennium as a time of action. Certain individuals from these various perspectives are acquiring weapons, storing food and clothing, raising funds through fraudulent means, procuring safe houses, preparing compounds, surveying potential targets, and recruiting new converts. These and other indicators are not taking place in a vacuum, nor are they random or arbitrary. In the final analysis, while making specific predictions is extremely difficult, acts of violence in commemoration of the millennium are just as likely to occur as not. In the absence of intelligence that the more established and organised terrorist groups are planning millennial violence as an organisational strategy, violence is most likely to be perpetrated by radical fringe members of established groups. For example, while Aryan Nations leader Richard Butler publicly frowns on proactive violence,

adherents of his religion or individual members of his organisation may commit acts of violence autonomously.

Potential cult-related violence presents additional challenges to law enforcement. The potential for violence on behalf of members of biblically-driven cults is determined almost exclusively by the whims of the cult leader. Therefore, effective intelligence and analysis of such cults requires an extensive understanding of the cult leader. Cult members generally act to serve and please the cult leader rather than accomplish an ideological objective. Almost universally, cult leaders are viewed as messianic in the eyes of their followers. Also, the cult leader's prophecies, preachings, orders, and objectives are subject to indiscriminate change. Thus, while analysis of publicly stated goals and objectives of cults may provide hints about their behaviour and intentions, it is just as likely to be uninformed or, at worst, misleading. Much more valuable is a thorough examination of the cult leader, his position of power over his followers, and an awareness of the responding behaviour and activity of the cult. Sudden changes in activity—for example, less time spent on “Bible study” and more time spent on “physical training”—indicate that the cult may be preparing for some type of action.

The millennium holds special significance for many, and as this pivotal point in time approaches, the impetus for the initiation of violence becomes more acute. Several religiously motivated groups envision a quick, fiery ending in an apocalyptic battle. Others may initiate a sustained campaign of terrorism in the United States to prevent the NWO. Armed with the urgency of the millennium as a motivating factor, new clandestine groups may conceivably form to engage in violence toward the U.S. Government or its citizens.

Most importantly, this analysis clearly shows that perceptions matter. The perceptions of the leaders and followers of extremist organisations will contribute much toward the ultimate course of action they choose. For example, in-depth analysis of Y2K compliancy on the part of various key sectors that rely on computers has determined that, despite a generally positive outlook for overall compliance, there will be problem industries and minor difficulties and inconveniences. If they occur, these inconveniences are likely to cause varying responses by the extreme fringes. Members of various militia groups, for example, have identified potentially massive power failures as an indication of a United Nations-directed NWO takeover. While experts have indicated that only minor brownouts will occur, various militias are likely to perceive such minor brownouts as indicative of a larger conspiracy.

The Senate Special Committee on the Year 2000 Technology Problem has stated that some state and local governments could be unprepared, including the inability to provide benefits payments. This could have a significant impact in major urban areas, resulting in the possibility for civil unrest. Violent white supremacists are likely to view such unrest as an affirmation of a racist, hate-filled world view. Likewise, militia members who predict the implementation of martial law in response to a Y2K computer failure would become all the more fearful.

SAFE SECTS?

EARLY WARNING SIGNS OF BAD RELIGIONS

The following essay is by James R. Lewis of Santa Barbara, CA.

'Bad Cults,' 'Genuine Religions' and Other Stereotypes

While the majority of minority religions are innocuous, many have been involved in social conflicts. A handful of these conflicts have made national and even international headlines, from the siege of the Branch Davidian community to the group suicide of Heaven's Gate members. One consequence of these highly publicised incidents is that they have served to reinforce unreflective stereotypes about "cults" and "cult leaders" that are appropriate for some—but certainly not the majority of—minority religions. Unfortunately, such stereotyped information is often the only "data" readily available to the media and law enforcement at the onset of such conflicts.

Putting aside the technical discourse of sociologists, in ordinary language people talk as if there is an objective category of groups called "cults" that can be distinguished from genuine religions. In this commonly accepted view, cults are by definition socially dangerous false religions, led by cynical cult leaders who exploit followers for their own gain.

This stereotype is, however, deeply flawed, and for more than one reason. In the first place, "cult" is a socially-negotiated label that often means little more than a religion one dislikes for some reason. To certain conservative Christians, for example, a "cult" is any religion that departs from a certain traditional interpretation of scripture. Alternatively, ultra-conservative Christians who take a strictly fundamentalist approach to scripture often appear "cult-like" to many mainline Christians. In other words, one person's cult is another person's religion.

In the second place, the founders of new groups are—despite whatever personal flaws some might have—almost always sincerely religious. Part of the problem here is that most people unreflectively assume that religion is always something “good.” If, therefore, a given religious body does something “bad,” then *ipso facto* it must not be “real” religion. Instead, it must be a false religion, created for no other reason than the founder/leader’s personal gain. This attitude is, however, naive. The ancient Aztecs, to take an extreme example, regularly tortured and sacrificed other human beings as part of their religious rites. These practices were, in fact, a central aspect of the Aztec religion. But, however much we might be able to explain and even to understand why the Aztecs engaged in such practices, no contemporary person would defend these rites as “good.”

Dangerous Groups

The proper question to ask, then, is not whether some particular group is or is not a cult (in the sense of a “false religion”), but, rather, whether or not the social-psychological dynamics within a particular religion are potentially dangerous to its members and/or to the larger society. Unfortunately, once we get beyond such actions as torturing and murdering other human beings, the criteria for what one regards as harmful can be quite subjective. It has been seriously asserted, for example, that requiring “cult” members to be celibate and to follow vegetarian diets are harmful practices. Similarly, requiring followers to engage in several hours of meditation per day plus discouraging the questioning of “cult” doctrine have often been portrayed as parts of a group’s “brainwashing” regime designed to damage one’s ability to reason properly.

Once again, the problem with such criteria is that they are naive. If celibacy was harmful, for example, then how does one explain the lack of more-than-ordinary pathology among monks and nuns? Also, if certain mental practices actually damaged the brain, then why do members of intensive religious groups perform so well on I.Q. tests and other measures of individual reasoning ability? Such critical criteria also reflect an abysmal ignorance of traditional religious practices: Many traditional religions have promoted celibacy, restricted diets, prescribed lengthy prayers and meditations, discouraged the questioning of group ideology, etc. Clearly, if one wants to delineate serious criteria for determining “bad religion,” then one must focus on traits that embody more than the observer’s ethnocentric attitudes.

To begin with, making a radical lifestyle change as part of joining a religious group should not, in itself, be taken to indicate that the individual has therefore become involved in something harmful. Friends and family members may feel that an individual is making a mistake to quit a job or to drop out of school—actions that, by the way, very few contemporary new religions would actively encourage—but a free society means nothing if one is not also free to make mistakes.

Developing Objective Early Warning Signs

If one wishes to develop objective criteria for distinguishing harmful or potentially harmful religious organisations from harmless religions, one needs to place oneself in the position of a public policy-maker. From this perspective, religions that raise the most concern are those groups that tangibly, physically harm members and/or non-members, or engage in other anti-social/illegal acts. However, a public policy-maker might well respond that this *post facto* criterion is too little too late, and that what is needed are criteria that could act as early warning signs—criteria indicating that a previously innocuous group is potentially “going bad.” The following discussion will make a stab at developing such criteria, with the caveat that the presence of the less serious factors listed below in any given group does not automatically mean they are on the verge of becoming the next Heaven’s Gate.

Charismatic Leader: As part of this discussion, we shall be referring to a few false criteria for distinguishing a healthy from an unhealthy religion. In the first place, the mere fact that a group is headed up by a charismatic leader does not automatically raise a red flag. This is because new religions are much like new businesses: new businesses are almost always the manifestation of the vision and work of a single entrepreneur. In contrast, few if any successful businesses are the outgrowth of the work of a committee.

Divine Authority: Also, to found a religion, a leader usually makes some sort of claim to special insight or to special revelation that legitimates both the new religion and the leader’s right to lead. The founder may even claim to be prophet, messiah or avatar. While many critics of alternative religions have asserted that the assumption of such authority is in itself a danger sign, too many objectively harmless groups have come into being with the leader asserting divine authority for such claims to be meaningful danger signs.

Use of Authority: Far more important than one’s claim to authority is what one does with the authority once he or she attracts followers

who choose to recognize it. A minister or guru who focuses her or his pronouncements on the interpretation of scripture or on other matters having to do with religion proper is far less problematic than a leader who takes it upon her, or himself to make decisions in the personal lives of individual parishioners, such as dictating (as opposed to suggesting) who and when one will marry. The line between advising and ordering others with respect to their personal lives can, however, be quite thin. A useful criterion for determining whether or not this line has been crossed is to examine what happens when one acts against the guru's advice: If one can respectfully disagree about a particular item of personal—as opposed to religious—advice without suffering negative consequences as a result, then the leadership dynamics within the group are healthy with respect to authority issues.

One of the clearest signs that leaders are overstepping their proper sphere of authority is when they articulate certain ethical guidelines that everyone must follow except for the guru or minister. This is especially the case with a differential sexual ethic that restricts the sexual activity of followers but allows leaders to initiate liaisons with whomever they choose.

Above the Law: Perhaps the most serious danger sign is when a religious group places itself above the law, although there are some nuances that make this point trickier than it might first appear. All of us, in some sphere of life, place ourselves above the law, if only when we go a few miles per hour over the speed limit or fudge a few figures on our income tax returns. Also, when push comes to shove, almost every religion in the world would be willing to assert that divine law takes precedence over human law—should they ever come into conflict. Hence, a group that, for example, solicits donations in an area where soliciting is forbidden should not, on that basis alone, be viewed as danger to society. Exceptions should also be made for groups or individuals who make a very public protest against certain laws judged as immoral, as when a contentious objector goes to jail rather than be drafted into the military.

On the other hand, it should be clear that a group leader who consistently violates serious laws has developed a rationale that could easily be used to legitimate more serious anti-social acts. Examples that come readily to mind are Marshall Hertiff, founder/leader of Heaven's Gate, who regularly ducked out on motel bills and who was once even arrested for stealing a rental car, and Swami Kirtananda, founder of the New Vrindavan community, who was caught authorising the stealing of computer software before being arrested for ordering

the murder of a community critic. Documentable child abuse and other illegalities committed within the organisation are also covered by this criterion.

End of the World Scenarios: Another misconceived criterion is perceiving groups as dangerous because of apocalyptic theologies. Almost every religion in the larger Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition has an apocalyptic theology, even the traditional peace churches that forbid members from participating in the military. Thus, contrary to the assertions of some contemporary critics of religion, having an apocalyptic theology does not, in itself, raise a red flag. This is because in most apocalyptic scenarios it is God and his angels who fight the final battle, not flesh-and-blood human beings. The human role is spiritual, and the “saved” fight a spiritual war, not a literal, physical war.

An apocalyptic theology is only dangerous when individual followers believe they are going to be called upon to be foot soldiers in God’s army, and prepare themselves by stocking up on weapons and ammunition. Groups that come to mind here are some of the Identity Christian churches who see themselves as preparing to fight a literal war with God’s enemies. On the other hand, a community’s possession of firearms—in the absence of such a theology of physical confrontation—is probably not dangerous, if no other danger signs are present. If the simple possession of firearms by members was a significant danger sign, then the Southern Baptist Convention would be the most dangerous “cult” in the nation.

Salvation: Another false, yet frequently voiced criterion is that religious groups are dangerous which see only themselves as saved and the rest of the world as damned. Like apocalypticism, this trait is far too widespread among traditional religions to constitute an authentic danger sign. A more meaningful characteristic should be how a religion actually treats non-members.

Group Isolation: Another criterion is a group’s relative isolation. This trait is somewhat more complex than the others we have examined. On the one hand, there are abundant examples of traditional religions establishing communities or monastic centers apart from the larger society that have posed no danger to anyone. On the other hand, some of the worst abuses have taken place in the segregated (usually communal) sub-societies of certain minority religions. From the suicidal violence of People’s Temple to the externally-directed violence of AUM Shinrikyo, it was the social dynamics found in an isolated or semi-

isolated community that allowed such extreme actions to be contemplated.

In order to flag this characteristic while simultaneously avoiding stigmatising every religion that sets up a segregated society as being potentially dangerous, it might be best to invert this trait and state it as a counter-indicator. In other words, rather than asserting that any religion with a partially isolated community is potentially dangerous, let us instead assert that the relative lack of such boundaries indicates that the group in question is almost certainly not dangerous.

Deception: A final early warning sign is a group's readiness to deceive outsiders. Some critics have asserted that a recruiter who invites a potential convert to a dinner without mentioning that the event is being sponsored by such-and-such church is deceptive. Others have criticised religions possessing a hierarchical system of knowledge to which only initiates are privy. These kinds of criticisms are silly. When a guru publicly asserts that no one in his organisation is involved in illegal drugs and police later find a LSD laboratory in his basement, that's deception.

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INTERFAITH STUDY CENTRES, PROGRAMMES AND DECLARATION: SPECIAL FOCUS ON FOODS OF VARIOUS RELIGIONS

INTERFAITH STUDIES

**PROCLAIMING A COMMON UNDERSTANDING AMONG ALL
RELIGIOUS FAITH IN THE WORLD BASED ON A GENUINE
PRINCIPLE OF GOODNESS AND KINDNESS: PEACE, LOVE,
RESPECT, TOLERANCE AND COMPASSION, TO THE WAY OF
ACHIEVING WELL-BEING AND A BETTER OF LIFE
WITHIN THE SOCIETY**

The world is becoming worse as we witness many conflicts, crime, violence, division, confusion, disobedience, ignorance, social injustice, misguidance, immorality and the loss of life's value. As this world it self is near to its end, its time to value this very short life by understanding the essence and ultimate purpose of life, putting ourselves in the highest alert of awareness and consciousness of mind. Going back to Almighty God, The Creator, seeking for Divine Guidance so that we may gain a real Eternal happiness.

IFS & CDA is a registered 501 C3 non-profit organisation dedicated and committed to denounce all forms of perversion and immorality by upgrading the quality of life and spiritual welfare of human being of all races, colors, faith, religions and ethnicity.

VISION

Often times spirituality and all religions that are namely known as or what we thought of as being a "*Godly way*" is no more than a

symbol of belief and ritual practice to the believer and the follower of it, including spiritual and supernatural aspect that people emotionally feel and much more its becoming a cultural tradition and celebration of the season that is marked on the calendar.

While we walk up there in the outside world, we see and witness the loss of identity and life moral values, the increasing amount of crime, violence, transgression, disobedience, immorality, misguidance, degradation and corruption in the community.

That is when we need to ponder and to answer upon these critical questions:

- What role does practising religion play in the community...?
- What can religion contribute to the community in order to solve these problems ...?
- What is the purpose and function of the religion in/for the human life...?
- What impact should religion have on society..?
- Is the religion one of the causes of the conflict and the problem itself...?

HOW SHOULD WE DEFINE RELIGION THEN....?

We see some people even hate and are anti-religion, they want to get away from any religious discussion. They feel religion is personal issue and should not be discussed in public and no one should try to convert their religion to another. Some people blame religion as the cause of the tension and conflict.

Probably what they feel is reasonable, as we have seen and if we trace back the history and bring our memory back in all time, many wars, turmoil, riot, mass murder, political conflict in the Middle East, Asia and other part of Africa in some case are started from religious conflict.

As religion itself is supposedly to be a mean and to be sort of the way to know God, to connect ourselves to the Highest power, or to seek the Eternal life and salvation from sin. Whatever the answer to the above questions is, surely we would be agreed to say that religious should function as, and therefore it should contain:

the law, the guidance, instruction, the rule and regulation to show people to the way of goodness, righteousness and to lead toward happiness.

Religion should provide and encourage people to obey divine law which is consist of several aspect that lead people toward goodness:

prohibition, restriction, obligation, commandment and instruct people what to do and what not to do. It should also contain job assignment, discipline, responsibility and informing the consequences of the trial on the Day of Judgment with its rewards and punishments.

While on the contrary otherwise as it mentioned, we see and witness many problems of disobedience occur in the society.

Immorality, uncontrollable behaviour, homosexuality, alcoholism, child abuse, racism, domestic violence, prostitution, pornography, fornication, incest, adultery, abortion, murder, homicide, sneaking, stealing, cheating, divorce, the brokenness of family tie, social injustice.

Hatred, prejudice, enmity, hostility, ignorance, envy, animosity, foolishness, all of these are of course the disease of the heart.

Therefore, we are as good and religious people who still have a sense of concern with a vision **MUST** stand up to get together, to work willingly, to solve the problems and change the condition within the society.

PHILOSOPHER OF RELIGION AND THEOLOGIAN

John Hick is an internationally read and discussed philosopher of religion and theologian. His many books have, between them, been translated into seventeen languages. More than twenty books have been published about his work in English, German, French, Chinese and Japanese.

Hick has doctorates from Oxford (D.Phil) and Edinburgh (D.Litt), and honorary doctorates from Uppsala University and Glasgow University. He is an emeritus professor of both Birmingham University, UK and the Claremont Graduate University, California. He is a Fellow of the Institute for Advanced Research in Arts and Social Sciences, University of Birmingham UK, and a Vice-President of the British Society for the Philosophy of Religion and of the World Congress of Faiths. The story of his life thus far is told in *John Hick: An Autobiography* (2002).

WILKES UNIVERSITY: HENRY STUDENT CENTRE CAMPUS INTERFAITH

Faced with a growing gap between the rich and poor, living in a world torn by war, prejudice and injustice, where do we find hope? Campus Interfaith encourages the students, faculty, and staff of Wilkes University to know their Creator and practice the faith of

their choice, so that we all might be instilled with peace, the strength to endure hardships, and live with a bountiful joy to unite this world into a peace-filled place. Events include Interfaith prayer services and faith-based events, information sessions, speakers and celebrations.

NEWMAN CLUB

The Newman Club is open to students, faculty, staff and community members to gather to pray the Liturgy of the Hours, discuss Catholic Social Teaching, read scripture, and reflect on various topics. Refreshments provided; all are welcome. When...Mondays at 5:30 pm to 7:00 pm. Where...Leadership Development Center on the 2nd floor of the Henry Student Center.

“FEAST ON FAITH”

Feast on Faith is an opportunity open to students, faculty, and staff to gather and discuss matters of faith, morals, and values. We will also dialogue with various faith traditions about beliefs and worship, as well as how those beliefs are related to daily life. Meetings may also include: discussions on world events and culture, guest speakers, and/ or viewing pertinent films. This programme is a free, open, and non-judgmental forum to express opinions and faith. A FREE meal will also be prepared and served by student volunteers.

When...Tuesdays at 5:00 PM—? (stop by anytime!)

Where...Leadership Development Center

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP CLUB

The Christian Fellowship Club meets weekly to provide a comfortable atmosphere for all who wish to learn about the Christian faith or continue to develop their Christian faith. Meetings include reading and discussing scripture, singing Praise and Worship songs, fellowship, and prayer. All are welcome.

Where and When...meets on Tuesdays at noon on the first floor of the Henry Student Center.

ISLAMIC INTEREST SOCIETY

The Islamic Interest Society meets for various celebrations, commemorations, and informational gatherings related to Islam and Muslim culture. All are welcome.

Where and When... check the Interfaith board, office 202 in the Henry Student Center.

SPIRITUALITY

Prayer and meditation are integral in speaking to God, knowing the Creator, and putting God's Plan into action in our lives. Campus Interfaith sponsors and posts various retreat and reflection opportunities, along with worship services for all faiths to assist in strengthening your spiritual life.

SERVICE

Campus Interfaith works in conjunction with the Community Service Office in serving the poor and less fortunate in the Wilkes-Barre community and beyond. For information on service opportunities or the Spring Break Service Trip, please stop by the Campus Interfaith or Community Service Offices.

PLEASE VISIT

You are always welcome to stop by the Campus Interfaith Office to check out the opportunities available to you to strengthen your character, your spirituality, build strong friendships, and just to talk and rest a while. Campus Interfaith is located at 84 West South Street in the Henry Student Center on the second floor. All are welcome—please stop by or call (570)408-5904 for an appointment. Peace and Blessings to you!

INDIA-VATION

Let the spirit of Regensburg enter interfaith dialogue, says Mgr Dabre by Nirmala Carvalho.

The bishop of Vasai, who yesterday was appointed to the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious by Benedict XVI, talks to *AsiaNews* about the importance of the Pope's Regensburg 'lectio' in which he laid down the bases for a true and fruitful dialogue between religions. This is especially fundamental in Asia where 95 per cent of the people are not Christian.

Mumbai (*AsiaNews*)—Interfaith dialogue "has to be an urgent priority for the Church," above all "since the Second Vatican Council earnest efforts have been made by the Episcopal conferences." This is true especially in Asia where 95 per cent of the population is not Christian, but where the "Church plays a fundamental role in the areas of health care and education," said Mgr Thomas Dabre, bishop of Vasai, who yesterday was appointed to the Pontifical Council for Inter-religious by Benedict XVI.

Speaking to *AsiaNews*, Bishop Dabre said that the Pope made it a “key principle of his pontificate” as clearly demonstrated in his famous *lectio magistralis* in Regensburg. His “speech was a clarion call for dialogue between religions and faith on the one hand and reason and science on the other.”

For the Pope, “Western intellectuals [...] should be open to other civilisations and the societies who believe in God.” In turn, “[r]eligion must be open to reason and reason must be open to faith. Religion must be reasonable and reason must be open to faith.”

Instead, “[s]ome in the West have exclusively emphasised the role of reason, science and technology neglecting the positive contribution that religions and faith can make to humanity. In fact [in his Regensburg speech] the Pope was telling Western intellectuals that they should be open to other civilisations and the societies who believe in God.”

Benedict XVI described religion as “a fundamental ingredient for dialogue in which faith is open to science and science to faith. Unfortunately some did not correctly understand the intention of the author (the Pope) and its great meaning.”

Yet, the Pope’s visit to Turkey was proof of its effectiveness. A pontiff visited a Muslim place of worship in “a spirit of openness and respect” with positive results.

Interfaith dialogue is very important from the perspective of globalisation since it places all confessions on a same level with the same challenges like materialism, “hedonism, profit-making and earthly prosperity. The needs of the soul are not in focus in the globalisation of today” and this harms everyone. “Religions can work together to solve these problems which often cause violence and tensions.”

Lastly according to Bishop Dabre, to live in peace we are called to collaborate and engage in dialogue. “A spiritual guide, of whatever religion, must understand the value of introspection, ask questions and offer answers. Only this way can we reach true peace, which rests on recognising that God is the author of man’s dignity.”

WRI PROGRAMMES

NON-VIOLENCE

We are pleased to present three articles from the 1960s and 1970s, reflecting WRI’s continuing work on non-violent theory and non-violence training:

- George Lakey's 1972 paper, *A Manifesto for Non-violent Revolution*, is a draft of a statement discussed at the 1972 Triennial in Sheffield.
- Michael Randle's 1975 paper *Towards Liberation* is the first draft of a statement discussed at the 1975 Triennial in Noordwijkerhout.
- *Training in Non-violence* is the title of a WRI pamphlet from 1965. Subtitled "A full documentation of the WRI study conference", it includes material from the Perugia meeting that year. Articles are from Fred Blum, Aldo Capitini, Narayan Desai, Evert Huisman, George Lakey, and Devi Prasad, together with a summary of the conference's decisions.

WRI and the Belgian WRI section *Vredesactie* will be organising a seminar on "military globalisation and non-violent resistance in Europe" in March 2008, following the NATO Game Over direct action on the 22nd. You can read more about the seminar here in English, and about NATO Game Over in English, Spanish, Dutch, or French.

The WRI September 2007 appeal focuses on the Non-violence Programme. The text is available here in German, English and Spanish.

Choosing Non-violent Action is the title and theme of the September 2007 issue of the *Broken Rifle*, available on this site in German (HTML or PDF), English (HTML or PDF) and Spanish (HTML or PDF).

A report on WRI's presence at the June G-8 protests in Germany can be found here in English. A new leaflet describing the Non-violence Programme and its funding needs is available in English (HTML or PDF) and German (HTML or PDF).

The 10th issue of *War Profiteers' News*, our email newsletter, is now online in English. You can subscribe to the newsletter either as email or as an RSS feed or consult past issues through the web archive.

THE RIGHT TO REFUSE TO KILL

Nine newspapers (five in Spanish, four in English) have been added to the Support Colombian Conscientious Objectors pages on this website. See the complete list of papers for each language in English or Spanish. There is also a Flash presentation of ACOOC's work (text in Spanish only), which can be viewed here—note that it is quite large, at 6 megabytes.

Luis Vildósola has written a long paper on military service and the anti-militarist movement in Chile which is available here in Spanish.

The 2007 Prisoners for Peace honour roll is available in English (HTML or PDF), German (HTML or PDF), Spanish (HTML or PDF), and French (HTML; some articles only). The campaign pack also contains articles on antimilitarism in Turkey, the focus country for this year's campaign, and additional information can be found on our Turkish CO campaign page. The WRI appeal for Prisoners for Peace Day is now available in English, Spanish, and German.

WEBSITE NOTES

The WRI Wiki has recently undergone a system upgrade. This is in part due to an escalation in activity by spammers — you now have to prove you are a human before registering or posting on the wiki. Don't let this discourage you from using the wiki, however — we need contributions, especially from people who can correct, update, or add to our profiles of war profiteers.

THEOLOGICAL DISCOVERIES THROUGH INTERFAITH DIALOGUE: MY NEIGHBOUR'S FAITH AND MINE

The study guide, *My Neighbour's Faith and Mine: Theological discoveries through interfaith dialogue*, was published by the WCC in 1986. Since then it has been translated into numerous languages and used widely.

This study guide is prepared in the hope that Christians would be challenged to seek new dimensions of their own faith and also to see their neighbours in a new light and learn to live with them in closer community. It is meant for Christians who live in religiously plural situations—and that's everywhere, in our day. It urges them to reflect on the theological significance of the faith and witness of their neighbours who are not Christians.

The text of the study guide has been made available via the Internet with the hope that it will be even more widely used.

WHY MEETING MY NEIGHBOR THE STRANGER IS IMPORTANT FOR OUR MUTUAL SURVIVAL

Who is my neighbor? The question resonates back through the centuries in every religious tradition. But an intense new immediacy attends the question today, in what Harvard professor Diana Eck calls "a new religious America." In less than half a century, the demographics of our nation's neighborhoods—large and small, urban and rural—have generated a startling religious diversity.

On a bus, in a classroom, at work, buying groceries, at the ballpark, most of us in this country continue to rub shoulders with Catholics, Jews, Protestants, and the unaffiliated. But the 20th century witnessed a massive shift in this country, particularly when immigration law was reformed in 1965 to end racial discrimination against certain groups. Today the American family has been joined by significant numbers of Buddhists, Confucians, Hindus, Jains, Muslims, Sikhs, Taoists, and Zoroastrians. These traditions all found their first public forum in this country at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions; now their temples, restaurants, and cultural festivals have become part of our lives. Simultaneously, newer religions are proliferating, bringing us Latter day Saints, Unitarian Universalists, Baha'i's, and the Brahma Kumaris, to name but a few. Equally important is growing recognition and respect for dozens of earth-based, indigenous traditions, communities that fall under such mantles as American Indian, Neo-Pagan, and Shinto.

The amazing religious landscape emerging is unprecedented. But the core issue facing religious communities learning to live together goes back at least to the 1840s, when interfaith peace societies started sprouting up here and abroad, all focused on ending war. Approximately 425 peace groups around the world were active in 1900, largely people of faith who had survived the bloodiest of all centuries and wanted a change. In February 1914, Andrew Carnegie invited Catholic, Jewish, and Protestant leaders to his home and offered to fund an interfaith effort to abolish war. Their initial conference was scheduled that September in Germany. The day it convened World War I was declared, and 24 hours later, after sharing prayers, the participants hurried home.

Today, in a world more bloodied than ever, not all is bleak. Peace studies and conflict resolution theory are in the second or third generation of a renaissance, starting with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Leading up to the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions (commemorating the 1893 gathering), Catholic theologian Hans Küng suggested that until religions make peace, nations will be at war, and until religions are in dialogue, they will not be at peace with each other. The 8,000 who went to the 1993 Parliament provided an enthusiastic choir for Professor Küng's notions about inter-religious dialogue, but the rest of the world paid scant attention.

Little changes started taking place on their own, though, across the land. Starting in the early 1990s, ecumenical groups (Christians

from different denominations) increasingly have moved to interfaith membership. Chaplains in hospitals, universities, and the military learn on the job from day one about ministry to multi-religious constituencies. Directors of neighborhood food programmes, emergency housing, and local/global crisis response efforts have become savvy about increasing their capacity to meet goals by welcoming participation from all faith families. But it took September 11, 2001, to wake the world up to the scope and import of Dr. Küng's challenge.

Several Sundays after that historic tragedy, 30 Muslims showed up on the doorstep of First Congregational United Church of Christ in San Jose as worship was about to begin. "We are Muslims," they explained. "Are we welcome?" They were welcomed in.

After worship, the Muslims said, "We are your neighbors, and we don't know you. We think we should know each other." From that first conversation flowed a series of collaborative events. The raw courage of the Muslims walking into an unknown worship environment within weeks of 9-11, and the startled Christians' ability to respond openly and in friendship, exemplifies the essence of what is required for interfaith relationship building. Demonising people behind their backs is so much easier than walking across the street and introducing yourself. But in neighborhoods everywhere, people—a few here, a few there—are putting shyness and fear of the unknown aside, and starting their introductions.

FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

- Who are your neighbors? Where do you live? How long have you lived there? How has the religious and racial composition of your neighborhood changed? Are you aware of the variety of religious practices of your neighbors?
- Have any other religious groups visited your place of worship recently? Have you visited any neighboring places of worship recently? If yes to either question, what was your experience? What did you gain from the meeting? What did you learn from the meeting that you can use in similar circumstances in the future?

PREPARING TO MEET 'THE RELIGIOUS OTHER'

Before introducing yourself to 'the religious other,' a few simple answers to several persistent, fearful questions (which we won't take time to repeat) might be helpful:

- Interfaith relationships tend to be about friendship, cooperation, and collaboration around shared stories, values, and goals—not about creating a new religion or a lowest common religious denominator.
- Healthy interfaith relationships are never about taking away your faith and practice. People who most actively pursue interfaith dialogue and cooperation, including leaders like Gandhi and the Dalai Lama, typically report that interfaith dialogue enriches rather than diminishes the faith they brought to the table. One’s own personal faith, far from being lost or diluted, is deepened by the experience.
- Many religions seek to convert outsiders to their tradition, an attitude that deserves respect. Proselytizing is inappropriate, though, at interfaith events where developing friendship and mutual respect is the goal.
- Very few in ‘the interfaith movement’ are relativists, people suggesting that, ‘after all, all religions are mostly the same anyway.’ On the other hand, interfaith activists do tend to believe that human beings have a variety of authentic ways to believe and practice and build a relationship with what Abrahamic religions call God, and ancient Hindu saints (not wanting to delimit divinity with their definitions) called ‘neither this, nor that.’

Most religions have a minority of followers who claim to own the ‘exclusive’ truth—and they are frequently opposed by those who see the goodness, beauty, and truth in different religious/spiritual approaches. The 2003 Gallup Religious Tolerance Index suggested that in this country, 17 per cent believe they alone know what is true and are labeled isolated or exclusivist. By comparison, 46 per cent are labeled tolerant, or “sort of’ inclusive. That leaves 37 per cent who are called integrated or pluralistic, people who tend to be religiously involved as well as interested in others. These figures should allay the fears which most of us have harbored at some point, that “those folks over there are taking over everything.” Diversity reigns and is not going away, so we need creative ways to build relationship. The din between pluralists and exclusivists, for instance, can get nasty and judgmental, but it doesn’t need to be that way.

Most if not all religions propound some version of the Golden Rule; the version in your tradition is your best starting point for preparing to meet the religious other. Quietly embodying love gives

everyone a huge additional advantage. This applies equally to fundamentalists and progressives, old-timers and newcomers, friends and strangers.

Whatever your own truth claims, whatever attitude—humble or assertive—you take towards your truth, interfaith dialogue is enhanced with a few ground rules:

- Offer everyone the same respect and dignity you hope to receive.
- Listen to the other person with enough care to begin to discern the “positive core,” the life-giving energy, in his or her faith.
- Speak from the heart, not to make a point but to build understanding and relationship.
- Remember that many traditions stay away from alcohol and meat; and many worship on a day other than Sunday, making time sensitivity important when planning shared activities.

The issue of sharing ritual and worship evokes some additional protocol:

- When praying, leading meditation, or otherwise contributing to interfaith worship, speak in your own language and idiom, just as others will when they come to the podium.
- When sharing spiritual practices, offer those attending three options—to actually participate if and when appropriate, to simply observe, or to leave and take some time out. Shared practice should never be coerced.

These guidelines reduce potential mis-steps. For several decades the World Council of Churches has worked on more elaborate interfaith guidelines, and in recent years a number of denominations and nonprofits have developed their own. All are good tools for learning to treat each other well.

Similarly, the art of graceful hosting, music and the arts, and good food almost always improve relationship building. Sacred space can be fully enjoyed by interfaith groups when all present feel respected, safe, and comfortable enough to participate. Providing one another hospitality in such a setting is a small but tangible step toward creating a world of sustained peace.

FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

- Did (or do) you have any fears or apprehensions about meeting the “religious other”?

- What positive feelings do you bring to the opportunity of meeting “the religious other”? What are your hopes for the meeting? What do you want to learn?
- Do the “ground rules” at the bottom of page 5 help to resolve any apprehension you may have had? In what way?
- Is there anything about the “ground rules” with which you would have difficulty complying? Do you think anything else should be added to the “ground rules”?
- Would you be open to sharing ritual and worship with the “religious other”? What interests or attracts about this? Do you have any reservations? If yes, what would have to change for you to be comfortable?
- Do you have any experience with shared ritual and worship? How did you find these experiences? What was challenging? What was positive? How did you grow in your understanding of the “religious other” as a result of these experiences?

ENGAGING WAYS TO BUILD GRASSROOTS INTERFAITH RELATIONS

In church, synagogue, mosque, coven, sanga, or gurdwara, clergy and lay leaders know full well how to design worship, create programmes, give life to religious education curricula, and organize service projects. In spite of this expertise and experience, though, figuring out what to do following interfaith introductions can be awkward. As an old-timer said, “So you’ve had a beautiful multi-faith Thanksgiving service, but then what are you meant to do?!”

The first person with his or her hand up usually says, “Let’s find out what we all agree on, the things that make us alike.” People well-read in religious studies can offer fascinating insights into this subject, but the approach is strewn with the dangers of oversimplification and distortion. Simplistic comparisons reduce religious experience—one of the most precious particularities of human experience—to a common denominator.

The one arena where studying religious convergence is useful and important is ethics. As noted above, the Golden Rule gives us a shared starting point. From there, comparing and contrasting what we teach about public and private ethics, about justice, compassion, forgiveness, reconciliation and peace, about walking the talk, is fascinating and edifying, a huge opportunity for interfaith dialogue. Lessons for sustaining the human family peacefully start to emerge.

Download from the Web, for instance, *Towards a Global Ethic—An Initial Declaration*. It is a 10-page document that 200 religious leaders signed at the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions that we will be examining in chapter 5. A cry from the heart over the violence of the world, the declaration suggests that we can rediscover the sources of peacemaking within each of our particular traditions. By itself this initial declaration provides a rich syllabus for any religious education project. It can be used within your own community but is so much more interesting when half of those in the room are from a different faith.

A caveat: Issues weighted with political controversy and polarised opinions need to be set on the shelf while people become friends, or dialogue can degenerate into irresolvable acrimony. An example can make the distinction clear. Interfaith groups around the world are studying forgiveness from the perspective of different religions, with remarkable results. They succeed because mutual respect has been established and they stay focused on the issue—forgiveness in each of their traditions. If these conversations veer into an argument about who is right in the Israel-Palestine conflict, or the India-Pakistan conflict, a harsh debate is the best you can expect, and mutual demonizing the worst. Can we ignore these conflicts? Of course not. But milk comes before solids, and friendship—real human connection where people have learned to appreciate each other—comes before tackling problems that have confounded the best and brightest for centuries.

Before taking on something as ambitious as the global ethic, you might want to implement a getting-to-know-you ice-breaker that creates friendship among people from different religions for no other reason than the satisfaction of doing so. The following sets of questions can be used in various contexts and formats. The most popular way to begin is one-on-one for 45 minutes to an hour, followed by people introducing each other in small groups. Initial interviews work best when the pairs don't know each other and come from different faiths, but even old friends from the same congregation can enjoy a rich conversation with these questions.

- Thank you for introducing yourself and telling me a little about yourself. Please tell me something about your religion and how you practice it day by day.
- What is most valuable and important to you about your spiritual life and faith family? Perhaps you would share a story about a particularly meaningful religious experience.

- What does your tradition teach about how to treat strangers? Do you have hospitality traditions in your faith—stories or lore or community practices for welcoming the visitor and relating to your neighbors peacefully?
- Let's put aside for a moment the conflicts communities experience internally and with the world. Could you tell me of a time when you witnessed a situation that moved from conflict to reconciliation and became a positive influence for peace, a bridge-builder among strangers? How did it happen and what did you learn?
- If in 100 years the human race is able to create a sustainable peace among religions and nations, what do you think it would look like? What are some of the steps that might lead us toward that vision, and what part of that vision should we start working on here and now?

The secret ingredient in this interfaith introduction recipe is keeping the questions and discussion focused on assets rather than deficits. Reflect on what works best in your communities and relationships, rather than what doesn't work. When problems come up, they can be reframed as opportunities, challenging possibilities for doing better instead of roadblocks. The failure of dedicated international peacemakers trying for a century and a half *to abolish war* suggests that shifting the focus *to creating cultures of peace* is infinitely more practical, fruitful, and transforming. Positive little steps now, starting in our own backyards, will inspire others to become active.

The question sets above and many more were used in creating United Religions Initiative (URI), an international interfaith network chartered in 2000 and connecting 240 (and growing) local interfaith groups in 50 countries. Taking time for the questions, encouraging every participant to be a listener and a contributor, is a wonderful introduction to the joy of grassroots interfaith community.

The kind of interfaith relationships we've talked about seem modest but can be deeply satisfying. Once they begin, things may seem to return to normal, but if the relationships are nurtured, the 'neighborhood' gradually finds itself with new life, unexpected gifts, a renewed imagination, rich conversations, and the energy to participate in healing the world.

FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

- Have you previously heard of or read *Towards a Global Ethic—An Initial Declaration*? What was your response then?

- Reading it now, what is your response to *Towards a Global Ethic*? Do you personally share its outcry about the violence in the world? Why or why not?
- To make the changes called for in *Towards a Global Ethic*, the writers of the document call for a change in “the ‘hearts’ of people.” How do you feel about making this change yourself? What kind of impact would such a change make if the majority of individuals took this first step? How would the world be different than it is today?
- Are there any other parts of *Towards a Global Ethic* that particularly moved you? Why?
- Try the exercise that is described on the bottom of page 7 and the top of page 8. How did you find it? Easy? Difficult? What did you learn? What moved you about the other participant’s responses? Did their sharing of their spiritual life allow you to understand anything more about your own faith?
- Were there times when the conversation strayed from discussing assets to discussing deficits? If a similar thing should happen in another discussion, what could you do differently to steer the conversation in a more positive direction?

SACRED AND FOUNDATIONAL TEXTS

Religious and spiritual traditions typically store their treasure – the narrative, wisdom, and values informing each faith family – in some sort of record. This documentation can come in the form of holy scripture, writing set aside, historically authorised in some way, revered, studied, and used in meditation and worship. Scripture is so important in Christianity, Judaism, and Islam that they are frequently called religions “of the Book.”

Orally transmitted stories take the place of authorised scripture in other traditions, particularly indigenous communities. Whether canonised or open-ended, the form and content of humankind’s sacred words are manifold... poetry, songs, religious tales of every kind, history, ethics, all providing guidance, nourishment for believers and practitioners as well as interested outsiders.

Most followers in most traditions find their own sacred texts fully adequate for spiritual and communitarian concerns. Many are learning, though, what a pleasure it is to hear the sacred words of other traditions, particularly in ritual settings. Grassroots interfaith activity is sprouting up across the country, with communities sharing their stories and

scripture with each other for the first time, an experience humbling and empowering all at once. Over and over people who worried that the experience might be strange or threatening find themselves enriched when it happens.

If there is any limitation in these wonderful words that knit together the meaning of life for us, it might be that very few traditions mention the religious other in tones of appreciation or goodwill. When other religions are mentioned, it tends to be judgmental, without much room for mutual respect. The *Guru Granth Sahib*, the sacred text of Sikhs, is a book of devotional songs, and it includes Hindu and Muslim hymns in a display of spiritual magnanimity hard to imagine in other faiths. Sikhism is an exception to the rule. Most traditions until recently have done little to create or encourage a level playing field of mutual respect for inter-religious dialogue. But the tide is turning.

As noted above, Catholic theologian Hans Küng observed that *until religions make peace, the world will be at war, and that religions will not be in peace until they are in dialogue*. To inspire and inform the inter-religious dialogue Küng calls for, sacred texts by themselves don't suffice. We need a new literature, not more scripture but a series of foundational, shared documents holding up *the value of every human being and the importance of religions working together to heal the world*.

Let us hope a library accumulates around the care of the whole human family. The selections discussed below, at this point in time, seem foundational, critical texts for the care and sustainability of the human family.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS (1948)

In 1948 the United Nations passed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a Magna Carta for the whole human race. Human rights till then were defined, enforced, and evaluated nation by nation, with 'mind your own business' the international ethic of the day. But the opening clause to the 1948 Declaration proposed that the "*recognition of the inherent dignity of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world.*"

Some, like this writer, may have assumed as children that the ethic in the faith you grew up with—valuing every human being as an invaluable child of God – would be a high priority for everyone. You may have assumed that since the United States of America Constitution is grounded in the inalienable rights of *every* human being to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, that Americans

would be supportive of inalienable rights for us all, in this country and everywhere else. Those turned out to be false assumptions.

To be sure, most religions have a high conception of human beings. But the horrors of the holocaust spurred the world's leadership to craft the 1948 Declaration. It passed the United National General Assembly as a resolution, and did not carry the force of international law. Yet it has become one of the 20th century's most significant documents, a bill of rights for all people, regardless of race, religion, or nationality.

Ironically, in the family of nations, the United States, with its own shining Bill of Rights, has turned out to be one of the least enthusiastic about the UN Declaration, much less the implication that international law should enforce its values. The same cannot be said at the grassroots, where millions of Americans hunger with the rest of the world for an end to violence and poverty for all. More than half a century later, studying the Declaration is an excellent starting point in defining the kind of world we wish to create for our children and grandchildren.

TOWARDS A GLOBAL ETHIC—AN INITIAL DECLARATION (1993)

A second document emerged from the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago, a centennial celebration of the 1893 gathering where Buddhist, Hindus, Muslims, and other religious minorities were given their first public forum in this country. Professor Küng, working with many others, drafted a text titled *Towards a Global Ethic – An Initial Declaration* that was signed by more than 200 leaders, scholars, and theologians from dozens of the world's communities of faith.

The preamble begins as a confessional exhortation about a world broken and full of pain.

The world is in agony. The agony is so pervasive and urgent that we are compelled to name its manifestations so that the depth of this pain may be made clear.

Peace eludes us... the planet is being destroyed... neighbors live in fear... women and men are estranged from each other... children die!

This is abhorrent!

We condemn the abuses of Earth's ecosystems.

We condemn the poverty that stifles life's potential; the hunger that weakens the human body; the economic disparities that threaten so many families with ruin...

Between the litany of failure and the affirmations that follow comes the notion of a global ethic bursting forth.

But this agony need not be.

It need not be because the basis for an ethic already exists. This ethic offers the possibility of a better individual and global order, and leads individuals away from despair and societies away from chaos.

We are women and men who have embraced the precepts and practices of the world's religions:

We affirm that a common set of core values is found in the teachings of the religions, and that these form the basis of a global ethic.

We affirm that this truth is already known, but yet to be lived in heart and action.

We affirm that there is an irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life, for families and communities, for races, nations, and religions. There already exist ancient guidelines for human behaviour which are found in the teachings of the religions of the world and which are the condition for a sustainable world order.

The idea of a Global Ethic remains controversial and has spawned dozens of conferences, classes, and books. Agree or disagree, though, the morning news each day suggests that it may be the soundest, safest idea still available to us, locally as well as globally. The second half of the preamble offers a series of powerful affirmations.

We Declare: We are interdependent. Each of us depends on the well-being of the whole, and so we have respect for the community of living beings, for people, animals, and plants, and for the preservation of Earth, the air, water and soil.

We take individual responsibility for all we do. All our decisions, actions, and failures to act have consequences.

We must treat others as we wish others to treat us. We make a commitment to respect life and dignity, individuality and diversity, so that every person is treated humanely, without exception. We must have patience and acceptance. We must be able to forgive, learning from the past but never allowing ourselves to be enslaved by memories of hate. Opening our hearts to one another, we must sink our narrow differences for the cause of the world community, practising a culture of solidarity and relatedness.

We consider humankind our family. We must strive to be kind and generous. We must not live for ourselves alone, but should also

serve others, never forgetting the children, the aged, the poor, the suffering, the disabled, the refugees, and the lonely. No person should ever be considered or treated as a second-class citizen, or be exploited in any way whatsoever. There should be equal partnership between men and women. We must not commit any kind of sexual immorality. We must put behind us all forms of domination or abuse.

We commit ourselves to a culture of non-violence, respect, justice, and peace. We shall not oppress, injure, torture, or kill other human beings, forsaking violence as a means of settling differences.

We must strive for a just social and economic order, in which everyone has an equal chance to reach full potential as a human being. We must speak and act truthfully and with compassion, dealing fairly with all, and avoiding prejudice and hatred. We must not steal. We must move beyond the dominance of greed for power, prestige, money, and consumption to make a just and peaceful world.

It concludes with a spiritually nuanced commitment:

Earth cannot be changed for the better unless the consciousness of individuals is changed first. We pledge to increase our awareness by disciplining our minds, by meditation, by prayer, or by positive thinking. Without risk and a readiness to sacrifice there can be no fundamental change in our situation. Therefore we commit ourselves to this global ethic, to understanding one another, and to socially beneficial, peace-fostering, and nature-friendly ways of life.

We invite all people, whether religious or not, to do the same.

The Declaration continues for another half a dozen pages, focusing on commitments to a culture of...

- *non-violence and respect for life,*
- *solidarity and a just economic order,*
- *tolerance and a life of truthfulness, and*
- *equal rights and partnership between men and women.*

The document is short and was purposely endorsed with a sense of tentativity and newness by including “towards” and “initial.” It is full of interesting notions and suggestions, a curriculum by itself about religious values, their effectiveness, and the future of the human race.

THE CHARTER OF THE UNITED RELIGIONS INITIATIVE (2000)

In 2000, the United Religions Initiative (URI) was signed and a network of interfaith groups around the world joined in a shared commitment. As the Charter says,

The purpose of the United Religions Initiative is to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings.

Any group of interfaith people with at least seven members representing at least three religious, spiritual, or indigenous traditions is welcome to apply for membership in URI if they are committed to URI's purpose as unfolded in the Charter. At this writing there are over 250 "Cooperation Circles" in 50 countries participating.

The preamble of the Charter covers much of the same territory as the affirmations found in *Towards a Global Ethic*. But a new series of principles were also enunciated, built on shared values, that provide diverse groups of people a way to safely, fruitfully interact with each other. Here are the principles:

1. The URI is a bridge-building organisation, not a religion.
2. We respect the sacred wisdom of each religion, spiritual expression and indigenous tradition.
3. We respect the differences among religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions.
4. We encourage our members to deepen their roots in their own tradition.
5. We listen and speak with respect to deepen mutual understanding and trust.
6. We give and receive hospitality.
7. We seek and welcome the gift of diversity and model practices that do not discriminate.
8. We practice equitable participation of women and men in all aspects of the URI.
9. We practice healing and reconciliation to resolve conflict without resorting to violence.
10. We act from sound ecological practices to protect and preserve the Earth for both present and future generations.
11. We seek and offer cooperation with other interfaith efforts.
12. We welcome as members all individuals, organisations and associations who subscribe to the Preamble, Purpose and Principles.
13. We have the authority to make decisions at the most local level that includes all the relevant and affected parties.

14. We have the right to organize in any manner, at any scale, in any area, and around any issue or activity which is relevant to and consistent with the Preamble, Purpose and Principles.
15. Our deliberations and decisions shall be made at every level by bodies and methods that fairly represent the diversity of affected interests and are not dominated by any.
16. We (each part of the URI) shall relinquish only such autonomy and resources as are essential to the pursuit of the Preamble, Purpose and Principles.
17. We have the responsibility to develop financial and other resources to meet the needs of our part, and to share financial and other resources to help meet the needs of other parts.
18. We maintain the highest standards of integrity and ethical conduct, prudent use of resources, and fair and accurate disclosure of information.
19. We are committed to organisational learning and adaptation.
20. We honor the richness and diversity of all languages and the right and responsibility of participants to translate and interpret the Charter, Articles, By-laws and related documents in accordance with the Preamble, Purpose and Principles, and the spirit of the United Religions Initiative.
21. Members of the URI shall not be coerced to participate in any ritual or be proselytised.

DECALOGUE OF ASSISI FOR PEACE (2002)

In January 2002 Pope John Paul II called together 200 religious leaders from the world religions to pray and craft a new ten commandments, one which provides the groundwork for peace and dialogue among religions.

1. We commit ourselves to proclaiming our firm conviction that violence and terrorism are incompatible with the authentic spirit of religion, and, as we condemn every recourse to violence and war in the name of God or of religion, we commit ourselves to doing everything possible to eliminate the root causes of terrorism.
2. We commit ourselves to educating people to mutual respect and esteem, in order to help bring about a peaceful and fraternal coexistence between people of different ethnic groups, cultures and religions.
3. We commit ourselves to fostering the culture of dialogue, so that there will be an increase of understanding and mutual trust

between individuals and among peoples, for these are the premise of authentic peace.

4. We commit ourselves to defending the right of everyone to live a decent life in accordance with their own cultural identity, and to form freely a family of their own.
5. We commit ourselves to frank and patient dialogue, refusing to consider our differences as an insurmountable barrier, but recognising instead that to encounter the diversity of others can become an opportunity for greater reciprocal understanding.
6. We commit ourselves to forgiving one another for past and present errors and prejudices, and to supporting one another in a common effort both to overcome selfishness and arrogance, hatred and violence, and to learn from the past that peace without justice is no true peace.
7. We commit ourselves to taking the side of the poor and the helpless, to speaking out for those who have no voice and to working effectively to change these situations, out of the conviction that no one can be happy alone.
8. We commit ourselves to taking up the cry of those who refuse to be resigned to violence and evil, and we desire to make every effort possible to offer the men and women of our time real hope for justice and peace.
9. We commit ourselves to encouraging all efforts to promote friendship between peoples, for we are convinced that, in the absence of solidarity and understanding between peoples, technological progress exposes the world to a growing risk of destruction and death.
10. We commit ourselves to urging leaders of nations to make every effort to create and consolidate, on the national and international levels, a world of solidarity and peace based on justice.

Taken together, these pioneering documents and others coming in their wake give the human family essential tools for creating a peaceful future. Here at last, in spiritually inclusive language, is the groundwork for including and honoring each one of us, wherever we come from and whatever our race and religion.

FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

- To what kind of religious tradition do you belong? Is yours a tradition that has a form of holy scripture or is your tradition transmitted orally?

- Have you ever explored the written or orally transmitted words of another tradition? What was your experience? What did you learn about the other tradition in this encounter? How did the encounter enrich your understanding of your own tradition?

Universal Declaration of Human Rights

- How do you feel about the fact that the United States has been the least enthusiastic about the *UN Declaration*?
- What was the part of the *UN Declaration* that moved you the most? Why? What part of the *UN Declaration* was most surprising to you? Why? If it were to be re-voted today, would you add anything, or cut anything out?

Towards a Global Ethic – An Initial Declaration

Questions about the global ethic can be found on page 10.

The Charter of the United Religions Initiative

- What was your response to *The Charter of the United Religions Initiative*? What did you like about it? Why?
- What did you feel about *The Charter's* call for a grassroots movement? Do you think that this is an effective approach? Is this something that you would like to be involved in?

Decalogue of Assisi for Peace

- What did you think of the *Decalogue*? Do you think that these commitments will foster peace and dialogue among religions? Why? Which do you find the most important?
- What were you most moved by in the *Decalogue*? Why?

LEARNING AND DOING

The new inter-religious neighborhood we've been exploring offers an unprecedented set of learning opportunities. On your own, in a classroom, a congregation, the new demographics mean most of us have resources nearby to study inter-religious dialogue and relationships and start to take our learning seriously. Teachers abound, starting in your congregation and your neighbor's. They know how to lead a class through the remarkable documents we've described, and compare them perhaps, with passages in their own traditions and literature.

Until you are able to include the 'stranger' in your classroom, of course, studying interfaith relations stays two-dimensional. One of the best first steps is to invite members of other faiths to visit and

perhaps speak to your community. A panel allows several religions to be represented. Taking an interfaith group to a series of sanctuaries or communities, each representing a different tradition, is another popular way to get acquainted.

Making the stranger-to-friend transition gracious and relaxed is the prelude to good interfaith relationships. Whatever the programme, whoever is invited, following a few guidelines can help this highly sensitive beginning, when people meet each other:

Offer Hospitality—Most racial, ethnic, and religious traditions have elaborate hospitality rituals and conventions, though they tend to get lost in today's bustling world. The stories and lore of hospitality are well worth rediscovering whenever strangers are meeting for the first time. Food is important. Music is usually a winner. Graciousness is the key. Mutual respect, as we noticed several times already, offers the ground we walk on.

Deep Listening—The art of listening turns out to be a crucial factor in building healthy communities. Strong personal relationships among people from different traditions depends on listening carefully. Careful listening deepens into a discernment that goes beyond words. Faith and practice regularly take us to regions beyond words, so this is no surprise; yet, when you share sacred time with people from different forms of faith and practice than your own, it's startling to feel the whole universe gets a little bigger, along with your appreciation.

The Power of Dialogue—In the past decade, the nascent interfaith community locally and globally has learned to depend on engaged dialogue – one-on-one conversation about issues that matter and small group work, punctuated by plenary sessions where learnings are shared.

Keynote speakers and panels are important, clerics and lay leaders are often wonderful contributors, and every tradition has wisdom to share. But conversation among members of different traditions – where *everyone* in the circle is heard, is the force growing the interfaith movement. When people are offered a friendly place to talk about what is most important to them, vitality and trust start to seep into the community.

How do you deal with red-hot issues that are too sensitive to talk about, particularly with strangers? The key is to initiate your conversations (and relationships) around issues of value focused on what people find most important, not the issues which come with complex disagreements and conflicted emotions. The questions in

chapter 3 are an example of the kind of conversation people can have safely – that is, where they don't stumble over differences but learn to profit from them. The questions focus our attention on what we most value from our respective backgrounds and help us frame a vision of a religiously peaceful world we can start to create.

One of the most involved interfaith dialogue networks in the world, the Interfaith Encounter Association, with offices in Jerusalem, organises ongoing dialogue programmes in Jerusalem, between Palestinian and Jewish communities, and throughout the Middle East (www.interfaith-encounter.org). They include youth meetings, meetings for women, and those for the whole community. Rather than talking about their disagreements, Christians, Jews, and Muslims, by the hundreds, even thousands, listen to each other with respect as they talk about scripture, theology, holy days, fasting, religious education, life-style, and dozens of other issues. They do the work to keep from demonising the enemy and to enrich themselves, and they are providing a lamp of hope in the Middle East.

From Learning to Doing—Learning about faith and practice usually includes moving from the idea to the act, challenging us to walk the talk. The emerging interfaith community is finding its significance and vitality in networking, developing connections with similarly minded people near and far. Without any traveling, you can become both locally and globally connected by starting a United Religions Initiative circle in your own community, perhaps with a circle of friends or a group of congregations. Those who have attended the twice-a-decade Parliament of the Worlds Religions typically come home with new local friends they met thousands of miles from home.

These associations, formal and informal, strengthen your own interfaith work. The mantra among activists is collaborate and build capacity. The internet in particular has given collaboration all sorts of new meanings.

Parallel networks outside of the religious community exist, full of secular people with deeply spiritual lives who probably share many of your values and dreams for the future, and it is worth connecting with them. A number of interfaith groups are focused on the environment, for instance. They will find valuable colleagues who share many of their values at the Earth Charter Initiative, a global network of people whose Charter echoes and resonates with the themes we've explored in *Towards a Global Ethic* and elsewhere (<http://www.earthcharter.org/>).

The International Bill of Rights project (IBOR) is a nonprofit group started in the late nineties supporting “a process for individuals, organisations and governments to draft—in a single document—an International Bill of Rights enforceable in the local courts of all countries.” IBOR (<http://www.ibor.org/>) represents a strong potential partner for the aggregate faith community, a place where secular and religious folk can work on common cause and learn to enjoy their differences. Interfaith dialogue can be introduced into all sorts of community activities, enriching the local community while making it safer. The local Rotary Club, for instance, is an interfaith organisation these days, and the local library serves an interfaith constituency. Paying attention paves the way to action.

How should we study interfaith dialogue and relationship? Finally it is a personal question and a congregational question. Answering it for yourself and in your community is a tangible step towards healing a wounded world.

FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

- What have you gained from this interfaith dialogue?
- Of all the things that you have read and heard, what do you think you will remember long after the end of this course?
- What kind of tangible difference does interfaith dialogue make in your life? Have you made any new commitments or decisions based on what you’ve learned?

FOODS OF RELIGIONS

WEB SITES THAT DESCRIBE FOOD PRACTICES OF VARIOUS RELIGIONS

1. *General Foods and Religions Sources*

http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Food_culture_and_religion?OpenDocument The Better Health Channel of the Victorian (Australia) Government

http://www.nagpuronline.com/people/rit_mslm.html Focus on ceremonies

<http://www.faqs.org/nutrition/Pre-Sma/Religion-and-Dietary-Practices.html>

2. *Hinduism and Food*

http://hinduwebsite.com/hinduism/h_food.htm

<http://www.syvum.com/recipes/index.html>

3. *Islam and Food*

http://www.sfusd.k12.ca.us/schwww/sch618/Food_and_Farming/Islam_Food_and_Farming.html
<http://www.afic.com.au/Halal.htm>

4. *Buddhists and Food*

<http://www.answers.com/topic/buddhist-cuisine>
<http://www.buddhistgateway.com/sites/kitchen/>

5. *Christians and Food*

<http://www.christianchefs.org/recipes.html>
<http://www.123christians.com/christians/recipes/index.html>
<http://www.vegblog.org/resources/>

6. *Jewish Foods*

<http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/~ab522/jewishfood.html>
<http://www.torahbytes.org/sechel/Jewish%20Recipes.htm>
<http://www.vegblog.org/resources/>

7. *Chinese Foods – Confucian/Taoist/Buddhist*

<http://www.recipelink.com/rcpchinese.html>
<http://chinesefood.about.com/library/blrecipe.htm>

8. *Jain Foods*

<http://www.jainworld.com/jainfoodrecipes/index.asp> Jain recipes
<http://jainworld.com/jainfood/index.asp> Jain food practices.
 6-13-06 D. Krueger <http://www.interfaithcalendar.org/>

HOME WHO WE ARE JOIN US CONTACT US MEMBER LOGIN

Spiritual Growth

Web Link

Beautiful Names of Allah

beliefnet

BibleGateway.com

Online, searchable Christian bible

Biography of Sister Joan Chittiseter

Benedictine Sister of Erie, PA

Blue Letter Bible

Online Christian Bible Search tool

Cross Currents

More than just a magazine... CrossCurrents is a global network for people of faith and intelligence who are committed to connecting the wisdom of the heart and the life of the mind. Also a print magazine.

Daily Word

This Unity publication has been in print continuously for more than 80 years.

FaithStreams

Videos and Articles to Support Living Your Faith

Inclusive Orthodoxy

We affirm that all people are included in the Gospel invitation regardless of age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. Further, we affirm that there is a place within the full life and ministry of the Christian....

Insight Meditation Center

Insight Meditation Center—Redwood City, California

Interfaith Alliance

Interfaith Calendar

Online calendar of holy days of many faith traditions.

Interfaith Center

at Presidio San Francisco

Interfaith Information Online

A site where anyone can ask an interfaith question and we'll ask the experts for an informed response.

Interfaith Spiritual Community

Office: 5 West 86th Street #14C New York, NY 10024 (212) 787-7272

John the Baptist's cave 'found'

Judaism 101

Searchable website, featuring frequently asked questions about Judaism

Killing the Buddha Manifesto

"Killing the Buddha" is an online religion magazine for people made anxious by churches, people embarrassed to be caught in the "spirituality" section of a bookstore, people both hostile and drawn to talk of God.

Library of Halexandria

Musical Prayer for Peace

Origin of Some Christian Holidays

Qur'an

An Index to the Qur'an

Religions.Net

An Interfaith Religious Studies Portal

Religious Tolerance: Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance

Sanskrit and Sanscrito

Here you will find information about Sanskrit language, Indian philosophies, translations, sacred sounds, hatha yoga postures and Sanskrit names.

Scriptures of the World Website

A Source for Low Cost Scripture Disks and Free Downloads

Speaking of Faith

American Public Media

Spirit Heart Sanctuary

is dedicated to holding and expanding awareness of the Divine Presence on and in the earth.

Tibetan Book of the Dead

Online translation of this classic text, translated by Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdub.

Unitarian Universalist Association

Website for Indigo and Crystal Children and Adults

WingMakers

Witches' Voice

NeoPagan News

World Prayers.



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INTERFAITH DIALOGUES AMONG VARIOUS RELIGIONS: ASSESSING THE INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT ASPECTS

“WHAT THE WORLD NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT INTERFAITH DIALOGUE”

Comprehensive ebook shows you how to build bridges between conflicting religions. Yes it's true that many wars and conflicts have started over religion. Now here's an electronic book that shows you how purposeful inter-religious dialogue can actually bring about peace.

The product of 25 years of research and practice, *What the World Needs to Know about Interfaith Dialogue*, is a comprehensive ebook that covers virtually every aspect of dialogue between diverse religious groups.

Selected by Beliefnet.com

As a guide and authority for online interfaith dialogue

What the World Needs to Know about Interfaith Dialogue covers a range of practical and philosophical issues supplemented by anecdotal information. For example, it shows you:

- How to overcome differences in theology and belief
- Which projects will gain recognition for interfaith groups
- How to get religious literalists and liberals to cooperate
- How to make interfaith meetings run smoothly
- How to temporarily suspend your heartfelt beliefs
- What “loaded” words to avoid
- How to defuse interfaith conflict

- How to distinguish a religion from a cult
- The “seven types of interfaith dialogue participants” – and
- How to deal with explosive political issues

In the shadow of the September 11 disasters, interest in interfaith dialogue boomed. So when Beliefnet.com – the world’s foremost website dedicated to faith-related issues – decided to launch online dialogue in October 2001, they asked for permission to excerpt segments from *What the World Needs to Know about Interfaith Dialogue*. And they asked me, as author, to moderate a dialogue group online.

For 27 years I have organised, chaired and participated in interfaith dialogue groups throughout North America. I work with all of the world religions every day – and have studied their holy texts and histories. As Executive Producer of a dozen faith-related TV series and host of the multiple award-winning weekly interfaith TV programme *Faith Journal*, I bring together all of the world religions.

Over the years, police and judicial authorities have called upon me to assist in the resolution of inter-religious conflicts and for expert testimony. I am frequently contacted by faith communities, schools and interfaith groups seeking assistance with operational issues and religious conflict resolution.

Why I wrote the Ebook...

I wrote the book because I see a lot of mistakes in how people approach dialogue and because there is no other book that explains the how-to’s of interfaith dialogue. In the book, I propose to you an exclusive technique that I call the ‘willing suspension of belief’... It works. So, if a devout Jew is meeting with a pious Muslim, the technique shows how you build genuine bridges of understanding and unity between them.

Traditionally interfaith dialogue groups have been hard to set up, difficult to sustain, and dogged by religious and personality conflicts. Frequently they do little more than spend hundreds of hours simply talking. But your group can accomplish much, much more—if you follow the basic ground rules outlined in my ebook.

This ebook is being used by the UK government and it was requested by the White House Office of Faith-based and Community Initiatives.

Since it was first made available on the web, scores of local interfaith initiatives from North Carolina to the Netherlands have successfully applied its lessons to launch working interfaith groups.

What Are the Biggest Interfaith Dialogue Mistakes?

It's inevitable.

Every dialogue group sooner or later faces a major challenge that can lead to a rift. Will you know how to handle it? My ebook shows you what to do in every situation...

- How do you avoid unintentionally favoring one faith group over others?
- Are you inadvertently assuming everyone has the "same" social or political agenda?
- What do you do when you have two faith communities that will not participate...unless the other is rejected?
- How do you respond when genuine undesirables—like a "Church" that believes in racial supremacy—want to join your group?
- How can you establish criteria that let you exclude extremists without sideswiping faiths in good standing?
- Gay group wants their issues on your agenda, some devout Muslims and Christians will leave if you accommodate the Gays. Is there any way out of this?
- What to do when your executive or members won't work with each other.
- How to keep hard-liners and liberals involved and engaged at the same time.
- How to move beyond the talk-talk-talk cycle of interfaith dialogue.

Master Interfaith Dialogue Right Now...

Written in an accessible style, *What the World Needs to Know about Interfaith Dialogue* shows you how to overcome basic differences to ensure the longevity and productivity of an interfaith dialogue group.

So many dialogue groups grind to a halt because of group politics, differences in approach, or because they have no sense of what they can do other than just talk. This book addresses and answers all of these issues.

You'll come away with knowledge of the diplomatic tools required to start and conduct successful interfaith or inter-denominational dialogue. It will help you to build bridges of understanding, resolve conflicts, and identify problems before they develop.

Learn

- An exclusive 13-point set of rules that ensure smooth meetings
- How to select a suitable task or project for your interfaith group
- The 5 criteria that define a legitimate religion
- What to do about quasi- and para-religious organisations
- How to avoid an argument with a literalist OR a liberal
- The Law of Vermilion and Scarlet—understanding why some faith groups don't seem to get along... and how to change it
- How to keep political causes from railroading your agenda

I've established and worked with numerous interfaith organisations. I've helped them get moving and achieve grand objectives – even when the tasks seemed daunting and the participants were few at the outset.

It's good work. It's honorable work. It's a field that is growing exponentially.

So whether you are new to interfaith dialogue or you've been in the field for years, *What the World Needs to Know about Interfaith Dialogue...* is a critical tool to help you work in harmony with people of other faiths. It's an entertaining, fast-paced reference text supplemented with additional useful anecdotal information. It touches on virtually every situation and challenge you'll encounter in interfaith dialogue. Nearly 70,000-words (equal in length to a typical 250-300-page hardcover work), it's an exhaustive sourcebook and a manual of diplomacy and tact.

INSTITUTE OF INTERFAITH DIALOG (IID)

The Institute of Interfaith Dialog (IID) grew out of the need to address the question, "How can citizens of the world live in peace and harmony?" From this question a conversation took root and began to grow. The founding members of the IID knew from personal experience that a discussion on religion and spirituality did not have to digress into confusion, fighting, and anarchy. On the contrary the founding members understood that peace could be achieved by sharing different perspectives by listening to each other from the space of love, respect, tolerance, mercy, and compassion.

MISSION OF THE IID

The Institute of Interfaith Dialog is a non-profit organisation whose primary goal is to help bring together the communities in order to

promote compassion, cooperation, partnership and community service through interfaith dialog and conversation. The IID is dedicated to encouraging the study of the global communities' spiritual traditions from the vantage point of respect, accuracy, and appreciation.

VISION OF IID

In its efforts to promote fully expressed dialog within the global community and to maintain its objectivity, the IID does not accept favors nor does it promote any political or government agency be it foreign or domestic. The IID has made a commitment to maintain its stance for compassion and respect with regard to free expression of spirituality throughout communities.

AIMS OF THE IID

The IID has taken a stand that peace on the planet can be achieved within the foreseeable future. The vision of the Institute of Interfaith Dialog is to help unite communities in order that the spirituality of all individuals be heard in a space that is free of dogmatism, criticism, oppression, and fear.

EDUCATION AND IID

An intrinsic aspect of the IID is to promote the study of world religions and spiritual faiths in order to gain wisdom and knowledge so that people will have a renewed sense of gratitude, and respect for the spiritual beliefs they hold closest to their hearts. By being in constant communication with other people who have different traditions from their own, we each have the opportunity to refine and appreciate our own beliefs and traditions.

AN OVERVIEW OF JUDAISM

EARLY HISTORY OF JUDAISM

Circa 2000 BCE, the G-d of the ancient Israelites established a divine covenant with Abraham, making him the patriarch of many nations. From his name, the term Abrahamic Religions is derived; these are the three religions which trace their roots back to Abraham: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The book of Genesis describes the events surrounding the lives of the four patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. Moses was the next leader. He led his people out of captivity in Egypt, and received the Law from G-d. After decades of wandering through wilderness, Joshua led the tribes into the promised land, driving out the Canaanites through a series of military battles.

The original tribal organisation was converted into a Kingdom by Samuel; its first king was Saul. The second king, David, established Jerusalem as the religious and political center. The third king, Solomon built the first temple there.

Division into the Northern kingdom of Israel and the Southern kingdom of Judah occurred shortly after the death of Solomon in 922 BCE. Israel fell to Assyria in 722 BCE; Judah fell to the Babylonians in 587 BCE. The temple was destroyed. Some Jews returned from captivity under the Babylonians and started to restore the temple in 536 BCE. Alexander the Great invaded the area in 332 BCE. From circa 300 to 63 BCE, Greek became the language of commerce, and Greek culture had a major influence on Judaism. In 63 BCE, the Roman Empire took control of Palestine.

Three religious sects had formed by the 1st century AD: the Sadducees, Pharisees and Essenes. Many anticipated the arrival of a Messiah who would drive the Roman invaders out and restore independence. Christianity was established initially as a Jewish sect, centered in Jerusalem. Paul broke with this tradition and spread the religion to the Gentiles (non-Jews). Many mini-revolts led to the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple in 70 CE. The Jewish Christians were wiped out or scattered at this time. The movement started by Paul flourished and quickly evolved into a separate religion. Jews were scattered throughout the known world. Their religion was no longer centered in Jerusalem; Jews were prohibited from setting foot there. Judaism became decentralised and stopped seeking converts. The local synagogue became the new center of Jewish life, and authority shifted from the centralised priesthood to local scholars and teachers, giving rise to Rabbinic Judaism.

The period from the destruction of the temple onward give rise to heavy persecution by Christians throughout Europe and Russia. The latter held the Jews continuously responsible for the execution of Jesus. In the 1930s and 1940s, Adolf Hitler and the German Nazi party drew on centuries of anti-Semitism (and upon their own psychotic beliefs in racial purity) when they organised the Holocaust, the attempted extermination of all Jews in Europe. About 6 million were killed in one of the world's greatest examples of religious and racial intolerance.

A Zionist movement was a response to persecution. Their initial goal was create a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The state of Israel was formed on 1948-May-18. There are currently about 18 million Jews throughout the world; about 7 million live in North America.

Jewish Texts

The Tanakh corresponds to the Jewish Scriptures (Old Testament) in the Christian bible. It is composed of three groups of books:

- the Torah Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.
- the Nevi'im, the Prophetic books of Isaiah, Amos, etc.
- the Ketuvim, the "Writings" including Kings, Chronicles, etc.

The Talmud contains stories, laws, medical knowledge, debates about moral choices, etc. It is composed of material which mainly comes from two sources:

- the Mishnah, 6 chapters containing a series of laws from the Hebrew Scriptures, arranged about 200 CE.
- the Gemera (one Babylonian and one Palestinian) which is an assembly of comments from hundreds of Rabbis from 200–500 CE, along with a passage from the Mishnah.

Jewish Beliefs

They Include:

- G-d is the creator and absolute ruler of the universe
- Jewish belief is unlike the Christian concept of original sin (the belief that all people have inherited Adam and Eve's sin when they disobeyed G-d's instructions in the Garden of Eden). Judaism affirms the inherent goodness of the world and its people as creations of G-d. Believers are able to sanctify their lives and draw closer to G-d by fulfilling mitzvot (divine commandments). No saviour is needed as an intermediary.
- The Jews are G-d's chosen people
- The Ten commandments, as delineated in Exodus 20:1-17 and Deuteronomy 5:6-21, form the core of Jewish life
- The need to follow the many dietary and other laws of the Torah
- Boys reach the status of Bar Mitzvah (literally son of the commandment) on their 13th birthday; girls reach Bat Mitzvah (daughter of the commandment) on their 12th birthday. This means that they are recognised as adults and are personally responsible to follow the Jewish commandments and laws; they are allowed to lead a religious service; they are counted in a "minyan" (a quota necessary to perform certain parts of religious

services); they can sign contracts; they can testify in religious courts; theoretically, they can marry, although the Talmud recommends 18 to 24 as the proper age for marriage.

Jewish Practices

They Include:

- Observation of the Sabbath (day of rest), starting at sundown on Friday evening.
- Strict religious discipline governs almost all areas of life
- Regular attendance at Synagogue
- Celebration of the annual festivals including:

The Passover, which is held each Spring to recall their deliverance out of slavery in Egypt. A ritual Seder meal is eaten in each observing Jewish home at this time. Some Passover dates are: 1998—11th April, 1999—1st April, 2000—20th April.

The 10 days from Rosh Hashanah (New Year) to Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement) which are days of fasting and penitence. Some Rosh Hashanah dates are 1998—21 September, 1999—11th September, 2000—30th September.

- Bar Mitzvah and Bat Mitzvah ceremonies are commonly held to recognize the coming-of-age of a Jewish youth. Shortly after their birthday, (13th for a male; 12th for a female), they recite a blessing during a Saturday Shabbat service. In most cases, they might handle additional functions, like reading the assigned text from the Torah, or leading the congregation in prayer. etc.. They often make a speech which, by tradition, starts with "Today I am a man." The youth's father often recites a blessing in appreciation for no longer being burdened with the responsibility of his child's sins. Within Orthodox and Chasidic practice, women are not allowed to take leadership roles in religious services. For them, a Bat Mitzvah celebration is basically a party.
- The local synagogue is governed by the congregation and led by a rabbi who has been chosen by the congregation. The Chief Rabbis in France and Great Britain have authority only by the agreement of those who accept it. Two Chief Rabbis in Israel have civil authority in areas of family law.

Jewish Sects

There are five main forms of Judaism in the world today:

- **Conservative Judaism:** This began in the mid-nineteenth century as a reaction against the Reform movement. It is a main-line movement midway between Reform and Orthodox.
- **Humanistic Judaism:** This is a small group, mainly composed of atheists and agnostics, who regard mankind as the measure of all things.
- **Orthodox Judaism:** This the oldest and most conservative form of Judaism. They attempt to observe their religion as close to its original forms as possible. They look upon every word in their sacred texts as being divinely inspired.
- **Reconstructist Judaism:** This is a new liberal movement started by Mordecai Kaplan as an attempt to unify and revitalize the religion. They reject the concept that Jews are a uniquely favored and chosen people. They have no connection at all with Christian Reconstructionism, which is an ultra-conservative form of Christianity.
- **Reform Judaism:** They are a liberal group, who follow the ethical laws of Judaism, but leave up to the individual the decision whether to follow or ignore the dietary and other traditional laws. They use modern forms of worship.

With thanks to the Religious Tolerance Organisation of Ontario for the Information on this page

Holy Days in Judaism

1. 1st of Tishri, Rosh Hashanah; "Head of the Year", The Jewish New Year, and the anniversary of the completion of creation.

2. 10th of Tishri, Yom Kippur; "Day of Atonement", A day of fasting and praying which occurs 10 days after the first day of Rosh Hashanah. The holiest day in the year.

3. 15th of Tishri, Sukkot; "Season of our rejoicing; Feast of Tabernacles", The Feast of Booths is an 8 day harvest festival; a time of thanksgiving. This was considered the most important Jewish festival in 1st cent.

4. 25th of Kislev, Hanukkah, Chanukah; "Feast of Dedication", The Feast of Lights is an 8-day Feast of Dedication. It recalls the war fought by the Maccabees in the cause of religious freedom.

5. 14th of Adar, Purim; "Feast of Lots", The Feast of Lots recalls the defeat by Queen Esther of the plan to slaughter all of the Persian Jews, circa 400 BCE.

6. 15th Nissan, Pesach; "Passover", The 8-day festival recalls the exodus of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt circa 1300 BCE. A holiday meal, the Seder, is held at home.

7. 6th of Sivan; 50 days after Pesach, Shavouth; "Festival of Weeks", Pentacost (a.k.a. Feast of Weeks) recalls God's revelation of the Torah to the Jewish people.

AN OVERVIEW OF ISLAM

INTRODUCTION

Islam, major world religion. The Arabic word islam literally means "surrender" or "submission". As the name of the religion it is understood to mean "surrender or submission to God". One who has thus surrendered is a Muslim. In theory, all that is necessary for one to become a Muslim is to recite sincerely the short statement of faith known as the shahadah: I witness that there is no god but God [Allah] and that Muhammad is the Messenger of God.

Although in an historical sense Muslims regard their religion as dating from the time of Muhammad in the early 7th century ad, in a religious sense they see it as identical with the true monotheism which prophets before Muhammad, such as Abraham (Ibrahim), Moses (Musa), and Jesus (Isa), had taught. In the Koran, Abraham is referred to as a Muslim. The followers of these and other prophets are held to have corrupted their teachings, but God in His mercy sent Muhammad to call mankind yet again to the truth.

Traditionally, Islam has been regarded by its followers as extending over all areas of life, not merely those (such as faith and worship) which are commonly viewed as the sphere of religion today. Thus, many Muslims prefer to call Islam a way of life rather than a religion. It is for this reason too that the word Islam, especially when referring to the past, is often used to refer to a society, culture or civilisation, as well as to a religion. While a history of Christianity will usually cover only matters relating to religion in a narrow sense, a history of Islam may discuss, for example, political developments, literary and artistic life, taxation and landholding, tribal and ethnic migrations, etc. In this wider sense Islam is the equivalent not only of Christianity but also of what is often called Christendom.

Adherents of a religion may differ among themselves regarding what constitutes the essence of the religion, what is more important or less important, what is right belief and what heresy, etc. Modern

students of religions, when attempting to describe a particular religion, may attempt to get around this problem by accepting the definitions given by some authoritative body or individual such as a Church council or the pope in Roman Catholicism. Such an expedient is not really possible for someone wishing to discuss Islam, however, since, at least before the modern period, there has been no body claiming to be the central authority for all Muslims. Instead, religious authority and power has been diffused at a local level among countless scholars and religious officials who lack a clearly defined hierarchy or organisation. An individual obtains religious authority as a result of a consensus regarding his learning and piety. In theory, at least, most positions of such authority are open to all.

In modern times there have been attempts to promote the idea that particular bodies or individuals have a special authority in Islam. In Sunni Islam, for example, the council of the Azhar university in Cairo is sometimes regarded as having a special authority while among the Shiites of Iran a hierarchy of religious scholars has developed and been recognised by the state. Even so, no body or individual has managed to establish itself as authoritative for all Muslims, and claims to be so are always contested.

It is not possible, therefore, to make many general statements about what Islam is or is not, without their being open to contest by groups or individuals with a different view of the religion. Certain ideas and especially practices have become so widely accepted among Muslims in general that they might be viewed as distinguishing features of Islam but even then there will be groups or individuals who reject them but still regard themselves as Muslims. In general, one should avoid terms like "orthodoxy" and "heresy" when discussing Islam.

The Emergence and Early Expansion of Islam

Traditional accounts of the emergence of Islam stress the role of Muhammad, who lived in western Arabia at the beginning of the 7th century ad. Muhammad experienced a series of verbal revelations from God. Among other things, these revelations stressed the oneness of God, called mankind to worship Him, and promised that God would reward or punish men according to their behaviour in this world. Muhammad was to proclaim God's message to the people among whom he lived, most of whom practised polytheism.

After an initial period in which he was rejected in his home town of Mecca, Muhammad was able to found a community and a state

with himself as its head in the town which soon came to be called Medina. By the time of his death in 632, several of the Arab tribes and a number of towns, including Mecca, had submitted to Muhammad and accepted Islam. Following his death the caliphate was established to provide for succession to Muhammad in his role as the head of the community, although prophecy, in the form of immediate verbal revelations from God, ceased with Muhammad.

Shortly after his death the process of collecting together all the revelations which he had received in his lifetime began. The tradition is not unanimous, but it is widely accepted that this work was completed under Uthman (caliph 644-656) and that it was in his time that the revelations were put together to form the text of the Koran as we know it.

The most important beliefs, institutions, and ritual practices of Islam are traditionally seen as originating in the time of Muhammad, and frequently they are understood to be the result of divine revelation. Sometimes a Koranic passage is seen as the source or justification of a practice or belief. Not all of them, however, can be associated with a relevant Koranic text and often they are seen to have originated in the practice of the Prophet Muhammad himself. Since he was a prophet, much of what he said and did is understood not as merely the result of personal and arbitrary decisions but as a result of divine guidance. Thus the practice of Muhammad, which came to be known as the Sunna, serves as an example and a source of guidance for Muslims alongside the Koran, especially for Sunnis.

Under the caliphs who governed the community and state following Muhammad, a period of territorial expansion began, first in Arabia and then beyond its borders. By about 650 Egypt, Syria, Iraq, and the western parts of Persia had been conquered by Arab forces which acknowledged the leadership of the caliphs in Medina. In about 660 the caliphate passed into the control of the Umayyad dynasty which was based in Syria. Under the Umayyads a second wave of expansion took place. By the time that dynasty was overthrown in 750 it controlled territories extending from Spain and Morocco in the west to Afghanistan and central Asia in the east.

Modern scholarship has tended to show the emergence and expansion of Islam as a more gradual and complex process than is apparent from the traditional accounts. By emphasising the relative lateness of the Muslim accounts of the early history of Islam (there is little which can be dated in the form in which we have it to before

about 800), it has raised the possibility that the traditional accounts should be understood as reflecting rather late views. It has suggested that the period when Islam was developing outside Arabia following the Arab conquest of the Middle East is of crucial importance. It has emphasised, as is clear from the traditional sources themselves, that the Arab conquests may have expanded the area under the control of the caliphs but that the spread of Islam at a personal level was much slower. The conquerors did not force the people they conquered to become Muslims and probably did not even intend that they should do so. The acceptance of Islam as a religion by the non-Arab peoples under the rule of the caliphs was a slow, uneven, and never-completed process, motivated by many things, some of which are not properly understood. It is also now better understood that these non-Arab peoples, gradually accepting Islam (and identifying themselves as Arabs at the same time), had much to do with the emergence of Islam as we know it.

Main Beliefs

Muslims believe that there is one God, Allah; that Muhammad was a prophet sent by God to mankind; and that the Koran is the collection of the revelations which God made to Muhammad. The Koran thus contains the words of God in a literal sense and is often referred to as the Speech of God (*kalam Allah*).

The vast majority of Muslims accept that Muhammad was the last in a series of prophets sent by God and that there can be no other after him. The Koranic phrase "the seal of the prophets" is understood by them in this sense. Some groups have regarded themselves as Muslims while recognising prophets, or something like prophets, after Muhammad, but their status as Muslims has been contested by the majority of the community.

The concept of "prophet" in Islam shares much with the idea as it had developed in Judaism and Christianity by the early centuries of the Christian era. The Arabic word *nabi*, which is one of the two most frequent words for "prophet" in Islam, is related to the Hebrew *nebi*, the most usual word for "prophet" in the Old Testament. The basic idea is of someone who is given a message by God to deliver either to mankind as a whole or to a specific group. Muslim tradition recognises numerous prophets sent by God before Muhammad, and most of them are known in Jewish and Christian tradition from the Bible and other writings.

In Muslim belief, it came to be commonly held that some of the earlier prophets had been entrusted with a revelation just as Muhammad had been sent with the Koran, and in essence these revelations were identical with one another. The revelation of Moses was the Torah and that of Jesus the Gospel (injil in Arabic, ultimately from Greek *evangelion*).

According to this concept, there is only one Gospel and it is the book of revelation entrusted to Jesus. It is not the same as any one of the four gospels preserved in the New Testament, which are different accounts of the life of Jesus. In the Koran and other writings Jesus is referred to as the Messiah (*Masih*) and as the Word of God. He was miraculously born of the Virgin Mary and his life was associated with many miracles. Nevertheless he was not the "Son of God", a concept which Islam rejects as a physical and logical impossibility. He did not die on the Cross, even though it seemed so to those who were present. Instead someone else died in his place and God raised Jesus up to Himself.

Some of the Muslim ideas about prophets and prophethood, and about Jesus, are similar to those associated with Judaeo-Christian groups whose existence is attested in the early centuries of the Christian era. Some scholars have suggested that descendants of those groups had an influence on the emergence of Islam.

In addition to the physical world, God has also created angels and spirits. The angels have various roles, among them the conveyance of God's revelation to the prophets. The spirits are usually known as the *jinni*. They inhabit this world and may affect human beings in various ways. Some are good and capable of obtaining salvation, others are evil and sometimes known as satans. The chief satan, the Devil, known as Satan or *Iblis*, is sometimes thought of as a disobedient angel, sometimes as a *jinni*. He has been allowed by God to roam the world and do evil deeds.

The world will end, and Islam has a rich body of eschatological and apocalyptic tradition. Before the world ends the Mahdi, a sort of Messiah figure, will appear to inaugurate a short period in which the world will be filled with justice and righteousness. The idea of the Mahdi is more prominent in Shiite Islam but is not limited to the Shiite tradition. After death, each human being will be judged and will either achieve salvation or be consigned to damnation according to his or her beliefs and deeds while alive.

Islamic Law

Although the essence of Islam is acceptance of the one God and of the prophethood of Muhammad, in practice adherence to Islam has traditionally been manifested by living a life according to Islamic law within an Islamic community. The law is regarded as of divine origin: although it is administered and interpreted by human beings (and, as in most religions, that means men rather than women), it is understood as the law of God. The law is known as the Shari'ah. To obey the law is to obey God. One should not underestimate the importance of questions of belief and dogma in Islam, but generally speaking for Muslims, Islam has been more a matter of right behaviour than of concern with the niceties of belief.

Traditionally, Muslims have held that the law was revealed by God in the Koran and in the Sunna. In addition to those two theoretical sources, different groups within Sunni and Shiite Islam accept that law may be derived from certain subsidiary sources such as the consensus of the Muslims (usually called *ijmaa*), the informed reasoning of individual scholars (often called *ijtihad*), and various more specific and limited forms of these.

Many modern scholars have accepted the views of Joseph Schacht, who argued that the idea of the Sunna and the theory of the sources of Islamic law did not really develop until the 9th century and that Islamic law is not really derived from the Koran and the Sunna. Rather, according to this view, it has evolved gradually from a variety of sources (such as earlier legal systems and *ad hoc* decisions made by early Arab rulers), and the classical Muslim theory of the sources of Islamic law was developed by the early Muslim scholars (culminating in the work of al-Shafii) in order to put the positive law which had evolved in the first centuries of Islam on a proper Islamic basis. These scholars, it is argued, looked at the law as it existed in their own day; reformed, rejected or accepted it; and then sought to portray it as deriving from the Koran, the Sunna or one of the other classical sources. Since there was a limit to what could be attributed to the Koran (which is relatively short and only partly concerned with establishing legal rules on a few questions), it was the Sunna (as reported in the hadiths) which was in practice most important. Since there was virtually no limit to the way in which hadiths could be interpreted or reworded, and new ones put into circulation, it was usually easier to find a hadith to support a particular legal rule than it was a Koranic text.

After the classical theory of the sources of law had come to be accepted, many and voluminous law books and hadith collections were produced, and law became the predominant expression of Islam. Islamic law concerns itself with far wider areas of public and private life than does a modern secular legal system. Economics, politics, matters of diet and dress, penal and civil law, warfare, and many other aspects of social and private life are, in theory at least, regulated by Islamic law. To live a life according to the law has probably been the main religious ideal for most Muslims, although one should not conclude that Islam is merely a legalistic religion.

Modern Islamic states have frequently adopted legal codes based on those of the West and have limited the sphere governed by Islamic law to personal and family matters: inheritance, marriage and divorce, etc. Even in these areas reforms have been made to traditional Islamic law, but these reforms are usually justified by reference to the traditional doctrine of the sources.

The Practices of Islam

Five duties have traditionally been seen as obligatory for all Muslims, although some mystics (Sufis) have allegorised them and many Muslims observe them only partially. These duties are the so-called five pillars of Islam: bearing witness to the unity and uniqueness of God and to the prophethood of Muhammad (shahadah); prayer at the prescribed times each day (salat); fasting during the month of Ramadan (sawm); pilgrimage to Mecca, and the performance of certain prescribed rituals in and around Mecca at a specified time of the year (hajj); and paying a certain amount out of one's wealth as alms for the poor and some other categories of Muslims (zakat). The first of these pillars balances external action (the recitation of the shahadah) with internal conviction (although different groups within Islam have held different views about the relative importance of recitation and belief in the shahadah); the other four, although they take belief for granted, consist predominantly of external acts.

There are other duties and practices regarded as obligatory. As in Judaism, the eating of pork is prohibited and male circumcision is the norm (the latter is not mentioned in the Koran). Consumption of alcohol is forbidden. Meat must be slaughtered according to an approved ritual or else it is not halal.

In some Muslim communities practices which are essentially local customs have come to be identified as Islamic: the wearing of a sari,

for example. There are variant practices concerning the covering of the head or face of a woman in public. A Koranic text is interpreted by some to mean that the entire head and face of a woman should be covered, by others as indicating that some sort of veil or head scarf should be worn. Others argue that the Koran does not require any such covering.

Sacred Places

The centre of Muslim life, apart from the home, is the mosque or masjid (Arabic, "place of prostration in prayer") where the prescribed prayers are performed five times daily (in some Shiite groups only three times daily). The prayers are performed while facing Mecca, the site of the Kaaba and the birthplace of Muhammad, and the mosque wall which is closest to Mecca has a niche known as the mihrab built into it to show the direction of the holy city.

The Kaaba at Mecca, a simple and relatively small cubical building, is often referred to as the "house of God", although without any implication that He is present there more than anywhere else. It is explained as having been built by Abraham at the command of God. At the time when he built it, Abraham called all peoples at all times to come there and perform the ceremonies of the hajj. In the south-east corner of the Kaaba on the outside wall is fixed a black stone which receives special reverence and is often said to have originated from Paradise. It was sent down to comfort Adam in his grief when he was expelled from there. By the time of Muhammad the pure monotheism which, according to Muslim belief, had been instituted at Mecca by Abraham, had become corrupted by idolatry and polytheism, and it was the task of Muhammad to restore the pure religion and re-establish monotheistic worship at the Kaaba. Around the Kaaba there has grown up a huge mosque known as al-Masjid al-Haram ("the sacred mosque").

In addition to Mecca various other places have a special status in Islam. At Medina, the town to which Muhammad moved when his preaching in Mecca had aroused opposition, the second holiest mosque in Islam grew up around his tomb. Jerusalem is the third most revered sanctuary, in part because of its association with prophets before Muhammad, in part because of the tradition that Muhammad was miraculously taken there from Mecca by night. From there he is said to have been taken up to heaven before being returned on the same night to the place where he had been sleeping in Mecca. Above the huge rock in Jerusalem which is regarded as the very place from

which Muhammad's ascension began, the Dome of the Rock was built. This is one of the earliest and most beautiful buildings of Islam, first constructed around 690 on the orders of the caliph Abd al-Malik. For Shiite Muslims other cities, often associated with their Imams, achieved a special status: A Najaf and Karbala' in Iraq, and Mashhad and Qom in Iran, are the most important.

The Islamic Year and Festivals

The Islamic era is known as that of that of the hijra (sometimes Latinized and Anglicized as Hegira) since its starting point is the year in which Muhammad moved from Mecca to Medina (ad 622), an event known in Muslim tradition as the hijra (variously translated as "flight", "emigration" or "exodus"). The calendar is based on the Moon rather than the Sun, a year consisting of 12 months, each counted as the time between the appearance of one new moon and that of the next. The year thus lasts for about 354 days, approximately 11 days less than the solar year used in the common calendar. Since intercalation is forbidden in the law, the Islamic year bears no fixed relationship to the seasons. Relative to the solar year, each day in the Muslim year falls 11 days earlier each year. Thus, the festivals and major events of the Muslim year eventually circulate through all the seasons.

The Hijri year begins with the month of Muharram, but no special significance is attached to the new year's day. The ninth month of the year, Ramadan, is the obligatory month of fasting, and every Muslim who has the duty to fast (there are some who are relieved of it because of illness or another reason) should abstain from food, drink, and sexual pleasure during the hours of daylight. The first day of the tenth month, Shawwal, marks the end of the fast and is a day of great rejoicing. It is the major festival of the year and is variously known as "the great festival", "the festival of the breaking of the fast" or simply "the festival" (al-eed). The last month of the year is Dhul-Hijjah, and the first half of it is the time for the annual ceremonies connected with the hajj at Mecca. The core of the hajj, when all the pilgrims take part together, occurs between the eighth and tenth of the month. On the tenth the pilgrims sacrifice a great number of animals at Mina, close to Mecca, and in many parts of the Islamic world sacrifices are also performed on this day. This is known as "the lesser festival" (al-eed al-sagheer) or "the festival of the sacrifice" (eed al-qurban or eed al-adha).

The tenth day of the first month, Muharram, is called Ashura (an Aramaic word meaning "tenth"). This has a special importance for

Shiite Muslims. On it they commemorate what in their view was the martyrdom of their third Imam, Husain, the son of Ali ibn Abi Talib. He was killed on Ashura day in 680 at Karbala' in Iraq, fighting against a Muslim ruler whom the Shiites regard as a usurper and tyrant. For Shiites the day is a sad one, marked in some places by processions, public weeping, and even sometimes self-flagellation.

Other events and festivals occur at various times during the year but do not have the official religious significance of those just mentioned. For example, the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad (mawlid al-nabee) is widely celebrated in the fifth month of the year and in some places is marked by the recitation of poems in his honour. This festival, however, seems to be quite late in origin. Since the precise date of Muhammad's birth is not known, the month was probably chosen because it is the most widely accepted date for his death and a symmetry between birth and death was assumed. For the Shiites the birthdays of Ali and his wife Fatima are also celebrated.

One of the odd-numbered days towards the end of Ramadan (the precise day is disputed) is marked with reverence as the "night of power" (lailat al-qadr) when, it is widely believed, God makes His decrees concerning everything which is to occur in the following year.

Friday is sometimes referred to as the Muslim sabbath, like Saturday for Jews and Sunday for Christians. It is not officially a day of rest, but the mid-day prayer service on Friday is the most important of the week, should be observed, if possible, in a large congregational mosque, and has a more elaborate form than that of the normal prayer service. The ritual contains a special sermon (khutba) delivered by a preacher who stands on a minbar, a sort of pulpit which is a prominent part of the furniture of a mosque.

The Main Groups of Islam

In the period of its early development Islam developed three main divisions: Sunni, Shiite, and Kharijii. Historically, the division between them is said to go back to a civil war between the Arabs between ad 656 and 661, following their conquest of the heartlands of the Middle East. As religious groups in the form in which we know them, however, the three traditions took considerably longer than that to emerge. The two most important of them, the Sunni and the Shiite, did not really crystallize before the 3rd to 9th centuries. The fundamental issue which divides the three groups is that of authority—who should be the source of authority in Islam and what sort of authority they should have.

Muslim Mysticism

From an early period in the development of Islam some individuals and groups began to feel that it was not enough simply to live according to the law and hope to achieve salvation in that way. They desired a stronger religious experience and sought to become closer to God through a variety of devotional and meditational practices, and sometimes through an austere ascetic way of life. Those who engaged in such practices came to be called Sufis. The characteristic aim of Sufism was to obtain a direct experience of God. This is a form of spirituality which has similarities in religions other than Islam and is usually referred to as mysticism. It has often been viewed with suspicion by non-mystical religious authorities who see it as a threat to institutional religion. The practices and beliefs of the Sufis came to be feared as possible rivals to those followed by the majority of ordinary Muslims.

In 922 a leading Muslim mystic, al-Hallaj, was executed by the ruling authorities for claiming, so it was alleged, that his experience of God had been so immediate that he had become completely united with the divinity. This was described as a form of polytheism by his opponents. Nevertheless, Sufi ideas remained attractive to many. It is al-Ghazali, one of the pivotal figures in the history of Sunni Islam, who is credited with bringing about the compromise which made it possible henceforth for Sufism to be regarded as a legitimate and important expression of Islam. Al-Ghazali argued that it is important to understand the deeper meaning of the law and not just to adhere to it blindly.

In the centuries following al-Ghazali the influence of Sufism in Islam became more widespread as various orders or "paths" (tariqas) came into existence. These are brotherhoods of Sufis which are distinguished by the allegiance they owe to a particular Sufi master. They involve a process of initiation and they appeal to various social classes. Some of them have a local basis, others cover large areas of the Islamic world. They provide not only an important means for the expression of spirituality in Islam but also a focus of loyalty within a universalist religion.

Islam in the Modern World

From the end of the 18th century onwards the Islamic world began to experience the increasing pressure of the military and political power and technological advances of the modern West. After centuries of Islamic political and cultural strength and self-confidence, it became

clear that at the economic and technical level at least the world of Islam had fallen behind. Part of the shock came from the fact that the Western countries were at least nominally Christian, and yet Muslims regarded Islam as the final revelation which had supplanted Christianity.

In the 20th century the creation of the state of Israel in an area which was regarded as one of the heartlands of Islam strengthened the feeling of many Muslims that there was a crisis facing them which involved their religion. One response was to argue that Islam needed to be modernised and reformed. This point of view has been held by a number of intellectuals, and various proposals for reforming the religion in what is understood as a modernist direction have been made.

Islamic Fundamentalism

The second half of the 20th century has seen the rise and domination of what may be seen as the opposite approach to discovering a solution to the perceived "crisis of Islam". It has been argued by many that the crisis facing the Muslims was a result of the willingness of many Muslims to follow the false ideas and values of the modern secular West. What is needed, it is argued, is a reassertion of traditional values. From this point of view, the crisis of Islam is seen as the result of the corruption of nominally Muslim governments and the creeping growth of secularism and Western influence in the Muslim world. Frequently, but not always, those who argue in this way espouse the use of violence in the cause of overthrowing unjust and corrupt governments. This approach is often referred to as Islamic fundamentalism.

The validity of this expression is open to question and is frequently rejected by Muslims themselves. The ideas of religious "fundamentalism" seems to have originated in discussions of Christianity, where it is usually used with reference to those groups of Christians who insist that the Bible is literally the word of God and that it alone should be regarded as authoritative by Christians. In this context "tradition" is usually regarded negatively as something which has corrupted the original true form of Christianity taught by Jesus.

Many Muslims do not like the use of the expression with regard to Islam since, they say, all Muslims accept that the Koran is the word of God in a very literal sense and so all Muslims are fundamentalist. Furthermore, although some "fundamentalists" try to argue that only the Koran is the true source of Islam, most accept many parts of non-Koranic tradition even though they may reject other parts. Muslim

groups which are often lumped together under the heading of “fundamentalist” in fact have many differences between them.

Modern proponents of this style of Islam can find their precursors in earlier centuries. Ibn Taymiyya is often cited by them since he argued for a purification of Islam from what he considered to be accretions and corruptions which had entered it by his own day. Ibn Taymiyya influenced later figures such as Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the father of Wahhabi, and it is perhaps ironic that the Saudi kingdom which came to power as a result of the strength of Wahhabi in Arabia is now one of the most prominent targets of the charge of corruption and of serving as a vehicle for Western influence in the Islamic world.

Among the Sunni Muslims one of the oldest of the modern “fundamentalist” movements is that of the Muslim Brothers, which was founded in 1929. Its most influential theorist was Sayyid Qutb who was executed by the Egyptian government in 1966. More recently groups such as Hamas in Gaza and Palestine, Gamaat al-Islamiyya in Egypt, and the Fronte Islamique de Salvation (FIS) in Algeria have emerged with individual local aims but with the common objective of installing what they see as a proper Islamic government, running a state based on Islamic law, in the country where they are active. In Europe the Hizb ut-Tahrir has attracted some following, and in Malaysia the Arqam movement.

Among Shiite Muslims this form of Islam achieved its greatest success with the overthrow of the ruling dynasty in Iran (Persia) and the establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. The Islamic Republic governed by Ayatollah Khomeini and his successors then offered support to groups such as Hizbollah in Lebanon as well as to Sunni movements like Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

The ability of such groups to capture the headlines, and the difficulties they have posed for governments, Muslim and non-Muslim, in many parts of the world, has sometimes led to the claim that Islam is of its very nature fundamentalist (which in this context usually means aggressive and expansionist). This claim is sometimes supported by reference to the importance of the doctrine of jihad (holy war) in traditional Islam and the importance of the Arab conquests in the earliest stages of the emergence of Islam.

In reality, however, Muslims, like followers of other religions, have behaved in a variety of ways and presented various images of their

religion according to differing historical contexts. While it would be wrong to underestimate the strength of movements such as those named above, or their ability to attract the sympathy of other Muslims, it would equally be wrong to overestimate the degree of unity between the various manifestations of "Islamic fundamentalism" or to fall into the trap of thinking that each religion is characterised by a particular spirit or quality which is unchanging and always dominant.

Islam as a World Religion

There are no exact figures for the number of Muslims in the world today. It seems clear, however, that in terms of numbers Islam at least matches those of Christianity, the other most widespread religion today.

From its heartlands in the Middle East and North Africa the religion spread before the modern period to many parts of sub-Saharan Africa, to central Asia, to the Indian subcontinent, and to East and South East Asia. In Europe, Sicily and most of Spain were part of the Islamic world during the Middle Ages, and most of the Balkans came to be ruled by the Muslim Ottoman Empire, with its capital at Istanbul, at various times between about 1300 and the end of World War I. In modern times Islam has spread as a result of emigration so that there are now large Muslim communities in parts of western Europe, North America, South Africa, and Australia.

The Sunni form of the religion is dominant in most countries apart from Iran, but there are large Shiite populations in Iraq and Lebanon, in Bahrain and eastern Saudi Arabia, and, to a lesser extent, in Central and South Asia.

It is a mistake to think that Islam has always been spread by warfare. Although, as has been noted above, its birth was associated with the Arab conquest of the Middle East and North Africa in the 7th century, and although it entered the Balkans as a result of the Ottoman expansion from 1300 onwards and spread in west Africa following a jihad in the 18th century, the religion of Islam has not generally been forced upon people by the sword. Periods of military conquest have usually been aimed at expanding the territories under Muslim rule rather than at forcing the conversion of non-Muslims to Islam.

Conversion to Islam has usually followed quite slowly, sometimes against the wishes of the Muslim rulers, after a territory has come under Muslim rule. The adoption of Islam as their religion has usually resulted from the wishes and actions of people wanting to become

Muslim, not because it was forced upon them against their will. Why some people have been attracted to Islam and others not is a complex question involving many different religious, social, political, and economic factors. In some parts of the world, trade and the cultural attraction of Islamic civilisation have been as important as preaching in the spread of the religion. Sufi brotherhoods have also done much to spread the religion in particular areas. Like Christianity (and like Buddhism) Islam is a universal religion open to all irrespective of nationality, gender or social status. Of course, normal ethnic and social divisions exist among Muslims, but one of the attractions of Islam is its insistence on the fundamental equality of all Muslims before God. One of its greatest strengths has been the way in which various peoples have been able to find a sense of their own identity in Islam.

AN OVERVIEW OF HINDUISM

EARLY HISTORY OF HINDUISM

Hinduism is derived from the Persian word for Indian. It differs from Christianity and other Western religions in that it does not have a single founder, a specific theological system, a single system of morality, or religious organisation. Its roots are traceable to the Indus valley civilisation circa 4000 to 2200 BCE. Its development was influenced by many invasions over thousands of years. One of the major influences occurred when Indo-Europeans invaded Northern India (circa 1500 to 500 BCE) from the steppes of Russia and Central Asia. They brought with them their religion of Vedism. These beliefs became mixed with the indigenous Indian native beliefs.

During the first few centuries CE, many sects were created, each dedicated to a specific deity. Typical among these were the Goddesses Shakti and Lakshmi, and the Gods Skanda and Surya. Hinduism grew to become the world's third largest religion, claiming about 13 per cent of the world's population. They form the dominant religion in India, Malaysia and Sri Lanka. Hindus totaled 157,015 in Canada's 1991 census.

Sacred Texts

The most important of all Hindu texts is the *Bhagavad Gita* which is a poem describing a conversation between a warrior Arjuna and his charioteer Krishna. Vedism survives in the Rigveda, a collection of over a thousand hymns. Other texts include the Brahmanas, the Sutras, and the Aranyakas.

Hindu Beliefs and Practices

- At the heart of Hinduism is the monotheistic principle of Brahman, that all reality is a unity; the entire universe is one divine entity. Deity is simultaneously visualised as a triad:
- Brahma the Creator who is continuing to create new realities
- Vishnu, the Preserver, who preserves these new creations. Whenever dharma (eternal order, righteousness, religion, law and duty) is threatened, Vishnu travels from heaven to earth in one of ten incarnations.
- Shiva, the Destroyer, is at times compassionate, erotic and destructive.

Simultaneously, many hundreds of Hindu Gods and Goddesses are worshipped as various aspects of that unity. Depending upon ones view, Hinduism can be looked upon as a monotheistic, trinitarian or polytheistic religion.

The Rigveda defined five social castes. One's caste determined the range of jobs or professions from which one could choose. Marriages normally took place within the same caste. One normally was of the same caste as one's parents. In decreasing status, the five castes are:

- Brahmins (the priests and academics)
- Kshatriyas (the military),
- Vaishyas (farmers and merchants)
- Sudras (peasants and servants).
- Harijan (the outcasts, commonly known as the untouchables)

Although the caste system was abolished by law in 1949, it remains a significant force throughout India, particularly in the south. Humans are perceived as being trapped in samsara, a meaningless cycle of birth, life, death and rebirth. Karma is the accumulated sum of ones good and bad deeds. Karma determines how you will live your next life. Through pure acts, thoughts and devotion, one can be reborn at a higher level. Eventually, one can escape samsara and achieve enlightenment. Bad deeds can cause a person to be reborn as a lower level, or even as an animal. The unequal distribution of wealth, prestige, suffering are thus seen as natural consequences for ones previous acts, both in this life and in previous lives.

Meditation is often practised, with Yoga being the most common. Other activities include daily devotions, public rituals, and puja a ceremonial dinner for a God.

Hindu Sects and Denominations

About 80 per cent of Hindus are Vaishnavites, who worship Lord Vishnu. Others follow various reform movements or neo-Hindu sects. Various sects of Hinduism have evolved into separate religious movements, including Hare Krishna, Sikhism and Theosophy. Transcendental Meditation was derived from a Hindu technique of meditation. The New Age movement has taken many of its concepts from Hinduism. With thanks to the Religious Tolerance Organisation of Ontario for the Information on this page

Holy Days in Hinduism

1. Maha Shivaratri, is a festival dedicated to Shiva in mid-February
2. Holi, a spring festival, is held in early March. It is a carnival-like celebration featuring bright colors, bonfires, and pilgrimages. It is dedicated to Krishna or Kama, the God of Pleasure.
3. Ramnavami, the anniversary of the birth of Rama, is held in late March. Rama was an incarnation of Vishnu.
4. Wesak, the birthday of the Buddha is celebrated in early April by Buddhists in the Mahayana tradition.
5. Dusserah, a festival celebrating the triumph of good over evil is in early October. It is derived from early Hindu stories of struggles between a Goddess and a demon.
6. Diwali, the Indian Festival of Lights is held in mid-November. It is mainly dedicated to Lakshmi, the Goddess of Wealth. It is the Hindu new year.

AN OVERVIEW OF CHRISTIANITY

EARLY HISTORY

The disciples originally called themselves "Christian Jews" but soon this changed to be just Christians or 'little Christs'. The number of Christians grew very quickly during the 50 years after the death of Jesus. St.Peter went to Rome and preached about Jesus. St. Paul travelled widely and converted many people to the new religion. The other disciples also travelled all over the Middle East and further afield. Some people believe that one of the disciples reached India! When Roman soldiers became Christians they took the new religion all over the Roman Empire as far north as the borders of Scotland, south to North Africa, West to Wales and East to modern-day Russia.

After the Roman Empire was defeated in 410 Christianity suffered but soon it was on the way up again. In 625 St.Augustine came to

Britain and established Canterbury as an important cathedral. However Christianity in the Middle East and North Africa was challenged by the spread of the new religion of Islam. By the year 1000 all of Europe was Christian, and the majority of Europeans Christians. In 1054 the church in the East split away from the church in the West. This was known as the great Schism and Rome became the “capital” of the Western (or Roman Catholic) church, and Constantinople (now called Istanbul) the capital of the Eastern (or Orthodox Catholic) church.

In 1517 Martin Luther nailed a list of 95 “protests” on the door of a church in Wittenberg and this was the start of the Protestant movement. One of the main groups to split away from the Roman Catholic church was the Church of England (or Anglican) church. Over the next 300 years many other groups split away from either the Roman Catholic or Church of England.

In the 1700s and 1800s the major European nations were expanding and creating empires around the world. They took their religion with them. The “flavour” of Christianity depended on the country that was colonising. Soon Christianity was established and growing in Africa (mainly Protestant) and South America (mainly Roman Catholic). By the end of the 1800s Christianity was established all over the world. In the 1900s Christianity has continued to grow in Africa, South America and in the last few decades in South East Asia, only in Europe are the number of Christians diminishing.

Today there are over 2,000,000,000 Christians in the world. All this from a handful of disciples following a man called Jesus of Nazareth in a small country 2,000 years ago.

Sacred Texts

While some of the associated sects have their own texts the vast majority of Christians have only one sacred text known as the Bible (from Greek Bibles for book or record). The Bible is divided into two major and one minor section.

- Old or Hebrew Scriptures*: These are shared with Jews and are used as the history of the world before the coming of Jesus
- The New or Christian Scriptures*: These tell the story of the life of Jesus, the development and the writings of the Early Church and the prophecies about the end of the world
- The Apocropha: A collection of prophets and writings which are not commonly agreed by the major sects.

*These are the commonly agreed sections found in all Bibles.

Belief and Practice

There is an enormous range of belief among Christians. However, the majority of Christians would, probably, agree on three main areas:

- God is a monotheistic deity, revealed in the works of creation, in the person of Jesus and in the presence of the spirit. God is the judge of all and the supreme authority.
- Jesus. Most Christians give a place of authority to Jesus Christ. They acknowledge his special relationship with God and his teachings form the basis of much of Christian belief and lifestyle.
- The Bible has an important place as the written authority on the commandments (laws) of God, on the life of Jesus and on the life of the early church. Most Christians would regard the bible as an important part of their understanding of God and as a special part of their understanding of the way they should live.

The Christian year starts at Advent and runs through the year in a series of seasons. The seasons of Advent and Lent are seasons of preparation for the two most important festivals, both linked to events in the life of Jesus.

- Christmas—celebrating the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem to Mary and Joseph
- Easter—celebrating the death, resurrection and eventual rising of Jesus to heaven.

Most Christians will have three elements at the centre of their worship:

- Eucharist: The recreation of the last supper when Jesus ate with his disciples before his crucifixion. The elements of bread and wine are used to represent Jesus' body and blood.
- Exposition: Using the message of the bible, the teachings of Jesus and those of other Christians to explain the workings of the world and to formulate responses to situations in the world today.
- Prayer: Communication with God in supplication, confession, adoration and thanksgiving both corporate and private.

Sects and Divisions

In Europe alone there are over a 1000 formal Christian organisations ranging from extreme conservative to extreme liberal. They agree on little. A committee consisting of one member from each of: Anglican,

Baptist, Episcopal, Greek Orthodox, Jehovah's Witness, Methodist, Mormon, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Russian Orthodox and Unity Church would probably fail to reach a consensus on almost any basic Christian belief or practice. In fact, some committee members would probably refuse to recognise some of the others as fellow Christians. It is possible to divide the world's Christians in 5 main groups

- Roman Catholics, based in Rome under the authority of the Pope
- Orthodox, split into two main groups Russian and Greek
- Protestants, split into many differing factions, but with a priestly/ministerial structure
- "Free Church" individual self-governing church groups
- Associated sects—which have some common ground with mainstream Christianity.

With thanks to the Religious Tolerance Organisation of Ontario for the Information on this page

Holy Days in Christianity

1. Lent, a period of fasting and prayer begins on Ash Wednesday, 40 days before Easter Sunday.

2. Palm Sunday is recognised 7 days before Easter Sunday; it is the beginning of Holy Week.

3. Holy Thursday, (also called Maundy Thursday), remembers the Last Supper. The term "Maundy" was derived from the old Latin name for the day, "Dies Mandatum," — "the day of the new commandment."

4. Good Friday, (also called Holy Friday), commemorates the execution of Jesus by the Roman army of occupation.

5. Easter Sunday celebrates the resurrection of Jesus.

6. Ascension Thursday, (also called Ascension Day), occurs 40 days after Easter Sunday; it commemorates the ascension of Jesus into heaven.

7. Pentecost, (also known as Whit Sunday), is the 7th Sunday after Easter, the day when the Holy Spirit is reported as having descended upon the Apostles.

8. The first day of Advent is the Sunday which is closest to November 30; it foretells the coming of Christmas.

9. Epiphany, on Jan-6 celebrates the visitation of the 3 wise men to Jesus after his birth.

10. Christmas is the day associated with Jesus' birth. It is celebrated on Dec-25 by Western churches and on Jan-7 the following year by Eastern Orthodox churches.

11. Advent Sunday (also called the First Sunday of Advent) is the first day of an approximately 40-day period of preparation for Christmas.

AN OVERVIEW OF BUDDHISM

HISTORY

Buddhism was founded in Northern India by the Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama, circa 563-483 BCE). At the age of 29, he left his wife, children and political involvements in order to seek truth; this was an accepted practice at the time for some men to leave their family and lead the life of an ascetic. He studied Brahminism, but ultimately rejected it. In 535 BCE, he reached enlightenment and assumed the title Buddha (one who has awakened). He is also referred to as the Sakyamuni, (sage of the Sakya clan). He promoted The Middle Way, rejecting both extremes of the mortification of the flesh and of hedonism as paths toward the state of Nirvana. He had many disciples and accumulated a large public following by the time of his death in his early 80's. Two and a half centuries later, a council of Buddhist monks collected his teachings and the oral traditions of the faith into written form, called the Tripitaka. This included a very large collection of commentaries and traditions; most are called Sutras (discourses).

Buddhist Beliefs

Buddhism is a religion which shares few concepts with Christianity. For example, they do not believe in a transcendent or immanent or any other type of God or Gods, the need for a personal savior, the power of prayer, eternal life in a heaven or hell after death, etc. They do believe in reincarnation: the concept that one must go through many cycles of birth, living, and death. After many such cycles, if a person releases their attachment to desire and the self, they can attain Nirvana.

The Buddha's Four Noble Truths may be described (somewhat simplicity) as:

- to be fully understood: the universality of suffering
- to be abandoned: the desire to have and control things which causes suffering

- to be made visible: the supreme truth and final liberation of nirvana which is achieved as the cause of suffering is eliminated. The mind experiences complete freedom and liberation
- to be brought into being: the truth of the eightfold ariya path leading to the cessation of suffering.

His Eightfold Path consists of:

1. right understanding
2. right thinking
3. right speech
4. right conduct
5. right livelihood
6. right effort
7. right mindfulness
8. right concentration

Buddhist Sects

Buddhism is not a single monolithic religion. Many of its adherents have combined the teachings of the Buddha with local religious rituals, beliefs and customs. Little conflict occurs, because Buddhism at its core is a philosophical system to which such additions can be easily grafted. After the Buddha's death, splits occurred. There are now three main systems of thought within Buddhism which are geographically and philosophically separate. Each tradition in turn has many sects. One source (J.R. Hinnels, *A Handbook of Living Religions*, Penguin, 1991) divides the religion into three main groups by their location:

Southern Buddhism (known as Theravada Buddhism) has 100 million followers, mainly in Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Sri Lanka and Thailand, and parts of Vietnam. It started in Sri Lanka when Buddhist missionaries arrived from India. They promoted the Vibhajjavada school (Separative Teaching). By the 15th century, this form of the religion reached almost its present extent.

Concepts and practices include:

- Dana—thoughtful, ceremonial giving
- Sila—accepting Buddhist teaching and following it in practice;
- refraining from killing, stealing, wrong behaviour, use of drugs.

On special days, three additional precepts may be added, restricting adornment, entertainment and comfort.

- Karma—the balance of accumulated sin and merit, which will determine one's future in the present life, and the nature of the next life to come.
- The Cosmos—consists of billions of worlds grouped into clusters; clusters are grouped into galaxies, which are themselves grouped into super-galaxies. The universe also has many levels: four underworlds and 21 heavenly realms.
- Paritta—ritual chanting

Worship—of relics of a Buddha, of items made by a Buddha, or of symbolic relics.

Festivals—days of the full moon, and three other days during the lunar cycle are celebrated. There is a new year's festival, and celebrations tied to the agricultural year.

Pilgrimages—particularly to Buddhist sites in Sri Lanka and India.

Eastern Buddhism is the predominant religion in China, Japan, Korea and much of Vietnam. Buddhism's Mahayana tradition entered China during the Han dynasty (206 BCE to 220 CE). It found initial acceptance there among the workers; later, it gradually penetrated the ruling class. Buddhism reached Japan in the 6th century. It underwent severe repression during the 1960's in China during the Cultural Revolution.

Eastern Buddhism contains many distinct schools: T'ien-t'ai, Hua-yen, Pure Land teachings, and the Meditation school. They celebrate New Years, harvest festivals, and five anniversaries from the lives of Buddha and of the Bodhisattva Kuan-yin. They also engage in Dana, Sila, Chanting, Worship and Pilgrimage.

Northern Buddhism has perhaps 10 million adherents in parts of China, Mongolia, Russia and Tibet. It entered Tibet circa 640 CE. Conflict with the native Tibetan religion of Bon caused it to go largely underground until its revival in the 11th century. The heads of the Gelu school of Buddhist teaching became the Dalai Lama, and ruled Tibet. It has been, until recently, wrongly dismissed as a degenerate.

Form of Buddhism

Ceremony and ritual are emphasised. They also engage in Dana, Sila, Chanting, Worship and Pilgrimage. They developed the practice of searching out a young child at the time of death of an important teacher. The child is believed to be the successor to the deceased teacher. They celebrate New Years, harvest festivals and anniversaries of five important events in the life of the Buddha. Buddhist and Tibetan

culture suffered greatly during the Cultural Revolution when an attempt was made to destroy all religious belief.

Buddhism in the West

Southern Buddhism became established in Europe early in this century. The Zen Buddhist tradition of Eastern Buddhism has also made inroads, particularly in North America. Canadian Buddhists totaled 163,415 in the 1991 census.

With thanks to the Ontario Religious Tolerance Site for this Information

Holy Days in Buddhism

1. Nirvana Day is held in mid-February. It commemorates the death of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha.

2. New Year Day is also celebrated in mid-February in China, Korea and Vietnam

3. Wesak is the Buddha's birthday in April or May. In some traditions, it celebrates the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and death.

4. Khao Pansa marks the beginning of the Buddhist lent. It is the preferred day for Buddhist men in some countries to be ordained as monks. It is celebrated in the full moon of the eighth lunar month, typically July.

5. Boun Ok Pansa marks the end of Lent. It is at the end of the rainy season, in October.

6. Bodhi Day, in early December, celebrates the Buddha's enlightenment in 596 BCE

INTERFAITH DIALOG CENTER

Founded by Turkish-American Muslims of North Jersey in 2003, Interfaith Dialog Center (IDC) is a non-profit organisation that endeavors to promote respect and mutual understanding among all faiths and cultures through partnership with other religious and inter-religious organisations, and organising educational activities such as seminars, lectures and discussion panels.

IDC started its activities by organising short educational seminars at the conference room of Rutherford Public Library. Now IDC is operating at its physical location at 545 Interstate Place, Carlstadt, New Jersey.

IDC is a non-profit, tax exempt (501(c) (3)) organisation.

OUR MISSION

Interfaith dialogue is one of the major medicines to overcome humanity's common ills that arise from unbelief. Our world's durability depends, to a great extent, on the promotion of interfaith dialogue. We also believe that establishment of dialog environments is a means to appreciate diverse opinions and eliminate the stereotypes often assigned to 'others'.

In that respect, IDC educates non-Muslims about Islam and Muslims about other faiths to establish mutual understanding and tolerance. To achieve this end, we invite and encourage sharing of various perspectives, partner with other religious and inter-religious organisations and organize educational activities such as seminars, lectures and discussion panels, all of which inspire and illuminate us in our endeavor to fulfill our mission.

OUR AIMS AND PRINCIPLES

- spread the inter-religious dialog at the grassroots level through meetings with diverse participation,
- provide a medium where followers of different religions may meet each other and understand the issues by finding consensus among them,
- To spread common values of faiths in order to contribute to the world peace,
- To cooperate with similar local and international organisations and work closely with them in the boundaries of its constitution,
- Religions, languages and ethnicities exist so that we come together and learn from, not fight, each other,
- We share values to promote; we share problems to solve,
- Coexistence of civilisations is possible only through dialogue in this age of globalisation,
- The pillars of dialogue are love, tolerance, compassion and forgiving,
- Love is the essence of existence.
- Tolerance is our binding spirit.
- Compassion and forgiving are inclusive aspects of a harmonious society, in which individual will flourish, community will arise,
- Diversity is our richness. Diversity without dialogue causes hostility, dialogue without diversity brings distortion.



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OTHER IMPORTANT INTERFAITH ORGANISATIONS, NETWORKS, CONFERENCES AND ASSOCIATIONS

INTERNATIONAL INTERFAITH CENTRE (IIC)

INTRODUCTION

Over the years the International Interfaith Centre (IIC) has had many achievements, mainly in its ability to link people from all parts of the world, to share their hopes, difficulties and successes. A series of conferences with subjects of common interest have built both friendship and inspiration as each portrays the situations faced by individuals and organisations in their own country.

In addition, IIC has built up an annual or biannual gathering connecting the different International Inter-religious Organisations IION. In November 2007 representatives from ten organisations will meet near Oxford for a three day gathering. Among the topics for discussion are interfaith work at the UN, the next Parliament of the World's Religions, new interfaith questions initiative, and work with young people.

Changes

A few changes have been made in the way the International Interfaith Centre operates. At around the same time as we had to vacate our office in the centre of Oxford our director also moved on. This has resulted in the work being carried out by a dedicated team of people working from their own homes and through the medium of email. This may herald the pattern for the future and allow us the freedom to carry out the work without the hindrance of running an office.

Continuing Work

The following are areas which we hope to continue with and develop.

- International Interfaith Organisations Network (IION)
- IIC Bursary to support research into Interfaith Dialogue
- Conferences and meetings for engagement
- Interfaith Information—an online initiative where anyone can post an interfaith question
- Website—Education and other resources, including our interfaith studies site.

Patiala Conference

“... report from the international interfaith conference at one of the leading Universities in India. Scholars and practitioners of interfaith from India, the UK and North America contributed to the conference...”

Buy Books and Videos Online: We have now integrated a new system into our website, making it possible to easily purchase selected interfaith books and videos online. Titles include Marcus Braybrooke’s new “*A Heart for the World: An Interfaith Alternative*”, as well as IIC publications such as “*Visions of an Interfaith Future*”, edited by Celia and David Storey.

INTERNATIONAL INTERFAITH ORGANISATIONS NETWORK

For a just and peaceful world, the International Interfaith Organisations Network (IION) provides a forum for the participating organisations to share information, challenges and solutions and to support each other.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the nineteen eighties, the World Congress of Faiths convened two meetings of international interfaith organisations at Ammerdown, near Bath. Four organisations, the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), the Temple of Understanding (ToU), the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) and the World Congress of Faiths (WCF) agreed to encourage observation of the centenary of the World Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in 1893, as a ‘Year of Inter-religious Understanding and Co-operation’. They also agreed to arrange a joint gathering, which was held at Bangalore in August 1993 and known as *Sarva-Dharma-Sammelana* (‘Religious People Coming Together’).

To continue this co-operation, after wide consultation, IARF, WCF and Westminster College, Oxford, in December 1993 established the International Interfaith Centre (IIC) at Oxford to foster co-operation between international interfaith organisations, to be a centre of information about global interfaith work and to be a focus for relevant research and educational activities.

At the 1999 Parliament of World Religions in Chicago, IIC arranged a Symposium on *Interfaith Action in a Global Context*, in which many interfaith organisations participated.

In March 2001, at a meeting convened by the International Interfaith Centre, held in Oxford, representatives of most of the leading international interfaith organisations agreed to establish a network, to be known as the International Interfaith Organisations Network. It was agreed that the international Interfaith Centre should be the co-ordinating body.

ACTIVITIES

1. To ensure that our interfaith work is as effective as possible by sharing information and supporting each other.
2. Some organisations have worked together on common projects.
3. To hold an annual meeting of representatives of member organisations
4. To be a centre of information. At one time the IIC received a large number of enquiries, but recently with reduced staff this work has been curtailed.
5. To maintain a website with links to member organisations.
6. E-learning via website. This gives an introduction to the varied approaches to interfaith work
7. Interfaith Presence at the United Nations

MEMBERSHIP

The present members are:

- Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions
- International Association for Religious Freedom
- International Interfaith Centre
- Interfaith Youth Core
- Minorities of Europe
- North American Interfaith Network

- Peace Council
- Towards Spiritual Forum for World Peace at the United Nations
- Temple of Understanding
- Three Faiths Forum
- United Religions Initiative
- Religions for Peace
- World Congress of Faiths
- Interfaith Network for the UK
- International Movement for a Just World
- Project on Religion and Human Rights
- World Faiths Inter-religious Council

There has been considerable discussion about the basis for membership. The following are the present guidelines.

- Members should be international interfaith organisations, national interfaith networks. The controlling body should represent at least two or more distinct religions.
- Organisations can apply or be nominated. They need to be proposed and seconded by a member organisation.
- Subsequent approval at a IION meeting should be by consensus.
- Organisations that are bilateral in nature (i.e. of just two religions) should only be considered in exceptional circumstances and if they truly international.

We live in a world of difference. Yet, we are interdependent. Nowhere is learning to live with difference more important than religion.

Too often, religion is misused as an instrument for division and injustice, betraying the very ideals and teachings that lie at the heart of each of the world's great traditions. At the same time, religious and spiritual traditions shape the lives of billions in wise and wonderful ways. They gather people in communities of shared beliefs and practices. When these diverse communities work in harmony for the common good, there is hope that the world can be transformed.

Over the years, the Council has initiated dialogues and nurtured relationships among people of difference. In doing so the Council has provided a framework for expressing many visions of a just, peaceful and sustainable future. In the process, religious and spiritual communities have discovered a shared commitment to ethical principles.

This shared commitment has opened the way for a new era of cooperative action among the world's religious and spiritual communities as well as civil and political societies. The well-being of the Earth and all life depends on this collaboration.

The vision of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions is of a just, peaceful and sustainable world in which:

- Religious and spiritual communities live in harmony and contribute to a better world from their riches of wisdom and compassion
- Religious and cultural fears and hatreds are replaced with understanding and respect
- People everywhere come to know and care for their neighbors
- The richness of human and religious diversity is woven into the fabric of communal, civil, societal and global life
- The world's most powerful and influential institutions move beyond narrow self-interest to realize common good
- The Earth and all life are cherished, protected, healed and restored
- All people commit to living out their highest values and aspirations.

The 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions will be an international inter-religious gathering spanning seven nights and six days – from December 3rd to 9th—bringing together an estimated 8,000 to 12,000 persons.

The city of Melbourne, Australia has been awarded the bid to host the 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions. The Council conducted a ten-month search that resulted in the selection of Melbourne in October 2006 as the host city for the 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions.

The Melbourne host team put forth an impressive bid that met all the criteria established by the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions. The way in which the team in Melbourne addressed the multiple questions and challenges that surround social cohesion in the midst of diversity within their local context contributed to Melbourne's selection by our advisory committee. [Click here](#) to review the website devoted to the 2009 Parliament of the World's Religions.

A multi-religious, multi-lingual, and multicultural city, Melbourne is an ideal place to hold the world's largest inter-religious gathering.

Culturally vibrant, Melbourne and Victoria are home to indigenous and aboriginal.

Melbourne has demonstrated collaboration among its religious communities through inter-religious councils, school programmes, and solidarity in times of stress and crisis. Melbourne has formed a council that works to ensure ongoing collaboration between religious leaders and police.

An active and multi-dimensional city nexus includes government initiatives to support inter-religious engagement and organisations at the community level. Melbourne's social policy model fosters cohesion and harmony in a multi-cultural and multi-religious society. The Parliament will showcase Melbourne's practices and policies designed to assist in integrating immigrants and refugees.

Within Australia, aboriginal reconciliation issues are pressing. The Parliament provides the opportunity to engage these issues within a larger context. Those gathered will have the opportunity to explore new approaches to aboriginal reconciliation through dialogue with indigenous peoples from other countries. Participants will also have the opportunity to explore the themes of sustainability and global climate change through the lens of indigenous spirituality.

Q: How can we extend our connections to the wider interfaith scene to work together for world peace and harmony?

Some of the major international interfaith organisations also operate at national and local level around the world. For example, Religions for Peace has local groups and national inter-religious councils; the International Association for Religious Freedom has member groups from many countries; the United Religions Initiatives has Cooperation Circles; and the Goldin Institute encourages City Partnerships. As an academic institution there is also the annual conference of Globalisation for the Common Good hosted by different associates. Links to the websites of all these organisations and many more can be found in our Resources section.

There are also organisations like the Interfaith Network for the UK and the North American Interfaith Network—national networking bodies that connect relevant groups to a wider interfaith family for mutual support and cooperation. These organisations are founded in areas with a rich diversity of peoples from different faiths and cultures but almost every country today is multi-cultural and multi-religious to some degree. More national networks could be very useful in bringing

together various groups working for the same goals in each country. It is a good start to connect with others where you are and to help each other build a strong national identity where every faith community is integrated, recognised and respected.

Guidelines for building good relations with other people of faith can be downloaded freely from the Interfaith Network of the UK's website. Such networks could then be extended regionally, for example a South Asian Interfaith Network, and this in turn could possibly become linked to the International Interfaith Organisations Network, a growing family coordinated by the International Interfaith Centre. Such growth takes time, effort, integrity and perseverance but who better to start it than you, if you have the vision and the dream of positive engagement with others of like mind for the greater good.

THE BAHÁ'Í FAITH AND RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

The central figures of the Bahá'í Faith are the Báb (1819-1850), Bahá'u'lláh (1817-1892), 'Abdu'l-Bahá (1844-1921), and Shoghi Effendi (1896-1957)....

...While covering spiritual issues such as God and creation, Prophets (or Manifestations of God) and their relation to God, to each other, and to humankind, purpose of life, life after death, worship, good and bad, and all that leads to personal spiritual salvation, the Bahá'í Faith also includes social teachings which lead to the prosperity and happiness of the society as a whole. Teachings that fall in the second category are blueprints for the realisation of unity of humankind and world peace. They include elimination of all prejudices, independent investigation of truth, equality of men and women, education for all, abolition of extremes of poverty and wealth, an international tribunal or world court, unity of science and religion, a universal auxiliary language, and many more.

The Bahá'í Faith's attitude towards 'Interfaith dialogue' is based on the following beliefs:

- Bahá'ís believe that despite different understandings of God, in essence God is unknowable, therefore all approaches to Him are acceptable provided that it is understood that God's reality transcends man's limited apprehension. This paves the way for dialogue with different faiths with a genuine desire to search for truth with humility and free from condemnation of other faiths.

- Bahá'ís also believe in the unity of all Faiths. It does not mean that all Faiths are similar in their views, but that they are all based on divine inspiration and provide different approaches to the same Reality. All religions have provided divine guidance, but societies evolve and need further dynamic and progressive guidance. Therefore, all faiths complement, rather than contradict, each other.
- Bahá'ís reject any discrimination based on race, colour, faith, gender, or nationality. Bahá'í teachings.... aim to establish universal peace based on the equality of people and the oneness of Truth.

UPCOMING EVENTS INTERNATIONAL INTERFAITH CONFERENCE, 2007

Jointly sponsored by the International Interfaith Centre, Oxford and Punjabi University, Patiala, India.

Dr Joy Barrow, our then Director, was much involved in a joint Interfaith Conference in co-operation with Punjabi University that took place in March this year. Below is her report of this successful event:

“I was invited to give the Keynote Lecture for the conference, and requested to do so from the Sikh perspective. The title of my paper was: ‘Faith or Interfaith, are they mutually exclusive: a reflection from the Sikh perspective’. Before I gave the paper I read a letter of greeting to the Vice Chancellor and conference participants from Charanjit. There were a total of twenty-one papers presented with scholars from: USA, Canada, India, Bangladesh, Germany, Wales and England. The presenters also came from a variety of different faiths, including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Jainism, Judaism and Sikhism. The papers of the conference will be published in a book, jointly edited by Prof Dharam Singh and myself, which will be published by Punjabi University.

It was significant that the Vice Chancellor of Punjabi University was present for both the opening and closing sessions in their entirety, and attended the evening meal on each day of the conference, his wife accompanying him on the final evening. Such was the success of the conference that the Vice Chancellor has announced that he will give financial support to the University organising an annual interfaith conference to be held in Patiala. He invited me to be a member of a council of ‘wise men’ from different countries that he was establishing to organise subsequent conferences.”

INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The International Association for Religious Freedom is a registered charity based in the United Kingdom which has the aim of working for freedom of religion and belief at a global level.

Encouraging interfaith dialogue and tolerance is part of this agenda, and we are proud of a 100-year-plus history in this work. We have over 90 affiliated member groups in approximately 25 countries, from a wide range of faith traditions including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Shintoism and Sikhism, among others.

With member organisations, regional co-ordinators, and national chapters around the world, the International Association for Religious Freedom is well placed to obtain local perspectives on religious freedom concerns and issues.

OUR PRIORITIES

The principles expressed in the United Nation's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 18) guides our work and activities:

"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

To ensure that these rights are upheld, the International Association for Religious Freedom has developed a statement of purpose which outlines our priorities and, from these guidelines, has focused its work on 5 practical programme areas.

New Council Members after the General Meeting in Budapest 2002 together with Retiring Council Members

An International Council of 21 members, representing numerous faith groups, guides the work of the organisation. The International Council is elected every three years by delegates from the Member Organisations and Chapters. Groups are accepted into membership by the Council, which meets annually.

At an administrative level, several regional coordinators initiate and support regional and local projects while the International Secretariat monitors religious freedom concerns, and implements worldwide programmes, from the centre of Oxford, England.

**31ST WORLD CONGRESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL
ASSOCIATION FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM BUDAPEST
JULY / AUGUST 2002**

From 28 July to 2 August 2002, the International Association for Religious Freedom held its 31st World Congress in Budapest, Hungary. Attended by nearly 500 participants from around the world, the Congress was on a theme of "Religious Freedom: Europe's Story for Today's World." In addition to presentations on the European experience, there was a daily sharing of different beliefs and practices, keynote lectures, daily 'Circle Group' gatherings, an international panel, regional meetings, and several workshops designed to encourage practical programmes in local communities.



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GLOBAL ISSUES AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE: AN OVERVIEW

GLOBAL ISSUES

The Oxford Secretariat monitors an incoming flow of information on religious freedom. On a quarterly basis, we compile and post information on the religious freedom situation in 6 selected countries. The Global Issues section also describes several international projects that are managed from the Oxford Secretariat. Finally, at the United Nations IARF is one of the 130 organisations in General Consultative status with the UN's Economic and Social Council. Thus IARF representatives in Geneva and New York carry on further work with international dimensions.

WCF WORKS TO DEVELOP BETTER UNDERSTANDING, CO-OPERATION

WHAT DOES IT DO?

The World Congress of Faiths publishes the leading journal on interfaith matters *Inter-religious Insight*. It arranges a variety of conferences, meetings, retreats, visits and group travel. All these provide occasions to learn what others believe, what they think about life today and how they pray, meditate and worship. Some meetings are of special interest to teachers or to health and social workers. WCF also provides a chance for members of local interfaith groups to meet people from different parts of the country and the world who share their concern.

WHAT ARE ITS BELIEFS?

The World Congress of Faiths believes that understanding between people of different religions is important for good community relations,

for moral and spiritual renewal and for world peace. A principle is respect for those of differing faith. WCF by its educational work encourages interfaith understanding and co-operation at all levels of society.

WHO ELSE DOES IT WORK WITH?

WCF is a member of the Interfaith Network (UK) and works with other interfaith organisations in Britain and across the world. WCF has helped to establish the International Interfaith Centre at Oxford and works closely with the London Interfaith Centre. It has good relations with many faith communities.

WHO ARE THE EXECUTIVE?

Revd Dr Marcus Braybrooke is a retired Anglican parish priest, living near Oxford, England. He has been involved in interfaith work for over forty years, especially through the World Congress of Faiths, which he joined in 1964 and of which he is now President. He was Executive Director of the Council of Christians and Jews from 1984-8. He is a Co-Founder of the Three Faiths Forum, Patron of the International Interfaith Centre at Oxford and a Peace Councillor. He has travelled widely to attend interfaith conferences and to lecture. He has studied for a time in India and in Israel.

In September 2004, he was awarded a Lambeth Doctorate of Divinity by the Archbishop of Canterbury 'in recognition of his contribution to the development of inter-religious co-operation and understanding throughout the world.'

He is author of over forty books on world religions and Christianity, including *Pilgrimage of Hope, Faith and Interfaith in a Global Age*, *Time to Meet*, *How to Understand Judaism*, *What We Can Learn from Hinduism*, *Christian-Jewish Dialogue: the Next Steps*. He has also written *Learn to Pray* and *365 Meditations for a Peaceful Heart and a Peaceful World* and has edited several anthologies of prayers and meditations, including *1,000 World Prayers* and *Life Lines*. His latest book *A Heart for the World: the Interfaith Alternative* is now available. See our publications page for more details. Marcus is married to Mary, who is a social worker and a magistrate. They have a son and a daughter and six granddaughters.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama

Desmond Tutu was born in Klerksdorp, in the South African state of Transvaal. The family moved to Johannesburg when he was 12,

and he attended Johannesburg Bantu High School. He trained as a teacher at Pretoria Bantu Normal Normal College and graduated from the University of South Africa in 1954.

He was ordained as a priest in the Anglican church in 1960. He lived in England from 1962 to 1966, where he earned a master's degree in theology. He taught theology in South Africa for the next five years, and returned to England to serve as an assistant director of the World Council of Churches in London. In 1975 he became the first black African to serve as Dean of St. Mary's Cathedral in Johannesburg.

From 1976 to 1978 he was Bishop of Lesotho. In 1978 he became the first I black General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches.

In 1984, Desmond Tutu was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace, "not only as a gesture of support to him and to the South African Council of Churches of which he is leader, but also to all individuals and groups in South Africa who, with their concern for human dignity, fraternity and democracy, incite the admiration of the world."

Two years later, Desmond Tutu was elected Archbishop of Cape Town. After the country's first multi-racial elections in 1994, President Mandela appointed Archbishop Tutu to chair the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, investigating the human rights violations of the previous 34 years. Today he is a Professor of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. Published collections of his speeches, sermons and other writings include *Crying in the Wilderness*, *Hope and Suffering*, and *The Rainbow People of God*.

Diana Eck

Diana L. Eck is Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies at Harvard University where she serves on the Committee on the Study of Religion in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. She is also a member of the Department of Sanskrit and Indian Studies as well as the Faculty of Divinity. She received her B.A. from Smith College (1967) in Religion, her M.A. from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London (1968) in South Asian History, and her Ph.D. from Harvard University (1976) in the Comparative Study of Religion. Diana Eck and her partner Dorothy Austin are currently serving as Masters of Lowell House at Harvard.

Since 1991, Diana Eck has been heading a research team at Harvard University to explore the new religious diversity of the United States

and its meaning for the American pluralist experiment. The Pluralism Project, funded by the Lilly Endowment, the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Ford Foundation, and the Rockefeller Foundation has been documenting the growing presence of the Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Jain, and Zoroastrian communities in the U.S. This research project has involved students and professors in “hometown” research on America’s new religious landscape.

In 1996, Diana L. Eck was appointed to a U.S. State Department Advisory Committee on Religious Freedom Abroad, a twenty-member commission charged with advising the Secretary of State on enhancing and protecting religious freedom in the overall context of human rights. In 1998, Eck received the National Humanities Medal from President Clinton and the National Endowment for the Humanities for her work on American religious pluralism.

Dadi Janki

Dadi Janki is a pioneer in spiritual leadership. She is Co-administrative Head of the Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University, known for its grassroots work in spiritual education and its role convening international projects and dialogues about issues of world transformation. An energetic 89-year-old, Dadi Janki provides inspiration and practical help to millions.

Since 1974, Dadi has overseen the expansion of the university’s work into nearly 90 countries. She shares only that which is an example in her own life. A mentor to business and community leaders, Dadi was one of the few women spiritual leaders empowering women to become leaders in their communities, following India’s independence. In 1992 Dadi was invited to be one of ten Keepers of Wisdom, an eminent group of world spiritual leaders convened to advise the Earth Summit in Brazil on the fundamental spiritual dilemmas which underpin current worldwide environment issues. Her awards include the Medal of Independence from The King of Jordan, for humanitarian work.

WHAT’S IN A NAME?

Welcome to *Inter-religious Insight: a Journal of Dialogue and Engagement!* It represents a new publishing endeavour at a time of profound transition in global relationships. As a shared venture between three interfaith groups, it aims to transcend narrow interests by providing a platform for reflecting with passion on many of the critical issues facing our world.

The name has been chosen with great care in order to mirror an emerging task. Given that they have traditionally acted as overarching worldviews, the religions have long been accustomed to thinking of themselves as self-sufficient, each tradition happily supplying its own separate vision of sacred truth. That era has now passed. It is the space between convictions that commands more and more of our attention. Maintained separately, the religions generate particular insights and wisdom, some having been shaped by long histories of cherished memory and some springing from more recent history. Yet in a world where the religions jostle together, often clash and sometimes cooperate, we are learning that the space between convictions is also a space with its own challenging insight. Put differently: in sight of one another we seek new ways of pursuing 'inter-religious' wisdom; and one might hope that the dawn of inter-religious harmony is now in sight.

There are significant theoretical and practical aspects to this new historical moment, as indicated by the journal's title. We are for *Dialogue* and *Engagement*.

Take *Dialogue* first. There may be as many definitions of dialogue as there are practitioners of the art, but at root there is the assumption that no one religion possesses the fullness of religious truth. Our convictions are precisely that, our convictions, fallible intimations of a mysterious transcendent reservoir of being and value. Dialogue implies that we have as much to receive as to give in the dynamic of our conversations with one another. We neither water down nor inflate what we offer in dialogue. Most of all, we cultivate self-criticism as the foundation of all criticism and the beginning of respect. The space between is a space of letting-go of outmoded prejudices, of rejoicing in differences and of discovering our interdependence before the sacredness that resides immanently in all things. We struggle in the making of judgements, for not everything generated by the religious imagination is conducive to human and planetary good. Yet the struggle is also against attitudes of inherited judgementalism.

What now of *Engagement*? The journal will reflect on practical projects, examples where faith-communities are working together in order to make a difference. What ethical values are being harnessed, or even generated, when people enter relationships of trust and so aspire to a greater common good? No doubt the failure of religious communities to cooperate has contributed to the sum total of anguish and pain in the world. Yet this history can be reversed, for the religions

at their ethical best are fountains of compassion, harmony and hope. These are fundamental values that await their full flowering as shared values within the inter-religious movement.

If the religions are interwoven with the world's problems, they also possess intrinsic elements of the solutions. Models of good practice are increasing around the world and we trust that this journal will lure many players to even further practical engagement.

Inter-religious Insight aims to embody a new mood. The argument for mutuality and interaction between varying religious voices has been largely won. *Dialogue and Engagement* have begun, but we are still in the foothills of the ascent. It is our hope that this journal will both assist in the exploration of the mountain slopes and communicate something of the wonders that will be glimpsed. Its pages will provide opportunities for hearing varying voices – voices crossing spiritualities, spanning generations and embracing practitioners from many different contexts around the world.

We are all invited to share this moment of global transition.

Alan Race, Seshagiri Rao, Jim Kenney

LONDON INTERFAITH CENTRE

A younger dialogue participant decides to slip out for a breath of fresh air.

ABOUT LIFC

The centre aims to provide a space where interfaith meetings, study and dialogue can take place amongst different world religions. The centre is funded and run by a single faith (Christian) but with many faith involvements. The London Interfaith Centre was founded by the Church of England and then joined by the United Reformed Church. As a 'single faith' Christian hosted place of meeting, study and dialogue between faith communities and with the secular world it functions ecumenically and benefits increasingly from many faith involvement.

The Centre works with a definition of interfaith as faiths in encounter and the issues raised thereby the Centre seeks through a variety of courses, conferences, seminars, open occasions and events, to promote the encounter between faiths, without foreclosing on the conclusions.

Just as the Centre works with a definition, so it has a motto true to self and open to others—and thus endeavours to create a safe space

within which those of differing and sometimes conflicting points of view can start to build communication with one another, leading to mutuality, trust and sometimes cooperative shared action.

Many of those interested in such issues may not represent or wish to be perceived as representing a whole tradition or even part of it—and so the Centre also has a Friends scheme for individuals, whereby individuals as individuals, of any faith or none, can actively participate in particular aspects of the work.

‘Interfaith’ means different things to different people—and for some involves multi-faith worship. While recognising that there are ways in which different traditions can explore sacred space and time together (See Sacred Silence) and while pursuing issues of spirituality that impact upon the spectrum of religious and even sometimes non-specifically-religious response, nonetheless the Centre avoids that which may effectively compromise mainstream worshippers of different religions. This site is under development to address these and other issues. We would be interested to know your views.

NON-VIOLENCE SELF-INVENTORY

Dr. Hal W. French is Emeritus Professor of Religious Studies at the University of South Carolina, USA.

Are you a non-violent person? I suppose that most of us would claim to be. But the issue isn’t so simple; we often have to make choices which involve some measure of violence to others or ourselves, or to the environment. Our actions may at times be careless, thoughtless, and unintended violence may occur. They may not quite match our intentions. But how do you measure your own commitment to non-violence?

For some years I’ve taught Honors courses at the University of South Carolina on the theme, “Learning Non-Violence from Gandhi and Friends.” Martin Luther King, Albert Schweitzer, Mother Teresa, William Wilberforce and others have been included among these friends of non-violence. Gandhi himself is a rather daunting model, recording his own attempts to live as scrupulously as possible by the Hindu teaching of *ahimsa*, literally non-killing. In *The Story of My Experiments with Truth* and other writings, he links non-violence with the search for truth. Lying, then, is a form of violence, but even more is required: a commitment to radical openness: no devious strategies, no hidden motivations.

A dedication to the simple life was also an aspect of Gandhi's practice of non-violence. The unnecessary accumulation of possessions, our addiction to what has been called "the fat, silly life", does violence to the limited treasury of earth resources. You may have seen the classic picture of Gandhi's possessions at the time of his death in 1948: his sandals, watch, glasses, spoons, bowls, and book of songs. Few of us could approximate anything like that. But maybe it's "out of the closet" time for some of your things. If you haven't worn it in a year, perhaps it should adorn someone else's back or bottom!

My students and those in workshops elsewhere have been interested, despite the intimidating effect that Gandhi's model may have, in exploring ways to live more gently on the earth. As part of this process, it's been useful to develop a tool for self-reflection, which may stimulate responses in personal journals. Obviously, we see the effects of violence in political, ethnic, religious spheres. We may find ourselves appalled at the collective willingness of nation states to wage wars, to meet violence with violence, in a spiraling, escalating cycle. But to what degree are we personally complicitous, by assent or silence? Do our own lives reflect more sensitivity to suffering, to the possible consequences of our deeds than does the political realm?

The following inventory has seemed helpful in asking the complex questions which arise from this issue. What would you change in this regard? What would you defend? What questions would you add or subtract, as the form suggests? Perhaps this will result in a fruitful inner dialogue for you.

NON-VIOLENCE SELF-INVENTORY

See where you are with reference to the following questions: (For your eyes only!)

1. Have you ever been the recipient of physical violence?
2. Have you ever initiated an act of violence on another person?
3. Have you ever witnessed an act of violence which caused real injury?
4. Do you drive a larger car than you really need?
5. Have you recently indulged in road rage? What triggered it?
6. Have you driven over the speed limit in the last two weeks?
7. Do you advocate (and have practised) spanking of children?
8. What's your position on abortion?

9. Have you, in the last two weeks, yelled in anger at anyone? Who?

10. Have you ever taken the risk of driving when you've had too much to drink?

11. How's your diet?

A. I am an unabashed carnivore.

B. I'm a carnivore, but I try to eat less red meat than I used to.

C. No red meat, but chicken and seafood are OK.

D. No chicken or red meat, but seafood's OK.

E. Vegetarian.

F. Vegan.

G. I only eat what otherwise would be thrown out.

H. I beg for food.

I. Other.

12. Do you believe in capital punishment? If so, for what crimes, and by what methods?

13. Are you a pacifist?

14. Did you think that the United States and Britain were right in launching an attack on Iraq? Have the results supported your convictions?

15. Do you give to any charities which are specifically targeted against violence?

Which ones?

16. Do you advocate a complete nuclear test ban?

17. Do you advocate the cessation of all production of nuclear weaponry?

18. Do you believe that all existing nuclear weapons should be destroyed?

19. Do you have more clothes in your closet than most of your peers?

20. Do you own a gun? For what purpose? Are you a hunter?

21. Do you keep your temperature (when you can regulate it) lower than 75 in the summer or higher than 65 in the winter? (Adjust for Celsius)

22. Do you consistently recycle?

23. Have you ever participated in an active protest against some form of violence?

What activity?

24. Have you ever written a letter of concern about something related to non-violence?

What was the issue? To whom did you write?

25. Do you think that the war in Vietnam was a “just war”?

26. Do you think that Gandhi and/or King were impractical idealists?

27. Have you told a lie to anyone in the last two weeks?

28. Have you ever tried to break up a fight, or witnessed one and didn’t act?

29. Do you think that sexual offenders, once released, should be identified to the community in any way? Similarly, with other offenders?

30. Have you received unwelcome attention by anyone in the last few weeks?

31. Have you given unwelcome attention to anyone in the last few weeks?

32. Do you smoke?

33. Do you support the principle of euthanasia?

34. What other questions would you add to this list? Which items don’t belong on it?

INTER-RELIGIOUS INSIGHT

INTRODUCTION

What can be learned by studying interfaith interactions in al-Andalus? The answers offered here are gleaned from our respective experiences as a student and a professor in an interdisciplinary course on Andalusia at the American University of Sharjah (AUS) in the United Arab Emirates. Our vantage point is made all the more valuable because many of the inhabitants of al-Andalus—the title often applied to modern-day Spain and Portugal from the 8th through 15th centuries, when most or parts of the Iberian Peninsula were under Muslim rule—could then and can now trace their heritage to the Arabian Peninsula. The lessons posited will hopefully help you understand some of the connections between this shared history, as well as utilize these

connections as you work to help those of your own and other faiths find their way forward together.

The time of the independent Umayyad caliphate (756-1031 AD)—with its most cohesive phase being described by scholars as the “Golden Age” or the time when its capital, Cordoba, was “the ornament of the world”—stands out as a period in which the so-called “clash of civilisations” proclaimed in the contemporary context by the American scholar Samuel Huntington was much less than inevitable. It is true that, after more than 250 years of mutually beneficial symbiosis among Muslims, Christians and Jews, this interaction came to be challenged in ways that left the society beyond repair, amidst the next 500 years of Muslim infighting and the Christian Reconquista. Yet even this latter period was highlighted from time to time by instances of stunning cross-cultural fertilisation in a variety of fields as Muslims, Christians and Jews alike benefited from the patronage of competing Muslim and Christian kings. Cases of cooperation and alliances between various Muslim and Christian leaders are also well-documented. Even the last Muslim-led kingdom of Granada, which held out on its own for some 260 years before its fall in 1492, arguably arose as a gift given to a Muslim ally by a Christian king in appreciation of the former’s support of the latter in a battle against a rival Christian leader. Was al-Andalus under the Umayyads or at any other time an ideal example of functioning multiculturalism? What were the failures and the successes of the Andalusian model in this regard? The theme emerging from our studies is that while al-Andalus was not an ideal society when it came to inter-religious interaction, co-existence or tolerance, it does provide an example of constructive interfaith dialogue that offers us much food for thought (not to mention its collective achievements in architecture, agriculture, literature, music, philosophy, diplomacy, and public administration) when it comes to contemporary interfaith and intra-faith discussions.

LESSONS LEARNED

The student of al-Andalus must guard against becoming a romantic. The positive aspects of this time and place have their limitations. Similarly, its critics must not be allowed to mislead us by exaggerating flaws. On the up-side, the histories of al-Andalus demonstrate that social dysfunctions caused by the pursuit of superiority can be overcome. There are ways to deal with and accommodate cultural contradictions brought about by beliefs, practices and circumstances which pose a challenge to one’s faith. The fear of difference and domination can be

overcome in a socially constructive manner. On the down-side, al-Andalus reconfirms the observation that people who feel they are superior demand more rights and privileges than those they see as inferior. They also demand more attention than and may further seek control over others, often under the guise of being on a heaven-sent mission. Stereotyping is another problematic aspect of the superiority complex. Whatever the answer, this explicit expression of superiority through the stereotyping (especially of Arabs, Muslims and Jews in our time) has put more emphasis on the need to identify areas of potential cooperation between people of different faiths.

Though at times a highly successful society, al-Andalus was not perfect, if perfection means an absence of discriminatory regulations or disputes between and within different societal subgroups. Muslim political dominance was softened in theory by an acceptance of Christians and Jews, but undermined in practice by fees and limitations. Attempts to secure religious dominance can also occur within religions, between religions, and between those who classify themselves as believers and those who identify with no faith. Each type of conflict was present there, even during the Umayyad dynasty, including what Tariq Ali has called "the clash of fundamentalisms".

When the Muslim conquest of Iberia began in 711, Islamic teachings led the conquerors (or should we view them as liberators?) to guarantee the religious rights of all other Peoples of the Book or dhimmis: Christians and Jews. By virtue of having a holy book containing teachings revealed through a prophet and Islam's recognition of its historical predecessors, Christians and Jews were treated with respect by their Muslim rulers in a form of social compact which recognised their right to organize their social affairs independently, thus extending co-existence beyond tolerance to acceptance. The Treaty of Tudmir in 713 serves as a prominent early example of this enlightened approach. Before the arrival of Muslims, the ruling Visigoths considered Jews to be inferior. They were not allowed to marry Christians, own land or hold administrative positions, were made to renounce their faith, and forced to have their children baptized as Christians. The arrival of the Muslims greatly improved the status of the Jewish community.

The Islam of the initial conquerors spoke of the need for a dialogue with other traditions and the desirability of protecting and preserving the cultural identity of other faiths. From this perspective, they were keen on preserving the status of the Christians and restoring the status of the Jews in their society, admittedly at least in part for instrumental

reasons, given the many useful societal and administrative contributions Christians and Jews could make as bureaucrats, diplomats, translators, traders, physicians, and learned advisors. Even the Hebrew language and Hebrew literature reached new heights during the time of the Umayyad caliphate within and beyond the Jewish community as a result of its inspired interaction with Arabic. Prominent Jewish scholars and administrators continued to appear during the subsequent Taifa Kings period (1031-1085) as well.

Affirming their faith, Umayyad leaders believed that a healthy interactive relationship between Islam, Christianity and Judaism would strengthen society as a whole. This said, there were still clear constraints on Christians and Jews under the Umayyads. Neither subordinate group was allowed to display their religious rituals in public. Jews had become somewhat familiar with this restriction under the Visigoths. That some Christians were unable to reconcile themselves with such limitations may have been one of the reasons some of them actively sought external support for a rebellion against their Muslim rulers and to promote what became the Christian reconquest of Iberia.

But while other religious freedoms were granted to the dhimmis, this protection did come at a price as in return Christians and Jews had to pay a tax—the *jizya*—which was not levied on Muslims. (Muslims were obligated by their faith to pay the less onerous *zakat*.) Further, by the middle of the ninth century and as the intolerance towards Christians and Jews among some Muslims began to rise, in many jurisdictions anyone who aspired to occupy an important position in the government had to be a Muslim. The quest to become exempt from the *jizya* and the desire to be eligible for court positions led many non-Muslims to convert to Islam—a trend that troubled Christian leaders in particular and fuelled their push to encourage the reconquest of the peninsula by Christian kingdoms in the north, a movement aided by pagans within al-Andalus who faced forced conversion or worse under Muslim rule.

The relatively cohesive, productive pluralistic and multicultural society nurtured by the Umayyads wasn't democratic, but it worked in its context. Thus, it remains for us a useful historical example to ponder, remembering that the pinnacle of Andalusian societal achievement came immediately before the period in which the modern state system emerged in Europe. As such, al-Andalus and the positive aspects of the Andalusian legacy could be seen as victims of the monocultural preferences apparent in the neighbouring political

developments of the time. The Muslim rulers were proved wise to preserve the cultural identity of the dhimmis. This diversity arguably created a distinct Andalusian culture. Mutual benefit could be observed in the all manner of arts and sciences. Christians and Jews were free to organize most of their social affairs without interference from the Muslim-led government. Moreover, with religious freedoms guaranteed, the Muslims and dhimmis could identify with the commonality found in their location and personal aspirations, rather than be divided on the basis of religious concerns.

Yet Andalusia under the Umayyads was not a model of cosmopolitanism at its best. Superiority was still manifest in different ways. Muslims in al-Andalus didn't pay the *jizya*, while the appropriateness of Christians, Jews and even converts to Islam holding high political office was increasingly contested within the Muslim community. These social limitations and economic obligations—which caused some to undergo nominal conversions to Islam and others to rebel—thus had a negative impact on the sociology of al-Andalus, its positive attributes notwithstanding. The exclusion, forced conversion and attempted elimination of pagans did not help. Instead, it helped contribute to the unsustainability of al-Andalus.

Just as the pursuit of monocultural, single religion, territorial and oppositional states has proven problematic since the demise of al-Andalus, so has the increasingly singular pursuit of Western or American-style democracy in our post-Cold War world of the twenty-first century. Democracy may not be the only way to achieve a peaceful, productive, pluralistic and culturally dynamic society. Does the history of al-Andalus suggest that there might be a middle way between the evils of dominance and the shortcomings of democracy?

As we have suggested, the core of the challenge lies in confronting the superiority complex, in finding ways to think of the other as we think of ourselves and in recognising the other's ability to add something to our knowledge of ourselves. Many Andalusis seem to have succeeded in dealing with cultural contradictions presented by the other and in "conceiving of their own selves in liberal, complex and ironic terms." For a time, the self-other problem seemed to vanish. The self and the other became one. Can we get beyond the various forms of contemporary fundamentalism? Is it possible for us today to operate with epistemological modesty? Can we deny that great civilisations were achieved by non-fundamentalists like the Greeks, Sumerians and Andalusians? If we believe it is a human right to be a believer, are we

willing to recognize the choice to be an infidel or non-believer as human right?

The lack of, need for, and challenges offered by critical thinking have been frequently exposed when trying to get across the multiple purposes of our course on al-Andalus, exploring the operating assumptions in student minds, and confronting apparent contradictions to one's faith. The same could be said for our discussions of the importance of history, the recognition that there are various histories of al-Andalus, the positive and negative aspects of the Andalusian legacy, Arab and Islamic contributions to Western civilisation, and the reasons why the history of al-Andalus is poorly understood (if it is understood or taught at all) in both the Arab/Muslim world and the West. The latter observation is a shocking indictment of educational systems everywhere. Al-Andalus was not a perfect society, but it was arguably the pre-eminent Western society of its time inasmuch as it served as the link between the Greek and Roman civilisations before it and the European civilisation that was to follow it. While the rest of Europe endured the Dark Ages, light and enlightenment shone brightly at times in al-Andalus. To ignore its existence, legacy and lessons seems illogical and irresponsible, if not criminal. At the same time, such omissions also force us to exercise our critical thinking skills in ways that will allow us to more effectively refute Orientalist logic and divisive, fear-laden theses like that of the clash of civilisations. In this spirit and fully aware that al-Andalus was not heaven on earth (despite the claims of many of its inhabitants!), we encourage you as people of faith, local community members, and global citizens to explore this example further on your own and to learn more about the lessons that can be drawn from this inspiring and instructive time and place.

SITTING WITH VIOLENCE CHRISTOPHER IVES

War with Iraq, paramilitary deaths I squads in Columbia, the 11,000 people killed by guns each year in the United States, or the destruction on September 11th (2001 and 1973)—violence in one or more of its forms weighs heavily on all of us these days. To sort through the complex issues surrounding violence, some people have turned to religions, including Buddhism. In its treatment of violence, however, the Buddhist tradition offers mixed messages.

On the one hand, Buddhist texts, doctrines, and ritual practices advocate *ahimsâ*, non-harming or non-violence. The Buddha reportedly told his followers (*Dhammapada*, ch. 10),

All are afraid of the rod.
 Of death all are afraid.
 Having made oneself the example,
 One should neither slay nor cause to slay.

The first of the five precepts (*pañca úlâni*) admonishes us to refrain from taking life, and early monastic codes list the taking of life as one of the four grave offenses. Mahayana texts carry this rejection of violence forward; for example, the *Daúabhûmika-sûtra* proclaims that Buddhists “must not hate any being and cannot kill a living creature even in thought.” Historically, Buddhists have formulated institutional and ritual supports for this ideal, as seen in the *uposatha* ceremony when Theravadan monks twice a month recite the precepts and confess transgressions.

Despite these apparently universalist admonitions against killing others, Buddhism equivocates. Several sutras recount how the historical Buddha killed people in his past lives to protect the innocent or protect the Dharma, and thereby also protect near-murderers or slanderers from karmic retribution in hell. The *Mahâparinirvâna-sûtra* allows for situations when not only the Buddha but his followers must ignore the first precept and take up arms to protect the Dharma. This sutra also exhorts the laity to use force to protect the sangha. And in the commentarial literature, Buddhist thinkers have set forth elaborate justifications of violence. Historically, some Buddhists have followed the lead of these reinterpretations and qualifications of the doctrine of *ahimsâ*: Buddhist thinkers have legitimated violence in particular situations; Buddhist sectarian groups have engaged in warfare; and Buddhist institutions have publicly supported violence by rulers and their armies.

This is the tradition in which contemporary Buddhists find themselves. To negotiate our way through the issues surrounding violence, we are left to our own exegetical devices. At the very least, however, Buddhism offers resources for our critiques, our personal wrestling with violence, and our active responses to it, that is to say, resources for theoretical analysis, religious practice, and political praxis.

Insofar as Buddhism strives to cultivate insight into inter-relational arising (*pratîitya-samutpâda* or *úûnyatâ*), Buddhists are compelled to explore the causes of violence. A genuinely Buddhist response to, for example, the September 11th violence is to probe its root causes. Was it caused by “evil doers” whose ontological make-up compelled them to lash out at all that is good? Was it caused by fanatics, evil or

otherwise, who hate the American way of life and take special offense at women in tank tops? Should we stop our causal analysis there, as is the preference of the President and many other Americans? What about several hundred years of Western imperialism and the concomitant oppression and humiliation of Muslims? What about the lingering effects of U.S. support for—and what was later perceived as betrayal of—Osama Bin Laden and other Muslims who fought against the Soviets in Afghanistan? What has been the causal role of U.S. support for repressive regimes in the Muslim world, or the lingering U.S. military presence near sacred Islamic sites in Saudi Arabia? Or our tacit approval of Israeli policies in the Occupied Territories? How might we analyze the role of globalisation in exacerbating the international maldistribution of wealth, especially in the face of longstanding Islamic commitment to helping those in need? And what has been the role of Wahhâbiya, especially when backed by royalty and wealth, or unpopular Arab regimes' deflection of local discontent away from themselves and onto the bogeyman of a decadent, secular West?

The need to pursue systemic analysis of causal factors, direct and indirect, is perhaps most pressing for Buddhists in the United States. As Eqbal Ahmad has astutely pointed out, when it comes to "terrorism," the U.S. government demonstrates little interest in rigorously exploring causation. Indeed, the Bush Administration has largely succeeded in large part in making its representation—of evil-doers who hate freedom, democracy, and other features of Western culture—nearly hegemonic in U.S. civic discourse, effectively silencing analyses that extend beyond such facile causal explanations.

Though Buddhism may not offer any distinctive tools for analysing the broader historical, political, and economic causes of 9/11, it does offer a framework for exploring psychological causes of violence. Central to the Buddhist analysis of the cause of *dukkha* (suffering) is the doctrine of the Three Poisons: greed or craving, anger or hatred, and ignorance. Buddhism prods us to look at these defilements in ourselves and those who might confront us, and how, in each of us as both perpetrator and victim of violence, these hindrances derive from certain conditions and cause certain actions. The second of these defilements, anger and hatred, relates most directly to violence. The force of the Buddhist argument about the Three Poisons compels us to investigate the contours and source of Al Qaeda anger, while cautioning Americans about our own anger, especially insofar as it may distort our analysis and trick us into choosing rash vengeance.

Then there is the poison of greed or craving. How has American greed, especially our cravings for cheap oil, fostered anger around the world? And what about the cravings of those who would exploit the discontent of impoverished Muslims to promote apocalyptic agendas?

And how do we work with ignorance, whether the broad ideological brush that paints the West as Satan or the habitual rationalisations and denials by Americans as we pursue material interests in the guise of promoting freedom or democracy, and in this way deny moral culpability for the uglier dimensions of our foreign policy and international business dealings? What should we do with the ignorance that accepts official representations of the country as consistently on the side of freedom and democracy around the world? How can we resist corporate influence on the media? Who are the Buddhist intellectuals that can speak truth to the ignorance of the broad negative fruits of unilateral (or U.S.-British) military action to bring about regime change, or the ignorance behind Francis Fukuyama's triumphalist rhetoric about the "end of history" or overstated civilisational explanations of global tensions? Despite what the Samuel Huntingtons of the world declare, it is not at all clear that we are engaged primarily in a clash of civilisations. Though civilisational factors do play a causal role, Huntingtons emphasis on them (or for that matter, Buddhist overemphasis on ostensibly universal epistemologies and psychological tendencies) masks key structural factors, such as the economic and political ramifications of globalisation.

Another Buddhist analytical tool is the Zen critique of dualistic conceptualisation, glaringly obvious in the simplistic and incendiary dichotomies between good and evil that have been offered by Osama Bin Laden and George W. Bush. One does not need to be a Buddhist to recognize the polarising nature of such essentialist characterisations, and the degree to which they lead to ideological rigidity. This reification of an "us" and a "them" as inherently good and evil also exacerbates the objectification and dehumanisation of those who threaten us. The wartime portrayal of the enemy as evil, or fanatical, that is, irrational and vaguely insane (Saddam) if not bestial ("Mad Dog" Khaddafi), and hence not meriting moral standing, functions at the extreme end of the dualistic epistemology roundly criticised by Zen, the tendency to experience reality only as a set of objects apart from the self and to become ensconced in that outlook. History attests to how these dehumanised representations can trigger annihilationist programmes if not full-blown apocalyptic crusades. While Bin Laden, Bush, and their apocalyptic supporters may not be disposed to recognize the

ambiguity of human actors or the dangers of starkly dualistic characterisation, in the service of more nuanced and productive analysis, we need to reject their dualism. (As a Buddhist I also take issue with the naïve dualism (and veiled threat) in Bush statements about being either “with us” or “against us” in the war on terrorism, especially when most countries are neither.)

Though my talk of “apocalyptic” crusades may border on hyperbole here, I am struck by how the messianic if not apocalyptic vision of certain evangelical and fundamentalist Christians in and around the Bush administration have coloured rhetoric about the war on terrorism (and have in certain Christian circles generated fervent support for the state of Israel as a necessary condition for the Second Coming of Christ). Possible apocalyptic tendencies are worth monitoring as the U.S. strives to reassert its invulnerability and superpower omnipotence by massively deploying military power in Afghanistan, pledging to hunt down every last Al Qaeda member (“dead or alive”), and, as outlined in the Bush Administration’s recent national security statement, attempting to dominate any government deemed threatening, whether the Taliban or the current Iraqi regime. (As Bernard Lewis has argued, radical Islamists may be trying to reassert past Islamic domination as well.) Drawing from its own resources and thinkers like Robert J. Lifton, Buddhism can shed light on these attempts by our collective ego to regain supposed invulnerability by ridding the world of evil dangers, especially insofar as these attempts emerge from our fear, “psychic numbing,” and the hope of controlling our world if not death itself (a kind of grand overcompensation?).

Needless to say, violence in general and 9/11 in particular do not hit me as a mere theoretical problem, an issue to be addressed solely through the intellect. Like all of you, I feel 9/11 in my gut. And it is there, the center of my breathing and my practice of zazen, that I sit with the images and the loss. Zazen constitutes the main container for my own fear, anger, and sadness around that and other violence. And as something with which I sit, 9/11 offers a stark lesson in impermanence. It makes me aware of the fragility of bodies, our loved ones, our accomplishments, our possessions, and all the other seemingly impenetrable walls of the self-protective ego. That violence especially challenges any false sense of security I might have had as a privileged resident of the United States.

And at the collective level, 9/11 burst the bubble of U.S. exceptionalism—the idea, the delusion, that with our wealth, military

might, and geographical location we are invulnerable, or at least generally immune to the insecurity faced by other people around the world. The attacks last September provided an opportunity to recognize the violence and vulnerability in which most of humankind lives, and not just the violence of ostensibly singular events like 9/11 but violence on an ongoing, less conspicuous, or less acknowledged scale, as seen in the violence of economic exploitation and political repression, in structural violence and state violence (if not state terrorism). The attacks on 9/11 also provided a wake-up call insofar as they opened American eyes to the anger many people around the world feel toward the United States. In short, it offered a jarring opportunity to glimpse the world free from the distortions wrought by our entanglement in the particular American configuration of greed, hatred, and ignorance.

But September 11th is not something that happened fourteen months ago. It was a long day, and it isn't over. It still moves in all of us, and none of us has the luxury of gazing at it retrospectively in some position of regained security. At the emotional level, perhaps the most skilful response is to sit with, and in, the event. Zazen offers a structure for sitting with and being mindful of my shock, my fear of death, my fear around recent economic vulnerability, my clinging to whatever wealth or imagined security I might have, and my own urge for revenge, or at least subtle satisfaction at images of Taliban positions getting shelled around Kabul last year.

Buddhist practice can also help loosen fixed senses of self, entrenched characterisations of others, and rigid ideologies. It promotes the epistemological breadth, conceptual flexibility, and fluidity of response necessary for encountering violence without slipping into the vicious circle of attack and counter-attack, or of competing and ultimately mutually-reinforcing discourses of suffering and victimhood. It can thus help foster the antidotes to the Three Poisons: generosity, loving kindness (or compassion), and wisdom. And with cultivated mindfulness we can see more deeply into the process of inter-relational arising on a global scale, recognize the need to respond with wisdom and compassion to unavoidable and at times painful change, and deal skilfully with the power of others help or harm us. (And at the deepest level, zazen can confirm the "place" beyond security and insecurity, beyond pre-9/11 and post-9/11.)

The process of receptive sitting also cultivates the kind of openness and sincere listening so foreign to angry terrorists and arrogant Americans alike. Not that we should accept all that we hear, whether

the simplistic rants of George W. Bush about a new crusade or Islamist tirades about Uncle Sam as the Great Satan. Nor does careful listening preclude skilful responses: we do need international police and policing actions, far preferable to a “war” on terrorism, a mental construct that, along with Bush’s comment about a new crusade, feeds directly into the Manichean worldview of those who would all too gladly fight a war to the ultimate end. That is to say, in the stead of the rule of military might in a war on terrorism, a more skilful and compassionate response to 9/11 is the rule of law, ideally through a collaborative international police force and international criminal court that could apprehend, arrest, prosecute, and isolate those who would commit or support terror, whether Osama Bin Laden, Augusto Pinochet, or Henry Kissinger.

Part of the Buddhist critique of ignorance can take the form of rejecting American unilateralism and calling on the United States to promote democratic self-determination, global distributive justice, and consistency in its denunciations of terroristic violence. From a Buddhist perspective, this seems to be in the United States’ ultimate interest, not as a hegemonic superpower trying to maintain its dominance, but as a champion of multilateralism, of synergistic power—with others rather than power—over them (as Joanna Macy has put it), of a community of nations cooperating to meet the basic needs of all people.

In such a global community American Buddhists and Christians (and Jews) can more easily affirm their commonality with others around the world, especially with Muslims whose tradition speaks loudly on social justice and the option for the poor. We can meet Muslims as co-conspirators in a movement (not a war) *against* exploitation, poverty, and despair, a movement *for* peace, justice, and ecological health, *for* a world in which ignorance, greed, and hatred have been replaced by wisdom, generosity, and compassion.

Of course, this long-term utopic vision of a Buddhistically mutual and multilateral world is all fine and well, but the short-term scenario demands attention. What do we do in the meantime, in the face of continued acts of violence, like those on 9/11? In the *Dhammapada* we read:

Not by enmity are enmities quelled,
Whatever the occasion here.
By the absence of enmity are they quelled.
This is an ancient truth.

But is not violence in response to imminent threat to innocent life acceptable from a Buddhist perspective, at least judging from some sutras? And how can we protect ourselves and still avoid the vicious cycle of violence, of attack and counterattack, and increasing distrust and long-term harm on both sides, serving only those who would recruit for Al Qaeda or lobby for an aggressive U.S. stance in the world. Might Buddhists be able to articulate their own just war theory, a doctrine of acceptable violence as a last resort, in the face of an imminent threat of the loss of (innocent) life, at a minimal level of force, and without enmity, as an expression of a commitment to minimal suffering, not of ignorance, greed, and hatred? Or is just-war theory a slippery slope, a method that is easily co-opted, and hard to apply whenever reliable and accurate information proves hard to obtain in the midst of possible disinformation and fearmongering? In the aftermath of 9/11 and on the brink of escalated conflict in the Middle East, these questions seem worth pondering, ideally in dialogue with our cousins in other religions.

INTER-RELIGIOUS INSIGHT

HINDU-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE: A HINDU PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

The theme of Hindu-Christian Dialogue has engaged my interest for the last three decades, and I am glad at the opportunity to express my thoughts on this very relevant and significant subject at the dawn of the 21st century.

The traditional name for Hinduism is *sanatana dharma*. There is no exact term for *dharma* in the English language. Neither the term Hinduism nor the word religion is adequate to translate *sanatana dharma*. Anyway, nearly a billion people prefer to call themselves Hindus presently, and another two billion refer to them as Hindus; hence, there is no point in arguing over the terminology. In this essay, therefore, I shall continue to use the terms Hindu and Hinduism. I shall communicate what Hinduism means to me, and how my involvement in Hindu-Christian dialogue has influenced my understanding of both the traditions.

I received my early lessons in Hinduism from my parents, who were devout Hindus. My first acquaintance with Christianity was in the late forties, when under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi, a number of students in Indian colleges took to the study of the *Bible* and the *Gita*. In my case, the study continued, and came to a focus when I accepted a fellowship from the Gandhi Peace Foundation, Delhi, to study Gandhi's religious thought. In that connection, I came into contact with and learned much from Hindu as well as Christian followers of Gandhi. I had also the opportunity to study, in some detail, other world religions. Further, as a doctoral student at Harvard university in the early sixties, I took a number of courses in Christian theology, history, and ethics; they have helped me to understand Christianity in the proper context.

I deeply cherish my tradition, but I do not wish it ever to be the only religion in the world. Nor do I see any need to turn a blind eye to its shortcomings. Actually, I am glad that there are other great religions which are, like mine, trying to stem the tides of violence, terrorism, war and materialism on one hand and trying to bring happiness and fulfilment through moral and spiritual instructions on the other.

A PAST ERA

In India, as in many Asian countries, Christianity came into effective contact with non-Christian traditions during the days of colonial expansion of Western powers: Portuguese, French, Danish and British. For Asian peoples, Christianity came mixed with and vitiated by imperialism, colonial domination, a degree of racism and a dose of Western culture. Even the architecture and music of the churches in the colonies imitated Western styles. These historical factors created difficulties for a proper appreciation of Christianity. During the period of struggle for Indian independence, I remember, the question was frequently raised: "Why should Christianity be presented to the Hindus?" "Does the West desire to 'dominate' Indian spirituality in the same way as it controls India's politics and economics?"

Christian missionaries used to make scathing attacks on Hinduism and dismiss it as a religion of superstition and crass idolatry, not to be taken seriously. They referred to the Hindus as polytheists, pagans and heathens. They implicitly believed that the Western nations possessed a superior religion and culture. Hence they went out to give and not to receive; their objective was to spread Christianity. The

technique frequently adopted was to exaggerate the so-called vulnerable points in Hindu thought and practice with little appreciation of the positive elements in them. The works of philanthropy, social uplift, medical aid or educational services were often used as means for winning converts.

Hindu responses to such criticisms were typical: praising one's own faith and blaming the faith of others are due to lack of sympathy and understanding. Each religion, like every geometric figure, has its own inherent logic and inner consistency. Unless one understands the inner logic, one cannot appreciate that religion. For example, Hindus worship one God (who is beyond names and forms) who makes himself available to his devotees in many names and forms. From the time of the Rigveda (which says that: Truth is one, sages call it by many names) to Sri Ramakrishna and Mahatma Gandhi, the validity of many names and forms of the one God is asserted. In the absence of appreciation of this basic Hindu principle, criticisms such as the one above, miss the point altogether.

For all its hopes and opportunities, "Christian triumphalism" of the Colonial era did not succeed. Christianity continues to be, by and large, a minority religion in Asia; it has to live amidst a majority community of another faith. Western Christians do not fully realize the enormous cultural and national pressures faced by the Christian minorities in Asia. Asian Christians clearly see the practical situation and recognize that human community is religiously pluralistic. They see no signs of immediate or even distant displacement of all other religions by Christianity.

PRESENT IMPRESSIONS

I know that in recent times, a number of Christian thinkers and groups are trying hard to eliminate the burdens of the past, to redefine their attitudes to other cultures, religions and peoples, and to dissociate themselves from certain unhappy historical associations. However, Asian peoples are still handicapped in their appreciation of Christianity by what has been done to them in the past by Western nations.

Traditional theology, developed in religious isolation, has now become inadequate. Historically, Christianity, like every other world religion, is a particular religion; but it has a universal message. Each religion has to transcend itself to become universal. The Christian faith is challenged daily from within to enter into dialogue with the followers of other religions. "In my Father's house are many dwelling

places. If this were not so, I would have told you" (John 14:2). Peter, the leader of the Apostles declares: "In truth, I see that God shows no partiality. Rather, in every nation whoever fears Him and acts uprightly is acceptable to him" (Acts 10:34-5). There are scholars in recent decades, who have not felt shy of visiting other dwelling places in God's mansion. Thanks to the efforts of far-seeing leaders like Paul Devanandan, Stanley Samartha, John Taylor, Bede Griffiths, etc., the atmosphere is now much better. The World Council of Churches has struggled as a pioneer in the area of dialogue between the religions.

I have been involved in scores of important inter-religious conferences and Hindu-Christian dialogues organised by the World Council of Churches, Temple of Understanding, World Conference of Religion and Peace, World Congress of Faiths, etc. For example, I was invited as a Hindu guest to participate in the Fifth Assembly of The World Council of Churches in Nairobi, in 1975. I was the co-chairman of the International Hindu-Christian Consultation organised by WCC at Dehradun, India, in 1981. I was a non-voting Hindu delegate to the World Conference on Mission and Evangelism convened by the WCC in San Antonio, Texas, in 1989. By engaging in vigorous dialogue for the last three decades, the WCC has shown that Christian faith stands to gain by spreading the testimony of Christ to others and by receiving valuable insights from them. In my dialogue with Christians, I have understood much about Christianity, but also much about my own religious tradition.

It took some time for me to understand the diversity within the Christian tradition. It certainly is difficult to make judgments on Christianity on the basis of a single movement. Within Christianity, there are Catholics, Protestants, followers of Eastern Orthodoxy; and within each branch, there are many denominations, not always harmonious with one another. In the late fifties, I once went into a Christian section of a South Indian village, in the course of my field work. I met the members and their families. On inquiry, I came to know that they belonged to seven different Churches, and they scarcely knew about their Church histories. Some were Roman Catholics, but did not know where Rome was; some were Anglicans, but did not know where England was, and so on. I wondered at that time what the European ecclesiastical struggles had to do with the communication of Jesus Christ to villagers in India. Thankfully, ecumenical dialogue is going on among these churches. As a Hindu, I pray for the ecumenical unity of Christian churches. United Christianity is a spiritual gain to

the world. It will also enable Christian activities to be coordinated for the benefit of humankind and of all creation.

I cherish my associations with enlightened Christian thinkers who have sought to realize that God is at work in events beyond the boundaries of the Christian church. God is already present in his world; we need only to recognize and respond to his presence. When Christ is exalted, whatever is universal in any religion is also exalted. I believe that Christ aimed at changing lives of persons, not their religious labels. In a multireligious society, my dialogue with Christians has made me realize that there is need to recognize that God is one, religions are many. Creative theological formulations are needed to do justice to religious pluralism. Further, the spiritual traditions of the world have a great role to play in arresting the tides of violence, materialism, skepticism and scientism that is challenging all religions. In this sense, Christianity and Hinduism have to work together, not against one another, in humanising humanity.

In my understanding of the New Testament, God's love embraces the whole world. Churches may be exclusivistic; Christ is universal. The Kingdom of God includes the whole of humanity. The resemblances between Hindu and Christian parables and scriptural passages came as a pleasant surprise to me. Let me illustrate the point with the Song of Praise, in which Mary discloses to Elizabeth God's purpose:

For he who is mighty have done great things for me, and holy is his name. And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away (Luke 1. 49-53).

Compare this with what Lord Krishna says about the purpose of *avatar* (incarnation of God on earth) in the *Bhagavadgita*:

When righteousness is weak and faints and unrighteousness exults in pride, then my Spirit arises on earth.

For the Salvation of those who are good, for the destruction of evil in men, for the fulfilment of the Kingdom of righteousness, I come into this world in the ages that pass. (Bh. G. IV. 7-8. tr. Juan Mascaro).

Incidentally, Hinduism and Christianity are the only world religions which teach a doctrine of Incarnation, though their interpretations of the doctrine are different.

A Hindu View of Christ

Jesus Christ is an ineradicable part of modern Hinduism. The power of the cross is felt in the lives of many Hindus in different walks of life. Hindus adore Christ. The way in which Christ has touched their lives, and their responses to him are varied: some Hindus acknowledge Jesus as an *avatar*; some others consider him as a *yogi*, a *satguru* and so on. Mahatma Gandhi for instance, showed great reverence to Jesus Christ and publicly acknowledged his indebtedness to him, but refused to limit Jesus Christ to the boundaries of this or that church.

Hindus look upon Jesus without the appendages of theology, dogma or doctrine. They give attention to his life of love and forgiveness. In the majesty of pure living, in the breadth of his sympathy, in the unselfish and sacrificial outlook of his life, and in pure disinterested love, he was supreme. What strikes a Hindu above all is his complete obedience to the will of God; the more he emptied himself the more he discovered God. The Cross is not something to be believed in and subscribed to as a dogma; but something to be lived and borne in life and experience. Jesus signifies to the Hindus the transcendence of the ego as the whole purpose of morality and spirituality. The enlightened person gains release by the surrender of his little self and its vanities by the purity of self and devotion to God.

The New Testament symbol of the Kingdom of God made a powerful appeal to modern Hindu reformers. It showed them the Christian message in its moral aspect. The teachings of the Sermon on the Mount were not speculative; they were exemplified in the life of Christ. They were impressed that the "Kingdom of God" belongs to the humble and the poor, that the "persecuted and the meek" are its citizens; that the "pure in heart" see it, and that the "Kingdom" is not meat and drink, but "righteousness, and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit." On the social side, the Kingdom of God involved the establishment of right relationships between institutions and communities of people. Modern Hindu reformers felt that this aspect of Christ's teaching was much needed in India. They tried to inculcate the view that spirituality did not consist in turning away from poverty, misery, and ignorance, but in fully facing and fighting them

I found that Gandhi's understanding and practice of the cross brought out fresh aspects of Jesus' life and character which the West had not so clearly perceived. He demonstrated how the soul force fights and overcomes evil only with the weapons of Truth and love.

Although *satyagraha* was used by Gandhi, a Hindu against governments run by Christians (whether in South Africa or Britain), many Christians all over the world recognised that his movements were in truth Christian, a reviving and reinterpretation of the cross. Dr. Stanley Jones, the well-known American missionary (in his *Gandhi: An Interpretation*, p.105) observes: "Never in human history has so much light been shed through this one man, and that man not even called Christian. Had not our Christianity been vitiated and overlain by our identification with unchristian attitudes and policies in public and private life, we would have seen at once the kinship between Gandhi's method and the cross."

Hindus do not accept the Bible as the only scripture and Jesus Christ as the only instance of God's self-disclosure. And yet the Hindus accept the *Bible*, and the scriptures of other religions along with the *Vedas* as God-given.. Despite this theological difference between Hindu and Christian approaches, practical cooperation with one another is possible in overcoming violence, war, injustice, poverty and sickness in the world. In this regard, the following verses of the New Testament are very instructive:

And John answered and said, "Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbade him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us. (Luke 9: 4-50). May I say that Hindus are not against Jesus Christ; they love him and adore him. Further, there are many devils to be cast out; Hindus and Christians should come together to vanquish them.

Hinduism: Accommodating and Cooperative

Hindus have expressed an ecumenical spirit in religious matters throughout history. Never have they claimed to be exclusive possessors of truth. It is not necessary to be or become a Hindu to obtain salvation. They recognize revealing and saving powers in all great religions. Hindus respect all prophets and sages who come to guide humanity. In the context of the diversity of human needs, they hold that the great religions of the world are not only relevant but also necessary. Hindus have shown willingness to learn from other traditions. They are at liberty to draw inspiration from any source in their spiritual quest. Actually, the Hindu tradition encourages its followers to celebrate each other's way of God-realisation. Reverence for other religions is an essential element of the Hindu spiritual vision.

Hinduism has witnessed the vicissitudes of history. It has periods of growth and stagnation which have brought many valuable and some questionable elements to life and society. New conditions bring new challenges to its adherents, while the age-old shortcomings are still to be addressed. But it has also shown remarkable powers of revival. Saints and sages have continued to call the Hindus to reform themselves and their society by purging old abuses, by throwing out undesirable accretions, and by conserving valuable insights and practices. In this endeavor, Christian contacts and even criticism have been very helpful. Hindus have been resilient, open and have succeeded in several areas. For example, in my teenage days, it was inconceivable for people of different castes to eat together and work together, but now these prejudices have dissipated.

Hindus have never been an organised ecclesiastical body nor do they seek to convert humanity to any one set of beliefs. In this sense, they have never been and will never be in competition with Christianity or with any other religion. They have been generally accommodating and cooperative. The Hindu tradition has provided historical examples of this attitude. When Jews (after the second destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem by the Romans) and Zoroastrians (in the 7th century when Persia was invaded by Muslims) sought shelter in India, they were received in their midst with warmth and understanding and were granted freedom of worship. The same spirit continues through the ages. Recently in 1961, India offered refuge to the Dalai Lama and 1,00,000 of his followers from Tibet in the face of threat of the Chinese Communist army. For those who questioned the wisdom of this action, Dr. Radhakrishnan, the former President of India, said: "We cannot go against our own tradition and history."

Hindus point out that Yoga is not in competition with any religious tradition. Yogic meditative techniques have helped spiritual aspirants across religious borders. They help a Hindu to become a better Hindu, a Christian a better Christian, and so forth. Men of other faiths have testified that their own dormant faith has come alive as consequence of yogi practices.

The Christian Church does not admit the theory of reincarnation, rebirth of a soul after death with a new body. In recent years, however, a number of Christian thinkers have considered reincarnation as a valid phenomenon, while at the same time, remaining firmly within the Christian faith. They also believe that it was acceptable in the Christian tradition in early times; and that it does justice to Christian

God of love and compassion. An errant child is given enough opportunities to correct his mistakes; God wishes that no soul be lost. In Hinduism, spiritual liberation is obtained through many lifetimes. Each lifetime is a god-given opportunity for further spiritual progress.

The theory of reincarnation is closely related to the doctrine of karma which emphasises the principle of moral causality. Not only does a person reap what he sows, but what he is reaping is the result of what he has already sown. Humans are the makers of their own destiny. All sects and schools of Hinduism have realised the truth and value of this doctrine. The present-day revival of the subject in philosophical, religious and popular circles in the West points to its importance. According to a recent Gallup poll survey, 23 per cent of the North Americans and Europeans believe in reincarnation.

Future Prospects

1. Historically, the dialogue of religions has broadened and deepened religious insights. Active dialogue and cooperation between Christianity and Hinduism will bring in greater light and deeper understanding.

2. Truth is many sided and our understanding of truth is fragmentary. Therefore, it is desirable, to go deep into one's own religious tradition and adhere firmly to it, while keeping an open mind regarding the Truth that may be available in other traditions.

3. Hindu-Christian dialogue has led to a stronger sense of the essential dignity of a human being as a human being. The caste system in India has considerably weakened. The integration of the 'untouchables' into the mainstream of Hindu Society, started by Gandhi, has recorded enormous success. Social obligations have assumed a greater importance.

4. In as much as God is one, the world is one and humanity is one, it is possible for Hindus and Christians to meet and cooperate at these vantage points and reinforce the religious life of humanity.

5. Hindu-Christian dialogue is necessary: i) to overcome misconceptions entertained about each others' tradition; ii) to achieve a clearer understanding of the similarities and differences between the two traditions; iii) and to promote spiritual and moral goods in them.

6. Hindu-Christian dialogue recognises that: i) religious indifference is bad and religious prejudice is worse; ii) proselytism is bad but conversion to a higher way of life is necessary; iii) that no religious

tradition should present its message in a way that may lead to conflict and violence in societies.

MISSION

Religions for Peace is the largest international coalition of representatives from the world's great religions dedicated to promoting peace.

Respecting religious differences while celebrating our common humanity, *Religions for Peace* is active on every continent and in some of the most troubled areas of the world, creating multi-religious partnerships to confront our most dire issues: stopping war, ending poverty, and protecting the earth.

Religious communities are the largest and best-organised civil institutions in the world, claiming the allegiance of billions across race, class, and national divides. These communities have particular cultural understandings, infrastructures, and resources to get help where it is needed most.

Founded in 1970, *Religions for Peace* enables these communities to unleash their enormous potential for common action. Some of *Religions for Peace's* recent successes include building a new climate of reconciliation in Iraq; mediating dialogue among warring factions in Sierra Leone; organising an international network of religious women's organisations; and establishing an extraordinary programme to assist the millions of children affected by Africa's AIDS pandemic, the Hope for African Children Initiative.

Religions for Peace brings together hundreds of key religious leaders every five years to discuss the great issues of our time. In August 2006, the Eighth World Assembly convened in Kyoto.

HISTORY

The First World Assembly, Kyoto, Japan, 1970, The World Conference of *Religions for Peace* convened for the first time in Kyoto, Japan, on 16-21 October 1970. However, the origins of *Religions for Peace* date to 1961, when a handful of senior leaders from the world's major faith traditions began exploring the possibilities for organising a "religious summit" to address the need for believers around the world to take action toward achieving peace.

Fulfilling its mission to engage religious communities on the national and regional levels, *Religions for Peace* is today organised on several levels: the International Secretariat in New York, Regional Conferences

in Europe and Asia, more than 40 affiliates at the national level, and a number of local units. Religions for Peace enjoys consultative status with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the United Nations, with UNESCO, and with UNICEF.

INTERNATIONAL SECRETARIAT

Dr. William F. Vendley, Dr. Vendley has served as Secretary General *Religions for Peace* since 1994. He is a member of the World Council, which is composed of outstanding international religious leaders. He also serves as the organisation's chief executive officer, overseeing the international secretariat in North America, Europe, the Balkans, West and East Africa, and Asia.

In addition, Dr. Vendley coordinates the international activities and projects of Religions for Peace's Inter-religious Councils in 55 states around the world. He actively works in areas engaged in armed conflict to mobilize and equip religious communities to mediate and mitigate violent conflict and build a climate of peace. In Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sierra Leone, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Liberia, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka, Dr. Vendley has led negotiations that have helped to prevent conflicts from developing, to mediate peace among warring parties, and to rebuild societies in the aftermath of violence.

Under his leadership, *Religions for Peace* and its local affiliates engaged religious communities in collaborative work to assist the more than 12 million orphans of HIV/AIDS in Africa. Notable among the *Religions for Peace* developments during the tenure of Dr. Vendley's leadership is the first-ever Global Network of Religious Women's organisations. The network facilitates multireligious collaboration among religious women's organisations and mainstreams their leadership into Religions for Peace action programmes.

Dr. Vendley is a theologian and has served as a professor and dean in graduate schools of theology. He lectures frequently in academic, United Nations and NGO fora. He has been awarded numerous prizes for religion and human rights, and serves on the boards of a number of organisations ranging from the fine arts to those committed to peacebuilding. He holds a doctorate in systematic theology from Fordham University and a master's degree in religious studies from the Maryknoll School of Theology.

Mr. Stein Villumstad, Deputy Secretary General

Mr. Villumstad has extensive and distinguished experience in international development, conflict transformation, and human rights.

He served as regional representative for Norwegian Church Aid (NCA) in Eastern Africa, where he oversaw development activities in ten countries and managed five regional sub-offices. Previously, he held the position of assistant general secretary of Norwegian Church Aid managing the Department for Policy and Human Rights. Mr. Villumstad brings history of partnership with religious communities, many of whom he has worked with in conflict and post-conflict situations. He has been a close partner with the religious leaders in Sierra Leone and Ethiopia-Eritrea in their conflict transformation efforts. In 1995, Mr. Villumstad became the first co-chair of the Action by Churches Together (ACT International) Executive Committee, charged with coordinating church based emergency relief for more than one hundred organisations worldwide. Until 2006, he was a member of the World Council of Churches' (WCC) Commission on International Affairs. His writing includes the book, *Reconstruction of Africa: Perspectives from Within and Without* (2005), and a number of articles in periodicals and newspapers. In addition to his bachelors of education, Mr. Villumstad holds a masters of international administration from the School for International Training in Vermont, where his thesis focused on policy considerations for non-governmental organisations involved in humanitarian assistance during conflict and complex emergencies.

James Cairns, Director, Programmes

Since 2001 Mr. Cairns has overseen the organisation's involvement in all issues related to child and family welfare, particularly the impact of HIV/AIDS on children. He coordinates a range of programmes to engage religious communities in expanded efforts to address HIV/AIDS, including *Religions for Peace's* participation in the Hope for African Children Initiative, which is a partnership designed to provide resources to local community and faith-based organisations in Africa to support their work with children affected by HIV/AIDS.

He joined the staff of *Religions for Peace* in November 1997 as director of the Bosnia Project and later served as director of programmes in the International Secretariat. In Sarajevo, he coordinated *Religions for Peace's* efforts to build cooperation among religious communities to promote peace building and reconciliation in Bosnia-Herzegovina and throughout the Southeastern Europe region, including Kosovo. From 1995–97, he served as a mission specialist with the Presbyterian Church (USA), working in Malawi with the Public Affairs Committee, a local inter-religious organisation, to develop civic education and advocacy programmes on democracy and human rights.

Mr. Cairns holds master's degrees in international relations and theology from Yale University and a bachelor's degree in government from Harvard. He previously worked for the United Nations office of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and held internships with the Carter Center and the World Alliance of Reformed Churches in Geneva on human rights-related issues.

Lisa Locke, Senior Programme Officer for Programme Development

Ms. Locke is responsible for managing and supporting resource mobilisation efforts at Religions for Peace. With more than sixteen years of experience in non-profit management and fundraising, she has extensive experience in proposal development, strategic partnerships at the regional and international levels and public-private partnerships. She also conducted programme evaluations on international humanitarian aid projects. Ms. Locke is currently engaged in leadership and governance issues, strategic planning, resource allocation and human resource decisions. Her overseas work assignments include Turkey and India. She has a bachelor's degree in international affairs from The George Washington University and is completing a master's degree in organisational change management at the New School University.

Andrea Louie, Communications Manager

Ms. Louie is a writer, reporter, and communications professional with extensive experience in the arts and not-for-profit communities. She has served as a reporter for the Akron Beacon Journal in Ohio, publications director for The Asian American Writers' Workshop, and senior writer at the office of communications at Brooklyn College. She is co-editor of the anthology, *Topography of War: Asian American Essays* (The Asian American Writers' Workshop) and the author of a novel, *Moon Cakes* (Ballantine Books). She has received such awards as the Hannah S. and Samuel A. Cohn Memorial Foundation Fellowship, a New York Foundation for the Arts fellowship, and a Ludwig Volgelstein Foundation grant.

Ms. Louie serves as a steering committee member of the New York Insight Meditation Center, focusing on membership and diversity issues. She is also currently a member of the review panel in literature for the New York Council on the Arts and was a writer-in-residence for the National Book Foundation. She holds a bachelor's degree in news journalism from Kent State University and a graduate certificate in Asian studies from the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

Jacqueline Moturi Ogega, Director of the Women's Mobilisation Programme

Ms. Ogega is the Director of the Women's Programme at the World Conference of *Religions for Peace*. Prior to joining *Religions for Peace-International* in New York, Ms. Ogega served as the African Women's Project Director at Religions for Peace in Africa where she established the African Women of Faith Network, a fundamental infrastructure for building multi-religious cooperation for action in Africa. Ms. Ogega has extensive experience and skills in gender, peace-building and development programming. She has worked to mobilize financial and human resources to tap on the global resource of women as agents for transformation. Ms. Ogega worked previously in various positions as a lecturer in Gender and Development Studies at the University of Nairobi in Kenya, National Coordinator of the Gender and Development Programme of Caritas Kenya, and as a graduate teacher. Ms. Ogega's field experience blends well with her academic qualifications and interests; she holds a masters degree as well as a post-graduate diploma in gender and development, both from the University of Nairobi Kenya. She earned her bachelor's degree in education from Kenyatta University in Kenya. Ms. Ogega has international specialised training in peace-building and conflict transformation from the School for International Training (SIT) in Vermont, USA and from the Austrian Study Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution (ASPR).

Paul Sherbow, Senior Researcher

Mr. Sherbow has studied several world religions, specialising in Hinduism. He was senior Sanskrit editor for translations published by the *Bhaktivedanta Book Trust* in the 1970s, and his articles have been included in recent publications from Columbia University Press, Oxford University Press, and the *Journal of Vaisnava Studies*. He holds a bachelor's degree in Middle Eastern studies from Columbia University.

Deepika Singh, Associate Director of Programmes

Ms. Singh is responsible for managing and coordinating grant management; overseeing grant compliance and donor stewardship; developing and implementing a donor-outreach strategy for external audiences; supporting strategic programme development and project planning, implementation, and monitoring; and developing and editing proposals and reports. Previously, Ms. Singh was at the Environmental Health Project, a USAID-funded project in Nepal where she was responsible for developing operational plans, overseeing programme

implementation, and establishing linkages with local and international partners. She also served as editor-in-chief of *Strategic Studies*, published by the Nepal Institute for International and Strategic Studies in Kathmandu. She received a bachelor's degree with honors from Bede's College, in Shimla, India, a master's degree in English literature from the University of Dhaka in Bangladesh, and a master's of public administration from Pace University in New York.

**Rev. Kyoichi Sugino, Director of Inter-religious Council
Development and Field Coordination**

Rev. Sugino has been secuded from a lay Buddhist organisation in Japan, Rissho Kosei-kai (RKK), to *Religions for Peace*. He graduated from Rissho Kosei-kai Seminary in 1991 as a Dharma Teacher. In 1995 he worked at the International Secretariat of Amnesty International in London, then served as Policy Research Officer at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in Geneva between 1996 and 1998. He holds a master's degree in international law and international human rights law from the University of Wisconsin. Rev. Sugino currently coordinates Religions for Peace's regional offices in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and Europe and affiliated inter-religious councils in seventy countries. He has directly engaged in multi-religious diplomacy and negotiations in Sri Lanka, Iraq, and other conflict areas. His published works include: The "Non-Political and Humanitarian' Clause in UNHCR's Statute," *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Volume 17, Number 1 (UNHCR/Oxford University Press, 1998), and "Building Peace in Iraq: Inter-religious Council of Iraq," *United Nations Journal*, Vol.4, 2004.

STATEMENT BY ACRL ON VIOLENCE IN KENYA

**AFRICAN COUNCIL OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS STATEMENT ON
KENYA**

"GIVE PEACE AND DIALOGUE A CHANCE"

The leadership of the *Religions for Peace* African Council of Religious Leaders (ACRL) is profoundly saddened with the post-election violence that has gripped Kenya. The Council is distressed and deeply disturbed that the violence is intensifying, with more loss of lives reported by the hour. The tragic case of people burnt alive in a church is a matter of grave concern.

Having keenly followed the pre-election process and the period afterward, and recognising that whereas there may have been issues

of concern with regard to the credibility of the election results and tallying, the *Religions for Peace* ACRL strongly believes that peace and stability in Kenya is of paramount importance. The Council therefore urges all Kenyans to give peace and dialogue a chance and end the violence.

The *Religions for Peace* ACRL notes that the violent situation—which includes loss of lives, destruction of property, despair, and displacement of people—is fast disintegrating into one of the biggest humanitarian crisis in the history of Kenya. The Council appeals for humanitarian assistance to those areas and persons who have been affected.

The *Religions for Peace* ACRL calls for ALL religious traditions, members, and their religious leaders to mobilize their spiritual, moral, and social assets to end to the violence and care for the displaced, the wounded, and all those affected.

The Council fully recognises the maturity of Kenyan politicians and thus appeals to them to reach out to one another to seek political solutions to the current situation and to stand together to end violence and begin a process of national healing and reconciliation.

The *Religions for Peace* ACRL appeals to the religious leadership in Kenya to work together for peace, show leadership and give moral direction to a nation in crisis. This leadership is needed now.

SRI LANKA DELEGATION ISSUES STATEMENT FOR PEACE SENIOR RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF DIFFERENT FAITHS BUILD PEACE IN WAR-TORN SRI LANKA

Sri Lankan religious leaders in Jaffna. (*Daily Mirror*) (New York, 19 December 2007)—Senior international religious leaders of different faiths met in war-torn Jaffna, Sri Lanka, to identify peaceful means for ending Sri Lanka's violent ethnic conflict. The summit of religious leaders from seven countries was convened by *Religions for Peace*, the world's largest and most representative multi-religious coalition.

The senior religious leaders—representing Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, and Hindu faith traditions—convened on 11-14 December 2007 at the Public Library Auditorium in Jaffna, which is located in the highly volatile northern region of Sri Lanka. Making Jaffna the location of the summit was a symbolic expression of solidarity with all those who continue to live in situations of violence and despair due to the ongoing conflict.

The eminent leaders—representing Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Japan, Norway, Pakistan, South Africa and the United States—unanimously adopted a Jaffna Declaration of Religious Leaders. “As religious leaders with extensive experience in peace making in other parts of the world, we urge a renewed search for a non-violent solution to the ongoing conflict,” the statement said. “We do not accept that there can be victory through a military solution or that war can bring peace. On the contrary, as religious leaders, we believe that violence begets violence and hatred does not cease by hatred, but only by love.”

In the statement, the leaders called for an immediate cessation of hostilities and for increased development assistance to reconstruct the war-torn areas, empower local community groups, rebuild the livelihoods of war-affected people, and strengthen the national economy. The leaders also called for an immediate end to the use of claymore mines, artillery fire, and bombings that have targeted civilians; and to the forced conscription of children and adults into armed groups.

A keynote address at the Summit was given by Mr. Yasushi Akashi, Representative of the Government of Japan for Peace Building, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction of Sri Lanka. Mr. Akashi has served as an Under-Secretary in the United Nations for public information, disarmament, and humanitarian and emergency relief.

This gathering was one of a series of meetings designed to support the emergence of a Religions for Peace Inter-religious Council—Sri Lanka that would include senior religious leadership from throughout Sri Lanka—West, East, North and South. Future meetings are planned for Kandy and Trincomalee.

SENIOR RELIGIOUS LEADERS BUILD PEACE IN MIDDLE EAST, STRENGTHEN MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

Senior Religious Leaders Take Action to Build Peace in Middle East, Strengthen Muslim-Christian Dialogue, and Call for Participatory Governance in Burma.

(New York, 7 December 2007)—The Executive Committee of the *Religions for Peace* World Council—senior religious leaders representing all major faith traditions—meeting in Alexandria, Egypt, announced new multi-faith initiatives to address the world’s most urgent issues.

The religious leaders endorsed the just-announced *Religions for Peace* multi-religious Middle East Council of Religious Leaders and the recently formed Religions for Peace Inter-religious Council—Palestine;

offered *Religions for Peace* as a facilitator of the highly sensitive global Muslim-Christian dialogue; and continued its call for constructive dialogue and participatory governance in Burma, offering its service to the Government of Myanmar to assist in building a just peace. *Religions for Peace* is the world's largest and most representative multi-religious coalition.

"Through common action on three critical issues—common living in the Holy Land, Muslim-Christian dialogue, and the peaceful aspirations of the Burmese people for participatory governance—the world's faith communities are exercising moral leadership," said Dr. William F. Vendley, the *Religions for Peace* Secretary General.

Twelve members of the *Religions for Peace* Executive Committee forged consensus on profoundly relevant global issues at their year-end meeting on 5–6 December at the Library of Alexandria in Alexandria, Egypt.

"The actions taken by such diverse religious leaders demonstrate the power and relevance of multi-faith cooperation to address the most serious issues of the global community," said V. Rev. Leonid Kishkovsky, Moderator of *Religions for Peace*.

The Executive Committee released three official public statements regarding the Middle East, Muslim-Christian relations, and Burma; below are excerpts. [Full texts are attached below.]

Middle East

"New initiatives are now being taken to build peace in the Middle East. Concrete solutions to the issues of the borders of a future Palestinian State, the future of Jerusalem and the rights of return of Palestinians can and must be achieved."

"We, the Executive Committee of Religions for Peace, urge the Palestinian and Israeli political leaders to take bold steps to advance a just and durable peace," the first statement said. "We also urge that other states—those in the region and those assisting in the peace process, notably the United States—redouble their efforts to support a practical and principled peace process."

"While a political solution depends on a just resolution of the legitimate political aspirations of Jews and Arabs in the Holy Land," the first statement continued, "we, as religious leaders, also know that true peace and reconciliation will require the active participation of the religious communities."

“We are grateful... for the recent establishment of the Religions for Peace Inter-religious Council in Palestine,” the first statement concluded. “We are further deeply heartened by the commitment of religious leaders to establish a Religions for Peace Middle East Council of Religious Leaders, designed to facilitate multi-religious cooperation for peace across the region. We stand in solidarity with these multi-religious mechanisms and commit ourselves to help support and strengthen them to take concrete action to build peace.”

Muslim-Christian Dialogue

“The Executive Committee of Religions for Peace, meeting in Alexandria on 5-6 December, 2007, welcomes the open letter to Christian leaders, ‘A Common Word Between You and Us,’ issued on 11 October 2007 by 138 Muslim leaders,” the second statement said. “The letter comes at a crucial time for Christian-Muslim relations and represents a positive and constructive spirit.”

“The Muslim leaders’ letter... explores the scriptures that are holy to Islam and Christianity, in order to emphasise similarities in the understanding of love for God and love for fellow human beings,” the statement said. “These convictions inspire values that are also deeply held and widely shared by many other great religious traditions: the responsibility to care for all people and to work for peace, justice, righteousness and protection of the environment. While our faiths remain genuinely diverse, a coalition of cooperation can and should be built on this convergence of moral commitment.”

“Mindful that Christian and Muslim leaders are the primary subjects of the dialogue called for in the letter, the Executive Committee of Religions for Peace offers itself as a facilitator of processes which build on the letter and the responses to it and which further enhance dialogue and common action.”

Burma

“We view with hope the engagement by the government of Myanmar with the United Nations Secretary General’s Special Advisor to Myanmar, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in Myanmar, and with Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the Nobel laureate and leader of the National League for Democracy,” the third statement said. “These preliminary steps, however, must become sustained engagement for peace.”

“We urge the United Nations and regional mechanisms, such as ASEAN, to use all tools at their disposal to encourage meaningful,

peaceful dialogue between the government and all sectors of society in Burma.”

“We, the Executive Committee of Religions for Peace, offer our good offices to assist these organisations and the government of Myanmar in taking the steps needed to achieve a just peace,” the statement concluded.

On 19 November 2007, a multi-religious delegation from Religions for Peace delivered to the ASEAN Chair in Singapore more than 3,000 messages of support for the Buddhist monks of Burma from people of different faiths in almost a hundred countries.

THE WORLD'S RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES CALL FOR PEACEFUL DIALOGUE AND PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE IN BURMA

CAMPAIGN FOR BURMA MESSAGES DELIVERED

— Religions for Peace *Delivers 3,000 Messages of Support for Buddhist Monks of Burma from People of Different Faiths*

— *Multi-faith Delegation of Religious Leaders Meet with ASEAN Chair*

Delivering the messages (New York, 19 November 2007)— Representatives of *Religions for Peace*, the world's largest and most representative multi-religious coalition, delivered to the ASEAN Chair in Singapore more than 3,000 messages of support for the Buddhist monks of Burma from people of different faiths in almost a hundred countries.

A *Religions for Peace* delegation representing the world's faith traditions met with Singaporean Minister of State for Community Development, Youth and Sports, Mrs. Yu-Foo Yee Shoon, on Saturday in Singapore. Singapore is the current Chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which seeks to promote economic development and advance peace in the region. ASEAN, of which Myanmar is a member, is holding its thirteenth summit in Singapore through 22 November 2007.

The *Religions for Peace* delegation of Taoist, Christian, and Buddhist religious leaders included Rev. Master Lee Zhiwang, Co-President of the Religions for Peace World Council and President of the Taoist Mission in Singapore; Brother Michael Broughton, Area Director, De La Salle Brothers and President of St. Joseph's Institution and member of the Singapore Inter-religious Organisation; Mr. Lawrence Chong, Moderator of the Religions for Peace Asian Inter-religious Youth

Network; and Rev. Kyoichi Sugino, Director for Inter-Religious Council Development and Coordination at *Religions for Peace–International*.

The messages of support from around the world were the result of a global campaign launched by the *Religions for Peace* network in response to the violent crackdown on peaceful protesters by the Myanmar authorities in September. The multi-religious appeals, addressed to Myanmar Senior General Than Shwe, condemned the violence and urged the government of Myanmar to release detained protesters and enter into peaceful dialogue with the country's religious communities and other groups. Signatories to the Burma appeal include senior religious leaders, inter-religious groups, networks of women of faith and youth groups, and individuals of different faiths from around the globe. Religious communities of the *Religions for Peace* global network have also issued public statements, held demonstrations and prayer vigils in support of the religious communities of Burma.

Dr. William F. Vendley, Secretary General of *Religions for Peace*, issued the following statement accompanying the messages of support:

“In a powerful demonstration of multi-religious cooperation, people of different faiths, their religious communities, and religious leaders are speaking out in support of the people of Burma and their religious communities.

Religions for Peace profoundly objects to the way the military government in Burma responded to peaceful protests. Religions for Peace and the world's faith communities are deeply concerned about the fate and well-being of the Buddhist monks targeted by the military government in Burma.

Any act against the religious communities of Burma is an act against all of the world's faith communities.

Religions for Peace calls upon the government of Myanmar to: eschew violence; release all those arrested as a result of the recent protests; immediately identify the location and condition of all detained protesters, and provide them with humanitarian assistance through the Red Cross and the Red Crescent; restore and respect the sanctity of religious orders and their places of worship; release all political prisoners; and engage in peaceful dialogue with Burma's religious communities and other groups to develop participatory governance.

The international community must work together urgently to ensure a peaceful outcome in Burma. Countries which are in close relationship with Burma should use their influence with the Myanmar authorities

to begin the long process toward healing and allowing the people of Burma to freely choose their future.

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the United Nations Security Council, and regional mechanisms, such as ASEAN, should use all tools at their disposal to encourage meaningful, peaceful dialogue between the military and all sectors of Burmese society, including the Buddhist religious community, all ethnic groups, and the opposition National League for Democracy.”

Rev. Kyoichi Sugino, in the presentation of the petitions to Minister Yu-Foo, encouraged the ASEAN-member governments to work together with Religions for Peace to help sustain dialogue regarding Burma through multi-religious channels.



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**CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION, GLOBAL
CHALLENGES AND WOMEN ISSUES:
INTERFAITH FOR HEALING**

CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION**Chaldean girl lighting candles in Baghdad, Iraq**

Since the mid-1990s, the Conflict Transformation programme operates around the world to encourage the cooperation of religious communities in response to violent conflict. When different religious communities work together, they possess an enormous capacity to promote peace. Religious leaders are also uniquely positioned to use their moral stature and influence to encourage mutual understanding within their communities. Religious communities are familiar and trusted institutions that may provide social cohesion and spiritual support, helping people face the most agonizing pain and suffering and leading them to forgive the unforgivable.

Inter-religious councils and groups formed and supported by *Religions for Peace* have played key roles transforming conflict and rebuilding peaceful societies in the Balkans, West Africa and the Middle East. In the past decade, *Religions for Peace* has engaged its leadership of prominent international religious figures to bring together diverse Bosnian religious leaders in the aftermath of civil war and to support multi-religious peacebuilding efforts in West Africa. Currently, *Religions for Peace* is also facilitating emerging efforts for peacebuilding collaboration among religious leaders in Sri Lanka, Iraq, Sudan, and the Korean Peninsula.

To date much of *Religions for Peace's* conflict transformation and peacebuilding programming has centered on sub-Saharan Africa, where its network of inter-religious councils and groups is the most developed. In West Africa and the Great Lakes region of Africa *Religions for Peace*

has facilitated multi-religious collaborations working to prevent conflicts from developing, to mediate peace negotiations among warring parties, and to rebuild peaceful societies in the aftermath of violence.

The priority objectives of the Conflict Transformation programme are:

- To deepen interfaith commitments to dialogue and cooperation for promoting peace.
- To equip existing inter-religious councils (IRCs) with relevant knowledge and skills in order to prevent and mediate violent conflicts.
- To strengthen the delivery capacity of the IRCs in the implementation of concrete responses to conflict situations.
- To mobilize and equip religious communities to build new IRCs in conflict areas to serve as a mechanism for peaceful change.
- To strengthen the participation and leadership of women of faith in their respective IRC structures and initiatives.
- To facilitate active sub-regional collaboration among religious leaders and IRCs for the advancement of peace, stability and security.

INITIATIVES

Forging multi-faith alliances The World Conference of *Religions for Peace* is the largest international coalition of representatives from the world's great religions who are dedicated to achieving peace. Respecting cultural differences while celebrating our common humanity, *Religions for Peace* is active on every continent and in some of the most troubled places on earth, creating multi-religious partnerships that mobilize the moral and social resources of religious people to address their shared problems.

Religious communities are, without question, the largest and best-organised civil institutions in the world today, claiming the allegiance of billions of believers and bridging the divides of race, class, and nationality. They are uniquely equipped to meet the challenges of our time: resolving conflicts, caring for the sick and needy, and promoting peaceful co-existence among all peoples.

CAMPAIGN FOR BURMA

Monks outside embassy, Bangkok. *Religions for Peace* has launched a global appeal in support of the Buddhist monks in Burma, condemning violence and calling for dialogue.

We urge you to take action!

Our entire global movement can participate in this appeal by sending an email to Myanmar Senior General Than Shwe via the *Religions for Peace* online campaign for Burma.

Three actions are important:

1. Sign the appeal. [*You may download suggested text below, which may be copied and pasted onto an email.*]
2. Send the email to: ReligionsforPeaceBurma@wcrp.org.
3. Pass on this request to other members of the *Religions for Peace* family and others who might join us in this campaign.

Religions for Peace will compile the emails and deliver them to the military government in Burma. No time is more urgent for all communities of faith to take common action for peace.

There is more that you can do:

1. Seek a meeting with—or write to—representatives of the government of Myanmar to refrain from violence, release any detained protesters, and enter into peaceful dialogue.
2. Encourage your own government to urge the Myanmar government on these same points.
3. Make an appeal within your own community, referring to your leadership in *Religions for Peace*.
4. Organize a multi-religious peace vigil or other public event.

Kindly share with us any actions you take, as these can strengthen the solidarity so important to our mission.

SUDAN

On December 4–9, 2005, the governing board of the African Council of Religious Leaders (ACRL), a pan-African multi-religious institution comprised senior religious leaders, paid a solidarity visit to Khartoum, Sudan to promote peace and reconciliation throughout the region.

Locally hosted by the Inter-religious Council of Southern Sudan and Munazzamat Al-Dawa Al-Islamia (Islamic Call Organisation), the visit provided an opportunity for peace advocates to offer public support in solidarity with religious leaders of Sudan and to take initial steps towards organising a united moral voice of distinguished African religious leaders from across all faiths in support of peace, reconciliation and religious tolerance.

The governing board visited Sudanese government, religious and academic institutions and faith-based organisations involved in peace and development to promote constructive dialogue between communities and to exchange best practice guidelines regarding effective peacebuilding measures and interventions. Participants discussed concrete strategies for advancing the peace process through mediation and mitigation of present violence.

ISRAEL

Art seminar *Religions for Peace*, in partnership with the Inter-religious Coordinating Council in Israel (ICCI), received a significant grant from The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to support Kedem, a highly successful ongoing inter-religious reconciliation programme in Israel.

Kedem—initiated in 2003 and now entering its fourth year of operation—brings together local leaders of Israel’s Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities over an extended period of time to foster dialogue and collaboration around joint action projects. Through the dialogues, study days, seminars, and action projects, participants develop strong personal relationships, build trust, and learn about each other’s religions in meaningful ways with an ultimate goal of empowering religious leaders to develop new ways to become voices for peace and reconciliation on the local level. For the past three years, Kedem has been funded primarily by grants from a special fund of the German government, which has financed conflict resolution programmes within Israel.

Currently, twenty Kedem members—a group of Israeli Jewish, Muslim, and Christian local grass-roots religious leaders—are working together to address the core issues of the conflict and plan local action projects designed to have a tangible impact on their own communities.

The partnership between *Religions for Peace* and ICCI represents a unique arrangement designed to bring together the strong conflict transformation experience of *Religions for Peace* and the local experience and insight of ICCI.

In 2001, ICCI initiated an innovative programme aimed at increasing the unique role for women in resolving the crisis in relations between Muslim and Christian Palestinians and Jewish Israelis. In June 2005, as a culmination of three years of active dialogue, the group published a book, *Women of the Book: A Jerusalem Collage*, which includes honest reflections by the participants about their dialogue experiences and

about some of the dilemmas raised by living in ongoing conflict. The work is a fascinating mosaic about the interwoven lives and identities of a group of “everyday” Jerusalem women, committed to sharing their present and their future and creating a better world for the next generation.

Women of the Book has already proven itself to be a powerful tool for helping other people move beyond their fear and distrust. Building on the experiences of this first women’s dialogue group, ICCI is now implementing further programming in order to capitalize on the momentum already created and to form a continuum of wider impact. While the first programme described briefly above serves as a complete programme in and of itself, the primary focus of our new dialogue group lies with the future of Jerusalem—the very heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Starting in May 2006 the programme has brought together a new group of leading women to discuss the future of Jerusalem both on a personal and a political level and create and publish a shared “vision” to serve as the platform for an alternative to the current limited political thinking. By raising their voices, the women will create legitimate space in the public sphere in both societies. Based on this joint vision, the women will work together to create grassroots change in their respective Jerusalem communities.

FAITH AND ETHICS NETWORK OF THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT (FENICC)

A song of solidarity *Religions for Peace* hosted an experts’ meeting, “African Faith-Based Communities Advancing Justice and Reconciliation in Relation to the International Criminal Court.” The 2005 gathering was convened by the Steering Committee of the Faith and Ethics Network of the International Criminal Court (FENICC), a coalition of religious, ethics and interfaith organisations working to promote awareness of the International Criminal Court among their communities. *Religions for Peace*, an international steering committee member of FENICC, has taken on a key role in this endeavor.

The gathering also deepened their commitment toward education, outreach, and action around the ICC and strengthened their capacity to achieve these goals by establishing the African Faith-Based Network for the ICC, to serve as a conduit for the exchange of pertinent information, experiences and initiatives.

As an outcome of the meeting, FENICC created an outreach campaign in Africa to engage religious communities in justice and reconciliation processes. To this end, FENICC created the *African Faith-*

Based Communities Advancing Justice and Reconciliation in Relation to the International Criminal Court training manual.

The manual, which will also be translated in French, explains the ICC mandate and mission within the broader context of justice and reconciliation to ensure that religious practitioners decide to support the complementary role of the ICC. This also promotes effective relationship development between religious leaders, faith-based organisations and the ICC that is characterised by critical dialogue. In this way the ICC will help to deliver justice and hope for the future.

SOUTH EAST EUROPE

As Bosnia and Kosovo immerse themselves in the process of reconstruction and the Balkans strive for integration into the European Union, religious communities throughout the region have joined forces to assist in the painstaking process of reconciliation, development, and stability. Since 1996, *Religions for Peace* has worked with senior religious leaders and officials in South East Europe's main religious communities—Islamic, Serbian Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Jewish—to facilitate and support their efforts at cooperation and peace building.

During the Bosnian conflict, *Religions for Peace* representatives made several visits to the region to meet religious leaders and assist in joint dialogues. A similar process was beginning in Kosovo when the Serb military's campaign of mass expulsions provoked the NATO bombing campaign in the spring of 1999. Once this conflict ended, *Religions for Peace* helped religious leaders from Islamic, Orthodox and Catholic communities in Kosovo resume their discussions and commence work to build a more civil society. *Religions for Peace* has expanded its work to include Macedonia, Albania and Serbia and Montenegro, where initial steps to form inter-religious councils have taken place.

CENTRAL AFRICA

A call to action the countries of the Great Lakes Region of Africa are faced with a daunting range of interconnected challenges, including a need for justice and reconciliation, armed conflicts that either continue unchecked or threaten to resurface, the crises of refugees and internally displaced people, tenuously stable governments, and tensions that cross the borders of countries, religions, and ethnicities. The governments, both local and national, are unable or at times unwilling to address all of these challenges and certainly cannot do so alone. Resources are often scarce or only intermittently available.

Religions for Peace's Conflict Transformation programme in the region began in June 2002 at the request of religious leaders in Burundi and DR Congo and representatives of national inter-religious groups in Rwanda and Uganda. Since that time, the inter-religious councils have become self-sustaining advocates and activists for peace. Women of faith have been involved in all trainings and are taking an increasingly active role in the IRCs' conflict programmes.

Religious leaders and communities, often among the more influential and trusted local groups, have already been taking an active and important role in reconciliation processes and the building of confidence and trust between communities. They have collaborated to advance the Gacaca process in Rwanda, engaged in interfaith solidarity visits to conflict-torn regions of DR Congo, addressed the post-trauma needs of their communities, and taken many other steps to build peace.

Religions for Peace has facilitated trauma healing trainings with inter-religious councils (IRCs) in Rwanda and DR Congo and participating religious leaders are now using those trauma healing techniques in their own communities. In Uganda, an advocacy project focusing on the conflict in the South has led to more understanding of the impact of the conflict in the North, especially on the part of influential religious leaders. In Burundi, the very existence of an IRC and its cooperative actions have reduced stereotyping between the constituent communities and provided a model for unity and reconciliation.

The IRCs continue to be active agents in improving security in their communities, building confidence between groups and across borders, advancing justice and reconciliation and working to prevent further conflict.

The Inter-religious Council of Uganda's peacebuilding programme activities include training the Peace and Conflict Resolution Committee to work on advocacy and media, completing a strategic-planning workshop, and implementing a strong advocacy programme to end the violent conflict.

Religions for Peace participated in an advocacy workshop in Gulu with religious leaders from Northern Uganda and Southern Sudan. The 2004 workshop allowed the leaders to share experiences and perceptions of conflict in order to shape a joint advocacy strategy and frame practical ways of strengthening solidarity between the two communities. The workshop participants noted that the 18-year conflict has resulted in the loss of lives, abduction and use of children as

soldiers, breakdown of social and moral fabric, displacement of civilians, sexual violence, growing rate of HIV/AIDS infection, proliferation of small arms and light weapons in the region, and increased ethnic tensions within Uganda and Sudan. The participants called for enhanced, coordinated and effective regional and international responses to resolving the conflict in Northern Uganda, and they appealed to the warring parties to pursue a peaceful political solution to the conflict.

WEST AFRICA

Food distribution in West Africa, senior religious leaders have been working cooperatively at the national and regional level to prevent conflicts from developing, to mediate peace negotiations among warring parties, and to rebuild peaceful societies in the aftermath of violence. These multi-religious collaborations have led to the formation of inter-religious councils – independent, self-led bodies – that continue to engage in peacebuilding activities within their societies.

Recognising the need to act effectively to promote peace and development across borders, the inter-religious council (IRC) leaders formed a sub-regional mechanism to coordinate their actions and share critical information. The West Africa Inter-religious Coordinating Council (WAIRCC), formed in 2003, convenes regularly to participate in training sessions, formulate plans, and implement concrete action and advocacy initiatives.

Religions for Peace has supported multi-religious collaboration in West Africa since 1996 when it worked in partnership with the IRC of Sierra Leone on negotiations that led to the signing of the Lome Peace Accord. Since 2001, *Religions for Peace* has facilitated regional-level consultations and training exercises and provided national level capacity building and organisational development. Since its formation, the IRCSL made significant contributions to the peace process by negotiating the release of more than 50 hostages, some of whom were child soldiers.

In 1999, *Religions for Peace* linked with an established interfaith council in Liberia, creating the IRCL. As one of the significant actors, the Council brokered the August 2003 Comprehensive Peace Accord in Accra, Ghana, thus positively transforming the crisis in Liberia.

In 2001 Guinea requested the assistance of *Religions for Peace* to formalize the IRC G. Since its establishment, they have remained constructively engaged in collaboration with other local actors in conflict prevention and sustainable peace building initiatives.

In response to the ongoing crises in Cote d'Ivoire, religious leaders requested *Religions for Peace* to assist in strengthening their multireligious body, the NFR-CI, to advocate for positive change and implement plans formulated for a peaceful solution to the present situation.

Integrating women and youth into the decision-making process at all levels is a concurrent initiative throughout the region. Recently, the Women's Desk of the IRC of Liberia was awarded the inaugural Greeley Prize in recognition of their groundbreaking efforts in making women part of the peacebuilding process in war-torn West Africa.

ADVOCACY FOR CHILDREN

Working in Kenya *Religions for Peace* has joined a coalition of organisations in an extraordinary initiative that will provide vital assistance to millions of African children orphaned by AIDS. The Hope for African Children Initiative confronts on a pan-African scale, enormous challenges:

- The increased risk of malnutrition, illness, abuse and sexual exploitation faced by orphans;
- The financial burden to care for sick family members, seek work, or leave school; and
- The stigma and discrimination often associated with HIV and AIDS.

Religions for Peace is collaborating with CARE, Network of African People Living with HIV/AIDS (NAP+), PLAN International, Save the Children, World Vision, and the Society for Women and AIDS in Africa to achieve far more than any other one of them could on its own.

Every religious tradition emphasises the beauty, sanctity, and value of the child, and religious people around the world have recognised the need to take immediate action in response to these great challenges. Together with governments, charities, and others, they are working to make the world a safer, more secure place for all our children.

The programme is currently operating or in startup in ten African countries:

- Kenya: Inter-religious Council of Kenya (IRCK)
- Uganda: The Inter-Religious Council of Uganda
- Malawi: Public Affairs Committee (PAC)
- Mozambique: Council of Religions of Mozambique (COREM)

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- Zambia: Zambia Interfaith Networking Group on HIV/AIDS (ZINGO)
 - Tanzania: Religions for Peace Tanzania
 - Ghana: Ghana Conference of *Religions for Peace*
 - Ethiopia: Ethiopian Interfaith Development Dialogue and Action (EIFDDA)
 - Senegal: National Alliance of Religions Against AIDS
 - Cameroon: Religions for Peace—Cameroon.

HOPE FOR AFRICAN CHILDREN INITIATIVE

Religions for Peace has joined a coalition of organisations in an extraordinary initiative that provides vital assistance to millions of African children orphaned by AIDS. The Hope for African Children Initiative is confronting, on a pan-African scale, challenges such as the increased risk of malnutrition, illness, abuse and sexual exploitation faced by orphans; the high costs of caring for sick family members that often fall upon children, who are left impoverished or forced to work rather than attend school; the stigma and discrimination often associated with HIV and AIDS, which often deprives children of basic social services and even the support of their extended families; the lack of home-based care for sick parents, insufficient medical responses to the opportunistic infections that follow the onset of AIDS, and the high percentage of babies who contract HIV from their mothers.

Responding to a crisis of such enormous scale, the Initiative allows each of the partner organisations—*Religions for Peace* as well as CARE, Network of African People Living with HIV/AIDS (NAP+), PLAN International, Save the Children, World Vision, and the Society for Women and AIDS in Africa to achieve far more than any other one of them could on its own.

TIDZUKE WOMEN'S GROUP

Currently, the Tidzuke Women's Group has 60 active volunteers who are counseling and providing home-based care to people living with HIV/AIDS. In addition, they grow nutritional foods for all community members on government-provided land. Over 60 chronically ill patients, one third of whom are infected with HIV/AIDS, receive these services. The volunteers also support local orphans with schoolbooks, uniforms, educational seminars and vocational skills such as tailoring and carpentry.

In the past year, the group expanded its services by creating a dairy center and four new nursery schools. The distribution of young milk calves permitted ten of the groups to become monetarily self-reliant through the sale of milk and also provided the chronically-ill with much needed nutrition. The new nursery schools support the children of the community, advance educational efforts for the orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) and are self-funded through small tuition payments.

The Tidzuke Women's Group is now focused on capacity building and advocacy activities, specifically, financial and management training for religious and traditional leaders and care-givers. The group has high aspirations for the future, including an expansion of their dairy programme and the initiation of a revolving loan programme for people living with HIV/AIDS. The capacity building activities have strengthened their ability to achieve these new organisational goals.

SOUTH ASIA INTER-RELIGIOUS COUNCIL (SAIRC) ON HIV/AIDS

Religions for Peace, in partnership with UNICEF, facilitated the inaugural meeting of the South Asia Inter-religious Council (SAIRC) on HIV/AIDS in 2004. Representing the many and diverse religions from the region, these senior religious leaders met to discuss how to mobilize communities in South Asia to confront HIV/AIDS.

Currently, South Asia is home to more than 5.2 million people living with HIV/AIDS and almost one-fourth of them are children and young people under the age of 25. Experts have expressed concern that the pandemic may begin to move into general populations, where young people and women, due to limited access to services and lack of knowledge, are extremely vulnerable to infection.

Over the next year, SAIRC plans to form and strengthen national inter-religious councils around the issue of HIV/AIDS and to review current training programmes for religious leaders and educators to ensure adequate information on HIV/AIDS prevention, care and support. In addition, each of the religious leaders committed to mobilising public opinion to reduce and eliminate HIV/AIDS related stigma and discrimination, and to engage women religious leaders and young people within their communities around the issue of HIV/AIDS.

AFRICAN COUNCIL OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS

Senior religious leaders, men and women, have gathered from across Africa to form the first continental, inter-religious leaders council.

The initial meeting was opened by H.E. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. President Obasanjo gave his full support to the Council and stressed that religion and politics are complementary spheres of public life and that religious leaders need to address both the spiritual and physical needs of people.

INITIATIVES

- Overview
- Campaign for Burma
- Conflict Transformation
- Advocacy for Children
- Hope for African Children Initiative
- Tidzuke Women's Group
- SAIRC on HIV/AIDS
- African Council of Religious Leaders
- Pan-African Task Force
- Global Women of Faith Network
- Global Youth Network
- Sustainable Development
- Disarmament and Security
- Human Rights
- Peace Education

PAN-AFRICAN TASK FORCE

The Task Force serves as the planning and coordination instrument for *Religions for Peace* on HIV / AIDS and OVC issues. One-half of the members are women from religious communities around Africa who are recognised for their experience as practitioners dealing directly with issues related to the impact of HIV/AIDS on children. They are joined by representatives of NGOs with strong religious affiliations such as the Salvation Army, the Islamic Relief Agency, Norwegian Church Aid, and Caritas. Meetings held are opportunities for members to share information on current programmes, to advise *Religions for Peace* on programme strategies, and to provide technical support and advice to the emerging African Religious Leaders Council.

GLOBAL WOMEN OF FAITH NETWORK

At the World Assembly, Kyoto, 2006

Religions for Peace recognises that women of faith around the world have enormous capacities for leadership and effective action in all areas of human development.

The Women's Mobilisation Programme was established in 1998 to advance the role of religious women in international development, peace-making and post-conflict reconstruction. The two overarching aims of the programme are to ensure that the concerns and perspectives of women are mainstreamed in all of Religions for Peace's programming and to build the capacity of religious women of faith organisations to engage in peace building and sustainable development.

In 2001, the programme launched the first-ever Global Network of Women of Faith. The growing network serves as an increasingly valuable resource for women of all faiths to communicate and learn from each other and to build bridges between faith-based organisations and major international agencies. At present, the Global Network includes more than 1,000 Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Indigenous, Sikh and Zoroastrian religious women's organisations. Some organisations in the network have a membership as large as 5,000 groups, while others have less than five. More recently, the programme inaugurated four regional women of faith sub-networks in Africa, South East Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Southeast Asia.

Today, the Women's Mobilisation Programme continues to convene and train women religious leaders and representatives at local, national, regional and global levels. True to its mission, Religions for Peace is building the capacity of women of faith to assume increasingly visible leadership roles in transforming conflict, promoting peace, and advancing sustainable development. At the Women's Assembly in Kyoto, Japan, in August 2006, 400 participants from sixty-five countries adopted a Declaration, "Women of faith make available strength and hope when all seems hopeless."

INITIATIVES

- Overview
- Campaign for Burma
- Conflict Transformation
- Advocacy for Children
- Global Women of Faith Network
- Plan of Action 2007-2011
- Kyoto Women's Assembly
- European Women of Faith Network
- African Women of Faith Network
- Latin American and Caribbean Women of Faith Network

- Asian Women of Faith Network
- North American Women of Faith Network
- Women's Mobilisation Programme Reports
- Global Youth Network
- Sustainable Development
- Disarmament and Security
- Human Rights
- Peace Education

RELIGIONS FOR PEACE GLOBAL WOMEN OF FAITH NETWORK PLAN OF ACTION 2007-2011

Common action for peace is the hallmark of *Religions for Peace*, and women of faith are at its center. The Global Women of Faith Network Plan of Action 2007–2011 is a necessary framework for strengthening the capacities of the Global Women of Faith Network and other religious communities to advance peace and promote just and harmonious societies. The Plan identifies four priority themes for multi-religious action:

1. Network Building

Network building is a crosscutting priority fundamental to the overall implementation of the Plan of Action. Women of faith possess valuable experiences and resources that, when mobilised, can strengthen community-based responses for peace and human development. Building the Global Women of Faith Network will enable women of faith to:

- Share information, resources and capabilities.
- Strengthen and expand the unique leadership of religious women and their organisations.
- Facilitate multi-religious mobilisation, communication and social action among women of faith working in different countries, locations, and regions.
- Fortify the operation and management of the network locally, regionally, and globally.

2. Peace and Security

Religions for Peace recognises religious women's organisations and their ability to mobilize their grassroots and broad social networks as key to building peace and advancing shared security. The Plan of Action affirms that women of faith have unique strengths in facilitating

peace-building and acting as both mediators and advocates. It seeks to promote the peace-building approaches by women of faith that are grounded in faith values, relationship building, community mobilisation, and human rights.

The plan acknowledges international instruments including recommendations in the UN Security Council Resolution and the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as the United Nations' document, "An Agenda for Peace." Like religion, these international instruments are complementary in emphasising the centrality of women in addressing issues of peace and security at all levels.

3. Women of Faith as Agents of Social Transformation

In today's polarized world where armed conflict, terrorism, and extremism have escalated, destroying the fabric of society and jeopardizing human security and development, it is necessary to affirm that women of faith play pivotal roles in averting violence and transforming conflicts. The Plan of Action aims to strengthen the role of religious women as agents of conflict transformation and to document good practices on the roles and resources of women of faith in conflict transformation.

4. Gender, Poverty, and Health

Gender is a determinant of health and well-being. Social, cultural, and economic violence and prejudices directly affect women's health, and the tremendous inequalities associated with human poverty affect women disproportionately. The Plan of Action acknowledges that religions can profoundly influence the status, role, and life opportunities of women. The focus will be to:

- Build an ongoing multi-religious capacity to promote gender equality and women's empowerment.
- Deepen awareness and understanding on the intrinsic linkages among gender, poverty, and health.
- Strengthen the capacity of national inter-religious councils and groups in gender analysis and mainstreaming.

KYOTO WOMEN'S ASSEMBLY

From 24-25 August 2006, 400 religious women leaders from 65 countries of the world and from the world's major faith traditions gathered in Kyoto, Japan for *Religions for Peace Women's Assembly* from 24-25 August 2006.

This Women's Assembly provided a unique opportunity to women of faith to prepare for *Religions for Peace* Eighth World Assembly that began two days later. The Women's Assembly, with the theme "Women of Faith: Assembling for Action," was the world's largest and most diverse multi-religious gathering that brought together more than four hundred women of faith.

The delegates were selected representatives of the regional and national women of faith networks and inter-religious councils, women of faith with senior representative positions in religious communities, senior women representatives of the UN, inter-governmental, faith-based and non-governmental organisations and experts and scholars who specialize in women and religion.

The delegates were unanimous in positively acknowledging *Religions for Peace's* efforts to build a strong women of faith network that is also mainstreamed into multi-religious structures and initiatives.

MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE WOMEN'S ASSEMBLY

The overall purpose of the Women's Assembly was to provide an opportunity for women to reflect on *Religions for Peace* Eighth World Assembly, in which women of faith constituted 35 per cent of the delegates. The Women's Assembly prepared the women of faith to take an active role in the main Assembly by reflecting on the Assembly Theme 'Confronting Violence and Advancing Shared Security' from a gender perspective.

The women of faith discussed gender realities and perspectives relating to the three Assembly Commission themes on transforming conflict, building peace, and advancing sustainable development, and their recommendations were reported at the main Assembly commission plenary. The women of faith displayed their unity through collective planning and reflection and made key recommendations and commitments in the Declaration that was presented at the Main Assembly. The women of faith re-claimed their voice, increased their visibility as religious leaders and attained over 34 per cent in the leadership of *Religions for Peace* World Council. Other objectives of the Women's Assembly were to:

- Provide a platform for women of faith to congregate and share knowledge and information.
- Identify key ways to expand and strengthen networking among women of different religions as well as mainstream the Network within multi-religious structures and programmes.

- Increase the visibility of the Global Women of Faith Network of Religions for Peace and create linkages and partnerships with local and international agencies.
- Identify the specificity of the concerns of women of faith with respect to building peace, transforming conflict and advancing sustainable development.
- Outline concrete recommendations and guidelines for action for Religions for Peace to respond to these concerns in the next 5 years.

Common Concerns for Action

During plenary and working group discussions, panelists and delegates re-affirmed that women of faith across the world are often in the frontlines working as committed peace builders, reconciliation brokers and activists. Women of faith possess valuable community-based experiences and resources based on proven track records of effective strategies and community-based responses to peace and development.

However, despite the multiple and inalienable roles of women of faith, discussions in plenary and working groups sessions unveiled the following key challenges and constraints faced by women of faith in building peace, transforming conflict and advancing sustainable development:

- Human rights abuses, impunity and escalation of all forms of violence against women.
- The brutal and devastating impacts of armed conflicts in many parts of the world.
- Ever increasing incidences of HIV and AIDS and its link to gender violence and discrimination.
- Poverty, economic injustices and impoverishment among vulnerable groups of women and girls including migrant and refugee women, child mothers, female and child-headed households.
- Marginalisation of religious women in faith-based communities and institutions as a key concern and challenge in advancing shared security.
- Invisibility of the structures, networks, roles and leadership by women of faith to build peace, transform conflict and advance sustainable development.

- Violence against children. The delegates acknowledged that these areas of concern were also areas of influence for women of faith, through multi-religious networking that provides unique opportunities and a collective voice to issues. They re-committed to build a bold and persistent women of faith voice for confronting violence and advancing shared security.

Recommendations and Commitments

Awakened by a clear need to stimulate a new level of commitment among faith-based organisations, religious institutions, UN agencies, Civil society movements and governmental organisations in working with women of faith, the delegates made the following recommendations and commitments:

Called on Religious Leaders and Communities to:

- Ensure the human rights of women and girls.
- Identify sources of Gender-Based Violence, prevent violence and actively protect women and girls from all forms of violence.
- Promote human rights advocacy and interfaith solidarity for victims and survivors of violence.
- Create and strengthen a faith knowledge-base that re-affirms religious principles on the dignity of women.
- Monitor the implementation of national, regional and International commitments and protocols that protect the security of women, including CEDAW, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and UN Millennium Development Goals.
- Ensure the leadership and participation of women of faith in multi-religious cooperation for peace.

Called on *Religions for Peace* to:

- Facilitate networking and information sharing and promote dialogue and cooperation among women and men of different faiths.
- Generate and promote local knowledge, information and skills at local, grassroots, national, regional and international networking levels in conferences and consultations.
- Create greater visibility of the potential and inalienable roles of women of faith to transform conflict, build peace and advance sustainable development.
- Build a databank of religious women's organisations and activities and be a contact point for needs and information on faith-based women's organisations.

- Coordinate Information gathering, documentation and dissemination.
- Develop effective management of religion and gender-based knowledge so as to support faith-based organisations with tools and guides in efforts to mainstream women of faith into multi-religious policies and programmes.
- Enhance the capacities of religious leaders and provide opportunities for training and advocacy on needs-based thematic areas by context and region.
- Create linkages and strengthen partnership and alliances among Women of faith networks with UN agencies, other faith-based organisations, governments and civil society organisations and groups.

Called on UN agencies, development and peace-building organisations, other faith-based organisations and civil society to:

- Create and strengthen linkages and alliances with women of faith networks
- Leverage resources, financial, material and informational, to build capacities of women of faith networks at local, national, regional and international levels

Called on themselves as women of faith to:

- Forge partnerships and create alliances with other secular women's networks, UN agencies, development and peace-building organisations and other civil society organisations
- Reclaim their voice and fundamental roles as religious leaders.

Strengthen inter-religious networking.

Build solidarity with women from different religions, regions and cultures.

EUROPEAN WOMEN OF FAITH NETWORK

THE HISTORY

During 1992-95, the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina struggled in its recovery from three years of bloody inter-ethnic war. Following the break-up of Yugoslavia, an estimated 2,50,000 people died in the conflict between Bosnian Muslims, Serbs and Croats. Working to bring healing and help forge a lasting peace, our *Religions for Peace* affiliate, the Inter-religious Council of Bosnia-Herzegovina, was active in promoting inter-religious collaboration among the country's women.

Under the auspices of the *Religions for Peace*, representatives of women of faith from the Inter-Religious Councils of Bosnia-Herzegovina (BiH) and Kosovo came together in the historic city of Sarajevo from 2-4 October 2003 for an inspirational, regional inter-religious training on mobilising women for peace. The 30 women from the Islamic, Orthodox, Catholic and Jewish communities of Kosovo and BiH came together for the first time since the end of the Balkan conflicts to mark the beginning of the southeast Europe women of faith network.

The Network Today

The *Religions for Peace*-European Women of Faith Network (EWFN) brings together a wide diversity of faith and interfaith-based women's organisations in Europe to work together for peace. The EWFN creates opportunities for women to communicate and learn from each other, share good practice and work in partnership with other organisations on issues concerning women and girls, grounded in faith. As part of *Religions for Peace* Global Women of Faith Network, the Network promotes the building of peace by working with religious leaders, governmental, statutory and voluntary organisations as well as through practical projects at the grassroots level.

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AFRICAN WOMEN OF FAITH NETWORK

The African Women of Faith Network was launched in January 2003 as the first regional sub-network of the Global Network of Religious Women's Organisations of *Religions for Peace*. It focuses on creating linkages with religious women's organisations to ensure that they are actively engaged in transforming conflict and building peace and are positioned to access resources required for advancing sustainable development. By cooperating, mobilising, transforming, advocating and delivering services, religious women of Africa are impacting the daily quality of life for all Africans.

The African Women of Faith Network brings together 400 organisations of women of faith, representing all the diverse religions and nations of the rich continent of Africa. A variety of faith traditions are represented including: Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Indigenous, Baha'i, and Buddhist. Member organisation also come from a wide variety of nations: Kenya, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote D'Ivoire, Niger, Ghana, Tanzania, Zambia, Nigeria, Cameroon, South Africa, Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Malawi, Sudan, Rwanda, Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Namibia, The Gambia, Zimbabwe, Togo, Botswana, Senegal, Madagascar, Guinea, Swaziland and Mozambique.

LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN WOMEN OF FAITH NETWORK

ABOUT THE NETWORK

Peru's brutal war against Maoist rebels during the 1980s and 1990s claimed as many as 69,000 lives and left a profoundly wounded society. Since then, the two guerrilla forces, Shining Path and Tupac Amaru, have been virtually eradicated, but violence and gang warfare continue to plague Peru's people. In this environment, Peru's women religious leaders requested the intervention of Religions for Peace to convene 21 women leaders and representatives from Catholic, Anglican, Jewish,

Islamic and Indigenous communities – from Peru, Argentina, Honduras, Ecuador, Chile, El Salvador, and Costa Rica gathered in Peru to participate in the inaugural meeting and plan collaborative action for peace.

During this consultation in Lima, Peru, on 24-25 August 2003, Religions for Peace Women's Programme launched the second sub-network of Latin American and Caribbean women of faith Network. The gathering was unique in its kind in that it was the first time the Women's Programme organised an event on the South American continent. It was jointly agreed that it is high time for women to come out of their homes and become actively involved in decision-making processes. With more education and training, women will be better equipped to create awareness and use religious institutions to disseminate information and perpetuate against violence.

ASIAN WOMEN OF FAITH NETWORK

WOMEN IN ACTION, PAKISTAN

The Women's Programme of *Religions for Peace* brought together 35 Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, and Muslim women in Phnom Penh to mobilize religious women and highlight their role as key partners in international efforts to end these human rights abuses. The regional conference, the first of its kind, was held from November 19 through 22, 2003. Delegates from Laos, Thailand, Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka, and Cambodia shared their unique assets, capacities and experiences working with affected populations. They examined the legal, health and post-conflict implications of sexual violence against women on communities and societies in the region and devised action agendas for advocacy and assistance. The consultation was a pivotal event in the launch of the South and South East Asian Women of Faith Network, and a vital addition to the *Religions for Peace* Women of Faith Global Network.

The delegates resolved to forge deeper partnerships, to expand their network, and engage in national and regional advocacy on this and other critical issues. The consultation provided an opportunity for women from diverse faiths and backgrounds as preachers, lawyers, educationists and peace-makers to share experiences and success stories, and to interface with the regional UNIFEM and UNAIDS office spokespersons on common issues and exchange best practices in their joint objective of eliminating all forms of violence against women.

RELIGIONS FOR PEACE

North American Women of Faith Network

INTRODUCTION

Women of faith from USA and Canada convened in New York at the 777 United Nations Plaza on the 16th of July 2007 for a consultative meeting on building the North American Women of Faith Network. The meeting was co-convened by Religions for Peace (The World Conference of Religions for Peace—WCRP) International Secretariat and USA Chapter.

The aim of the meeting was to discuss ways of building, coordinating and enhancing networking among women of different religions in North America based on existing national, local and regional interfaith and faith-based networking activities that women from different faith traditions very skilfully lead in their own religious communities. The meeting was an initial consultation that allowed the planning in the process of building the North America Women of Faith Network as part of Religions for Peace Global Women of Faith Network.

The opening remarks were given by Dr. William F. Vendley, Secretary General of Religions for Peace. The sessions in the agenda were chaired by various women religious leaders: Mrs. Rajinderjit Kaur Singh, Sikh Heritage Organisation; Rev. Dr. Karen Hamilton, General Secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches; Mrs. Judith Hertz, Co-Chair, Commission on Inter-Religious Affairs, Union of Reformed Judaism; Mrs. Brenda Smith, UN NGO Representative World Federation of Methodist and Uniting Church Women; and Mrs. Karen Hurley, President General World Union of Catholic Women's Organisations.

In his opening remarks, the Secretary General pointed out that peace was the ultimate goal of all religions and at the centre of peace was the well-being of humanity and the family. Women of faith played pivotal roles in promoting peace and the ultimate well-being of the human family, and that is why such a meeting to support networking among women of different faiths was critical. Dr. Vendley gave an historical overview of Religions for Peace, an international non-sectarian organisation that was established in 1970 and that aims at promoting multi-religious cooperation for peace. Today Religions for Peace has established over 70 inter-religious councils all over the world and a Global Women of Faith Network.

THE CONTEXT

Religions for Peace established the Women's Mobilisation Programme in 1998 to promote the role of religious women in conflict transformation, peace-building and sustainable development. In 2001, the programme launched the first-ever Global Women of Faith Network, which has since expanded into regional networks in Africa, South East Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean, and more recently to Europe. North America is yet to organize such a network. At present, the Global Network includes more than 1000 Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Indigenous, Sikh and Zoroastrian religious women's organisations.

In August 2006, women of faith leaders from sixty-five countries of the world and from the world's major faith traditions gathered in Kyoto, Japan for *Religions for Peace* Women's Assembly. North American delegates confirmed that women of faith networks are essential, as the world needs women's voices of peace from the perspective of faith. Women of faith must claim their voices, and set the agenda and speak out on difficult and controversial issues that affect them. Particular questions raised by the North American women of faith at the World Assembly included:

- What was life sustaining in building North America women of faith network? What would be the responsibility of such a network?
- To what extent might the women of faith network in North America speak against the culture of war and trade in arms?
- How could *Religions for Peace* facilitate collaboration and create linkages and build alliances among women of faith networks with other non-faith based organisations and UN agencies?
- How might women of faith networks further enhance the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in their communities?

The North American delegates recommended that there was a need for a practical action agenda for the North America Women of Faith.

This consultative meeting was a step towards implementing these recommendations and carrying on the work already began. The women of faith shared personal stories on their paths to peace and affirmed the need to establish the North American Women of Faith network

and share their humanity, especially in troubled world of terrorism, poverty, violence and other forms of hopelessness.

Building the North American Women of Faith Network: Structure and Membership

Having affirmed the need for a multi-religious women of faith network in North America, the women of faith discussed the structure and membership of such a network as follows:

Structure

Religions for Peace North American Women's Coordinating Committees will be formed and mandated to advise and provide strategic leadership and direction on building the Religions for Peace North American Women of Faith Network. The North American Women's Coordinating Committee (NAWCC) shall consist of fifteen to twenty representatives of the *Religions for Peace* regional women of faith networks. This Committee shall co-opt women already serving in Religions for Peace "World Council" and International Women's Coordinating Committee as ex-officials. The Committee members would serve for five years, until the next World Assembly of Religions for Peace. In constituting this NAWCC, due consideration shall be given to achieve religious and geographical balance and to integrate young women of faith. The Committee shall elect its own co-coordinators, one of whom may be co-opted to the International Women's Coordinating Committee.

The participants agreed on the following process to constitute the NAWCC:

I. To form an *Ad-hoc* Leadership committee that would give recommendations on constituting the North American Women's Coordinating Committee. The following members were chosen to serve in the Ad-hoc Leadership Committee:

- Ms. Mia Adjali (Christian protestant)
- Ms. Judith Hertz (Jewish)
- Ms. Farhana Mateen (Muslim)
- Ms. Karen M. Hurley (Christian Catholic)
- Rev. Dr. Karen Hamilton (Christian Protestant)

The Ad-Hoc Leadership Committee was tasked primarily to make recommendations in three weeks time and present them to the larger consultative group by mid-September 2007. Religions for Peace would

facilitate communication through email and phone among the members of the ad-hoc leadership committee.

II. To reconvene in a second consultative meeting around October 2007 in which the participants will prepare a nomination slate for the North American Women's Coordinating Committee.

MEMBERSHIP

Building the Religions for Peace North America Women of Faith Network shall be guided by the following principles:

- Ensure representativity, recognising that a person, or group of persons, can represent, informally or formally, concerns of a larger community. Membership must seek to ensure representation from different religions and geographical regions.
- Respect of religious differences
- Action on deeply held and widely shared concerns
- Preserve the identity of each religious community; use existing religious women's organisations as building blocks.
- Honor the ways religious communities are organised.

Participants agreed to review an inventory of religious women's organisations in North America and plan towards convening a major networking Forum for the North American Women of Faith Network in 2008.

Thematic Focus of the North American Women of Faith Network

Participants brainstormed on the thematic focus for the North American Women of Faith Network. They emphasised that it was important not to duplicate efforts, but rather build on spiritual, human, and institutional resources that already exist among religious communities to promote multi-religious cooperation for peace and take collective action for the common good guided by the following main thematic areas:

- Build Peace and transform conflict
- Advance Sustainable Development, including the advancement of Millennium Development goals and protection of the environment.
- Network and build a community of women of faith for peace, human rights and development.

Specific issues that were identified where women of faith could share good practices and advocate for action included:

- I. The trafficking of women and girls. It was pointed out that the Maryknoll sisters had just released an impressive documentary on trafficking, which would be an excellent resource for women of faith in North America.
- II. HIV/AIDS and poverty in North America and the underlying silence on the resulting impact on women and girls.
- III. Security and violence against women and girls (domestic violence, sexual violence, urban gun violence and violence against young and/or migrant women)
- IV. Global warming and how it affects women especially from developing countries

WOMEN, FAITH AND DEVELOPMENT ALLIANCE (WFDA)

An overview of the Women, Faith and Development Alliance was given. The alliance is co-convened by Religions for Peace, InterAction, Women's Edge and the National Cathedral in Washington DC, with the aim of forging partnerships among faith and secular and development organisations to increase investments for women and girls. WFDA is preparing a World Summit to be held in 2008. Participants were invited to reflect on that and share their thoughts about the engagement of North American Women of Faith Network.

Summary and Conclusion

A summary of the meeting was presented with the following immediate actions and milestones:

- Communication be maintained through email and telephone with all participants. The contact list of participants would be shared with all the participants.
- Constitution of the suggested list of North American Women's Coordinating Committee be finalised by 6th of August 2007 by the Ad-Hoc Leadership Committee.
- Another consultative meeting be convened in October 2007 and engage other key persons to further review the suggested list of members of the NAWCC.
- The inventory of Religious Women's Organisations be sent to the participants for further review and recommendations.
- A planning process be put in place towards convening Religions for Peace North American Women of Faith Network Regional Conference/Assembly in 2008.

- Participants share the report on the meeting with other stakeholders in respective religious communities.

GLOBAL YOUTH NETWORK

Religions for Peace Global Youth Network harnesses the energy and commitment of religious youth leaders all over the world to advance the mission of multi-religious cooperation for peace.

The Global Youth Network gained full momentum in 2006 when the six regional inter-religious youth networks were launched in Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Europe, North America, as well as in Latin America and the Caribbean. Concrete success in mounting action programmes among six regions has inspired donors to award funding to carry out similar projects around the globe. Today, the Global Youth Network is developing pilot programmes to confront some of our most urgent challenges—building peace, addressing environmental issues, and coping with the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Concurrently, the youth are working to mainstream youth and youth issues into Religions for Peace programming activities at the local, regional, and global levels. This important work is led by the International Youth Committee (IYC), comprised fifteen members representing the world's faith traditions from six continents. The IYC was first established at the Sixth World Assembly in Riva del Garda, Italy, in 1994, and the current members were elected at the Religions for Peace VIII World Assembly in Kyoto, Japan in August 2006. Currently, the Religions for Peace Global Youth Network is led by its newly elected Youth Coordinator, Ms. Stellamaris Mulaeh, who also serves as Pax Romana's national coordinator for peace-building in Kenya.

The Global Youth Network seeks to advance its work of mobilising power of religious youth, building strategic partnerships with the United Nations, inter-governmental institutions, and civil society organisation, and implementing action programmes through national and regional inter-religious youth networks.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

It is morally abhorrent that poverty afflicts the lives of more than 1.3 billion people in a world so richly endowed with abundance.

—Religions for Peace World Council statement

For three decades, *Religions for Peace* has worked with religious leaders to advocate for better government policies regarding the poor;

to fight against malnutrition and preventable disease; and to develop programmes for communities of faith to eradicate poverty at every level.

Religions for Peace has taken on perhaps the most crucial development-related challenge of our time: the AIDS pandemic in Africa and its effects on millions of children and families. The Hope for African Children Initiative addresses the social, medical, educational, and financial crises that have resulted from the AIDS devastation of sub-Saharan Africa, particularly for the more than 13 million children who have lost one or both parents to the disease.

Religions for Peace has begun working with religious communities on the critical Millennium Development Goals (MDG). These goals are a compact among nations and present an achievable plan to combat global poverty, which kills 30,000 children everyday.

DISARMAMENT AND SECURITY

Throughout its thirty-year history, *Religions for Peace* has worked toward limiting and eventually eliminating nuclear weapons. Recognising that common security is the key to establishing a culture of peace, *Religions for Peace* helps communities of faith condemn policies that perpetuate the building of weapons and envision a world free from the threat of nuclear destruction.

Religions for Peace has long served as a leader among international non-governmental organisations on disarmament issues. The organisation is a key participant in major United Nations initiatives, monitoring discussions, and exploring the role religions may play in helping to shape coherent arguments for disarmament on moral, ethical, and spiritual grounds.

Religions for Peace is a founder and publication committee member of the Disarmament Times, the only independent newspaper devoted exclusively to reporting on arms control and disarmament activities in the United Nations context. The paper reaches a worldwide readership of policy makers, researchers, students, organisations, and concerned individuals.

Religions for Peace also is a member of the Reference Group of the International Action Network on Small Arms (IANSA), which encourages the development of community-based programmes to educate citizens about the dangers of small arms; promotes peaceful resolution of conflict among religious communities; and promotes a culture of peace, solidarity and non-violence.

CALL FOR ARMS CONTROL

Religions for Peace works to create a sustainable future for all. The ongoing menace posed by the possession and threatened use of nuclear weapons is incompatible with such a future. Moreover, the claim of several states to a unique right to have and threaten to use these horrific devices is the greatest stimulus to their proliferation.

Only an unequivocal commitment to adhere to the legal commitments embodied in the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, including those of the nuclear weapons states, to constrain the spread of nuclear weapons and obtain their universal and total elimination will set the world on a secure course. Otherwise, eventually by accident or design nuclear weapons will be used with devastating consequences to human life and the very fabric of civilisation. We cannot be silent in the face of such peril.

DISARMAMENT ACTIVISM

The hope for an end to the arms race at the conclusion of the Cold War and the beginning of the new millennium have been overshadowed by new and ongoing conflicts, increased military budgets, development of new weapons and their delivery systems, the continued sale and transfer of weapons and systems, and the weakening of long-standing efforts in the international community for arms control and disarmament. More than ten trillion dollars has been spent on military expenditures since the end of the Cold War. More than \$100 million dollars are expended each day on nuclear weapons alone. Neither the security among states nor the capacity to overcome terrorism is advanced by these dangerous trends. In fact, the dangers of widespread warfare resulting in mass destruction both through conventional and unconventional weapons are rising, not diminishing. All who value human life have a responsibility to change this course quickly. The gravity of risk posed by nuclear weapons makes it incumbent upon us to act.

At this critical time, *Religions for Peace* calls upon all religious and spiritually aware people and their communities, as key instruments of civil society, to promote arms control and disarmament through their own structures and in cooperation with other organisations. It calls upon governments and intergovernmental bodies at all levels to pursue substantial reductions in military spending with increased support for domestic and international programmes designed to improve human security.

Only through an affirmation of our most fundamental human values and a renewed commitment to the well-being of all humanity can security be restored and hope fulfilled. We ask you to join us in this work.

HUMAN RIGHTS

All of the world's great religious traditions emphasize the intrinsic value of human life, and in recent decades religious communities have recognised their vital role in expressing moral outrage and acting against the inhumanity that people have time and again inflicted upon one another.

Religions for Peace has helped those communities work together to influence policy and take concrete action at the local, national, and international levels—from pressing for the development and implementation of international treaties to securing the release of child soldiers.

PEACE EDUCATION

Religions for Peace, through its Peace Education Standing Commission, has led the way toward developing a curriculum to promote tolerance among young people and adults. Using the spiritual and ethical teachings of students' own faith traditions as a foundation, peace educators help students develop a new understanding of, and respect for, people of other backgrounds.

For example, *Religions for Peace* and its affiliates have worked in such nations as:

- Israel, where a project called Common Values/Different Sources brought together Jews, Muslims, and Christians to study sacred texts together in search of shared values that they could practice in everyday life, eventually resulting in a book for classroom use;
- Thailand and Japan, where recent Youth Leadership Ethics Camps brought together young representatives of those countries' religious communities for training programmes in leadership vision, moral ethics, and community service, and strengthened reconciliation between Japan and Korea;
- Germany, England, and other countries, where educators are analysing school textbooks' treatment of religious traditions that are foreign to the books' intended audiences.

ABOUT RUMI FORUM

Rumi Forum was founded in 1999 with the mission to foster interfaith and inter-cultural dialogue, stimulate thinking and exchange of opinions on supporting and fostering democracy and peace all over the world and to provide a common platform for education and information exchange.

With this mission, the Forum set up 4 Centers under its umbrella, namely;

Center for Democracy and Human Rights,
Center for Development and Environment,
Center for Education and Youth
Center for Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue.

INAUGURATION OF THE RUMI FORUM

The Foreign Minister of the Republic of Turkey, His Excellency Mr. Ali Babacan, performed the ribbon cutting ceremony for the Inauguration of the Rumi Forum.

LUNCHEON—Your Body and Your Spiritual Life / January 10.

The RUMI FORUM's Center for Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue presents 'Your Body and Your Spiritual Life: Friends or Foes?'

MOVIE and TALK—A National Geographic Documentary: 'Inside Mecca' / January 15

The RUMI FORUM presents Dialogue and a Movie

"Hajj: a Journey of the Soul" with Imam Yahya Hendi, Muslim Chaplain, Georgetown University and Featuring the film: National Geographic's 'Inside Mecca'

MUSICAL PERFORMANCE—'Music and Spirituality'

The RUMI FORUM presents A Sufi Musical Performance: 'Music and Spirituality' featuring

Roya Bahrami and Jonathan Seligman

LUNCHEON—The Rumi Forum hosted Dr. Abdul Karim Bangura / December 18th

The RUMI FORUM'S Center for Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue Luncheon Speaker Series hosted "Challenges and Opportunities of Integrating New Muslim Immigrants into American Society: A Multi-theoretical and Multi-methodological Analysis".

INTER-CULTURAL TRIP TO TURKEY

On December 6th the Rumi Forum began its December 2007 Intercultural Trip to Turkey. The cities that were visited on the trip were Istanbul, Izmir, Konya, Kayseri and Cappadocia. The group visited many sites in each of these cities among them Topkapi Palace, Hagia Sophia, Ephesus, Virgin Mary's house, Cappadocia museums and much more. While in Konya the group experienced the spectacular event of the Seb-I Aruz in which the Whirling Dervishes performed.

ABOUT RUMI

The name Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi stands for Love and ecstatic flight into the infinite. Rumi is one of the greatest spiritual and literary figures of all time and was the founder of the Mawlawi Sufi order. He was born in Wakhsh (Tajikistan) under the administration of Balkh in September 30, 1207 to a family of learned theologians.

His father Baha' al-Din Walad (Bahauddin), was a religious scholar and Sufi who with the advent of Mongol invasion of Central Asia took his family westward, visiting Damascus and Naishapur on the way to the Hijaz. Here, the young Jalal al-Din (Jalaluddin) met and received the blessing of Farid al-Din (Fariduddin) Attar, the outstanding Sufi poet of the day, whom he was to succeed in the annals of Persian Sufi poetry. He is reported to have said, as he saw Bahauddin walking toward him with the young Rumi a little behind, "Here comes a sea, followed by an ocean!". The family made the pilgrimage to Mecca and then set out northward to Anatolia and settled down in the city of Konya, Turkey. It was here that Rumi was to spend his forty-some years of his life, where he composed his peerless works, and where he received the inspiration for sacred music and dervishes. Rumi became like his father, a religious scholar and mastered the sciences of his day. He was also initiated into the mysteries of Sufism. But it was the meeting with the mysterious Sufi, Shams al-Din Tabrizi (Shams), that set his soul on fire and turned him into an incomparable poet of Divine Love and Illumination.

Rumi composed his Mathnawi and Divan-i Shams, the monumental works devoted to gnosis and divine ecstasy, following the encounter with Shams which changed the literary and spiritual landscape of Persian and Turkish worlds. Rumi was not a poet who happened to practice Sufism, but great Sufi master the rhythms of whose soul were expressed in poetry. He founded the Mathnawi Order, which exercised such a profound influence in the Ottoman world as well as its poetic

and musical arts. He became a luminous star for both Persian and Turkish speaking worlds and his influence in these worlds subsists to this day. Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi died on December 17, 1273. Men of five faiths followed his bier. That night was named *Sebul Arus* (Night of Union). Ever since, the Mawlawi dervishes have kept that date as a festival.

Now Rumi, one of the most universal of Islamic Saints, is becoming known to West and the light of his teachings are beginning to illuminate the hearts and minds of many in the occident as it has guided numerous generations of world during past seven centuries.

WHY DEDICATED TO RUMI?

Commensurate with its mission, the Forum takes its name from the 13th. Century Sufi philosopher-poet Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi, whose reach embraced all humanity as personified by his message, "Come, whoever you are, come..." We welcome everyone who has a desire to explore 'the other' in the spirit of mutual respect and tolerance.

We chose the name "Rumi" for our forum because Mevlana Celaleddin Rumi (Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi) is a symbol figure for these love, tolerance and dialogue. We are motivated by Rumi's well-known message and call for love, humanity and peace. The following verses summarize what we mean:

There are some significant personalities who with the help of their voice and breath, their love and excitement, and their promise for humanity always remain fresh and alive over the course of centuries. Time evidently fails to make these characters obsolete. Their thoughts, analyses, explanations, and spiritual messages, which will never be lost, represent, ever anew, alternative solutions and prescriptions for today's social problems, in great variety and diversity.

Rumi is one such personality. Despite the vast amount of time that separates his life from ours, Rumi continues to hear and to listen to us, to share our feelings, to present solutions to our problems in a voice that is without equal. Despite the fact that he lived some centuries ago, he remains absolutely alive among and with us today. He is a man of light-one who receives his light from the spirit of the Master of Humanity (Prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him), distributing this light in a variety of manners to just about everywhere. He was chosen to be one of the world's saints and to be pure of heart; a blessed one whose words are outstanding among those of the heroes of love and passion. He was and continues to function as Israfil; blowing

life into dead spirits. He did and continues to provide the water of life to the barren hearts of many; a spiritual irrigation. He was and continues to provide light for the travelers on their paths. He was and continues to be the perfect heir of the Prophet.

LUNCHEON FORUMS NEWS

STRATEGIC PLANNING

We are serving for the Global Chicago Community by bringing people together from diverse backgrounds in order to strengthen peace, understanding, respect and diversity.

Niagara Foundation helps to make Chicago a stronger, more vibrant and more prosperous place by advancing the causes of peace, cross-cultural tolerance, and human dignity. We publicly recognize the outstanding.

We are holding a series of public conversations that draw together Chicago's diverse communities to discuss critical issues, form partnerships, and engage in cooperative social action. Morning Conversations tie together the vision.

Niagara Foundation is currently offering new internship opportunities. Niagara Foundation envisions a community in which people from all walks of life interact with each other and cooperate to serve their. Niagara Multimedia Department aims at furthering the quality service of the organisation by Planning, Shooting, Capturing, Editing and Embedding Video for Delivery on a Computer as well as recording and. We are organising Intercultural and Friendship tours to Turkey as means of building bridges and strengthening friendships between Turkish and American People here in Chicago.

We organize annual friendship and dialogue dinners and meetings with people from a wide variety of ethnic traditions. To reinforce the friendship, and dialog between diverse communities,

VISION STATEMENT

In a world where even the farthest point is within an arm's reach, it is impossible to live anywhere without experiencing diversity. In order for everyone to live peacefully, it is important for individuals to rise above differences that drive us apart or against each other. Niagara Foundation envisions a community in which people from all walks of life interact with each other and cooperate to serve their communities,

thereby strengthening civil society and promoting the development of human values.

MISSION STATEMENT

Niagara Foundation serves societal peace, love, and friendship wisely and compassionately in support of human dignity and the common good by striving to bring forth the common values of humanity; values such as understanding, tolerance, respect, and compassion.

METHODOLOGY

In order to build a better society, Niagara Foundation works together with people and organisations that foster excellence in public service by acknowledging the importance of spreading these most significant common values within Global Chicago community, hoping for all to take them on as a common virtue.

Company Overview

Niagara Foundation is a subsidiary of Niagara Educational Services, Inc.(NES). NES, a non-profit organisation dedicated to innovation and revitalisation in education, was founded by a group of businessmen in Chicago in 1997. NES initiated tutoring sessions in mathematics, computer education, SAT, TOEFL and foreign languages. In 2000 NES opened Science Academy of Chicago (SAC), a primary school emphasising achievement in science, mathematics and technology (see video). In its short history, SAC students have been awarded numerous medals, certificates and honors in various math and science competitions. Today the SAC community includes a committed faculty and a growing student body who continue to implement the schools mission with great success.

In response to unrest in the world community and in cooperation with the Chicago area organisations and universities, NF is dedicated to promoting the development of human values. Through its programmes NF continues to bring together thousands of people from different communities and ethnic backgrounds.

Honorary President

Niagara Foundation's honorary president Mr. M. Fethullah Gulen is a world renowned Muslim scholar and leader whose message of love, tolerance, and peaceable coexistence inspires Niagara Foundation in contributing something meaningful—albeit small—to this great message.

World first heard Mr. Gulen's name when he met Pope John Paul II in 1998. His visit came at a time Samuel Huntington's idea of the alleged "clash of civilisations" was gaining prominence. He saw the need to further efforts to establish dialogue to stave off conflicts. Since then, his efforts and strong supports influenced many to start interfaith dialogues in many countries which received a great deal of interest and resulted in strong bridges to be built between individuals, families and communities. People of different religions, first time, realised that they can work together regardless of their religious background for one common goal, namely global peace. Especially now, when hatred is widespread and the clash of civilisation is predicted, Mr. Gulen's efforts are of paramount importance for modern humanity.

JESUS AND MARY IN THE QURAN

Hull College organised Christmas Carol Concert in St. Marys church in Hull. There were four orators giving speech about the importance of the day and some passages were read from Bible. Most of the audiences were from Hull College and youngsters around Hull. Our chairperson Asuman Aydin was invited to give a speech about Jesus and Mary in the Quran. Mrs Aydin stressed the significance of Jesus and Mary in the Quran with some verses from the Quran and how Muslims accept Jesus and Mary. We, as Muslims and Christians altogether said Amen to Mrs Aydin's prays about world peace and harmony.

HOW DO WE LIVE TOGETHER?

Education and Dialogue Charity, Islamic Society of Britain, Sheffield Interfaith Forum and South Yorkshire Police have organised a conference named "How do we live together" at Hallam University Main Hall in The Owen Building on Wednesday the 28th of November 2007.

INTERFAITH TRIP TO TURKEY

The Education Dialogue Charity organised an interfaith trip to Turkey between 23 and 27 November 2007. The trip was aimed to discover the historical, cultural and natural beauties of Turkey, a country which could probably be considered as the best living example of the harmony of different communities and faiths for centuries. The trip covered the cities of Istanbul and Izmir, where our guests had an opportunity to experience many ancient civilisations and Turkish culture and traditions.

WHIRLING DERVISHES

Whispers of Love, Whirling Dervishes event took place at the Montgomery Theatre, Sheffield on the 27th of November 2007. The *Whispers of Love* event emphasised the renowned Rumi way of love, understanding and universal peace; values which stem from the very heart of Islam but which have sadly been eclipsed in recent times. The event comprised stories and poems from Rumi, live performance of Sufi Music and Whirling Dervishes, a demonstration on traditional Turkish Marbling and a book exhibition on Rumi, Anatolian Sufi tradition and marbling.

RAMADAN DINNER

On 2nd October, the Interfaith groups invited to a Ramadan Dinner in our community centre in Sheffield. There were home made dinners which was very delicious everybody liked it. Then it was pray time. After pray we had a presentation it was about the events that we had in the past. All the interfaith groups then had a chat.

APRIL FESTIVAL CHILDREN TRIP

23rd April is an important day for people in Turkey, because it is celebrated with children from all over the world as a National Independence and Children festival. As a part of celebrations of this week, we organised a short museum trip to Weston Park Museum in Sheffield. Students of Sheffield Anatolian Weekend School discovered both history of Sheffield and taste of icecreams in front of the muesum!

ART EXHIBITION

We attended the art exhibition entitled “Whose Presence?— Contemporary art and contemporary church” in Holy Trinity Church, Leeds, which was sponsored by arts@trinity and Leeds Church Institute. We are grateful to Pippa Julings, a community artist, for her kind invitation to this fabulous and inspiring exhibition and her thorough presentation of her pieces of art during our visit.

MR. JOHN RAWSTHORNE, BISHOP OF HALLAM

Further to our meeting at Sheffield Interfaith Forum, we visited Mr. John Rawsthorne, Bishop of Hallam. In our meeting, we mainly discuss issues regarding Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue. It was a stimulating conversation and we had the opportunity to benefit from Mr. Rawsthorne’s experience and knowledge. We would like to thank him again for his warm welcome and hospitality.

EDUCATION AND DIALOGUE CHARITY

Education and Dialogue Charity was founded in August 2004 as a non-profit organisation operating throughout England and Wales. It is a multi-religious, multi-racial, and multi-cultural society seeking to promote interfaith and intercultural dialogue in our community. The major goals are to promote the benefit of the inhabitants of the UK who live in North England and Wales without distinction of sex or political, religious or other opinion by associating with local authorities, voluntary organisations and inhabitants in a common effort to advance education and leisure time occupation with the object of improving the condition of life for said inhabitants; to play a vital role in the process of integrating many nations while preserving the national and cultural values in authenticity; to help pupils overcome the social and cultural problems and support their education to develop their knowledge and self-confidence; and to provide help for those to share the cultural values with other people.

Education and Dialogue Charity is composed of people of good will from diverse faiths and backgrounds who believe that the faith community as a whole should be a force for good. Our Nominating Committee strives to achieve as much diversity as possible to maintain religious, cultural, and racial diversity on our board and in our membership. We are an autonomous organisation open to all people of good will. The charity has partnerships with other organisations in achieving common goals. Desiring to be a unifying force in society with emphasis on agreement and positive attitudes, we focus on building common bonds around which all people can come together, work together, and learn together.

WHY EDUCATION AND DIALOGUE CHARITY?

In view of the multiple faiths and religious tradition represented in our community, Education and Dialogue Charity is dedicated to building understanding, acceptance and trust among the diverse, often competing and sometimes conflicting groups. We believe that faith should be unifying force in all communities. Funding and people are both crucial to our continued growth and development. Ultimately we need to have an office, hire staff, offer to college students and have an interfaith chapel for any religious, meditative, contemplative or spiritual activity. Our main purposes and activities have centered on building bridges of understanding and respect. We commit ourselves to practice and promote mutual respect for all peoples of faith and for all people.

WHAT WE TOLERATE FOR?

Providing a trusted and reliable moral voice in the community. Providing a positive and unifying influence in shaping the nature of our society and building better community. Listening to all perspectives and exploring all aspects of an issue. Breaking down barriers by people joining together in a safe environment, engaging in thoughtful, reasoned, respectful discussion, to search for and work together for the common good.

OUR MISSION

To offer the people of the England hope by providing a non-partisan, nationwide, faith-based organisation where all people of goodwill can participate, and: Promote the insight and wisdom of religion as a positive force in life, and as a reconciling and unifying influence on our society. Unite behind shared beliefs of ethical and moral principles and behaviour. Be an influence in shaping the nature of our society by engaging in public policy discussions. Promote harmony, trust, and understanding among all religions, races, and groups, and among all people.

MISSION

The ASMA Society, a not-for-profit 501(c) 3 founded in 1997 in New York City, is an Islamic cultural and educational organisation dedicated to fostering an American-Muslim identity and building bridges between American Muslims and the American public.

ASMA's philosophical objective is to strengthen a culturally American expression of Islam based on tolerance and on cultural and religious harmony and to foster an environment in which Muslims can thrive within a pluralistic society without compromising their essential values and beliefs.

AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH

ASMA's participants and members are drawn from two large and specific groups of individuals:

1. Muslims seeking to improve their own understanding of Islam and to practice their faith in the company of individuals committed to understanding the true principles of Islam, free of cultural biases;
2. Non-Muslims seeking to understand Islam and to overcome negative perceptions of Islam.

OBJECTIVES

ASMA intends to meet six key objectives over the next five years:

1. **IDENTITY:** To forge an American Muslim identity that combines the best aspects of being both American and Muslim.
2. **EMPOWERMENT OF YOUTH LEADERS:** To empower young American Muslims to become spokespeople for a tolerant, harmonious, authentic Islam by encouraging them to identify with the essentials of the Islamic faith that cut across cultural boundaries.
3. **BUILDING BRIDGES:** To aid non-Muslims overcome biases and negative perceptions by dismantling the common stereotypes and myths surrounding Muslims and Islam. Conversely, to work toward dismantling myths regarding Americans held in parts of the Muslim world.
4. **CULTURAL EXPRESSION:** To explore and celebrate the role that various expressions of Islamic art have played in contributing to world civilisations and to promote contemporary Muslim artists and their inclusion into the artistic fabric of America.
5. **INTERFAITH:** Encouraging spiritual evolution in Muslim and non-Muslim Americans by engaging with other contemplative traditions that penetrate beyond different languages, practices and faiths to the common substrate of the religious experience.
6. **INTRAFaITH:** To amplify Islamic arguments demonstrating that Islamic texts, theology and law support the principles of separation of powers, justice, women's rights, and freedom of religious practice.

STRATEGIES

ASMA manifests its mission and objectives objective through outreach lectures, inreach study groups, spiritual education, cultural and art programmes, coalition building and interfaith dialogue.

HEALING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ISLAMIC WORLD AND THE WEST

...An important proposal for dealing with what is and increasingly will be a critical issue for our nation and the world.

—Senator George Mitchell,

The distrust and animosity that plague the Islamic world's relationship with the United States represent today's greatest single threat to international security and the world's economy.

While many excellent attempts have been made to improve relations between Islamic countries and the West and to further peace in the Middle East, rarely have politically moderate, mainstream American Muslims helped initiate and lead a major multi-faith effort aimed at improving communication, increasing understanding and “waging peace.”

THE MISSION OF THE CORDOBA INITIATIVE

The Cordoba Initiative, founded in 2002, is a multi-faith organisation whose objective is to heal the relationship between the Islamic World and America. Working through civil dialogue, policy initiatives, education, and cultural programmes, the Initiative focuses on Thought, Action and Outcomes.

Its goals include:

- Increasing intercultural understanding, tolerance and respect, both in Muslim societies and in the West
- Improving the nature of the discourse about Islam in America and about America in the Muslim world
- Stimulating fresh thinking about peace in the Middle East
- Addressing the root causes of international terrorism and helping to prevent the horrors of another September 11

UNIQUENESS AND NEED

International terrorism remains a substantial global threat. Respect for the United States in the Middle East and even within Europe lingers at historic lows. Meanwhile, both anti-Muslim bias and a new anti-Semitism have grown in the West. National and international economies have been impacted substantially by the uncertainties and threats of war and terrorism. Whether or not one subscribes to the theory of a clash of civilisations, the world has become an increasingly insecure and dangerous place. The need for improved communication and understanding between the Islamic World and the United States is critical.

Unique Attributes of the Cordoba Initiative:

(1) Mainstream American Muslim leaders, working in partnership with Jewish and Christian leaders, play a central role in mediating the effort.

(2) The Initiative focuses on the underlying roots of cultural intolerance and violence, not merely the symptoms.

(3) To leverage the impact of its efforts, the initiative seeks to form strong partnerships with other non-profit institutions, such as the Aspen Institute, CLAL, the Chautauqua Institution, the East-West Institute, and the American Society for Muslim Advancement (ASMA).

(4) The Initiative employs a contemplative methodology, inviting spiritual leaders and scholars to join their secular counterparts in the quest for peace.

(5) The Initiative is firmly multi-faith: no single religion's followers may hold a majority of voting seats on its board of directors.

The Cordoba Name

For hundreds of years during the middle ages, Cordoba was the capital of Muslim Spain. During much of its "golden age" from the 8th to 12th centuries, the Cordoba Caliphate witnessed a great flowering of culture, art, and philosophical inquiry amid a remarkable climate of religious tolerance. Religious freedom, while not perfect, was sufficient that many Jewish and Christian intellectuals emigrated to Cordoba, where they lived, wrote and flourished side by side with their Muslim counterparts in a strikingly pluralistic society. The Cordoba name reminds both Muslims and non-Muslims that a great Islamic civilisation was once the most open and tolerant of its era.

HEALING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ISLAMIC WORLD AND THE WEST

...War leaves no victors, only victims. ... Mankind must remember that peace is not God's gift to his creatures, it is our gift to each other.

— Elie Wiesel, Nobel Peace Prize
Acceptance Speech, 1986

Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf – Co-founder and Chairman of the Board of the Cordoba Initiative. He is also founder of the ASMA Society (American Society for Muslim Advancement) and Imam of Masjid Al-Farah, a New York mosque twelve blocks from Ground Zero. A leader in the effort to build religious pluralism and integrate Islam into modern America, he has dedicated his life to building bridges between Muslims and the West.

By establishing ASMA in 1997, he created the first American organisation committed to bringing Muslims and non-Muslims together through programmes in culture, art, academia and current affairs. As Imam of Masjid Al-Farah, he preaches a message of peace and

understanding between people, regardless of creed, nationality or political beliefs. His inspiring sermons have made him one of the most sought-after Muslim clerics in the country.

As a tireless advocate for an ecumenical solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he has impressed his vision on US lawmakers and administration officials, most recently as member of the National Inter-religious Initiative For Peace in Washington DC. Regarded as one of the world's most eloquent and erudite Muslim leaders, Imam Feisal speaks frequently at major international conferences, including the Fortune/Aspen Institute Annual Conference in Colorado and the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. In addition, his ability to motivate religious novices and experts alike has made him a popular teacher of Islam and Sufism at many respected New York institutions, including the Center for Religious Inquiry at St. Bartholomew's Church, the New York Seminary and the Chautauqua Institution.

Imam Feisal is a member of the World Economic Forum's Council of 100 Leaders and the Board of Trustees of the Islamic Center of New York. He is also an advisor to the Interfaith Center of New York. His books include *Islam: A Search for Meaning*, *Islam: A Sacred Law*, and *What's Right With Islam: A New Vision for Muslims and the West* (HarperCollins, 2004).

A charismatic public speaker, Imam Feisal has appeared extensively in national and international news media. The *New York Times* wrote, "He preaches a moderate Islam, one that embraces the values of Western democracy, carries within it a love of America and calls on Muslims to respect other faiths." In 2005, the Alliance for International Conflict Prevention and Resolution presented its first annual International Peacemaker Award to Imam Feisal and Rabbi Avraham Soetendorp of the Netherlands.

Imam Feisal was born in Kuwait in 1948 into an Egyptian family steeped in religious scholarship. He was educated in England and Malaysia and earned a degree in physics from Columbia University. He lives in New York with his wife, Daisy Khan.

John S. Bennett – Co-founder and Executive Director of the Cordoba Initiative. He was previously founding Executive Director of the Garrison Institute, whose mission is to apply the wisdom of the world's great contemplative traditions to issues of civil society. He also serves as vice chair of the board of trustees of Naropa University, America's premiere institution of contemplative education.

In 2001, Bennett retired from his position as vice president of the Aspen Institute. While in that position, he helped rebuild the relationship between the Institute and the Aspen community and greatly increased the Institute's activities and programmes in its Aspen home. In doing so, Bennett pioneered new ways to bring the Institute's tradition of enlightened civil dialogue to bear on significant issues facing individual lives. He brought to Aspen a variety of new community programmes, including seminars on Shakespeare, wilderness, the crosscurrents between music and philosophy, and an acclaimed education programme, the High School Great Ideas Seminar: The Good Life and the Good Society; and most of these remain active and successful today. He also conceived the idea and acted as the organising point person for the Aspen Institute's 50th Anniversary Symposium, an event which convened a diverse group of Nobel prize winners, heads of state, and other world leaders from the fields of business, religion, art and academia to explore globalisation and its effects on humanity.

In 1999, Bennett completed his fourth term as Mayor of Aspen, Colorado. During his four terms in office, he focused on critical issues of building and preserving community—the challenge of maintaining the character, values and livability of a small city under enormous economic pressure to grow and change.

Bennett, a graduate of Andover and Yale University, worked to control suburban sprawl, build affordable housing, preserve the environment, support the arts and humanities, and create an innovative transportation system offering alternatives to the single occupant automobile. Collectively, all of his efforts were aimed at improving the quality of life of Aspen valley residents. As mayor, Bennett presided over a \$40 million budget, which produced a surplus each year he was in office. Aspen Magazine wrote of Mayor Bennett, "He has brought civility to city government and championed long-term regional planning, gathering the valley's mayors for the first time... His mark lies heavily upon Aspen, and his vision will guide her into the next century."

Daisy Khan – In addition to being a trustee of the Cordoba Initiative, Daisy Khan is Executive Director of ASMA, a religious cultural and educational organisation dedicated to building bridges between Muslim and non-Muslim Americans. As wife of Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, Ms. Khan mentors young Muslim women who face the challenges of cultural assimilation in America. Having immigrated to the US at age 15, Ms. Khan is particularly effective at helping young adults grapple with issues of dual identity, gender relations, cultural norms and the challenge of integrating Islam with modernity.

Ms. Khan was featured in the 2-hour PBS documentary, *Muhammad – Legacy of the Prophet*. She produced *Reflections at the Time of Transformation*, a Muslim response to 9/11 in which artists; musicians, poets, filmmakers and sculptors performed to an audience of over 600 people. Ms. Khan co-produced a Jewish/Muslim/Christian theatrical performance called *Same Difference*, which sold out its two-week New York run. The event was featured on NBC, Al-Jazeera, BBC, and Irish TV. She also produced *The Córdoba Bread Fest: Children of Abraham Break Bread Together*, a theatrical and culinary celebration of the common historical role played by bread in the three Abrahamic traditions. This unique evening was held in St. Bartholomew’s Church with a sold-out audience of Jews, Christians and Muslims. The event was featured on Australian television.

Ms. Khan earned a BFA degree in Interior Architecture from New York School of Design. She has been Vice President of Project Management at Smith Barney, a Director of Design and Construction for Primedia, and head of the Project Management team for Global Real Estate at Avaya Communications.

HEALING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE ISLAMIC WORLD AND THE WEST

...If the 21st century wishes to free itself from the cycle of violence, acts of terror and war, and avoid repetition of the experience of the 20th century—that most disaster-ridden century of humankind, there is no other way except by understanding and putting into practice every human right for all mankind, irrespective of race, gender, faith, nationality or social status. In anticipation of that day. With much gratitude...

—Shirin Ebadi, Conclusion to her Nobel
Peace Prize Acceptance Speech, 2003



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CORDOBA INITIATIVE, WORKS OF HARVARD UNIVERSITY AND ASPEN INSTITUTE: CASE STUDY OF SELECT INSTITUTIONS

THE CORDOBA INITIATIVE'S FOUR PRINCIPAL PROGRAMME AREAS

1. Issue and Policy Research

The Cordoba Initiative provides U.S. and Muslim policy-makers and the international press with informed research and critical thinking regarding ways to improve the relationship between America and the Islamic world. This effort produces issue-specific research, as well as policy white papers, editorials, magazine articles and books. Examples include consulting with influential leaders, the Shariah Project (below), and the Fortune magazine article by Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf on Bringing Muslim Nations into the Global Century. Cordoba is a reliable source for fresh ideas and new thinking on Islamic issues, America's communication with the Middle East, values-based peace building, and similar issues.

The Shariah Project – Shariah (Islamic holy law) requires a nation to care for its citizens' welfare, provide religious freedom, offer educational opportunities, protect minorities, and allow citizens to participate in their own governance. The Shariah Project will enumerate the societal – as opposed to religious – obligations that Shariah requires of a nation governed according to Islamic principles. The Project will strengthen the capacity of moderate Muslims to employ the vocabulary and principles of Islam to reduce conflict and promote democratic values in Islamic societies.

2. The Dialogues

A. *The Jerusalem Dialogues*—The Jerusalem Dialogues is convening a series of thoughtful dialogues between Muslim, Jewish and Christian leaders to build trust and explore common ground in the urgent search for a peaceful, just and secure a solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. An example is Cordoba's planned series of conferences – Why Israel? Why Palestine? – which is aimed at illuminating the separate cultural narratives cherished by Arabs and Jews and exploring how these narratives, if better understood, could become powerful peace building tools.

B. *The Spirit 21 Dialogues* (“*Difficult conversations in difficult places*”)—Religion, which has sparked so many conflicts throughout world history, must play a far greater 21st Century role in helping to resolve them. This programme will host dialogues between spiritual leaders in regions of the world where religious intolerance and violence are a daily reality. The dialogues will seat local religious leaders, who may never before have experienced an interfaith conversation, next to their international peers for discussions aimed at deepening understanding between religions.

C. *The Civil Society Dialogues*—A programme convening influential opinion leaders and scholars from America and the Muslim world for bilateral roundtable dialogues focused on improving communication, increasing trust and building civil society. Different dialogues will explore specific issues appropriate to the interests of the group. Examples include international trust-building, conflict avoidance, economic development, political reform, the role of religion and the media in the public arena, the challenge of adapting principles of participatory self-governance and democratic capitalism to specific cultures, and the building of institutions that support the infrastructure of civil society.

3. Cultural and Educational Programmes

Lectures, Symposia and Conferences—The Cordoba Initiative organises a variety of special public educational events. Examples are the 2003—2005 panel discussions in Paepcke Auditorium on the Aspen Institute's campus. These discussions, titled *When Cultures Collide*, have featured Rabbi Bradley Hirschfield of CLAL, Princeton Professor Elaine Pagels, Harvard Professor and Minister Peter Gomes, and Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf. Walter Isaacson, CEO of the Aspen Institute, has moderated. Another example is the 2005 Palm Beach conference, *Searching for Shared Values in a Divided World—A Conference of Jews, Christians*

and Muslims, on whose speakers and programme the Cordoba Initiative and the Aspen Institute collaborated.

Seminars/Cultural Events—The Cordoba Initiative plans a series of seminars for Jewish, Muslim and Christian high school students to explore the great ideas of western civilisation and the cultural relationship between the West and the Muslim world. In addition, Cordoba supports the ASMA Society's youth and community programmes, which employ education, art and culture to build bridges between the Abrahamic traditions. The ASMA Society's Cordoba Bread Fest, for example, gathers Christians, Jews and Muslims to break bread together and celebrate the sacred significance of bread in the three Abrahamic cultures. In partnership with Jewish organisations, ASMA also convenes small groups of young Jewish and Muslim professionals to increase cross-cultural understanding.

Curriculum Development Symposium—The Cordoba Initiative will convene a symposium of scholars to focus on curriculum development issues in Muslim education. Leading educators—Muslim and non-Muslim – will share knowledge and identify best practices for developing successful multicultural curricula. The symposium will address curricula within both Muslim and non-Muslim schools. Topics will include curriculum design, teacher training, support materials, a resource website, outreach efforts and educational alliances. The symposium will explore ways to dispel stereotypes while increasing understanding and tolerance at home and abroad.

4. The American Muslim Initiatives

Organised in partnership with the American Society for Muslim Advancement (ASMA).

A. *The Muslim Leaders of Tomorrow (MLT)*—The leadership of young American Muslim professionals represents one of the best hopes for bridging the chasm between the Islamic World and the U.S. The Muslim Leaders of Tomorrow project (MLT) convenes urbane, mostly Western-born, emerging Muslim leaders who embody a moderate expression of Islam that promotes pluralism, respect for other cultures, and human rights. By leveraging the leadership and pooling the talents of these young Muslim doctors, lawyers, bankers, artists, writers, academics and media professionals, the MLT can greatly amplify Islam's peaceful and moderate voice as a source of hope and inspiration for Muslims and non-Muslims alike.

B. *The Muslim Women's Summit*—A pioneering project to convene and empower influential Muslim women leaders from around the world. The first conference is planned for the summer of 2006.

ASPEN INSTITUTE (AI)

The Aspen Institute, founded in 1950, is an international non-profit organisation dedicated to fostering enlightened leadership and open-minded dialogue. Through seminars, policy programmes, conferences and leadership development initiatives, the Institute and its international partners seek to promote nonpartisan inquiry and an appreciation for timeless values. The Institute is headquartered in Washington, DC, and has campuses in Aspen, Colorado, and on the Wye River near the shores of the Chesapeake Bay in Maryland. Its international network includes partner Aspen Institutes in Berlin, Rome, Lyon, Tokyo, New Delhi, and Bucharest, and leadership initiatives in Africa, Central America, and India.

WALTER ISAACSON

At certain points in our lives, many of us feel the need to reflect on what it takes to lead a life that is good, useful, worthy, and meaningful. Perhaps we have noticed ourselves trimming our principles and making too many compromises in our careers, and we want to reconnect with our values. Or perhaps we yearn, in a world filled with clashing opinions, to understand the great ideas and ideals that have competed throughout the progress of civilisation.

Aspen's seminars, programmes and leadership initiatives offer a chance for restorative reflection on the meaning of the good life, leadership, and sound public policy based on non-partisan principles and timeless ideas. The endeavor is particularly relevant today. We have passed through a period in the 1990s when we saw the consequences, in both the business and political arenas, of becoming unhinged from underlying values. We face a world in which the biggest threat, to nations and to communities, is a lack of tolerance and understanding.

Our core mission is to foster enlightened leadership and open-minded dialogue. Through seminars, policy programmes, conferences and leadership development initiatives, the Institute and its international partners seek to promote non-partisan inquiry and an appreciation for timeless values.

We help people become more enlightened in their work and enriched in their lives. Together we can learn one of the keys to being successful in business, leadership and life: balancing conflicting values in order to find common ground with our fellow citizens while remaining true to basic ideals.

RELIGIONS IN RENEWAL: DIALOGUE, REFORM, RE-VISION

This site is dedicated to efforts by people all over the globe to renew their religions or ideologies in such a way that in the future they will be open to ongoing transformation while remaining solidly rooted in what is essential in their past. This is not a site to connect with new religious movements or syncretic religions amalgamated from bits and pieces of the existing faiths of the world. There are many such sites on the Web (and a few may be included if their guiding vision is congruent with the goals of this site). Rather, *Religions in Renewal* is a site to link members of groups within the major established religions or ideologies who are seeking respectfully and gradually to reform their traditions from within while remaining loyal to the spirit of their path. Secondly, it is a site to demonstrate that no matter how different our faith-languages, we have much in common and can learn from one another if we are open to the beauty and wealth of religious and intellectual diversity and willing to learn another's native tongue, not to abandon our own but to enrich it. Finally, this site reflects my conviction that Reason and Faith are meant to complement one another and that at its best, the European Enlightenment liberated humanity, as Immanuel Kant puts it, from millennia of superstition, fanaticism, and intellectual immaturity.

No matter which faith or ideology, this effort should include commitment to loving kindness toward one another and non-human sentient creatures; respect for the personhood of all human beings; awareness of global interdependence; appreciation both of rationality and mystical insight; acceptance of diversity and pluralism; prudent sympathy for the values of secular life; and willingness to engage in dialogue with others.

The religions of the world represent a treasure trove of spiritual wisdom. They have given meaning to the lives of billions, and at their best have passed on the value of all-encompassing love in such principles as the various versions of the Golden Rule. They have also been perverted to rationalize heinous crimes against humanity, and have served to legitimize tyranny, blind obedience, fear and fanaticism, doctrinal rigidity, thought control, intolerance, discrimination, persecution of heretics, forced conversions, crusades and other (un)holy wars, misogyny, and neglect of the biosphere.

It is one of the great challenges of the present age to begin the work of separating those aspects of our religious and ideological traditions that liberate the human spirit and serve life in a global and

pluralistic community from those aspects that have become destructive and discourage mature thought and individual accountability (it is important to note that “life-serving” and “destructive” are functions of the cultural matrix of an age; unquestioning obedience to authority or protecting the “poor and simple faithful” through censorship would have been considered a virtue in a non-democratic era). Practitioners of each religion and followers of each ideology will have to decide for themselves precisely what to address and how to proceed, but while there is a great deal of divergence in the specific problems encountered, there are also striking parallels. I hope that this website will eventually give people all over the world a chance to contact others in congruent circumstances in order to share reflections, prayer, and strategies — or at least to know that they are not alone.

From within my Catholic analogical universe I dedicate this site to two of my favorite quotations: “*Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est*” (God is, where charity and love are found) and (from an Episcopal poster) “Christ came to take away our sins, not our minds...”

Other sites include as many links as possible. No wonder, web-navigators (consciously or unconsciously) are suffering from what Alvin Toffler called “overchoice.” There is simply too much information available for the human brain to assimilate, and there is practically no quality control. In the *Religions in Renewal* site I will only include links which point to cyber locations which reflect authentic efforts to reform existing religions or ideologies from within (in line with the principles I stated earlier) and/or are dedicated to furthering thoughtful ecumenical or inter-ideological dialogue.

Since I first set up this site I acquired a virtual server and have filled it with domains and pages dedicated to buiding bridges between diverse faiths and ideologies. Those projects kept me occupied, and I have spent little time on maintaining this page.

AMERICAN ETHICAL UNION: ETHICALHUMANISM

EIGHT COMMITMENTS OF ETHICAL CULTURE:

Ethics is central.

The most central human issue in our lives involves creating a more humane environment.

Ethics begins with choice.

Creating a more humane environment begins by affirming the need to make significant choices in our lives.

We choose to treat each other as ends, not merely means.

To enable us to be whole, in a fragmented world, we choose to treat each other as unique individuals having intrinsic worth.

We seek to act with integrity.

Treating one another as ends requires that we learn to act with integrity. This includes keeping commitments, and being more open, honest, caring, and responsive.

We are committed to educate ourselves.

Personal progress is possible, both in wisdom and in social life. Learning how to build ethical relationships and cultivate a humane community is a life-long endeavor.

Self-reflection and our social nature require us to shape a more humane world.

Spiritual life is rooted in self-reflection, but can only come to full flower in community. This is because people are social, needing both primary relationships and larger supportive groups to become fully human. Our social nature requires that we reach beyond ourselves to decrease suffering and increase creativity in the world.

Democratic process is essential to our task.

The democratic process is essential to a humane social order because it respects the worth of persons and elicits and allows a greater expression of human capacities. Democratic process also implies a commitment to shared responsibility and authority.

Life itself inspires religious response.

Although awareness of impending death intensifies the human quest for meaning, and lends perspective to all our achievements, the mystery of life itself, the need to belong, to feel connected to the universe, and the desire for celebration and joy, are primary factors motivating human "religious" response.

- JUDAISM
- Alliance for Jewish Renewal

This site appears to reflect in a Jewish modality exactly what Religions in Renewal is all about, including emphasis on taking care of the earth, egalitarianism, openness to other religious traditions, focus on the inner life, understanding reality as a process, celebrating diversity, and faith in the power of love and compassion. The hauntingly beautiful, mandala-like logo alone is worth an extended visit. This is a brief introductory citation from the site:

At the heart of JEWISH RENEWAL is a renewed encounter with God and an understanding of Jewish history as a series of renewed encounters with God. These encounters have followed crises during which God has been eclipsed; yet each crisis has resulted in the emergence of a more or less deeply transformed version of Judaism.

Through prayer, study, and action, Jewish renewal seeks —

to nurture the rebbe-spark in everyone without fearing its emergence in different ways and degrees at different moments in different people;

to nurture communities that dance and wrestle with God, that are intimate, participatory, and egalitarian, and that create a “field of rebbetude”;

and to assist the spiritual growth and healing of individuals, communities, whole societies, and the planet.

Tikkun Community and Magazine

This Jewish Renewal site is dedicated to mending, healing and transforming the world through the power of love, faith, and reason with the kind of clear vision that dares to be critical of intolerance and fanaticism BOTH to the right and the left. IN the spirit of Rabbi Michael Lerner, “Jewish Renewal seeks a revolutionary transformation of the world: away from the ethos of selfishness and materialism and toward an ethos of love and caring.”

The Jewish Reconstructionist Federation

Reconstructionism was founded by Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan to provide a dynamic, flexible, and inclusive alternative to Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform Judaism. A few excerpts from the site in which Rabbi Sheryl Lewart Shulewitz describes Reconstructionism as “a bridge between ancient traditions and contemporary needs, hopes and realities”:

WHO IS A RECONSTRUCTIONIST JEW?

Reconstructionists define Judaism as the evolving religious civilisation of the Jewish people. By “evolving” we mean that Judaism has changed over the centuries of its existence. The faith of the ancient Israelites in the days of Solomon’s Temple was not the same as that of the early rabbis. And neither of those faiths was the same as that of our more recent European ancestors. Each generation of Jews has subtly reshaped the faith and traditions of the Jewish people....

We believe in a God who inhabits this world and especially the human heart. God is the source of our generosity, sensitivity and concern for the world around us. God is also the power within us that urges us toward self-

fulfillment and ethical behaviour. We find God when we look for meaning in the world, when we are motivated toward study and when we work to realize the goals of morality and social justice....

ISRAEL

While our support for Israel is unconditional, a variety of opinion exists within the Reconstructionist movement with regard to specific policies of the Israeli government. We are united in supporting efforts by the World Union for Progressive Judaism (with which we are affiliated) and others who work to strengthen religious freedom in Israel and to make Israel a religious home for all Jews.

THE SECULAR WORLD

Jews who now find themselves in democratic societies live primarily in a secular civilisation—governed by non-Jewish legislatures and courts, speaking non-Jewish languages, singing popular music, working in secular environments with non-Jews, learning in non-Jewish schools, and structuring their lives according to accepted Western values.

Reconstructionists call upon Jews to embrace this open, democratic society—not only because its structural pluralism does not require the abandonment of Judaism, but also because American ideal at their best coincide with Jewish ideals as they ought to be developed and reconstructed. We have much to gain by incorporating contemporary mores into the Jewish civilisation—with regard to the role of women, respect for individual liberties, and acceptance of cultural pluralism.

VISION OF THE JEWISH FUTURE

We hope for a Judaism that serves as a rich source of spiritual self-expression and moral challenge in the way we conduct our lives. We dream of a Jewish people that will overcome divisions and realize its commitment to the single goal of transforming the world into one where all people are respected as bearers of the divine image.

- CHRISTIANITY/CATHOLIC
- Association for the Rights of Catholics in the Church

Selections from the Preamble to the Charter of Rights of Catholics in the Church.

The rights of Catholics in the Church derive both from our basic humanity as persons and from our baptism as Christians. Membership in the human community and membership in the community of the Church, therefore, jointly confer the rights here presented which guarantee our dignity and freedom as persons and as Catholics.

Fundamental human rights are clearly set forth in the United Nations Charter (see Appendix II in the Charter Booklet). This Charter of the Rights of Catholics in the Church presupposes the rights expressed in the U.N. Charter. These basic human rights are supplemented by the common rights and freedom of Christians bestowed at baptism, and which are based on: (1) the priesthood of all believers, (2) the fundamental equality of believers, and (3) the prophetic role of all believers.

Moreover, Vatican Council II urged the Church to read and learn from "the signs of the times." One of the clear signs of the times in many countries is a concern for human rights. The framers of this Charter of Rights for Catholics maintain that faithfulness to the message of the Gospel mandates a concern for justice in the Church, as well as in the world. The Church, by its very nature, must labour for the liberation of those oppressed and marginalised by sinful social structures, which often make it impossible for many men and women to claim even their basic human rights. The Church as a People of God, and not individual Christians only, is called to give witness to the love commandment. This responsibility entails, especially, the renewal of the Church's own structural organisation where it is seen to foster injustice and to deny to some Catholics the rights of persons and the freedom of Christians.² "Justice is love's absolute minimum" (Paul VI). The institutional Church, as a human society, can therefore no longer justify an authoritarian and patriarchal order appropriate to earlier stages of human development. The Social Justice teachings of the Church, especially as set forth in Paul VI's "Populorum Progressio," are presupposed by this Charter.

Fundamental to this Charter is the principle that all Catholics are radically equal. Canon 208 of the revised Code of Canon Law states:

There exists among all the Christian faithful, in virtue of their rebirth in Christ, a true equality with regard to dignity and activity; all cooperate in the building up of the body of Christ in accord with each one's own condition and function.

In other words, the equality of all Catholics is based on their one God, one faith, one call and one common sacramental initiation. Therefore, rights and equality are not diminished by the differing gifts and roles of Church members. Christ has destroyed all divisions, "between Jew and gentile, male and female, slave and free" (Gal. 3:28). Thus, because all are equally beloved by God, each one's ability to respond to that God and to actualize his or her capacities within the Church community, must not be limited by considerations of race, age, nationality, sex, sexual orientation, state-of-life or social position.

The revised Code of Canon Law (see Appendix I) only partially articulates the principles which should inform a just, loving, and therefore fruitful relationship between Church authorities and the People of God.

Rights do not exist in isolation, but only in conjunction with corresponding responsibilities. But it is vital to remember that no responsibilities can be properly carried out without the safeguarding and exercising of those human and Catholic rights. In view of these considerations, there is, then, a need for a clear and complete Charter of the Rights of Catholics in the Church, rights that are founded on (and limited by) the Gospel and on the authentic tradition of the Church.

- CHRISTIANITY/PROTESTANT
- Zygon Center for Religion and Science

“Whereas the non-theological thinker can understand that we are created by the processes of evolution, the theological thrust is that God has created us to be co-creators. God created us to be free, in other words, in the sense that we have the capacity to imagine that the world and we ourselves can be different in significant ways, and we conclude, even though we cannot understand it very well, that God intends for us to be co-creators.” Philip Hefner

ISLAM

- Institute of Islamic Studies and Center for the Study of Society and Secularism

Several years’ of articles by scholar and rights activist Asghar Ali Engineer who heads the two organisations, Institute of Islamic Studies and Centre for Study of Society and Secularism. He has authored or edited 44 books on such issues as Islam and communal and ethnic problems in India and South Asia in general.

- Muslim Women’s League

The Muslim Women’s League is a non-profit Muslim American organisation working to implement the values of Islam and thereby reclaim the status of women as free, equal and vital contributors to society.

- Muslims against Extremism and Fundamentalism

“When we close our hearts to others, our eyes are closed to see the beauty of God in them. The message of Islam, Judaism, Christianity and all other religions is one of love and service to others. If God decides to care and love and feed even those who deny his existence, then who are we to deprive someone else of our love just because he is of different colour or speaks a different language or is born in a different country or prays to the same God but in a different direction, using different words?” Dr. Shahid Athar

HINDUISM

- Association for Communal Harmony in Asia

Members of the Association for Communal Harmony in Asia (ACHA) envision South Asia and other parts of the world as regions of peace and harmony,

1. *Where individuals of all regions, religions, rational persuasions, sects, castes, and cultural and ethnic groups live in peace and harmony, and their holy books, places of worship, and founders are respected.*
2. *Where there are no wars or threats of wars, and nations respect borders of each other and solve their disputes through peaceful means.*
3. *Where governments respect the human rights of all their residents and do not engage in persecution or repression of any individual or group on account of caste, ethnic or national origin, beliefs, religious practices, or political affiliations.*
4. *Where female as well as male children, and women enjoy respect and protection.*

Members of the Association for Communal Harmony in Asia (ACHA) are committed to promote awareness of these issues and harmony among South Asians in the countries of their origin and abroad, wherever they live.

BAHA'I

- Baha'i Documents

Chief among any organism's growth adjustments is the major shift from closed system to open system; from dependence to independence. In the growth and maturation cycle of almost all higher life forms there is a natural and even beautiful process of a decreasing need for nurturance and a consequent and increasing need for self-realisation and unprotected development. The seed becomes sprout becomes sapling becomes tree and bears fruit; the bird gradually learns flight; the child becomes a woman. As growth and maturation in the physical realm leads from attachment to detachment, so the cycle of spiritual maturity in a given community is a function of increasing autonomy and openness to discovery, awareness, and change.

PROPOSAL: (A) That the National Spiritual Assembly adopt and publish a new policy emphasising openness and decentralisation in the affairs of the American Baha'i community; (B)... (C) That American assemblies, both local and national, endeavor by policy to more actively seek out the views and input of their respective constituencies before undertaking any major initiative or programme; (D) That the National Spiritual Assembly, its staff, committees, and agencies adopt a more open administrative style that will encourage and

permit more individual initiative and the growth of nontraditional or unconventional approaches to Baha'i activity, with the aim of fostering unfettered and creative new approaches to teaching, consolidation, and administration.

The free flow of ideas and opinions is vital to the open consultation process and, more importantly, to the spirit of that cardinal Baha'i principle: the independent investigation of truth. Certainly, signing a declaration card does not strip the new believer of his or her access to said principle; yet we often act as if it were necessary to protect the Faith from its adherents.... Originally intended by Shoghi Effendi only to insure accuracy and dignity when presenting the Baha'i Faith to the public, review of publications has become a politicised process whereby reviewing bodies may impose their particular views of the Faith in unmitigated and unchecked censorship. This policy, now often utilised to silence disparate opinion and frank expression of non-mainstream views, has become a silent censor, hidden from the community at large and doubly dangerous because of its cloistered nature.

OBJECTIVE: If review is abolished, the flow of ideas, scholarly debate, and intellectual fervor will increase, becoming a boon to the quality of Baha'i life, individually and collectively. A climate in which people feel comfortable to speak out and share controversial or new ideas will be created. Also, non-Baha'is will begin to see a community that values and gives full expression to diversity. (A Modest Proposal)

Note: This article never appeared in print.... It appears that members of the elective Baha'i institutions, used to perpetual incumbency, the perquisites of office, and an authoritarian leadership style, could not abide the above document and therefore stooped to smear tactics to defame its authors. The editors, heart-broken, ceased publication of Dialogue. Several have subsequently been sanctioned, silenced, or left the Baha'i faith.—J. Cole

ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE: BUILDING BRIDGES TOWARD PEACE

The ECUMENE domain provides cyber-homes for organisations dedicated to bridging the ideological boundaries that divide humanity and have been used for millennia to rationalize suspicion, proselytism, hatred, aggression, and warfare. The Internet is giving us the opportunity both to focus on what human beings have in common and to discover, come to respect, and celebrate our many faces and varied ways. People from all over the world can now collaborate on countless projects to "build the earth," in the words of Teilhard de Chardin. Knowledge can be shared across borders and all can be simultaneously learners and teachers. From the perspective of cyberspace the world of communication and human relationships is as much one as the physical earth is when viewed from outer space. But unity does not mean uniformity and genuine globalisation does not mean loss of what is best in a

culture's tradition; it means enrichment, healing, cross-fertilisation, and growth. It means that all human beings can finally begin to see themselves as members of one big, sprawling, diverse, noisy, argumentative, but ultimately caring and mutually supportive family. Ingrid Shafer

- Bat Shalom: Women's Center for Peace and Social Justice in Jerusalem

THE JERUSALEM LINK DECLARATION

We, Palestinian and Israeli Women, united in a joint effort to bring about a just and lasting peace between our two people, affirm our commitment to working together, within the framework of The Jerusalem Link, for the rapid realisation of our common vision of peace, based on the following principles:

1. *Recognition of the right to self-determination of both peoples in the land, through the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel.*
2. *The city of Jerusalem: two capitals for two states.*
3. *The Oslo Declaration of Principles, signed on September 13, 1993, and all subsequent agreements, must be implemented in their entirety and should serve as the basis for negotiations of the permanent settlement.*
4. *The permanent settlement negotiations must resume immediately, the terms of reference being UN Resolutions 242 and 338, and the Oslo Agreements.*
5. *The settlements and their ongoing expansion constitute a severe impediment to peace.*
6. *Respect for international conventions, and the active involvement of the international community in the peace process, is crucial to its success.*
7. *The realisation of political peace will pave the way for mutual trust, and good neighborly relations on the basis of equality and respect for the national and human rights of each community.*
8. *Women are central partners in the peace process—their involvement in negotiation and in government is critical to the fulfilment of an open and just peace.*
9. *We women are opposed to the use of violence and are committed to the promotion of democratic norms and civil society for the realisation of an enduring peace.*

We call on women in the region and elsewhere to join in making our vision of peace a reality.

- Center for Global Ethics
- Commission for Bosnia in Dialogue

- Global Dialogue Institute (GDI) (Founded by Prof. Leonard Swidler)
- Global Ethic Foundation (Prof. Dr. Hans Küng, President)
- Institute for Global Ethics (Rushworth M. Kidder, President)
- Golden Compass Religious Worldnews.
- Journal of Ecumenical Studies
- Ingrid Shafer's Faculty Homepage
- Institute for Ecumenical Research (University of Tübingen, Germany)
- Interfaith Alliance

INTERFAITH ALLIANCE: STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

At a time when Americans fear our values are being undermined, our communities frayed and the strength of our families and our children's future are threatened, The Interfaith Alliance offers hope and renewal.

The Interfaith Alliance believes in the dignity of the individual and the importance of community. These religious principles compel us to take responsibility for both our own communities and our larger national community.

As a non-partisan organisation, The Interfaith Alliance offers Americans a mainstream, faith-based agenda committed to the positive role of religion as a healing and constructive force in public life. The Interfaith Alliance draws on shared religious principles to challenge those who manipulate religion to promote an extreme political agenda based on a false gospel of irresponsible individualism. This false gospel threatens our families, our values and our future.

We believe we must not only give voice to mainstream values, but also take action to preserve and express our shared beliefs. We are committed to supporting families, ensuring opportunity and honoring freedom.

- Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington
- International Association for Religious Freedom (organised in 1900 in Oxford, England)
- International Interfaith Centre (Oxford, England)
- Institute for Inter-religious Studies, Nachrodt, Germany
- The Inter-Religious Federation for World Peace (International Religious Foundation, New York, NY)
- Movement for Beloved Community
- Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance

- Peace Abbey
- World Council of Churches
- Source Book for Earth's Community of Religions
- The Non-violence Web
- United Communities of Spirit
- United Religions Initiative
- World Scripture Archive

THE PLURALISM PROJECT AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

- Resources by state
- Resources by religious tradition

In the past forty years, immigration has dramatically changed the religious landscape of the United States. Today, the encounter between people of different religious traditions takes place in our own cities and neighborhoods. In 1991, the Pluralism Project at Harvard University began a pioneering study of America's changing religious landscape. Through an expanding network of affiliates, we document the contours of our multi-religious society, explore new forms of interfaith engagement, and study the impact of religious diversity in civic life. In 2000, we expanded our study of pluralism to other multi-religious societies.

SPOTLIGHT

- "The Role and Impact of Religion in the 2008 Presidential Election"

A news conference featuring Diana Eck, Welton Gaddy, and Amy Caiazza.

- Summer Research on World Religions in Boston By Tradition And Researcher
- Twenty Most Recent Research Reports
- Acting on Faith DVDs

THE PLURALISM PROJECT AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

WHAT IS PLURALISM?

The plurality of religious traditions and cultures has come to characterize every part of the world today. But what is pluralism? Here are four points to begin our thinking:

- First, pluralism is not diversity alone, but *the energetic engagement with diversity*. Diversity can and has meant the creation of religious

ghettoes with little traffic between or among them. Today, religious diversity is a given, but pluralism is not a given; it is an achievement. Mere diversity without real encounter and relationship will yield increasing tensions in our societies.

- Second, pluralism is not just tolerance, but *the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference*. Tolerance is a necessary public virtue, but it does not require Christians and Muslims, Hindus, Jews, and ardent secularists to know anything about one another. Tolerance is too thin a foundation for a world of religious difference and proximity. It does nothing to remove our ignorance of one another, and leaves in place the stereotype, the half-truth, the fears that underlie old patterns of division and violence. In the world in which we live today, our ignorance of one another will be increasingly costly.
- Third, pluralism is not relativism, but *the encounter of commitments*. The new paradigm of pluralism does not require us to leave our identities and our commitments behind, for pluralism is the encounter of commitments. It means holding our deepest differences, even our religious differences, not in isolation, but in relationship to one another.
- Fourth, pluralism is *based on dialogue*. The language of pluralism is that of dialogue and encounter, give and take, criticism and self-criticism. Dialogue means both speaking and listening, and that process reveals both common understandings and real differences. Dialogue does not mean everyone at the “table” will agree with one another. Pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table—with one’s commitments.

THE PLURALISM PROJECT AT HARVARD UNIVERSITY

FROM DIVERSITY TO PLURALISM

All of America’s diversity, old and new, does not add up to pluralism. “Pluralism” and “diversity” are sometimes used as if they were synonyms, but diversity is just plurality, plain and simple — splendid, colorful, perhaps threatening. Pluralism is the engagement that creates a common society from all that plurality. On the same street in Silver Spring, Maryland the Vietnamese Catholic church, the Cambodian Buddhist temple, the Ukrainian Orthodox church, the Muslim Community Center, the Disciples of Christ church and the Mangal Mandir Hindu temple are all located in the same neighborhood. This is certainly diversity, but without any engagement or relationship with one another it may not be an instance of pluralism.

Pluralism is only one of the possible responses to this diversity. Some people may feel threatened by diversity, or even hostile to it. Throughout American history there have been groups that have expressed prejudice and intolerance toward newcomers of other religions and cultures. Other people may look forward to the day when all these differences fade into the landscape of a predominantly Christian culture. Clearly the pluralism that would engage people of different faiths and cultures in the creation of a common society is not a “given,” but an achievement.

From the historical perspective, the terms “exclusion,” “assimilation,” and “pluralism” suggest three different ways in which Americans have approached this widening cultural and religious diversity. For exclusionists, the answer to the tumultuous influx of cultural and religious diversity that seemed to threaten the very core civilisation of America was to close the door, especially against the entry of the “alien,” whether Asians, Catholics, or Jews. For assimilationists, like those who envisioned America as a “melting pot,” the invitation to new immigrants was to come, but leave your differences and angularities behind as quickly as possible. Come and be like us, come and conform to a predominantly Anglo-Protestant culture. For the pluralists, like Horace Kallen in the early twentieth century, the American promise was to come as you are, with all your differences and angularities, pledged only to the common civic demands of American citizenship. Come and be yourself, contributing in your distinctive way to the “orchestra” of American civilisation.

In today’s discussion of America’s religious and cultural diversity, there are echoes of these voices of the past. America’s new religious diversity has produced faultlines, those cracks that indicate deep fractures and divisions. Stereotypes and prejudice have old and new forms as they are experienced by immigrant Hindu, Buddhist, or Muslim communities. There are encounters, sometimes hostile encounters, over “zoning” and “traffic” as new religious communities move into the neighborhood. They are often legitimate concerns, but they are also ways of expressing fear and uncertainty about newcomers in the community. Unfortunately, there have also been incidents of vandalism and arson directed against the religious centers of newcomers.

But America’s religious diversity has also produced a new period of bridge-building, as diverse religious communities build unprecedented relationships with one another. A church and a mosque buy property together and build side by side in the San Francisco area. Councils of churches and synagogues gradually include mosques

and temples, becoming interfaith councils. Today, they are beginning to constitute a new inter-religious infrastructure in America's cities and towns. There are interfaith dialogues, interfaith coalitions to fight hunger and homelessness, and interfaith Thanksgiving services. In school boards, there are real encounters, often heated, over issues of the proper role of religion in the public schools.

Today, as in every era, Americans are appropriating anew the meaning of "We, the people of the United States of America...." What does it mean to say "we" in a multireligious America? How do "we" relate to one another, when that "we" includes Buddhist Americans, like the Hawaiian born Buddhist astronaut who died on the Challenger, Muslim Americans, like the mayor of a small town in Texas, and Sikh Americans, like the research scientist in Fairfax, Virginia. What, then, is pluralism?

First, pluralism is not the sheer fact of plurality or diversity alone, but is active engagement with that diversity. One can be an observer of diversity. One can "celebrate diversity," as the cliché goes. Or one can be critical of it or threatened by it. But real pluralism requires participation, engagement. Diversity can and often has meant isolation and the creation of virtual ghettos of religion and sub-culture with little traffic between them. The dynamic of pluralism, however, is one of meeting, exchange, and two-way traffic. Kallen's analogy of the orchestra, sounding together, may be a good one. But as Kallen was well aware, it is always an unfinished symphony. The music, perhaps more like jazz, depends upon having an ear always attuned to the genius of the other players.

Second, pluralism is more than the mere tolerance of differences; it requires some knowledge of our differences. There is no question that tolerance is important, but tolerance by itself may be a deceptive virtue. Sometimes an attitude of tolerance may stand in the way of engagement. Tolerance does not require people to know anything at all about one another. As a result, tolerance can let us harbor all the stereotypes and half-truths that we want to believe about our neighbors. Tolerance does little to remove our ignorance of one another. Tolerance is definitely important, but it is probably too thin a foundation for a society as religiously diverse and complex as that of America.

Third, pluralism is not simply relativism, but makes room for real and different religious commitments. Some people are wary of the language of pluralism, insisting that it effectively waters down one's own religious beliefs by acknowledging that others believe differently. Some mistakenly think that a pluralist perspective assumes that there

is no real difference among various religious traditions and their values. On the contrary, the encounter of a pluralist society is the encounter of real commitments and real differences. Pluralism does not require relinquishing the distinctiveness of one's own tradition of faith to reach the "lowest common denominator." In the public square of a pluralist society, commitments are not left at the door. Rather, pluralism invites people of every faith or of none to be themselves, with all their particularities, and yet to be engaged in creating a civil society, through the critical and self-critical encounter with one another. Pluralism is a process of creating a society by acknowledging, rather than hiding, our deepest differences.

Fourth, pluralism in America is clearly based on the common ground rules of the First Amendment to the Constitution: "no establishment" of religion and the "free exercise" of religion. The vigorous encounter of a pluralistic society is not premised on achieving agreement on matters of conscience and faith, but achieving a vigorous context of discussion and relationship. *E Pluribus Unum*, "out of many, one," envisions one people, a common sense of a civic "we," but not one religion, one faith, one conscience. *Unum* does not mean uniformity. Perhaps the most valuable thing people of many faiths have in common is their commitment to a society based on the give and take of the civil dialogue at a common table.

Fifth, pluralism requires the nurturing of constructive dialogue, revealing both common understandings and real differences. Dialogue does not mean everyone at the "table" will agree with one another. The process of public discussion will inevitably reveal both areas of agreement and of disagreement. Pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table—with one's commitments. Discovering where the metaphorical "tables" are in American society and encouraging a climate of dialogue is foundational for pluralism.

Where are those public spaces, those "tables" where people of various religious traditions and none meet in American society? They are certainly in neighborhoods and community organisations, schools and colleges, legislatures and courts, zoning boards and planning commissions, interfaith councils and interfaith coalitions, chaplaincies and hospitals. In every one of these areas of public life, Americans are now facing new questions, new challenges, and new tensions in appropriating a more complex sense of who "we" now are.



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