Spring 2016

Reflections

YALE DIVINITY SCHOOL

a magazine of theological and ethical inquiry

All Together Now: Pluralism and Faith

YALE DIVINITY SCHOOL

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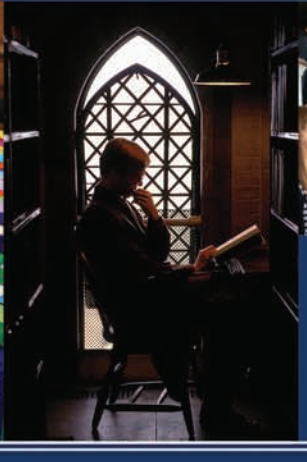

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Reflections

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a magazine of theological and ethical inquiry

We need to cultivate an understanding of Christianity that permits us to profess our unswerving loyalty to Christ without denying the value of other religions.

–YDS Dean Gregory E. Sterling

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From the Dean's Desk

Gregory E. Sterling
The Reverend Henry L. Slack
Dean of Yale Divinity School
& Lillian Claus Professor
of New Testament

It would be irresponsible to think of Christianity in less than global terms in the 21st century. By extension it would be irresponsible to think in global terms without considering the ways in which Christianity relates to other religions.

According to the Pew Research Center's 2014 report on "Global Religious Diversity," in 2010 Christians comprised 31.5 percent of the world's population, Muslims 23.2 percent, Hindus 15 percent, Buddhists 7.1 percent, folk religionists 5.9 percent, and all other religions less than 1 percent. Some 16 percent had no religious affiliation. Thus Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists comprise almost half the globe. While Jews are only 0.2 percent of the world's population, Christians cannot afford to ignore our relationship to them – after all, we include their Scriptures as the first half of our own Scriptures.

Global thinking is a pressing need for a Christian divinity school. The issues we face range from the dynamics of intermarriage to violent conflicts that use religion to justify bloodshed.

Almost every minister today will face the question of counseling couples from different religious backgrounds. Before 1960, according to a Pew Research Center report last year ("Interfaith marriage is common in US ..."), 81 percent of people married a spouse of the same religion. Between 2010-2014, this number dropped to 61 percent. Although the most common forms of intermarriage are between Christians and a "none" (18 percent) or a spouse from a different Christian tradition (15 percent), 6 percent were to individuals of another religion, double the percentage prior to 1960. We have to prepare ministers who can respond to these realities.

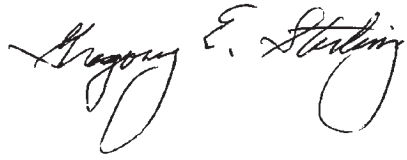
We also need to prepare ministers who can address the horrific episodes of violence in the name of religion that recur with alarming frequency. We want to do this by creating a new model for thinking about the relationship between religions.

There are two widely known models today. In academic circles, religious studies departments use the comparative religion approach. This approach brackets all commitments of faith and compares religions largely through social scientific methods. Although there is an important place for the academic study of religion, we cannot afford to reduce religion to a social construct and expect practitioners of other religions to take us seriously – they will not.

A second model is an interfaith approach used in ecclesial circles. Its multiple incarnations range from single meetings to dedicated units within a denomination. Again, this is important work, but an ecumenical divinity school like Yale Divinity School cannot speak for a particular church or a group of churches.

As a school within a major research university, we want to create an approach to issues from a rigorous intellectual perspective – yet within an environment of faith or practice. We are not interested in identifying the lowest common denominator among religions but in exploring both the points of agreement and disagreement. It is shortsighted to avoid issues that divide. Further, our approach needs to include experts from other fields, such as anthropology, law, and political theory. We want to draw on the University's full range of resources to address the issues that drive wedges between practitioners of different religions.

This issue of *Reflections* is a step for us to think about issues we need to address. The contributors are diverse: Buddhists, Christians, Jews, Hindus, and Muslims. We all share at least two convictions: We are loyal to our own religion and, at the same time, we are committed to live in peace with one another. This is not simply an academic exercise. The lives and well-being of millions of people are at stake. I invite you to read these articles with the same level of seriousness out of which the authors have written them.



Gregory E. Sterling
Dean

can weigh them. Why is this important? It allows individuals to remain true to their own religious convictions while at the same time allowing others the space to have their own.

Beyond Exclusivism

The purpose of this exercise has been to force us to think about a sacred text that has a viewpoint that is not exclusive. I would situate Acts 17 in the inclusive

We need an understanding of our own faith that is true to Christianity but permits space for others to be true to their faiths.

category; it is certainly not exclusive. Every major tradition has texts or warrants like the Aereopagetica that move beyond the exclusive to the inclusive or pluralistic categories. It is important that we learn how to articulate our own loyalty without requiring someone else to forfeit their loyalty. As a Christian I have an exclusive loyalty to Christ; this is what it means to confess him as Lord. At the same time, my own exclusive loyalty does not require that I dismiss the validity of the loyalties of Jews or Muslims or Hindus or Buddhists.

While I was writing this article, I was also preparing a private retreat for representatives of the Iraqi government, the US State Department, delegates from the UN, and faculty from Yale in order to discuss the future of inclusivity within Iraq. The practice of exclusion has created enormous tensions within Iraq and has threatened to eliminate US support. Yet how could I encourage these practitioners and peacemakers to look within the Islamic tradition for warrants of inclusivity if I have not done the same within Christianity? These remarks are my attempt to do for Christianity what I think Muslims need to do for their own religion.

We need to be models of what it means to be unashamedly Christian without being narrowly Christian. We need to cultivate an understanding of Christianity that permits us to profess our unswerving loyalty to Christ without denying the value of other religions.

Gregory E. Sterling is The Reverend Henry L. Slack Dean and Lillian Claus Professor of New Testament at Yale Divinity School. Concentrating his research in Hellenistic Judaism, the writings of Philo of Alexandria, Josephus, and Luke-Acts, he is the author or editor of seven books and more than 70 scholarly articles and chapters. This essay is a shorter adaptation of a plenary address he gave in South Korea to the Korean Association of Christian Studies in late 2014.

Notes

1 An important study of the global phenomenon in its rise is *The Fundamentalism Project*, 5 volumes, edited by Martin E. Marty and Scott R. Appleby (University of Chicago, 1991-1995).

2 On their opposition see David L. Balch, "The Areopagus Speech: An Appeal to the Stoic Historian Posidonius against Later Stoics and the Epicureans," in *Greeks, Romans, and Christians: Essays in Honor of Abraham J. Malherbe* (edited by David L. Balch, Everett Ferguson, and Wayne A. Meeks (Fortress, 1990), pp. 52-79.

3 On the parallels see Karl O. Sandnes, "Paul and Socrates: The Aim of Paul's Areopagus Speech," *JSNT* 50 (1993), pp. 13-26, esp. 20-24; and David M. Reis, "The Areopagus as Echo Chamber: *Mimesis* and Intertextuality in Acts," *Journal of Higher Criticism* 9 (2002), pp. 259-277, esp. 266-273.

4 Acts 17:18 and Xenophon, *Mem.* 1.1.1. See also Plato, *Apol.* 24B; *Euth.* 1C, 2B.

5 Plutarch, *Stoic Self-Contradictions* 1052E citing Euripides, *Madness of Hercules* 1345-1346.

6 Aratus, *Phaen.* 5.

7 E.g., Acts 4:12. This is also a way of emphasizing the universality of claims of Christianity.

8 John Hick, "Religious Pluralism," *ER* 12, pp. 331-333.

9 E.g., John 1:9-13 and John 9:39-41, which use blindness and seeing for the same purpose.

10 John 14:6. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (S.P.C.K., 1960), p. 382, accurately captured the thrust of the statement: "If John, here and elsewhere, used some of the notions and terminology of the religions of his day, and there are many indications that he was not unfamiliar with them, he was quite sure that those religions were ineffective and that there was no religious or mystical approach to God which could achieve its goal."

11 See the formulation of Cyprian, *Ep.* 72.21, *salus extra ecclesiam non est*.

12 Arthur J. Droge, *Homer or Moses? Early Christian Interpretation of the History of Culture* (HUT 26; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1989), provides a very helpful analysis.

13 Karl Rahner, *Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews, 1965-1982*, edited by Paul Imhof and Hubert Biallowons (Crossroads, 1986), p. 135.

14 Huston Smith, *Religions of Man* (Harper, 1958) or *The World's Religions: Our Great Wisdom Traditions* (HarperOne, 1991, revised edition) is his most popular book.

15 Mahatma Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule* (Navajivan, 1938), pp. 45-46.

A 21ST-CENTURY PLEA FOR EMPATHY

By His Holiness the 17th Karmapa, Ogyen Trinley Dorje

The 17th Karmapa, born in 1985, is head of the 900-year-old Karma Kagyu lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. He has emerged as a global spiritual voice especially around issues of ecological compassion. Karmapa means "the one who carries out buddha activity" or "the embodiment of all the activities of the buddhas." (See kagyuoffice.org.) Last year, Yale awarded him a Chubb Fellowship, which is devoted to encouraging an interest in public service.

Central to my beliefs as a Buddhist is the view that all of us are deeply interconnected. Whether we acknowledge it or not, from the moment we are born we depend on others in order to live. The source of our food and clothing and even the air that we breathe is external to us. From this perspective, there is no difference between rich and poor, high and low, or between religious and cultural traditions. Our well-being is dependent on others.

Even when one takes into account the various differences in practices and philosophy, the main message of all world religions seems to be the same: The source of our happiness lies in helping and giving to others. Though religions may diverge in metaphysics – for example, whether there is a God or not, or whether the law of karma, cause and effect, is accurate or not – their ethics converge. World religions have codes of conduct intended to stop actions that will harm others. They encourage people to act compassionately, to give to those in need, to forgive. Furthermore, they all seem to agree that ultimately happiness cannot be derived from material possessions alone.

Religions exist side by side in most parts of the world. Many people think of old Tibet as exclusively Buddhist, but in Lhasa there was a thriving Tibetan Muslim community, which has successfully re-established itself in Ladakh, and Tibetan Christians lived in the borderlands with China. And India, the birthplace of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism, has been a multicultural society for more than 2,000 years – also home to Zoroastrian refugees from Persia, different Islamic traditions, as well as one of the oldest branches of the Christian church. We have always lived in a world of diversity.

Religions have evolved within specific cultural histories and unique environments. With seven billion people in the world, it would be impossible for everyone to follow the same religion. However, we need to recognize that each religion has a treasury of good qualities to offer that are of great practical help. For instance, in Buddhism, we emphasize the quality of lovingkindness. Christianity emphasizes forgiveness. Islam encourages almsgiving. When we are confident in our own religious path, we have no need to feel threatened by others.

I often draw on a simple analogy to describe how we should relate to differences of religion. When we eat in a restaurant, we don't expect everyone to eat the same food. If other people prefer different food, we are happy for them to choose the food they enjoy. We don't get upset because they don't like the food we like. Religions, likewise, are not in competition with each other but meet different needs and conditions.

When I visited universities in the US, including Yale University, I had many heart-to-heart discussions with members of other faiths. These experiences confirmed my view that connections between people of diverse religious traditions need to develop not on a public level but at an interpersonal level, so that people's experience of other faiths develop into feelings of empathy and mutual respect. Nowadays, unfortunately, there are many negative actions taking place in the name of religion. In the same way that we may have attachments to our own ethnic group, we may have attachment to our religion; these attachments are based on irrational and unreflective habitual ways of thinking.

It is vital that we present the qualities of the religious path in a proper way. We must raise our voices to echo positive and peaceful messages of the various world religions.

Our 21st-century world is facing many dangers and difficulties: the environmental crisis, war and conflict, large migrations of refugees, and deep social divisions, to name a few. One of the most important things religious traditions can do is to shift people's attitudes towards empathy and simple living. Scientists are very clear about the damage being done to our environment because of our unsustainable lifestyles, but most people seem indifferent to the implications. If people's attitudes and motivations are to be positively transformed, religious leaders must show the way.

This means that all of us in the religious traditions have a great responsibility. As spiritual leaders, we need to remind people of the essence of the teachings of our respective traditions, not as mere philosophical concepts but as a practical guide to modern-day living. We have to transcend the borders of our affiliations and harness the potential of all religious traditions. It seems to me to be of the utmost importance that all religious traditions work together to ease the suffering of the world.

A Christian Divinity School, a Jewish Professor

By Joel Baden

Being the only full-time Jewish faculty member at an explicitly Christian divinity school can be a remarkable pedagogical opportunity – and at times an exercise in existential frustration. I offer these thoughts here for any who may be thinking about the nature of theological education, and the role that religious pluralism plays both in the classroom and in the wider culture of a divinity school.

The students at YDS know that, being in an ecumenical setting, they cannot expect their classroom experiences to simply reinforce the traditions and beliefs with which they were raised. Unlike at a denominational seminary, our courses, our pedagogy, cannot be tailored to any specific constituent group, for fear of alienating the many others represented in the classroom. Nevertheless, this is a Christian divinity school, and the students, especially those planning to go into pulpit ministry, may well have the expectation that their classes will be, if not denominationally specific, at least generally Christian in character.

Students should know that learning about other faiths is an integral part of Christian education.

First Day of Class

It may thus be somewhat of a surprise when, early in the morning on the first day of their first semester here, the students who take their seats in the Old Testament Interpretation lecture find themselves face to face with a professor who is unwilling – indeed, unable – to provide them with a Christian understanding of the Bible.

Despite the common language of "Judeo-Christian," which makes it sound as if we are all one common faith tradition, my Judaism and their Christianity are worlds apart. And it is in the space between my religious background and theirs that they encounter, and come to appreciate the value of, the critical academic study of the biblical text.

Beyond Alienation

Christian ecumenism allows for the discovery of common ground among different Christian traditions. True religious pluralism, looking beyond the borders of Christianity, both permits and requires even broader exploration. What we are searching for – both the students and I as their instructor – is that space where we can talk together about the Bible without experiencing any alienation, either from each other or from the text.

This means setting aside presumptions about which parts of the Bible are most important and about how the text should be read. Almost no one enters my classroom excited to dive into the sacrificial ritual legislation of Leviticus; most of them have never bothered to read it (or have given up if they did try). On the other hand, they have given extensive thought to the less than 20 verses about the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22.

This habit has nothing to do with which is more important in the Bible, and everything to do with which had a more lasting legacy in Christianity. Part of the task of reading the Bible in a pluralistic setting is recalibrating one's sense of how to determine which texts are more deserving of attention. When a Jew is teaching the Old Testament – and calling it, quite consciously, the Hebrew Bible – it is remarkable how quickly students are able to stop finding Jesus in every other verse.

In other words, the forced separation from one's denominational traditions – even from Christianity altogether – leads inevitably to a far closer reading, and a clearer and more nuanced understanding, of the material being studied, of the Bible itself. And this, in turn, leads – I hope – to a clearer understanding of one's own traditions. Absent any alternative, it is all too easy to believe that what one learns in church about the Bible is somehow "the truth." Pluralistic learning by necessity presents just that missing alternative.

Revealing a World

From my perspective, teaching a room full of Christian divinity students presents a far greater challenge than speaking to a synagogue or a Jewish classroom. Teaching the Bible in a way that does not, indeed cannot, rely on any shared background, history, culture, or knowledge – this forces me, too,

How can I open the word and world of the Bible to them? What can I tell them that will be at once engaging, informative, and, crucially for a professional school, useful?

back into the text itself. What can I tell them that will be at once engaging, informative, and, crucially for a professional school, useful? How can I open the word and world of the Bible to them – and to them all at once, equally, despite their remarkable diversity, and despite their utter difference from me? It is a challenge that I enjoy thoroughly.

A school that wants to commit itself to pluralistic theological education must also face some more difficult challenges, however. True pluralism requires not only common intellectual ground between traditions, but also appreciation for individual particularity across faiths, and too often at Christian schools there is a general lack of knowledge of any non-Christian faith within a student body. We do students a gross disservice if we send them out into the world, as religious leaders of any variety, without giving them at least a basic training in the other major faith traditions in America, that is, minimally, Judaism and Islam. And such training should be an established part of the curriculum of the divinity school or seminary proper, not merely an encouragement to explore possible courses in an affiliated department of religious studies. Students should know that learning about other faiths is an integral part of Christian education.

As strongly as I feel about the pedagogical advantages of having non-Christian faculty teaching in a Christian context, there are many in the world of theological education for whom it is not such an obvious good – those who talk the talk of the desirability of religious pluralism but don't recognize the repercussions. There is an inherent tension between promoting the value of religiously diverse faculty and desiring, even requiring, certain faith-based behavior in educational spaces. (Praying before class, for example. Or praying before faculty meetings.)

A Christian Culture

I recognize the tricky balancing act: how to create a broadly pluralistic educational environment without sacrificing the distinctively Christian nature of the school? Yet pluralism in the classroom, with all its pedagogical advantages, in no way requires any diminishment of Christian culture outside it. There is still chapel, and internships, spiritual formation groups, clinical pastoral education programs. (At YDS many courses do not and cannot aspire to pluralism: preaching, pastoral care, polity classes, and others.) The place can be Christian even while the theological education provided – or at least some parts of it – is non-Christian.

"I USED TO SHUN MY COMPANION" *

I used to shun my companion
if his religion was not like mine;
but now my heart accepts every form.
It is a pasturage for gazelles, a monastery for monks,
a temple of idols, a Ka'ba for the pilgrim,
the tables of the Torah, the holy book of the Qur'an.
Love alone is my religion, and whichever way
its horses turn, that is my faith and creed.

**** By an anonymous medieval Arabic poet***

The desire to celebrate pluralism, and train students to work in a religiously pluralistic world, are admirable goals. But they require more than lip service. Is it worth giving up the explicitly Christian nature of some spaces – a lecture hall, a seminar room, a faculty meeting – to achieve the benefits of a more pluralistic theological education? There is no correct or incorrect path: Every school has the right to train its students as it sees fit. But a path ought to be cleared and taken, and marked with signposts to ensure that everyone at the institution knows where they are going. If a commitment to pluralism is made, I believe it requires more attentiveness to an institution's pedagogical culture. If the culture is unwelcoming to those who would make it pluralistic, it will not long be so.

It is my strong hope that my classroom, despite being an explicitly non-Christian space, still contributes directly to the Christian identity of my students. I believe that when they leave my course, they will be better able to appreciate the biblical text in and of itself, and also be better able to articulate how and why their own faith traditions take up that text and reshape it.

This is what pluralism does, at its heart: It provides students with distance from themselves, a distance that is necessary for the kind of self-evaluation and self-criticism that makes them into better and more productive human beings and leaders.

Joel Baden, professor of Hebrew Bible at YDS, is a specialist in the Pentateuch, biblical Hebrew, and disability theory in biblical studies. His books include The Historical David: The Real Life of an Invented Hero *(HarperOne, 2013) and* The Promise to the Patriarchs *(Oxford, 2013). Future projects include commentaries on Deuteronomy (International Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament) and Exodus (Anchor).*

Kathy Thaden, whose work "Passion" is featured on the cover of this *Reflections*, is a mosaic artist who finds beauty in what was once broken. She finds art in what was once discarded.

"Working with stone or glass is transforming," she says. "The pieces are broken, change shape, fit together, and then made whole again."

There's a theology at work here amid the vivid array of vitreous glass, ceramic tile, stained glass, and other materials she uses.

"My work is informed by my faith – expressing awe at creation and the Creator. I love to find meaning in things that would go to waste, and give them purpose."

Thaden is a full-time mosaicist living in Colorado with her husband, an Episcopal priest. Before the transition to mosaic artwork 13 years ago, she was an Emmy-winning TV art director and graphic designer.

With mosaic she discovered a tactile creative outlet and a new vocation.

"Exploring it, I was soon hooked. It took my breath away."

Today she leads mosaic-making retreats at churches and abbeys, inviting participants to open their creativity to God's presence.

She returns often to a quote from the late Henri Nouwen as a kind of cornerstone.

"A mosaic consists of thousands of little stones," Nouwen wrote in *Bread for the Journey*. "Some are blue, some are green, some are yellow, some are gold. When we bring our faces close to the mosaic, we can admire the beauty of each stone. But as we step back from it, we can see that all these little stones reveal to us a beautiful picture, telling a story that none of these stones can tell by itself. That is what our life in community is about. Each of us is like a little stone, but together we reveal the face of God to the world."

See more at thadenmosaics.com.

The Religion of Love: A Space for All

By Seyed Amir Akrami

I was born into a religious Shi'ite family in Iran. The Christian and Jewish communities in my hometown were tiny, yet numerous enough to make me think from early childhood about the question of religious diversity. Many theological subjects were debated in our families and schools by passionate participants.

Now that I reflect back, there were two main approaches. A group of people, mostly less educated, had the motto: literally, "Moses with his religion and Jesus with his," which today could be taken as an endorsement of pluralism, the view that people of different religions are justified in practicing their faiths.

Can Truth Be Many?

But there was another approach. It insisted that religion has to do with truth, and truth cannot be many. Therefore, for them there was one true religion and all others were false. Furthermore, among the different views of Islam only the Shi'i version had the true understanding of the faith.

An old joke captures the exclusivist outlook: Two Iranian scholars were discussing religion. One of them asked the other, "In the last analysis, who goes to paradise?" The other, a poet known for his sense of humor, answered, "Well, it is really very simple. First, all religions other than Islam are obviously false. But among Muslims, some are Shi'ites and some Sunnis, and we all know that the Sunnis have strayed from the right path ... That leaves the Shi'ites. But among Shi'ites, there are the common people and the ulama (religious scholars). Everyone knows that the common people don't care about God and religion ... That leaves the ulama. But the ulama have become ulama in order to lord it over the common people. That leaves you and me. And I am not so sure about you." (*The Vision of Islam* by Sachiko Marata and William Chittick, Paragon House, 1994, p. 175)

God is merciful and loving according to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This central belief cannot be reconciled with exclusivism.

Three Options

Besides pluralism and exclusivism, there is a third option – a kind of inclusivism wherein one's own religion is regarded as the more truthful version but other faiths are still considered adequate enough to provide at least a minimally successful path of salvation and truth for their adherents.

Among all these, pluralism is the most tenable option, I believe. God is merciful and loving according to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This central belief cannot be reconciled with exclusivism or with an inclusivism that says most people who do not adhere to "our" religion have arbitrarily less of a chance to salvation and truth. Further, we can find morally good and spiritually elevated people among all the world faiths. And it is reasonable to observe that most adherents identify with their religion because of an accident of birth rather than a strictly systematic intellectual endeavor that has born the fruit of commitment.

In my own life I became familiar with a profound mystical view emphasized by some Sufis. It captures a pluralistic spirit, declaring that different faith traditions offer various ways in which God has manifested to humanity or, alternatively, the ways humans have responded to God. This finds its best expression, in my view, in the following lines from Rumi, in a story about Moses who chastises a shepherd for imploring God in unfamiliar and theologically

incorrect ways. After Moses scolds the shepherd, a revelation from God comes to Moses:

"Thou hast parted My servant from Me. Didst thou come (as a prophet) to unite, or didst thou come to sever? ... I have bestowed on everyone a (special) way of acting, I have given to everyone a (peculiar) form of expression. In regard to him it is (worthy of) praise, and in regard to thee it is (worthy of) blame: in regard to him honey, and in regard to thee poison. ... In the Hindus the idiom of Hind (India) is praiseworthy, in the Sindians the idiom of Sind is praiseworthy. ... I look not at the tongue and speech, I look at the inward (spirit) and the state (of feeling). I gaze into the heart (to see) whether it be lowly, though the words uttered be not lowly. ... How much (more) of these phrases and conceptions and metaphors? I want burning, burning: become friendly with that burning! Light up a fire of love in thy soul, burn thought and expression entirely (away)! ... The religion of Love is apart from all religions. For lovers, the (only) religion and creed is – God." (*The Mathnawi of Jalalu'ddin Rumi*, translated by Reynold Nicholson, vol. 2, pp. 311-312.)

As I see it, pluralism creates space for others to seek their own path to truth and avoid the exceptionalism and arrogance that is the cause of so much religious chauvinism in the world.

However, religious pluralism turns out to be a difficult position to hold for many. Here I just address one important problem, the charge of relativism. As the argument goes, if one concedes that other religions are valid roads of salvation and truth

All dimensions of our religions should be fundamentally oriented toward human ethical transformation, away from self-centeredness and towards God.

then one cannot make unique truth claims for one's own tradition. There are different ways of averting the charge of relativism, but here I'll suggest one – the analogy of language.

The fact that I can observe people of other countries using other languages effectively for their communication doesn't mean that I cannot or should not use my own any longer. I am able to communicate with the people of my own country – that is what matters – and it may well be the only option available to me.

Reality-Centered

This implies that religions are like languages, whose main criterion is efficiency and practical consequences. This suggests that the non-practical dimensions of our religions should somehow translate into something practical and specifically ethical. In my view, this is what religious pluralism entails. All other dimensions of our religions – doctrinal, mythological, institutional, legal, experiential – should be fundamentally oriented toward human ethical transformation, away from self-centeredness and towards God/Reality-centeredness, to use John Hick's important idea. I think this is a sensible price to pay in order to move away from violent exclusivism and toward social cohesion and intellectual credibility.

I conclude with a Qur'anic reference that in my view contains intimations both of pluralism and the centrality of a practical-ethical dimension of our religions: "We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God had so willed, He would have made you one community, but He wanted to test you through that which He has given you, so race to do good: you will all return to God and He will make clear to you the matters you differed about." (Qur'an, 5:48, translation by Abdel Haleem)

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BLESSING THE BOATS
By Lucille Clifton

(at St. Mary's)

may the tide
that is entering even now
the lip of our understanding
carry you out
beyond the face of fear
may you kiss
the wind then turn from it
certain that it will
love your back may you
open your eyes to water
water waving forever
and may you in your innocence
sail through this to that

A Christian in Public and Private

By LaShawn Warren '15 M.A.R.

I recently walked past a small stone church downtown, not far from where I work. With its medieval architecture and weathered exterior, the church seemed out of place among the enormous buildings in the business district. I was disappointed to find a tall, padlocked iron gate encircling the church's courtyard entrance.

It gave the appearance of separation, a distancing from the outside world. No doubt there may have been practical reasons for the church's fence, but the abrupt division provides a disturbing metaphor for the way many Christians erect barriers between their faith and public life.

Having worked in Washington politics for over a decade, I find many of my Christian colleagues, most of whom would consider themselves progressives, often struggle to embrace or articulate their faith publicly. They are not alone in navigating the tension between fully living their faith while honoring the religious choices of others without judgment.

Religion in Abeyance

Many Christians confront this tension by projecting an agnostic facade, holding their own religious beliefs in abeyance while hoping to enhance their public profile as neutral and objective. They are reluctant to make an outward demonstration of faith for various reasons: They do not want to be accused of imposing their personal beliefs on others, or they fear being labeled judgmental or anti-intellectual. Wishing to ensure the comfort of others, some Christians lean toward extremes by avoiding any discussion of faith in the public square, choosing instead to conceal and compartmentalize their faith life as totally private.

I have come to realize it is impossible to change the world without being proximate to the brokenness we seek to heal.

Unfortunately, many progressive Christians self-police to such an extent that their values never penetrate the public dialogue about our country. But we cannot remain on the sidelines. Our silence and neutrality make us complicit in the social injustice and spiritual decay we see around us.

Coworkers with God

In his *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, Dr. Martin Luther King writes: "We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the vitriolic words and actions of the bad people, but the appalling silence of the good people. We must come to see that human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability. It comes through the tireless efforts and persistent work of men willing to be coworkers with God and, without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of stagnation."[1]

Christians are indeed called to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth, even in a pluralistic society. We must stir the moral consciousness of the nation while living in a loving manner that exemplifies the Christian faith.

This holds true particularly now in a political season of divisive, angry, hate-filled rhetoric. It is virtually impossible for me to reconcile those who identify as Christian with their support of candidates who promote racism and torture, excite religious and ethnic discord, and incite violence. This blurring of lines – this false witness – allows people to engage in pernicious behavior while still laying claim to Christianity.

Where is the public counternarrative of faith, hope, and love? I agree with the Apostle Paul that a spiritual conversion to Christianity should bring

an outward manifestation of an inward change – a transformation that should be evident to all, beyond the church walls.

Proximity to Pain

I have served as a public interest attorney for nearly two decades, and in that time I have come to realize it is impossible to change the world without being proximate to the brokenness we seek to heal. We have to be intentional about walking alongside communities where there is suffering, injustice, poverty, and inequality. Proximity allows us to see, hear, and understand things that cannot be seen, heard, or understood from a distance. This closeness spurs mercy and compassion. We cannot get there when we build gates and fences around our spiritual life that insulate us from the difficult reality of life endured by the most vulnerable among us, people of differing races, ethnicities, cultures, and religions.

My faith fuels my passion to fight for kids. It colors my view of humanity, fairness, mercy, justice, and redemption.

I am consciously working to live a life of faith that occupies both public and private spaces, while respecting those who are religious and those who are not. Throughout my career, I have worked with people from multiple faith traditions. As I have discovered, in these spaces we find commonality of purpose. Our moral compass is grounded in common values that inspire us to address the root causes of inequality in urban centers, compelling us to work together to protect those vulnerable citizens within the reach of our projects and influence.

I translate Christian teachings into this pluralistic setting. My faith informs my decisions, my actions, even my choice to pursue public interest work. I believe in an embodied faith – a faith that can no more be separated from my daily identity than the heart from the body.

I currently lead a coalition of advocates dedicated to improving outcomes for youth involved in the juvenile justice system. My faith fuels my passion to fight for kids. It colors my view of humanity, fairness, mercy, justice, and redemption. It leads me to believe that "each of us is more than the worst thing we've ever done."[2] I am convinced that faith and public life are mutually beneficial and lead to better policy outcomes.

In truth, I see faith in the public square as an imperative. Without it, Christianity becomes distorted by religious fanatics and false witnesses who commandeer the public meaning of the faith. How can progressive Christians remain quiet when all around us we see the consequences of silence manifested in the form of oppression, discrimination, violence, genocide, religious intolerance, and war?

Silence is not an option. We must tear down our walls and tell our truth – one of love, justice, peace, and hope.

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Notes

1 Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," from *I Have A Dream: Writings & Speeches That Changed The World,* edited by James M. Washington (HarperOne, 1992), p. 92.

2 Bryan Stevenson, *Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption* (Speigel & Grau, 2014).

THE LAST DAY
By Lucille Clifton

we will find ourselves surrounded
by our kind all of them now
wearing the eyes they had
only imagined possible
and they will reproach us
with those eyes
in a language more actual
than speech
asking why we allowed this
to happen asking why
for the love of God
we did this to ourselves
and we will answer
in our feeble voices because
because because

Cherishing One Another, Against the Odds

By Lamin Sanneh

I recently finished a study of the ummah*, the faith community in Sunni Islam, and in the process was struck by the emphasis in the sources on the necessity of a religious society as opposed to the idea of a religious state – the state is needed to avert anarchy, but it cannot substitute for religion as the heartbeat of civil society.*[1]

This viewpoint is so pervasive in the sources over the centuries that I suffer something of a whiplash when I turn to the proliferating accounts in today's media about Islam and the politics of violence. But I am not the only one surprised and impressed by this viewpoint and its contrast with the current political interpretation of Islam. Many scholars, Muslim and non-Muslim, have long noted this early history of Islam's religious heritage, but their voices have been drowned in the strident politics of radical Islam.

Faith v. State

As the preponderance of historical sources shows, Muslim scholars set out very early to make the Islamic *ummah* far more important in promoting the spiritual teachings of Islam than the maintenance of *mulk*, the worldly kingdom. God's sovereignty in revelation and law is at the core of Islam's spiritual heritage, and the scholars insisted that that heritage could not be subsumed or overtaken by considerations of *mulk*.

Thus I came upon a pacifist Islamic tradition, originating in the Mali Empire, that focused on religious life and practice, with rejection of jihad for the sake of religious freedom.

Ibn Isháq, the early biographer of Muhammad, has him setting down the moral terms of the community he would entrust with his values: "Out of everything that God creates He chooses and selects; the actions He chooses he calls *khíra*; the people He chooses He calls *muṣṭafá*; and the speech He chooses He calls *ṣálih*." When we speak, as we often do, about the political failure of Islam we tend to miss the implicit point that in its nature religion is not a political craft, so that to reduce it to politics merely is to violate what it means to be religious. The founders of classical Shari'ah law, for example, were to a person pursued and persecuted by Islamic political authorities for refusing to surrender their conscience and give in to the rulers' wishes, enduring physical torture in the process. It is highly ironic and a reversal of history to speak today of Shari'ah as state law when the state at the time was threatened by the profound influence the code and its guardians exercised on society independent of the state.

Answerable to God

Thus the scholars asked: What is the religious code's relationship to civil society? The question impinges on Muslim ideas of the *ummah* as a pillar of civil society and on the necessary but limited role of the state in it. Political sovereignty in Islam – the jurisdiction of government – may not repeal or replace the divine law. Islam's religious code is such by virtue of its revealed status, not by reason of political will or legislative authority.

The code is vested in the *ummah*, with the *'ulama*, religious scholars, as its guardians and interpreters – not the sultan or caliph except as caretaker. No one is above being answerable to God, and the religious code exempts no one on the basis of nationality, geography, rank, status, race, color, or wealth. One 19th-century African Muslim scholar says that ordering right and forbidding wrong, what is known as *hisbah*, is the prerogative of religion in

matters such as washing and ablution, almsgiving and fasting, buying and selling, teaching about what is exemplary, approved, or forbidden, "and how to be mindful of purpose in all these things."[2] The state is ill-suited to that task.

Ancient Moral Impulse

Voltaire's tongue-in-cheek view that governments must have both shepherds and butchers, one for moral guidance and the other for self-serving ends, camouflages the issue – that of the unique role of religion in forming the civil character of society. Despite the fact that the Western version of the separation of church and state failed to take root in Islamic history, religious sources across the centuries have been clear about the place of religion in civil society. The seeds of separate jurisdiction thus litter the field to indicate a genuine and autonomous moral impulse in Muslim society.

Thus I came upon a centuries-long pacifist tradition, originating in the Mali Empire, that made it a principle to focus primarily on religious life and practice, with rejection of jihad and of political involvement for the sake of religious freedom. Suffused with Sufi ideas and the ethical teachings of the jurists, and exercising a radiating influence on surrounding populations, these pacifist communities committed themselves to promoting Islam's spiritual heritage in contradistinction to the religion's moribund political heritage. The pacifist cleric was the quintessential anti-sultan, his turban the boundary against overreach by the ruler. We have documented cases of rulers forced to their knees before determined learned clerics who resisted their orders.

Pacifist Passion

The pacifist premise claims that obedience to the ruler should not compete or conflict with the moral obligation to God and to one another. In fact, religion forbids the obsequious pursuit of favors from rulers, and scholars who tried to ingratiate themselves with rulers were denounced as venal – *'ulamá al-sú'i* – and held to public ridicule. An outspoken defender of this defiant view was the classical legal scholar Ibn Hanbal, as was Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, the influential Egyptian scholar-jurist. The sentiment is well expressed by Shakespeare to the effect that "every subject's duty is the king's, but every subject's soul is his own." (*Henry V*, Act IV, Scene 1.)

We find these ancient religious distinctions captured in the debates of early America. James Madison draws on the principle of the two distinct sovereignties, the religious and the political, as a safeguard of the conditions necessary for a strong democratic society. He says he is convinced that "before any man can be considered as a member of Civil Society, he must be considered as a subject of the Governor of the Universe."[3] We are equally subjects and citizens, with both feet planted in time and eternity.

An American Talent

Tocqueville picks up the theme when he asks: "And what can be done with a people who are their own masters if they are not submissive to the Deity?"[4] For Tocqueville, religion in America is the leaven of democratic politics: The two are mutually reinforcing. Political obligation has its roots in the life and liberty of the Creator's prerogative, and if you don't believe in that, you must make political obligation the right of the state to exact without heed of the moral conscience – and that spells tyranny by reducing citizens to the status of political animals. As John Stuart Mill warned, a state that dwarfs its people in order that they may be more docile instruments in its hands even for beneficial purposes, will find that with small people no great thing can be accomplished. Thus "despotism may govern without faith," Tocqueville contends, "but liberty cannot." Tocqueville supports the middle course between the two extremes of totalitarian state control and sectarian repudiation of society. It shows, Tocqueville notes, the American talent for politics and for religion as a catalyst of freedom.

Tocqueville noted the American talent for politics and for religion as a catalyst of freedom. With some variation, these ideas are echoed in Islamic thought.

With some variation, these ideas are echoed in Islamic thought. As such, scholars of Islam have understood the faith community in terms of the *ummatan wasatan* (Qur'an 2: 137), "a middle community of moderation" that accommodates difference. Jefferson once observed in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* that difference is advantageous in religion: Acknowledgement of difference enlarges the bounds of tolerance and sensibility. It is reminiscent of a *hadith* saying of Muhammad that difference found within the *ummah* is a sign of mercy from God, an idea that has a Qur'anic basis, thus: "If God had willed, He would have made you one nation; but that He may try you in what has come to you." (Qur'an 5: 53.) Difference respects what is unique, and thus is a safeguard of diversity.

As it developed, Muslim religious pacifism remained within the *ummah* rather than turning sec-

tarian, and as such helped steer civil society through the stress and disruptions of 19th-century jihad outbreaks as well as against encroaching colonial rule and its nationalist sequel. It helped the clerics promote their reputation for moderation as a centuries-long witness against extremism and intolerance, a contribution of religion in an unsettled world.

All this discussion points to the place of religious moderation in the making of civil society as a bulwark of peace and accommodation, and since critics find it handy to claim that Islam has no place in a democratic society, it is not too soon to offer a correction. It is faulty procedure to judge religion, any religion, by objectionable specimens of its protagonists or of its critics, for that procedure would exempt nothing ever touched by human hands. It tempts us to try fighting fire, and the rumors of fire, with fire, with disproportionate negative fallout. Hobbes prescribed such action in his *Behemoth* when he asked rhetorically, "Had it not been much better that those seditious preachers, which were not perhaps 1,000, had been all killed before they had preached? It had been, I confess, a great massacre, but the killing of 100,000 [in the English civil wars] is a greater."

It is faulty procedure to judge any religion by the objectionable specimens of its protagonists or its critics, for that would exempt nothing ever touched by human hands.

Amid Deserts of Greed

Philip Toynbee, son of the historian Arnold J. Toynbee, offered a counternarrative to the constant note of contemporary suspicion of religion, saying amidst the desert of greed and triviality there are many and increasing signs of a new thirst for the waters of the Spirit, the pure waters of the love of God and of our fellow human beings. The secular dream for humanity's freest possible self-development connects also with the Christian vision, yet what for the humanist is the visible end of the human story is for the Christian only a stage on the pilgrimage of eternal life. We know, says Toynbee, what terrible crimes have been committed in the name of Christianity, but the world that faithful people have served far transcends the vision of Karl Marx and John Stuart Mill.[5]

With declining religious attendance in the West, it might be tempting to think the dire arithmetic in the pew will eventually kill the virus of intolerance that religion allegedly feeds, but that demise would remove the wall of separation that has been a bulwark against the octopus-like encroachments of the organic state.

On the long cross-country drive a few years ago from Harare to Mutare in Zimbabwe, I was struck by the spectacle of large worshipping crowds clogging the fields. In response to my inquiry, my taxi driver bestirred himself to explain how the religious resurgence had filled the churches, spilling over into fields and neighborhoods. He proceeded to reflect on the religious impact of Christianity on the country's civic life, saying, "thanks to a repressive state, Zimbabwe would be mired in unimaginable bloodbath but for the faith communities that minister to the people." His comments profoundly evoked the religious mediation that helped resolve the political tension that once prevailed in many African countries. The tragedies subsequently averted in these countries, or, as in Rwanda, the reconciliation that followed tragedy, should, however, make us grateful for the rays of hope that religion inspires in the hearts of people, helping them to embark on a new divine relationship by forgiving and cherishing one another against the odds. It is not an insignificant asset in the cause of global peace and understanding.

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Notes

1 Lamin Sanneh, *Beyond Jihad: The Pacifist Tradition in West African History* (Oxford University Press, July 2016).

2 'Abdullah dan Fodio, *Tazyín al-Waraqát*, 1963, 100, Arabic text 43.

3 *The Papers of James Madison*, edited by Robert Rutland (University of Chicago Press, 1973), vol. VIII, June 20, 1785, p. 299.

4 Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* vol. 1 (Vintage, 1990), p. 307.

5 Philip Toynbee, *Christians, Then and Now,* Essex Hall Lecture for 1979.

On the Limits of Religious Pluralism

By Victor Anderson

Pluralism is celebrated as a necessary idea for meeting our social arrangements today and respecting the diversity of our faiths. However, it raises other problems. It is a term that can actually minimize or smother difference, holding it at bay by a kind of ethical politeness.

Regarded this way, pluralism seeks to create geographical centers of agreement or commonality among differing faith traditions: the Abrahamic religions of the West, the Asian religions of the East, as well as other religions delicately called "indigenous" (African, Native religions of the Americas, aboriginal religions of South Pacific Islands). Uneasy differences between beliefs are thus hastily resolved. Real-life diversity melts into an abstraction of false unity, rituals fold into symbols, and the encyclopedia of beliefs are reduced to their ethical import.

Not in Kansas Anymore

We can see the emotional pragmatism and attraction of this. John Howard Yoder describes it as a quest for a modern trans-tribal validation.[1] He offers a metaphor – a "wayward child" who runs to the big city in flight from the customs and morals of her small town. She finds she must adjust spiritually to the great pluralism of the city, its buildings and bridges, towering lofts and skyscrapers, its markets filled with different-looking people speaking unknown languages, embracing unusual religions. She's "not in Kansas anymore." But she must make sense of this world of differences if she is to make a new home here, a place where she must live cooperatively with others. Religious pluralism steps in to offer a trans-tribal model for coping with the tensions and validating the differences.

Religious dialogue needs most to be about the kind of hope and vision that Dr. King prized so highly – a world of cosmic companionship.

Is this enough to navigate our differences? Diana L. Eck of Harvard's ambitious, compelling Pluralism Project argues that the achievement of pluralism must always push beyond mere tolerance – a minimal standard of cooperation within our political culture – and commit to an "active seeking of understanding across lines of difference."[2] "Tolerance is too thin a foundation for a world of religious difference and proximity," she says. "It does nothing to remove our ignorance of one another ..." It leaves in place stereotypes, half-truths, and fear.

Our commitment to the integrity of our religious beliefs is usually too great to settle for a benign relativism.

She argues that pluralism is not relativism but "the encounter of commitments." However, I believe pluralism does not resolve the benign relativism that characterizes so much of the discussion around difference, as if our specific religious beliefs are irrelevant to the task of making sense of the world we all share.

Our beliefs are not just a matter of holding a set of claims about the world. They hold consequences for the way we regard ourselves, estimate human worth, treat others sexually, view and care for the poor, children, and families, and how we regard our planet, our environment, and our sustainable future. Our commitment to the integrity of our religious beliefs is usually too great to settle for a benign relativism. Religious pluralism must somehow acknowledge that the trusts and loyalties of believers are matters of ultimate concern.

Indeed, it is here, at the place of trust and loyalty in specific faiths, that the ethical limits of religious pluralism are exposed. Calls for dialogue are often made in order to clarify religious common ground and differences. But how potent is dialogue when our trusts and loyalties stir seemingly interminable conflicts over our ultimate commitments? What moral or metaphysical hope will mediate or transcend such conflicts of faith and draw us closer together? Religious pluralism appears unable to speak to a high religion and high morality that might mediate such places of faith.

MLK and High Religion

This question of appeal to a higher morality was on the mind of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. when, in 1957, he faced a group of young people at the University of California at Berkeley and explained his philosophy of nonviolent direct resistance. He was keenly aware that nonviolent resistance or direct action was not likely to win favor among critical young minds who were skeptical of both his philosophy and his Christian faith that God was on the side of love and justice in the American struggle for civil equalities. King could not presume sympathy for his moral language, even as he tried to explain the ways that agape love was compatible with robust social activism, and nonviolent direct resistance was compatible with the demands of social justice. At such a moment, King offered skeptical listeners a powerful image of all-pervasive justice. He said:

I am aware of the fact that there are persons who believe firmly in nonviolence who do not believe in a personal God, but I think every person who believes in nonviolent resistance believes somehow that the universe in some form is on the side of justice. That there is something unfolding in the universe whether one speaks of it as an unconscious process or whether one speaks of it as some unmoved mover, or whether someone speaks of it as a personal God. There is something in the universe that unfolds for justice, and so in Montgomery we felt somehow that as we struggled we had cosmic companionship. And this was one of the things that kept the people together, the belief that the universe is on the side of justice.[3]

King evoked a generous confidence that no matter what creed or faith, or whether one rejected such things, no matter one's social location, the world that is inhabited by all, the universe itself, is measured by a moral arc that bends toward justice. The moral ends of justice are to protect the "world house in which we have to live together," as he said in his 1964 Nobel Prize speech. King articulated his faith in a mode of high religion and a high morality beyond the many religions and moralities.

The postmodern temper has done away with such appeals that might touch the loyalties of believers and redirect them to ecumenical, planetary ends – done away with them, at least for now. My foregrounding the limits of religious pluralism is in no way a rejection of it or its ethics of dialogue. In the absence of a vision reminiscent of King's, pluralism remains our best hope for mediating our conflicts. Yet, in our pressing times of terror and conflict, religious dialogue perhaps needs most to be about the kind of hope and vision that King prized so highly – a world of cosmic companionship, where justice is all-pervasive, and where cooperation toward forming beloved communities is the highest aspiration of religious pluralism.

Religious pluralism must somehow acknowledge that the trusts and loyalties of believers are matters of ultimate concern.

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Notes

1 John Howard Yoder, "On Not Being Ashamed of the Gospel: Particularity, Pluralism, and Validation," *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers* (1992, 9:3), pp. 285-300.

2 See pluralism.org/what-is-pluralism.

3 See teachingamericanhistory.org/library/document/the-power-of-non-violence.

The Good Life and the Crisis of Meaning

By Matt Croasmun '01 B.A., '06 M.A.R., '14 Ph.D.

"And so we're condemned to be free." The phrase, echoing Sartre, lay heavy on us once the student said it – a stark contrast to the bucolic setting (we held the seminar outside that day). There was an instinct to correct him – surely freedom is not something to which one could be condemned. *But then we all quickly realized that he had said what he meant. And when I asked the other dozen students how many identified with the phrase, a strong majority of hands went up.*

For the past three years, my Yale Center for Faith & Culture colleagues Miroslav Volf and Ryan McAnnally-Linz and I have designed and taught a course in the Humanities Program in Yale College called Life Worth Living. Each semester, we've had extraordinary groups of undergraduates from different countries, socioeconomic backgrounds, and religious and nonreligious traditions. We explore a number of philosophical and religious traditions that provide answers to the central question of our lives: What makes a life worth living?

The Big Question

More than an "introduction to world religions" course, the seminar equips students to ask and answer this most important question for themselves. They write papers about the University's explicit and implicit definitions of a life worth living and about their peers' visions of the good life. Finally, they write a short piece laying out their own answer: How do *they* understand what makes life worth living?

Students repeatedly express a fear that the world, ultimately, has no meaning – a fear that meaning has to be *invented*.

Each time we've taught it, students have raved about the opportunity to wrestle with the big questions of life with all the intellectual energy they bring to organic chemistry or Russian literature or any of their most challenging classes. Year after year, student demand for the course has grown exponentially. Beyond Yale, colleagues at other universities are adapting our seminar, from Peter Anstey at the University of Sydney in Australia to YDS alumnus Kurt Nelson '07 M.Div. at Colby College in Maine. Everywhere the course is taught, it is over-enrolled.

Unbearable Lightness

For me, as the teacher, the seminar has been an indispensable crash course on the crisis of meaning that is afflicting millennials. Students repeatedly express a fear that the world, ultimately, has no meaning – a fear that meaning has to be *invented.* And they have a hunch that the production of meaning (if this is indeed their task) might simply be above their pay grade. One student protested: "The world's great traditions have been carefully crafting answers to these questions for three millennia – and I'm supposed to invent my own answers in my free time?!"

This is not what I was led to expect coming out of graduate school. I was taught that students were fundamentally held in bondage by "regimes of truth" and desperately needed the liberation that comes in the form of deconstruction and destabilization. But by and large, I find that today's students are less afraid of the unbending hegemony of Foucault's regimes of truth than they are of Milan Kundera's unbearable lightness of being, a sense that the world has no meaning, no ground.

This changes what they need from the college curriculum and their instructors. And in many cases we aren't prepared to give them what they need. As university instructors – and, I fear, as pastors – we actually contribute to the crisis of meaning when we define our calling as aiding only in the struggle against coercive ideologies. Doubtless, such coercive schemes exist – racism, consumerism, imperialism, etc. – and need to be resisted. But for a generation that understands itself as "condemned to be free," the slogan, "more freedom!" either in its free-market or postmodern form, sounds merely like another nail in the coffin.

False Choices

Ultimately, students aren't seeking just any old liberation; they are looking for a liberation that doesn't come at the cost of meaning. More and more students are finding that liberation without meaning is no liberation at all. Yet we continue to present them with a false choice – either liberation or meaning.

A prevailing wisdom says: Once upon a time, when our universities were fairly homogenous, they could aim to impart "values" to students, but now, when our universities reflect the diversity of our nation and our world and when the very idea of imparting values is suspect, such an education is no longer possible. But such reasoning poses another false choice to students: Either you can have meaning with homogeneity (through exclusion) or you can have diversity (through inclusion) but without meaning.

Another impediment has frustrated contemporary discussions of meaning. Conventional wisdom holds that, in the case of values, questions of truth are simply inaccessible to us: They are locked within

We ask students to at least imagine what it would be like to adopt this or that way of life: If these claims are true, how would your life have to change?

a black box of unassailable "commitments" brought to the table by would-be conversants. In reality, genuine *conversation* about ultimate meaning and values rarely happens, since conversation requires a belief that one's interlocutor is reasonable and the topic is one about which one can reason. Convinced that meaning is beyond reason, and that others cannot be reasoned with, many of us conclude that the exertion of power – shouting at each other or, at worst, committing true violence – is the only option for settling our presumably irreconcilable

THE FLOOD

By Chana Bloch

1
The ark noisy with children,
angels, birds – dim, stuffy,
close, the nest of home
where Noah broods,
at sea.
How can one think
in such a place? The world
presses around, and God
breathes down his neck.

2
The ark, at least, is
warm. Outside,
a patch of blue, pale, tentative,
perhaps still wet.

Noah gropes, but the brave
animals sniff land:
the dove
a fist of light.

3
Yawning, the rain still drips
from memory,
damps the small dust down.

Sun buds in the sky.
Trees shake out their quills.
Birds sing, gingerly,
rolling the last drops off their wings.

New grass whets its blades.

4
The great hulk of houseboat beached
on top of Ararat.
Drying, the timbers crack.
It will stay there forever, shrinking
invisibly.

On land our stiff
white birds' legs
wobble,
remembering the ocean's push.

The last
waters go on rocking
in the conch of the ear.

differences. Where persuasion appears impossible, conquest is the only option. The violent and vapid discourses of religious fundamentalisms and cable news are predictable, regrettable results.

Hard Conversations

Having lost the art of persuasion as a society, we have serious anxiety about disagreement. Pessimistic about the possibility of civil dialogue, many students describe their adoption of moral relativism as a strategy of conflict avoidance. Our culture presents them with a third false choice – truth or charity – and, perhaps to their credit, they have chosen charity. Better to compromise on questions of truth and concede, "Well, that must be true for you," than start a hard conversation that has no hope of a satisfactory outcome.

Imperfectly but steadily, I think we're figuring out how to heal the collective trauma of our culture's failure to wrestle charitably with the truth.

In our seminar, we dare to put truth claims on the table and invite students to learn the art of principled, charitable disagreement. We invite students to interact with an array of moral traditions (for instance, Buddhism, utilitarianism, Judaism, Islam, Christianity) not as a smorgasbord of insights to be mixed and matched at their pleasure, but as *wholes* to be encountered and assessed (notwithstanding each tradition's own internal diversity).

We ask students to identify the truth claims being made and describe how these claims shape a way of life. We ask students to *evaluate* them. Is this account of what it is to be a human being compelling? Is the world in fact as this tradition describes it? Many of these historic claims to truth are mutually exclusive, and we don't shy away from that. Finally, we ask students to at least *imagine* what it would be like to adopt this or that tradition's way of life as their own: If these claims were true – if they *are* true – how would your life have to change?

Truth on the Table

This pedagogy requires vulnerability from students *and* instructors. Our lives – not merely our ideas – need to be on the table. Especially in the pluralistic context, this means acknowledging that none of us stands nowhere. Each of us is located somewhere within a tradition or set of traditions. Indeed, we each come to the seminar table with particular claims to universal truth – and particular ways of reasoning about the truth.

I always begin the first session by telling students that I am a Christian pastor and that I have no delusions that I am a disinterested tour guide for the course. But precisely my commitments as a Christian are what compel me to affirm the integrity of each person's search for truth and to be sensitive to the power that I exert in the classroom as instructor. I want to create a hospitable environment for diverse voices to come and learn from one another and from the perspectives we will examine. This mutual learning is not always comfortable. If we are to wrestle seriously with truth claims, we will find ourselves reasoning with one another, persuading one another – contending with one another.

Imperfectly but steadily, I think we're figuring out how to heal the collective trauma of our culture's failure to wrestle charitably with the truth. We are not aiming to discern a lowest-common-denominator set of bland "universals." We're holding out hope that "meaning-full" liberation is possible. In the community created around the seminar table, we are finding, I think, the *education* – by which I mean the *formation* of human beings – that we need.

Matt Croasmun is associate research scholar and director of the Life Worth Living Program at the Yale Center for Faith & Culture at Yale Divinity School and a lecturer of divinity and humanities at Yale University. He also serves as staff pastor at the Elm City Vineyard Church in New Haven, CT., a church he and his wife, Hannah, helped plant in 2007.

Conversation Partners: We Need Each Other

By Jennifer Peace

Basma was soft spoken by nature, but as the only Muslim student in a class on interfaith leadership she had a lot to contribute. Before she moved to the US from Egypt, her contact with non-Muslims had been limited. Since coming to the US, she had met many people from different religious traditions as well as Muslims from various backgrounds. "Our experiences change who we are," she told the class.

It was an assertion she repeated more than once. Basma's openness led her to become an interfaith leader on our campus.

Web of Relationships

Helping students explore each other's religious traditions and share their stories animates the model of interfaith education at Andover Newton Theological School and Hebrew College. "Interreligious learning through relationship-building" has long been a guiding maxim of our shared work at CIRCLE (the Center for Inter-Religious and Communal Leadership Education), where I am co-director. Our commitment is rooted in a belief that these experiences make Christians better Christians (and Jews better Jews, Muslims better Muslims).

"We Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Humanists, etc., need each other to liberate us from our own stories," he declared.

Beyond the paradigms of comparative theology, world religions, or religious literacy, we are committed to *coformation*.[1] By coformation I mean that students in theological education are formed within a web of relationships and not simply in isolation. This reflects the pluralistic world we are preparing them for.

Students eagerly embrace the power of personal narrative and storytelling. At the same time, there is a potential hazard in over-idolizing one's own story. This insight was brought home to me by Sister Chundru, a Hindu nun and fellow interfaith activist. We were talking about how hard it can be to build an authentic dialogue when people get overly focused on their own personal experiences in ways that leave no room for other – potentially contradictory – experiences. "Ah yes," she said, "the tyranny of personal experience."

When building interreligious relationships, one of the best strategies I've found to combat the tyranny of personal experience was shared with me by Father Ray Helmick, a Catholic priest, life-long peacemaker, and interreligious bridge-builder. When he comes up against a dogmatic position forged through a deeply held personal experience, he says simply, "My experiences have not led me to the same conclusion." This simple sentence acknowledges the legitimacy of experience without capitulating to the ways we can use our stories to build exclusivist ideologies.

Shadow Side

This shadow side of personal experience, as identified by Sister Chundru, was further nuanced and expanded for me by Buddhist scholar John McKransky. John had contributed a chapter to a collection I co-edited called *My Neighbor's Faith: Stories of*

Interreligious Encounter, Transformation and Growth. (Orbis, 2012). Speaking on a panel of contributors to the book, he made a comment that intrigued me: "We Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Sikhs, Humanists, etc., need each other to liberate us from our own stories." After the event I asked him to elaborate. Via email, here is what he wrote:

The stories of our own tradition are foundational for us, orienting us to our religious identities and ways of being and understanding. But we all tend to get caught in the stories of our own tradition, imprisoned in them in ways not fully conscious to us. We get caught in a kind of idolatry that clings too exclusively, in too limited a way, to our own culturally conditioned current understandings of our own stories.

For this reason, we are dependent upon religious others to liberate us from bondage to our own stories. Religious others do this by sharing their stories, which interrupt our own narratives and point beyond them to more of the richness of human perspectives and experiences, thereby opening us to further possible meanings in our own stories.

This imprisonment in our stories in "ways not fully conscious to us" makes it urgent to address the internal dimensions of grassroots interfaith work – the need for self-awareness and self-knowledge, a confrontation with our own biases. Though peace-building, social justice, and coalition-building across religious lines are important forms of interfaith work, a critical facet of this work is akin to spiritual formation. In all of my classes, I begin with attention to the unconscious biases that undergird our relations to others, and then I introduce students to practices that help them explore this inner landscape.

Consciousness in one area is not necessarily a predictor of awareness in another. I've met racist feminists, sexist interfaith activists, and homophobic champions of racial equality.

Unmasking Hatreds

Without this orienting self-awareness, interfaith work runs the risk of remaining shallow and self-congratulatory. It can become an exercise in reinforcing rather than dismantling destructive stereotypes. In this sense, interfaith work shares many of the same challenges and dynamics of consciousness-raising, the work of unmasking racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, ableism, homophobia, classism, and the myriad other ways that hatred masquerades.

One disconcerting conclusion I've drawn from decades of work as an interfaith organizer and educator is that consciousness in one area is not necessarily a predictor of awareness in another. I've met racist feminists, sexist interfaith activists, and homophobic champions of racial equality. We can be bigoted when it comes to one group of people and enlightened advocates for others.

This is both disheartening and fascinating to me. Because the more I explore these intersecting forms of exclusion, the more I recognize the same patterns of thought underlying them.

Mutual Transformation

This brings me back to Basma's insight: New experiences change who we are. One way to disrupt

WIND
By Ok-Koo Kang Grosjean

Like a well-trained soldier
you know precisely
when to advance
and when to retreat.

When you appear as a gale
you are violent
as a shaman entering
the other world.

But in your gentle breath,
the animate and
inanimate
sing in unison.

I'd like to remember you
as a sage
whose presence is felt
but who leaves no trace
behind.

the patterns of thought that underlie bigotry is to expand experiences. Basma became an interfaith leader on our hill because her willing exposure to new viewpoints enlarged her outlook on the value of religious pluralism. As a seminary educator I am constantly thinking about how to fine-tune programs we design for our students in the classroom, through campus programming, and with our interfaith fellowship program to arrange for new connections across religious lines. Religious diversity is a fact, but cultivating healthy interfaith relationships takes skill, practice, curiosity, and will.

Much seems to hinge on our relationship to our own stories, the narrative chronicles of our personal experiences. Will we cling to them rigidly in a kind of unconscious idolatry? Or can we offer and receive them as gifts, allowing my story to expand your understanding even as I allow your story to expand mine?

When we commit to the latter, I've found that it creates a powerful opening, a space for mutual transformation.[2] This is key to the kind of learning that marks interreligious education at its best – new connections made amid our irreducible differences, without ignoring them or flattening them out.

Even now, as I tell this story of my own education in the power and pitfalls of personal experience for interfaith work, I'm aware of the cohort of interfaith conversation partners who I have to thank: a Muslim student, a Hindu nun, a Catholic priest, a Buddhist scholar, my UU and Christian students, an Islamic scholar, and a rabbi. We need each other.

Jennifer Howe Peace is associate professor of interfaith studies at Andover Newton Theological School in Newton, MA., and a pioneer in contemporary interfaith initiatives. At Andover Newton, she co-directs CIRCLE, a joint center shared with Hebrew College. CIRCLE promotes interfaith learning for students in and beyond the classroom. Peace has helped organize interfaith groups such as the United Religions Initiative, the Interfaith Youth Core, and Daughters of Abraham. With Or Rose and Gregory Mobley, she is co-editor of My Neighbor's Faith: Stories of Interreligious Encounter, Growth, and Transformation *(Orbis, 2012).*

Notes

1 Jennifer Peace, "CoformationThrough Interreligious Learning," *Colloquy* v. 20, No. 1 (2011), pp. 24-27.

2 For a simple exercise that introduces students to the power of giving and receiving stories, see my "Teaching Tactic for Interfaith Engagement," *Teaching Theology and Religion*, vol. 16, Issue 4 (October 2013), p. 388.

The scene was a Pentecost service at New York's St. John the Divine Church. Represented in the processional were major religions – a rabbi, imam, Native American elder, many more.

And Wilfredo Benitez, who was attending, started weeping.

His own spiritual sojourn had been tempestuous. He was raised Roman Catholic in the Bronx, became a Protestant fundamentalist in Puerto Rico, then fled rigid literalism, took up yoga and meditation for years, then came back to Christianity.

Immersed in the remarkable Pentecost-related multi-religious worship service, he felt like he had finally come home: It was OK to accept the pluralism of faiths under the Creator.

Benitez is now an Episcopal priest at a multiethnic congregation in Queens, NY. – also a noted photographer of contemplative and social-justice themes. His work is featured in this *Reflections* issue.

"After many years, I came back to church realizing I didn't need to be a biblical literalist," he says. "I found a mystical connection to a higher power, a force beyond anything we can name, and I could do that through Christianity after all. We get so stuck in our heads, stuck on semantics, and we miss the bigger picture. All faiths are pointing toward the same truth."

Benitez is rector of historic St. George's Episcopal Church in Flushing. The church holds services in English, Spanish, and Chinese. Periodic worship gatherings combine all three groups, about 300 people total.

"Trust is a major factor – it takes time," he says. "I make myself available to everyone. We validate each other's cultural events. The glue is love."

He is blunt about the human tendency to twist faith into something dark and abusive. Religion is "garbage," he says, when it turns destructive. His vocation is dedicated to Christian faith and practice that honors love, beauty, and liberation. See religionisgarbage.com

His far-flung photography captures some of that prophetic passion and art. On page 14, two dancers (one Palestinian, one Israeli) perform a dance of peace in Israel. On page 26, a discarded image of Jesus peeks out from a Havana street.

"Every culture develops its own faith system," he says. "But in the end they all have something in common: love of neighbor."

The "Nones" Are Becoming Somethings

By Tom Krattenmaker

Ten years out from the barrage of best-selling "new atheist" manifestos, something different is happening in the gathering wave of those who check "none" when asked for their religious affiliation.

Among the *newer* atheists (plus agnostics, spiritual-but-not-religious people, and the otherwise non-religious), it's not just the absence of God belief and church participation that defines the conversation and exploration. It's interest in, and pursuit of, questions like: What *do* we believe in? How *shall* we live and treat others? What *can* make our lives meaningful?

Their pursuit of these big questions bodes well not only for those who are part of the growing population of nonreligious, but also for religious people who are open to cross-culture partnerships and collaborations to advance the greater good in our increasingly secular century.

"Shock troops." This is an analogy I floated with author Sam Harris in a conversation 18 months ago. His 2004 book, *The End of Faith*, and its 2006 follow-up, *Letter to a Christian Nation*, had firmly established Harris as one of the preeminent representatives of new atheism. The book tour for his then-new release, *Waking Up*, was bringing him to ultra-secular Portland, OR., my home at the time, and the event organizers recruited me to be his on-stage interviewer.

Clearing Spaces

During the conversation – held, intriguingly, at a Unitarian church downtown – I laid out for Harris a theory that maybe, in retrospect, critics of Christopher Hitchens, Richard Dawkins, and himself could concede that these writers' flame-thrower attacks on religion and religious people had served a purpose.

Maybe, I offered, they had empowered and cleared out space for those just behind them: a larger crowd of people – nonreligious people with milder temperaments, essentially – who were ready to bring a more positive secular voice into the public conversation about ethics, meaning, doing good, and being good.

What did Harris think of this theory? He didn't care for it, as I recall. He rejects suggestions that his broadsides against religion are unwarranted either in substance or tone. But even his own career was, at that very moment, furnishing evidence of the theory's validity. *Waking Up* did not focus on the ills of religion, but, rather, on the benefits of meditation as part of a nonreligious spirituality.

Younger nonbelievers do not want to dwell on what they don't believe. They want to identify what they do believe and how to improve their own lives and those of others.

So it is with the younger generation of nonbelievers who have flowed into this cleared-out space. They do not want to dwell, generally speaking, on that which they don't believe. They want to identify, develop, and pursue what they *do* believe, what they *do* care about, how they *can* deepen their own lives and improve the lives of others.

Parting Ways

As with Harris, the intervention of time has had a marked impact on new atheism's other leading swordsmen. *God is not Great* author Christopher Hitchens is dead, felled by cancer in 2011. Richard Dawkins of *The God Delusion* fame is still active in antitheism advocacy and retains some of his stature. But he has alienated many of his one-time and would-be listeners and admirers with frequent

public outbursts that bespeak, in the words of one of his former devotees, a "narcissistic anti-religious extremism that flirts with outright racism."

This critic, a political commentator and campaign manager named Chris Sosa, probably spoke for many when he declared earlier this year in a *Huffington Post* headline, "I'm finally breaking up with Richard Dawkins."

As a participant in the Yale Humanist Community (YHC) in my new city of New Haven, I am finding a similar bent among the core participants. They've either broken up with Richard Dawkins and what he represents, or they never fell for him in the first place. These people, many of them millennials,

One sees a willingness to collaborate with religious people and institutions to serve the greater good.

exhibit little interest in joining the attacks on religion that are common among older-generation atheist leaders. In these circles, one sees a willingness to collaborate with religious people and institutions to serve the community.

Last year, undergraduate participants in YHC undertook an ongoing service project with students active in Yale's St. Thomas More Center, a Catholic ministry. Also, Christians are welcome at – and, indeed, occasionally attend – YHC's discussion groups and "Humanist Haven" Sunday gatherings.

A Search for New Affirmations

These are manifestations of the philosophy articulated by YHC executive director Chris Stedman in his frequent speaking and media appearances and his well-known book *Faitheist: How an Atheist Found Common Ground with the Religious* (Beacon, 2013). Mentored at the Chicago-based Interfaith Youth Core, the 28-year-old Stedman advocates a positive role for the nonreligious in interfaith dialogues and the broader public conversation about strengthening communities and improving the lot of human beings across the planet.

From his vantage point, Stedman observes "a significant shift away from, 'This is what I don't believe,' toward, 'Yes, these are the things I believe and affirm, these are the values I hold, these are the propositions I find valuable, and these are the things that give my life meaning and joy.'"

What *are* those things? The kind of humanism exemplified by YHC does not deign to dictate all the answers. Rather, it frames the questions and provides a community in which to pursue them – which is far preferable to solo voyaging when a person embarks on a journey of this sort. The answers that *are* emerging within the humanist community in and around Yale include community service, an ambitious public art project, and gatherings to learn about social issues and work out their implications for participants' ethics and behavior.

Winter Light

Particularly revealing is the effort to create an art installation for display on the New Haven Green during the Christmas/winter holiday season each year. Rather than acting out the tired War on Christmas scenarios and fighting to remove the overtly religious displays that appear on the Green, YHC has commissioned an artist to create a light sculpture representing the winter solstice theme of light and hope during the darkest time of year. The winning artist's proposal is an updated take on a lighthouse – evocative of New Haven's history but very much of the present technological moment, glowing from top to bottom and using motion sensors to change color as people walk toward it and around it. Plans call for the piece's installation in December 2016.

Stedman, an evangelical Christian in his teenage years, acknowledges the lingering influence of Christian teachings on his career as a humanist leader. Perhaps it's not surprising, then, to hear an echo of the Golden Rule in what he says about another aspect of the humanism that is being modeled in and around Yale.

"What is happening among some of the nones – certainly in our humanist community in New Haven – is that we are not only investing more deeply in our own beliefs but asking at the same time how *our* values intersect with *others'* values, and how we can support those communities."

As all this suggests, the "nones" are becoming somethings. The exact nature of that something is a work in progress, and it will probably never yield to strict definitions and dimensions. But this much is clear: The process bodes well for the project of pluralism and the possibilities for religious people to collaborate with one of our society's fastest-growing and increasingly influential populations.

Tom Krattenmaker is communications director at YDS and a member of the board of directors of the Yale Humanist Community. He is the author of the forthcoming book Confessions of a Secular Jesus Follower *(Penguin Random House).*

Global Dynamics of Faith: An Interview with Shaun Casey

Shaun Casey has served as Secretary John Kerry's Special Representative for Religion and Global Affairs since □□□□. The Office of Religion and Global Affairs at the US Department of State advises Secretary Kerry on policy matters as they relate to religion, helps American embassies and consulates overseas assess regional religious dynamics, and serves as an entry point for individuals who want to contact the State Department in Washington on matters of religion and global affairs.

Casey has written on the ethics of the Iraq war as well as religion's role in presidential politics. He is the author of The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon 1960 *(Oxford, □□□□) and is at work now on two book projects – co-editing the* Oxford Handbook of Political Theology *and writing a book on ethics and international politics tentatively titled* Niebuhr's Children.

In fall □□□□, Casey participated in a gathering at Yale that focused on the role of religion and its impact on civil society in Iraq and elsewhere.

He is a graduate of Harvard Divinity School (M.Div. and Doctor of Theology) and Harvard's Kennedy School of Government. He has a B.A. from Abilene Christian University.

Casey responded to questions submitted by Reflections.

REFLECTIONS: **Is religion a part of the problem of world conflict, or a solution to conflict?**

SHAUN CASEY: Religion is a complex societal force and a legitimate category of analysis in international relations. However, religion is multivalent, and therefore should not be dichotomized as either a source of conflict or a panacea in addressing global challenges. Assessing religious dynamics within a specific cultural context or within a particular issue must be done very diligently and with sophistication. Within our office, we have a staff of 30 people, possessing over 20 graduate degrees in religion or a cognate field. We recognize that there is considerable interplay between religion, politics, law, economics, and culture. Moreover, we are attuned to the complexities of "lived religion" – that religion is interrelated to and mutually influential on everyday life – and its impact within specific contexts.

We are also aware that religious communities can and do shape and drive social change. Many religious groups are at the forefront of initiatives that focus on encouraging sustainable development, promoting good governance, combating corruption, caring for the planet, supporting women's empowerment, and advocating for social justice. It is important to emphasize and promote this type of constructive engagement, as appropriate.

REFLECTIONS: **How does the US government approach the dynamic of religion in world affairs?**

CASEY: The US government historically has examined religion through two lenses: the evaluation of international religious freedom, or religion as a potential catalyst for violent extremism. While these are both important analytical lenses, they do not begin to exhaust the range of diplomatic and political implications of understanding religion. Our office was cre-

ated to explore the vast territory between these two conceptualizations of religion in the realm of foreign policy. In practical terms, it means identifying areas where US policy goals intersect with issues of importance to religious communities, such as climate change, disaster preparedness, the refugee crisis, and peace and security. It also means exploring the ways in which we can expand training and tools for diplomats that will allow for a more sophisticated analysis of religious dynamics, which will in turn inform and guide foreign policy decisions.

REFLECTIONS: **How does the US decide whose side to be on in a religious conflict? What are the criteria?**

CASEY: Religion is often one variable in conflict situations, and it is an oversimplification to depict it in starkly binary terms. If religion is indeed a factor at play in conflict, it is different in each situation and influenced by ideologies, attitudes and perceptions, religious and secular leaders, individuals and communities, economic and political situations, and culture and tradition. One aspect of our work is to try to understand the nuances within a particular situation and identify the religious resources for ending and mitigating religious conflict.

REFLECTIONS: **How would you characterize our relations with the Muslim-majority world?**

CASEY: From the beginning, the Obama administration has deepened and expanded US engagement with a diverse array of Muslim communities, both here and overseas, on the basis of mutual interest and mutual respect. In our engagements, we have demonstrated American values of justice, tolerance, and the dignity of all human beings, and consistently sought to counter negative stereotypes of Islam. In his Cairo speech in 2009, President Obama emphasized that Islam has always been a part of America's story, which he reiterated most recently during his remarks at the Islamic Society in Baltimore. He explicitly stated that religious bigotry runs counter to fundamental American principles, and that "an attack on one faith is an attack on all our faiths."

I believe that we have a much more sophisticated understanding of religious dynamics amongst Muslims – and their complexity. Within our office, I am privileged to work alongside Shaarik Zafar, the Special Representative to Muslim Communities, and Arsalan Suleman, the Acting US Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Special Representative Zafar is charged with overseeing the State Department's engagement with Muslim communities on issues that they care about – not simply security or terrorism. This includes bilateral diplomacy with countries with majority or significant Muslim populations. This also includes engaging civil society, religious leaders, and most importantly, young people, to build opportunities in entrepreneurship, environmental protection, and technology, to name a few – all areas that are relevant to Muslim and non-Muslim communities alike. One of Special Representative Zafar's priorities is storytelling and supporting the creative economy. He's working with technology and entertainment industry leaders to help Muslim civil society leaders use digital platforms to share their stories and counter hateful and intolerant voices.

Acting US Special Envoy Suleman works with OIC-member countries and relevant civil society representatives on key foreign policy issues and to establish partnerships in areas such as human rights, health, education, and science and technology. He has encouraged OIC member states to play an increased role in improving health outcomes within their borders – through polio eradication, support of immunizations, promotion of maternal and child health, and adequate preparedness in response to health emergencies like Ebola.

REFLECTIONS: **How can pluralistic values overcome tribalist loyalties and fundamentalisms?**

CASEY: It is important to resist the temptation to use a homogenizing lens to understand religion. I do not accept the premise that individuals who adhere to tribal loyalties or fundamentalist religious understanding – however defined – are inherently antagonists to pluralistic values. In today's world, it is critical to observe how lived religion manifests itself within diverse cultural contexts.

We are not calling for any religious community to give up its particularity in the name of pluralism. Furthermore, we hold in high regard opportunities for religious leaders to come together to discuss common challenges. As an example, I would point to the recent conference in Marrakesh, Morocco, that brought together government officials, religious leaders, and prominent Islamic scholars to discuss religious teachings and interpretations, and to advise governments to live up to the highest standards of human rights shared across cultures and religions. The resulting "Marrakesh Declaration" called upon representatives of various religious traditions to confront religious discrimination and protect the rights of religious minorities around the world.

MAY WE ALL BECOME PATHFINDERS

By Omer Bajwa

Omer Bajwa is coordinator of Muslim life in the Chaplain's Office at Yale. He has been involved in religious service, social activism, and educational outreach since 2000. He received an M.A. in Near Eastern studies from Cornell University. He also earned an M.S. in communication from Cornell, and a B.A. in English literature and rhetoric from Binghamton University (SUNY).

The Qur'an asks us, "Where, then, are you going?" (81:26).

We live in an age of seemingly incomprehensible turmoil. Amid such political and environmental tribulations, our American society is in the grip of xenophobia and anti-Muslim bigotry. More than ever, the nation must re-examine its assumptions about Islam and relationships with Muslims.

Our approach to Islamophobia needs to evolve. Even the term – Islamophobia – is problematic. It's a tactical way to contrive a narrative that keeps the focus on the fear and suspicion and marginalization of Muslims. These same tactics are used by xenophobes to marginalize other minorities; Muslims are the enemy du jour.

We need to empower the "choir," Muslims and non-Muslims who understand the problems, by offering accurate information and building the confidence to create an alternate narrative, one of welcome and belonging.

As a college Muslim chaplain, among my many privileges is to oversee the religious and spiritual dimensions of my students' experiences. Muslim students are quite anxious about the grossly distorted images of Islam that are causing discernable anti-Muslim violence. Daily I see the emotionally and spiritually debilitating effects that Islamophobia has on Muslim students and communities.

What kind of community do we all want to build? This, I believe, is the essential question of our time, and perhaps throughout the ages. The Qur'an's existential question – "Where, then, are you going?" – invites us to dream how we can transcend the negative forces and bring out the positive counterforces around us by cultivating both introspection and vision.

Three essential E's mark the way forward: education, engagement, and empowerment.

- Education: As teachers, preachers, and mentors, we must help today's students – Muslim and non-Muslim – delve into a deep and informed sense of Islamic literacy. Present this learning in welcoming spaces and study circles where doubt is allowed and questions are explored about the power and future of Islam in the world. We need Muslim spaces where Muslim students are comfortable sharing reflections, and we need open spaces where other students of faith can share their perspectives on religious identity. We need hospitable off-campus programs, in mosques and churches and temples, that promote serious religious literacy.
- Engagement: Our Muslim students should reach out across campus organizations to make allies. This entails literally showing up and being present in campus life. Actual relationship-building is an underestimated virtue in today's competitive, bottom-line, overscheduled social atmosphere. The Kaba, the iconic black cubed building and focal point of millions of Muslims prayers, has different gates for entering the sanctuary. Similarly, our communities need multiple entrances for guests to walk through as avenues of conversation and encounter. Let us take note: Research shows that people who harbor the worst stereotypes of Islam and Muslims are those who interact least with Muslims. Again, mosques and non-Muslim congregations are positioned to encourage new relationships and friendships, modeling an ethic of "radical hospitality."
- Empowerment: Nurture confidence in students' faith, moving it beyond education into consciousness. Teach them about homiletics, public speaking, and dialectical conversation on difficult faith questions. Give them a sense of rootedness and belonging. Reacting to world events by just always "doing something" doesn't necessarily solve the deeper issues. We cannot play into the arbitrary narratives of the opposition that demand a defensive response from victims. We must build both intra- and inter-communal resilience – and feel empowered to defend each other from malicious attacks, whether from religious extremists or anti-religious forces.

We all have serious work to do – particularly Christians and Muslims – in order to craft the healthy relationships we envision. Like many other concerned Muslims, I navigated the aftermath of 9/11 by getting involved in interfaith work and educational outreach. I have discovered new friendships and forged lasting alliances through these interfaith experiences. This work is a both a blessing and a responsibility, and it allows us to become bridge-builders and goodwill ambassadors. It reaffirms my faith in the power of the Prophet Muhammad's teaching that, "None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother [and sister in humanity] what he loves for himself."

In many places, exemplary multifaith efforts are thriving, but we as people of faith and conscience must map out new paths of peacemaking in our respective environments. May we all become pathfinders – amen!

Global Christianities: A Minority Report

By Chloë Starr

The future of Christianity in a more integrated pluralistic world is an important debate. We have, mostly, now grasped that diversity and difference are sources of enrichment in our common life, and that the global-scale problems of our era (climate change, terrorist ideologies, weapons proliferation, and mass refugee movements) require solidarity across religions as well as across borders.[1]

However, we still need to face an equally foundational debate on the nature of Christianities in our own society and abroad. It is easy to assume that we know what we mean by "Christianity," or can represent our own faith in interfaith debates, but which of us really has a clear sense of what Greek Orthodox in the US believe, let alone Chinese Catholics or Japanese Presbyterians?

The recent Anglican primates' meeting at Lambeth Palace has once again highlighted the profound cultural and theological differences that can exist within a single (global) church community. Sitting in an Episcopal church in New Haven recently I listened to a sermon on the topic of the Lambeth meeting. The preacher helpfully pointed to the US experience of the civil rights movement and AIDS as factors in the development of the current Episcopalian stance on minority inclusion – but then suggested that "racism" was a primary cause of the "Global South" primates' stance on human sexuality, an explanation that sounds bizarre to an Anglican from elsewhere in the Communion.

Whether in the shared use of worship spaces, in Christian ashrams, in joint spirituality explorations, or in theoretical proposals for reading across religious scriptures, Asian churchgoers and scholars have pioneered multifaith dialogue for centuries.

We all have our prejudices and partial explanations, especially of global phenomena. A prime role of a divinity school is to enable us to see these, to trace their histories and the curvature of their distortion through greater exposure to others' lives, perceptions, and thought.

Global and Glocal

One of the gifts of the Asian church to world Christianity is its theological reflection on life in a multireligious society. As we all interact more globally and glocally, and as migration slowly changes the composition and patterns of interaction in our own societies, it is a voice worth heeding.

According to Pew Research Center data, the US professes to be over 70 percent Christian, and no other single religion comprises more than 2 percent of the population. Even in European countries like Britain or France, religious minorities such as Muslims make up only 4.8 percent and 7.5 percent of the population respectively. Yet in Asia, other than the Philippines with its dominant Roman Catholicism or South Korea where Christians comprise the largest single religious group (just under 32 percent), there are few countries in which Christians number more than one in ten of the population. In most, they are a small minority alongside majority or mixed Hindu, Buddhist, atheist, Islamic, or Shamanist populations.

The Sri Lankan Jesuit Aloysius Pieris wrote decades ago that inculturation of Christianity in Asia was a matter of three-fold dialogue: with cultures, with the poor, and with other religions.[2] Whether in

the shared use of worship spaces, in Christian ashrams, in joint spirituality explorations, in "Six-Text Scriptural Reasoning,"[3] in comparative studies, or in theoretical proposals for reading across religious scriptures,[4] Asian churchgoers and scholars have pioneered multifaith dialogue, both pragmatically and theoretically, for centuries.

The decision of the Anglican primates in January 2016 not to give much latitude to cultural (and therefore theological) diversity within unity – a diversity which was the early Christian norm, as Gregory Sterling suggested in the Fall 2015 *Reflections* – underplays the degree to which all of our theologies are necessarily in close dialogue with our societies. Yet the application of others' very different ways of thinking can produce much insight into our own situation and religio-cultural matrix.

Pragmatic Pluralism

One of the joys of the end of semester is reading students' work. Among the crop of essays from a course I taught last semester, "Introduction to East Asian Theology," were several theological reflections that drew on Asian theologians' thinking on pluralism in order to examine local matters of belief.

One such essay focused on bridge-building in a fractured Connecticut church, using Taiwanese theologian C. S. Song's understanding of the meaning of symbols to different faith communities. A Ghanaian student applied Song's "one-stroke theology" to his own Ashanti culture. Another student used Song's "Third-Eye Theology" to re-think the appropriation of Native American symbols at a New England retreat center. One essay showed how Japanese burial rites might improve the process of mourning for western Protestants. Another student wrote about Christ as samurai, re-examining the triumphalism of certain western mission theologies and the presence of Christ in solidarity with the poor.

Which of us really has a clear sense of what Greek Orthodox in the US believe, let alone Chinese Catholics or Japanese Presbyterians?

In each case, the experience of life in a multifaith society proved fruitful for reflection on life at home.

In the US, we need not look quite so far away for inspiration. The field of Asian American theology is burgeoning, and gaining institutional strength: There is an annual Asian and Asian American Hermeneutics panel at the national Society of Biblical Literature convention, for example, and a new Chinese Christianities seminar at the American Academy of Religion meeting. Single ethnic-group studies such as *Religion and Spirituality in Korean America*, edited by David K. Yoo and Ruth H. Chung (Illinois, 2008) or *Filipino American Faith in Action* by Joaquin Jay Gonzalez III (NYU, 2009) have been joined on the bookshelf by volumes on Asian American women's experiences and theologies, theological narratives of journeys and border crossing, and studies of postcolonial biblical hermeneutics or Asian American queer sexuality.

PSALM 157
By Charles H. Harper '61 S.T.M.

Sing
people of Earth

Sing lustily

Lift your hearts and voices
into far reaches of our Universe

Let billions upon billions of stars,
and planets with their circling
moons, hear our songs

Boom your music into the fury
of exploding supernova

Fling your harmonies into vast
unknowns beyond farsighted telescopes

Shout triple fortissimo into deep
darkness that surrounds our fragile lights

Chant as though our small species
alone, in all the Universe,
is able to give voice to awe,
terror, amazement and praise

Let your songs, within a nanosecond, fly
Home into the heart of fathomless Mystery

Let our children hear this music
and know that they are loved

For many first- or 1.5-generation Asian Americans, themes of in-betweenness and hybridity recur across sub-fields. This language frequently describes both a religious or religious-cultural belonging and the experience of being American yet perceived as Other. Several theologians have followed Korean American Sang Hyun Lee in working on the concept of liminality, or the positive side to marginality and its prophetic possibilities. Unlike some other ethnic minorities in the US, Asian American experience is often one of a pluri-religious home culture, and this is now a prominent factor in theologizing, alongside reflection on experiences of race discrimination common to other ethnic populations, and those particular to Asian Americans.

Challenging American Identity

Asian American experience and theologizing speak both to American society and to America-in-the-world. This experience can challenge American views of itself and open up engagement with Asian Americans' own history of inclusion, such as when we read searing accounts by Japanese American Christians of life in US internment camps. A more recent example is theologian Rita Nakashima Brock, who discusses her countercultural experience of "life as a mixed-race, Asian North American woman," given that "the United States prefers its citizens to be pure racial types and monolingual people who can be categorized easily as friend or foe, elect or damned, patriot or terrorist," and when purity "is deeply embedded in the founding myths of society," affecting all aspects of cultural, religious, and sexual relations.[5]

From its marginal position, Asian American experience can relativize and critique "the complacency of mainstream white theologians, challenging them to rediscover and retrieve elements of the good news of Jesus Christ that were lost when Christianity was transformed from an erstwhile religion of the powerless and marginalized ... to the official religion of an imperial empire," as Jonathan Tan notes.[6] It can offer models for dialogue across difference, frameworks for moving from ethnicity to solidarity,[7] templates of engagement beyond bilateral dialogue,[8] as well as articulate the social locations of power of all those engaging in partnerships and supposedly equal conversations.

As debates on religious pluralism progress, it might be good, in other words, first to look inward – to begin with the pluralities of Christian experience in the United States, and to listen to those with rich experience of inter-religious dialogue and life in multi-religious families and communities.

Chloë Starr is associate professor of Asian Christianity and theology at YDS. Her research interest is in Chinese theology, and her latest volume, Chinese Theology: Text and Context *(Yale, 2016), explores Chinese theological texts from the Ming dynasty to the 21st century. Her courses at Yale include introductory surveys to East and South East Asian theologies, and seminars on Chinese and Japanese Christian literatures, Asian American theologies, and China mission.*

Notes

1 Cf. Martin Conway, "Key Issues for Theological Education in the Twenty-first Century," in *Handbook of Education in World Christianity*, edited by D. Werner, D. Esterline, N. Kang, and J. Raja (Regnum, 2010), pp. 23-30.

2 See e.g. Aloysius Pieris, S.J., *An Asian Theology of Liberation* (T&T Clark, 1988). See also his "The Place of Non-Christian Religions and Cultures in the Evolution of a Third World Theology," EAPR, 19, 1982, pp. 5-53.

3 For a lively account of one such session, see David F. Ford, "Flamenco, Tai-Chi and Six-Text Scriptural Reasoning; Report on a Visit to China," http://www.interfaith.cam.ac.uk/resources/lecturespapersandspeeches/chinavisit

4 Such as, for example, Hong Kong scholar Archie C. C. Lee's "cross-textual" reading method for Asian and biblical texts; see e.g. 'Cross-Textual Interpretation and Its Implications for Biblical Studies,' in *Teaching the Bible: Discourse and Politics of Biblical Pedagogy*, edited by F. F. Segovia and M. A. Tolbert (Orbis, 1998); "Cross-Textual Hermeneutics on Gospel and Culture," in *Asia Journal of Theology*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1996), pp. 38-48.

5 Rita Nakashima Brock, "Cooking without Recipes: Interstitial Integrity," in *Off the Menu: Asian and Asian North American Women's Religion and Theology,* edited by Rita Nakashima Brock, Jung Ha Kim, Kwok Pui-lan, and Seung Ai Yang (Westminster John Knox, 2007).

6 Jonathan Tan, *Introducing Asian American Theologies* (Orbis, 2008), p. 82.

7 One good short essay we read in class is Anselm Kyongsuk Min, "From Autobiography to Fellowship of Others: Reflections on Doing Ethnic Theology Today" in *Journeys at the Margin: Toward an Autobiographical Theology in American-Asian Perspective*, edited by Peter Phan and Jung Young Lee (Liturgical Press, 1999).

8 On the need for "inter-multicultural theology," see Peter C. Phan, *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian American Theology in the Making* (Orbis, 2003).

The Politics of the Divine Image

By Ray Waddle

In moments of hopeful reverie I imagine a new political party that would revolutionize ill-tempered times. Call it the Divine Image party. It would declare everyone is made in the image of God, and everyone is a member. We're all on the same side: creatures of God, tending the earth, making it bloom.

At one stroke our exhausting stalemates would end. Racism would finally be shamed and eclipsed. Old ideological binaries of left and right would retreat. Media punditry, that lucrative line of work that obsesses over conflict, would be cashiered. Statesmanship might make a comeback.

Alas, challenges would arise. What about people who dismiss the image of God idea, or reject God outright? Nobody could force them to join. They'd likely try to organize their own party. At that point, deft strategic skill would be needed to avert dangerous new factions of God versus no God, or their God versus ours. History's killing fields have seen enough of that. The whole point of an Image of God movement would be to release a benign spirit of solidarity into community life.

At one stroke our exhausting stalemates would end. Racism would finally be shamed. Old ideological binaries would retreat.

American Paradox

This idea of a new party – a renewed search for unity – is, I concede, still in rough draft. It might have to wait. In the US, the dream of common purpose, historically a theological intuition, has always been at war with other instincts – individualism, tribalism, class, racial identity, loyalty to region or state or ancestors. Our noisy American paradox – the fretful attempt at *e pluribus unum* – is as ambivalent as ever.

In recent decades monumental efforts have tried to rise above the internal contradictions and stir national purpose. After World War II, a cohesive language was sought. The term "Judeo-Christian" was given an expansive meaning after the world was traumatized by the toll of the war – the 50 million dead, the Holocaust, the atom bomb, the grim Cold War aftermath. Notable theologians argued that the era's stupefying nihilism and totalitarianism must be met by a recommitment to democratic values and humane habits of the heart, a vision underwritten by biblical monotheism. It was a hopeful time for internationalism, UN resolutions, and civic club membership. A Judeo-Christian foundation of meaning was offered as moral glue, the cornerstone of civilization in a era of peril.[1]

Reinhold Niebuhr and others drew on a new appreciation of Jesus' Jewish roots, the ethical passion of the Hebrew prophets, and a biblical suspicion of human hubris. Defenders hoped the religious framework was specific enough to stir millions to civic nobility yet not so precise or sectarian that it would be overbearing. But they underestimated the spirit of the times: The culture was moving elsewhere fast. Society was metabolizing new magnitudes of pluralism religious, cultural, and ethnic.

The story of postwar religious consensus and fragmentation is compellingly told by Mark Silk in *Spiritual Politics*. These latter-day forms of spiritual unity had giddy moments of promise but never overcame the political convulsions of the time. Critics left and right always had doubts.

By the 1960s, sociologist Robert Bellah offered the idea of an American civil religion. In his interpretation, it had always latently been there: a liberal, ecumenical spirituality that informs our public rituals and hopes. It has its own sacred documents (the Constitution, the Gettysburg Address), existential trials (the Revolutionary War, the Civil War), saints (Lincoln and King), and holidays (Thanksgiving and now King Day), all honoring our best virtues.

By the 1970s, as Silk notes, Bellah abandoned the idea. The civil religion had failed to stop Vietnam and Watergate. It disqualified itself as an ethical binding agent in a body politic that was never comfortable fully embraced any such binding.

Era of Liberation

The ambitious search for cohesive purpose has receded since then, or has rallied only smaller and smaller demographic subsets. Instead, it has yielded to a different story of American promise – not the assertion of common spiritual coordinates but the extraordinary series of movements for civil rights, women's rights, laws protecting minority religions, laws upholding same-sex marriage. For four decades, pluralism has been claiming its power and place, forging a vocabulary, confronting historical wrongs, filling the world.

The advancements of pluralism – and the fierce reactions against them – now define national life. Every day, pluralism strips away another layer of our provincialism, the complacent unawareness of other faiths, other forms of emancipation. But backlashes intensify – condemnations of political correctness, calls for a return to Christian America, the triumph of outlier politicians, a spike in gun sales. We haven't seen such ideological division in a century. And yet the future of human liberation, rights, and tolerance – despite pockets of resistance – cannot be stopped.

Is the search for collective purpose still possible? Is it necessary? The author Rabbi Jonathan Sacks says we better try, and there's no time to lose. The West's prosperous secularism has created a climate of casual relativism, a void being filled by an entirely different set of unifying ideas, those of hatred, extremism, and, as always, anti-Semitism. In his latest book, *Not in God's Name*, Sacks worries that we are losing our religious ideals – reverence, altruism, public service, the peaceable co-existence of multiple faiths. If those values fade, only power and bloodshed will matter. Sacks is addressing Christians, Jews, and Muslims. He implores them to rediscover their common ancestry in Abraham, put aside their sibling rivalries, and realize they are all precious in God's sight. We are all blessed: "Our common humanity precedes our religious differences," he declares.

"Today Jews, Christians, and Muslims must stand together, in defense of humanity, the sanctity of life, religious freedom and the honor of God himself," he writes.[2]

"We must train a generation of religious leaders and educators who embrace the world in its diversity, and sacred texts in their maximal generosity."

It is a very old and mysterious idea: We are made in the divine image, and it is our responsibility to live as if everyone else bears that image too. Perhaps such an idea will find its way to public consciousness again, in unpredictable, planetary, political, healing ways, and just in time.

Ray Waddle is editor of Reflections. *His latest book is* Undistorted God *(Abingdon, 2014).*

Notes

1 See Mark Silk, *Spiritual Politics: Religion and America Since World War II* (Simon & Schuster 1988).

2 Jonathan Sacks, *Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2015), p. 262.

THE SCATTERED CONGREGATION

By Tomas Tranströmer

I.
We got ready and showed our home.
The visitor thought: you live well.
The slum must be inside you.

II.
Inside the church, pillars and vaulting
white as plaster, like the cast
around the broken arm of faith.

III.
Inside the church there's a begging bowl
that slowly lifts from the floor
and floats along the pews.

IV.
But the church bells have gone underground.
They're hanging in the sewage pipes.
Whenever we take a step, they ring.

V.
Nicodemus the sleepwalker is on his way
to the Address. Who's got the Address?
Don't know. But that's where we're going.

Can Public Life Survive the Internet?

By Mary Doak

Daily life for most Americans has been dramatically transformed. We are mesmerized by the possibilities of online life. Pedestrians walk with heads down, scrolling or texting. Friends gather at restaurants looking at their phones rather than each other. Everyone seems to be "talking" to everyone else – elsewhere – all the time.

We ought to consider how the internet's unlimited perspectives and overwhelming pluralism are affecting our public life. Can we still hope to achieve a consensus about our common goals and purposes – or are we are condemned to a cacophony of siloed voices?

Truth Exceeds Our Grasp

A few decades ago, discussions of pluralism and relativism were the focus of much attention in the academy. The more nuanced thinkers argued that, although the dream (or, to many, the nightmare) of absolute certainty was over, we were not forced to accept a radical relativism that allowed no way to judge between competing perspectives. Recognizing that the truth exceeds our grasp, scholars like theologian David Tracy (my mentor) maintained that dialogue among competing perspectives might lead us to more adequate interpretations and closer approximations to the truth, as we encounter and learn from each other.

Imagine if our churches took more seriously their own teachings on the importance of building community.

But we might well ask whether this ideal is still relevant in a world dominated by social media and the expanding universe of online perspectives competing for our attention. Is there any good evidence that this new pluralism will enrich rather than fracture our public life?

On the one hand, it may be that this explosion of online communication and social media is cause for celebration. After all, David Tracy argued that one of the requirements of a productive conversation is to be open to difference, to other views we have not yet considered. Clearly, the internet's unfathomable variety of voices allows us to extend the conversation far beyond the usual confines of geography or print.

But – on the other hand – Tracy's ideal conversation also includes some other "hard rules." Those involved in the conversation must respect each other, say what they mean, weigh evidence proffered, offer support for their own claims, and, when appropriate, change their minds. Tracy envisioned thoughtful dialogue that gives considerable attention to the pros and cons of the different perspectives.

Competing Facts

This is not the kind of interaction universally prized in online communication. If social media is known for anything, it is speed, brevity, and brashness. Consider how difficult it is to weigh evidence when online sources proclaim alternative "facts" repeatedly so that a great deal of nonsense quickly becomes common wisdom. Who will take the time to reason thoughtfully when 140-character tweets get more attention and applause?

Further disrupting Tracy's conversational ideal is the anonymity and even fictitious identity permitted by social media: The sincerity of the other is exactly what cannot be assumed.

The anonymity of the internet – the posturing and extremism it invites – frequently stirs mob psychology: Cyberbullying is not limited to school children. People risk barrages of hate mail and even threats of violence for taking an unpopular position

or for making a thoughtless comment. The internet can be a very unsafe place, with no legal process or authority to protect the vulnerable.

Perhaps most devastating to the ideal of a pluralistic conversation is the tendency of internet users to gravitate toward like-minded people. It is easier to listen to those who shore up our settled views than to allow our most cherished positions to be called into question by someone's anonymous musings. Online communication is sought more often to confirm than to interrupt tribal mentalities – at a time when we live, work, play, and rub shoulders increasingly with people similar to us.

Is it any wonder that public life is sharply polarized, and that insults replace debate in the latest presidential campaign? We've come to expect political conversations dominated not by policy debates but by threats, put-downs, and attack slogans.

Offline Connection

Some hold out hope that the internet itself will be part of the solution to a healthier common life, connecting us all in unprecedented ways. That may be. But I am convinced that the attitudes and values needed for public life – enabling us to experience difference as potentially enriching rather than as primarily threatening – are best cultivated offline, in the human interactions that form us most deeply.

It is instructive to recall that Abraham Lincoln, appalled by mob violence early in his career, argued for a culture of respect for the law. In his 1838 speech to the Young Man's Lyceum in Springfield, IL., Lincoln insisted that, to restrain vigilante vengeance, a deep reverence for law had to be inculcated in children and reinforced by social institutions.

I would argue similarly: If the inherent pluralism of the internet is not to become a cosmos of thoroughgoing relativism that reinforces tribal divisions, we need to reconceive how we approach diverse perspectives, bringing with us an element of curiosity, patience, humility, and a sense that we are all in this together.

Churches and other communities of worship have much to contribute here. Of course, people who gather for worship are (more or less) united in religious belief, and too often are of the same race, ethnicity, and class as well. Yet religious communities remain institutions for transmitting fundamental values through face-to-face interactions. Churches should teach their members to value the human diversity through which we can learn more about the infinite God. Religious communities are in a position to sponsor public events on matters of common concern, bringing people together in respectful discussion.

There is an emerging consensus that the public purpose of the church is to work for greater human unity in (and not despite) our diversity. This concept of the church was articulated by the Roman Catholic Church's Second Vatican Council, influenced by the Orthodox Churches, and is now found in documents of the World Council of Churches. This agreement that the church's task is to work for public harmony explains Pope Francis's emphasis on building bridges that unite rather than walls that reinforce our divisions.

We ought to bring with us an element of curiosity, patience, humility, and a sense that we are all in this together.

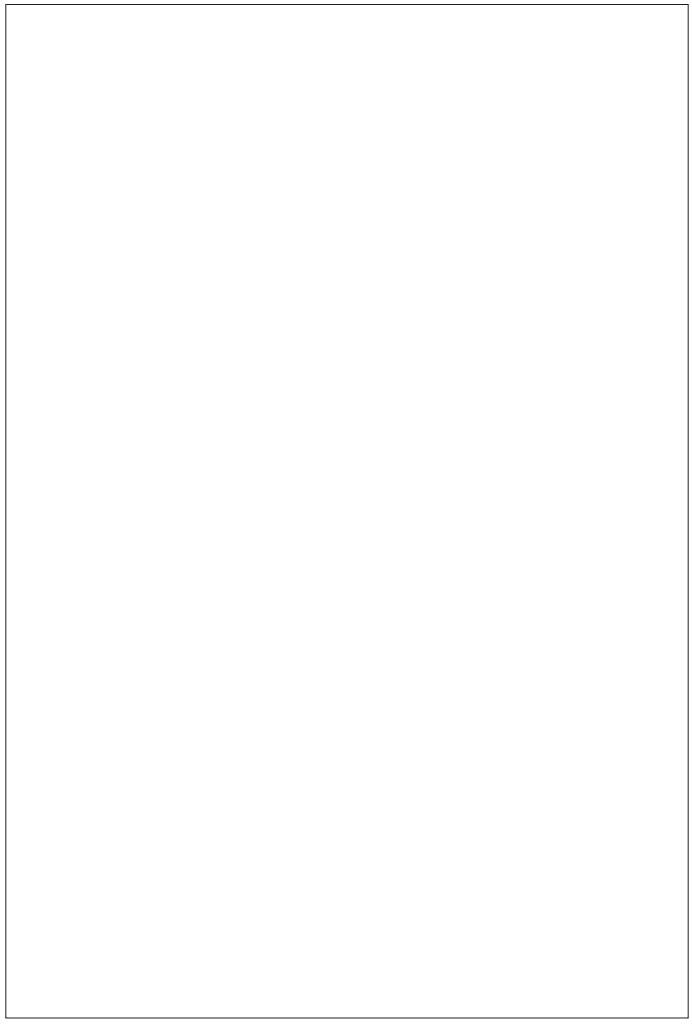
Eclipsing Tribalism

Imagine if our churches were to take more seriously their own teachings on the importance of building community, beginning with people who are poor or who, for any reason, have little voice in society. What might happen if every church accepted Pope Francis's challenge to sponsor a refugee family? All of society would be transformed if religious communities became places where tribalism is interrupted with respectful, even loving, openness.

Howard Thurman, the great 20th-century African American preacher and mystic, maintained that if churches truly exemplified the love of all, a love that accepts everyone – without exception – as precious brothers and sisters, people would flock to these churches to learn their secret of how to live together in peace.

We might also learn to be skeptical of the internet's destructive side, and resist using social media as an echo chamber to reinforce rather than expand our limited perspectives.

Mary Doak is associate professor of theology at the University of San Diego. Her research interests include liberation and political theologies, theologies of democracy and religious freedom, and the goals of history from a Christian perspective. She is the author of Reclaiming Narrative for Public Theology *(SUNY, 2004). She has an M.A. and a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago Divinity School.*



The Healing Force of Multifaith Work

By Yvonne C. Lodico '09 M.A.R.

Since the trauma of / , religious extremists have expanded their heinous tactics to include unimaginable acts of human trafficking, mass executions, abuse of women and children, and territorial conquest. They pose some of the gravest humanitarian and security challenges of our time.

Never has it been more important to pursue multifaith relationships in the cause of peace. The axiom is as urgent as ever: "There will be no peace among nations without peace among religions."[1]

According to the Pew Research Center last year, governments with high restrictions on worship or enforcement of preferential worship rank highest for social hostilities – including armed conflict, terrorism, mob sectarian violence.[2]

It's a familiar paradox: Policies of exclusion, isolation, and discrimination are more likely to engender anger and religious extremism than prevent them.[3] Defying this stark trend, enlightened multifaith encounters build social trust based a mutual recognition of our innate human dignity.[4] Indeed,

Multifaith encounters do not require a diminishment of one's own theological commitment or undercut the truth of other traditions.

the United Nations and other international organizations seek to integrate this understanding of faith into negotiations and peacekeeping.

Harmony and trust, however, mean more than tolerating diversity. They depend on a genuine interest in crossing lines of difference. A dramatic example is the current pope. In his quest to end discord and violence, Pope Francis has been reaching across religious divides, visiting some of the world's most conflict-prone countries. Last November, on his first trip to sub-Sahara Africa, he called for interfaith initiatives and insisted that religion can never justify violence. His plea is considered critical in a region where the number of Christians and Muslims is increasing, and tension between the two faiths is intensifying.[5]

YDS Initiative

Closer to home, the search for sustainable bonds of social cohesion continues. In recent years Yale Divinity School and the UN have carried out a series of events that focused on a deeper understanding of inclusiveness and faith.

One of the events, a retreat at Yale in October 2014, was co-sponsored by the World Council of Churches, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and the Permanent Mission of Iraq to the UN. It centered on the role of religion in creating inclusive governance, with emphasis on Iraq. The discussion looked beyond sectarian divisions and sought common theological threads found in Islam that could offer a compelling foundation for moderation and consensus.[6]

The retreat featured Yale faculty and others who examined the relationship between Islamic Sharia and civil law, methods to combat the narrative of transnational jihad, and strategies for dealing with fear of religious diversity. Scholars stressed the core religious tenets shared by Shia and Sunni Islam and suggested how faith leaders could work harmoniously at a community level. This retreat broke new ground for interfaith dialogue.[7]

A foundational assumption of multifaith work is that a conversation among faiths will generate peaceable illuminations about each other. Mutual

respect finally issues forth from awareness of our common humanity as creatures of God. Discourse is not based on trying to persuade one faith over another but acknowledging the positive aspects of other faiths.[8] Ultimately we must regard the sheer diversity of creation as a benign and healing force. Christians, for instance, live out the truth within the church, but their faith unfolds in the world of countless diverse relationships. We hold our deepest differences, even our religious differences, not in isolation, but in relationship to one another.[9]

Syrian Nightmare

We only have to look at the horrific civil war in Syria to ponder what might happen if multifaith work were deployed preemptively. Before the war, Syrians lived together no matter their beliefs – Judaism, Christianity, Islam.[10] The strife began as a protest against state corruption and a lack of freedom, then escalated with the government's severe and sustained backlash against protestors.[11] The violence drove religious groups against each other, especially after they sought help from foreign governments. As conflict intensified, a new sectarianism spread, legitimating violence among the three major monotheistic religions.[12] The engulfing violence spread to the region, making it one of the worst religious wars of our time.[13]

Multifaith initiative may not bring about a universal agreement on the meaning of the good life, but its accomplishments prove that collaborative efforts – based on the dignity of every person despite religious differences – will serve the common good.

Moving forward in search of peace, we global citizens of the 21st century must grasp this: Multifaith engagement does not require a diminishment of one's own theological commitment or undercut the truth of other traditions. Multifaith work sees the diversity of beliefs under God as a source of compatibility and coexistence. This search for empathy – a journey made with strangers – has very ancient roots. "You shall not oppress a stranger; you know the heart of a stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt," says Exodus 23:9.

It is a potent force for peace.

Yvonne C. Lodico '09 M.A.R. is head of the UNITAR (United Nations Institute for Training and Research) New York Office. Previously, she served as special advisor with the UN mission in Timor-Leste and worked with three other UN missions in sub-Sahara Africa. She has taught human rights law and advised on international affairs and law. She has a law degree from NYU and an international affairs degree from Columbia.

Notes

1 Hans Kung, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic* (SCM Press, 1991).

2 http://www.pewforum.org/2015/02/26/religious-hostilities/

3 Maajid Nawaz, *Radical: My Journey Out of Islamist Extremism* (Lyons Press, 2013), p. 45.

4 William Sullivan, "Making Civil Society Work," in *Civil Society, Democracy, and Civic Renewal*, edited by Robert K. Fullinwider (Rowman & Littlefield, 1999), p. 37.

5 http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/11/24/in-africa-pope-francis-will-find-religious-vibrancy-and-violence/

6 Speaking at the retreat were: Gregory E. Sterling, dean of YDS; YDS professor Lamin Sanneh; Darryl Li, associate research scholar at Yale Law School; Yale political science professor Andrew March; Sheikh Fadhel Al-Sahlani of the Imam Al-Khoei Foundation in New York; Kareem Adeeb of the Interfaith Council of Southwestern Connecticut, and Yvonne Lodico.

7 Last fall, during a General Assembly high-level focus on countering extremism, YDS held a side event at the UN on "Trust Building and Peaceful and Inclusive Societies." It included Gregory E. Sterling, dean of YDS; YDS professor Miroslav Volf; Sabri Boukadoum, Ambassador of Algeria; and Yvonne Lodico. See, http://www.unitar.org/building-and-promoting-trust-peaceful-and-inclusive-societies.

8 David Hollenbach, S.J. *The Global Face of Public Faith: Politics, Human Rights and Christian Ethics* (Georgetown University Press, 2003), p. 5.

9 http://www.huffingtonpost.com/brian-c-stiller/dont-mistake-pluralism-fo_b_2837966.html

10 Dennis Covington, *Revelation: A Search for Faith in a Violent Religious World* (Little, Brown and Co., 2016), p. 74.

11 See Fouad Ajami, *The Syrian Rebellion* (Hoover Institution Press, 2012), p. 103.

12 https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/08/2648161/

13 Covington, p. 62.

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POETRY CREDITS

Poet **Chana Bloch**'s *Swimming in the Rain: New & Selected Poems, 1980-2015* (Autumn House, 2015) includes work from *The Secrets of the Tribe, The Past Keeps Changing, Mrs. Dumpty*, and *Blood Honey*. Bloch co-translated *The Song of Songs* (Modern Library Classics, 2006) and books by Israeli poets Yehuda Amichai and Dahlia Ravikovitch. New work of hers appears in *The Best American Poetry 2015, Pushcart Prize XL, The New York Times Sunday Magazine*, and *The New Yorker.* See www.chanabloch.com.

"The Flood," from *The Secrets of the Tribe* (Sheep Meadow Press). Copyright © 1980 by Chana Bloch. Reprinted with permission of Sheep Meadow Press.

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Lucille Clifton (1936-2010) was an award-winning poet and woman of letters. *The Collected Poems of Lucille Clifton 1965-2010* (BOA Editions, 2012), edited by Kevin Young and Michael Glaser, includes all 11 of her published collections and more than 60 other poems.

"the last day" and "blessing the boats" from *The Collected Poems of Lucille Clifton*. Copyright © 1991 by Lucille Clifton. Reprinted with the permission of The Permissions Company, Inc. on behalf of BOA Editions Ltd., www.boaeditions.org.

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Korean-born poet and translator **Ok-Koo Kang Grosjean** (1940-2000) was the author of *A Hummingbird's Dance* (Parallax Press, 1994). She translated books into Korean by the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Gary Snyder, among others.

"The Wind," from *What Book!?: Buddha Poems from Beat to Hip Hop* (Parallax Press, 1998), edited by Gary Gach. Reprinted with permission of Parallax Press, Berkeley, CA. www.parallax.org.

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Charles H. Harper '61 S.T.M. is a poet and retired United Church of Christ minister living in Las Cruces, NM. His latest volume of poetry, *Odyssey* (Powder Horn Press), will appear this year. His work can be seen at www.harperpoetry.com.

"Psalm 157" from *Odyssey*. Copyright © 2016 by Charles H. Harper. Reprinted with permission from the author.

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Tibetan-born poet **Ngodup Paljor** (1947-88) was a Buddhist scholar and translator.

"Robert Frost and I," from *What Book!?: Buddha Poems from Beat to Hip Hop* (Parallax Press, 1998), edited by Gary Gach. Reprinted with permission of Parallax Press, Berkeley, CA. www.parallax.org.

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The Swedish poet **Tomas Tranströmer** (1931-2015) won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2011. He was a respected psychologist who worked with juveniles, the disabled, convicts, and drug addicts. His many books include *The Deleted World: Poems* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011) and *The Great Enigma: New Collected Poems* (New Directions, 2006).

"Romanesque Arches" and "The Scattered Congregation," translated by Robert Bly, from *The Half-Finished Heaven: The Best Poems of Tomas Tranströmer*. Copyright © 2001 by Tomas Tranströmer. Translation copyright © 2001 by Robert Bly. Reprinted with the permission of The Permissions Company, Inc. on behalf of Graywolf Press, Minneapolis, MN., www.graywolfpress.org.

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The poem "I used to shun my companion" was written by an anonymous Arabic poet of the medieval period. It is featured in the collection *Music of a Distant Drum: Classical Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Hebrew Poems*, translated and introduced by Bernard Lewis (Princeton University Press, 2001).

"I used to shun my companion" from *Music of a Distant Drum: Classical Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Hebrew Poems,* translated by Bernard Lewis. Copyright © 2001 by Princeton University Press. Reprinted by permission.

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access Yale

A university initiative for financial aid

Announcing

The Access Yale Divinity Challenge

A YDS initiative for financial aid

Upon his death in 2014, Yale Divinity School (YDS) received a bequest from the estate of Howard Benson '53 STM that Reverend Benson hoped would be used for the school's greatest need. YDS has now received generous additional funds from an anonymous donor. With these combined resources, Yale Divinity School has established a $750,000 challenge fund to encourage the creation of new endowed scholarships as part of the Access Yale initiative for financial aid.

Magnify the impact of your gift to YDS

Any new gift or commitment of $50,000 or more to create a new endowed scholarship fund for Yale Divinity School students studying for the ordained ministry will be matched by an additional $50,000 from the challenge fund.

Here's how it works:

- Give $500,000 over the next five years? Have an additional $50,000 placed in the fund for a total of $550,000.
- Give $50,000 over the next five years? Have an additional $50,000 placed in the fund for a total of $100,000.
- Any gift of $50,000 or more is eligible for the $50,000 challenge match as long as the original commitment is paid within five years and the first $10,000 is paid before June 30, 2016.
- You will receive gift credit for the amount of your gift but the total fund principal will include your gift plus the $50,000 match.
- Your fund may be named for yourself, or to honor or memorialize a family member or loved one.
- The challenge will run until June 30, 2016, or until the challenge fund is exhausted, whichever comes first.

For more information

Access Yale is a two-year, university-wide initiative in support of financial aid at Yale. The initiative seeks to build financial aid endowment across all of Yale's schools, as well as raise current use funds that can go to work immediately to support financial aid in Yale College, the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences, and the professional schools.. For more information about how you can participate in the Access Yale Divinity Challenge, please contact:

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Concern over financial aid is the number one reason accepted applicants do not attend YDS.

Many top candidates receive larger financial aid offers

Giving Opportunities

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