



Spiritual Diversity Conference

The Challenge of Peaceful Co-existence

17, 18 October 2013
Atlantica Hotel, Halifax

Editor:
Robin Arthur



Citizenship and
Immigration Canada

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Conference**
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12. Dr. Yassin Sankar, Sri Satya Sai Baba Organization
13. Imam Zia Khan, Director of the Centre for Islamic Development

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the proposed conference is two-fold. First, we seek to deepen public understanding of different religious traditions, find commonalities, acknowledge differences and advance an appreciation of Canada's religious diversity. To these ends, a desired result will be greater societal harmony.

Second, the conference will examine challenges that pluralistic states face and how interfaith dialogue can inform both social and security policy development. The desired results are policies that accommodate religious diversity.

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The Challenge of Peaceful Co-existence: An Introduction

By Robin Arthur

Good morning ladies and gentlemen:
I thought it would be appropriate to kick off the conference on a light note and wake some of you up, if a Tim Horton's cup of coffee has not already done that. So, this aside was something I picked up on the internet and I thought it was relevant to this dialogue. This is how it goes:

A man comes up to St Peter at the gates to Heaven.
"Religion?" Peter asks.
"Catholic"
"Door 1." Peter responds.
The man goes through and another man comes along.
"Religion?"
"Methodist."
"Door 8, walk quietly past door 3." Peter cautions.
A third man turns up.
"Religion?"
"Episcopalian."
"Door 5. Walk quietly past door 3." Peter warns.
The man raises an eyebrow. "What's in door 3?"
St. Peter's eyes meet the man's.
"Another Christian denomination. But they think they're the only ones out here."

I think every religion takes a position on salvation. But interfaith dialogue does not engage in knocking one or the other and therefore it does not even remotely suggest that engaging in interfaith dialogue would somehow compromise those positions in matters of faith, theology, or the life after. Instead as the conference statement of purpose declares: This conference seeks commonalities and will acknowledge differences so that in coming together we build peaceful societies. The challenge of peaceful coexistence is the theme of this conference.

So, what's the need for this conference at this time? You see, the thing is that immigration, which is the lifeblood of Canada's economy, gradually alters the demographic face of Canada. As people of different faith groups take up residence, the challenge of accommodating religious diversity gets more pointed. In 2010 the top source countries for immigration were The

Philippines, India and China.

It's just as well that analysts see religious diversity as the major challenge in countries with a pluralistic society such as Canada. The vandalism of a Dartmouth mosque and later a mosque in Prince Edward Island in 2012 shocked the Island's Muslim community. There are calls for the inclusion of Muslim Sharia law into Canada's legal structure as well as calls for a designated river where Canadian Hindus may immerse the ashes of the deceased.

And now the **Charter of Quebec Values** is a proposed bill in Quebec introduced by the governing party to restrict public sector employees from wearing or displaying conspicuous religious symbols. According to the bill, the kippah, turban, hijab, niqāb and larger religious pendants would be prohibited. The proposal was first announced on May 22, 2013.

This is a dangerous precedent and points to the fact that accommodating various religious traditions especially within the framework of secular governance is a challenge.

It is with that in view and with a stated objective of informing both social and security policy development, that the Multicultural Association of Nova Scotia (MANS) is hosting this Spiritual Diversity Conference.

But this conference seeks to move a step further—to take interfaith dialogue to people on the ground in schools and hospitals, police departments and penitentiaries. The panelists speaking at the afternoon workshops are drawn from these specific fields with hands-on experience of what it means to connect with people of different faith traditions in schools, commiserate with people in hospitals and penitentiaries and facilitate the practice of their faith in new, difficult situations. That represents the critical step ahead this conference takes on the heels of the 2011 event.

With that, I'd like to see the conference move forward. Thank you.

Robin Arthur, the conference project coordinator, is a journalist and he is editor of the newspaper Touch BASE. The paper was launched fifteen years ago and has been addressing the many challenges that pluralistic societies are confronted with, of which religious diversity is only of them.



The Spiritual Diversity Conference is Arthur's brainchild. He launched the first conference in June 2011 which was an outright success and has guided this conference committee, giving this conference an agenda that seeks to address the challenge of peaceful coexistence. He is the author of several books - fiction and academic - and even a One Act Play, staged in Halifax, which gave audiences an insight into the challenges of diversity in Canada.

Freedom of Religion in a Secular State: Why is it desirable in the Public Square

Gordon Naylor

National Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Canada

Some suggest that religion and secularism have no place together. Others propose we are living in a post-secular era because it is clear that religion is here to stay and always has been. It is important to explore the role of religion in society because religion has inspired people from every walk of life.

Religion is central to what many believe is the major component of their true identity. It moves them to contribute to the building of a just community. There is a rejection on the part of people of faith to accept the rigid contingencies of a secular society for discourse. The desire has always been there at public discourses to not attempt to stifle religious people expressing their values and knowledge based on their beliefs. They want to bring their 'whole self' to the public square.



Should these spaces be supported by government and secular society? How do we address injustices or inequity in day to day religious life in the public sphere when it occurs? Should some religious based schools be funded and others not funded? Should we support or celebrate holy days differently, based on historical precedence or numerical significance?

Rather than accepting the constraining view that dichotomizes secular and religious thought, Canadian society could well benefit from integrating and seeking coherence from these varied views. This does not represent compromise or a 'melting pot' but rather acknowledges that each faith community can and will contribute to the common good and thereby enrich the social landscape of Canadian society. What are the possible benefits of religious diversity when there are spaces and structures that are open to the creative interplay between the practical and the spiritual.

At the Couchiching series of conversations on advancing a discourse on youth empowerment, spirituality and social action, February 2013, the theme articulated the concept of discourse as: "For many young people, who are committed to social change, matters of religion and spirituality are not simply private concerns. They inform the values; principles and ethical framework

that inspire commitment to social action.

Religion has been viewed, with some justification, as the cause of division between groups of people, but it can also be seen as a source of knowledge and wisdom for the kind of society we want to create together. Efforts to contribute to social change are animated by a vision of society characterized by unity, justice, cooperation, mutual support, the eradication of prejudice, and removal of social barriers. These are values shared by the vast majority of people regardless of their religious affiliation or system of belief. They go on to say however, “These spiritual attributes of a community are not captured by the dominant discourses about economic growth and political change.”

The key question for all administrators charged with the responsibility for managing environments is what are the elements that create a secular environment that stifles religious freedom of expression or prevents a faith community from contributing to discourse and or social development. What features does a secular country need to have in place to demonstrate to it’s citizens that it is open to benefit from enrichment in discourse that includes religiously diverse viewpoints, motivation, inspiration and idealism?

Canada has a rich heritage of religious pluralism and has welcomed people from the most diverse belief systems around the planet. Our challenge, as a society, is to explore the potential contribution that can be made to society by the insights, inspiration and dedication of diverse religions.

Immigration

Canada is accepting three hundred thousand immigrants every year. These newcomers are from many backgrounds with significant religious diversity. Canada has historically stood firm on preventing religious as well as other types of persecution and threat.

At an earlier time, the Baha’i community itself was spared great loss by this government when Canada saved many Baha’i lives.

In 1973, the Trudeau government decided that Canada’s immigration and refugee policies were outdated and in need of revision. Canada’s response to a series of refugee situations—the Czechs in 1968, Asian Ugandans in 1972 and Chileans in 1973—had each required the creation of new regulations, and it was clear that a more general framework was needed to allow for a more flexible and nimble response to humanitarian crises. A series of government-led national dialogues on immigration were held, culminating in the passage of the *Immigration Act* in 1976, and its implementation two years later. The act made a number of important changes to refugee policy. The most important included the principle of admission to Canada on humanitarian grounds and a provision for private sponsorship of refugees.

While the Indochinese program has been widely discussed and analyzed, it was followed by another, smaller refugee movement to Canada that has received scant attention from scholars or journalists. The Iranian Baha’i refugee program ran from 1981 to 1989, blending private sponsorship and government-assisted resettlement, in a unique model of partnership

between government and civil society. Around 2,300 refugees were resettled in about 220 communities across Canada, and Canada's program was used as a model to open doors to resettlement for some 6,000 more Baha'i refugees in 25 countries around the world.

The Threat of Genocide

The Baha'i minority of Iran was targeted by ascendant Islamic hardliners in the aftermath of the 1979 Iranian revolution. Baha'is were the clearest obstacle to ideological unity in the clerics' project to fuse the state with a radical version of Shi'a Islam. Iran's clerical elite had a particular animus towards the Baha'is, the country's largest religious minority and followers of a post-Islamic religion—heretics, in their eyes.

The Baha'i faith has its origins in mid 19th century Persia. Baha'u'llah, its prophet-founder, spent most of his life as a prisoner and exile, eventually passing away under house arrest near Ottoman Akka (now in Israel). The Baha'i faith is an independent world religion that espouses the oneness of humankind and a vision of society that is both spiritually and materially prosperous. Its followers in Iran have experienced persecution since the inception of the religion.

Following the revolution, the early attacks on the Baha'is included more than 200 executions and "disappearances," which appeared to be coordinated to eliminate those in visible leadership positions in the community. Baha'i graveyards and holy sites were razed, children and youth were ejected from schools, properties were seized and virtually all citizenship rights were stripped from Baha'is.

Writing in the *New York Review of Books* in 1982, Firuz Kazemzadeh raised an alarm: "The threat of genocide hangs over the heads of the Baha'is of Iran." Canada was a leading voice in the international outcry against the attacks on Baha'is. In June 1980, Canada's House of Commons was the first legislature to pass a resolution (unanimously) calling attention to the situation of the Baha'is in Iran. The government brought a resolution to the United Nations Sub Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination Against Minorities, initiating a series of interventions by the UN Commission on Human Rights. Canada matched its diplomatic words with protective action—its special resettlement program for Baha'i refugees was the first dedicated effort to extend international protection to Baha'is fleeing violence in Iran.

Making It Happen

The Baha'i Community of Canada approached the government in 1981 to seek its assistance in resettling stateless Baha'i refugees. Lloyd Axworthy, Canada's future foreign minister, had just been named minister of employment and immigration, and the case of the Baha'is was one of the first he encountered. Axworthy's response was influenced by two factors. The first was an earlier approach by his constituents to support the June 1980 House of Commons motion condemning attacks on Iranian Baha'is. He was familiar with the Baha'i case and was convinced of its seriousness and urgency. The

second was the availability of a policy framework for private sponsorship, which had been tried and tested in the case of the Indochinese resettlement program.

Canada bypassed the lengthy procedure of determining refugee status through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and encouraged its officers to grant refugee status to Iranian Baha'is, provided they could verify their status as Baha'i. (Jeff Cameron, Chief Researcher, Canadian Baha'i Community)

The willingness of Canada to step out of the norm as a sovereign state in an effort to save a community that was in a perilous condition will not be forgotten around the world. The members of the Baha'i community that were able to immigrate to Canada at that time and thereafter were inspired to want to make the best and most helpful contribution to the common good for this country and the world.

What is the role of religion in public discourse?

Religion provides a moral compass for the common good and “through the clash of differing views comes the spark of truth. If we as a country strive to hear all the voices of diverse religions and those of people without religion we will create an atmosphere of enrichment, learning and understanding. If the “...root cause of wrongdoing is ignorance”(‘Abdu'lBaha, Baha'i Faith} the methodology for true and lasting change is education, learning and understanding.

As was stated in McGill's recent conference on *Bridging the Secular Divide: Religion and Canadian Public Discourse* in May 2013: There is general uncertainty in Canadian society about how religion ought to enter into the spaces of public discourse, where the ideas that shape public opinion and public policy are generated..We make a distinction between the influence of religious institutions on policy, and the concepts, ideas, language and approaches that have developed out of Canada's many practiced religions and which can help to enrich our public discourse.

While we recognize the important role that religious organizations have played in the provision of social services and development of many secular institutions, it is the latter role that religion plays – as a source of knowledge and wisdom available to everyone – that we wish to emphasize. We think that the insights offered by religion, whether based on spiritual teachings or the experience of people applying them, can contribute positively to the clarification of shared values and thinking on issues of public concern.

Religion enters into Canadian public discourse through the content of interventions by citizens, professionals, civil society organizations, politicians, media and other actors in the civic landscape. Religious perspectives have sometimes been expressed in the public sphere using moralizing or discriminatory language – or in ways that suggest that one religion should be regarded as uniquely authoritative.

These contributions have not helped to improve the tone or content of public discourse. Our aspiration is for a more moderate and gracious mode of

deliberation, characterized by mutual respect and a search for shared insight and understanding.

We are calling for a new level of maturity in our public discourse, where diverse religious perspectives are part of a rich and dynamic Canadian conversation. Religious voices can help to set a higher standard for civil, respectful, and robust discussions around social issues and public policy – precisely by avoiding self-righteousness, modeling mutual respect and learning, demonstrating appreciation for the value of science, and acknowledging the truth present in the views of others.

These are values that will enrich Canadian public discourse and the role of diverse religions in advancing the common good. Religious individuals must be subjected to the same moderating discipline as others. If in the name of faith we attempt to perpetrate, however subtly, a bullying manner it must be deemed unacceptable and oppressive.

The McGill article goes on to say: “We believe that civic institutions, including media, political parties, government and civil society, benefit from greater inclusion of religious perspectives, when shared in a manner described above. Religious communities often possess a wealth of experience addressing a range of social issues, from education and youth empowerment to restorative justice and reconciliation. Furthermore, as our public discourse is increasingly narrowed by strictly market or utilitarian analysis, religious voices can offer fresh perspectives on the moral, ethical and spiritual dimensions of public issues and priorities – from the crisis of climate change to the challenge of eradicating poverty.”

Secular views often attempt to silence, by making allegations against religious communities. They go on to state: “An extreme form, espouses the restriction of many public expressions of religion. It assumes that religion is inherently exclusionary or divisive, and that democratic civility is promoted by restricting its role to private belief.

“This is a form of secularism that limits the advancement of our public discourse by excluding perspectives that draw from the insights of religion. In a country that has embraced values of pluralism and religious freedom, the exclusion of religion from all public discourse would be inconsistent with our heritage. Our challenge is to foster a new spirit of civility and reconciliation within an increasingly diverse society, where we can speak openly together about our beliefs, values and principles and how they relate to the common good – where neither belief nor unbelief are privileged.”

An obvious example of secular government opening itself to the advice of faith communities to inform itself of the views, knowledge and insights of religions was the request of the Office of Religious Freedom of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade to receive submissions as to how it should function and what should be its priority issues. It should be remembered that the Office of Religious Freedom is to focus on the engagement of Canada in processes that are international in nature relating to other nations.

In the Baha’i writings, the Prophet Founder, Baha’u’llah has said: “Let your vision be world embracing rather than confined to your own self.” This is

not simply an encouragement to think in a world minded way, as vital as that is, but it must also be viewed as a means that through service to the world as a nation, our own issues and shortcomings become more illumined and a stronger commitment to change is realized.

Every nation must be concerned with the standards it keeps and how it relates and compares to other nations of the world. As we work on the issues facing mankind it causes us to raise our consciousness to the level of principle and consider how it applies and what changes should be made to realize the type of future we want for our world civilization. These principles, once identified, throw light on what must change on the domestic scene as well. We would not want to be educating other nations on religious freedom without striving to be the best example ourselves. An unwillingness to examine our own issues in Canada in light of principles of international ethics and morals would leave us in a state of hypocrisy.

Preserving and Respecting Diversity

Canada has prided itself on its open policies and its commitment to respect and human rights for all. It has been a leader among the nations of the world in this regard. This commitment goes beyond words and to the level of international action. This is why we cannot wait for people to litigate against institutions either at home or at the United Nations to bring about a just solution in Canadian society. We must strive to consult and sort out our issues before this happens.

For example, the Ontario government in deciding to fund Catholic High Schools beyond the historic British North American Act ceiling of grade nine created just such a problem. Ontario's unwillingness to fund other religious based schools has caused that government to be deemed prejudicial towards other faiths and out of compliance with international values of justice and human rights.

Another example historically was Ontario's long time commitment to a half hour of religious education weekly in public schools. Over forty years ago, Dr. George Grant, a Rhodes Scholar, was commissioned by the Ontario Ministry of Education to recommend what type of religious instruction should be given to students during this instruction time: Protestant or Anglican etc. He wisely concluded that 'It wouldn't matter what type of religious instruction was given in a half hour a week when everyone was living the 'bastard religion' of materialism.'

Later, in the 1980's the issue came to a head, when in Elgin County evangelical Christian education was disrupting Baha'i and Jewish children when in that half hour a week the preaching reached such a pitch, as to cause these children to have nightmares. When the parents asked that it be toned down they were denied. The Jews and the Baha'is took the matter to court and in the Supreme Court of Ontario were successful in changing the interpretation of this educational experience. It was ruled that in the public school system the Boards of Education were to be given a choice. They could ensure that all religions should be taught or no religion. Thus giving precedence to the

'Lord's Prayer' over others was no longer acceptable. Some principals lost their jobs over refusing to discontinue this practice. One major religious monthly stated: 'Now our children are subjected to a smorgasbord of religion that smacks of a distinct Baha'i flavour.' It was generous to accredit the Baha'i Faith for the entire multifaith movement but nonetheless inaccurate and inappropriate.

On a personal note, the day a Baha'i writing was read in my children's school over the PA system all three attending school came home excitedly proclaiming how wonderful this was to have taken place in their school. Their facial expressions clearly conveyed the joy they felt at this most important part of their identity, their Faith, was being validated in an educational environment that they spent most of their hours in each day.

We would do well to consider in a consultative manner between faiths and religions how to deal with holidays and other unbalanced or unjust patterns. Migration of three hundred thousand people annually is strengthening Canada's religious diversity and this along with people changing their religions or beliefs and their strong sensitivity to discrimination of all types, is increasing the weight and importance of a just solution being found. Otherwise, litigation will be the only route and/or international embarrassment, instead of leadership, will be the outcome at least temporarily. Diversity of religion and respect not tolerance should be the desired standard if we are to strive to be an exemplary nation. If we use a democratic process to decide about protecting and safeguarding the rights of minorities it is inappropriate if that process is used to outnumber. Unless the majority is educated about the importance of preserving diversity it is of course possible to steamroll over the rights of minorities. Dominant culture is exactly that, unless it values the richness that diversity brings to a nation.

Consider how much we are trying to protect the world from the loss of diversity of species in the animal world or the environment. How much greater is the importance of diversity in the human world. We cannot afford to ignore the needs of any minority group to their peril or that of the society. Canada has distinguished itself in the area of group law and found ways to enshrine in law the protection of groups even when it has meant compromising the rights of individuals. For example, words of hate and hate crimes against groups are unacceptable by law in Canada no matter what standard an individual may wish to keep.

Small interventions especially when enacted by law or those that are principle based ensure respect and go a long way to ensure peaceful coexistence. One example of this was highlighted when a friend and owner of a large construction company in Italy found his managers continually complaining about their Muslim immigrant workers as difficult and argumentative at times. He didn't have time to consider why these complaints were so numerous until the situation had caused these workers to stop work on a major project.

He decided to personally travel to the site and hold discussions with these workers and try to solve the problem. To his surprise he discovered that

their only complaint was they were not being given time to say their prayers at the required times or to have a place to do so on site. He immediately ordered that these considerations be given by all managers and the problem was solved.

From a Baha'i point of view, we must want to be respectful of diversity of faith and be seen to do so, for this makes for a more prosperous and peaceful future for all. All issues of inequality relate to impoverishing some people and thereby diminishing all people in a country, nay the world. Another example is gender equality and its vital importance. We cannot systematically disadvantage women for decades and expect that now we have formally committed to changing this oppression, that it will suddenly be remediated.

Conclusion

There are many subtleties in demonstrating respect and the valuing of diversity. If we are not careful we can trivialize the importance of these daily occurrences that begin to eat at the vitals of our just and peaceful society. People do care about the little things but most importantly they care about the ways and means to address inconsistencies in society.

Law and other structures must be ever evolving to serve the needs of the people in a changing world made up of many faith communities. We have the capacity to be proactive in the manner we treat people whether it be in our businesses, government, education or social services. Developing systems and processes that empower the diverse members of our community to make their contribution to Canada is a matter of urgency. We are proud to say we are Canadians because we have demonstrated this commitment in the past and we will work to ensure its reality in the future.

To be enriched by the special insights, knowledge, wisdom and motivation of all faith communities, whether large or small, can only improve our happiness as a nation and stimulate a peaceful and prosperous nation capable of contributing to the world.

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Gordon Naylor has been developing and implementing programs for the education and empowerment of youth and families in North and South America. Mr. Naylor is the founder and Executive Director of the Nancy Campbell Collegiate Institute (www.nancycampbell.ca), an international, co-educational secondary school with special focus on moral leadership for social transformation. He is the Founder and Executive Director of a private treatment agency, Hatt's Off Inc., for disturbed children and youth. Mr. Naylor holds a Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies/Psychology from McMaster University, and a Masters of Education from the University of Toronto. He has been a member of the Baha'i Faith for over forty years and serves as one of nine members of the National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'is of Canada since 2000.

Human Rights Under Fire: How do religion and human rights connect?

Dr. Syed Adnan Hussain

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This century was the first that began with the generally accepted premise that we are all equal, at least biologically.

Whereas at the dawn of the twentieth century, racial theories of difference were *de rigueur*, by the beginning of the twenty first, we were willing to challenge that premise. It took the ravages of the Second World War to convince us that it was not enough to leave the welfare of human beings in the hands of individual governments and that an international system was needed arguably to police, but definitely to promote, the universalism of individual human dignity.



The irony was, of course, that the debates on what constituted universal rights for all were conducted in the halls of the powerful, in the language of the coloniser and rooted in the culture and traditions of Western Europe¹.

The essence of the human rights system is that human beings have rights by merit of their being human and not because of any affiliation, be it religious, ethnic or political. Though this soft form of universalism is amenable to most, its rootedness in the particular histories of Europe and North America has continued to face challenge by a number of spirited detractors².

Moreover, if the United Nations, the international body which underwrote the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), suffers from moral bankruptcy, as many have alleged, what can be said of a future for human rights?³ Or perhaps as provocatively posed in Robin Arthur's invitation to present this talk, what part could religion play in the protection and promotion of human rights?

Traditionally, though the underpinnings may have carried some religious residue, the foundational documents of the modern international human rights system were largely mute on the matter of religion. In response, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) has proposed alternatives such as the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam (CDHR) which mimic the language and style of the UDHR but which narrows the scope of rights to and make them conditional on conformity with the *shari'a*, and explicitly refers to *Allah*.⁴

Proponents have argued that Muslims are simply claiming their voices by means of the CDHR, and responding to the silences of the UDHR.

The limits in the CDHR, they argue, are limits prescribed by God. For example, a proponent of the CDHR might suggest that a Hindu man should not be able to marry a Muslim woman because that right is not protected under God's law.

Herein lies the conflict—the UDHR is based on an enlightened conception of a secularized justice that guarantees the fullest packet of rights for all because every rational person would choose those rights in their own best interest, whereas the CDHR operates on the assumption that human beings are obligated to order their social and political lives on a predetermined set of duties owed to God and other humans.

The UDHR argues that the Golden Rule is the only legitimate basis of rights, and that consensus on what constitutes 'the good' is the best that human beings can do. The CDHR argues that rational consensus is inherently unstable and can change over time. A stable conception of 'the good'—one that is guaranteed by religion—is therefore necessary for justice and rights are meaningless without this firm foundation.

At first blush the differences may seem insurmountable but I hope to propose some ways in which we can imagine better outcomes by suggesting ways to escape the limits of an entirely secular rights system while avoiding the parochialism of an entirely religious system.

Part of the problem of developing a stable concept of the good, I argue, may be linked to how we conceptualize time. Scholars have posited that our modern, political and social organization are intimately linked to the ways in which we order time. I will lump these conceptualizations into the phrase *secular time*.⁵ Secular time, simply put, is 'ordinary time': the time which we measure when we look at a clock. It begins with birth and ends at death.

This may be contrasted with 'higher time,' or alternatively, a religious concept of time. In religious conceptions, time begins when God creates the world. Time ends, for Muslims for example, on the day of judgment. This may mean that life, for Muslims, should be ordered with a consciousness of God, as decisions made in secular time may have an impact beyond this worldly life.

The *suras* revealed during the Meccan period warn of the dangers of nihilism implicit in secular time and their exhortations are for humanity to realize the presence of God and the obligation to reorder life accordingly. Similarly, Arjuna is cautioned by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita of the dangers of privileging rights and duties based in secular time against the requirements of *dharma*, which ties together and upholds the order of the universe.

Secular time, by contrast, is conceived in terms of progress, in which people and things are ordered in terms of where they fit linearly. Thereby progressives are tasked with rooting out the backward. This undergirds the logic of colonialism both in history and current neocolonial projects where 'hapless natives' are liberated from their resources or where indigenous claims are denied by settlers.

Secular time is not, however, devoid of ethics. I began by discussing how human rights systems are an attempt to create a baseline for rights in the world which are not rooted in any transcendental claims.

This baseline is not necessarily weak: the emphasis on human dignity in constitutional orders has resulted in gains for sexual, racial and religious minorities. The gains tend to focus on the politics of tolerance. Tolerance, as we well know, has its limits and a shift towards the politics of recognition—in which we see people and respect them as they wish to be seen—takes time.⁶

Current secular rights systems are well-suited to dealing with abuses taking place at present, but are ineffective when dealing with historical and future injustice. Moreover, secular time is hungry; it consumes the space necessary for contemplation and self-reflection which are indispensable for a less presentist (that relating to the present) relationship with time. Secular time's value system is thereby materialistic and intimately tied to the market: time is money.

The worrisome linear narrative that sees capitalism emerging triumphant from the cold war similarly reduces the value of human life to a mere monetary consideration. We forget the objections raised by Marxist critique, which helped inspire the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR).

The covenant was designed to encourage parties to promote the rights to self-determination, social security, health, a family life, an adequate standard of living, free education and the right to participate in cultural life.⁷ Sometimes called positive rights, they were debated at the same time as the rights recognized in the UDHR but were relegated to goals to be achieved through 'progressive realization' – which is to say that they are to be implemented over time but are always conditional on the demands of the present.

Therefore the need to purchase clothes cheaply takes precedence over combating wage slavery or ensuring safe working conditions. Making rights conditional to the exigencies of the market should trouble us deeply.

The human rights system was initially structured to combat the ability of the nation-state to abuse its citizens with impunity. It was premised on a need to limit state sovereignty through the establishment of an international treaty system.

The sovereignty of the nation-state has been eroded by both the market and our evolving understanding of common heritages. Take, for example the recent Canada-China Foreign Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (FIPPA), which would protect Chinese state-owned corporations from Canadian attempts to change domestic environmental regulations.⁸

Since a healthy environment is a global good that transcends national borders, it needs to be protected from both short-sighted national interests as well as transnational corporate interests. We are trapped in dangerous times in which corporations—which owe their loyalty to their shareholders—are becoming more powerful than the nation-state, yet these corporations are not subject to the same human rights treaty regulations.

Even the language of sustainability, which was proposed as a challenge to presentist thinking by emphasizing the rights of future generations, has been criticized for its loyalty to corporate development interests as opposed to environmental health as a good in and of itself. It is to these many complaints which religion, or any other world view which challenges the dominance of secular time, is most needed.

However, human rights in a presentist frame does provide an important source of criticism for the shortcoming of an entirely religious conception of rights. For example, slavery on southern plantations in the United States was justified on a particular reading of the Bible that punished the decedents of Ham for exposing Noah in his drunkenness.

A husband may justify the beating of his wife in the Qur'an by drawing on a narrow interpretation of a verse given authority by tradition. In such situations, a presentist approach allows us to combat abuse in the now as an unjustifiable wrong regardless of their traditional permissibility.

Dialogue offers us one way of reaching a balance between challenging the limited vision of secular time and the possible rigidity of religious tradition in the struggle for rights, but one objection to traditional dialogue bears noting here. Canadian scholar of religion and theologian Wilfred Cantwell Smith notes that dialogue is a face-to-face confrontation of each other.⁹

In this kind of exchange, the problem may become conflated with a party to the dialogue, and it may turn into an *ad hominem* attack. For example, a dialogue about the prevention of terrorism may devolve into merely an attack on Islam, or a demand that Muslims prove their loyalty to secularist values. Smith instead proposes the colloquy, wherein problems are addressed in the spirit of a side-by-side partnership of diverse voices, rather than a face-to-face confrontation.

Understanding religion's contribution to human rights is not about deciding whether its approach should trump a secularist one, but about recognizing the lineages of both religious and secular approaches—and their limits and relative strengths. Such a partnership would recognize our individual vulnerabilities and shortcomings in the hope of a better future.

Religion gives us a potent means of critiquing the tyranny of the now, and its short-sightedness. It provides a counter narrative to the worth of human beings and the planet beyond the monetary. To combat injustice we should endeavor to cultivate a notion of the good that can reach back through time and help us dream of a better tomorrow.

Destabilizing presentist concerns allows our pasts to have a voice and helps us develop a more robust appreciation of how we fit within a larger narrative. This nuanced perspective may help us develop a more expansive notion of justice and resist the triumphalism of the present.

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Religious Divisions and Social Conflicts

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Ladies and Gentlemen, greetings and good morning. Al-salaamu alaikum wa rahmatullahi wa barakatahu. Peace be upon you and the mercy and blessings of God. I am honoured to be able to talk with you today about religious divisions and social conflicts. I will use the metaphor of being a “faith neighbour” to discuss these ideas.

As a religious person, I need to begin with thanks. In the Qur’an, the word for unbelief, *kufir*, is often contrasted with the word for thanks, *shukr*.

The implication is clear: the person who does not believe is the person who is not thankful to God. My thanks to everyone at the Multicultural Association of Nova Scotia who worked so hard to make this conference happen. In particular, I would like to thank Robin Arthur for inviting me to speak with you this morning, and to Dr. Rhonda Britton for moderating this session. Of course, my thanks to all of you for being here.



I am from a quiet, sleepy little town in Los Angeles - the Town of Our Lady, the Queen of the Angels, on the River Porthiúncula. Today, it is at once the largest Catholic archdiocese in the United States and the most religiously diverse city in the world. For over fifteen years, it has informed my thinking about religious diversity.

Let me talk a little more about, well, me! I do this not to be self-indulgent. I do this because I think my example is illustrative of how a number of non-Christian students come almost by accident to the study of religion and theology. It was through the study of English literature, specifically the works of William Shakespeare and the visionary artist William Blake, that I first became attracted to the study of religion.

You could not, for example, understand Blake’s poetry or art without understanding the symbolic world that he had created, which in turn was deeply influenced by the Bible. At the University of Toronto, I was fortunate to be able to learn about Blake from Professors Northrop Frye and Jerry Bentley. They taught me to value the power of stories which, after all, is what we do at the university.

Ted Chamberlin is another retired English professor at the University of Toronto. When asked what we do as university professors, Ted says it’s

simple. “We tell stories. We call the old stories teaching, and we call the new stories research.” In trying to understand Western stories, what Professor Frye called in one of his course titles “the mythological framework of western culture,” I had to learn about the Bible. In doing so, I realized that I also needed to learn more about my own Muslim religious tradition.

At the university, I had the extraordinary privilege of being mentored by Wilfred Cantwell Smith, the greatest Canadian scholar of religion in the 20th century. He founded and directed the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University in Montreal in 1951, before moving to Harvard in 1964, where for two decades he directed the Centre for the Study of World Religions. He and Muriel then moved back to their native Toronto where they lived till his death in 2000.

One of Wilfred’s most important books was 1981’s *Towards a World Theology*. The subtitle of the book reflected Professor Smith’s life-long work, “*Faith and the Comparative History of Religion*”. In that book, he argued that our various religious traditions were best understood when taken together, or to use his words, “that their several histories, individually already complex, can be understood, and indeed can be understood better, and in the end can be understood only, in terms of each other: as strands in a still more complex whole. What they have in common is that the history of each has been what it has been in significant part because the history of the others has been what it has been”.

To show the deep connections in our religious history, Professor Smith began the book with the story of Leo Tolstoy, his Confession written in 1879 and published in 1884.

How many of you are familiar with Tolstoy and the story of his “conversion” from a worldly life to a life of ascetic service? The story that converted him was the story of Barlaam (the hermit) and Josaphat (the Indian prince). In the story, the Indian prince Josaphat is converted from a life worldly power to the search for moral and spiritual truths by Barlaam, a Sinai desert monk.

Tolstoy learned the story from the Russian Orthodox Church. However, it was not a Russian story, as the Russian Church got it from the Byzantine Church. But it was not a Byzantine story, either, as it came to the Byzantine Church from the Muslims. But the story did not originate with Muslims, as Muslims in Central Asia learned it from Manichees. And in the end, finally, it was not a Manichean story, as the Manichees got it from Buddhists. The tale of Barlaam and Josaphat is, in fact, a story of the Buddha. Bodhisattva becomes “Bodasaf” in Manichee, “Josaphat” in later narratives of the tale.

However, Wilfred’s genius was not in simply pointing to the history of this story, but to how it moved forward in time. Those who know Tolstoy know that he was an influence on a young Indian lawyer, Mahatma Gandhi, who founded Tolstoy farm in Durban in 1910. And those that know Gandhi know that the story does not end with him. Gandhi was an influence on a young African American minister, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. The story shows that we are connected to each other, both forwards and backwards

in time.

And there is of course a local connection here. Exactly 40 years ago, Wilfred came to teach at Dalhousie University and establish the Department of Comparative Religion. His ideas on religion and conflict were shaped during the six years that he and his wife Muriel lived in Lahore, India (the city of my birth, coincidentally), from 1940 to 1946. They returned to Lahore in 1948, which had, after the forced migrations and massacres of Partition, become the capital city of Pakistan.

It was there, in the ruins of Lahore, that Wilfred found his calling, described by Kenneth Cracknell, “so to help men and women understand each other, that religion should never again be used as an excuse for such bloodshed and such destruction”.

We are neighbours to each other. That is a very important metaphor. Again, I think of Wilfred. Someone asked Wilfred, “Professor Smith, are you Christian?” If the question had been: “Are you *a* Christian”, the answer would have been a very simple “yes”. Instead, Wilfred did what he always did when asked a question. He paused, repeated the question, and thought about his answer. “Am I Christian”, he said. “Maybe, I was, last week. On a Tuesday. At lunch. For about an hour. But if you really want to know, ask my neighbour”.

There are any number of conflicts with religious undertones that I could talk about here, from Israel/Palestine, to the Balkans, to civil wars in Sri Lanka and the Congo. Perhaps in the discussion, we can get to those. However, since I only have a few minutes and I am standing between you and lunch, let me focus on interactions between Christians and Muslims.

It is important to note that pluralism and dialogue are happening around the Muslim world, not just in North America. In 2007, based out of Jordan, a number of Muslim scholars, clerics and intellectuals issued a call to Christian leaders with the publication of the document *A Common Word Between Us and You* <<http://www.acommonword.com/>>.

That document calls Christians and Muslims into dialogue based on the two great commandments in each tradition (Mark 12:28-32): love of God and love of one’s neighbour. It is instructive for us to remember that when Jesus is asked about the greatest commandment, he repeats the words of the *shema*, Deuteronomy 6:4, “Here O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one”.

This verse is incredibly helpful to me when speaking to Muslim audiences to address Muslim misconceptions of Christianity. Some Muslims mistake the Triune God with the polytheism of three gods. Of course, this isn’t true, and although Christian faith is Trinitarian, it is anchored in the same unity of God that Muslims know from the *shahada*: “There is no god but God.” Of course, we Muslims and Christians both get this from the Jewish tradition.

In 2008, Saudi Arabia sponsored conferences on dialogue for Muslims in Mecca, and for Muslims and non-Muslims together in Madrid. In January of 2009, I was one of a dozen Muslim scholars from the US and the UK who were invited to Al-Azhar University in Cairo for a conference on *Bridges of Dialogue* between the most important university in the Sunni Muslim world and the West. That conference also had Jewish and Christian participants.

Interfaith dialogue, I would argue, is at the heart of the Christian message. My favourite gospel passage is the parable of the Great Banquet in Matthew 25: 31-46:

“When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.

“Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, “Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?” And the King will answer and say to them: “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.”

Then He will also say to those on the left hand, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.”

Then they also will answer Him, saying, “Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?” Then He will answer them, saying: “Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.” And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

What is required to gain a seat at the banquet? Feeding the hungry, caring for the stranger, visiting the sick. being a good neighbour. I first started doing interfaith work by working with a food bank that was run out of Trinity – St. Paul’s United Church in Toronto. So, how do we make connections with our Muslim neighbours?

First we need to learn their stories, their histories which, of course, are woven into our histories. Many North Americans are surprised to learn that Muslims have a long history on their continent. Many historians estimate that between 10 and 20 percent of the slaves who came from West Africa were Muslim. The connection between Islamic civilization and the Americas, however, begins even earlier.

When Christopher Columbus set sail for what he believed would be India, he recognized that the people there might not speak his language, or the Castilian of his royal patrons. So he brought with him someone who could speak the language of the “other” civilization: Arabic. Luis de Torres was a converso, a Jew who was forced to convert to Christianity during the period in

Spain known as the Reconquista, when the Roman Catholic Church purged Spain of its intertwined Islamic and Jewish heritage. Torres knew Arabic because of his heritage. Arabic was a language that Thomas Jefferson began learning in the 1770s, after he purchased a translation of the Qur'an in 1765. It was this Qur'an that Keith Ellison used when he was sworn in as the first Muslim member of Congress in 2007.

The first Muslim immigrants to North America other than slaves were from the Ottoman Empire in the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Many were itinerants who came to make money and then return to their countries of origin. Some, however, were farmers and settled permanently. Mosques sprung up in 1915 (Maine), 1919 (Connecticut), 1928 (New York), and 1937 (North Dakota). From the time of the slave trade, there has been a consciousness about Islam in African American communities.

In the last half-century, the Muslim population of the United States has increased dramatically through immigration, strong birth rates, and conversion. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 allowed many more Muslims to immigrate than were previously allowed under the earlier quota system.

The United States census does not ask the question of religious affiliation, so there is less certainty about the size of its Muslim population. I have seen estimates as low as two million people, and as high as ten million. My own research of America's immigration patterns, birth rates, and conversion rates – similar to those of Canada – leads me to conclude that both of these estimates are extreme. Instead, I and many researchers estimate that there are about seven million American Muslims.

Muslims are at once a very old community here, but in many ways, a very new one when it comes to building institutions. As a child growing up in Toronto, I had very few Muslim role models. The ones that were most important to me were two African American athletes, Kareem Abdul Jabbar and the Greatest, Muhammad Ali.

These days, for young North American Muslims, their Muslim heroes continue to be African American athletes, but also entertainers such as Dave Chapelle and rappers such as Lupe Fiasco, Busta Rhymes, or the RZA. For them, the connection is with other North Americans, particularly African Americans, who have long experiences of discrimination and racism that many American immigrant Muslims face.

One opportunity that interfaith dialogue brings is increased cooperation and understanding. We can do this at the international or national level with our churches and mosques. Since 1980, the National Christian Muslim Liaison Committee has existed as an official vehicle of dialogue. Led by the United Church of Canada, there have been a number of conferences and workshops on interfaith dialogue. Several useful resources have been produced as a result of these workshops.

In 2004, the United Church published a study document entitled *That We May Know Each Other: United Church—Muslim Relations Today*. The subtitle of the document was indicative of its goal: "Toward a United Church of Canada understanding of the relationship between Christianity and Islam in

the Canadian context.”

What can we do at the institutional level? We can partner with individual mosques or Islamic centres. There is the example of the Muslim Christian Consultative Group in Los Angeles. They have a new program, *Standing Together*, which pairs churches and mosques. Through that work, we can help each other to better understanding of our traditions.

We can welcome Muslim students into our colleges and universities. American Muslims are an American success story, equal in wealth and with higher education than non-Muslims. *Newsweek* did a cover story a few years ago on Islam in America, highlighting a 2007 survey by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life which found that 26 percent of American Muslims had household incomes above \$75,000 (as compared to 28 percent of non-Muslims) and 24 percent of American Muslims had graduated from university or done graduate studies (as compared to 25 percent of non-Muslims).

That Pew survey of American Muslims found that: “The first-ever, nationwide, random sample survey of Muslim Americans finds them to be largely assimilated, happy with their lives, and moderate with respect to many of the issues that have divided Muslims and Westerners around the world.”

At LMU we have some 40 to 50 Muslim students, who attend because of the excellent reputation for both education and social justice in Jesuit and Marymount colleges. Our past president, Fr. Robert Lawton, has spoken of the value that non-Catholic students (including not just other Christians, but members of other religious traditions, as well as atheists) have in Catholic universities.

At our Mass of the Holy Spirit in 2009, the traditional beginning to our fall term, Fr. Lawton said this in his homily: “Non-Catholics and non-believers are not here at the University simply because we need you to pay our bills or raise our grades or SAT scores. We want you here for a deeper reason. By helping us to doubt, you help us get closer to a deeper understanding of our God, this life and this world we share.”

At the individual level, we can make a Muslim friend. The first step towards learning about Islam, then, is not to pick up the Qur’an and begin reading, or to observe prayer at a mosque. One starts by finding a Muslim friend with whom to speak. In large communities this is not a problem, since most everyone is in some kind of contact with Muslims.

In smaller or more homogeneous communities, the range of options are admittedly more limited, but it is surprising how many mosques and informal Muslim associations exist outside the main urban centres. One’s dialogue partner may be a neighbour, a doctor at the local hospital, a teacher, a restaurant owner, a university professor, a cab driver, a factory worker, a motel owner, or the manager of an ethnic grocery store. Sometimes one can make an acquaintance by working alongside people of other traditions in social justice or service projects such as food banks, blood drives or other charitable causes.

As religious people, we may share a common belief that it is our duty to help each other. I am reminded here of a quote I once heard. Someone asked a Christian minister about the quote from the Book of Genesis, where God asks

Cain about his brother Abel. Cain responds with the famous line: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” Many of us adopt that line - that we are not responsible for, and to, our brothers and sisters. This particular minister answered in a different way. “Am I my brother’s keeper? Yes, because I am my brother’s brother”.

We have lots of examples of people from different religions working together to help each other. Here, in 2004, we voted Tommy Douglas as the Greatest Canadian in a poll by the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation). And it was his Christian roots in the social gospel movement that spurred him. Not that it was his neighbourly duty, but his Christian duty to take care of his neighbour.

We can be seen in conflict and competition, and we have been in both conflict and competition in our history and in our present as Christians and Muslims. The Great Commission for Christians and the Qur’anic teaching on da’wa (or calling people to Islam) for Muslims are certainly in competition.

It is because of those commandments in our traditions that we are the two largest religious traditions in the world. But we can also be in cooperation with each other, being in what the Catholic Church describes as a culture of dialogue. I have learned the most about Catholic perspectives on this from my friend and Jesuit colleague, Fr. Thomas Michel. About this, Tom wrote:

“...the focal question is not whether the church should be proclaiming the Gospel or engaged in dialogue, but rather whether Christians are actually sharing life with their neighbors of other faiths. The basic distinction is not between being a church in dialogue or one that proclaims the Gospel, but rather the option of being a church that is following the Spirit’s lead to partake humanly in life with others, and thus constantly engaged in dialogue, witness, and proclamation, or else that of being a church that is closed in on itself and exists in a self-imposed ghetto with little concern for and involvement with people of other faiths with whom Christians share culture, history, citizenship, and common human destiny.

When people of various faiths live together – not simply cohabiting the same town but sharing life together—the question of dialogue or proclamation doesn’t arise. When they work, study, struggle, celebrate, and mourn together and face the universal crises of injustice, illness, and death as one, they don’t spend most of their time talking about doctrine.

Their focus is on immediate concerns of survival, on taking care of the sick and needy, on communicating cherished values to new generations, on resolving problems and tensions in productive rather than in destructive ways, on reconciling after conflicts, on seeking to build more just, humane, and dignified societies.”

There are issues here, of course, of common values and assimilation into American society. In August of 2011, the Pew Research Center released a study entitled: *Muslim Americans: No Signs of Growth in Alienation or Support for Extremism*. There you find that American Muslims are religious, with 69 percent saying that religion is very important in their lives, and 47 percent reporting that they go to the mosque at least once a week for prayer.

This is almost identical to the 70 percent of US Christians who say that

religion is very important in their lives, 45 percent of whom attend services on a weekly basis. A majority of Muslim Americans, 56 percent, say that most Muslims who come to the US want to adopt American customs and ways of life. By contrast, however, only a third (33 percent) of the general public believes that most Muslims in the US today want to assimilate.

James Hunter directs the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia. His categorization of the life course of immigrant religions is as follows: Introduction; Recognition; Negotiation; Establishment.

The Pew figures reflect the Negotiation stage, where American Muslims are now. There are the same prejudices faced by American Muslims now that were faced by American Catholics 200 years earlier. There are fears about American Muslims, fears which are often stoked by the media. Thankfully, there are those in the media who also challenge these fears. One who does it with humour is Stephen Colbert. It's from Colbert and another comedian, Jon Stewart on the *Daily Show*, where we often get not only our best news, but our most insightful political commentary.

The majority of American Muslims are immigrants or the children of immigrants. As such, we face the same prejudices, that, for example, immigrants bring with them crime and disorder. The reality is, in fact, the opposite as a story in the June 2011 edition of *The Walrus* magazine tells it. (<http://www.walrusmagazine.com/articles/2011.06-society-arrival-of-the-fittest/>):

When the violent crime rate in the US began to fall, sharply and consistently, in the 1990s, a handful of criminologists and sociologists there started investigating a possible connection to the rising tide of immigration. Two earlier studies that tracked crime in dozens of metropolitan areas discovered that cities with the highest increase in immigration also had the largest decrease in violent crime. There was possibly a causal relationship, but it wasn't clear what it was. One of the first researchers to begin to connect the dots was Harvard sociologist Robert J. Sampson.

About a decade ago, he and his colleagues looked at violent acts committed over an eight-year period by some 3,000 men and women in 180 neighbourhoods in Chicago, a diverse city with a considerable population of Hispanic immigrants. What they found was that Mexican Americans were far less likely to be violent than African Americans or whites. When all variables were accounted for, it became clear that this was in large part because a quarter of the subjects were born outside the US and more than half lived in communities where the majority of residents were also of Mexican heritage.

Overall, first generation immigrants of any background were 45 percent less likely to commit violent acts than third generation Americans, and living in a neighbourhood with a large concentration of immigrants of any nationality was associated with lower levels of violence. In a nutshell, immigration protected these Chicago communities against violent behaviour...

[The University of Toronto did a study (by Ronit Dinovitzer, a professor of sociology and law, and Ron Levi, a professor of criminology)] in 2009, shortly after Sampson's findings, which has done a great deal to validate

the theory that immigration decreases crime in Canada as well as in the United States. And the case is only getting stronger: Statistics Canada has now released findings from a spatial analysis of crime data in Canadian cities that suggest the percentage of recent immigrants in various regions of Toronto and Montreal is inversely proportional to all types of violent crime; in the latter case, it concluded that while various socio-economic factors increase crime, “the proportion of recent immigrants lowers the violent crime rate; it acts as a protective factor.”

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Gender and Religion

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Gender and Religion is a broad topic and one that is quite important for discussions of spiritual diversity and of peaceful co-existence.

Differentiation of human beings by sex or gender is embedded in many religious traditions and many traditions also have prescribed gender roles entrenched in their moral and ethical codes. In fact, we can look at these codes as examples of some early constructs, human beings designed as a way to peaceful co-existence within given traditions. And, of course, it can be argued that at least the interpretation of these codes have not been applied in such a way as to bring peace, but to oppress and to marginalize members of the community.



In this talk, I will address both of these conceptions of religion, as it is perceived from the inside and from the outside—using women, religion and feminism as my lenses.

First, it is good to ask: what is religion? There are as many answers to that question as there are scholars of religion—and we are legion! Living religions are organic, dynamic constructs that in many ways defy definition and are better off described. The concept of compartmentalizing and labeling religions is a Western one and arose out of the modern desire for taxonomy—we love to put things into neat little boxes and label each one with its precise little tag.

One way of looking at it is as an insider—William Cantwell Smith wrote that if an insider defined his/her system as a religion—then it was. Another insider perspective is simply this: that religion is humanity's response to the Divine. What makes this an insider perspective, of course, is that the definition takes the existence of a transcendent divine as a given.

While I am fond of Smith's delineation—it imbues the practitioner with the power that comes with definition—as an outsider, or scholar of religion, I don't always find it an easy construct with which to work. William James wrote of an "unseen order" with which humanity had to find a way to be in harmony. Winston King wrote that "Religion is the organization of life around the depth dimensions of experience—varied in form, completeness and clarity in accordance with the environing culture."

Depth dimension, in this instance, refers to the “big questions”: Why is there evil? Why do we die? What is the meaning of life? I often say to my students that this is what keeps hockey or baseball from being a religion—I got engaged to be married at Fenway Park in Boston. A cathedral of a ballpark. However, I do not look to the Red Sox for answers to why human beings die or even to why there is evil. Religion uses the vehicles of symbols, rituals, myths, poetry, metaphor to understand, portray and describe what is Ultimate (or what an insider would call Divine or God).

Rituals, in particular, serve to bring the practitioner into closer contact with the Ultimate and to keep the less savoury forces of the Universe from bringing chaos upon the believer and her community. Religion also delineates sacred space, in the name of what is Ultimate. Religion is traditionally thought of as communal. From its beginnings, religion has been all about community.

Anderson and Young (among many others) have pointed out that, in the western world, the communal aspect of religion has declined in favour of a more individualized belief and practice in the face of King’s depth dimension. More and more often, this shift is embedded in the language of “spiritual, not religious”—where people do not want to identify with a particular religious tradition but also feel some connection to the Ultimate or the transcendent. The connotations here are that spirituality is an individual choice, practice, endeavour and that religion is communal and institutional. There are provocative aspects to this division which are beyond the scope of this talk, but I bring it up to foreshadow some of the discourse below.

Spiritual but not religious, in one way, is a reflection of the freedom people feel to pick and choose from various cultural traditions. The western predilection for compartmentalizing and categorizing is an aspect of secularization—the division of religion and civic life or the separation of religion from the public to the private aspect of one’s life. Secularization has been embraced by many western feminists, many of whom view traditional religious institutions and religious beliefs with great distrust for myriad reasons that I will discuss below.

At this point I would like to move away briefly from our discussion of religion to the other component of this panel: gender.

Although they can be conflated, feminist work has historically differentiated between sex and gender. Sex has been seen as biological, that is, anatomical. Gender, however, is understood to be a social construct—we are socialized to take on particular roles as women or as men depending on the prescriptions provided by the society in which we live. Often, gender is spoken of less as a category than as a spectrum along a line that could be labeled “man” on one end and “woman” on the other. Anderson and Young point out that “in many, perhaps most, religious traditions, sex and gender have been seen as basically synonymous.” They point out (as do other scholars of women and religion), that religious traditions tend to ascribe certain gender roles based on one’s biological sex. In these instances, one’s anatomy becomes determinate in one’s role and expectations within the tradition.

At this point you may be curious as to why, when issues of gender and sex obviously affect both men and women, I have chosen to concentrate on women in religion. First off, I am interested in the ways in which Western non-religious feminists and non-Western women with deep roots in faith communities engage with one another (if at all). This discussion must, I believe, start with an understanding of the role women and feminist thought play in our understanding of religious worldviews.

Secondly, my answer has to do with making sure that hidden voices find a place in this broader conference discussion regarding spiritual diversity and peaceful co-existence. As Anderson and Young (among others) have pointed out, using women as a category (in the face of religious traditions that are historically patriarchal) to discuss and explore religion, opens up and highlights issues and aspects of religion that are often overlooked. By enabling marginalized voices to be heard, the whole complexity of the tradition can be better understood and, it is hoped, that such understanding brings with it an appreciation of its diversity. I will get to the question of just who is being marginalized and by whom, below.

The marginalization of women's voices is a ramification of patriarchal systems that privilege maleness over femaleness—what scholars refer to as “patriarchal privilege.” It does not claim that this is the only privilege, but it is important for our purposes, because it offers us insight into the development of feminist thought and the interest in women's places in religious traditions. Feminist interest in religion began with an analysis of the male/female dualisms that are often apparent within such traditions. These dualisms often tie men to the mind and to the spirit and link women with bodies and with the natural world. Many feminist scholars have observed that this dualism also leads to a tendency for the tradition to link men with what is most valued and women to spheres that are less valued. For instance, in many Christian fundamentalist traditions, a woman may direct the Children's Ministry, but preaching the Word as pastor of a congregation is strictly a male purview. A patriarchal system privileges the lives and perspectives of the male over the female and, as such, subsumes the perspective and experiences of the female in the story of the religious tradition.

However, feminist scholarship shows that women's contributions come to the fore when popular, rather than formal, religion is explored. Marianne Ferguson asserts that by uncovering the beliefs, myths, rituals, art, and practices of ordinary people via popular religion, women's contributions to rituals, processions, study groups and devotional practices become clear and present representations of the fullness of a tradition's experiences.

Bringing the unique perspective of women and women's experience has enriched our understanding of religion, even as it has highlighted our understanding of its complexity and diversity. Having this complexity come to the fore has brought with it some interesting and unforeseen challenges. One of those challenges has to do with feminism itself.

When I teach “Love”, we do a section on feminism and the very first thing I do is ask students to shout out their own conception of what a feminist

looks like. We get some interesting pictures. Then I ask them to tell me what comes to their minds when I say the word. It's not a word many of them are comfortable with. I find that a lot of them have a very thin idea of what it means, exactly.

The term "feminism" is as broadly and contentiously defined as that of "religion". Like religion, it is sometimes easier to think of feminism as, well, a way of thinking about and viewing the world. An important tenet of feminism, for example, is that of choice—a feminist perspective can be said to be one in which no one choice (religion, lifestyle, political party) should be inherently placed above another. From this perspective, the stay-at-home mum is just as feminist in her choice as is the mother working outside the home.

From a scholarly perspective, Anderson and Young use it to mean women in a variety of positions that recognize and seek to change the fact that women have been systemically seen and portrayed as inferior to men. When that recognition and change are realized, women and men are liberated to make choices that suit them as persons, rather than being constrained by social dictates or oppressive powers. This view of feminism will be the one that I use throughout the rest of this paper.

As I stated above, feminism is a way of thinking about the world in a different way. Feminist methodologies, or the way we do things from a feminist perspective, are usually centred on issues of power and the manifestation of power in different social contexts. These methodologies also focus on issues of difference and the construction of those differences (Anderson and Young).

An important aspect of feminist thought (and one that is frequently overlooked) is that its methodologies are many-faceted and diverse. This very diversity can be problematic—especially when it is unacknowledged. For example, feminism was seen as a white, privileged stance by some women of colour in the mid twentieth century. Feeling that their perspectives and experiences were not reflected in the feminist movement, women of colour crafted the term "womanist" to denote the particularity of non-white women within the modern, western context.

This demarcation was important for many reasons, one of which was that it served to emphasize that women may be alike in their general oppression by the patriarchy, but that oppression was different (and worse!) for some than it was for others. The reality that women should not be oppressed for their gender also became more complex when this awareness arose: that the issues women faced were not necessarily universal just by virtue of sharing a gender.

Another problematic issue that arose from the diversity of feminism was that of a western/non-western divide. Eager to liberate all women from the oppression of patriarchy, some western feminists were accused by their non-western sisters as perpetuating a patriarchal, colonialist point of view by categorizing their cultures of beliefs as "unmodern" or "backwards" and pushing for radical change without considering context or the actual stated needs of whatever population was being addressed. The need for Western

feminists to take seriously the context and localized issues of women outside of their own cultures was brilliantly put forth in Chandra Talpade Mohanty's classic essay, "*Under Western Eyes*." I will return to this essay in a few minutes.

Another aspect of feminism that arose was that of religion. Feminism in the west arose at the same time as secularization began to loom large and begin to relegate religion to the private rather than to the public sphere. Many feminists saw religion as a key player in the subjugation of women and bid a happy adieu to its institutions, embracing secularization as a clean slate in the public sphere onto which they could write an egalitarian future. Although many, many women kept to their religious traditions, working hard from within to change the power structures and find empowerment in the rich traditions of their foremothers, the predominant voices in the feminist west became secular more often than not.

And thus we come to the question for today—on the one hand we have secular, Western feminists who see religion, particularly Islam, as oppressive to women and who would, in their most extreme expression, have all believers embrace a secular perspective. On the other, we have non-Western women of faith all over the world who are working to overcome unjust power structures and operating from a position of deeply held faith. Is it possible for their work and their understanding of one another to coincide?

One thinker/activist who believes that it can is Mohanty, who I mentioned above. Mohanty asserts that despite the apparent (and real) differences between women from different socio-economic and/or colonized contexts, women of the world do have common goals, despite their particularities. She writes, in a newer essay, that "I was committed, both politically and personally, to building a non-colonizing feminist solidarity across borders. I believed in a larger feminist project than the colonizing, self-interested one I saw emerging in much influential feminist scholarship and in the mainstream women's movement." (503) In essence, Mohanty says that women have a common project in fighting against oppressive systems and powers that rob human beings of their freedom to achieve their potential for fulfillment. We can tease out that commonality by looking at the ways in which our particular locations reflect the damage inflicted by those systems and powers. In this way feminism, which teaches one to be critical of the power dynamics inherent in one's singular location, can be used also as a tool to critically analyze the perfidy of oppressive systems and powers. We find relevance in our particularity and cohesion in the bigger picture, of which our situation is a part.

More to our point regarding women in religion and western feminists, another scholar who is calling for finding a way for dialogue between Western feminists and non-western women of faith is scholar and blogger Louisa Acciari. Acciari writes that feminist theory is locking religious women into a "subjugated position" which "denies religious women agency and capacity to be part of the feminist movements." "I find it crucial," she writes, "to rethink common assumptions about religion, secularity and

feminism, and to question how part of the feminist movements has become so intolerant of the religious “other”.

Acciari goes on to describe the Brazilian NGO *Catolicas para o Direito de Decidir* (Catholics for the Right to Choose: CDD): a group of religious Catholic women who are using the discourse of human rights to justify their argument for the legalization of abortion. The CDD argues for the construction of a theological feminist discourse in which protection from religion in the public sphere is given, but the religious values which they embrace are accepted as impetus for their actions and activism.

Acciari notes that Western feminism is being disingenuous by insisting on “breaking the division public/private to demand reproductive and sexual rights, (but) reinstating this division when it comes to religion. She underscores what I have written elsewhere, that religious beliefs cannot be removed from the individual like a hat or earrings whenever we enter the public sphere. We bring that part of ourselves to the proverbial Rawlsian table. As well, because Catholicism is integral to the political and cultural structure of their context, the CDD cannot foment real change arguing from an a-religious perspective.

Riffat Hassan observes that for communities in which religious belief and praxis is the norm, changing the theology around an issue, educating from a religious standpoint, is the only way to ensure real change. Shifting civil law will not work because civil law is positivist—human-made—and therefore has not the gravitas that God’s law does.

Acciari argues that Western, secular feminists would be wise to recognize that women who “mobilise the discourses of rights, modernity and secularity to articulate religious beliefs with feminist demands” are doing valuable work in the name of feminism. Highlighting the malleability of feminism and embracing it in its diversity allows for it to live up to its highest ideals.

Where does this leave us, sitting here in Canada, thinking about religious and spiritual diversity? I think this discussion is important in terms of us learning to understand one another. Feminist discourse is a key component to how we in Canada think about ourselves and our society—even if we do not recognize it as feminist discourse. If women from non-Western cultures who are new to Canada cannot find common ground with not-so-new Canadians, it will make our ability to continue to craft a cohesive culture difficult if not impossible. I offer feminism as it is conceived by Acciari and Mohanty as a model for humbly approaching one another and honouring our diversity while finding the ways in which we are alike.

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Spirituality and the Earth

Billy Lewis

Miqmaq Friendship Centre

Indigenous people's spirituality is about honouring and respecting our original mother, the earth, from the moment we welcome the first light. In our sunrise ceremony, we offer tobacco (one of our four sacred plants) to give thanks for the new day. We honour all that the earth gives us. The food and water that nourishes us, the shelter that houses us, the clothing that protects us and the sights, sounds, smells and feelings of nature that give us spiritual sustenance

Our whole being and way of life is defined by how we honour and respect the land. *Weji scalia'tiek* means "We come from here." A sense of place is important in defining who we are as a people, The seven sacred teachings, the medicine wheel and other ways of learning give life to our ways for the benefit of all humanity and the earth that gives us life. We celebrate the unity of us all and the oneness of all life by ending all gatherings with *M'sit No'kmaq* (All My Relations)



When you examine your own spirituality, you reflect on how your life reflects the thoughts of Jesus. In just the same way, indigenous people look to the earth as a metaphor. Getting to understand spiritual diversity, involves tolerance, respect and understanding. Nothing aggravates me more than the expression: "I'll put up with you." Accept me for who I am, although you do not have to agree with me.

Think of the earth as a living being. The essential element is water. Amniotic fluid is life itself for the baby before birth. Indeed, water is sacred – it is the blood of mother earth. Likewise, the food we eat and the air we breathe – now rapidly being endangered - are fruits of the earth for which we must give thanks. And it is this that connects us with all creation – one with all our diversity.

What's wrong with people getting together and trying to understand one another. The distinctness of an individual does not have to mean division. We come together as distinct people.

The assault on First Nations people protesting the fracking activity on their hunting lands in New Brunswick yesterday (October 17) is disturbing. The fracking activity is a violation of their rights. The Miqmaq concern is about the pollution of fresh water and land that fracking will cause. But the focus of the media story will not be about the pollution of water. Instead, the

focus will be the burning car which resulted from the protests.

The protection of the earth is more important than anything else. We need to speak about it. That will make us better human beings. How can we care for each other if we are disconnected from one another. The same metaphor applies to the earth. If we have that foundation of respecting all things connected with the earth, we are all family – all my relations. What defines us is what we have in common.

Ecuador and Bolivia have incorporated the rights of mother earth into their legal structure. The United Nations has long ago framed the Declaration on Rights of the Indigenous People, but unfortunately, Canada has dragged its feet on ratifying the document.

In any case, I leave you with what is our very first prayer: *Malala*, which means Thank You.

Billy Lewis is an urban indigenous elder who has been active in various social and spiritual communities. These activities have brought him to an understanding of the spiritual diversities of our different communities and the need to find a common understanding and a shared experience. His experiences at such organizations inform his approach to the needs of urban aboriginals and the struggle for social justice for all peoples that he hopes to share with everyone.

Religion, Spirituality and Humanism: The Challenge from Youth

Rabbi Ari Isenberg
Shaar Shalom Synagogue
Halifax

In researching my topic today, I decided to speak with some Jewish teenagers and university students. One of the individuals I spoke to graduated with a bachelor's degree two years ago and is now out in the work force. She is Jewish and defines herself as secular, though fairly cultural; but not at all religious. I asked her to describe a typical daily routine for me. This was her response:

"I wake up and do a 10-minute mind-soul-body meditative grounding exercise. I then water my plants, feed my cat, make breakfast and head out for a quick run. I'm training for a 10k to raise money for a charitable foundation.



I then go to my office." Her office, by the way, is part of a non-profit organization that seeks to find intermediary employment for opera singers who are between roles.

Now, she defines herself as secular. And yet, it would seem, on the surface, that this young woman is fervently religious and lives a life according to profound and rich religious precepts and beliefs. After all, she wakes up and meditates: in Judaism, we call that a form of prayer – *kavanah*. Spontaneous soul-directing prayer. It is a Jewish commandment.

She then feeds her animals, her plants, and nourishes her own body – all of this taking after the Matriarch Rebecca. When Abraham's servant heads out to find a wife for his son Isaac, he encounters Rebecca and becomes impressed by her because of her desire to ensure that his animal and he have enough to drink and eat.

She then goes for a run, taking care of her body – another Jewish principle. And what's she training for? A fundraiser marathon – in Hebrew, we call that *tzedakah*, a foundational tenet of our tradition. Finally, she goes to work – also a Jewish commandment. The Hebrew dictum is "*ein Torah bli kemach*" – there is no Torah without labour. That means, if all you wish to do is sit around all day and study scripture, who's going to put food on the table? You must go out and provide for yourself. Balance.

I suspect this example in my tradition probably resonates for you and recalls for you examples in your own faith communities. These are young

people who are filling their days with noble, sacred, inherently religious acts, and yet do not themselves associate those acts as being in any way religiously driven. What causes this disconnect? How might we recapture the basic religious actions and rituals in our daily lives and see them for what they inherently are: rooted in religious tradition?

In Judaism, our entire system of religious actions and behaviours is categorized as fulfilling Jewish *Mitzvot*. A *mitzvah* can be anything from opening the door for an elder to fasting on Yom Kippur to praying each day, and so on. *Mitzvah* is a word not easily defined, but we often define it as a commandment.

Now let me ask you to think for a quick moment: What motivates someone to obey a commandment, a law? One of my teachers, Rabbi Brad Artson, offers one motivation: fear. In his words, this is an ancient pedigree, but in order for fear to work, you have to believe it. So, if you really think that the creator of the universe watching you eat the pork chop will make your spouse leave you or your boss fire you; if you really believe that, then that's a strong motivator to not have that pork chop.

The problem with this position is that goodness is not always rewarded; evil is not always punished. It seems there are random relationships between moral decency and outcome. Expecting the universe to treat you well because you're good is like expecting the bull not to charge because you're vegetarian (Kushner). If it's true among people, it's even more true in the universe. Bad things aren't dished out as punishments. They just happen.

So believing in doing commandments out of fear of God isn't a tenable position because the moment something bad happens in your life, you might then come to a realization that all of these commandments didn't bring you what you hoped for, so you'll now just do away with them all. The flipside of that theology: I don't think God cares what I put in my mouth, and I don't think God cares if I read from a prayer book. If you think that the only reason to obey commandments is because there's some powerful guy who's going to punish you and if you don't believe that, then there's no point doing them.

Most NA Jews bounce back and forth between those two binary, opposite, polar theologies. So we need a new understanding of commandment and why we do them.

Anita Diamant discovered that, while in Hebrew, *Mitzvah* means commandment/law, in Aramaic, though, the root *tzaveh* means to join, to bring together...moments of connection, moments of belonging. We believe, if anything, that the divine is our recognition of something bigger than ourselves – loved ones, ancestors, community, history, culture, future, universe, all living things.

If we start to see *mitzvah* as our ability to connect with others, with community, we might be more inclined to label our daily actions as *mitzvot*. Fulfilling *Mitzvot* is like the ultimate social media app! And why do them? The answer is found right in the middle of the Torah – right in the center of the book of Leviticus... “You Shall Be Holy, for I, your God, am Holy”. We are commanded to be holy people. I would like to assert that achieving holiness is

about turning our ordinary moments into something greater, something more meaningful. To transform the mundane or regular moments of our lives into a series of spiritually profound, meaningful, and holy occasions.

There is no need to do away with your secular lifestyle; simply reposition your outlook. Infuse those ordinary moments with enhanced spirituality. I would like to argue that an active secular life and a deeply profound holy and religious life are not mutually exclusive. They can be expressed concurrently and, often are, when seen in proper perspective.

I started this morning with the anecdote of a college graduate whose life is filled with *mitzvot*, with moments of religious connection, with moments infusing the ordinary with holiness and significance, yet who herself doesn't see it that way, with that perspective. I would like to leave you with another anecdote. It's about a 21 year old Jewish university student and it takes place on a Saturday night at pizza corner – so brace yourself!

She was out, drinking a few martinis, laughing, dancing, maybe even meeting someone there and getting a phone number to arrange for a coffee date. It was a wonderful night, but it's now 2:00 am and they're all on their way home. On their way, they decide to stop at Pizza Corner for a slice of pizza. This young lady notices that they only have pepperoni pizza left. She asks how long it would take to make a veggie pizza. The pizza guy says that he can make a vegetarian pizza, but it will take eight minutes. This girl chooses to wait there for eight minutes, rather than eat the pepperoni pizza.

Think about it— it's 2:00 am, the night was about socializing, drinking, dancing, and now a decision that, ultimately, stems all the way back to the Torah... a decision influenced by Jewish law. What a powerful moment that is.

If we can communicate to our youth that secular and religious moments can be concurrent, can enhance each other, that we can actually feel augmented by the combination of both, that we can feel an enhanced sense of connection with our families, our communities, humanity, perhaps we'll be more successful at helping them live their lives through that lens.

***Rabbi Ari Isenberg**, originally from Montreal, moved to Halifax to assume the spiritual leadership of Shaar Shalom Congregation. Rabbi Isenberg is dedicated to pastoral work, community leadership, and creating meaningful, sacred moments in the lives of his congregants. He is also active in the city, frequently addressing Halifax's interfaith organizations and guest lecturing at local universities. His contributions include commentaries in newspapers and guest appearances on radio and television. Locally, Rabbi Isenberg serves as Associate Chaplain of Dalhousie University. Nationally, he was elected to sit on the Executive Committee of the Canadian Rabbinic Caucus for the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA). He graduated from the Jewish Theological Seminary with a Masters in Sacred Music and Rabbinic Ordination. While at the seminary, he was named Tanenbaum Fellow of Beth Tzedec (Toronto), Leffell Fellow of AIPAC, and rabbinic intern-in-residence of Masorti France and the Jerusalem Open House.*

PANEL WORKSHOP –1

The Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would like others do unto you.

What commonalities and differences do we see in our religious texts?

A Christian, Buddhist and Baha'i perspective

PANELIST-1

Clement Mehlman

Lutheran Campus Ministry

The Christian texts that echo the Golden Rule appear in two of the synoptic gospels: in Matthew's version of Christ's teachings in the Sermon on the Mount and in Luke's version of the teachings in the Sermon on the Plain. These texts, both of which present the positive formulation of the Rule while the Hebrew scriptures use the negative formulation, show Jesus affirming the universal code for reciprocity in our actions to others but with two differing and appended doctrines or teachings.

In Matthew those teachings involve the centrality of the [parental love of God] Abba-hood and the kinship of all peoples. In Luke the focus is on



responses to those who seek to do harm, "the enemy," and how proactive goodness toward "the enemy" informs Christian responses to others. The way these two texts are structured moves the teaching by Jesus beyond a practice of reciprocity or even the "rule of talio" (an eye-for-an-eye) to actions that reflect the character of Abba in kindness, mercy, and love.

While the early Christians saw the Golden Rule as a principle to be enacted, they grappled with its application from the very beginning; we see this tension clearly in the writers' or redactors' attitudes toward their fellow Jewish peoples in the gospel of Matthew. The implications of the Golden Rule as embedded in Matthew and Luke are demanding and forceful, and there have been examples in the development of Christianity of deflecting the force of that teaching.

I will present how the Rule is woven into the two Christian texts, reflect on theological underpinnings of those texts, and consider some particularities and some problems in these presentations of the Rule. As we know, the Rule was part of many cultures, especially a theme in the Hebrew scriptures.

The Rule in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew:

The writer is a highly educated Jewish writer in Damascus or Antioch at a time of tension and hostility within a Jewish synagogue. The date of the composition is between the year 80 to 90 of the Common Era. Reflecting Moses, Jesus repeatedly ascends a mountain to instruct the people.

Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you.

For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.

Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone?

Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake?

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!

In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it.

For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

□The Rule appears in a section on Prayer, inserted after the gifts given by the Creator to those who ask. It could have been placed near the teaching of removing the log from one's own eye before trying to remove the speck from someone else's eye which would strengthen the customary association of the Rule with fairness between equals. But Matthew is after something more than a rule for equity. Attaching the Rule to a teaching about Abba's generosity weaves the Rule into a theme of grace.

□The Rule also becomes a summation of "the law and the prophets," connecting Jesus' mission to the Judaic Covenant. Later when Matthew cites the Jewish synthesis of the law as twofold, as loving God and loving neighbour, he adds that on these two commands hang all "the law and the prophets," the customary expression for the whole of Hebrew scripture. Frequently, rabbis and prophets provide summaries of the 613 precepts in Judaism: David to 11, Micah to 3, Hosea, like Jesus, to 1. Such a summary rule of the law is called a *kelal*.

□The Rule is a pivot between a summary of "the law and prophets" and Jesus' teaching of God's love and the challenging rigor of discipleship. Jesus is not naïve about human beings and our tendency to act according to self-interest and ego. He assumes self-interest and self-regard and seeks to move the disciples toward self-sacrifice and regard for others. The "you" is emphatic; others may not follow this rule, but there is no escaping it for disciples. Some argue that some of the teachings in the Sermon are, in part, a demanding preparation of the inner circle of disciples.

□The Rule is not about the ethics of reciprocity or retaliation or repayment.

Wattles indicates that the Rule ought not be confused with other rules:

1. The rule of reciprocity, being friendly to those who are friendly to you;

2. The rule of retaliation, repaying harm with harm. The “eye for an eye” or the “law of talio” was not about wrathful vengeance but a limitation on vengeance.

3. The rule with repayment ethics, is a combination of reciprocity and retaliation, such that justice means doing good to friends and harm to enemies. While repayment thinking was common, Jesus clearly calls for a standard higher than returning favors. In spite of his words, repayment ethics still haunts the New Testament. Right after the Rule is the contrast of the narrow way that leads to life and the broad way that leads to destruction. In fact, both texts, Matthew and Luke associate the Rule with a system of rewards: Give to others, or face the punishment of God as in Matthew, and give generously in order that you may receive abundantly as in Luke.

4. Wattles writes of the Rule also as a principle of social and universal realism: acts have consequences in normal social interaction, in the course of nature, and in the life to come. If we do good, we can expect good in return; if we do evil, we can expect to suffer. While the tradition had focused on blessings for the righteous and ruin for the unrighteous, Jesus’ challenge is beyond reciprocity, retaliation, repayment, or realism responses. In searching for a single word to understand Jesus’ position, I find that reconciling works best for me.

The Rule in the Sermon on the Plain in Luke: Secondly, we read from Luke’s Sermon, written perhaps in the 60s of the Common Era for an urban community in the Greek world. It is from an anonymous writer which tradition says is the physician Luke.

But I say to you that listen, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also;
and from anyone who takes away your coat

do not withhold even your shirt.

Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods,
do not ask for them again.

Do to others as you would have them do to you.

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you?

For even sinners love those who love them.

If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you?

For even sinners do the same.

If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive,
what credit is that to you?

Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again.

But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.

Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High;
for He is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

□ Luke's Jesus first establishes a principle: not to reciprocate by returning evil for evil. Immediately before the Rule itself, we find four radical examples of what it means not to practice repayment. These examples of nonviolence become illustrations of interacting with a supposed enemy. The principle of reciprocity (do to others as they do to you, or love your friends and hate your enemies) was widely accepted in the ancient world and represents the position that Jesus is challenging.

We are not to do to others as they do to us but as we would want them to do to us. This invites us to respond with proactive goodness, free of calculations concerning our past treatment by others. Offering the other cheek and one's cloak is not passivity but is to be proactive, requiring the aggressor to look closely at the victim and thereby changing the relationship. Here we see Jesus' use of "focal instances," or examples needed when a situation doesn't provide a very useful or general rule of action. Jesus seeks to obliterate the illusion that we are separate from others, that there is no such person as "an enemy" or some "other." In the High Priestly Prayer, Jesus prays that "all may be one."

□ After the Rule is stated, three rhetorical questions are used to underscore the difference between what Jesus expects and the normal practice of reciprocity. The questions, more focal instances, move us from a general, and perhaps unclear, principle to action. Is the problem with the Rule itself? The theologian Paul Tillich suggests that the Rule is essentially an "empty principle," lacking in "content."

If you believe in an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, the Rule is a rule of revenge; if, however, you believe in love for your supposed enemies, it is a rule of reconciliation. Its value as a guide for actual behavior may be weak. It is interesting to note that during the slavery debates in the United States as well as in more recent abortion debates, the Rule has been used in the arguments on both sides.

Tillich asks: Is the Rule "the supreme moral principle or an inferior principle"? Jesus' use of focal instances removes the vagueness from the Rule and urges us to greater sacrifice or ego-swallowing. The specificity of his examples awakens the moral imagination; we sense how we might respond to violence by creative nonviolence.

□ This is a sidebar. Several of the focal instances prompt action to end the human cycle of violence, or the repetition of rivalry. Why do we construct "enemies" and live within structures of violence? A reading of Jesus' teaching and his life of love and forgiveness would say that his refusal to enter into positions of violence is the recipe for destroying the little bundle of lies about myself and my society and my religion that came into existence the moment my tribe and I found someone to hate.

Jesus' words and action is one of the means to destroy the whole system of mimetic rivalry which has been the womb in which we live and have our social existence. Refusing to label the other as "enemy" and refusing stances of violence is the key to deconstructing the whole business. Too bad it has been so rarely tried!

□ While the early church saw the Rule as a principle to be enacted, they grappled with its significance from the outset. Because Jesus' words are so demanding, so unreasonably high, there have been attempts from the beginning to deflect the force of his instruction, especially as Christianity came to power. This compromising of the Rule came as Christians were faced with hostility, sometimes by lethal threats to see whether at least some neighbours or some enemies might be excluded from Jesus' commands. How easy it is to rationalize ourselves out of an evident moral obligation!

□ And then the passage from Luke ends with a critical argument and motivation: "Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High." Love of enemies does not lead ultimately to suffering and misery but to great rewards. The challenge is to live lives of mercy, echoing the mercy of Abba. "Be merciful." Is this a further Hebrew *kelal*, the summary rule, that restates the essence of the Rule?

How often translation fails us; that powerful Hebrew word for mercy, *hesed*, is variously paraphrased from a Greek parallel word as "loving-kindness" or "unconditional tenderness." Over and over, the prophets urge mercy; for example, Amos, Micah, Hosea. Hosea 6:6 captures this perfectly: "I desire mercy [toward your neighbour] not [just] sacrificial service." How unambiguous is this *kelal* of the Rule: Show great tenderness and kindness to one another.

Are These Christian Distinctives? How Do We Differ? Differences

□ I am left wondering about how complex the Rule is across faith traditions, how different we are in our interpretations and understandings. As I have tried to show, the Rule as a summary principle is subordinated to differing theological intentions even in these two gospel contexts. Luke places the Rule in the context of love of enemies; Matthew understands it as the quintessence of Jesus' vision of Abba's blessings to all people and its continuity with the Law and the Prophets. The Rule, while still an ethical imperative, also becomes a statement of faith in the loving-kindness, the tenderness, of Abba.

□ Is it helpful in interfaith dialogue to speak of these theological underpinnings of the Rule? Should the quest for universal agreement operate independently of religion? Should the Rule simply remain as one of the laws of nature or of human nature, or the Rule of Right or Wrong, to which C. S. Lewis refers? The Rule as simply a moral lesson. Tying the Rule to religions, to theological or non-theological beliefs, may not be helpful. Convictions about religion can be so intractable – so difficult, so stubborn.

We exclude our mates, especially those who do not subscribe to a religion or faith, in theologizing on the Rule. Needless to say, I desire to be a disciple of Jesus, where response to others flows from the agape love of Abba in actions reflective of Abba's nature and presence through Christ in the human experience.

Interacting with the Panel: Finding Common Ground

□ The Rule contains an appeal for wisdom, asking us to respond to the wants and needs and desires of others, to be attentive to the consequences of our actions on the long-term welfare of others. The challenge in the Rule is for both: actions that value the differences and acknowledging “conflicting moral universes.”

As George Bernard Shaw quipped, “Don’t do to others as you want them to do unto you. Their tastes may be different.” I find the qualities of wisdom mentioned in the Analects of Confucius to be instructive: *chung* and *shu*, translated as “conscientiousness” and “empathy with another person, being of like mind and heart.” When we extend our minds to others to the point that our desires are like their own, that is *shu*.

□ The Rule invites us to have regard for, indeed love of, the neighbour, beyond ethnic and religious differences. William Scott Green wrote: “The rule is an expression of human kinship, the most fundamental truth underlying morality.” Many of the religions view a person in the context of the holiness within. Reverence for the other is reverence for God. I am reminded of Emerson’s comment that we ought to take off our shoes in the presence of others, acknowledging the holiness of others: “take the shoes from off their feet, for God is here within.”

□ I dream of being bilingual, linguistically hospitable, finding another common language with others, when words like Father, mercy, love might be perceived/misunderstood as too centred in my own tradition. Abba is never merely one’s own parent, but always the parent of others. We come to live as sisters or brothers in relation to others.

Words like Father from Matthew are tied to our membership in the human family, our *jen*, our “cohumanity” as Confucians say, also translated as “humanity,” “benevolence,” or “love.” Cohumanity is being truly humane in one-to-one relationships. Or, the Hebrew word for mercy in the passage from Luke may be translated as “loving-kindness.” There is no “they” and “us” and no such thing as an “enemy.” The relatedness, the kinship of all, the “kin-dom of God,” is a central motif for Jesus.

Or consider the much used word “love” in Christianity where in the Greek sources four different words are reduced to a single English word in translation. When I am not sure what we are talking about, *agape*, *filia*, etc., I always return to an early writing of Erich Fromm in which he names the elements common to all forms of love as care, responsibility, respect, and knowledge, and in that list I find clarity. An expansion and flexibility of a more inclusive language across faith traditions could be helpful.

□ Do we need to focus on what we have in common, finding agreement in what appears similar like compassion or the Rule? Stephen Prothero’s caution is that in striving for the commonalities, we focus only on the less important aspects of our traditions, reducing beliefs and faith to “least common denominators,” missing the essential and distinctive features of a faith. It seems to me we ought to welcome the differences more, learn from them, let them enrich our own traditions. A focus on commonality can too easily lead to

supersessionism, or to failure to affirm “the intrinsic dignity of particularity,” as a professor of mine used to say.

Towards Another Needed Rule

□ I do not see that centuries of the Golden Rule have tamed the savage heart. I have always admired one of Krister Stendahl’s rules of religious understanding from a statement in 1985 in Stockholm. As the Lutheran bishop of Sweden, he faced a controversial protest against the building of a temple by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. His third rule in interreligious understanding is to “Leave room for ‘holy envy,’” a willingness to recognize elements in another religious tradition or faith that we admire and wish might find greater scope in your own religious tradition or faith.

This is the reverse of the search for commonality: finding something in other’s tradition that is beautiful, acknowledging our own as lacking in some way, taking on a healthy religious self-doubting, claiming the “rough neighbourhoods” of my own religion, being able to see what is attractive in the other, what is holy and wholly belongs to the other, seeing something meaningful that tells us something else about God, seeing something radically not me and saying “That’s great.” To do this requires that I have a clear sense of who I am.

□ We need to welcome difference, not to succumb to what Freud terms “the narcissism of minor differences.” Perhaps another way of saying this is that we need occasions to practice what Kyle Cupp calls a “hermeneutic of hospitality.” When we think we’ve got the other person or faith entirely figured out, we’re fooling ourselves, and are probably missing an opportunity to learn something.

“Real dialogue requires hospitality, an open, welcoming, and genuine attempt to understand the other’s ideas. . . . It requires changing our whole culture to where we value a shared pursuit of truth. Currently we value others so far as they are fodder for our intellectual wars. We have to drop the hermeneutic of war and adopt a hermeneutic of hospitality. Such an exchange is a prerequisite if we want our ideas to bear fruit beyond merely ourselves.”

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Clement Mehlman’s first career was as a high school English teacher and department head in Nova Scotia. He holds degrees from Mount Allison, Saint Mary’s University, and the University of Toronto, as well as a degree in ministry and spirituality from the

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PANELIST -2

Adrian Fish,
Zen Buddhist

I would like to start off by presenting the Buddhist ethical guidelines, known as the ten precepts. They are remarkably similar in content to the Ten Commandments, as they include the following admonitions:

1. Do not kill/affirm life 2. Do not take what is not given/respect things of others. 3. Do not misuse sexuality/cultivate honest relationships. 4. Do not lie/speak the truth. 5. Do not indulge in intoxicants/cultivate internal clarity. 6. Do not slander others/cultivate respectfulness. 7. Do not praise yourself at expense of others/abide in awakened nature. 8. Do not covet possessions/cultivate mutual support. 9. Do not harbour ill-will/practice loving kindness and understanding. 10. Do not abuse three treasures/support community that encourages awakening.

In spite of the similarities to the basic laws outlined in Judeo-Christianity, there is a difference in the spirit in which these are interpreted. In order to illuminate these differences, we must understand the fundamental difference in the Buddhist perspective as compared to those of monotheistic traditions. One such difference is the principle of *anatman* (no self).



This can be understood to mean that the self we believe to be a fixed, solid, substantial entity called 'I' is, in fact, illusory. This is not to say that there is not a relative self that lives in a relative world with relative rules and laws, but rather that this relative perspective is

incomplete.

In Zen, we are tasked with grasping the complete truth directly, through our own experience in the practice of *zazen* or meditation. When addressing the topic of ourselves, we must pause to question whether the truth we think we refer to is complete, rather than just a relative, mutable, shifting truth. Through *zazen*, we begin to see the disintegration of our neat little moral categories. The emphasis on parsing right and wrong falls squarely on our shoulders.

My teacher, Zenkai Taiun Roshi, often states that we observe the precepts when we break them. We must note that it is, in fact, impossible not to break even the most basic precept of not killing, for example, virtually every moment we are alive. Our survival depends on transgressing this precept every moment, as any biologist would observe the incessant killing factory that is our body. Critical bodily functions such as digestion and disease immunity illustrate this point quite simply.

The precept of lying, for example, is implicit in virtually all the others. We can understand this from the conventional position of communication with malicious intent. We can also think of it as an act of omission as well as commission. When we introduce the concept of *anatman*- the principle of no substantial self, one can see that selfhood in the conventional sense is, in fact, a type of lie.

We must note that there is a critical need for navigating through our complex cultural world. Out of necessity, we must develop our personhood, or persona. The etymology of this word comes from the Latin *dramatis personae* or 'characters of the drama'. We define our self as a character in a performance of everyday life that is, if you will, a type of lie. This latter type of lie is the most insidious of all given that it seeps its way into our consciousness without really seeming to be constructed at all. We can see a fundamental confusion between what we believe to be real or natural, versus what is, in fact, constructed or conventional. "Natural" typically refers to something that is derived from nature, so as to imply free from affectation. Convention can be defined as a culturally-specific norm - a perspective that fundamentally informs a specific world-view, typically without one's conscious awareness.

I discussed killing and lying, but an examination of some of the other precepts viewed through this lens may offer similar insights. In not taking what is not freely given, one could argue that the simple consumption of oxygen is a transgression of this precept. My teacher used the example of multiple people trapped in an airtight room. By definition, one's breathing takes away oxygen from another. Again, we must be clear that our conventional view of the world is not complete.

Misusing sexuality can be interpreted in many relative ways. Some Buddhist sects uphold abstinence, whereas others sanction marriage in non-monastic orders. But what does this precept really mean to you? Does it mean respecting the bond of trust developed between two partners? Does it define the gender of these two theoretical partners? Unlike other traditions, Buddhism is mute on these details.

The precept surrounding intoxicants has many interpretations. Some sects (such as those in the Hinayana school) observe this literally through the total abstention of alcohol. Other sects understand this more metaphorically, viewing it as the ways in which we intoxicate ourselves with false ideas and beliefs. There are many good reasons to lie to ourselves, mostly having to do with bolstering the false notions about who we are. It's soothing to live in a fool's paradise, even when we know we're playing the part of the fool. Amazingly, we can play these dual roles, only admitting to it, to even

ourselves in times of great strain or exhaustion. Clearly we are complex creatures.

Coveting possessions is likewise read in some sects as renunciation, while others emphasize one's attitude towards possessions. It is possible to have many things but not hold an attitude of attachment that causes suffering, while at the same time, it is possible to own nothing but a robe and bowl and still be consumed by desire. Things are not always what they seem.

The practice of *zazen* allows us to cultivate the space to see the differences between relative and complete. The spillover effect of this practice helps us calibrate our internal moral compass, filling out the vague ethical generality of the precepts as written. The flexibility of interpretation obliges us to find out the true meaning of the non-transgression of the precepts for ourselves. The internalization of the precepts allows us to live in our awakened nature and actualize their essence: to do no harm, do good, and to do good for others.

Adrian Fish is a photo-based artist, teacher and novice priest in the Soto Zen school of Buddhism. He holds an MFA from York University in Toronto, as well as accreditation from the Ontario College of Art & Design in Toronto and Sheridan College in Oakville, ON. His work has been shown in a number of public institutions, artist-run centres and commercial galleries in such cities as Toronto, Ottawa, Halifax, Winnipeg, New York City and Tokyo. Adrian is currently Associate Professor at NSCAD University, and co-practice leader at the Atlantic Soto Zen Centre in Halifax.

PANELIST-3

Will Naylor

Baha'i Spiritual Assembly of HRM

More than a century ago, Bahá'u'lláh told Bahá'ís to "Consort with the followers of all religions in a spirit of friendliness and fellowship." Bahá'u'lláh's teachings on religious unity are clear and unambiguous: religion is one, all religions spring from the same Divine Source.



In accordance with that principle, the worldwide Bahá'í community has, since its earliest days, articulated in interfaith activities, religion's essential unity, thereby working to promote harmony among the world's faiths and their followers.

Founded in 1844 in Iran, the Bahá'í Faith is today the second-most widespread independent world religion, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica. With its teachings on human and religious oneness, it has attracted followers from every religious, ethnic, racial and national background. Currently, there are some five million Bahá'ís, residing in virtually every country and territory.

The growth and expansion of the Faith paralleled the rise of the international interfaith movement, a relatively new phenomenon. Before the middle of the last century, the world's major religions had little contact with each other, outside of war and conflict. But the first wave of globalization in the mid-1800s - powered by the steamship, the railroad and the telegraph - brought believers of all religions into increasing contact, and many began to see the importance of inter-religious understanding. A perception grew among students and commentators that religions shared underlying similarities.

A milestone came in 1893, when the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago, drew "together the widest spectrum of speakers and participants ever assembled from the religious traditions of the world," according to Diana Eck, a professor of comparative religion at Harvard University. While the representation was overwhelmingly Christian, with some 100 of the 170 speakers identified as Protestant, also present on the podium were Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Confucians, Jains and Zoroastrians. For Bahá'ís, the Parliament has a special significance: it was the first time the Bahá'í Faith was publicly mentioned in the Western world - and it symbolized in many ways the dawning of the ideal of inter-religious harmony that Bahá'ís work for.

Although Bahá'u'lláh was the object of intense religious persecution and spent much of His adult life as a prisoner of the Ottoman Empire, He, nevertheless, associated with religious leaders and followers of all kinds - as evidenced by the great outpouring of sentiment that followed His passing in Palestine in 1892.

"Notables, among whom were Shí'ahs, Sunnis, Christians, Jews and Druzes, as well as poets, 'ulamás and government officials, all joined in lamenting the loss, and in magnifying the virtues and greatness of Bahá'u'lláh, many of them paying to Him their written tributes, in verse and in prose, in both Arabic and Turkish," writes Shoghi Effendi in "God Passes By", an authoritative account of the Bahá'í Faith's first century.

At the end of the 19th century, there were some 50,000 Bahá'ís in the world. The Faith had spread to most of the countries and territories in the Middle East and to the Indian subcontinent. In Europe, the Americas, sub-Saharan Africa, Australasia, and most of Asia, Bahá'u'lláh and His teachings were yet largely unknown. This changed when His son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, made a landmark tour in 1911 and 1912 of Europe and North America. During that tour, the Bahá'í leader spoke at all manner of churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples, among other sites. His message sounded a conspicuous call to religious unity.

"All human creatures are the servants of God," said 'Abdu'l-Bahá in a talk on 2 June 1912 at the Church of the Ascension in New York. "All are submerged in the sea of His mercy. The Creator of all is one God; the Provider, the Giver, the Protector of all is one God. He is kind to all; why should we be unkind? All live beneath the shadow of His love; why should we hate each other?"

'Abdu'l-Bahá elaborated on the oneness of religion before an audience assembled at the Eighth Street Temple, Synagogue, New York on 8 November

1912.

God is one, the effulgence of God is one, and humanity constitutes the servants of that one God. But we have acted contrary to the will and good pleasure of God. We have been the cause of enmity and disunion. We have separated from each other and risen against each other in opposition and strife.

Most regrettable of all is the state of difference and divergence we have created between each other in the name of religion, imagining that a paramount duty in our religious belief is that of alienation and estrangement, that we should shun each other and consider each other contaminated with error and infidelity. In reality, the foundations of the divine religions are one and the same. The differences which have arisen between us are due to blind imitations of dogmatic beliefs and adherence to ancestral forms of worship.

Creating a dialogue about religious harmony was a continuing theme of Bahá'í activity throughout the middle years of the 20th century. In the late 1930s, for example, a number of inter religious conferences were held in northern India - and a Bahá'í representative was invited to each. At a Parliament of Religions conference in Calcutta in January 1937, for instance, a Bahá'í representative addressed several thousand people on the Bahá'í point of view.

With the formation of the United Nations after World War II, many religious organizations became associated with the UN as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). As a community, the Bahá'í Faith was recognized at the UN in 1947 and, like other religious communities, representatives of the Bahá'í Faith have played an important role in giving voice to the moral and spiritual ideals that undergird the UN and its activities.

In 1947, for example, a "Bahá'í Declaration of Human Obligations and Rights" was presented to the first session of the UN Commission on Human Rights at Lake Success, New York, during its deliberations on the drafting of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. Since that time, the Bahá'í International Community has worked at the UN alongside other religious groups, participating in a number of UN conferences on topics ranging from racism to ecology.

In the late 1980s, indeed, the cause of environmental conservation provided a new impetus for cooperation among the world's religions. In a series of events sponsored by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), religious leaders - including representatives of the Bahá'í Faith - came together to discuss ways in which religious communities could play a greater role in protecting the earth's environment.

From these events, the Alliance on Conservation and Religion (ARC) was born, an organization of which the Bahá'í Faith was a charter member. In May 1995, Bahá'ís came together with leaders from Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, and Taoism, at Windsor Castle, and identified a number of key areas for cooperation and collaboration, including a proposal to collaborate with the United Nations Environment Program by encouraging local religious communities to monitor environmental changes at the local level.

In 1998, this sense of collaboration among religions was taken to the next step when religious leaders gathered for another summit in England, this time at Lambeth Palace, the official residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Known officially as the World Faith Development Dialogue (WFDD), the meeting brought together leaders from the world's major religions and key officials of the World Bank. The purpose was to discuss how spiritual and material development are interrelated and how the Bank and the religious might forge a relationship to tackle the problems of global poverty.

"Only development programs that are perceived as just and equitable can hope to engage the commitment of the people upon whom successful implementation ultimately depends," stated the Bahá'í representative to the WFDD Summit. "When people trust that all are protected by standards and assured of benefits, such virtues as honesty, the willingness to work and sacrifice, moderation, and a spirit of cooperation can flourish and combine to make possible the attainment of demanding collective goals."

With the coming of the new millennium, the pace of interfaith and inter-religious activities has increased - as has Bahá'í involvement. World Religion Day is commemorated worldwide on the third Sunday in January in hundreds of Bahá'í communities worldwide. The National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of the United States inaugurated the observance in 1950 to foster interfaith understanding.

In 1999, a council composed of representatives of world religions - including the Bahá'í Faith - convened the second Parliament of the World's Religions in South Africa, a follow-up to the 1993 gathering in Chicago, which also had extensive Bahá'í participation and which commemorated the 100th anniversary of the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions.

A Bahá'í served as co-chair of the Parliament of the World's Religions, South Africa, one of the main organizers of the event, and more than 100 Bahá'ís attended the Parliament. The Bahá'í community of South Africa issued a statement to the Parliament, urging the world's peoples "to rise above our petty differences of national and religious rivalries and work constructively and enthusiastically to build new order in the world where each and all share in the prosperity of the whole and where none bear the yoke of extreme poverty nor the humiliation of subjugation."

In 2000, the international interfaith movement passed another milestone when religious leaders gathered at the United Nations for the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders. More than 1,000 representatives came together, including Bahá'ís, to establish guidelines for the world's religious communities to begin working together - in cooperation with secular leaders at the United Nations and elsewhere - on issues of peace, justice, the eradication of poverty, the protection of the environment, and social harmony.

In their speeches at the Summit, many religious leaders said that the world's religions can work together if they emphasize their essential commonalities while respecting their diversity. The Bahá'í International Community spokesman, for example, called on the religious to work for a

"global community based on unity in diversity" - something that could be realistically accomplished by identifying the "core values that are common to all religious and spiritual traditions."

Bahá'ís believe that their understanding of the relationship between the various religions and of the purpose of inter-religious dialogue represents a significant step towards unity. The foundation of the Bahá'í approach arises from a conviction that "the religion of God is one, but it must ever be renewed."

"There can be no doubt whatsoever, that the peoples of the world, of whatever race or religion, derive their inspiration from one heavenly Source, and are the subjects of one God," wrote Bahá'u'lláh. "These principles and laws, these firmly-established and mighty systems, have proceeded from one Source, and are the rays of one Light. That they differ one from another is to be attributed to the varying requirements of the ages in which they were promulgated."

Thus, from the Bahá'í perspective, the intent of the Founders of the worlds' great religions - Moses, Buddha, Zoroaster, Krishna, Christ, Muhammad - was to progressively awaken a wider range of spiritual and moral capacities in humanity.

Bahá'ís believe that humanity now stands at the beginning of a great new era, an era of peace and prosperity, as promised in the scriptures of all of the world's religions. The key to fulfillment of this expectation, Bahá'ís believe, lies in recognizing the essential unity of the truth found at the heart of the religions of the world. As Bahá'u'lláh affirms: "That the diverse communions of the earth, and the manifold systems of religious belief, should never be allowed to foster the feelings of animosity among men, is, in this day, of the essence of the Faith of God and His Religion."

PANEL WORKSHOP –2

Best Practices in Interfaith Dialogue in our Hospitals and Schools

PANELIST-1

Buffy Harper,

Professional Practice Coordinator—Spiritual Care,
QEII and Dartmouth General Hospital

Health Care and how best to provide it continues to be a hot topic of discussion in our province. With costs climbing and demand increasing as Nova Scotians age, the government and hospital administrators are challenged daily to come up with solutions, which balance provision for the real needs of the sick and the limits of a finite provincial budget.

Through all the changes over the last few years, Capital Health has maintained Our Promise, which states that “we care for the whole person before us”, that “every person has the right and the responsibility to achieve their optimal state of health and that such health embraces all aspects of our humanity, the physical, emotional, mental and spiritual”.



Research shows that patients who belong to a religion or faith group and are supported when hospitalized through prayer and visitation from their faith community, spend fewer days in the hospital, improve physically faster, and generally have a better prognosis.

With the limited number of professional spiritual care providers employed by Capital Health within the urban setting of Halifax/Dartmouth and even fewer in the rural areas, it has been important to develop partnerships with religious leaders within our communities to support us in the provision of spiritual and religious care for those requesting it.

This has been and continues to be a fruitful partnership, which benefits patient and family care. Over the next fifteen minutes I will be giving you

examples of how we are developing ways of providing spiritual and religious care through the cooperation of our various faith communities with hospital staff and administration, all committed to providing the best patient care possible.

1. Health Equity Forum: In early March 2013, the Department of Health and Wellness held a Health Equity Forum, titled *Promising Practices*, attended by all nine health districts and the IWK Health Centre. Cape Breton District and Capital Health District were invited to speak to the delegates about spiritual care and spirituality in Nova Scotia. The presentations were followed by some fruitful dialogue among the health care employees attending the forum, a diverse group in themselves. They grappled with questions such as the difference between being religious and being spiritual, about who provides spiritual and religious care in each district and pondered—after one delegate provided feedback, where atheists fit into this discussion as they experience the same kind of health issues and dilemmas as people who have a belief in God. What was evident from this meeting was that there is a varied range of options within the districts on how spiritual and religious care is provided and by whom and there was a general interest in further discussion.

2. Atlantic Region of the Canadian Association for Spiritual Care (CASC). Late last April, the nine health care districts and the IWK Health Centre were invited by the Atlantic Region of the Canadian Association for Spiritual Care (CASC) to attend a full day conference titled *Spiritual Care in Nova Scotia's Health Care Facilities*. The participants, including hospital administrators, community faith leaders and professional spiritual care providers, explored three key questions that day: How is Spiritual Care provided in your facility? What are the strengths and challenges in Spiritual Care across the province? Where are the growth areas in Spiritual Care in Nova Scotia? A key finding, not surprisingly, was that much of the spiritual and religious care provided in our health care facilities is provided voluntarily by community faith leaders who either visit the hospital regularly or agree to be called when patients are requesting religious or spiritual care. A few of the districts employ professional spiritual care providers who coordinate these community visitors, while other districts have that duty assigned to another allied health professional.

There is a thirst among the districts for more equity and understanding of how we can provide the best spiritual and religious care to patients wherever they are in the province. This summer, spiritual care providers developed an environmental scan survey and sent it out to all nine districts and the IWK, clarifying questions around how spiritual and religious care fits into their organization: Who is responsible for spiritual and religious care? Who provides it? Is there a budget for it? Our hope is to meet with the health districts again in the spring of 2014, armed with this data, which is presently being analysed, ready to move forward in a more coordinated fashion to find a way to provide spiritual care more equitably in Nova Scotia.

3. The Personal Health Information Act (PHIA) is now law in Nova Scotia. The underlying commitment behind this legislation is to protect the

privacy of each person's personal health information. Of particular importance to us in the provision of spiritual and religious care is being aware of the religious affiliation, if any, of patients entering our health care institutions. On admission patients are asked, "Do you wish your religion to be part of your permanent health record?"

If the response is yes, Capital Health will disclose that information in order to "notify a representative of your faith group to visit you during your stay, if you identify with that group". This allows us to provide faith group lists to visiting clergy and religious leaders so they are able to visit these patients while in hospital. Over 80 percent of inpatients in Capital District Health Authority still identify a faith tradition or community on admission. Our responsibility is to protect this personal health information so all visiting clergy and faith group visitors must register with spiritual care, sign a pledge of confidentiality and wear a name badge when making these hospital visits and accessing these lists.

These patient lists must also be protected so access to them is through a clerk or secretary during regular office hours. This practice of disclosing the identified religion of patients, respects the right of these patients to continued religious and spiritual support while in hospital and also protects the privacy of this information so only authorized individuals have access to it.

4. Sacred Spaces. When many of our hospitals were built years ago, the vast majority of patients and staff were practicing Christians and it was important that these large hospitals house a chapel for prayer and worship. These chapels were designed to resemble churches with altars, pews and candles. Over the years there have been changes that have affected the way we use our chapels. Although most patients still identify with a Christian denomination, they are more sick entering the hospital these days and there is limited need for worship services within our institutions. The exception is the Veteran's Memorial Building, which still has daily worship in their chapel for the veterans.

Families and patients now more than ever are looking for a place of peace where they can go to reflect, pray, journal, a refuge from the sometimes confusing, harried pace of hospital procedures. At Capital Health, under the auspices of the Diversity Committee, we have formed a Sacred Spaces Committee. The members of this committee come from varied faith and cultural traditions, the staff of Capital Health and community stakeholders, and are committed to making these sacred spaces more available to meet the varied spiritual needs of patients, families and staff. These spaces have been renamed Places of Prayer and Meditation and have been setup to meet the stated needs of those who use them. Lately we have been engaged in changing the signage to reflect the new name of each of these former chapels.

While there are still areas for Christian prayer and worship, there are now Muslim prayer areas in every Place of Prayer and Meditation. We have also added benches and cushions for those who wish to meditate and contemplate. We have provided a journal for those who find comfort in expressing their thoughts and feelings by writing and many use these books

regularly. We have a policy around the use of these Places of Prayer and Meditation and our dream is that every building in Capital Health will eventually have a designated sacred space.

5. Diversity Council. A number of years ago, Capital Health hired a Diversity Coordinator. This unique position has been beneficial to us in our work in spiritual and religious care as he coordinates our efforts, through ongoing education around cultural competency, so we have the skill to welcome patients, families, staff and doctors of all ethnicities to our hospitals. Language, gender, culture as well as spirituality and religion are all included in the work of the Diversity Council. While much of the work of the Council is carried out by Capital Health employees, community representatives make up about a third of the Diversity Council and play a key role in directing what initiatives we move forward with in our mandate to the people served by Capital Health.

6. Communicating with community faith group leaders. Three years ago, we developed a new model for a Professional Advisory Council for Spiritual and Religious Care. At that time, we realized that the staff chaplains working for Capital Health and the denominational chaplains employed by their churches to work in the hospital were all from mainstream Christian faith groups. To provide some counter balance we designed the membership of the Professional Advisory Council to include two non Christian members who were connected to the Interfaith Council of Halifax. We also included a patient or family member, a Capital Health employee (not from Spiritual Care) and representatives from the theology schools, Acadia Divinity College and Atlantic School of Theology. These external members have provided the spiritual care providers on the council with a wider perspective of the needs coming from the community, the limits of what can be offered in a hospital environment and always discussion of how best to provide spiritual and religious care to our patients, family and staff.

The connection to the interfaith council has been important to us as it acts as a clearing house for information that we are seeking as spiritual care providers working in a busy hospital environment. The interfaith council has a database of faith groups and leaders in our communities and usually through a quick email can connect a chaplain with requested information. We look forward to continuing and enhancing this connection with the interfaith council.

7. Spiritual and Religious webpage on the Capital Health website. On the Capital Health public website, spiritual and religious care, maintains a webpage Home > Patients, Clients & Visitors > Support Services > Spiritual Care. On it we provide some information about the services we offer as well a contact list of staff and denominational chaplains. If there are upcoming events that we believe would be of interest to the public, we post that information on our webpage. For those who want information about particular faith groups in the Halifax area, we are able to offer a link to the Dalhousie database, which provides a comprehensive list of faith groups found in HRM and where and when they worship. We are continually looking for ways to improve what

information we provide on our webpage and plan to grow in our capacity to use this communication tool.

8. Spiritual and Religious Care Database. We maintain a database of close to 400 volunteers, community faith leaders and ministers who are registered to visit patients in our hospitals. We value our partnerships with these individuals and faith communities as we witness their calling to visit the sick and bring the comfort of their shared faith to patients in their time of need. It is a constant task to keep this database current as religious leaders move in and out of our communities. We use the database to communicate changes, invite community members to upcoming events, which could be of interest to them, as well as informing them of training opportunities being offered through Capital Health. We also welcome feedback from the community, knowing how important it is for us to be aware of what issues are arising among the people we serve.

As mentioned earlier, many of our hospital beds today are filled with seniors who generally identify themselves with a mainstream Christian religion. Where we witness much more diversity is in the staff and students who work in these teaching hospitals. They come from all over the world and bring their unique traditions, culture and spiritual beliefs with them. They and their families will be our patients in the future. They are also looking for a workplace that not only accepts their diversity, but welcomes it and see that it enriches the fabric of the workplace.

The Department of Health and Wellness calls on the district health authorities to be aware of the demographics in our communities “in order to effectively plan and provide services that respond to the racial, ethnic, cultural, spiritual and linguistic needs of the populations we serve”. To do this we need to continue to be connected to religious and spiritual leaders in our communities through dialogue and through listening. The Challenge of Peaceful Coexistence within spiritual and religious care can be met through acceptance, resource sharing and mutual respect. There is the will to meet these challenges and to benefit from the journey we begin when we seek to learn from each other.

***Buffy Harper** is a certified Spiritual Care Specialist and Teaching Supervisor of Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE). She has worked in a diversity of settings, including being trained at the NSH psychiatric facility, and employed as an interfaith chaplain in long-term, acute and palliative care, the ICU, HIV/AIDS outpatients' clinic, NS Rehabilitation Centre and the IWK maternity/children's hospital. She is presently Professional Practice Coordinator for Spiritual and Religious Care at the QEII in Halifax and the Dartmouth General Hospital. Buffy graduated from Carlton University (BA) and the Atlantic School of Theology (MDiv). Early in her career, Buffy joined CUSO and taught school in both Jamaica and Nigeria. She values and supports diversity in the workplace and is a strong proponent of ecumenical dialogue and interfaith understanding.*

PANELIST—2

Glenn Breen,

Coordinator, Professional Chief—Spiritual Health,
IWK Health Centre

ABSTRACT:

The IWK serves a diverse population from the three Maritime Provinces. With staff, physicians and volunteers from many cultural and religious backgrounds, we strive to provide the best possible care which takes into consideration cultural and religious needs.

As a secular health care centre, the IWK's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy provides the framework and commitment to ensure culturally competent care for patients and families. The Spiritual Care Team plays a focused role in attending to the spiritual and religious components of patient and family centred care. Interfaith dialogue plays an important role in how the IWK provides culturally competent care. I believe the key to good interfaith dialogue is cultivating relationships, encouraging partnerships and interacting with the larger Maritime community.



The first part of my presentation will focus on describing how we have achieved successes in interfaith dialogue through hosting World Religion Day events, lunch and learn sessions for staff with community faith group leaders, providing opportunities for graduate learners, participating in the Halifax Interfaith Council and other activities that promote appreciation for spiritual and religious diversity.

The second part of my presentation will discuss challenges and opportunities for growth in the areas of interfaith dialogue and culturally competent spiritual and religious care. I will discuss how demographic shifts in religious affiliation affect funding along with changes in traditional spiritual care delivery models. The overall goal will be to stimulate discussion and draw upon the insights and observations of those attending the presentation session in order to gain insights and improve relationships with community partners and stakeholders.

Glenn Breen is the Coordinator and Professional Chief for Spiritual Health at the IWK Health Centre in Halifax, where he ministers to children, youth, women and families. He has over 20 years of ministry experience in healthcare settings and is a certified Chaplain and Specialist in Pastoral Care with the Canadian Association for Spiritual Care. He graduated from the University of Waterloo/St. Jerome's College with a Bachelor of Arts degree and from there went on to complete a Master of Divinity Degree from the University of St. Michael's College in Toronto, Ontario. Glenn's interest in pastoral ministry led him to further graduate studies at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary/Wilfrid Laurier University where he graduated with a Master of Theology in

Pastoral Counselling in 1996. Glenn's academic and professional practice interest areas focus on bereavement, diversity, spirituality and healthcare ministry. He is a published researcher and author in the area of high-risk pregnancy and spirituality.

PANELIST 3:

Paul Stacey

Teacher of Comparative World Religions 12
Lockview High School

The Comparative World Religions course is a grade 12 course that is recognized as a grade 12 credit towards university admission. In this course, students examine the nature of religion and its origin and place in human society. Students do an objective and comprehensive study of the five major religious traditions of the world today: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism.

Each of these are studied from the same perspective, which includes their origin and historical development, fundamental beliefs, sacred writings, ritual practices, values and their impact on the world. As time allows, other religious traditions such as Sikhism, Taoism, Confucianism and native spirituality are studied.



This course fosters student awareness and understanding of the diversity of religions, as well as their similarities. It also examines the religious dimension of human existence in general, encouraging a comprehensive and balanced examination of all ideas and attitudes pertaining to religion as a component of human culture.

Currently there are eight sections of the course, with approximately 260 students, offered by the HRSB. There is one section each at Citadel High and CPA, and two sections each at Halifax West, Lockview High and Dartmouth High. It is a locally developed course and even though it is now listed on the PSP (Provincial School Program), resources such as textbooks and teacher guides are very limited.

The challenge is in getting more students taking the course and more teachers interested in teaching it! It certainly is a wonderful way to promote interfaith dialogue in schools.

Paul Stacey is from St. John's Newfoundland. He went to Brother Rice High School, where his interest in religion began. He attended Memorial University, B.Arts 1981, B.ED 1982. (He is presently attending MSVU, working on a Masters in Ed. PYSCH., Human Relations.) Stacey taught in a Catholic school for fourteen years as well taught a course called world religions there and has been interested in learning about different belief systems ever since. He moved to Halifax in 1997 and has been teaching in the HRSB since. About six years ago, the course, Comparative World Religions 12, was offered at Lockview High School and Stacey jumped at the chance to teach and develop the course. He has given presentations on the merits of this course and the wonderful

teaching opportunities it offers at the SSTA October conference.

PANELIST 4

Kathy Rhodes Langille

RCH Coordinator,
Strait Regional School Board

I would like to begin with some words from former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan:

“Let us be true global citizens. Let us not rest until we have truly succeeded in bringing positive change to the lives of people and laid the foundations for peaceful, well-functioning, sustainable societies throughout the world.”

And in another context:

“Rarely has there been a moment in recent history when it has been so critical for all of us to protect our common space, building on what unites us, Again I ask, if not us, then who?”

The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines best practices as a method, process, activity which conventional wisdom regards as more effective at delivery. I agree.

My professional mission is to promote race relations, cross-cultural understanding and human rights throughout the school board and community where I work and live. Through policy and practices my job is to teach a respect for tolerance of human kind, through teacher training – relationship building; cultural proficiency, culturally relevant and racial/ethnic equitable instruction, assessment and the alignment of these to the individual child.

The term interfaith dialogue refers to cooperative, constructive and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions.

An effective delivery of that dialogue, calls for reflective examination of how we, as cultural beings, see ourselves – then how we see ourselves in relation to the people of our schools, community and world. What do we do next and how we take action in our daily lives and practice depends on the outcome of that examination.



The vehicle is the tools of CP. An inside-out approach that makes explicit the values and practices that enable both individuals and schools interact effectively across cultures. It means raising awareness of and closing the gap between a person’s expressed values and how he or she is actually perceived by clients, colleagues and the community. (*Lindsey et als.* 1999-2010)

The four tools are:

1. Guiding Principles: the underlying values of this approach
2. Continuum: It provides the language for describing both healthy and counter-productive policies, practices and individual behaviours.
3. Barriers. These are obstacles that impede the process of developing CP.

4. Essential Elements: These are behaviour standards for planning and measuring growth toward CP.

Keeping the Department of Education's (DoE's) Provincial Racial Equity Policy of 2002 as a central document, we can then use the Cultural Proficiency Framework of 2011, to guide our journey. For instance, across the province in each school, board administrators, teachers and support staff are receiving CP training. Discussions and implementations about how to align school improvement plans with culture relevant instruction/practices are happening. Policies are written to be more inclusive of Human Rights legislation.

I. Pre-Service and Teacher Training: This includes: A) Certificate training courses for second year pre-service teachers B) Human resources – racial equity interview questions when hiring.

II. School Board Policy, Procedures and Guidelines Development: This involves: A) Listening to Human Rights Groups and Identifying Gaps in Policy. Human Rights Watch has stated: “The ban on the veil (and other cultural traditions like praying and wearing ceremonial items) violates human rights and stigmatizes and marginalizes women who wear it. The freedom to express religion and freedom of conscience are fundamental rights.” B) Regular Reviews of Guidelines and Procedures and Implementation by Board Members, Principals, Staff. C) Student Self-Identification.

III. Curriculum Development: It must take into account the respect and awareness of ethnic/racial groups, cultural understanding and human rights: A) REP clearly states that the NS education system recognizes the disparities people have suffered. B) Seven Components Guide: These components include instruction, the Board, assessment, curriculum, community relations, guiding councillors, language C) Bias evaluation D) Critical literacy – calls into question that humankind live very cultural and diverse lives E) The achievement gap initiative.

IV. Teacher Training in Curriculum Alignment: A) Schools, Boards across the province are partnering with universities regarding Masters degrees in Cultural Diversity. Two-year programs encourage a change in the ways teachers teach and understand pedagogy B) Applying to another position C) Hiring practices – the respect of staff's first language and traditions.

V. Regular yearly meetings to introduce school representatives to cultural exposure and opportunities. RCH Advisors, in turn, educate their colleagues through professional learning communities. RCH Coordinators, like myself gather several times a year and share our practices, brain storm issues and provide feedback.

In closing, US President Barrack Obama has said this about the face coverings: “It is important for Western countries to avoid impeding Muslim citizens from practicing religion as they see fit. We're not going to tell people what to wear.”

In Canada we have religious freedoms that intersect with schools boards and the Charter of Rights and Freedom (section 2) and along with courts have agreed that language, religious practices, traditional dress is a right. As a

Canadian, it is my responsibility and duty to uphold these rights and bring acceptance and awareness to my colleagues and school board.

Kathy Rhodes Langille: *Kathy has a deep, abiding love for equity among humankind. She is known for working on race, culture and human rights issues and she is a steadfast activist of these issues. Friends and family say she is trustworthy and faithful; her colleagues say she is a good listener and determined. Her passion is for research, policy and educational transformation. When Kathy is not working, she is reading, writing or sewing. If she had her way Kathy would love to be remembered for her respect of freedom, the spiritual, the body and all life. Kathy is an educator and coordinator with the Strait Regional School Board.*

PANEL WORKSHOP –3

How do faith communities cope with barriers to religious practice.

PANELIST 1

Dr. Hassan Raza

Al Rasoul Islamic Society

The right to practice one's faith is a basic human right. On theoretical grounds, countries in the world and societies claim to provide proper legislation and provision to facilitate this basic human right.

The impact of this facilitation is not yet evident. It appears as if this right has often been relegated to second-class status among human rights priorities, although the issue of freedom of religion or belief today stands at the center of our most pressing global challenges.

Successful social and economic development, for example, is greatly influenced by the religious beliefs of a country's citizens. Experts are also increasingly making connections between religious freedom and other fundamental rights such as freedom of expression and assembly, and equal protection before the law.



Today there can no longer be any doubt that matters of peace and security are often directly related to freedom of religion or belief. Among the chief sources of conflict so far in the new millennium have been disputes over religious ideology. The rise of terrorism, in particular, can in large part, be attributed to a simultaneous rise in religious extremism.

In *"The Trouble with American Foreign Policy and Islam,"* Thomas Farr argues that no society can flourish as a stable democracy in the absence of religious liberty, and that repressive countries will continue to lag far behind

their more progressive and inclusive counterparts until they become more protective of religious liberty. He also points out that studies have shown a connection between the lack of religious freedom and the emergence of terrorism [1].

The right to religious freedom was established in the 1948 Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR). The UDHR, in Article 18, proclaims [2]: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

All the major religions apparently seem to have this concept incorporated. Christianity is a religion of peace and love. The Qur’an states: “There is no compulsion in religion: Truth stands out clear from Error.” In a statement to the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, the Bahá’í International Community noted [3]: “Many believers find it difficult to reconcile deep religious conviction with tolerance of other beliefs. It is tempting to insist that one has discovered the one and only truth and to relegate the remaining masses of humanity, adhering to other beliefs, to the status of apostates or unbelievers, spiritually doomed, deserving pity at best, or outright ridicule and persecution at worst. Throughout history too many sincere people in every part of the world have fallen victim to this thinking.”

Religious barriers have been evident since the beginning of time. These barriers are denominational doctrines and beliefs. At the present time it is estimated that there are over 2,000 different denominations to choose from in Christianity. The same is true for other religions: Muslims have dozens of sects. The development of denominations throughout history is solely based on new ideas and doctrines of men. The success of these new ideas and doctrines are dependent on those who will follow them. Poverty, economic insecurity, ethnic difference, class conflict, political marginalisation and social instability are often contributing factors and obvious outcomes in situations of acute social unrest and religious intolerance.

In the light of this background, faith communities in the world may adopt various techniques to cope with barriers to religious practices. Many of us might have either practiced or witnessed many of these techniques in action throughout the world. Let’s look at some of them.

Methods of coping with barriers to religious practice

1. Education and financial status: Until a faith group does not excel in the field of education, that faith group cannot earn the deserved respect of the societies they live with. Education is tied to advancement in financial status. It can be seen worldwide, that those faith communities who have achieved a higher degree of education and correspondingly an advancement in financial status enjoy better life circumstances.

The Muslim sect of Agha Khanis is an excellent example of how education and financial status invite the respect of communities. As a faith

group, both their education levels and monetary status are excellent. They enjoy better freedom to practice their belief even in those countries where other faiths encounter problems in doing so. This faith group has also earned great respect for its initiatives and support in the field of education and health care the world over.

In contrast, many of the Christian faith groups in Asian countries appear to have hurdles that they must overcome in order to truly practice their faith. This is precisely because these communities are behind in education and their financial status is below average. The individuals who have better education levels and/or financial circumstances even in these Asian Christian faith groups are better positioned to practice their faith than their less privileged faith fellows. Therefore, an appropriate level of education and financial situation is a key enabling factor to cope with barriers to religious practices.

2. Coming out of your shell: When we live together as members of one society, we should be ready to come out of our hard shell of faith. Every faith provides the space to its followers to interact in society without damaging the core values of their religion. We should take advantage from this excellent and common feature of our faith to defeat intolerance and earn social harmony. Let me present two examples: one from Bulgaria and the other from India.

In Bulgaria, 76 percent of the population belongs to the Orthodox Church, and Protestant Evangelicals are generally viewed with suspicion. None of the Evangelicals who had applied to the University of Sofia Orthodox Theological Faculty (the only PhD program for theology available in Bulgaria) had passed the entrance exam. That is, until lawyer and theologian Kameliya Slavcheva made the attempt.

She says about this experience [4]: “To be able to take the required exams, I had to learn Orthodox theology and understand and use Orthodox terminology. It was hard, but now it helps me a lot. First, because now I have many friends among my colleagues and teachers with whom I was for four years. Second, the Orthodox theology expanded my knowledge.”

Marian devotion in India is held in the month of May with no religious barriers even as more than 80 percent of pilgrims to Marian sanctuaries are non-Catholics. They bring all kinds of offerings - flowers, garlands, coconuts - and it is not unusual to see women dressed in burqas (Muslim ladies) and people from other religions gather there in prayer. What is evidenced is great religious harmony. Similarly many visitors to Muslim shrines in India are non-Muslims. Many Hindu poets write poems for the martyred grandson (Imam Hussein) of the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Coming out of one's shell into community space that is provided by faith groups is the common denominator in both of these examples. As Pope Francis has recently said: “Our God is too big to be pigeon-holed or placed in a box.” God is bigger than anything we can ever imagine and as human beings we need to realise this. Often we tend to make God in our image and likeness and so restrict God to a Church, Mosque, Temple or another place of worship. This is a disservice to God. It is a wonderful example of religious harmony when we see people of all faiths converging to pray to God who is all and in

all. "

3. Raise your voice against hostile religious laws: Democracy is the best protection for any majority. The Rule of Law is the best protection for any minority. Unfortunately, these laws are drafted by the majority. We can see this happening in various parts of the world. Hostile laws in some Asian countries, recent laws regarding the wearing of the *hijab* (veil) in France, and the Bill under consideration in Quebec which seeks to ban the public display of religious symbols in workplaces are some examples of such efforts. In this situation, the faith communities have a greater challenge of raising their voice within civilized limits. The faith communities should never let their right to speak up, assemble for peaceful protest, communicate through social media and seek defense in courts, be abrogated.

4. Strategic hideout in ultra-hostile environments: If there is an ultra-hostile environment and there is a great threat to the lives or honor of a faith group, there is no harm in going to a strategic hideout, where you do not give up your faith practices, but instead, practice your faith in private or safe places. The whole idea is to safeguard life, religious dignity, social honor and religious practice when in the midst of hostile environments. Some Muslim sects have the concept of *al-Taqiyya* where followers are encouraged to dissimulate in ultra-hostile situations. The word "*al-Taqiyya*" literally means: "Concealing or disguising one's beliefs, convictions, ideas, feelings, opinions, at a time of eminent danger, whether now or later in time, to save oneself from physical and/or mental injury." A one-word translation would be "Dissimulation." A better, and more accurate definition of "*al-Taqiyya*" is "diplomacy." The true spirit of "*al-Taqiyya*" is better embodied in the single word "diplomacy" because it encompasses a comprehensive spectrum of behaviors that serve to further the vested interests of all parties involved [5]. Therefore, a faith group can use diplomatic gestures to guard its existence and practice its religion in unfavorable circumstances.

5. Knowing other religions and educating others about your religion: The world has multicultural and multi-faith populations. We cannot live together being ignorant of each other's faith beliefs. Each faith group should learn about the basic definitions of other faiths, their principles, common practices, values, observance of Holy Days and celebrations. By doing so, we will be more prepared to react and respond to various challenges. We can support and help each other in a better way. We can treat other faith groups meaningfully and expect a fair treatment from them.

6. Clarifying misconceptions about your faith: The concepts of reputation management and image building are equally important for faith groups as they are in the corporate world. A bad image or impression goes a long way in damage proportions. For example, after 9/11, Muslims failed in reputation management of their faith. A handful of people who were responsible for the tragedy of 9/11 overshadowed the religious ideology of more than a billion Muslims in the world.

In contrast, Buddhists and Hindus have successfully handled the reputation management of their faiths and the world sees them as relatively

peaceful religions. A faith group should always try to be aware of the misconception about it and should try to clarify these misconceptions with the best available resources and capabilities.

7. Exhibiting your faith by actions rather than by words. That's where many faith groups lag behind from where they ought to be. The best way to correct misconceptions is by our actions. But this act of correcting misconceptions is merely given lip service through the spoken or written word. Therefore, it's never effective. Sometimes the impact of a brief negative action is so horrendous that many decades of good actions are required to nullify it. I will carry forward the example of the 9/11 attack to explain this point.

An act of terrorism that lasted a few seconds, tarnished the image of Muslims so badly that even countless words could not help Muslims in instant image building. A long sequence of actions would be required to establish the true spirit of Islam. The forces of evil are still out there and their brief actions of terror are making reputation management hard for Muslims. How can we do this? Simply, by following our faith. The common problem among faith followers is that we say we are Muslim or Christian or of other faiths, but we fail in making that visible through our actions. Whatever faith we follow, the teachings of that faith should reflect in our actions and not only in our words. This is the key in reputation management of a faith group.

8. Being united as followers of a faith: Divide and rule has been a popular strategy to fragment religious as well as social and political groups. The British Empire and other empires have used it successfully in the 19th century. In history, many dictators, rulers, and politicians have tried to use it, and some have occasionally been successful. Many Asian and Arab countries are examples in this regard. When such divisive force is being applied to divide a faith group, it is important that this faith group recognise it. It should avoid any monetary, power and position offerings which can be strong temptations. A faith group should sense such threats and try to be united under the teaching of their faith.

9. Supporting fellow believers and seeking support from other faith groups in society:

Once co-existing faith groups know each other very well in terms of their belief and customs, they are equipped better to help each other in time of need. If a faith group supports other groups, it may expect a reciprocal action. This builds harmony among faith groups to react together to odd circumstances.

Examples of this concept can be seen in a number incidents that have occurred in recent history including the tsunamis in Japan and Asia, bombing incidents, and other acts of terrorism that brought different faith groups together. Our recent history is also replete of incidents that show that where there is a lack of this mutual support among faith groups, dangerous situations develop. The violence in India's state of Gujerat in 2002 and sectarian occasional violence in the Muslim world are some examples.

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Dr. M. Hassan Raza is with the Faculty of Engineering, Dalhousie University. He serves as a member on the Board of Directors of Al-Rasoul Islamic Society and an occasional religious speaker. He has strong interest in learning religious diversity, importance of tolerance in co-existence of various religions and interfaith dialogues. He likes to be involved in community volunteering and community building. He received his Ph.D. from Dalhousie University. He also holds Masters degrees in Electrical Engineering, Business Administration and Mass Communications. He is writer of a book, various book chapters, and a number of publications in international Journals and conferences in the areas of management and computer networks.

PANELIST 2

Rabbi Ari Isenberg

Shaar Shalom Congregation

When attending a Mooseheads game, think about what the PA announcer says at the outset: "Please rise and remove your headwear for the singing of our national anthem".

Why do we remove our headwear? Where does that custom come from? Indeed, it is rooted in Christianity. A Christian religious tradition that, in this predominantly Christian country, has found its way into secular cultural norms.



But, as a Jewish person, I cover my head as a sign of respect, humility, and an acknowledgement of the divine (that is, that I am part of a greater humanity, an ecosystem, something greater than myself).

The Jewish People and, by extension, the Jewish faith, has always encountered other cultures and responded accordingly. From the Jewish presence in Biblical EgyptAbraham is promised Israel, but finds a drought there so he goes to Egypt. Jacob's sons sell their brother Joseph to slavery and he ends up in Egypt. The reunion of that family occurs in Egypt. That's how the people of Israel ultimately spend a couple of hundred years

there, in slavery, before God, through Moses, orchestrates the dramatic exodus story we're all familiar with.

When the first Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BCE, scores of Jews leave Israel for Babylonia. Babylonia is modern-day Baghdad, Iraq. There, they learn a new language, Aramaic. One of Judaism's foremost volumes of Jewish wisdom, the Talmud, is written in Aramaic – not in Hebrew.

Then, of course, after the second Temple was destroyed in the year 70 of this era, a majority of the Jewish community started to live in other peoples' homelands, in other countries. We learned to become a minority in someone else's home.

Jewish law prescribes a standard when it comes to this:

“Dinah d'Malchuteh Dinah” means “The law of the land should be adopted by Jewish communities”. This is a Jewish precept, acknowledging the status of a Jewish minority living in a country wherein other religions are the majority. We are to acquiesce, to defer, to the law of the land in many respects. Why? Because we are also commanded to be good neighbours, to love our fellow, to contribute to society, to maintain the peace, to do good work in society.

Here's an example of how Judaism has made an adjustment to adhere to the law of the land:

Burial. In North America, one must be buried in a coffin. This is standard Canadian law and practice. In Judaism, one is not supposed to be buried in any sort of box. The deceased should be wrapped up in a shroud and placed directly into the earth... from dust to dust.

So how did Jewish law adjust so that we could on the one hand adhere to Canadian law while also not blatantly disregarding our religious law? Plain wooden caskets with no metal. So that the entirety of it would be biodegradable.

In the end, perhaps there is some beauty to being a minority. I think Judaism has been enriched significantly by its interaction with other cultures, and I suspect other cultures have benefited from their interaction with the Jewish people.

***Rabbi Ari Isenberg**, originally from Montreal, moved to Halifax to assume the spiritual leadership of Shaar Shalom Congregation. Rabbi Isenberg is dedicated to pastoral work, community leadership and creating meaningful, sacred moments in the lives of his congregation.. He is also active in the city, frequently addressing Halifax's interfaith organizations and guest lecturing at local universities. His contributions include commentaries in newspapers and guest appearances on radio and television. Locally, Rabbi Isenberg serves as Associate Chaplain of Dalhousie University. Nationally, he was elected to sit on the Executive Committee of the Canadian Rabbinic Caucus for the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA). He graduated from the Jewish Theological Seminary with a Masters in Sacred Music and Rabbinic Ordination. While at the seminary, he was named Tanenbaum Fellow of Beth Tzedec (Toronto), Leffell Fellow of AIPAC, and rabbinic intern-in-residence of Masorti France and the Jerusalem Open House.*

PANELIST 3

Dr. S. Swaminathan

Vedanta Ashram

There are Hindus in North America who are either transient or immigrants. The transient ones are mostly students who have come over to study for higher degrees and, possibly, obtain some experience by working in some job.

For example, I met a group of such students recently at a gathering at the Multifaith Centre of Dalhousie University. They discussed with me the possibility of observing a religious worship in the second week of October. Most students are not keen about observing festivals and other religious functions while they are abroad. As regards immigrants, it depends on how they have been brought up in India. If they belonged to families that have a tradition of celebrating all festivals, then they would like to continue that tradition as much as possible when they are abroad.



Let us consider the barriers. To observe any festival publicly or privately we need a remarkable atmosphere. There are individual functions like birthdays, anniversaries, etc. These are observed to a certain extent with friends outside working hours or during weekends. The birthdays of children are definitely observed, since all children look forward to a celebration.

Worship: Many Hindu families have the habit of setting up a *puja* room if this is possible; otherwise, if they happen to live in apartments, they may set apart a suitable portion of a room or shelf, where they have a display of idols and other items needed for worship. If this is not possible, they may attend the Sunday service at the Hindu Temple. We have such a temple on Cork St. The service there is quite unlike what we normally have in India.

Satsangh: This word means a holy gathering. In India, pious religious people attend evening sessions in a temple or other suitable place where a priest gives religious discourses. Such a gathering usually takes place in Halifax at the temple in the evenings, especially on Friday evenings, attended mostly by ladies.

Dress: Men are used to wearing western dress such as pants or suits. A problem arises only for women. Women are used to wearing sarees or salvar-kameez (loose cotton pants and a long shirt-like dress). Since this would look a little strange in Canadian society, women may wear such a dress only for occasions in Hindu gatherings or at the temple. Wearing a red dot on the fore-head is an important custom for married women in India. Many immigrant women observe this as far as possible.

Festivals. The major festivals are: Pongal (Jan.13/14), mostly in South India; Maha Sivarathri (February); April, New Year (14/15) (in some States); October (second or third week, Navarathri, pujas for the trinity consorts);

November (Diwali). These are observed in a restricted fashion; the gala atmosphere with lots of pomp and fun, which is present in India, lacks in the observance abroad.

Likewise there are other faith practices that are carried out in very restricted ways: Fasting is one of them. Pious Hindus fast periodically to keep good health. Vegetarianism is another. Many Hindus are vegetarians. Only a few such people continue to be vegetarians abroad. Rituals are a third. There are quite a few rituals which pious Hindus observe; these vary from region to region from which they hail. These rituals too are observed in a very restricted way in Canada.

Dr. S. Swaminathan is Professor Emeritus in the Department of Mathematics, Statistics and Computing Science at Dalhousie University. He got his Ph.D in India and since, has worked at the Institute Henri Poincare at the University of Paris and the University of Illinois in Chicago before moving to Halifax to join Dalhousie University. He is an active member of the Canadian Mathematical Society and the American Mathematical Society. Dr. Swaminathan is also a voluntary, licensed priest of the Hindu Temple and serves the Hindu community in Nova Scotia. As a licensed priest he helps the Hindu community in Nova Scotia during religious and social functions.

PANEL WORKSHOP –4

Best practices in Interfaith dialogue in our police departments and penitentiaries

PANELIST 1

**Cst Jeffrey Hirsch
RCMP**

ABSTRACT:



In keeping with its overriding goal of ensuring safe homes and safe communities, RCMP National Security Criminal Investigations has established a community outreach program. This program is in line with the RCMP's bias free policing policy. The RCMP is committed to respecting all people and does not target individuals or groups based on racial, ethnic or religious background. Rather, the RCMP focuses on criminal behaviour.

The RCMP strives hard to build positive relations with a variety of diverse communities throughout Nova Scotia. The purpose is to increase

understanding and trust between members of these communities and the RCMP. The protection of Canada and reduction of crime, requires the awareness and involvement of all citizens.

National Security investigations uniquely deal with violence that is often ideologically, politically or religiously motivated. Our National Security Enforcement teams have made it a priority to engage with various cultural and faith groups to open dialogue and build trust.

Across Canada, these relationships built on years of effort, have assisted in several high profile, important terrorism investigations. Due to the community contacts made through outreach efforts, such as the Cultural Diversity Committee in Halifax, national security investigators are often called upon to liaise between communities and the police of jurisdiction.

"Bias Free Policing" does not occur overnight, but is achieved through ongoing, long term effort. It encompasses many activities including recruiting practices, cultural workshops, awareness training and community engagement. It is also a two way street. The police must be open to listening to the communities, and communities must be willing to meet with and engage with the police in a positive way.

Cst Jeff HIRSCH has been a police officer for 15 years serving across Canada. Jeff worked as a uniformed officer in British Columbia, as an Air Marshall in Toronto and uniform policing in Halifax and the Annapolis Valley. Jeff also served for one year as an RCMP trainer with the Afghan National Police in Kandahar, Afghanistan in 2008/09. He is now an investigator with the RCMP National Security Enforcement Section in Halifax investigating national security and terrorism offences. Jeff has been a founding participant in the Partners in Policing Cultural Diversity Committee in Halifax.

PANELIST 2

Staff Sergeant Scott MacDonald
Halifax Regional Police

Good afternoon everyone and thank-you. It is a pleasure for me to not only have the opportunity to attend this conference, but to also be invited to join in as a panelist, and I want to acknowledge Robin Arthur for initiating the invitation.



I first met Robin about a year ago and his hard work and insightfulness in making our city and our province a more welcoming and a more respectful place for all of us was evident from our very first meeting.

So, just what would bring a local police officer to a gathering such as this one on spiritual diversity? Certainly not a crime to be investigated!

I'm going to take a few minutes to share with you a little bit of history and some insights on the challenges and opportunities for the local city police force when it comes to the issue of

diversity, along with some details on the work of my particular office.

As the HRM Public Safety Officer, my responsibilities are a little different from those of the typical police officer. A part of my job is to foster partnerships and relationships which help to address the root causes of criminal behaviour. But let me start with the police perspective.

We are approaching the two hundredth anniversary of what is generally thought of as the origins of modern policing. And credit continues to be bestowed upon one particular individual, Sir Robert Peel, the twice British Prime Minister, who before taking on that role was an interior government minister who helped to establish the Metropolitan Police and Scotland Yard.

Now in his work, Peel identified nine principles of law enforcement. I'm not going to go through all nine, but there are two I would like to touch on. The first of these is that the ability of the police to perform their duties is dependent upon public approval of police existence, actions, behavior and the ability of the police to secure and maintain public respect. And secondly – that the police at all times should maintain a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and the public are the police. The police are the only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the intent of community welfare.

Fast forward a couple of centuries and you will, generally speaking, be able to find a commitment or a goal of most modern police departments to be proportionately representative of the community they police. So it would seem that these two principles, namely that public approval and public respect of the police are essential, and that in reality the police are the public and the public are the police, remain as valid today as they did two centuries ago.

So, how does Halifax Regional Police fare on these fronts? It is a difficult task for any organization to make a fair assessment or measurement of itself. And we are certainly not without concerns—a police officer being charged with a criminal offence, for example, is not a particularly comforting occasion, and we've had a couple of these situations over the years. But we've also had the benefit for several years now, of having annual citizen satisfaction surveys conducted by an independent company, and their analysis is comforting. This past year we learned that:

86 percent of citizens here are mostly or completely satisfied with the quality of policing in their community.

83 percent are mostly or completely satisfied with police visibility and presence.

88 percent are somewhat or completely confident, police will respond to emergencies in a timely and efficient manner.

83 percent are mostly or completely satisfied with the peace and order in local neighbourhoods.

89 percent feel very or completely safe in the community where they live and areas where they shop, work and engage in recreation activities

Now, HRM is a large city, geographically speaking. The day-to-day frontline policing in the urban core falls on the Halifax Regional Police. And

here, we currently have a little over 500 police officers employed. Nearly one-hundred of these officers are females, about a dozen are aboriginal people and we currently have about fifty officers who would describe themselves as racially visible. The compliment of officers here has not always looked this way – in fact, this is a much more representative look to the service than we have ever had.

Policing as we understand it, began in Halifax as a military function. In 1818 the legislature passed an act that provided for a less militaristic day watch and a night watch for the better protection of citizens. We are currently in the midst of reviewing some archives, but it appears that shortly after this development, the first black police officer was employed in Halifax. His name was Septemus Hawkins and he may have initially come to the area as a war of 1812 refugee from Chesapeake, and retired in the Preston area following his career as a police constable.

His presence on the police force was certainly exceptional for the time period and it was also something not repeated for nearly the next century and a half. Some of the folks going through archives recently came across a newspaper clipping from the 1960's which included a photo of former police chief Verdun Mitchell, meeting interestingly, with a local minister by the name of Revered Wrenfred Bryant and with Mr. Rocky Jones, who recently passed away.

The highlight of the newspaper story was the fact that the Chief was looking for applicants from the African Nova Scotian community to join the police force. Not too long afterwards, we had Cst. Layton Johnson join Halifax Police in 1967 and Cst. Sinclair Williams join the Dartmouth Police in 1968. The first female to work as a police officer was Cst. Aileen Mitchell-Halliday who began her career in 1975.

And so some significant progress has been made by HRP in a relatively short period of time in moving towards being more representative of the community. I am personally not prepared however to raise a mission accomplished banner on the subject. Young white males continue to form the vast majority of our applicants to become police officers, yet the HRM population is not made up of only young white males.

There are a number of ongoing efforts by both the department and the public safety office to ensure policing here is relevant and respected. For example, the department has an Equity Diversity Officer –this position was established in April 2004 as a dedicated position to address diversity related issues. Reporting directly to the Chief of Police, this position ensures a co-ordinated response to diversity concerns, which includes, but is not limited to, community outreach, training and recruitment. The Equity Diversity Officer works with other units within the Department as well as with the community to address diversity issues, thereby incorporating both internal and external responsibilities and providing a consistent contact point.

The HRP Diversity Action Team, is an internal mechanism within the Department, committed to promoting and encouraging diversity in the workplace. The primary objective of the Team is to establish a diverse

representation of individuals within HRP committed to promoting and encouraging diversity in the workplace. As “Ambassadors of Diversity,” the team works towards making HRP an inclusive, accepting and respectful force in all areas related to diversity. Committee members may also provide an internal mechanism to identify and address any diversity issues within HRP and recommend resolutions. They also help to plan and deliver an educational session to all officers during annual officer training and re-certifications.

Police officers who work for me in the Public Safety Office are also engaged in a variety of public programs

My officers have, for a number of years now, assisted in a Legal Awareness Program delivered in conjunction with ISIS (Immigrant Settlement and Integration Services). Welcoming new immigrants and informing them on the roles, functions and responsibilities for police in Canada is an important task. As we have already heard, the role and behaviour of police can vary significantly across the globe.

Earlier this summer, a number of my officers assisted in Camp Courage, a week-long experience for teenaged girls which exposes them to not only police, but other emergency response professions including fire services and paramedics. These are jobs where traditionally, not very many females have enrolled.

The community relations unit helps to coordinate an annual Co-op Education Program for high school students. Co-op education allows students to experience a vocation and it is a recognized credit program within the school system. Now while it is not possible to provide a high school student with a police uniform and task them with front-line law enforcement, they do nonetheless have to attend court, prepare research reports and receive instruction on a variety of functions within the police service.

I am assuming that some of the attendees here today are already familiar with the Partners in Policing Cultural Diversity Committee. This committee was set up two years ago to provide a forum for discussion, education and identification of issues of concern between the two local police services and a wide variety of culturally diverse communities in HRM and there are regular learning opportunities for all parties on the committee.

I would be remiss in the company of my fellow panelists if I failed to also take a moment to mention the Chaplains Program within the police service. Police officers get to witness and work amongst all aspects of our society. Some of these experiences are wonderful, but many times officers are witness to some terrible sights and events. We currently have three chaplains who are regularly called upon sometimes at ridiculous hours, to assist families facing a tragedy and also to support the officers who are called upon in their duties to respond to such events. They are a tremendous help on these calls, as well for our own families when we have a tragedy within the police community.

I hope I’ve been able to enlighten you a little bit on some police perspectives and experiences. And I want to finish off with one more of those Peel principles, which I think sums up my particular goals as your public

safety officer. Peel declared that the true test of police efficiency is not in the actions taken to respond to crime and disorder, but it is in the absence of crime or disorder. I believe that education, recreation, a spiritual focus and a respect for others are amongst the most powerful tools in preventing crime and violence.

Thank you again for this opportunity and I look forward to having some further discussion.

Halifax Regional Police Staff Sergeant R. Scott MacDonald is HRM's Public Safety Officer. In his role, Scott works to build partnerships with government, social agencies, educational institutions, business associations and a variety of community and citizen groups in an effort to provide a coordinated and holistic approach to addressing root causes of crime and enhance public safety in the Halifax Regional Municipality. Scott holds an MBA degree from Dalhousie University, and sits on a variety of boards and committees including the HRM Pension Committee and the Halifax Regional Police Association. Before taking on the HRM Public Safety Officer role in the fall of 2012, his policing experience included uniformed patrol work, community and school officer duties, and a variety of supervisor positions. On behalf of Halifax Regional Police, Scott was amongst the founding members of the HRM Partners in Policing Cultural Diversity Committee, and he is always keen to engage in dialogues promoting understanding and safety.

PANELIST 3

Sr. Pat Wilson

Community Chaplain

Halifax Community Chaplaincy Society

In his Introduction to the book: *Religious Roots of Restorative Justice*, Michael Hadley states, "Justice is peace, Shalom, Salaam; it is a peace that heals wounds, removes fear, and is beyond all human manufacture and convention." [p.6] I believe that this is a fine starting point on the topic of our conference today.



In Canada, we are living in a society that is leaning toward the highly punitive in regard to criminal justice and incarceration. Our Government, desiring to realize the ideal that, "the protection of society is the paramount consideration," passed the Safe Streets and Communities Act (Bill C-10) in March 2012. In the name of public safety, we now have stricter sentences, mandatory minimum sentences, expansion of categories of offenders eligible for continued detention after statutory release and emphasis on rights "lawfully removed or restricted."

Public attitudes toward those who commit crimes and are incarcerated

are hard and often are fired by fear. Allow me to illustrate by telling a story.

One day when sitting in a hospital waiting room, I watched as the atmosphere in the room changed from individuals quietly reading and conversing, to a crowd that was ready to pummel anyone who was in conflict with the law. The people in the room were transformed by a comment on an article on the front page of the morning paper. A young woman who had fled the province three years prior to this day had returned to serve her sentence. Her desire was to make restitution for a painful and foolish act of her youth. She knew it was time to 'serve her time' and to begin again to create a meaningful and responsible life.

A person in the waiting room said: "She only got three months; she is getting off easily and not being punished enough. They should put all of 'them' behind bars for life and throw away the key!" In a matter of minutes, the reserved tenor of the room was transformed into that of lynch mob frenzy. As this happened, I sat in the corner of the room, looking at the newspaper. My thoughts were jumbled. Should I speak? Should I let them know another side of the story? I decided that I might not be the best response to the situation as I could be the next victim of their rancor.

Two days later, I was leading a group session. As the women introduced themselves and told their stories, I realized that the person reported in the newspaper was there. She was not brazen, hard hearted or light hearted in serving her sentence. In fact, she was devastated, penitent, confused and broken. She was very involved in the process of the restoration of her personhood. She was deeply experiencing horror at what she could do. She was filled with shame for what she had done and had a desperate need to repair the broken threads of her life and the lives of those she had hurt.

Our group that day focused on admission of wrong doing, expression of guilt and acceptance of responsibility for our actions. There was a real yearning to find ways to repair the damage of broken relationships. How I wished that the two groups of people could come together, meet one another as persons and talk at the level of the heart.

I tell this story to illustrate how fear and misperception can shape our lives. What would our community look like if we all were willing to focus less on the ways of punitive justice and more on the ways of restorative justice? What if we were to look at justice as a way to change perceptions, structures, persons and communities? Can we engage in a spiritual process of coming to grips with who we are, what we've done and move into repairing the broken fabric of relationships among individuals and in society?

Our faith traditions offer ways of speaking peace, Shalom, Salaam while acknowledging the deep rifts within lives and society. They form us in ways of transforming love – sometimes a hard love that calls for a change of heart and ways of living. How can people and communities of faith offer examples of forgiveness and healing? Do we model how to take responsibility for our actions? Do we see and act on the need for the restoration of dignity and peace - for individuals and communities; victims and offenders; families and faith communities? I don't doubt that some might encourage us to look at

ourselves and our traditions. How many wars and personal tragedies have occurred “in the name of faith /God?

Something I have learned as a chaplain in the community working with men and women returning from a time of incarceration is that the need for someone to speak to their hearts and spirits is essential. Who better to do that than people of faith? I’m not speaking of proselytizing; I’m speaking of witnessing by presence and word to the conviction that right relationships can be restored – because we have experienced this in our own lives in the ways God works in us. If we are willing to enter this process, we must be ready for change ourselves.

Can we create circles of support, accountability and reintegration that will enable some people to start life over? By reaching out to victims, families and communities as well as to offenders, might we begin a change in our homes and neighborhoods that chips away at the crime and fear that surrounds them? Some might call this naive and unrealistic, but I have seen it work in real women and men – one at a time, in small and large ways.

Will this work for everyone? Maybe not, but perhaps we can be advocates of a common good that will spread justice in a way that touches the spirit of the law and the persons who are challenged to live it. I’m willing to give it a chance. It is my hope that you and your faith communities will do the same.

***Patricia Wilson** sc, a Sister of Charity, holds a BA (Sociology) from Queens College, MA Liturgical Studies, University of Notre Dame, and a certificate in Spiritual Direction from the Vincentian Spirituality Center. She has ministered in a variety of pastoral settings, offering workshops, directed retreats, days of reflection and spirituality programs. She served as parish liturgical coordinator, pastoral administrator of a city parish and Director of Liturgy in two Roman Catholic Dioceses. After six years on the Congregational Leadership team of the Sisters of Charity, Pat ministered in the Archdiocese of Halifax as Associate Director of Koinonia: Formation for Pastoral Ministry Program, Chaplain for Religious Education Directors and Chaplain at Mount Saint Vincent University. Currently, she is Community Chaplain with the Halifax Community Chaplaincy Society in HRM. Her volunteer work includes the Board of Concilio Prison Ministry, the Community Justice Society, and 11 years with the women at the CNSCF in Burnside.*

PANELIST 4

HUGH KIRKEGAARD.

Regional Chaplain
Correctional Services Canada

ABSTRACT: Prisons are a microcosm of the wider societies in which they are situated. They reflect a diversity of cultures, classes, races and religions, though the poor and some minority groups are often overrepresented. In Canada, the over-representation of Aboriginal persons is well understood. The Charter requires that the spiritual and religious needs of all those in the care of the Correctional Service of Canada be respected.



These needs have been addressed in various ways in recent years as prison populations have grown in diversity and complexity. Traditional Christian religious expressions have diminished as increasingly diverse and secular populations have grown.

This diversity has presented challenges both to correctional institutions and faith communities. Chaplains have been the traditional agents of dialogue between these structures; within faith communities struggling to respond to the needs of their adherents caught up in the criminal justice system; and facilitating the involvement of spiritual and religious traditions in prison settings.

A largely Christian focus has given way to the presence of representatives from Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh, Hindu and Earth-based traditions and the varying expressions within these groups. Services have been provided by volunteers and chaplains from these traditions. Recent developments have led to a shift from primarily Christian chaplains to the possibility of trained professional representatives of varying traditions providing services to persons from all faiths in an effort to create a truly interfaith approach.

Rev. Hugh Kirkegaard is the Regional Chaplain for the Atlantic Region with the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC). Prior to moving to Nova Scotia in 2008 he served as Regional Chaplain for Ontario and Nunavut for eight years. He has served as National Chaplaincy Coordinator for Circles of Support and Accountability (CoSA) for released offenders, and also as Community Chaplain in Toronto, where he was involved with the founding of CoSA. An ordained Baptist minister, Hugh is affiliated with First Baptist Church Halifax. He has been involved in correctional chaplaincy since 1978, when he began working as a volunteer in Dorchester Penitentiary. He has served as a prison chaplain in Dorchester, Springhill, Atlantic and Westmorland Institutions and as University Chaplain at Mount Allison. Educated at Mount Allison, Regent College, and Acadia Divinity College, Hugh has also taught in the Restorative Justice Program at Queen's Theological College in Kingston, Ontario.

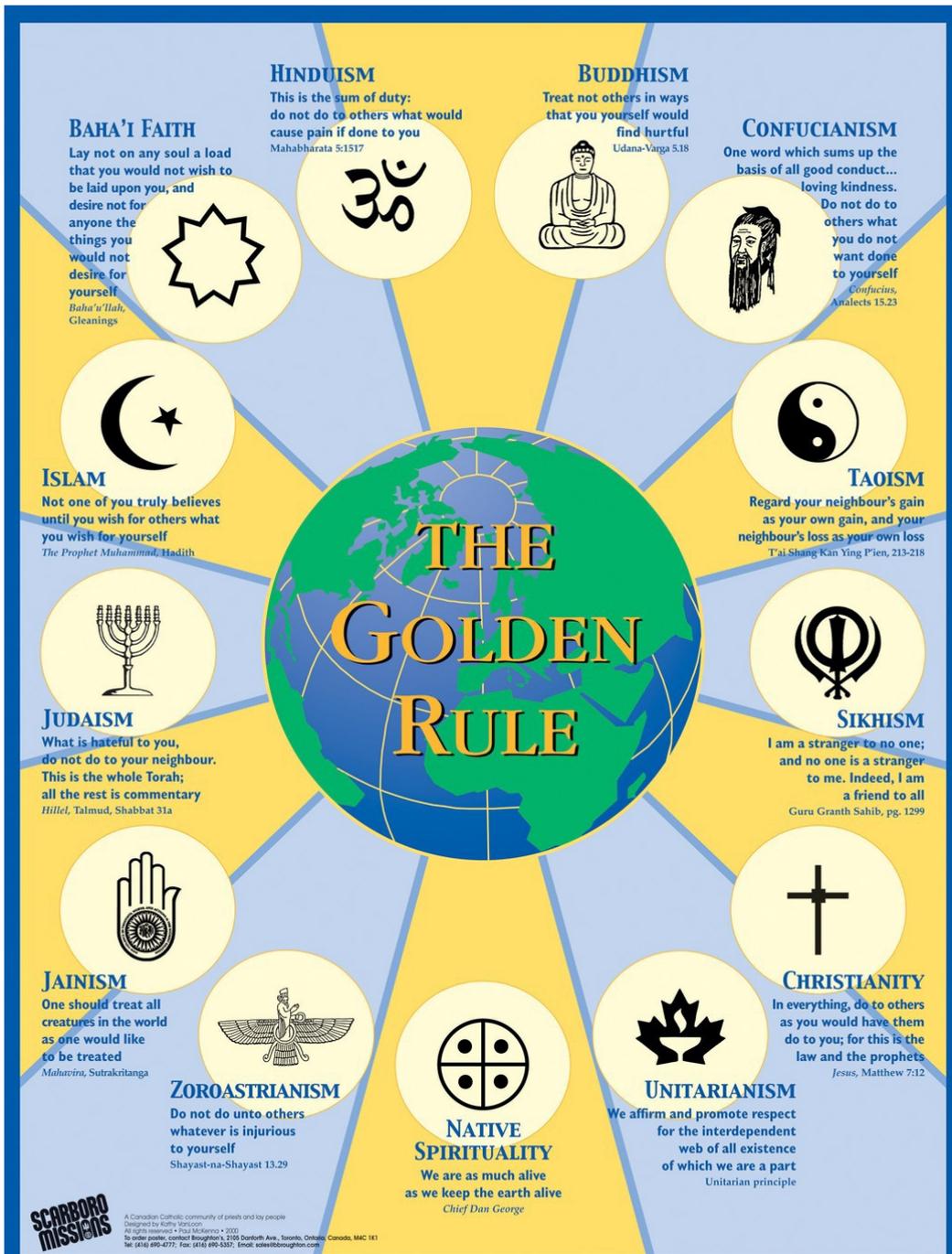
Multicultural Association of Nova Scotia

The October 2013 spiritual diversity conference was hosted by The Multicultural Association of Nova Scotia (MANS). The organization is a voluntary, non-profit entity that reflects the needs of the community for multicultural education, advocacy and information-sharing.

It's aims are to carry out the following: 1. Develop and/or influence existing multicultural policy to promote equality 2. Create a sense of belonging and respect for all cultures 3. Influence and /or initiate the development of all relevant legislation so that it reflects multiculturalism 4. Educate all Nova Scotians on multiculturalism by developing and/or delivering multicultural programs; acting as a clearing house for multicultural issues, information, and services. 5. Advocate for broad multicultural issues

MANS is a collaborative and inclusive organization of interested individuals, community groups, businesses, and governments focused on being a catalyst for multiculturalism in the province of Nova Scotia

It is a volunteer driven, charitable, and culturally competent organization. In pursuit of its mission and to achieve its vision, MANS will: 1. Build awareness in Nova Scotia around multicultural issues. 2. Recognize, promote and celebrate multicultural successes throughout Nova Scotia. 3. Advocate and champion multiculturalism so that policies and practices within government and other organizations reflect a high level of cultural competency. 4. Promote tools and resources that people and organizations can use to identify and respond to emerging multicultural issues.



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