

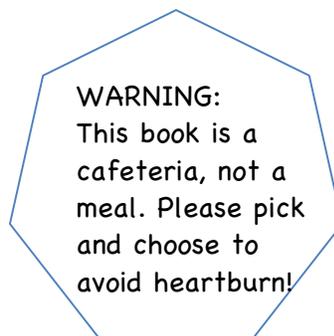
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INTRODUCTION

Toward Tolerance within Religious Community: Developing a Christian Understanding

Religious tolerance is an ambiguous term. For some it encompasses the idea of allowing freedom of religious faith expression in a pluralistic society, be it Judaism, Christianity, Islam or other religious faith. For others, it is a term to describe how a specific religious community deals with varying positions within its own walls. Many religious organizations today are struggling along the liberal/conservative divide over topics such as homosexuality, gender roles, ecumenism, and racism, and these struggles are creating irreconcilable divides within congregations. It is the focus of this project to address tolerance within a faith community. The lessons learned from addressing divides within will help in building bridges to those outside.

Os Guinness posits the incivility in our social system will be the end of western civilization as we know it. James Hunter identifies new alliances which cut across religious communities rather than remain within a religious community, further deepening the chasm in our churches and society. These trends result in polarized positions that refuse to find common ground, threaten our society and undermine the mission and message of Christianity.

America is one of the most religious countries, one of the most religiously diverse countries, yet one of the most polarized countries in the world. In the past, religious community identification held individuals together in spite of varying views. The bond of the group was strong enough and deep enough to allow varying opinions within the group. However, since the 1950s and 60s, there has been a move for like-minded people to collaborate to promote a shared agenda regardless of religious affiliation, such as, conservative Protestants working with conservative Catholics. Because of this inherent desire for consensus, self selection drives us to seek out those that share our views and results in rejection of those with whom we differ. We self-select into polarized groups, creating communities of similarity that reject varying views and never have to listen to other points of view. What trends in society move us down this trajectory, and what can religious communities do to change this trend?

In some of our religious communities, tolerance is equated with sin. Yet, in any setting, it would be very difficult to find consensus on many issues, either theological or cultural. Given the diversity of people inherent in any organization, tolerance is at the core of any healthy group dynamic. The incivility of our language and actions, polarization into tribes that only accept those who are like us, and dysfunctional dialogue between the tribes has brought society and our churches to the brink of a deep chasm that must be bridged.

A review of religious and social trends in American history will unearth that this is not a new phenomenon. It has been at play since the Puritans settled in Massachusetts. As society faced cultural upheaval with events or movements like the Civil War, slavery,

women's rights and civil rights, this incivility, polarization and dysfunctional dialogue has taken control of the public square. Rather than hearing and understanding the other side and then working to compromise, mean-spiritedness and win-lose paradigms have become the norm. Yet, in the past, these social crises have been overcome, and the novel American experiment has continued, ever strengthened by the successful resolution of the conflict.

Encouraged by the knowledge that the conflict we currently see in culture and religion is not new or completely unique, we have the opportunity and obligation to find a way to bring tolerance back into our communities. But how do we reach out to those with whom we have disagreement and remain honest to our convictions? What role does fear play in our reactions to individuals or organizations we don't understand? What is the way forward?

The resources listed below will provide a breadth of information for understanding and working through the issue of tolerance. Some resources approach the problem from a hard science view with reams of studies to support findings; others approach the topic of tolerance from a philosophical or theological position. Each approach offers insights concerning how we got here and how to move forward. However, there are two concepts that are seen as foundational to this topic and present opportunities for further exploration: humility and bindings.

The first concept is taken from Micah 6:8 – *“He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”* For the topic of religious tolerance, the theme of humility is the key theme. We are not God; any position we hold just might be wrong. So let us humble ourselves and treat each other with respect, realizing other views just might be right.

The second concept is the idea referred to as “bindings.” A “binding” occurs when you discover that people with whom you have good relationships hold different points of views on certain topics. *Example: You and your favorite uncle disagree on a topic. The strength of the friendship between the two of you reframes the disagreement in more congenial terms. You know your uncle was a good person before you realized he held viewpoints that are so troubling to you. Therefore, because of the preexisting relationship, you are more willing to consider the merits of his viewpoint.* This binding of relationships is critical in breaking down barriers and helping us frame our disagreements in more respectful ways.

We would value your feedback regarding how you used these resources. Please let us know what additional resources you have discovered in your studies. Please contact Rev. Dee Ivy at deecharlie@msn.com or 505-265-4123.

RESOURCES

Bible Studies

1. Community: Building Relationships Within God's Family, Bill Hybels, (2005). Zondervan. www.zondervan.co (\$7.99)

This is a six-week study on building relationships within the church community.

2. Lasting Legacy: making a difference with my life. Life Connections – Serendipity House. www.lifeway.com (\$13.95)

A thirteen-week Bible study for small or mid-size groups, to build Christian community.

3. What Do Other Faiths Believe?, A Study of World Religions, Paul Stroble (2003). Abingdon Press. (\$8.99) <http://www.Christianbook.com>

“What do other religions believe about sin, forgiveness, salvation, the future beyond death, ethics, and the nature of the Divine? How do their beliefs agree with or differ from those in the Christian faith? How can Christians accept and respect religious freedom and diversity and, at the same time, be faithful to biblical Christianity?” A seven-week study.

UMC Teachings

1. Social Principles of the United Methodist Church, United Methodist Communications (2009). 2005-2008. <http://www.umc.org/>.

Page 44. (The World Community) “God’s world is one world. The unity now being thrust upon us by technological revolution has far outrun our moral and spiritual capacity to achieve a stable world. The enforced unity of humanity, increasingly evident on all levels of life, presents the Church as well as all people with problems that will not wait for answer: injustice, war, exploitation, privilege, population international ecological crisis, proliferation of arsenals of nuclear weapons, development of transnational business organizations that operate beyond the effective control of any governmental structure, and the increase of tyranny in all its forms. This generation must find viable answers to these and related questions if humanity is to continue on this earth. We commit ourselves as a Church to the achievement of a world community that is a fellowship of persons who honestly love one another. We pledge ourselves to seek the meaning of gospel in all issues that divide people and threaten the growth of world community.”

Discussion Questions

- How do we work, love and worship with those whom we have serious disagreement?
- How do we accept someone without condoning their behavior?
- How do we reach out to those with whom we have disagreement and remain honest to our convictions?
- How does fear drive our positions and responses?
- What role does trust play in agreeing to disagree? How does trust allow us to move beyond fear?
- In dealing with our relationships to others, how does fear and trust interact with the confidence we have in our relationship with God?
- Can I have compromise? If so, on which issues?
- How do I balance evangelism and tolerance? Can you think of Bible verses or parables that address this?

Books

1. A History of God: The 4,000 Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, Karen Armstrong (1994). Ballentine Books.

This searching, profound comparative history of the three major monotheistic faiths fearlessly illuminates the sociopolitical ground in which religious ideas take root, blossom and mutate. Armstrong, a British broadcaster, commentator on religious affairs and former Roman Catholic nun, argues that Judaism, Christianity and Islam each developed the idea of a personal God, which has helped believers to mature as full human beings. Yet Armstrong also acknowledges that the idea of a personal God can be dangerous, encouraging us to judge, condemn and marginalize others. Recognizing this, each of the three monotheisms, in their different ways, developed a mystical tradition grounded in a realization that our human idea of God is merely a symbol of an ineffable reality. To Armstrong, modern, aggressively righteous fundamentalists of all three faiths represent “a retreat from God.”

2. The Case for Civility, O. Guinness (2008). Grand Rapids, MI, Baker Academic.

Guinness takes on the contemporary threat of the excesses of the Religious Right and the secular Left, arguing that we must find a middle ground between privileging one religion over another and attempting to make all public expression of faith illegal. If we do not do this, Guinness contends, western civilization as we know it will die.

Guinness makes a case that the United States, due to its history and constitutional foundation is the best hope for the world to see how to develop a civil public square. He compares the pressure to develop a sacred public square and a naked public and offers a third alternative of a civil public square.

3. Seeing Gray in a World of Black and White, Adam Hamilton (2008).

One solution to the culture and political wars that hasn't yet been tried, suggests Adam Hamilton, is for thinking persons of faith to model for the rest of the country a richer, more thoughtful conversation on the political, moral, and religious issues that divide us. Hamilton, senior pastor of the largest United Methodist congregation in the United States provides blueprints to loving Christians who find it difficult to discuss polarizing subjects by searching for gray areas that allow meaningful discussion.

4. Living Buddha, Living Christ, Hanh, Thich Nhat (2007) Riverhead Trade Books

Buddha and Christ, perhaps the two most pivotal figures in the history of humankind, each left behind a legacy of teachings and practices that have shaped the lives of billions of people over two millennia. If they were to meet on the road today, what would each think of the other's spiritual views and practices? In this classic text for spiritual seekers, Thich Nhat Hanh explores the crossroads of compassion and holiness at which the two traditions meet, and he reawakens our understanding of both. **About the Author:** A rare combination of mystic, scholar, and activist, Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh is one of the most beloved Buddhist teachers in the West. Excellent book for strengthening one's own Christianity while learning about Buddhism.

4. Culture Wars: the struggle to define America, James Davison Hunter (1991). Basic Books

Abortion, funding for the arts, women's rights, gay rights, court-packing – the list of controversies that divide our nation runs long and each one cuts deep. This book shows that these issues are not isolated from one another but are part of the fabric of conflict which constitutes nothing short of a struggle over the meaning of America. The contemporary culture war's foundation is a profound realignment in American culture which cuts across established moral and religious communities

5. The Faith Club: A Muslim, A Christian, a Jew – Three Women Searching for Understanding, Idliby, et al (2007)

Three women of diverse religious backgrounds set out to write a children's book emphasizing the connections among Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In working on the project, tensions quickly arose yet the women persevered and became personally enriched by the experience that they have inspired a movement to begin Faith Clubs focusing on intentional interfaith dialogue.

6. Azim's Bardo – A Father's Journey from Murder to Forgiveness, Azim Khamisa (1998) Rising Star Press

A true account of how a father (Muslim) became friends with the grandfather (a Christian) of his son's murderer and established the Tariq Khamisa Foundation through education of nonviolent solutions to problems to prevent future killings by teens.

7. Without Buddah, I Could Not Be a Christian, Paul Knitter (2009) One World Books

A moving story of one man's quest for truth, this is also a ground-breaking work of inter-religious dialogue, comparative theology and social ethics... the rarest combination of theological acumen, humility and humor. A must read for anyone who wants to renew their faith and rediscover their humanity in intimate dialogue with the faiths of others.

"This is a fascinating book... accessible to anyone in the pew, not without a touch of quiet humor... a book to be read and reflected upon." –Journal of Theological Reflection

"This book is an excellent survey of the possibilities for Buddhist-Christian contact." – Anglican Theological Review

8. Amish Grace: How Forgiveness Transcended Tragedy, Kraybill, et al, (2007), Jossey-Bass

The authors of this book retell the recent tragedy of the killings of five Amish children in Nickel Mines, PA as a centerpiece for a study on forgiveness based upon Amish tradition. The book provides the scriptural bases for forgiveness as Christian practice and forgiveness within the local Christian community. While the book provides an in depth examination of Amish forgiveness the reader cannot help but question why forgiveness is not a practice sincerely exercised in other Christian traditions. The book provides a platform to showcase with admiration and appreciation for the counter-cultural Amish which have a proven record for peaceful coexistence. A study guide is available for this book for discussion groups and Sunday school classes.

9. The Impossible Will Take a Little While, a Citizen's Guide to Hope in a Time of Fear, Paul Rogat Loeb, editor (2004), Basic Books

This is a collection of essays and stories that range across nations, eras and political movements. From international legends Nelson Mandela and Vaclav Havel, to American icons Cornel West and Alice Walker, to the untiring, unheralded activists working for peace, justice and the health of our planet, these writers explore a path of heart-felt community involvement that leads beyond despair to compassion and hope.

10. Getting to the Heart of Interfaith – The Eye-Opening, Hope-Filled Friendship of a Pastor, a Rabbi, & A Sheikh, Mackenzie, et al, (2009), Skylight Paths Publishing

This book is a personal journey to interfaith collaboration that offers hope for an inclusive and healing way of being together in the world. The avenues visited are: the five stages of interfaith journey, the power of our stories, the core of our traditions, the promises and problems of our traditions, and new dimensions of spiritual identity. This

text gives concrete examples of practical actions, readings and discussion questions toward a revolutionary spirit of healing.

11. A Generous Orthodoxy, Brian D. McLaren, (2004), Zondervan

This book assists the typical denominational Christian in learning the positive aspects and contributions of a large number of denominations and movements which make up the greater Christian church in America. It is with an open and nonjudgmental eye that McLaren makes sense of what appears to be a very fractured and splintered situation among America's churches. If we understand, acknowledge and appreciate the differences that make up each individual denomination we find ourselves able to embrace the common ground that binds us together as Christians. It is then that we are able to work together in religious tolerance among ourselves and then to the tolerance of other religious traditions. The book is complete with suggested discussion questions suitable for discussion groups and Sunday School classes.

12. Eerdmans' Handbook to Christianity in America, Mark Noll et al. editors, (1983), Eerdmans Publishing

American Christianity, like the nation itself, is by nature enigmatic, highly distinctive yet remarkably diverse. The editors of this volume have sought to capture its freshness and vitality, its pragmatism and idealism, its traditions and innovations. The book tells the story of individual Christian leaders, the organized church, and popular movements. It is about Christians as believers and Christians as behavers; it speaks of their faith, their culture, and the nation to which they belonged.

13. Bowling Alone, R. Putnam (2000), Simon & Schuster.

Putnam shows how we have become increasingly disconnected from family, friends, neighbors, and our democratic structures-- and how we may reconnect. Putnam warns that our stock of social capital - the very fabric of our connections with each other, has plummeted, impoverishing our lives and communities.

Putnam draws on evidence including nearly 500,000 interviews over the last quarter century to show that we sign fewer petitions, belong to fewer organizations that meet, know our neighbors less, meet with friends less frequently, and even socialize with our families less often. We're even bowling alone. More Americans are bowling than ever before, but they are not bowling in leagues. Putnam shows how changes in work, family structure, age, suburban life, television, computers, women's roles and other factors have contributed to this decline.

14. American Grace, R. Putnam and D. Campbell (2010) Simon & Schuster

From the 1950s and 1960s until the early 2000s, there has been a dramatic shift on the religious landscape. Religious communities at one time united varying positions against outside influences are now aligning along the conservative/liberal divide across varying

religious communities. Putnam and Campbell explore how the American religious community at the same time can be more diverse and more polarized.

"This massive book eschews the narrow, monographic approach to sociological study in favor of an older, more useful model: the sweeping chronicle of national change over time. Harvard professor Putnam (*Bowling Alone*) and his University of Notre Dame coauthor Campbell (*Why We Vote*) argue two apparently contradictory theses persuasively: first, that a 'new religious fault line' exists in America, a deep political polarization that has transcended denominationalism as the greatest chasm in religious life; and second, that the culture (especially its younger generation) is becoming so much more accepting of diversity that thesis #1 will not tear America apart. The bulk of the book explores in detail cultural developments--the boom of evangelicals in the 1970s and 1980s, largely concluded in the early 1990s; the rise of feminism in the pews; the liberalization of attitudes about premarital sex and homosexuality, especially among the youngest generations; and what may prove to be the most seismic shift of all: the dramatic increase of 'nones,' or people claiming no institutional religious affiliation. Putnam and Campbell (with their researcher, Garrett) have done the public a great service in not only producing their own mammoth survey of American religion but also drawing from many prior statistical studies, enabling readers to track mostly gradual change over time. (Oct. 5)" *Publishers Weekly (Starred Review)*

15. Changing the Conversation: A Third Way for Congregations, Robinson, A. (2008), Eerdmans Publishing

Changing the culture of organizations is about changing the conversation. Offering new language, introducing different topic and providing alternate ways of framing issues and situations is a key component of change management. Robinson offers a way to set aside the dominate language of consumerism and scarcity and discover ourselves in a complex narrative of receiving, giving and abundance. Making progress on the challenges before us is about changing the conversation.

16. Whose Community? Which Interpretation? Philosophical Hermeneutics for the Church, M. Westphal (2009), Baker Academic

The hermeneutical circle consists of presuppositions and interpretations that mutually determine each other. This means our interpretations are relative to the presuppositions that we bring with us to the task of interpretation and that we have inherited and internalized from the traditions that have formed us. Better understanding of the role of theological and philosophical hermeneutics in our interpretations will serve well in offering clarity to disagreements and humility to our positions, allowing us to listen the others interpretations and above all, to listen to the Holy Spirit.

Films and Videos

1. God in America: How Religious Liberty Shaped America (2010). Frontline: American Experience Series. www.pbs.org/godinamerica/

For those who know that in America, religion matters, and for those who wish it didn't matter so much, comes GOD IN AMERICA, a sweeping history of how religious faith has shaped America. Interweaving documentary footage, historical dramatizations, and interviews with religious historians, this documentary series is an in-depth exploration of the historical role of religion in the public life of the United States.

This also has a study guide to direct a 6-week study. It can be found at www.pbs.org/godinamerica/art/studyguide.pdf

Websites

1. *Voice of the Martyrs*

P. O. Box 443

Bartlesville, OK 74005-0443

www.persecution.com

2. *Reconciling Ministries Network*

3801 North Keeler Avenue, Third Floor

Chicago, IL 60641-3007

773.736.5526

www.rmnblog.org

www.rmnetwork.org

Articles

1. "Religious Freedom." FaithLink: Connecting Faith and Life 16(20):6, A. Joyner. and E Alsgaard (2010).

Controversy over a planned mosque near the World Trade Center site raises the issue of religious freedom. The article offers background material from historical America and contemporary America that encourages discussion of our current views on religious freedom.

Go to www.cokesbury.com and enter article into search.

2. “Islamophobia and Homophobia.” The Times op-ed, Robert Wright (Oct 26, 2010).

In looking at the current trends in today’s society, one gets the impression that part of the problem is a kind of “scriptural determinism”. In all three of the Abrahamic faiths, sacred scripture is indeed powerful, but a new book “American Grace” (see above) casts doubt on the power of intolerant scripture and discusses how relationships allow us to bridge differing viewpoints.

Go to : www.opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/10/26/islamaphobia-and-homophobia/

Local Speakers and Experts

Albuquerque Mennonite Church
Anita Amstutz
1330 Girard NE
Albuquerque, NM 87106
505.254.1824
pastor@abqmenonnite.org

Albuquerque Interfaith
Mr. Kipp Bobroff
6001 Marble Ave NE #11
Albuquerque, NM 87110-6636
505.268.3991

The Center for Action and Contemplation
1823 Five Points Rd. SW
Albuquerque, NM 87106
505.268.9557

Albuquerque Center for Peace and Justice
202 Harvard SE
Albuquerque, NM 87106
505.268.9557

Holocaust & Intolerance Museum of New Mexico
ATTN: Lyn Berner
616 Central Avenue SW
Albuquerque, NM 87102
505.247.0606
<http://www.nmholocaustmuseum.org/>

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

Your group may want to visit a religious congregation about which you would like to learn more. You may also want to request a speaker to come to your group and answer questions. The following are possibilities:

1. Islamic Center of New Mexico

1100 Yale Blvd. SE
Albuquerque, NM 87106
505.265.1450

www.islamnm.org

Excellent website – tours of the mosque can be arranged and speakers on various topics on Islam can be scheduled.

Altaf Farooqi – Outreach
Abass Akhil- Public Affairs

2. Albuquerque Bahai Center

5700 Ouray NW
Albuquerque, NM 87120
505.232.2424

www.abqbahai.org

3. Buddhist Center of New Mexico

143 Madison NE
Albuquerque, NM 87108
505.256.7520

4. Hindu Temple Society of New Mexico

8418 Zuni SE
Albuquerque, NM 87108
505.508.4360

www.htsnm.org

5. New Mexico Temple (Latter Day Saints)

10301 San Francisco NE
Albuquerque, NM 87122
505.822.5150

<http://lds.org/temples/main/0,11204,1912-1-109-0,00.html>

6. Congregation Albert (Reform)

Rabbi Howard A. Kosovske
3800 Louisiana NE
Albuquerque, NM 87110
505.883.1818

www.congregationalburt.org

7. Congregation B'nai Israel (Conservative)

Rabbi Arthur Flicker
4401 Indian School NE
Albuquerque, NM 87110
505.266.0155
www.bnaiisrael-nm.org

8. Congregation Nahalat Shalom (Renewal/Independent)

Rabbi Deborah Brin
3606 Rio Grande Blvd. NW
Albuquerque, NM 87107
505.343.8227
www.nahalatshalom.org

9. St. George Greek Orthodox Church

Rev. Father Conan Gill
308 High Street
Albuquerque, NM 87102
505.247.9411
<http://stgeorge.nm.goarch.org/>