



Religion & ETHICS

NEWSWEEKLY

VIEWER'S GUIDE

With Essays, Discussion Questions and Resources on
America's Changing Religious & Ethical Landscape

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Left: The Western Wall, Jerusalem

Right Top: Prayer inside Dome of Rock, Jerusalem,
last day of Ramadan

Right Bottom: Palm Sunday parade, Nazareth

David Holloway/APIX



Bob Abernethy, Host and Executive Editor of Religion & Ethics Newsweekly.

Dear Reader and Viewer,

In the weeks and months since September 11, some observers have noted a new spirit of seriousness and reflection in American society. The mood and the questions that linger all seem to add up to a renewed recognition of the primary role religion plays in the world at large, in American life, and in binding up the nation's wounds.

Against that backdrop, the essays in this edition of the *Viewer's Guide*, a companion to the fifth season of *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*, explore various aspects of world religions as a fundamental force in human experience — in how we think about capital punishment; in the causes and consequences of war; in the growing presence and influence of Latino faith communities in the U.S.; in the spiritual significance of pilgrimage and sacred journey (two of the oldest-known religious activities); and in how we remember the dead.

Television has the capacity to convey the experience of religion with great power and immediacy — to show how religion is practiced, to explore its role in the daily experience of living, and to chart its influence in world affairs. The most interesting stories of our time continue to emerge at the intersection of the secular and the spiritual, and religion is worthy of the most penetrating reporting and analysis we can bring to it.

Has religion changed since September 11? Have you? In the months to come, we at *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* will continue doing what we do best — reporting on the news, events and stories about religion and ethics that might help answer these questions. Please join us.

Yours truly,

Bob Abernethy
Executive Editor

Arnold Labaton
Executive Producer

ABOUT THE TELEVISION PROGRAM

Hailed as “one of the most thoughtful and satisfying magazine series on the air” (*Minneapolis Star Tribune*) and “the best spot on the television landscape to take in a broad view of the spiritual dimension of American life” (*Christian Science Monitor*), *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* has been breaking ground in news reporting since its national debut on PBS in September 1997. Hosted by veteran journalist Bob Abernethy, the acclaimed series, winner of the prestigious Sigma Delta Chi Award, covers top stories in religion and ethics news, focusing on significant events, controversies, people and practices in all religions, all denominations and all expressions of faith. Through live reports from the show’s studios in Washington, D.C., and taped reports from the field, the program seeks out leading experts for the essential ideas of each issue and, in a regular feature on “Belief and Practice,” explores the different ways people experience and express their faiths. Newsmakers, scholars, historians, journalists and religious leaders also provide their perspectives on the news, and additional features offer lively and thoughtful views on religion, ethics, culture and society.

ABOUT THE VIEWER’S GUIDE

The *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly Viewer’s Guide* is designed to provide material for further thought and discussion about issues related to the series. The guide may be photocopied and distributed to adult education organizations, community groups, teachers and individual viewers. To request a *Viewer’s Guide*, please e-mail us at guiderequest@thirteen.org or write to *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly Viewer’s Guide*, Thirteen/WNET, P.O. Box 245, Little Falls, NJ 07424-0245.

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WEB SITE

Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly Online, the Web companion to the television series, includes full transcripts of each episode’s major segments. In addition, full transcripts of each program are available during the week following broadcast, along with other features such as weekly polls, a site of the month, a religious calendar, a searchable archive, links to related Web sites, online-only interviews, recommended resources and reading lists, expert commentary and analysis, and selected audio and video from the show. The site also provides an online version of the *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly Viewer’s Guide* at www.pbs.org/religion or www.thirteen.org/religion.

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Memorial outside of Tillary Street fire station, New York, September 2001

RELIGIOUS VOICES AT GROUND ZERO

by Missy Daniel

Three months after the attacks of September 11, a group of 47 residents from Rochester, New York, made an interfaith journey to Ground Zero. The trip was organized by the Greater Rochester Community of Churches, one of a half-dozen ecumenical and interfaith efforts that have thrived in Rochester for more than a decade.

Since the attacks, says Rabbi Alan Katz of Temple Sinai in Brighton, New York, “I have had a huge hole inside me. To see the vastness of what was no longer there opened the hole even deeper.”

At Ground Zero he took out his prayer book and read from the Psalms, “Out of the depths I cry.”

“I needed to do that,” he says. “In Judaism the word ‘martyr’ means ‘those who sanctify the name of God.’ It’s the deaths of so many, the people martyred there, that make it a holy place.”

For Aly Nahas, a member of the Islamic Center of Rochester, the importance of making the trip as an interfaith group to what he calls “a mass graveyard” was deep-seated. “The dead will stay there. There is no way to get them out. To see the Christian and the Sikh and the Jew and the Muslim praying there, each in their own way, each seeking strength and consolation, meant we came back stronger as individuals and as a group. That day together served as a spiritual retreat. We forgot all else. It has strengthened relations, no question about it. We aren’t healed yet, but at least we’re on the road to it.”

“The flesh and bones, spirit and blood and sinews that were fused to those buildings are part of the same dust and became one in that moment of collapse,” says the Reverend Gayle Harris, rector at St. Luke



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Early morning at Centre Street, Ground Zero, September 2001.

“That place, profaned by terror, has been made sacred by death. And because so many bodies will never emerge from the rubble, it will remain holy ground.”

—STEPHEN PROTHERO
Associate Professor of Religion
at Boston University

dead is crucial. It’s not important that the bodies aren’t there. It’s whether you are there. A terrible thing happened, and we went together, and that will be our mortar, our strength.” ♦

MISSY DANIEL is the Information Editor at *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*.

and St. Cyrene Episcopal Church in Rochester. At Ground Zero she saw in the mingled dust both the lives and hopes of the dead and “an opportunity to find God, even in destruction. God was there and is still there.”

Feeling a sense of the presence of God at the site was an experience shared by the Reverend Natalie Hanson, co-pastor at Rochester’s Covenant United Methodist Church. “If God isn’t in the human, God isn’t anywhere,” she observes. “What is sacred is always caught up in the real, the complex.” Ground Zero is holy ground, she adds, “because it is heartbreaking and human.”

The interfaith aspect of the group’s pilgrimage to lower Manhattan will be important for future remembrance, says Hanson, of the loss of life that has ripped at the fabric of the human community and rippled across the country and the world. “Remembering the



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A September 11th vigil at the Brooklyn Heights promenade. September 2001

RELATED PROGRAM CLIP GROUND ZERO (Show #517) Originally broadcast: 12/28/01

Lucky Severson goes on location to Ground Zero, former site of the World Trade Center in New York City, and looks at how it has become a pilgrimage destination for thousands of people in search of some spiritual experience — a place to grieve, to pray and to remember the dead. Many people regard the 16 acres in Lower Manhattan as hallowed ground — a sacred place where they can struggle with their doubts and draw strength from their faith. Ground Zero, says the Reverend Daniel Paul Matthews, rector at Trinity Church Wall Street, “is both a very spiritual place and a civic kind of patriotic place.”

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION

- ◆ How do you think the dead should be memorialized at Ground Zero?
- ◆ One visitor interviewed at Ground Zero speaks of the “kindred bond of humanity” she feels there. The Reverend Matthews mentions the “spiritual curiosity” of visitors to the site. What do you think draws people to Ground Zero?
- ◆ Discuss the important role that St. Paul’s Chapel has played at Ground Zero. How can the resources and the work of a congregation respond to the needs of the community around it in other situations?

HOW WILL AMERICA LIVE WITH THE DEAD OF SEPTEMBER 11?

by Gary Laderman

Death and the bones of the dead have long been a part of American life. We still ponder the carnage and destruction of Oklahoma City, Pearl Harbor and even the deadliest battles of the Civil War. But try as we might, we struggle to comprehend the events of September 11 and say goodbye to these dead.

The cold, brutal facts of the acts of terror on September 11 will not be easy to transcend. Institutional religion sometimes provides the most gratifying answers to the horrible questions associated with the deaths of innocents. But because these bodies have disappeared, the dead themselves are another matter altogether. Churches, synagogues and other houses of worship help, but they cannot always prescribe ways to allow survivors to live with the dead. The victims will haunt imaginations that yearn for visual confirmation of familiar, recognizable bodies — a desire that likely will remain unfulfilled.

Without identifiable bodies, Americans are left literally with nothing on which to focus their hearts and

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Do you think Ground Zero is “holy ground”?
2. Discuss experiences you have had visiting sacred sites and monuments or attending services dedicated to remembering the dead.
3. What role does religion play in American attitudes toward death and at times of national grief?

SUGGESTED WEB SITES

Here is New York www.hereisnewyork.org
Memorializing September 11, 2001
www.emory.edu/COLLEGE/MARIAL/sept11/

minds. The sad flyers with pictures of the missing still inhabit our thoughts. Photographs of individuals once in the midst of life, but now disconnected from any material form, continue to line the streets of New York City and mark to memorial spaces.

While family and friends will find their own ways to ritually say goodbye to loved ones without the body present, the nation will draw strength from permanent memorials at or near the horrific sites of destruction. Sacred sites dedicated to remembering the dead (already prominent on the Mall in Washington, D.C., but also at Civil War battlefields and other locations throughout the country) transform the physical landscape and become pilgrimage centers that reinforce the ties that bind the national community together.

Bereft of routine rituals of burial and individual gravesites, these dead will not go away. They will stay with us, part of the American cultural and political landscape for many, many years to come. ◆

GARY LADERMAN is Associate Professor of Religion at Emory University and the author of *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799-1883* (Yale University Press).



Orthodox Christian pilgrim participates in a Good Friday procession in Jerusalem's Old City. April 2001



Hindu pilgrims bathe at ghats on the Ganges River.

SACRED JOURNEYS

by John Stratton Hawley

In February 2000, some twenty-five million souls gathered for a Hindu festival where the River Ganges joins its sister river, the Yamuna, at a time when the planets also join in a potent constellation. We would call everyone who bathed there a pilgrim, but in India they are simply *yatris* — journeyers.

We in the United States have our journeys, too. Two years ago I took my daughter to Orlando, and we found ourselves on the Great American Pilgrimage. No rivers here, but you would recognize the crowds, and in the year 2000 the entire enterprise was displayed as the transit of time itself: enormous millennial digits strode across the huge sphere that is Epcot's "Spaceship Earth." Secular though it seems, Disney World faithfully mimics themes associated for millennia with pilgrimage in the world's major religious communities. In fact, it purports to be the world: The Magic Kingdom, the original kernel of the whole

space, is a mandala mapped out in a foursquare plan that suggests the points of the compass.

Of all the reminders of the world's pilgrimage sites that one encounters here, the layout itself is the most striking. The motif of a giant flower spreading its petals — Main Street U.S.A. is the stem — echoes certain Hindu pilgrimage sites. Krishna's boyhood playground in Braj and Shiva's shrine at Srishailam in India are mapped out as cosmic lotuses. Often the four directions of the compass are encoded into cities and shrines that serve as goals for religious journeyers worldwide. Beijing, arrayed in four quadrants, is built around the massive temple where Chinese emperors performed sacrifices and divinations intended to harmonize human and divine aspects of the universe. Indeed, China as a whole can be seen as a pilgrimage template connected by four sacred mountains — north, east, south, and west — with a fifth at the center.

Tibetan Buddhists imagine four sacred cities radiating from the site of the Buddha's enlightenment at

Bodh Gaya in northeastern India, long ago called the navel of the earth. Hindus, meanwhile, map their most extensive pilgrimage networks as a clockwise route connecting the four divine abodes. Ayodha, a pilgrim mecca for centuries and the city where Lord Rama is believed to have been born and to have established his righteous rule, is sometimes conceived as the axle of this compass-pointed wheel.

In 1992, militant Hindus undertook a new sort of pilgrimage to Ayodhya — a politicized one. In a well-coordinated effort, they traveled there from all corners of the subcontinent to destroy a 16th-century mosque they took to symbolize an outsider's oppressive challenge to their vision of cultural and religious integrity.

This is hardly the first time competing religious visions have caused major conflicts that turned pilgrimage centers into flash points for violence. Jerusalem is the best known example. As al-Quds (Arabic for "the holy one"), it is venerated as the



© MICHAL RONNEN SAFDIE

Jewish woman at the Western Wall during the ten days of atonement.

place where Muhammed ascended to the divine throne on a nighttime dream-journey or *miraj* – the ultimate pilgrimage. Muhammed’s *miraj* allied al-Quds with Medina and Mecca — the three cities that all able-bodied Muslims are recommended to visit, though it is only the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, that is strictly enjoined.

In the European Middle Ages, the desire to displace Muslim dominance over Jerusalem turned the costly, dangerous and often penitential practice of Christian pilgrimage there into holy war – the Crusades. When the State of Israel gained control of the entire city in 1967, it fulfilled a dream deeply ingrained in Jewish pilgrimage ritual: “Next year in Jerusalem,” as the great Passover prayer says. Many Israelis could no longer abide the thought of anyone else administering the city’s holy places, and the consequences of the struggle over them reverberate to this day.

Other pilgrimage sites have suffered similar fates. In India, for example, the proprietorship of Bodh Gaya

has been vigorously contested. The battle began in 1895 when a Buddhist reformer from Sri Lanka attempted to reclaim the shrine to the Buddha’s enlightenment from Hindu ascetics who held legal claim to it and served as its custodians. But a hundred years later, the Sri Lankan organization was under attack from a large group of lower-caste Indians who had recently converted to Buddhism and who protested their exclusion from leadership roles at the site.

If these struggles seem anomalous at a place that marks enlightenment, the ironies in Jerusalem are even starker. Here is the place where, according to Hasidic sensibilities, God settles accounts on a daily basis. Here is the place enshrined in Protestant anthems as “a city that is at unity with itself.” Here everything is in alignment, as the Prophet’s *miraj* attests.

Struggles over Jerusalem, Ayodhya and Bodh Gaya show how natural it is for human beings to try to control whatever they conceive to be their journey’s goal. In doing so, they miss one of the main meanings that religious journeys have always had: the logic — and the vagaries — of the journey itself. Often this image of life as journey shines forth in accounts of the exemplars in whose steps a pilgrim treads. When a Buddhist boy in Burma, Thailand or Cambodia undergoes a ritual that signifies his departure from his family into a monastic order (usually for two weeks or three months rather than a lifetime), he is understood to be recapitulating the story of the Buddha’s own departure from the well-protected family life into which he was born. Buddha’s journey was inspired by encountering the realities of sickness, old age and death. His response to the transience and sorrow of human existence is remembered as his Great Departure, the true beginning of his life journey.

In a similar way the author of the Gospel of Luke describes the life of Jesus as a reenactment of Israel’s exodus from Egypt. The turning point was His trans-

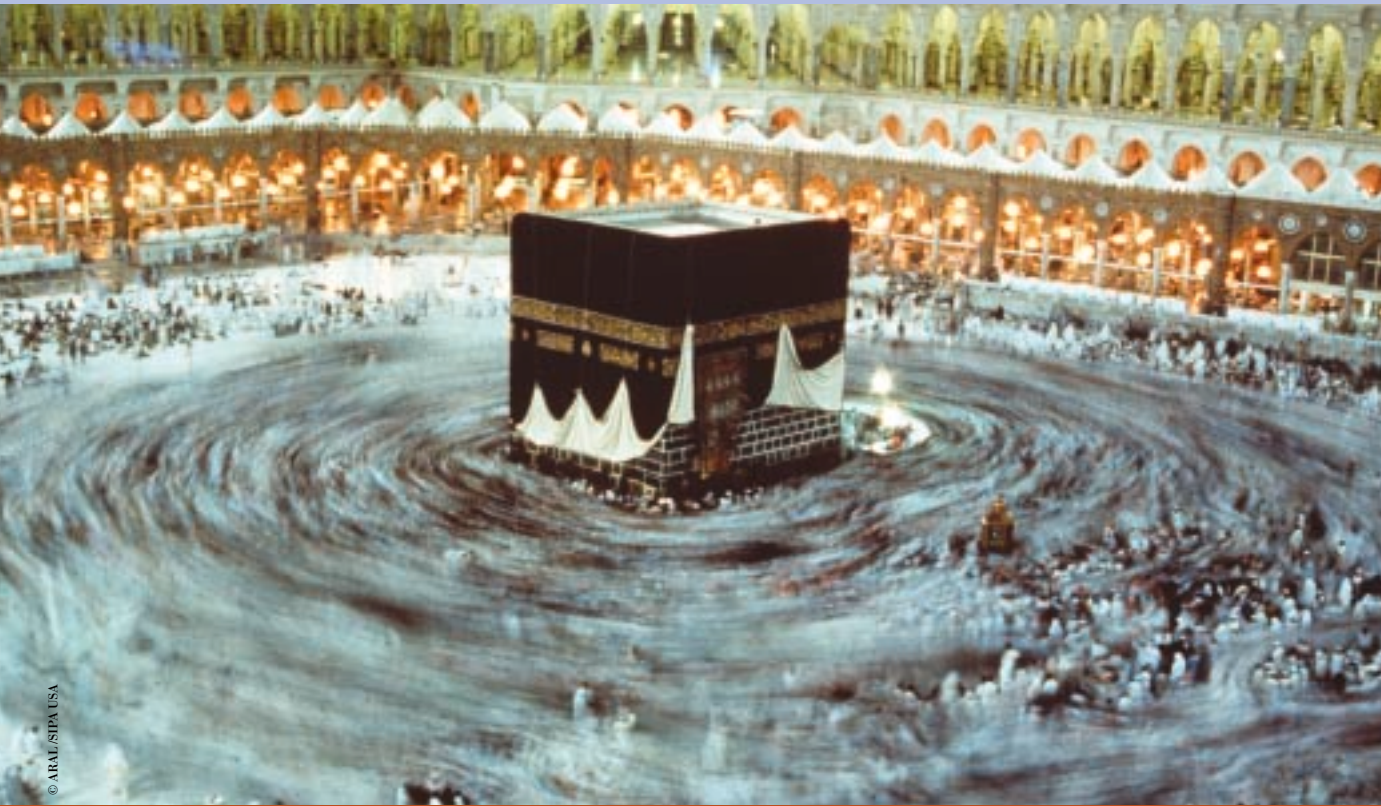
MALCOLM X AND THE HAJJ

As the center of Islam, Mecca stands for the unity of Allah and all who accept that unity. It was there, Muslims believe, that Abraham (whom they call Ibrahim) became the first person to submit to the oneness of God. Hence they identify him as the first Muslim.

Anyone who travels to Mecca at the time of the *hajj* experiences that unity all over again in the presence of Muslims from around the world. Men wear a common unstitched white garb and call out a common *labbaika!* — “Here I come!” They visit the same sites and circle the great shrine, the *ka’aba*, in the same counterclockwise pattern, affirming a common center.

America’s best-known *hajji*, Malcolm X, made the journey in 1964 and reported his experience as follows: “You may be shocked by these words coming from me. But on this pilgrimage, what I have seen, and experienced, has forced me to rearrange much of my thought-patterns previously held, and to toss aside some of my previous conclusions....I have eaten from the same plate, drunk from the same glass, and slept in the same bed (or on the same rug) — while praying to the same God with fellow Muslims, whose eyes were the bluest of blue, whose hair was the blondest of blond, whose skin was the whitest of white....We were truly the same (brothers) because their belief in one God had removed the ‘white’ from their minds, the ‘white’ from their behavior, and the ‘white’ from their attitude.”

The famous anthropologist Victor Turner held that the recovery of a common, primordial humanity — he called it *communitas* — was the great goal of all pilgrimages. Many have challenged this interpretation, but in experiences like the one Malcolm X described, we can see how Turner got the idea.



Pilgrims walk around the ka'aba seven times in the ritual of the Tawaf. Mecca, Saudi Arabia. July 1988

RELATED PROGRAM CLIP

THE HAJJ (Show #133)

Originally broadcast: 4/17/98

Abdul Alim Mubarak, an African American convert to Islam, leaves his home in Maplewood, New Jersey, and goes on *hajj*, the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca. Shoulder to shoulder with hundreds of thousands of other Muslims from around the world, he describes the power and intensity of his spiritual journey and how he experiences the nearness of God in the holy places of Islam.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION

- ◆ Have you ever gone on a pilgrimage or spiritual journey? Describe where you went and what you experienced.
- ◆ Mr. Mubarak says his pilgrimage takes him “back to our spiritual and human origins.” What do you think are the goals of a pilgrimage in religious life?
- ◆ Can you think of similarities and differences among Muslim, Jewish and Christian pilgrimages? Among other pilgrimages in the world’s religions?
- ◆ What are some other great religious and spiritual pilgrimage destinations — the holy cities, promised lands and sacred sites to which people travel?
- ◆ What do you think pilgrimages can teach people about life as a journey? About the inner life?

figuration on a mountain in the Galilee, which replicated Moses’ journey up Mount Sinai. At that point Jesus headed definitively toward Jerusalem. So, for Luke, Jesus’ passion entailed far more than fulfilling the biblical command that each Jew should celebrate three key festivals, including Passover, in Jerusalem. Passover recalls a passage through suffering and bondage, and Christians who travel to Jerusalem for Holy Week (or, indeed, at any time) are apt to repeat Jesus’ passion by tracing his steps, both within and without, on the Via Dolorosa. They do so on foot or on their knees, often praying and meditating as they go.

In Japan, in a very different setting, long journeys such as the one memorialized in the 17th-century poet Basho’s *Narrow Road to the Deep North* provide an occasion to “perform” the transience of life — its loneliness, tenderness and slenderness, as Basho said. In India, too, pilgrimage allows ordinary people to become renunciatory wanderers. Ideally (if rarely in practice), these lay people completely abandon the identities that bind them to settled households. For as long as they travel, they brand as fiction the social conventions that constitute ordinary human life. For to be a pilgrim — the Latin *peregrinus* means “wanderer” — is to know that life is more than home, more than society.

Some pilgrimages underscore this perspective by challenging any sense of a goal at all. The routes followed by some travelers as they approach Braj in North India or Shikoku in Japan are circular, not linear. Other religious journeys accomplish a similar purpose by focusing on the disorientation of death. For Christians, of course, there are the sites of the crucifixion and burial of Jesus at Jerusalem. The Islamic *hajj* incorporates the story of a father’s terrible near-murder of his son (Ishmael for Muslims, Isaac for Jews). Throughout the Muslim world, the



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gilded journeys to the great shrines of Christendom. In Banaras at roughly the same time, the poet-saint Kabir was no less caustic in his evaluation of the Hindu pilgrimage trade in his home town. If bathing in the Ganges was the royal road to liberation, he remarked, heaven must be full of fish!

Yet the urge to perform a memorial by making a journey is an ancient and very contemporary urge. Consider what has happened in New York City since September 11. The attack itself can partially be understood as an assault on a site that attracted pilgrims from around the world as workers and visitors. But for the terrorists it was no Mecca; it was the anti-Mecca. In the wake of their assault, a new set of pilgrimage practices emerged.

Because the city was quickly closed to the public south of 14th Street, the park at Union Square, right on 14th Street, became a major site for memorials. People brought candles and pictures of the beloved dead; they tied ribbons to fences; they wrote inscriptions of all kinds; they left crosses, flags, flowers and teddy bears; they chanted and prayed and wept. Spontaneously Union Square turned into a place of pilgrimage. The same thing happened to the area surrounding the World Trade Center once it was opened to the public. At the gate of St. Paul's Chapel, which used to lie in the immediate shadow of the Twin Towers, someone put up a sheet on which people from all over the world wrote messages. When it was full, another went up and another; many more pilgrims have come to read the inscriptions.

Here is the ancient motif of axial centering all over again, this time at a place with no coordinates. They call it Ground Zero. ♦

JOHN STRATTON HAWLEY is a professor of religion at Barnard College, Columbia University, and the author of books on Krishna, Hindu poetry and religion and goddesses of India.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why do people go on pilgrimages?
2. What can pilgrimages teach us about the religious traditions in which they play an important role?
3. What are the connections between a spiritual journey to a holy site and an inner spiritual journey?
4. What is the relationship between tourism, pilgrimage and sacred travel?
5. Not all pilgrimages are the same. What sorts of sacred journeys do you see in America?
6. Pilgrimages are one way people search for a spiritual center in their lives. What other ways can you think of? Do they relate to making a journey?

SUGGESTED READINGS AND RESOURCES

Pilgrimage: Past and Present in the World Religions by Simon Coleman and John Elsner (Harvard University Press, 1995)

On Glory Roads: A Pilgrim's Book about Pilgrimage by Eleanor Munro (Thames & Hudson, 1988)

One Thousand Roads to Mecca: Ten Centuries of Travelers Writing about the Muslim Pilgrimage by Michael Wolfe (Grove Press, 1999)

Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture by Victor and Edith Turner (Columbia University Press, 1978)

Hard Travels to Sacred Places by Rudolph Wurlitzer (Shambhala, 1995)

The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton (New Directions, 1973)

Jerusalem: One City, Three Faiths by Karen Armstrong (Ballantine, 1996)

The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches by Basho and translated by Nobuyuki Yuasa (Penguin, 1966)

Palkhi: An Indian Pilgrimage by D. B. Mokashi (SUNY Press, 1987)

Thousands of pilgrims flock to Bodh Gaya, India, to celebrate Buddha Purnima, the Buddha's birthday, in 1991.

burial places of saints have created pilgrimage networks completely unrelated to the *hajj*. The faithful travel to these regional sites on the death anniversaries of the saints in question, a practice that was until recently shared by North African Jews as well.

Many other pilgrimages are journeys to the site of a death. Sikh pilgrimage is very largely a set of journeys to places where leaders of the faith were martyred, and the Christian cult of relics, so closely tied with martyrs, has surprisingly strong analogues in Buddhist practice: stupas often inter the bones and personal effects of saints, if not the Buddha himself. Then there is America, where tens of thousands of people travel every year to Graceland, in Memphis, on the anniversary of Elvis Presley's death.

Critics have often scoffed at such practices. The 16th-century Protestant reformers ridiculed the cult of relics and despised the promises of merit or indulgence with which the Roman Catholic hierarchy had



Young Muslim women join anti-Afghan war demonstration in Times Square, New York, October 2001



Palestinians survey damage to their homes and businesses after ten days of fighting between Israeli army tanks and Palestinian gunmen, West Bank, Bethlehem, October 2001

RELIGION AND WAR

by Chris Hedges

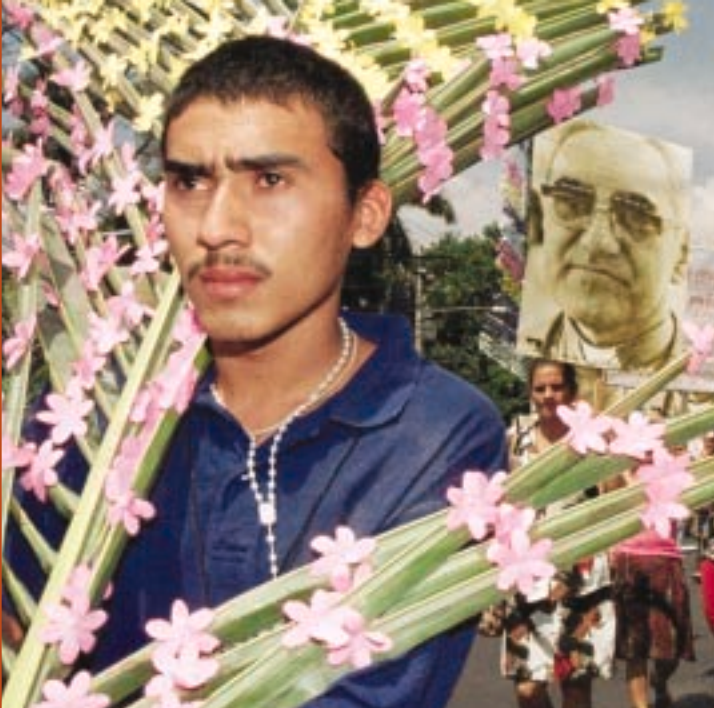
I have covered nearly a dozen conflicts, from the civil wars in Central America in the early 1980s to the Gulf War, the civil wars in the Sudan and Algeria, the Palestinian uprising, the fall of the communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo. Nearly all of them have had a religious dimension.

It comes as no surprise that the clash between the American-led forces in Afghanistan and the Taliban should have been defined as well for many of the participants along religious lines. But is religion fundamental to this and many other conflicts? Or is religion hijacked, perhaps even distorted, by those intent on war and conflict? And is this current war a religious war? What, indeed, is a religious war?

There is a strident and uncompromising tone to all theological justifications of the use of violence. Calls for mercy and compassion toward the neighbor (especially the neighbor who is not of your ethnic or religious group) do not serve the agenda of warlords and nationalists. Those who dare to speak out against war and violence, as religious leaders such as the Reverend William Sloane Coffin and others did during the Vietnam War, are quickly branded as unpatriotic. In many conflicts, political and military leaders try to commandeer religious institutions, often before the conflict begins. The individuals who lead their nations or ethnic groups into war usually seek to cloak themselves in the mantle of religion, to fuse religion and patriotism. An unholy alliance is often made between armed groups and pliable religious leaders before the shooting ever starts.

The armed groups in Central America, whether the rebels in El Salvador or the armed forces that fought

to crush the insurgents, each sought to carry the banner of Catholicism. Central America pitted conservative Catholic priests, often supported by the Vatican, against the Catholic liberation theologians who preached that in repressive societies rebel violence was acceptable. The clash took place within the Catholic Church, but it was no less bitter than other fratricides. Religious figures such as Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero were murdered for calling for an end to the bloodletting, and liberal priests were butchered by death squads. Nuns were taken away, tortured and raped. And those who committed such acts did so in the belief that they were defending the nation from communist intervention, almost a quaint notion in the post-communist era. But soldiers on each side of the war in El Salvador carried the same icons of the Virgin Mary and sought justification for their violence in faith. Religion was not the reason for the wars in Central America — in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala the rebellions were waged



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In the Balkans, three warring factions sought to distinguish themselves by religion, although in Bosnia they spoke the same language, came from the same ethnic background, and were virtually indistinguishable. Indeed, the factions seized upon religion to make sense of the fratricide. Serbs and Croats sought to demolish the religious sites of the other, especially the Muslim mosques. This was a war that used religion to legitimize mythical and often fabricated nationalist and ethnic struggles. Most of the participants believed it was a religious war, one that was meant to defend the faith, although under the communists few had any religious ties.

Finally we have the clash with Osama bin Laden, who has taken a very narrow concept of *jihad* and used it to spin out a theology of vengeance against the United States and its allies. Like many fundamentalists, he rejects a more nuanced interpretation, ignoring that for centuries the concept of *jihad* meant for many Muslims an inner struggle for perfection and morality, a concept not alien to most Jews and Christians. For bin Laden and other fundamentalists, the *jihad* is a holy war against the infidel. Nothing more or less is allowed. The distortion is so prevalent that many forget that *harb*, not *jihad*, means “war” in Arabic.

And here we touch upon the key point in understanding religious conflicts. All armed movements seek not only divine blessing but also the messianic appeal of religion. Soldiers want the comfort of knowing that they are being blown up by land mines for a greater glory. In order for a war to go forward, everyone has to mouth the nationalist platitudes spun out like a vast Greek chorus to justify the bloodletting. Dissension, questioning of purpose and the exposure of war crimes by those who fight on your behalf are all dangerous to the cause. And these dissidents are usually silenced.

by an abused and impoverished peasantry against a corrupt and brutal oligarchy — but religion on both sides served as the ideological engine that propelled the combatants forward.

The Middle East is even more religiously divided, with an Orthodox Jewish community in Israel battling militant Islamic groups such as Hamas and Islamic *jihad*. The secular Jewish and Palestinian communities are shrinking in size and influence, and what is, at its core, a conflict over land is evolving into a religious clash. The preponderance of ultra-Orthodox Jews in the Jewish settlements in Gaza and the West Bank is mirrored by the mounting control of Islamic activists in the Palestinian refugee camps. The duration of the conflict has empowered the religious extremists on each side, making any hope of compromise and negotiation more difficult.

A BELIEF TOO FIERCE

In 1994, after Jewish settler Baruch Goldstein gunned down 29 Muslims praying at a mosque on the West Bank, members of the Agudas Achim Congregation of Conservative Jews in Alexandria, Virginia, gathered for some painful soul-searching. How could anyone commit mass murder in the name of religion?

“There was no making sense of it,” says Jack Moline, the congregation’s rabbi. When it comes to causing conflict, he observes, religion is no different from any other deeply held belief. Religion itself is not the problem. “The danger,” he says, “is people who believe too fiercely in any system of values.”

Since September 11, many religious communities and faith traditions have been forced to think about the connections between religion, war and peace. “Muslims need to look at our own theological tradition,” says Faried Esack, a visiting professor of Islam at Union Theological Seminary. “How is it that these people are able to find justification for their horrendous deeds?”

Can the words of a sacred text cause such violence? “It is wrong to say that any text by itself can induce people to do this or that,” says Esack. “But what makes the violent or peaceful parts of texts come alive for us? That’s the question we need to ask today. I don’t think it is appropriate to seize on texts and then use them as bullets against an enemy you choose.”

Stanley Hauerwas, professor of theological ethics at Duke Divinity School and a pacifist, remains committed to Christian nonviolence. “I need to be nonviolent because that is what God was on the cross. That is the ultimate display of how God deals with evil.”

In the months ahead, religious justifications for war will be among the most important news stories being covered, according to Mark Juergensmeyer, professor of sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara. “We are just understanding how religion can justify terrorism,” he says. “We are now challenged to understand how religion can justify the warfare against [terrorism].”



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Israelis pray at memorial site of a Palestinian suicide bombing in a crowded Jerusalem cafe area. December 2001

The goal of the religious nationalist is to invoke pity only for one's own, to show the community how that which is most sacred is under threat, how the other side seeks to destroy religious life, how this is a battle to preserve religious identity. But in the Balkans, for example, religious identity in times of peace, especially under the communists, counted for little. For journalists covering that war, this was always the saddest irony: Many of those fighting to preserve and protect the faith had spent a lifetime caring little for it.

The conflicts of the past two decades are not conventional. They are not wars as we once knew them — battles between nation states that sign the Geneva Convention and run prisoner-of-war camps. Rather, these are battles with amorphous groups that do not abide by rules of engagement recognized by conventional armies. The attacks of September 11 illustrate the new conflict. There are no real political goals, no demands that we are being asked to meet. No group really took responsibility for the act. No group probably ever will.

Rather, those who carried out these attacks sought to give them an epic quality. Muslim militants say the attacks are an assault against evil, against a culture and society trying to crush Islam. There will be no cease-fires, no negotiations, no truces, no final surrender by those we have set out to hunt down in Afghanistan. They have given an absolutist quality to the attacks that make it hard for a Western society that does not deal in absolutes to know how to respond. The political demands made by bin Laden (the withdrawal of American forces from the Gulf, the end to the Israeli occupation, the overthrow of the pro-Western regimes in countries such as Egypt) are so sweeping and unattainable that one suspects they are to these new terrorists irrelevant, used more as a

RELATED PROGRAM CLIP HOLY WAR
(Show #504) Originally broadcast: 9/28/01

Is there anything in Islam that justifies terrorism? “In my view, I battle it out for the soul of Islam, for who gets to define what Islam is going to stand for,” says Professor Khaled Abou el Fadl, an expert on Islamic law. In the aftermath of September 11, Lucky Severson examines the idea of holy war and the justifications for it. He talks with scholars and experts about *jihād*, martyrdom, the roots of militant Islam and the role American Muslims can play “to speak out about what their religion is authentically teaching,” as Muslim Public Affairs Council director Salam Al-Marayati says.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION

- ◆ What have you learned about Islam since September 11?
- ◆ Do you think there is a debate underway about the meaning of Islam, especially about terror in the name of Islam? What do you think the debate is about?
- ◆ Discuss Salam Al-Marayati’s remark that “Islam is a perfect faith and Muslims are imperfect.” Can the same be said of other faiths?
- ◆ Do other causes — economic, political, social — contribute to violence in the name of religion? How?
- ◆ What does your religious tradition say about war and violence?



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Bosnian man mourns a victim of the ethnic violence in Sarajevo in 1992.

reason to incite violence rather than to achieve a political end. There is an apocalyptic quality to this kind of terrorism, for it seeks only to destroy. It eschews compromise. It does not plan to build anything. And it calls for the maximum number of dead as a measure of success.

The hunt to root out terrorism will involve a curtailment of the very liberties we cherish. The crucial moral questions we must struggle to answer are unlike those we faced in conventional wars. For this

is a war in many ways that will be carried out in the shadows. How far can our society go in locking up illegal immigrants who have no access to counsel? Is torture justified when we suspect a prisoner has information that could mean the deaths of thousands? What limits should be placed on phone taps, the random detention of suspects and the curtailment of the rights of fringe groups that support or sympathize with these terrorist groups? And what rights should terrorists have in our judicial system?

As much as we try to hold up a more moderate view of Islam, one that pays homage to older, established traditions of tolerance, those who carried out the September 11 attacks view the current conflict as a religious war. Osama bin Laden cloaks all his threats and calls for retribution in the language of the Koran, seated with his lieutenants like the Prophet Mohammed in his cave. The Taliban were born of a fanatical religious movement. And millions of Muslims across the world see in these radicals a statement of their own anger and alienation.

But they must not be allowed to define this war. It is a war waged by fundamentalists against an interpretation of Islam, indeed against any religion that tolerates the outsider and places the concept of forgiveness above that of vengeance. It is a war against the humanistic ideals that created liberal religious thought. It is a war against a kind of religious belief, one as central to Muslims as to Christians.

This is a battle against those who would hijack Islam. It is a battle that must be waged to preserve a different kind of religiosity, one that eschews the certitude of fanatics, whatever their religious identification, and promises to respect the value of a single human life above the call for collective retribution and condemnation. ♦

CHRIS HEDGES is a reporter at *The New York Times*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Religion has been used to justify many worldly causes. Can it ever be used to justify going to war?
2. Do you think the conflict that began on September 11 is a religious war?
3. What are the ways that religion might serve as a resource for peacemaking? Can you think of examples?
4. Did the events of September 11 make you feel differently about war and the use of military force? About retaliation?
5. What do the sacred texts of your religious tradition say about war and peace? How do you think they apply to the world today?

SUGGESTED READINGS AND RESOURCES

Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics by Reinhold Niebuhr (First published in 1932; MacMillan Publishing Co., 1998)

The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience by Michael Ignatieff (Metropolitan Books, 1998)

Facing the Extreme: Moral Life in the Concentration Camps by Tzvetan Todorov (Metropolitan Books, 1996)

The Vanished Imam: Musa Al Sadr and the Shia of Lebanon by Fouad Ajami (Cornell University Press, 1986)

Humanity: A Moral History of the 20th Century by Jonathan Glover (Yale University Press, 1999)

The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence and Reconciliation by R. Scott Appleby (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000)

Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence by Mark Juergensmeyer (University of California Press, 2000)

War in the Twentieth Century: Sources in Theological Ethics edited by Richard B. Miller (Westminster John Knox Press, 1993)



KEY TO RELIGIOUS GROUPS

BAHA'Í (BA)
BUDDHIST (BU)
CHRISTIAN (C)
HINDU (H)
JEWISH (J)
MORMON (MO)
MUSLIM (M)
ORTHODOX (O)
PROTESTANT (P)
ROMAN CATHOLIC (RC)
SHINTO (SH)
SIKH (S)
WICCAN (W)

JANUARY

1 **TEMPLE DAY (BU)**
6 **EPIPHANY (WESTERN) (C)**
7 **CHRISTMAS (EASTERN) (O)**
19 **EPIPHANY (EASTERN) (O)**
20 **WORLD RELIGION DAY (BA)**
28 **TU B'SHEVAT (J)**

FEBRUARY

2 **FEAST OF THE WAXING LIGHT (W)**
8 **NIRVANA DAY (BU)**
12-13 **CHINESE/VIETNAMESE/TIBETAN NEW YEAR (BU)**
13 **ASH WEDNESDAY/LENT BEGINS (WESTERN) (P, RC)**
21 **DAY OF HAJJ (M)**
22 **EID-UL-ADHA (M)**
26 **PURIM (J)**

MARCH

1 **WORLD DAY OF PRAYER (C)**
2-19 **EIGHTEEN-DAY FAST (BA)**
12 **MAHA SHIVARATRI (H)**
14/29 **NANAKSHAHI (NEW YEAR'S DAY) (S)**
15 **AL HIJRA (NEW YEAR'S DAY) (M)**
18 **LENT BEGINS (EASTERN) (O)**
21 **NAW-RUZ (NEW YEAR'S DAY) (BA,Z)**
24 **PALM SUNDAY (WESTERN) (P, RC)**
28 **PASSOVER (J)**
28 **MAUNDY THURSDAY (P, RC)**
28 **HOLI (LAST DAY) (H)**
29 **GOOD FRIDAY (P, RC)**
31 **EASTER (P, RC)**

APRIL

8 **BUDDHA DAY (BU)**
9 **YOM HASHOAH (J)**

13-14 VAISAKHI (S)

21 **FIRST DAY OF RIDVAN (BA)**
21 **RAMANAVAMI (H)**
27 **HANUMAN JAYANTI (H)**
28 **PALM SUNDAY (EASTERN) (O)**
29 **HOLY WEEK BEGINS (EASTERN) (O)**

MAY

1 **MAY DAY (W)**
3 **HOLY FRIDAY (EASTERN) (O)**
5 **PASCHA (EASTERN) (O)**
9 **ASCENSION DAY (WESTERN) (P, RC)**
17-18 **SHAVUOT (J)**
19 **PENTECOST (WESTERN) (P, RC)**
23 **DECLARATION OF THE BAB (BA)**
24 **MAWLID AL-NABIY (M)**
26 **WESAK (BU)**
29 **ASCENSION OF BAHA'U'LLAH (BA)**



JUNE

- 13 ASCENSION DAY (EASTERN) (O)
- 14-16 MARTYRDOM OF GURU ARJAN (S)
- 21 MIDSUMMER'S EVE (W)
- 23 PENTECOST (EASTERN) (O)

JULY

- 16 MARTYRDOM OF THE BAB (BA)
- 24 PIONEER DAY (MO)

AUGUST

- 12 DHARMA DAY (BU)
- 15 FEAST OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY (P, RC) (O)
- 22 RAKSHA BANDHAN (H)
- 30 SRI KRISHNA JAYANTI (H)

SEPTEMBER

- 7-8 ROSH HASHANAH (J)

- 9 GANESH CHATURTHI (H)

- 16 YOM KIPPUR (J)
- 20-28 SUKKOT (J)
- 28 SHMINI ATZERET (J)
- 28-29 SIMCHAT TORAH (J)

OCTOBER

- 3 MÍ RÁJ AL-NABIY (M)
- 15 DASSEHRA (H)
- 20 BIRTH OF THE BÁB (BA)
- 20 NISF SHÁ BÁN (M)
- 31 CELTIC NEW YEAR (W)

NOVEMBER

- 1 ALL SAINTS DAY (O, P, RC)
- 6 RAMADHAAN BEGINS (M)
- 12 BAHÁ Ú LLÁH'S BIRTHDAY (BA)
- 19 BIRTHDAY OF GURU NANAK (S)
- 30 FIRST DAY OF HANUKKAH (J)

DECEMBER

- 1 ADVENT BEGINS (WESTERN) (P, RC)
- 1 LAYLAT AL-QADR (M)
- 6 EID-UL-FITR (THE FEAST OF BREAKING RAMADHAAN'S FAST) (M)
- 8 BODHI DAY (BU)
- 12 FEAST OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE (RC)
- 22 WINTER SOLSTICE/YULE (SH, W)
- 25 CHRISTMAS (WESTERN) (MO, P, RC)
- 26 KWANZAA BEGINS

NOTES

All Jewish and Baha'i holidays begin at sunset the previous day. Hindu, Sikh and Jain holidays are calculated on a lunar calendar and are observed at different times in different regions.

◆ This calendar of selected religious observances has been adapted with permission from both the National Conference for Community and Justice Calendar of Holidays and Festivals (www.nccj.org) and the Multifaith Calendar (www.amssa.org/calendar/index.htm). Published by a non-profit volunteer organization in Canada, the Multifaith Calendar provides accurate dates and information for thirteen major faiths. To order the Multifaith Calendar: E-mail mfcalendar@pacificcoast.net or call 604-469-1164.



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Death penalty opponent cries following the execution of Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh. Terre Haute, Indiana. June 2001

RELIGION AND THE DEATH PENALTY

by Michael Kress

Ron Mosby, a Church of Christ minister, regularly serves as a volunteer prison chaplain for death-row inmates at the Riverbend Maximum Security Institution in Nashville, Tennessee. But his evangelical Christian faith leads him to support capital punishment as “the vengeance of God’s justice.” He says he would gladly hold a condemned man’s hand and pray with him as he is put death, but he would not oppose the execution.

As a child, Pat Clark lost two family members to murder, but her religious faith has led her to oppose the death penalty. Clark, a Quaker, says capital punishment “brutalizes society further by sanctioning murder.” She is a coordinator of the Religious Organizing against the Death Penalty Project, a multi-faith program, sponsored largely by the American Friends

Service Committee, that ministers to families of murder victims, inmates on death row and the families of those who have been executed. “They’re not allowed to publicly mourn,” says Clark.

People of faith are at the forefront of political activism on all sides of the volatile issue of the death penalty, and their voices are as diverse as their religious backgrounds. In 2001, the highly publicized execution of Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh brought the question to the center of public debate. A large majority of the public — 80 percent — said they believed McVeigh should be executed. The event also highlighted the range of views with which faith communities approach the death penalty.

Nearly every major religious denomination has spoken out on capital punishment: Catholics, Reform Jews, and most mainline and liberal Protestants such as the United Church of Christ, the United Methodist Church, and the Presbyterian Church (USA) have lined up against it whereas Orthodox Jews, traditional

Muslims, and most evangelical Christian groups, such as the Southern Baptist Convention, support it. The Evangelical Lutheran Church of America opposes it, but the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod supports it.

But denominational statements hardly begin to tell the whole story. Individual pastors, congregations and members of the laity may disagree — often vehemently and publicly — with their denominational leaders. Even among those who agree with their religious leaders, the reasons and the emphasis may vary widely.

Don Alexander and Verity Jones are both pastors of congregations affiliated with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), but their views on the death penalty are not at all alike.

“It goes against God’s purposes for the reconciliation of the world,” says Jones, whose church is in Terre Haute, Indiana, where McVeigh was executed. “God is the God of life and has called us to be masters of reconciliation.”



© AP/PORETS

The chair where Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh was executed by lethal injection.

Alexander's church in Oklahoma City served as a disaster relief center on the day the federal building was bombed in 1995. "What does forgiveness mean in the absence of repentance?" he asks. "Society must structure itself to honor life by being willing to take the life of one who has taken life. When someone takes a life, they should sacrifice their own life."

Among death penalty opponents, few religious figures have been as visible as Pope John Paul II. At a 1999 papal mass in St. Louis, he called the death penalty "both cruel and unnecessary." And in a declaration to the first World Congress on the Death Penalty in 2001, the Vatican said that "the universal abolition of the death penalty would be a courageous reaffirmation of the belief that humankind can be successful in dealing with criminality and of our refusal to succumb to despair before such forces, and as such it would regenerate new hope in our very humanity."

The pope has pleaded for the lives of many condemned prisoners in the United States in recent

years, and he speaks out often in strong opposition to the death penalty. Both traditional and liberal American Catholics, however, remain unconvinced. According to recent surveys, Catholics support capital punishment in roughly the same proportion as the American public at large now does — 66 percent for and 27 percent against.

The numbers indicate that public opinion remains strongly in favor of the death penalty, although this level of support is the lowest in 20 years. In the United States, where there are 38 death-penalty states, executions have been dropping sharply across the country, from 98 in 1999 to 85 in 2000 to 66 in 2001.

Cardinal Avery Dulles, a prominent Catholic theologian and professor of religion and society at New York's Fordham University, made waves recently with an article on Catholicism and capital punishment in which he made clear that he does not believe all human beings in every instance have a right to life.

"There are circumstances in which you can lose your right to life," he said in an interview. "There is a long biblical and church tradition that says in certain extreme cases, the death penalty is warranted."

Although Dulles's attitude and rhetoric set him apart from his fellow cardinals and theologians, there is little practical difference in their views. Dulles's support for the death penalty is contingent upon its being applied fairly, and only in cases where the same goals cannot be accomplished through other punishments. Dulles says there have been no cases in recent memory where he supported an execution. Still, his views mark a difference in philosophy from those Catholics who say the state never has the right to take the life of a criminal. Catholicism, says Dulles, respects the state's right to take a criminal's life under certain circumstances. But American Catholics today "don't have respect for government as delivering divine justice."

REPAIRING THE WORLD

Growing up as an observant Jew, Lawrence Marshall says he was infused with the notion that "it is essential that each of us does our part to repair the world." As a lawyer, that notion led him to public-interest projects, working to free innocent people condemned for murder and awaiting execution on death row.

When he was a high school student, Marshall studied with a Hasidic rabbi. Today, as a professor at Northwestern University's Law School, he serves as legal director of the school's Center on Wrongful Convictions, which has been involved in the exoneration of at least nine men on death row in Illinois. In his office Marshall keeps a gift from his law school students: a poster of their thumb prints in recognition of his frequent citation of the passage from the Talmud that God gave each person a distinct finger print because each one has a unique role to play in saving the world.

Although he says that Judaism did not directly influence his decision to tackle the death penalty specifically, it is clear that his opposition to capital punishment stems in part from his religious values. He cites the verses in the Talmud that record the Jewish sages' reservations about the death penalty: Any court that executes more than one person in seventy years, one passage declares, has blood on its hands. "I find it odd that there are those who want to look to the Old Testament for support of the death penalty without looking at the other parts of the tradition," Marshall says. The rabbis, it is clear, greatly feared that an innocent person might be executed, a fear Marshall shares. "No God of justice would ever relegate to us, with all our fallibility" the responsibility for taking someone's life, he says. "I believe in a God of compassion who wants not our death, but our repentance. Given that that's God's omniscient position, it seems to me we mortals have no business messing with that."



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Pro-death penalty demonstrator supporting the execution of Timothy McVeigh. Terre Haute, Indiana. June 2001

RELATED PROGRAM CLIP CAPITAL PUNISHMENT (Show #437) Originally broadcast: 5/11/01

The McVeigh execution intensified debate over the death penalty, especially among people of faith. Tim O'Brien looks at the controversy through the eyes of two ministers in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), both with a connection to the McVeigh case. The Reverend Don Alexander, whose Oklahoma City church served as a disaster relief center the day the federal building was bombed, supports capital punishment "because it is the only way to undergird a system of moral accountability." But the Reverend Verity Jones, whose church in Terre Haute, Indiana, is not far from the penitentiary where McVeigh was executed, opposes capital punishment because "it puts us in a place of perpetuating a cycle of violence."

If Catholics have been among the most visible opponents of the death penalty, evangelicals have been among its most visible supporters. Support for capital punishment has been affirmed in a resolution, for example, by the National Association of Evangelicals.

"When a man pulls the plug or inserts the needle into a condemned inmate, he is carrying out the justice of God," says Mosby, who has baptized 23 inmates, including some on death row. "When you're baptized into Christ, you're as clean as the day you were born, but you still have to pay the consequences of your sin," he says, citing Old and New Testament verses to prove that capital punishment is biblically ordained. "I forgive them, but when I forgive them, I can't forget the consequences of what they did. At least they can meet their Savior sin-free."

But there are cracks even in widespread evangelical support for capital punishment. The 1998 execution of Texas convict Karla Faye Tucker, who said she was born again in prison, galvanized evangelicals. For

many of them, the case was an exception to their usually steadfast support for the death penalty. For others, it served as a wake-up call to reevaluate their stance. The influential evangelical magazine *Christianity Today*, for instance, called for an end to capital punishment soon after Tucker's death. Christian Coalition president Pat Robertson, although still asserting his general support for the death penalty, said that her execution was "an act of barbarity that was totally unnecessary."

American Jews split along liberal Reform and conservative Orthodox lines when it comes to the issue of capital punishment, each side invoking Jewish sources for support of its views. In the Talmud, the collection of ancient rabbinic writings that interpret the Bible, there are many debates on the issue.

In stating their opposition to capital punishment, liberal Jews cite Talmudic sources in which the rabbis placed so many legal safeguards against executing an innocent person that implementing the punishment was rendered nearly impossible. Referring to such texts, the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the Reform Jewish movement, calls capital punishment "a stain upon civilization and our religious conscience."

But Nathan Diament, director of public policy for the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, says that the Talmud does not intend to ban the death penalty entirely.

"If you read the sources as a whole, what the Talmud is conveying is that there must be accuracy [in condemning someone to death]," Diament says. "The death penalty is necessary not as a deterrent or for vengeance, but as a means of making a statement that murder is completely unacceptable."

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION

- ◆ Which minister's views on the death penalty come closest to your own and why?
- ◆ Discuss the meaning of the different Bible verses the ministers use to support their positions. What do you think these verses say about capital punishment?
- ◆ What resources does religion offer for thinking about capital punishment? How do positions for and against the death penalty use religious understandings of justice and mercy, revenge and retribution, crime and punishment?
- ◆ The Reverend Verity Jones says that the problem with capital punishment is "what it says about us." What do you think the death penalty says about us?



View down a cell-lined prison corridor.

But the reservations of the rabbis who wrote the Talmud led Diamant's organization to support a growing movement calling for a temporary moratorium on executions. Sister Helen Prejean, the Catholic nun who became an icon of religious opposition to the death penalty when her book *Dead Man Walking* became a popular movie, now directs The Moratorium Campaign, an effort to suspend executions worldwide. A moratorium would allow officials to study whether the death penalty is implemented fairly and how the courts can ensure that innocent people do not get put to death. Illinois remains the only state in the United States with the death penalty to have imposed a moratorium on all executions.

Often, opposing opinions on the death penalty are formed by divergent interpretations of the same biblical passage. Liberal Christians, for instance, may see the death of Jesus on the cross — a form of capital punishment — as proof that Christians should oppose executions, whereas conservatives may point to the fact that Jesus never explicitly condemned the death penalty and was innocent, so did not deserve his fate.

The Reverend Jerry Falwell has pointed to Christ's experience on the cross as support for his pro-death

penalty stance. "He didn't use any time on the cross to decry what was happening to the people beside him," Falwell said in a recent interview. "He made not one pejorative statement about the wrongness or rightness of capital punishment."

But the Reverend Verity Jones draws the opposite conclusion. "Christ conquered death and our sins by refusing violent retaliation," she says. "He refused to defend himself, he refused to fight, he refused to kill." And that, she concludes, should be the model for today's Christians: refraining from killing even those guilty of murder.

People of faith rely on their sacred texts to guide and inspire their views on many political and social issues. On capital punishment, they will continue ministering to the condemned, educating the public and fighting for or against the death penalty, depending on the way their scriptures, traditions and interpretations draw them. ♦

MICHAEL KRESS has written on religion and spirituality for *Newsweek*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Salon.com*, and *Beliefnet.com*, among others.

QUESTIONS

1. What does your religious tradition say about the death penalty? How much is your opinion influenced by the position your faith group takes?
2. What role should religious groups play advocating for or against capital punishment? What do you think about citing verses from the Bible or other sacred texts in debates on the death penalty or other social issues?
3. Has September 11 affected your views on the morality of the death penalty? How?
4. In deciding to impose the death penalty, should courts consider whether a person has had a religious conversion while on death row?
5. Are the issues of capital punishment and abortion related? Is it inconsistent to support one and oppose the other?
6. Is there a difference between what is right for an individual and what is right for the state? Can it be right for the state to execute as a matter of justice, but wrong for an individual to murder?

SUGGESTED READINGS AND RESOURCES

Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States by Helen Prejean (Random House, 1993)

Against the Death Penalty: Christian and Secular Arguments Against Capital Punishment by Gardner C. Hanks (Herald Press, 1997)

Executing Justice: The Moral Meaning of the Death Penalty by Lloyd Steffen (Pilgrim Press, 1999)

The Killing State: Capital Punishment in Law, Politics and Culture by Austin Sarat (Oxford University Press, 2001)

Capital Punishment: What the Bible Says by Lloyd Bailey (Abingdon Press, 1987)

Capital Punishment: A Reader by Glenn Stassen (Pilgrim Press, 1998)

Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life: Issue Brief on Capital Punishment
www.pewforum.org/issues/deathpenalty.php3



Children of St. Michael's elementary school in Chicago start the day with morning prayers.

LATINOS AND RELIGION IN THE U.S. by Rubén Martínez

María Enríquez is one of the American heartland's new immigrants. Drawn by jobs at a meatpacking plant that expanded in the mid-1990s, she and her family call the middle-Wisconsin town of Norwalk (pop. 600) home.

Like many Latin Americans of deep faith but little institutional attachment, María, her husband Santiago and their five children were Catholic mostly in the cultural sense — they attended Mass only a couple of times a year. But they have found renewed religious fervor in their adopted country. Their experience of religion is being changed by their sojourn in America, and they are changing spiritual life in America as well.

In the living room of their spacious home in the Midwest, María has fashioned an altar with a large baby Jesus, fruit, flowers and votive candles. “It’s

funny, I didn’t always keep an altar back home,” says María. “But here, it just seems more important.” This is a classic immigrant experience of religion. The farther one is from the homeland, the more heightened one’s sense of Old World tradition becomes.

It also happens that the Enríquez family settled in a part of America that takes its religion very seriously. Middle Wisconsin is a stronghold of Plain Christianity (Protestants such as some Amish, Mennonite and Brethren groups that follow the tradition of “plain” living), and missionaries from nearby towns drop in frequently on the Mexican enclave in Norwalk. “We don’t need them to convert, or anything like that,” says Joe Bailey, a missionary from a non-denominational evangelical church in Chicago who visits the Enríquez family regularly. “We just want them to know that the word of God is close to them, even though they’re far from home.”

Bailey’s gentle proselytizing, ironically, appears to be emboldening the family’s sense of connection to Catholicism. At the same time, living in the Protestant heartland of America will no doubt have an impact on their religious lives, too.

In the United States, Latinos are at the center of a spiritual rebirth, bringing their religion to America

and encountering American religion as well. Now America’s largest minority (nearly 13 percent of the population), they represent the largest single ethnic group among American Catholics. And they are also bolstering the ranks of Protestant denominations, especially Pentecostal ministries.

The Latino presence — particularly the presence of newly arrived immigrants — is having the effect of what some theologians call “re-sacrilizing” American public space. This can take the form of religious processions (such as those on the Virgin of Guadalupe’s feast day, December 12th, when the Mexican faithful stage public events everywhere from Los Angeles to middle Wisconsin to Manhattan). It is also visible in public art (virgins and saints emblazoning storefronts and even graffiti murals). In the secular marketplace, many chain stores carry votive candles for church-sanctioned icons and even the underground animist variety, such as La Santísima Muerte (Most Holy Death) and Las Siete Potencias (The Seven Powers), which are called upon for both “black” and “white” magic.

“In many Latin American countries, the distinction between public and private space, between the religious and the secular, is less rigidly demarcated than in the United States,” says Dr. Luis León, a professor of religion at Arizona State University. “And so,

RELATED PROGRAM CLIP VIRGIN OF GUADALUPE (Show #316) Originally broadcast: 12/17/99

Every December 12th, millions of Latino Catholics around the world honor the Virgin of Guadalupe with colorful public observances and prayers. Rubén Martínez reports from Los Angeles on the growing numbers who express their religious devotion in massive public demonstrations of adoration. “Devotion to the Virgin is more than just a mere affirmation of faith,” he says. “It is also a way for Mexicans and Latin Americans to give flesh and spirit to their mixed European and Indian identity.”

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION

- ◆ Religious rituals are about an encounter with the sacred. How is the religious experience of these Latino Catholics similar to your own?
- ◆ What public rituals or celebrations does your religious tradition have? How do they compare to the devotions for the Virgin of Guadalupe?
- ◆ What religious holidays or festivals are celebrated publicly in your town? Are they opportunities for people of different faiths to meet?
- ◆ What role does religion play in the immigrant experience?



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Young girl carrying a Virgin of Guadalupe banner in an outdoor mass celebrating the 150th anniversary of the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago.

immigrant religion becomes all the more visible to us — it literally spills into the street.”

Indeed, the immigrant Pentecostal storefront church has become a ubiquitous sight in most major American cities. The nightly services are hard to miss because the front door is almost invariably open, allowing the throbbing sounds of the church band to carry up and down the boulevards.

The traditional American immigrant narrative is that “they” (the immigrants) will become like us. But already, immigrants have changed America by reshaping communities according to their own cultural, spiritual and economic needs. Catholic parishes in Latino neighborhoods, for example, become bastions of Old World culture. Yet immigrants are changed inexorably by their lives in America. The rate of conversion from Catholicism to Protestant denominations remains high. Even among Latino

Catholics, Protestantism has had an impact. Apparently envious of the spirited celebrations of Pentecostals, for example, the Charismatic movement (similar in many ways to Pentecostal worship) is growing dramatically within the Catholic Church.

Religion is also evident in the Latino workplace. At the forefront of labor advocacy in many cases are local churches, Catholic and Protestant, whose membership is overwhelmingly working class and immigrant. Most of the newcomers hold non-union jobs at hotels, at restaurants and in the garment industry. Priests and ministers often allow labor activists to organize from the pulpit, and the same priests and ministers frequently participate in labor demonstrations.

Mexican immigrant workers perished in the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center (estimates have ranged from more than a dozen to as many as 500), and as a result of the after-effects, tens

SHARING CELEBRATIONS

Public celebrations of the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe are popular across the United States. But there is also a growing appreciation of the different apparitions and titles for “Our Lady” that Latinos from countries other than Mexico revere.

At St. Martin of Tours Catholic Church in Gaithersburg, Maryland, parishioners from El Salvador, Peru, Nicaragua, Bolivia and Argentina as well as Mexico hold three distinct cultural celebrations “making noise for Mary,” as Adrianna Ferpozzi, director of Spanish-language religious education, describes it. In the Archdiocese of Washington, where most Latino immigrants are from Central America, the celebration of the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe has been expanded to honor diverse devotions to Mary throughout the Americas. And from Miami to New Orleans to Hartford, Connecticut, tens of thousands of Cuban Americans celebrate the Virgin Mary by observing the Feast of Our Lady of Charity (Nuestra Señora de la Caridad del Cobre) with special masses, processions, hymns and prayers.

More and more Latino immigrant communities in the United States are also marking the feasts of other patron saints and beloved images. Many Guatemalans, for example, revere the 16th-century “Cristo Negro” or “Black Christ,” and the Archdiocese of Los Angeles recently recognized local observances in his honor. And for decades, Puerto Ricans have marked the Feast of San Juan Bautista or St. John the Baptist, patron saint of the island of Puerto Rico.

These rituals and celebrations signal a growing sensitivity to the cultural and religious diversity of Latino communities. In parishes around the country, “Latinos are learning and enjoying one another’s traditions,” says Timothy Matovina, professor of theology at the University of Notre Dame. “Interest in each other’s feasts is a growth area for Latino Catholics and a challenge for the future.”



The annual Three Kings Day procession in Humboldt Park, Chicago.

of thousands of other migrants lost their livelihoods. One of their most visible advocates in New York City is Joel Magallán, a Jesuit brother from Mexico. He directs Asociación Tepeyac — the community-based organization to promote the social welfare and human rights of Mexican immigrants. He christened it after the hill in Mexico on which legend holds that the Virgin of Guadalupe miraculously appeared to the Indian Juan Diego nearly 500 years ago.

Apparitions of the Virgin of Guadalupe, also known as the “Empress of the Americas,” have occurred in ever greater numbers in recent years, seemingly in direct proportion to the number of migrants crossing the border. In Watsonville, California, a labor leader said the Virgin appeared to him in the midst of organizing a wildcat strike against a cannery company; the workers subsequently won the strike.

Across America, from the cities of the coasts to the tiniest of heartland towns, one finds evidence of these kinds of visible changes taking place on the religious landscape — from public feast-day celebrations to private home altars, from an increasing embrace of Protestantism to the renewed importance of Catholic worship and devotion. Change is by no means a new story. Immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe and Asia have revised and revitalized the American narrative from time to time, as did African slaves, retelling the story of how religion in America is both tied to the Old World and independent of it. That is the story of “New World” religion, and these days Latinos are writing the next chapter. ♦

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RUBÉN MARTÍNEZ, an associate editor at Pacific News Service, is the author of *Crossing Over: A Mexican Family on the Migrant Trail* (Metropolitan/Holt, 2001).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Have new immigrant religions become more visible in your community? Where do you see evidence of them?
2. According to a recent poll, 70% of the 35 million Latinos in the United States are Catholic and 22% percent are Protestant. By some estimates there may now be 25,000 to 40,000 Hispanic Muslims in the U.S. Why do you think Latinos are changing religion in America and how is it changing them?
3. Latinos are active in urban life through many public celebrations of their religious traditions. How do you think these rituals are influencing the American religious landscape?
4. Do you think Latino religious traditions such as vigils for Our Lady of Guadalupe can transcend cultural and denominational differences and be open to the participation of all?

SUGGESTED READINGS AND RESOURCES

Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father by Richard Rodriguez (Penguin USA, 1993)

Crossing Guadalupe Street: Growing Up Hispanic and Protestant by David Maldonado (University of New Mexico Press, 2001)

Goddess of the Americas: Writings on the Virgin of Guadalupe edited by Ana Castillo (Riverhead, 1996)

Americanos: Latino Life in the United States (Little, Brown and Company, 1999)

Presente! U.S. Latino Catholics from Colonial Origins to the Present edited by Timothy Matovina et al. (Orbis Books, 2000)

Protestantes: Hispanic Christianity within Mainline Traditions edited by David Maldonado (Abingdon Press, 1999)

Hispanic Churches in American Public Life
www.hcapl.org

OUTREACH ASSOCIATES

The following national organizations have local affiliates across the country that can provide information for and guidance on establishing discussions in your area. Contact them to find out if there is an affiliate group in your town and how you might partner with it.

American Jewish Committee
165 East 56th Street
New York, N.Y. 10022
Contact: Rabbi Arnold E. Resnicoff
National Director of Interreligious Affairs
T: 212-891-6760, F: 212-891-1455
E-mail: resnicoffa@ajc.org
Web site: www.ajc.org

Congress of National Black Churches
1225 I Street NW, Suite 750
Washington, D.C. 20005
Contact: Ms. Sullivan Robinson, Executive Director
T: 202-296-5657, F: 202-296-4939
Web site: www.cnbc.org

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
Office of News and Information
Public Affairs and Press Officer
8 East 79th Street
New York, N.Y. 10021
Contact: Nikki Stephanopoulos, Director
T: 212-570-3530, F: 212-774-0215
E-mail: nikki@goarch.org
Web site: www.goarch.org

Hindu Temple and Cultural Society of USA, Inc.
780 Old Farm Road
Bridgewater, N.J. 08807
Contact: Dr. M.G. Prasad
Chairperson of the Education Committee
T: 908-725-4477

Islamic Cultural Center of New York
1711 3rd Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10029-7303
Contact: Mohamed Younes, Public Relations
T: 212-722-5234, F: 212-722-5936

The National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ)
(formerly The National Conference of Christians and Jews)
475 Park Avenue South, 19th Floor
New York, N.Y. 10016-6901
Contact: Chrissie Reyes
Communications & Marketing Associate
T: 212-545-1300, F: 212-684-2616
E-mail: creyes@nccj.org
Web site: www.nccj.org

United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
3211 Fourth Street, NE
Washington, D.C. 20017-1194
Contact: Monsignor Francis Maniscalco
Director of Communications
T: 202-541-3200, F: 202-541-3173
Web site: www.usccb.org

National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA
Office of Interfaith Relations
475 Riverside Drive, Room 868
New York, N.Y. 10115-0050
Contact: Rev. Dr. Jay T. Rock
T: 212-870-2560, F: 212-870-2158
E-mail: jayr@nccusa.org
Web site: www.nccusa.org

National Spiritual Assembly of Baha'is of the United States
Office of Public Information
1320 19th Street, NW, Suite 701
Washington, D.C. 20036-1610
Contact: Gregory Meyjes, Director
T: 202-466-9870, F: 202-466-9873
E-mail: opi@usbnc.org
Web site: www.us.bahai.org

North American Federation of Temple Brotherhoods
and the Jewish Chautauqua Society
633 3rd Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10017-6778
Contact: Mr. Douglas Barden, Executive Director
T: 212-650-4100 (800-765-6200), F: 212-650-4189
E-mail: nftb@uahc.org
Web site: www.rj.org/nftb

WEB SITE

Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly Online, the Web companion to the television series, is a useful tool for viewers to learn more about the series and to explore related issues. The site offers access to more information about religion and ethics through video and audio clips from the show (including the related program clips mentioned in each of the essays in this guide), essays and commentary supplementing topics explored in the series and special discussion forums. Other features include transcripts of each 30-minute program, weekly polls, and full transcripts of interviews with newsmakers and scholars. *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly Online* also provides a list of outreach resources and links to a variety of Web sites on different religions and faith traditions.

This *Viewer's Guide* and the guides from previous seasons of the series are available in PDF format and can be downloaded.

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