



# viewer's guide



With essays, discussion questions and resources on our changing religious and ethical landscape  
A production of Thirteen/WNET New York

# Contents



**Interfaith America** by Gustav Niebuhr

2



**Religion in the Age of AIDS** by Michael Kress

6



**The Language of Paradise** An interview with Philip Zaleski and Carol Zaleski

11



**Business Ethics, Morality and Vision** by Jeffrey L. Seglin

14



**Death & the Afterlife** by Missy Daniel

17



**Related Program Clips**

21

## Dear Reader and Viewer,

**i**f any single view unites people of different nations and circumstances, it is their unhappiness with the current state of the world, according to a recent international survey of global attitudes. “The world is not a happy place,” the Pew Research Center reports. “Almost all national publics view the fortunes of the world as drifting downward.”

People at home and abroad are troubled by fear of war and terror, a weak economy, corporate scandals in American business, and sexual scandals among some Catholic clergy. They worry about the global spread of illness and disease, and they are insecure about the future.

At such a moment, serious, thoughtful reporting about religion and ethics seems all the more necessary.

The readings and resources in this edition of the Viewer’s Guide extend the reporting of *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* on several timely subjects — inter-faith efforts to come to terms with religious difference; religion’s response to the HIV/AIDS crisis; the state of business ethics; religious rituals and beliefs about death and the afterlife; and the meaning of prayer in human life and culture.

We hope that *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* and this companion guide will contribute not only to understanding religious experience in these times but also



Bob Abernethy, Host and Executive Editor of *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*

to the larger conversations underway in American society about the role of religion and ethics in a complicated world.

Yours truly,

**Bob Abernethy**  
*Executive Editor*

**Arnold Labaton**  
*Executive Producer*

## About the Television Series

Hailed as “one of the most thoughtful and satisfying magazine series on the air” (*Minneapolis Star Tribune*), *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 of all religions, all denominations, and all expressions of faith.

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# Interfaith America

by Gustav Niebuhr



**More than a decade has passed since the end of the Cold War, and the world has abruptly entered a new era in which religious belief can seem distressingly linked to acts of terrible violence.**

Assorted terrorists, sometimes acting as mobs, sometimes working alone as suicide bombers, often cite religious beliefs to try to justify murder and mayhem. On one hand, this means that religion must be regarded with the utmost seriousness in the 21st century, for the world cannot be fully understood otherwise. But should these events also impel believers of different faiths to work together for understanding and harmony?

An answer might be found in the words of the eminent Swiss theologian Hans Küng, who once wrote that peace among nations will be impossible without peace among religions. And there could be no peace among religions without dialogue, he said.

That's a tall order. It demands that members of different faith groups speak with one another as equals, discussing their religious beliefs, discovering common ethical ground, while also recognizing their theological differences. The problem is that doing this involves overcoming centuries of suspicion and mistrust that often divide faith groups. In addition, the differences between major religions are momentous, distinguished by claims to absolute truth that cannot be ignored.

Against these odds, however, a trend toward interfaith dialogue has emerged, gaining steam in the late twentieth century, especially in the United States and Europe. Those involved call it a movement. Its possibilities for peace have been hailed by some major religious figures, notably Pope John Paul II and the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet.

At a multifaith gathering in Assisi arranged by the Vatican in 1999, the pope called dialogue among religious people a sign of hope for collaboration against social injustices. "Greater mutual esteem and growing trust," he said, "must lead to still more effective and coordinated common action on behalf of the human family."

It's not surprising if all this seems new to some people. Efforts to build ties across religious lines may amount to a movement, but it is a much decentralized one. Furthermore, interfaith work rarely makes the news. In that sense, it would seem to be at a distinct disadvantage compared with its opposite, the use of violence either on behalf of or against a religious group.

But, as shown by events in 1965 and 2001, there can be a link between these two tendencies.

It was the terrible legacy of the Holocaust that gradually forced major Christian churches to confront anti-Jewish elements in their traditions. In 1965, at the close of the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church produced a document — the Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions — which, among much

else, deplored anti-Semitism and rejected the idea that the Jewish people could be blamed for the death of Jesus. Since then, the Church has gone considerably further, building closer ties with the world's Jews and affirming that their covenant with God was never revoked.

After September 11, 2001 interfaith activity in the United States increased. In the wake of the murderous attacks on New York and Washington by the al-Qaeda terrorist network, people of different faiths sought each other out, arranging joint worship services to share their common grief. In addition, a number of Christians and Jews were moved to help their Muslim neighbors, concerned that Muslims risked falling victim to a violent backlash against Islam and to vandals who would seek out Muslim property and people. In many cities and towns, non-Muslims reached out in small but meaningful ways, standing vigil outside mosques and Islamic schools or offering to go shopping for Muslim women who feared harassment if they left their homes.

At the same time, churches, colleges and civic groups began turning to Muslims who felt sufficiently articulate and acculturated to speak about Islam to non-Muslim audiences that might know nothing of the faith beyond the fact that al-Qaeda's terrorists claimed to act in its name. Last spring, I met one imam, the spiritual leader at a major urban mosque, who said he had accepted nearly 100 speaking invitations within seven months of the attacks. In an outreach of their own, many mosques flung open their doors, holding open houses to allow non-Muslim neighbors to visit, ask questions and learn about Islam.

The speeches and open houses amount to a basic level of interfaith dialogue. How long they will continue is an open question. But their cumulative effect has been to raise the public profile of Muslims in the United States, making their inclusion in interfaith organizations appear all the more necessary.

## Finding a Way

Still, even the simplest interfaith activity can be controversial. President Bush's statements that Islam is a peaceful faith have met with criticism by some conservative Christians. Beyond that, Christians in general are divided over how they should respond theologically to other religions in a world where immigration and new communication technologies have brought people so much closer.

In a recent book, Catholic theologian Paul F. Knitter identifies at least four major approaches by Christians to understanding other faiths. These run the gamut from a theology of "replacement" (Christianity is to replace all other religions), to one of "fulfillment" (Christ fulfills and

*Facing page* Crowd of spiritual leaders and followers gather at the second Parliament of the World's Religions, Chicago, 1993

## No Religion is an Island

The growth in interfaith dialogue at home and abroad has been widely recognized but it is not without ongoing controversy.

One of the most discussed Vatican texts in decades was a declaration on religious pluralism released in September 2000. Some fear that its language (that followers of other religions are “in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the church, have the fullness of the means of salvation”) will have a chilling effect on interfaith dialogue. Others have observed that the pope’s many concrete actions — his prayerful visit to a mosque in Damascus, his trip to a synagogue in Rome and to the Western Wall in Jerusalem, his major interreligious assemblies in Assisi — are all examples of interfaith outreach that speak louder than words.

In the United States, among the stories of increased interfaith activity after September 11, 2001, there were some very public examples of resistance to that trend. The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod forbids interfaith worship, and it suspended the Rev. David Benke, a district president of the synod, for participating in a post-September 11 interfaith memorial service in New York City. The denomination also investigated two clergy at Valparaiso University, a school in Indiana with ties to the synod, over an interfaith event that marked the anniversary of the September 11 attacks.

The Southern Baptist Convention, America’s largest Protestant denomination, refrains from interfaith cooperation. Hasidic Jews say it is more important to invest in strengthening their own faith than to be advocates of interfaith activity. And in some parts of the Muslim world, particularly outside the United States, better interfaith relations receive little attention.

“The first and most important prerequisite of interfaith is faith,” wrote Abraham Joshua Heschel, one of the foremost Jewish theologians of our time, in a 1965 essay called “No Religion Is an Island.” He warned that “in a world of conformity, religions can easily be leveled down to the lowest common denominator.”

Heschel also dealt with the purpose of interreligious cooperation. “It is neither to flatter nor to refute one another, but to help one another,” he wrote. “Is it not clear that in spite of fundamental disagreements there is a convergence of some of our commitments, of some of our views, tasks we have in common, evils we must fight together, goals we share, a predicament afflicting us all?” It is still a question for interfaith advocates and critics alike to try to answer.

brings to perfection other religions), to one of “mutuality” (Christianity and other religions are mutually respectful), to one of “acceptance” (other, different faiths must be accepted).

While it may be possible to count different theological approaches to interfaith understanding, the number of interfaith organizations is far harder to estimate. One list offers a “sampling” of 26, many carrying the word “international” or “world” in their titles, but it is far from complete. Some interfaith dialogue takes place under the authority of large Christian organizations. The Vatican, for example, has a staff specializing in inter-religious affairs, as do the World Council of Churches and National Council of Churches.

But a great deal of interfaith work goes on outside such circles, occurring instead at a local level, which lends the movement an energy and staying power that come from grass roots enthusiasm. Local work, often enough, occurs when interested people from different religious groups decide they ought to meet to build closer community ties. Their events may occur in living rooms, in church or synagogue halls or at retreat centers.

Some months ago, I dropped in on one such gathering held at a Catholic retreat center in suburban Seattle. About 20 people, Christians, Jews and Muslims, were getting together once a month to talk over religious issues as a way to become better acquainted. That day, one man brought up a biblical story — Jacob wrestling with the angel — that touched off a lively discussion about what different religious traditions have to say about a believer’s right to challenge God. The discussion ran well over an hour but ended civilly. Later, one participant told me the sessions worked because everyone kept away from politics.

What brought that particular group together was a desire to talk about religious concepts. But it easily might have been a social issue that united them. Interfaith organizations have been formed to work against homelessness, to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS and to promote peace, among many other causes. The pope’s 1999 speech at Assisi talked about how dialogue can lead to social action. But for some, it can be the other way around: Practical collaboration leads to theological conversation.

The Rev. Marcus Braybrooke, co-president of the World Congress of Faiths, based in Oxford, England, has written that what makes the interfaith movement distinctive is the desire of participants to encourage religious people to be respectful and cooperative, rather than competitive with one another.

But being cooperative does not mean trying somehow to create a new religious faith. Indeed, many who have participated in interfaith dialogue report that by talking with people of other faiths, they gain a greater knowledge of and

Pope John Paul II at interreligious assembly in Assisi, 1994



commitment to their own, if only because they are forced to think deeply about what they believe.

## Openness to Other Traditions

Joseph C. Hough, Jr., the president of Union Theological Seminary, has called recently for Christians to adopt a new theology of other faiths, one that does not fear that openness to other religious traditions will compromise their own faith. “What is essential for Christian faith is that we know we have seen the face of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It is not essential to believe that no one else has seen God and experienced redemption in another place or time,” he says. “For my faith, Jesus Christ is decisive. But I am a Christian who strongly believes that God has always been and now is working everywhere in every human culture to redeem the world. I believe that there is ample evidence in the best of the world’s religions, including our own, that God’s work is effective. Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and others have been and are being transformed by a powerful vision of God that redeems them with hope and infuses their religious practice with compassion, justice and peace.”

A respect for religious differences, in fact, was a ground rule at a remarkable conference that many regard as the first great interfaith meeting, the World’s Parliament of Religions, held in Chicago in 1893. Among the conference’s stated objectives was a call for fostering “good understanding” among different groups of believers, but without encouraging indifference to dogma or trying to create a false unity.

Although organized largely by Protestants, the parliament provided a platform for other speakers, most notably from Asia. One man, the Hindu Swami Vivekananda of India, made an extraordinary impression, was lauded by conference delegates and was given enough news coverage to make him an international figure.

In his opening speech, Vivekananda offered a vision that continues to inspire some in the interfaith movement in its hope that believers across religious lines may make a positive difference in the world’s condition. Referring to the



Interfaith peace service at Trinity Church in Boston, 2003

ringing of the bell that opened the conference, Vivekananda expressed his great hope that the sound would toll “the death-knell” of all fanaticism and persecution. ♦

*Gustav Niebuhr, former national correspondent at The New York Times, is writing a book on contemporary religious diversity and interfaith dialogue.*

## Suggested Readings and Resources

*Christianity and World Religions* by Hans Küng (Orbis Books, 1993)

*Interreligious Dialogue: A Short Introduction* by Martin Forward (Oneworld Publications, 2001)

*Introducing Theologies of Religions* by Paul F. Knitter (Orbis Books, 2002)

*Sourcebook of the World’s Religions* by Joel Beversluis (New World Library, 2000)

Council for a Parliament  
of the World’s Religions  
70 East Lake Street, Suite 205  
Chicago, IL 60601  
Tel. 312-629-2990  
[www.cpwr.org](http://www.cpwr.org)

The Interfaith Alliance  
1331 H Street, NW, 11th Floor  
Washington, DC 20005  
Tel. 202-639-6370  
[www.interfaithalliance.org](http://www.interfaithalliance.org)

Interfaith Center of New York  
40 East 30th Street  
New York, NY 10016  
Tel. 212-685-4242  
[www.interfaithcenter.org](http://www.interfaithcenter.org)

North American Interfaith Network  
4910 Valley Crest Drive  
St. Louis, MO 64128-1829  
Tel. 314-892-1192  
[www.nain.org](http://www.nain.org)

The Pluralism Project  
Harvard University  
201 Vanserg Hall  
25 Francis Avenue  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
Tel. 617-496-2481  
[www.pluralism.org](http://www.pluralism.org)

World Congress of Faiths  
2 Market Street  
Oxford, OX1 3EF  
United Kingdom  
[www.worldfaiths.org](http://www.worldfaiths.org)

## Discussion Questions

- ♦ Do you think all religions are equal paths to salvation?
- ♦ Discuss your experiences with interfaith prayer, interfaith worship and interfaith dialogue.
- ♦ How do you understand and relate to other faiths? Does interfaith activity challenge your faith? Does it help you to understand it better?
- ♦ Do you think a religiously homogeneous society is less fractious than a pluralistic one?
- ♦ Is religious tolerance sufficient for there to be peace among religions?

# Religion in th

by Michael Kress

**Over since a mysterious illness started killing gay men in the early 1980s, religious groups have had a mixed record on coping with the disease that came to be known as AIDS. Although their faith traditions called them to care for those in need, some people of faith found it difficult to fulfill this mandate when it came to HIV/AIDS.**

Over the years, however, that attitude has changed for many religious leaders and lay people. As the death toll rises dramatically and the pandemic spreads to new parts of the globe (more than 40 million people worldwide have been infected with HIV/AIDS, 25 million have already died and, according to the National Intelligence Council, the number of those infected could rise to 100 million by 2010), religious organizations are working against AIDS with increasing passion. Still, AIDS forces people of faith to confront issues of sex and homosexuality, drug abuse, gender, race, stigmatization, poverty, and justice — not an easy task for many religions, yet facing difficult social issues has long been part of religious history.

"I don't care how you got AIDS — whether you got it from a needle, whether you got it through a blood transfusion, whether through homosexual contact, or whether just being careless," the influential evangelist Franklin Graham has told Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly in words that resonate across the religious spectrum. "It doesn't matter how you got it. The fact is you have it. The church of Jesus Christ, I think, needs to be on the forefront of this issue with love, with compassion, with understanding and giving hope to those that don't have hope."

Today, Buddhist temples in Thailand are providing health care and sex education to treat AIDS and prevent its spread; Presbyterians in Africa are distributing home-care kits for AIDS patients without access to medical care; synagogues throughout the United States give solace and spiritual care to AIDS patients and their families; and the United Methodist Church lobbies the U.S. Congress for greater funding to fight AIDS.

It is a significant change from 20 years ago, says the Rev. Jimmy Allen, former president of the Southern Baptist Convention. "We have moved out of the days of fear...to a

time of involvement with people living with AIDS," he says.

Allen's family knew those "days of fear" all too well. His daughter-in-law, Lydia, contracted the virus from a blood transfusion in the early 1980s, hours before giving birth to her son, Matthew. The disease went undiscovered until Lydia and her husband, Scott Allen, had a second son who died of AIDS as an infant in 1986. Matthew also had AIDS and lived with rejection upon rejection from church Sunday schools until he died at age 13. In addition, Jimmy Allen's son Skip is gay and HIV-positive.

"I have a lot of differences of opinion with my gay son, but we decided to love each other," Allen says. "There is an acceptance level when love is present that doesn't involve approval."

It is a message he hopes to convey to churches. "My challenge to churches is that they find out what's happening in the AIDS community," he says. "Once they see the pain and sorrow, the Christian response has to be to care for the victim."

## Mobilizing People of Faith

In the 1980s, as people began dying of AIDS, Earl Shelp, a Baptist pastor and medical ethicist in Houston, was among the first to mobilize people of faith to help. He founded Interfaith Care Partners, a non-profit organization in which small groups from Christian and Jewish congregations are matched with an AIDS patient to provide assistance.

"There were religious voices condemning people with AIDS and calling for their abandonment. We took that head on," Shelp says. "God's people are called to befriend and defend those who are on the margins of society."

As AIDS spread in the United States, it became harder for communities of faith to ignore the disease; their siblings, children, congregants, and co-workers were dying. Religious communities became increasingly involved. But in the 1990s, when the disease all but seemed to disappear, AIDS dropped off some agendas. Increased awareness about prevention had slowed its spread, and the advent of the so-called "cocktail" of AIDS drugs dramatically reduced the number of deaths in the United States.

Norman Sandfield, chairman of the International



# e Age of AIDS

Rosa Lee prepares for church while her daughter sleeps. Both are HIV positive.



© 1994, Washington Post photo by Lucian Perkins. Reprinted with permission.

Jewish AIDS Network, says his organization has all but ceased getting calls from Jews looking for either health services or spiritual solace. The former are less needed, and the latter is being provided by a large number of synagogues that have embraced AIDS victims and their families.

"People I know who are Jewish and living with AIDS — it's a chronic condition. They have a medical problem, but

they're not planning on dying anytime soon," Sandfield says, in a statement that is true for affluent American AIDS patients of all religions.

In truth, though, AIDS has hardly disappeared from the U.S. scene. Instead, it has moved from mostly white, relatively affluent gay men to mostly poor African Americans who cannot afford treatment with the AIDS "cocktail." Less

## A Crisis in the Present

To pastors such as the Rev. Darius Pridgen of True Bethel Baptist Church in Buffalo, NY, AIDS is not a thing of the past but very much a crisis in the present. "AIDS is not just spreading in the drug community, AIDS is not just spreading in the homosexual community, it's also spreading in the church community," Pridgen says.

Faced with a growing AIDS problem among inner-city African Americans, Pridgen halted services before his sermon one recent Sunday to take an AIDS test right in the pulpit and to implore his 2,500-member Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship congregation to follow suit.

But despite the fact that Pridgen is taking on the AIDS issue directly, he separates support for AIDS patients and the need for prevention from accepting what he cannot condone. He condemns homosexuality and non-marital sex in unambiguous terms. "You have to call sin sin, but HIV/AIDS is not the sin, it's the disease," he says. "Until you separate the sin from the disease, people are not going to get tested."

Before taking the public AIDS test, Pridgen says he called all the children to the pulpit, exhorted them to abstain from sex until they are married, and told them they should learn how to use condoms in case they need them after they are married — or before, should they choose to ignore his message of abstinence.

Pridgen criticizes churches that refrain from AIDS ministry because they feel it would be condoning the sin that gave people AIDS. "I am preaching a message of transformation," he says. "If I put out everyone who is not saved, who will I preach to? It's time for us to come before the cross and say we have made mistakes in our lives."

than half of all African Americans with HIV are recipients of Medicaid, the largest funding source for AIDS care. And while many African American churches and faith-based organizations, such as The Balm in Gilead, vigorously address the AIDS crisis in their ministries (through training institutes, awareness programs, prayer services, and capacity-building conferences for church leaders), many others, although they are a major force in their urban and rural communities, have been reluctant to address AIDS prevention, fearing it might undermine traditional Bible-based teaching on extramarital sex.

The vastness of the international pandemic has both reawakened religious organizations that had deemphasized AIDS and convinced newcomers to the issue that they must act. In the Presbyterian Church (USA), for example, the AIDS issue is getting increased funding at a time when the denomination is generally tightening its belt. At a major meeting in October 2002, plans were formulated to pair U.S. churches with African counterparts and to hire two Africa-based people to work exclusively on AIDS.

"The Presbyterian Church had been very active in the 1980s talking about issues of stigma and sexuality," says Jennifer Butler, the church's U.N. representative. "But nobody had taken up the banner of looking at the crisis globally."

Many religious leaders say their institutions still have not given AIDS nearly enough attention domestically or abroad. Richard Cizik, vice president for governmental

A woman speaks to the local Anglican church about her experiences with HIV and AIDS, Uganda, 2001



affairs at the National Association of Evangelicals, cites a recent survey sponsored by World Vision, the Christian humanitarian organization, that found only three percent of evangelicals consider HIV/AIDS a priority for giving. He laments the fact that AIDS ministries have had to close their doors for lack of funds. "Our people are not willing to invest dollars in these sorts of ministries," he says. Yet at a recent conference on HIV/AIDS sponsored by Samaritan's Purse, Franklin Graham's international relief organization, Graham called on evangelical Christians to attack AIDS "with the same level of commitment, zeal, money, and resources that we have rightly applied toward combating international terrorism," and he acknowledged publicly that many Christians have been wrong to avoid AIDS ministry.

## Rethinking Attitudes

Despite all the efforts to combat AIDS, some theologians say communities of faith cannot truly be part of the solution without deep introspection about traditional religious stances on human sexuality. "[AIDS is] a life-and-death situation and you need to rethink your values," say Letty Russell, a feminist theologian and professor emeritus at Yale Divinity School. "The stigma of having it is still so great. In the U.S., people assume you're gay. In other countries, they assume you're a prostitute."

Russell and others point to the fact that many religious leaders deny that AIDS is a problem, and some still condemn AIDS patients as sinners. In other cases, they say, traditional religious beliefs inhibit efforts at prevention. In South Africa, for example, one of the countries most devastated by the pandemic, Catholic bishops in 2001 condemned the use of condoms to prevent AIDS as "immoral and misguided" with one exception — for married couples, and even then it is limited. The bishops said that when one partner is HIV-positive, a married couple could use condoms in some circumstances. They also claimed that condoms "contribute to the breakdown of self-control and mutual trust," and may be one of the main reasons for the spread of HIV/AIDS.

Yet Catholics in general have been "in the forefront of responding to people with AIDS," according to Kenneth Overberg, S.J., a moral theologian at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. But, he continues, there is only so much the church can do without systemic change. "Many of us find the traditional teachings limiting," Overberg says. "That work needs to be done delicately, but many of us know it needs to be done."

In San Francisco, Steve Peskind, co-coordinator of the Buddhist AIDS Project, spends much of his time applying Buddhist teachings to the prevention of AIDS and care for AIDS patients — breathing techniques, mindfulness meditation, end-of-life counseling, advocacy for compassionate social action, spiritual reflection on impermanence and suffering, and simply being present for people with AIDS. "We're basically trying to infuse Buddhist perspectives into



World AIDS Day, India, 2002

what is sometimes seen as an addictive culture of sex and sexual gratification," he says.

But Peskind also grapples with traditional Buddhist teachings about sexual misconduct that he says contribute to anti-homosexual attitudes around the world. Gay Buddhists in San Francisco have met with the Dalai Lama, spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism, to discuss Buddhist statements on homosexuality and "what the consequences may be, especially for sexual minorities," Peskind says.

It is all the more unfortunate, say those involved in the issue, because religion has a unique role to play in fighting HIV/AIDS. With its influence on believers' values and behavioral norms — and its role in caring for the suffering — religion can have an impact on everything from prevention to treatment to dealing with the dying.

"[In] Africa, but largely everywhere in the world, people are extremely religious, and religion is tied to the culture," says Russell. "Religion is at the heart of people's culture and way of life, and if you don't address ways it can be used to change attitudes toward sexuality, you're not going to be successful in stemming the disease."

In South Africa, where only about two percent of the population is Muslim, Rukia Cornelius is in charge of awareness and education programs at mosques and Islamic societies for an AIDS support group called Positive Muslims. "We believe in a theology of compassion," she says, "a way of reading the Holy Koran...that focuses on



Grave diggers work to bury an average of 50 bodies every day, many of them AIDS victims. Funeral processions arrive every 15 to 20 minutes. Lusaka, Zambia

Allah as most compassionate.”

Too many Muslims, she observes, seem to believe that HIV/AIDS does not affect them. They say that Muslims are not promiscuous, or that Muslims have strong moral values and don't have sex before marriage.

“We do gratefully have pockets in our community that want to make a difference and are starting to develop their own HIV/AIDS programs,” says Cornelius. But local Muslim judicial councils, she reports, ignore the situation and refuse to use “the strongest tool available to us — the pulpit.”

In Senegal, however, where the HIV infection rate is barely one percent, imams in Senegal's mosques told *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* correspondent Fred de Sam Lazaro that there is one important reason for the low number: the country is 95 percent devout Muslim. Homosexuality and marital infidelity, the imams preach, are outlawed by the Koran.

Conservatives and liberals alike point to another African country, Uganda, as an example of what can be done. There, schools, churches and mosques are used to provide AIDS education and care, and as a result, Uganda has recorded declining rates of HIV infection since 1993, according to a 2001 U.N. report — this at a time when the news about AIDS in Africa is almost uniformly tragic.

Religious leaders around the world are hoping to recreate the Uganda experience in many, many other countries — before it is too late. ♦

Michael Kress is editor-in-chief of the Internet site MyJewishLearning.com.

## Discussion Questions

- ♦ In what ways is AIDS a religious or spiritual issue? Are there other diseases that are religious issues?
- ♦ How has your religious community responded to HIV/AIDS? Are health ministries part of your religious tradition?
- ♦ Do Americans have a greater responsibility to assist AIDS victims in the United States than to help victims abroad? How might faith-based organizations and others decide where to dedicate limited resources to fight AIDS?
- ♦ What role do religious views about sex, gender and homosexuality play in the way you see AIDS and the spread of the disease?

## Suggested Readings and Resources

*AIDS, Ethics & Religion: Embracing a World of Suffering* edited by Kenneth R. Overberg, S.J. (Orbis Books, 1991)

*AIDS in Jewish Thought and Law* edited by Gad Freudenthal (Ktav Publishing House, 1998)

*Catholic Ethicists on HIV/AIDS Prevention* edited by James F. Keeler (Continuum, 2000)

*The Church with AIDS: Renewal in the Midst of Crisis* edited by Letty M. Russell (Westminster John Knox Press, 1990)

*The Continuing Challenge of AIDS: Clergy Responses to Patients, Friends and Families* by Robert Beckley and Jerome Koch (Auburn House, 2002)

*Islamic Model for Control of AIDS* by Javed Jamil (Mission Publications, 1996)

*Somebody's Knocking at Your Door: AIDS and the African-American Church* by Ronald Weatherford and Carole Boston Weatherford (Haworth Pastoral Press, 1999)

The Balm in Gilead  
[www.balmingilead.org/home.asp](http://www.balmingilead.org/home.asp)

The Body: Religion and AIDS  
[www.thebody.com/religion.html](http://www.thebody.com/religion.html)

Council of Religious AIDS Networks  
[www.aidfaith.com](http://www.aidfaith.com)

The Global AIDS Interfaith Alliance  
[www.thegaia.org](http://www.thegaia.org)

*Religion in the Age of AIDS* by Public Media Center and AIDS National Interfaith Network  
[www.publicmediacenter.org/pdfs/religion.pdf](http://www.publicmediacenter.org/pdfs/religion.pdf)

# The Language of Paradise

**Q: What do we know about the origins of prayer?**

*Philip Zaleski:* We don't know what the earliest religion was like, but certainly it involved some sort of ritual. As far as we know, ritual never exists without prayer of some kind, so we can assume they came about simultaneously, and both seem immensely old. We have Cro-Magnon cave drawings of people in ritual postures, arms stretched out to the sky, that seem pretty clearly to be prayer postures. Neanderthal burial sites involved ritual action—placing flowers on dead bodies, aligning dead bodies with compass points—and showed a symbolic and religious understanding of the cosmos that always goes along with prayer.

*Carol Zaleski:* But societies didn't designate a separate compartment of culture as religious until modern times. Prayer, ritual and religion were complementary. Today, people may feel an instinct to pray and not view themselves as religious, but this is a novel situation.

**Q: What prompts prayer among believers and skeptics alike?**

*Carol Zaleski:* Prayer is inscribed in our ordinary language. After all, the word “pray” just means “to ask.” It's polite



language expressing a wish in a particularly gracious way. We all have the instinct to say, “Let me get over this illness,” or “Let me pass this test.” That is prayer in embryonic form—even if it's not clear who is being addressed.

**Q: What about the relationship between prayer and language?**

*Carol Zaleski:* People who pray sense that words have a special power. Underlying prayer is the belief that language is not just an instrument for expressing ideas, but also a creative force. In traditions that believe the world

was created through speech, human beings who use sacred language—the language of prayer—are echoing the language of God, the Creator who spoke the world into existence. Some traditions say that when you pray to God, God is praying through you, also.

The language of prayer is strong and mysterious and often can't be translated into ordinary words. In Buddhism and Hinduism, the Sanskrit syllable *Om* doesn't have a translatable meaning. It is a summation of all meaning, a sacred sound embodying the audible essence of absolute reality. Chanting *Om* is a way of connecting to that reality.

*Philip Zaleski:* In Navajo healing rituals, every word must be said precisely right or healing doesn't occur. When there

is an error, often things have to restart from the beginning. Language is coded to allow sacred, healing activities that involve divine energies.

*Carol Zaleski:* In Vedic sacrifices, special priests, who make sure all the words are said in the proper order, are invested with the inherent power of the mantra. Because ordinary language is inadequate for communication with the gods, most traditions have special, often archaic language for prayer.

**Q: You also observe that prayer is rooted in sacrifice.**

*Carol Zaleski:* One of the oldest forms of religious activity is offering good things to the divine—burning up food stuffs or animals or even human beings—and getting something in return. In ancient Judaism, when the Temple was standing, the central form of worship was performing sacrifices. The exemplar was Abraham’s willingness to sacrifice his son, for whom a ram was substituted. When literal sacrifice is no longer practiced, as in Judaism after the destruction of the Second Temple, prayer often takes its place. Similarly, in Hinduism and Buddhism, prayer, meditation and ascetic spiritual disciplines internalize the Vedic fire sacrifice, burning up passions on the altar of one’s body. In every tradition, offering worshipful prayer is seen as a spiritual sacrifice.

**Q: Two of the most influential prayers are the Lord’s Prayer in Christianity and the Kaddish in Judaism.**

*Carol Zaleski:* In both cases, the first thing is to magnify the divine name. You offer your adoration: “Hallowed be Thy Name,” or “Glorified and sanctified be God’s great name.” You align yourself with God’s will: “Thy will be done,” or

[Previous page](#) Cree Indian, Quebec, 1992  
[Below](#) Young Jewish man at prayer

“May He establish His kingdom in your lifetime.” The Lord’s Prayer goes on to say, “Give us this day our daily bread,” because prayer involves an exchange, a willingness to give up everything in order that God’s will be done. Yet in the very act of giving up everything, you receive everything. You receive the gift of life and goodness.

**Q: What about unanswered prayers?**

*Philip Zaleski:* That’s the most difficult question anybody could ask about prayer. People often assume that if a prayer seems unanswered, it’s simply being answered in a way that’s so surprising it escapes our perception. Others say an unanswered prayer means the prayer was inappropriate and didn’t deserve an answer. For others, it’s evidence that there is no divine realm to provide an answer. And to other people, it’s simply a great mystery. In asking, a dialogue is created between you and God. The outcome is simply not clear. However, asking can be valuable in its own right, regardless of the outcome. The Lord’s Prayer puts petitionary prayer on the same level as adoration or contemplation. This is one of the important things we’ve discovered—that petitions, often derided as the least important form of prayer, stands shoulder to shoulder with all other types of prayer.

**Q: What is the origin of continuous prayer?**

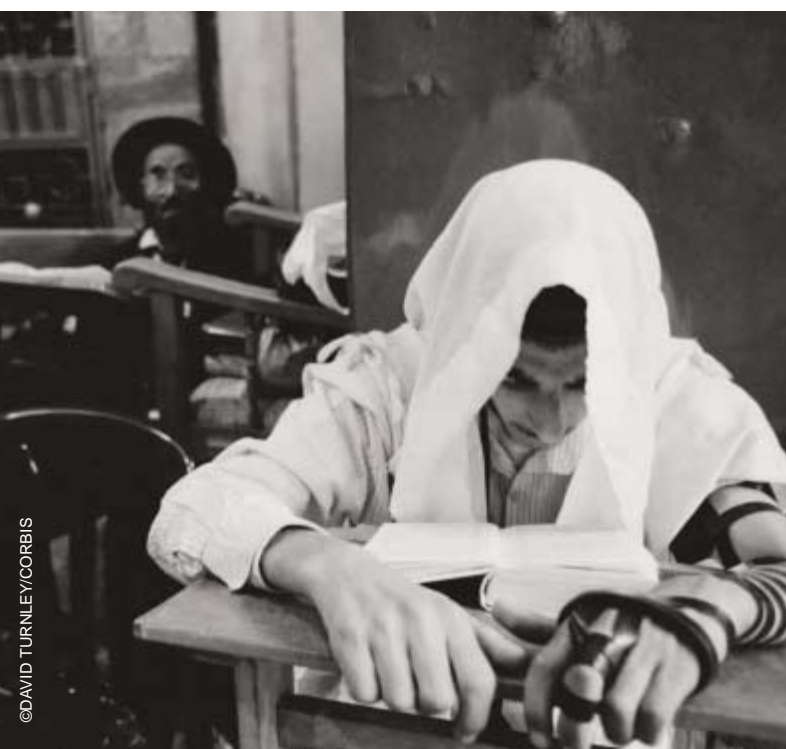
*Carol Zaleski:* It’s in St. Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians: “Rejoice always, pray without ceasing.” The Jesus Prayer, according to Eastern Christian tradition, is a response to Paul’s injunction. In the 19th-century Russian classic, *The Way of a Pilgrim*, the pilgrim hears this text and asks, “How can I be constantly in a state of prayer?” The method he learns involves repeating the name of Jesus over and over again. You acknowledge your neediness and make a petition: “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner.”

Unceasing prayer is found in any tradition that involves repetitive prayer. The idea is not that God needs to hear something more than once. It’s a way of standing before God ceaselessly, a foretaste of what it would be like in heaven praising and contemplating God, an imitation of eternity in time.

**Q: What about prayer as rapture and as refuge?**

*Carol Zaleski:* Many prayer practices induce a state of ecstasy. People faint, swoon or fall into trances. Fasting and seclusion, repetitive chanting and ecstatic dancing, like that found in Afro-Caribbean traditions or the whirling prayers of the Mevlevi Sufis, can help bring on such states. You can see resemblances between the Pentecostal “slain in the spirit,” the Voodoo practitioner taken over by one of the deities, and the god-intoxicated Hindu saints of India.

*Philip Zaleski:* Apart from prayers like the Lord’s Prayer, repeated exactly the same way day after day, prayers of taking refuge are probably the most common. Whenever any-



one is in sudden need, a state of crisis, or just facing a minor problem, asking for help means taking refuge. A well-known modern example is Alcoholics Anonymous, where individuals finally realize they can't do anything on their own and take refuge in a higher power. The idea is praying for safety.

**Q: Prayer often includes tangible objects — stones, shells, beads, books, icons, incense.**

*Carol Zaleski:* We have visualized a museum featuring all of prayer's cultural treasures and artifacts — Tibetan prayer wheels and prayer flags, for instance. When the wheels spin and the flags wave, the wind makes the prayer happen, so the whole natural world is conspiring to be part of this prayer.

In Japan we found fans inscribed with the Nembutsu, the Buddhist prayer invoking the grace of Amida Buddha. Every time you fan yourself, you are saying the prayer. Rosaries and beads, knotted ropes and stones are used to count prayers in many traditions. But these sensual objects can also take on a sacramental quality. All the senses enter into prayer — the visual through the use of icons and holy images; the aural through music and numinous sounds; the sense of smell through incense, flowers and perfumed oils.

*Philip Zaleski:* This counters another commonly held notion — that the highest prayer is wordless, contemplative prayer. But richly physical prayers are also important.

**Q: One of your touchstones is William James's line: "Prayer...is the very soul and essence of religion."**

*Carol Zaleski:* He wrote that in *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, and we are taking it as our motto. But personally, James was ambivalent about prayer. "I can't possibly pray. I feel foolish and artificial," he wrote a year before he died on a student's questionnaire about religious beliefs. Here was the great defender of religious experience and the benefits of prayer, stuck on the threshold, never able to pray himself.

**Q: In what sense is prayer "the language of paradise"?**

*Carol Zaleski:* The historian of religion Mircea Eliade spoke about a nostalgia for paradise. In paradise, the legends say, heaven was close to earth and human beings communicated freely with the gods. Prayer is the last vestige of that lost art of free communication with the divine.

*Philip Zaleski:* Perhaps prayer is also the language by which we reach toward paradise — a paradise we may never reach in this lifetime. But if it can be approached, it is through prayer. ♦

*Philip Zaleski, senior editor of Parabola magazine, and Carol Zaleski, professor of religion at Smith College, are writing The Language of Paradise, a book on prayer to be published by Houghton Mifflin. Interview by Missy Daniel.*



Sufi Muslim in a religious ceremony called Zikar. Kabul, Afghanistan, 2002

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## Discussion Questions

- ♦ Must one be religious to pray?
- ♦ What difficulties does prayer face in a modern, religiously plural world?
- ♦ Do men and women pray differently?
- ♦ What is the relationship between prayer and free will?
- ♦ How do you understand suffering that is unrelieved by prayer?
- ♦ Why do you think prayer endures?

## Suggested Readings

- The Cloud of Unknowing* translated by A.C. Spearing (Penguin USA, 2002)
- Diary of a Country Priest* by Georges Bernanos (Carroll & Graf, 2002)
- The Divine Hours* by Phyllis Tickle (Doubleday, 2000 and 2001)
- A Guide to Jewish Prayer* by Adin Steinsaltz (Random House, 2002)
- Language of Faith* edited by Nahum Glatzer (Schocken Books, 1975)
- The Oxford Book of Prayer* edited by George Appleton (Oxford University Press, 2002)
- Praying with Our Hands* by Jon M. Sweeney (Skylight Paths, 2002)
- Watch and Pray* edited by Lorraine Kisly (Bell Tower, 2002)
- The Way of a Pilgrim* translated by R. M. French (Harper San Francisco, 1991)
- The Way We Pray* by Maggie Oman Shannon (Conari Press, 2001)

# Business Ethics, M

by Jeffrey L. Seglin

**“If we're going to have morality at all,” says Peter A. French, director of the Lincoln Center for Applied Ethics at Arizona State University, “if it's to mean anything, then it has to have muscle.” French is outraged that after more than a year of corporate scandals, the highly-placed perpetrators “have suffered very little.**

“Everybody thinks that the guys involved in Enron, WorldCom, Tyco, and so on have done things that are totally unjustifiable from a moral point of view,” says French. “The question then is, so what?”

Ethicists fear that people don't take them — or ethics — seriously, French observes. “If all you say is that what these folks did is really bad or wrong, if that's the end of it, then the concept of bad and wrong has become vacuous.”

For business ethics to be taken seriously, corporations will need to make three major changes. First, they must make clear what acceptable ethical behavior is. Second, violating ethical behavior has to have consequences. And finally, ethical behavior needs to be just as integral to business operations as is profitably growing the business.

On the surface, these tasks seem straightforward enough. Yet try to get a fix on what people mean when they talk about business ethics and it is quickly apparent how muddled the topic can become.

Recent high-profile corporate scandals have brought into sharp relief what happens when people lose sight of what it means to be a moral human being. It's too easy to point a finger at corporations as the culprit. But business, says Jacob Needleman, a philosophy professor at San Francisco State University, “is only a reflection of what society wants. Society gives business permission to do what it's doing because it provides things that society wants and needs.”

## Don't Look Now

It's not particularly surprising that people turned a blind eye to corporate misbehavior during the run-up in the economy in the late 1990s. In a monthly business ethics column I write for *The New York Times*, I asked: Why did so few of Enron's 20,000 employees come forward to report that

something was amiss? One answer is that when a company's stock is performing obscenely well, few people want to rock the boat even if they know shortcuts were taken. At Enron, for example, televisions in the elevators carried the financial news stations so the sixty percent of the employees who held stock options could see how much wealthier they had become as they reached the next floor. Another reason is that employees had a vested interest in the company's performance. “When everything is looking good, few people look too closely,” says Max Stackhouse, a professor of Christian ethics at Princeton Theological Seminary.

If acceptable behavior in business is driven by how well a company can line its employees' pockets, there's a troubling disconnect between ethics and business. But this disconnect is only apparent, says Anthony Grayling, a philosophy lecturer at the University of London. “Because business is governed by the bottom line...it seems as if there is nothing but hard-nosed calculation out there in the market, and sure enough, that is how it is. But fraud, deceit, manipulation, insider dealing, cheating of any kind — these things are treated as unacceptable because they destabilize the good order of the market, and so the market has its ethics, too, and generally speaking there is a kind of tough probity in its dealings, which are a necessary condition for its existence. This doesn't mean that there aren't a lot of swindlers and people sailing close to the wind out there, whose concern to get rich...turns them into cheats. But it isn't approved of, and that's the ethical bottom line in play.”

While corporate scandals can be seen as a failure of ethical behavior in business, that they come to light at all might be an example of how the “ethical bottom line” Grayling speaks of has successfully deemed such behavior unacceptable.



# morality and Vision



## Discussion Questions

- ◆ How have recent high-profile scandals changed the way you think about ethics in business?
- ◆ Do you agree that without significant punishment for violators of ethical standards in business, any talk of ethics is weakened?
- ◆ Why should whistle-blowers come forward in a company if there is no guarantee of protection from retribution, and almost a guarantee of career suicide?
- ◆ Observers say that one of the causes of unethical behavior in business is a relentless devotion to rewarding short-term results, most notably a company's stock price. From an ethical perspective, why should this matter?
- ◆ Do you think that the public holds businesses ethically accountable for their actions?
- ◆ Who should be held accountable for ethical behavior in companies?
- ◆ How might business managers measure the ethical outcomes of their decisions?
- ◆ Beyond individual ethical failures such as greed and lying, is there something about the business culture itself that encourages unethical behavior? What needs to change?

## Suggested Readings

- The American Soul* by Jacob Needleman (Tarcher/Putnam, 2002)
- The Good, the Bad, and Your Business: Choosing Right When Ethical Dilemmas Pull You Apart* by Jeffrey L. Seglin (Wiley, 2000)
- Meditations for the Humanist: Ethics for a Secular Age* by A.C. Grayling (Oxford University Press, 2002)
- Money and the Meaning of Life* by Jacob Needleman (Doubleday, 1991)
- On Moral Business* edited by Max Stackhouse (Eerdmans, 1995)
- The Right Thing: Conscience, Profit and Personal Responsibility in Today's Business* by Jeffrey L. Seglin (Spiro Press, 2003)
- Saving the Corporate Soul* by David Batstone (Wiley, 2003)
- The Virtues of Vengeance* by Peter A. French (University Press of Kansas, 2001)

Certainly, it's not just greed that's driven people to turn a blind eye to corporate misdeeds. Another stumbling block to disclosing corruption is that, while pop business ethics gurus would have us think otherwise, doing the right thing sometimes has painful repercussions. Indeed, the truest test of ethical behavior comes when you know what you do could cause you or your company pain and you do it anyway. (The words of Isaiah 59:14–15 provide wonderful context for knowing that when those around you are evil and you speak the truth, the outcome is not pretty: "So justice is driven back, and righteousness stands at a distance; truth has stumbled in the streets, honesty cannot enter. Truth is lacking, and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey.")

### Valuing Ethical Behavior

The fundamental questions raised by recent events, says Needleman, are: "What are the qualities of a really good human being? What does it mean to be virtuous? We've got to ask the question and really ask it deeply, struggle with it, think about it, ponder it, turn to ideas, turn to observations, turn to the Bible, turn to religion and don't settle for quick, easy answers."

Beyond that, the question of business ethics is not just about how wrongdoers will be punished. If corporations want ethical behavior in business to go beyond being a shallow attempt to paint a company in the best light, then they need to figure out a way to place a value on ethical behavior.

"We need a theory of productive justice," says Stackhouse, "one that justly rewards those who create new wealth for the commonwealth of humanity in a global era, and that neither destroys the ecology nor violates the human rights of all stakeholders."

David Batstone, a professor of social ethics at the University of San Francisco, believes that if the proper mechanisms are put in place, businesses may already be a receptive audience. "Most senior managers today do feel an escalating pressure to conform to higher standards of integrity," he says. "But if they cannot understand how to identify and measure their outcomes, managers are likely to consider principles a matter of image, not substance."

The corporate scandals of 2002 elevate the need for envisioning a business model that treats ethical behavior with the same respect as the bottom line. For those in business, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Proverbs 29:18) should be a rallying cry for a moral reinvention. ◆

*Jeffrey L. Seglin (jseglin@post.harvard.edu) teaches writing and ethics at Emerson College in Boston.*

by Missy Daniel

# DEATH & THE AFTERLIFE

**“All except God doth perish,” wrote the 13th-century Islamic mystic and poet Rumi, and his words express the realization of a universal experience — that life is transitory.**

The scriptures, rites and customs of world religions have much to say about how human beings face death and attempt to transcend it. Religious death rituals derive from the world’s diverse faith traditions and reflect each tradition’s answers to the most fundamental questions about the nature and destiny of human existence.

For weeks after September 11, Orthodox Jews volunteered to sit outside the New York City Medical Examiner’s office, singing the psalms and fulfilling the Jewish commandment to keep watch over the dead, who must not be left alone from the moment of death until burial. In an exception to the normal rules of the ritual, known as sitting *shmira*, women as well as men kept watch.

In everyday practice, after the dead are washed and buried, the Orthodox Jewish family lights a memorial candle and remains at home to sit *shivah*, a seven-day mourning period. Every day they recite the famous *Kaddish*, a traditional prayer that glorifies God (and makes no mention of death), and they continue to do so for a year. Friends and relatives visit to bring meals and say prayers, and family members make a tear in their clothing as a sign of grief. They may sit on the floor or on low chairs and shun vanity by covering the mirrors in the house — customs that have evolved over thousands of years to help the living confront the reality of death.

Hindus, too, ceremonially wash the dead in a purifying ritual, but do so to prepare the body for cremation rather than burial. Death is not final in Hinduism; it is one state in an endless cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth (*samsara*). The process by which an individual soul can be



*Adam Among the Angels*, Louvre, Paris, France

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*Lamentation*, Giotto de Bondone, c. 1305–06, Arena Chapel, Padua, Italy

reborn into a new human life (or as an animal or a plant) is known as reincarnation or transmigration. Release from continual reincarnation is sought by those who withdraw into ascetic practices such as fasting and meditation to try to achieve an afterlife that is a final state of liberation, or moksha — freedom from both death and rebirth. Ordinary Hindus, too, strive for a better rebirth or for freedom from rebirth through their loving devotion (bhakti) to a Hindu deity.

Cremation, an ancient Asian death rite, is becoming more and more common in modern America. “Cremation is not becoming popular because we’re becoming less religious,” Boston University religion professor Stephen Prothero has said. “It’s becoming more popular because

we’re becoming religious in a different sort of way,” redefining notions of immortality and accepting a more Eastern view that “spirit no more depends on the body it inhabits than bodies depend on the clothes they wear or the houses they live in,” as Huston Smith has written. Smith cites the *Bhagavad Gita*, the best known of all Hindu scriptures: “Worn-out garments are shed by the body / Worn-out bodies are shed by the dweller.”

Recently, the New York State Catholic Conference released a guide to Catholic teaching on cremation. The Catholic Church lifted its ban on the practice in 1963, and although it prefers burial or entombment of the body of the deceased, in imitation of the burial of Jesus’ body, cremation is permitted “as long as it is not chosen in denial of



*Death of the Historical Buddha*, Unidentified Artist, c. 1185–1333, Kyoto, Japan

Christian teaching on the resurrection and the sacredness of the human body.”

In Judaism, Christianity and Islam the resurrection of the body is what is hoped for. At Christian burials, the body is returned to the earth, as the Book of Common Prayer puts it, “in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection of the dead.” Prayers ask God to receive into his presence the one who has died. In Christianity, resurrection “promises actual life to individual persons within God’s global transformation of all things,” writes Bruce Chilton, a professor of religion and a chaplain at Bard College. In Judaism, there are a variety of beliefs about the relationship between body and soul, including that the body returns to the dust while “the soul, often identified as the divine spark, finds its way

back to the divine creator....Both body and soul return to their original source,” according to Jewish psychologist and anthropologist Henry Abramovitch.

The Koran teaches Muslims that body and soul will be reunited at the end of time on a day of resurrection, when God will judge everyone. “And the Trumpet shall be blown,” according to a passage often recited at Muslim funerals. “Then behold, they are sliding down from their tombs unto their Lord.” Men and women are separated in Muslim ceremonies of death and dying. As soon as possible after death, and with appropriate prayers accompanying each stage of the process, the dead body is washed, dressed in a cotton shroud and carried to the cemetery, where it is lowered into a simple grave without a coffin. Some devout



Left *Yahrzeit Plaque* (memorial plaque), Germany, c. 1910

## Discussion Questions

- ◆ What does your faith tradition have to say about death and the after-life? Body and soul? Heaven and hell? Funerals and cemeteries?
- ◆ Is there a “good” way to die?
- ◆ Talk about your own encounters with death at funerals or other settings and rituals. How did you make sense of the experience?
- ◆ What effect does the expectation of death have on life?
- ◆ What do the death rituals of your religion reveal about your beliefs about life and death?

## Suggested Readings

- Buddha* by Karen Armstrong (Viking Penguin, 2001)
- Death and the Afterlife* edited by Jacob Neusner (Pilgrim Press, 2000)
- Death and Afterlife: Perspectives of World Religions* edited by Hiroshi Obayashi (Praeger, 1992)
- Death, Afterlife and the Soul* edited by Lawrence E. Sullivan (Macmillan, 1987)
- The Death of Death: Resurrection and Immortality in Jewish Thought* by Neil Gillman (Jewish Lights, 2000)
- Facing Death* edited by Howard M. Spiro, et al. (Yale University Press, 1996)
- From This World to the Next: Jewish Approaches to Illness, Death and the Afterlife* (The Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1999)
- How Different Religions View Death and Afterlife* edited by Christopher Jay Johnson and Marsha G. McGee (The Charles Press, 1998)
- How We Die* by Sherwin Nuland (Vintage, 1995)
- The Illustrated World's Religions* by Huston Smith (Harper San Francisco, 1994)
- The Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection* by Jane I. Smith and Yvonne Y. Haddad (Oxford University Press, 2002)
- Purified by Fire: A History of Cremation in America* by Stephen Prothero (University of California Press, 2002)
- The Tibetan Book of the Dead* translated by Robert Thurman (Bantam, 1994)
- Western Attitudes toward Death* by Phillipe Ariès (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974)

Muslims disapprove of durable tombs and markers and the visitation of graves. But, according to history professor Ira Lapidus, “Muslims the world over take for granted that the dead in some way share the lives of the living” and have commemorated their family dead with the construction of tombs, visitation at graves and ceremonies of veneration, especially at the graves of saints and holy men.

According to ancient Chinese practices of piety, one pays respect to the souls of loved ones by frequently visiting their graves. But for immigrants and their children who live far from where their forebears lie buried, the practice of worshiping ancestors is often fulfilled by offering fruit and flowers and incense at a local temple in front of photographs that symbolize one’s ancestors, in order to make them comfortable in their new world. Many Chinese Buddhist temples in the United States, for example, make room for people to memorialize their ancestors in this way, although the practice existed long before Buddhism spread to China more than a thousand years ago.

In Buddhist thought, it is important to be mindful of death and to meditate on the impermanence of life. Buddhists, like Hindus, believe in the cycle of death and rebirth. But in the moment of his enlightenment and again at the end of a lifetime of training his mind to be conscious of human suffering and transitory reality, the Buddha was aware that he had transcended death. Scholar Karen Armstrong describes the experience as an extinction that was “the supreme state of being and the final goal of humanity.” In one Buddhist sutra or religious discourse, it is described this way:

As a flame blown out by the wind  
Goes to rest and cannot be defined  
So the enlightened man freed from selfishness  
Goes to rest and cannot be defined  
Gone beyond all images —  
Gone beyond the power of words. ◆

*Missy Daniel is the information editor at Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly.*

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*Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* Online, the Web companion to the television series, is a useful tool that can help the viewer learn more about the series, as well as explore a wide variety of related issues. The site offers visitors access to more information about the world of religion and ethics through streaming video, essays and articles supplementing topics explored in the series, and special discussion forums. Other features include transcripts of each 30-minute program, weekly polls, and full interview transcripts with newsmakers and scholars from select segments. *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* Online also provides a list of outreach resources and links to a variety of Web sites on differing faiths and religions. The Viewer's Guide is available in PDF format and can be downloaded.

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## Multifaith Calendar

Information on holidays and religious observances can be found on the series Web site ([www.pbs.org](http://www.pbs.org) or [www.thirteen.org](http://www.thirteen.org)) courtesy of the Multifaith Calendar, a leading resource for more than a dozen world religions and faith groups. To learn more about the Multifaith Calendar, please contact David Spence, Managing Editor, The Multifaith Calendar Committee, at 604-469-1164, or send an e-mail to: [mfcalendar@pacificcoast.net](mailto:mfcalendar@pacificcoast.net).

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### Interfaith America

*(Originally broadcast: June 22, 2001)* A conversation with Diana Eck, the author of *A New Religious America*, about living with religious diversity and learning from other faiths.



### Religion in the Age of AIDS

*AIDS and the African American Church in the South (Originally broadcast: January 11, 2002)* In Mississippi, 28 percent of new HIV infections are reported among heterosexual black women. Should pastors offer people any counseling on sex outside marriage? It's a real issue in the Deep South, especially in black churches, and especially for black women.



### Business Ethics, Morality and Vision

*Executive Compensation (Originally broadcast: June 21, 2002)* How much should a chief executive be paid? Is there something morally wrong with \$50 million or \$100 million salaries, especially when the value of a company's stock is going down? A look at why some Americans are paid so much.



### The Language of Paradise

*Jewish Prayer on the High Holidays (Originally broadcast: September 21, 2001)* At Yom Kippur on the Day of Atonement, the cantor leads the congregation in ancient, sung prayer, pleading for God's forgiveness. A cantor talks about prayer during the High Holidays.

*Desmond Tutu on Prayer (Originally broadcast: November 6, 1998)* Archbishop Desmond Tutu, now the retired head of the Anglican Communion of South Africa, describes how he understands prayer.



### Death & the Afterlife

*Thomas Lynch Profile (Originally broadcast: May 4, 2001)* A profile of writer and funeral director Thomas Lynch, author of *The Undertaking*.

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