



Religion & ETHICS
NEWSWEEKLY

V I E W E R ' S G U I D E

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

A Production of Thirteen/WNET

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



Dear Reader and Viewer,

All of us working on Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly, and at Thirteen/WNET in New York, are proud to present this second edition of our Viewer's Guide – ten thoughtful, provocative articles about religious practices and ethical choices by some of this country's most respected scholars and journalists.

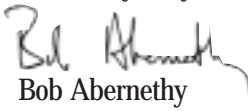
Like our television program, the guide explores the new diversity of America's spiritual life, the beliefs of the major faith traditions, and the profound ethical dilemmas facing us all. Indeed, there may never have been a time in this country's history of so much religious diversity and so many simultaneous ethical challenges.

We hope the guide will be informative for those who want to know more about their own religious traditions and the religious traditions of others. We also hope families and groups – at home, in places of worship, and in schools and other community organizations – will find it a springboard for stimulating conversation.

In the months to come, we intend Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly to continue to report the news that grows out of these and other ongoing conditions and conflicts. We also plan lively discussions with informed and sensitive participants in the country's rich spiritual life, and in its many debates about questions of right and wrong.

We welcome your comments about the guide and the programs, and we hope you find both of them interesting and useful.

Yours very truly,


Bob Abernethy
Executive Editor and Host


Gerry Solomon
Executive Producer

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Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly, a groundbreaking half-hour series for PBS, covers major religion and ethics news stories and examines significant developments within religions, denominations, and congregations, with reports from all over the U.S. and the world. Studio guests also address a religious or ethical issue, or look at a development in the general news from their religious or ethical perspectives, while special profiles focus on people doing interesting things with their lives because of their beliefs.

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 write to RELIGION & ETHICS NEWSWEEKLY Viewer's Guide, Thirteen/WNET, P.O. Box 245, Little Falls, NJ 07424-0245.

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In many people's minds, the new millennium is linked with cataclysmic change. Anticipating the world's end, some believers scramble to convert unbelievers, while others prophecy destruction for all who disagree with them. In the 20th century, the Holocaust and the fall of anti-religious Communist regimes abroad were earthquakes that altered the religious landscape. The Second Vatican Council was a different sort of earthquake, one which shook the foundations of the Catholic Church and led to remarkable positive changes. We know cataclysmic events will occur in the new millennium, but no one can predict what they will be. Meanwhile, we keep our eyes on the predictable changes, which more slowly but no less surely will alter our religious environment.

A third of a century ago — in the mid-1960s — most forecasters foresaw the decline of religion and the growth of secularism, first at home and then globally. By secular they meant a world in which people did not need or use religious explanations, a world in which ever fewer would practice faiths or pursue spirituality. The pace of decline seemed glacially slow but relentless. Surprise! At the turn of the third millennium, the picture has changed drastically.

THE GLACIER MELTS AND EXPANDS

Today, especially but not only in poorer nations, religion flourishes. In most parts of North America, religious growth is slower and religious institutions do not all prosper. Once Europe and America exported religious teachings around the world. Today they receive immigrants who bring their own faiths with them and spread them. In 1950, one-seventh of the world's population was Muslim. Today Muslims comprise almost one-fifth of a far larger world population. Other world religions like Hinduism and Buddhism grow apace. (See chart, p. 3.)

In North America, the growth of religious belief is spotty. One-fourth of Americans call themselves Catholic, but attendance at Mass has shrunk and entrants into the priestly ministry are declining. Mainstream Protestantism began to lose members in the 1960s, but thousands of congregations remain healthy. Judaism, plagued by rising rates of intermarriage, has not lived up to its promise of growth in the suburbs. But African Americans remain loyal to their churches and assert themselves, as do Protestant Pentecostals, fundamentalists, and conservatives, plus Muslims, Mormons, and Buddhists. Together they make up for losses in the old mainstream.

U.S. POPULATION CHANGE

In 1965, a change in immigration legislation opened gates for floods of non-Europeans to become U.S. citizens. Today, in many parts of the country, a Zen center or Hindu ashram nestles next to a synagogue or a Christian church. Such juxtapositions will become far more commonplace in the new millennium.

Will the newly prosperous faiths, once considered "marginal," mark an end to our Judeo-Christian

society? After all, Christianity is growing by only 0.8 percent annually and Judaism is not growing at all; on the other hand, Buddhism and Hinduism enjoy annual growth rates of 2.75 percent and 3.38 percent respectively, and Islam outpaces them all.

Still, the change will remain glacial. Christianity has such a huge numerical head start that by 2025 its population share will fall less than two percentage points, from 85 to 83.3 percent. Its teachings and practices, along with those of Judaism, mesh with too many elements of American culture to disappear. But fast-growing Islam and other faiths will subtly alter that culture, as they have already begun to do in public schools and community religious observances. In 25 years, will it make sense to speak of the United States as a Judeo-Christian society?

SPIRITUAL SURPRISES

God is dead. The world is godless. Religion will die. Those were the standard prophecies not long ago. The spiritual surprise of the late century is this: The vast majority of people around the world and at home experience God as living. They see the world's drama as a mixture of godliness and godlessness, which affects both faith institutions and spiritual impulses. The profound themes of doubt, disappointment, and despair will remain. But those who watch the new millennium's stories unfold will also be moved by bold affirmations and heroic faith and action. All the signs are there for these to appear.

— M. M.

WHAT LIES AHEAD

Prediction is risky, but let us project:

Expect anything but easy times for organized religion. God did not die, but the weekend, when most were devoted to God, changed. Sports and pleasure vie with the attractions of the houses of God. People move from place to place and are less loyal to inherited faith communities. A media-saturated population, addicted to ads for the latest in cars, entertainment, and sex, worships bargains and neglects God.

Still, religious people are amazingly adaptive. They will change worship hours and places, engage in market analysis, and meet new expectations. Denominations and congregations will not disappear, but their functions and styles may change. Most of them will not define doctrines or fence people in. Think of them as sometimes harmonious, sometimes squabbling extended families.

Expect ever increasing attention to be paid to “spirituality,” which competes with traditional and communal religion — and sometimes complements it. A third of a century ago, almost no one foresaw this trend. In the new millennium, expect people to continue saying, “I’m against organized religion. I’m probably not even religious. But I am very spiritual.”

Spirituality prospers in coffee shops and bookstores, at retreats and in conversations. Individuals go on spiritual journeys, often alone, sometimes with God or the gods, sometimes with a sense of the universe’s energy in their souls. Watch for more and more to congregate, however, forming organizations not unlike denominations. They will have to if they want to do works of mercy and justice.

(Continued on page 4)

WORLD RELIGIONS: HOW WILL THEY FARE?

Year:	1900	1970	2000	2025
<u>WORLD POPULATION</u>				
Total population	1,619,886,800	3,701,909,000	6,091,351,000	8,039,130,000
Urban dwellers	232,694,900	1,349,293,000	2,889,855,000	4,736,200,000
Rural dwellers	1,387,191,900	2,352,616,000	3,201,496,000	3,302,930,000
Adult population (over 15)	1,025,938,000	2,323,466,000	4,203,032,000	6,085,620,000
Literates	286,705,000	1,487,863,000	2,975,747,000	4,976,211,000
Nonliterates	739,233,000	835,603,000	1,227,285,000	1,109,409,000

WORLD POPULATION BY RELIGION

(Those who claim to have a religious affiliation.)

Christians (total all kinds)	558,056,300	1,222,585,000	2,015,743,000	2,710,800,000
Muslims	200,102,200	558,272,000	1,215,693,000	1,894,436,000
Nonreligious	2,923,300	542,976,000	774,693,000	878,669,000
Hindus	203,033,300	473,823,000	786,532,000	1,020,666,000
Buddhists	127,159,000	234,096,000	362,245,000	423,046,000
Atheists	225,600	172,744,000	151,430,000	160,193,000
New-Religionists	5,910,000	77,872,000	102,174,000	118,049,000
Tribal religionists	106,339,600	166,525,000	255,950,000	324,068,000
Sikhs	2,960,600	10,618,000	23,102,000	31,381,000
Jews	12,269,800	14,767,000	14,307,000	15,864,000

CHRISTIAN MEMBERSHIP BY ECCLESIASTICAL BLOC

(Some people have dual membership.)

Anglicans	30,573,700	47,520,000	77,000,000	110,000,000
Catholics (non-Roman)	276,000	3,214,000	6,688,000	9,635,000
Marginal Christians	927,600	10,838,000	26,173,000	47,210,000
Non-White indigenous Christians	7,743,100	59,784,000	362,647,000	585,071,000
Orthodox	115,897,700	147,369,000	223,513,000	271,755,000
Protestants	103,056,700	233,800,000	325,508,000	461,808,000
Roman Catholics	266,419,400	671,441,000	1,053,104,000	1,376,282,000

from Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission: 1999, by David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, International Bulletin of Missionary Research
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MASAO HAYASHIDONO, PHOTO RESEARCHERS, INC.

The fact that conservative and fiery forms of faith – Pentecostals, fundamentalists, and the like – have outpaced moderate faiths everywhere, including in the United States, is a sign that many seek absolute truths, secure identity, authority, and enthusiasm in a world where they have found too little. In the new millennium, many of these faiths will continue to burgeon, competing with postmodern relativism, the “you have your truths, I have mine” outlook.

The search for peace, civil rights, racial change, and economic welfare will continue to engage religious activists. But close-up concerns about the family, sexual behavior, and poverty at home will exert their pull as never before, as will global issues. It will dawn on more and more people that saving the planet from pollution and destruction is urgent. Finding ways to effect peace between “tribes” in an over-armed world, and helping close the gap between rich and poor, will be seen as specifically religious concerns.

A SOFTER, CARING GOD

Those who associate apocalypse and cataclysm with millennial turns will preach of hell-fire, brimstone, and damnation. But those words hardly characterize the faith or preachments of the vast majority of Americans. The new and growing language deals with a God who relates to humans and calls them to engage each other in reassuring, therapeutic, relational ways. God will be pictured, even more than before, as “soft,” personal, adaptive – to the point of risking sentimentality. Faith communities will have an ever-larger understanding of their role in healing mind and body and in reconciling diverse factions.

In part, this relates to the increasing role of women in religious and secular life. This revolution is unstoppable; though its course will not be even, its effects will be even more visible in the new millennium.

Will there still be theologians, people who reflect on religious experience? Not many people respond to the systematic philosopher-theologians at this start of the millennium, though they have a role to play. People are more likely to think imaginatively about the future and about God thanks to the stimulus of mystics, novelists, poets, and film-makers. These will take risks, portraying a God whose ways we cannot explain but whose presence so many of us experience.

God is dead! said a few thinkers not long ago. The modern experience reveals not a dead God, but one who appears to be absent. God’s silence mingles with divine presences and hushed, small voices that inspire people – and will continue to do so.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Are population changes bringing people of very different religions into your community? If so, how do you relate? If not, how do you imagine community life where there is drastic change?
2. Looking out from where we are, does it seem that religion is prospering or declining? What are some of the forces at work?
3. Can you define “spirituality”? Do you describe yourself as pursuing it? If not, what might you learn from it?
4. If you had to prepare an agenda for action by religious groups, what would be the lead items?
5. Does religion enter your world chiefly as an agent of healing or of conflict? How do you relate to both elements?

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MARTIN E. MARTY is director of the Public Religion Project at the University of Chicago, promoting efforts to bring to light and interpret the forces of faith within a pluralistic society.



PHOTO: GILLES PERESSIMIGNUM

The black church, often called the first African American institution, has played a vital role in shaping black life, from the days when it helped fleeing slaves “steal away to Jesus” and produced abolitionists who served as the nation’s moral conscience, through the times when it honed civil rights leaders, organized demonstrations, and registered sharecroppers to vote.

At the dawn of the new millennium, however, a host of social ills plagues urban America – from drug abuse, violence, and homelessness to joblessness, disease, and high prison rates. We now have the largest black underclass in history, and half of all black children live in poverty. Added to this, the chasm between working-class and middle-class black churches and “unchurched” communities deepens, challenging the religious community’s ability to solve urban dilemmas.

Despite these adversities, the black church remains the pivotal institution it has always been. One striking characteristic is its work to restore inner cities. Here, the separation of church and state seems to dissolve, as churches attempt to roll back poverty with an abundance of services and facilities – from day care and soup kitchens to family counseling, adoption programs, and hi-rise apartments. By focusing on academics,

churches steer youth away from drugs, premature parenthood, and gang activity. Baltimore’s 12,000-member Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church serves 56,000 people a year through its outreach programs and runs 38 ministries.

CHRISTIAN CAPITALISM

The black church was the “first form of economic cooperation” among African Americans, according to W.E.B. Du Bois. That spirit of cooperation continues, though some might label it a new form of black power – Christian capitalism. Christian capitalism flourishes in New York at Allen African Methodist Episcopal Church, where Floyd H. Flake, a former preacher-Congressman, presides. There, 12 church-based investment clubs, each with 99 members, implement various trading strategies. Evidently, when Flake speaks, people listen. When he was appointed pastor in 1976, Allen AME had 1,400 members and an annual budget of \$250,000. Today, it has 10,500 members, 11 subsidiary corporations with 825 employees, and a \$25 million budget.

Black churches pool resources too. The Congress of National Black Churches (CNBC), representing 65,000 churches and 20 million Christians, operates a large-scale after-school tutorial program and another aimed at encouraging entrepreneurship in churches. Established in 1978 by the seven largest black denominations – three Methodist, three Baptist, and one Pentecostal – CNBC forms the “beloved community” envisioned by Martin Luther King Jr.

Churches know that their work serves only as a stopgap compared to government programs. But they also recognize that economics is a powerful weapon in the holy war in our nation’s cities, a war waged ultimately for souls.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How can black churches reach out to the poor and attract new members while serving their current members?
2. Should black churches remain a distinct religious and social entity, and if so, why?
3. How does the concept of “freedom” in the black church during slavery differ from the concept of “freedom” during the civil rights era?

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Steven Barboza is the author of The African American Book of Values (New York: Doubleday, 1998).

THE TEN POINT COALITION

In 1992, at the funeral of a slain youth, a gang chased a youngster into the Morning Star Baptist Church in Boston and stabbed him. The incident served as “a wake up call” for clergy. Ministers from small churches in Boston’s black communities met at the home of Eugene Rivers, a Pentecostal minister and an ex-gang member who quit Harvard. Then they took to the streets, using the power of religion to win over gang members from lives of crime.

Eventually, the ministers devised ten direct intervention activities churches could undertake to reduce crime. This Ten Point Coalition, which includes collaboration with law enforcement, is credited with helping reduce the homicide rate for young black men in Boston.



CORBIS

Ultra-Orthodox Jewish rabbis cover their faces while praying.

To many citizens of the late 20th century, the world is involved in a colossal battle not unlike the struggles in the imaginary galaxy of *Star Wars*. Some, who would be considered fundamentalists or ultra-orthodox, see themselves as young Luke Skywalkers, preserving the God-given wisdom of the past against the godlessness of modern life. Others, described variously as moderates, progressives, or liberals, see the enemy as ignorance transmitted from the past. These groups clash, then, largely around the issues of modernity: women's rights, abortion, sexuality, and sources of truth.

The conflicts play out in nearly every religious tradition and every country. Christians argue over women's ordination, inclusive language in Scripture, officiating at same-sex marriages, and ordaining practicing homosexuals. Jews debate the legitimacy of conversions performed by Reform or Conservative rabbis or the level of commitment to ancient practices. Muslims attempt to establish governments based on the Koran, their sacred writings.

INTERNAL STRIFE

To some, the ominous force, Darth Vader, is not among the infidel, but rather among their fellow believers. People of the same religion may share doctrines and rituals of the faith, but have different diagnoses for what ails the world. To progressives, whatever their religion, modern life – even in its complexity – represents forward movement and thinking. Living in a pluralistic society requires that they reject the notion of one true and only faith and respect the claims of all earnest seekers.

Such acceptance of the premises of contemporary life is intolerable to the ultra-orthodox of all traditions. They find the modern world so threatening they must oppose it vigorously. If they don't, their faith community might not survive for another generation. The task for defenders of the faith, then, becomes how to identify those in their midst who are unwilling to sacrifice for their beliefs.

“Modernity erodes [the fundamentalists'] ability to distinguish the good people from the bad,” says Scott Appleby, professor of history at Notre Dame University and associate director of the University of Chicago's Fundamentalism Project. “People who come to the mosque or synagogue or parish may seem good and devout, but their commitment may not be complete.”

SEEKING THE TRUE BELIEVER

Worse almost than no faith is lukewarm faith, fundamentalists believe. They try to detect the true believers by testing their commitment, Appleby says, pushing those teachings and practices that most challenge a modern mind.

Thus, many conservative Christians require their co-religionists to believe that the Bible is inerrant in everything, including science and history. Or they support the position taken by the Southern Baptist Convention at their annual meeting last June, when they reaffirmed that women must “submit to the leadership of their husbands.” Traditional Muslims expect their women to cover themselves from head to foot with a veil. Extremist Muslims reject peace-making with their enemies as a failure to stand up forcefully for the faith.

In Israel, a central question for all Jews is what it means to be a Jewish state, says Rabbi James Rudin, national director of interreligious affairs for the American Jewish Committee. “The ultra-Orthodox Jews want a state where religion plays a major role,” Rudin says, “while moderates would say that Israel should be for all Jews, whatever their religious adherence.” Jewish fundamentalists, he says, control whether a road will stay open or buses will run or dance concerts will be performed on the Sabbath.

LAISSEZ-FAIRE FAITH

By contrast, Appleby says, moderates of every tradition may agree with much of the doctrine of their faith, but are less concerned with “policing” believers. In reaction to such laissez-faire faith, conservative factions have emerged in nearly every U.S. Christian organization, and many have threatened to withdraw from the national group if their views do not dominate. The United Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church (USA), American Baptists, and Episcopal Church, to name a few, all face strong opposition from within. Meanwhile, moderates have been leaving or forced out of the Southern Baptist Convention over the last decade.



NICHOLAS DEVORETTONY STONE IMAGES

Whether Christian, Muslim, or Jewish, fundamentalists often feel they have more in common with like-thinking members of other religions than with opponents in their own faith traditions. Moderates feel the same. And so both groups have begun to create inter-religious alliances. In 1995, for example, Catholic conservatives led by Father Richard John Neuhaus joined with Protestants to form Catholics and Evangelicals Together to speak out against abortion and moral relativism. Two years later, Jim Wallis, of the liberal *Sojourners* magazine, brought together Catholics, Protestants, Latinos, and Pentecostals in a “new movement” known as Call to Renewal, to address the problem of poverty. Religions have also tried to bridge the gap between orthodox and liberal factions with efforts like Catholic Common Ground Initiative (see *Seeking Unity*).

It is a time of organizational fluidity and flux, says Nancy Ammerman of Hartford Seminary in Connecticut, who is tracking the ebb and flow of

Christian denominations. Congregations are leaving their denominational homes to join other groups or strike out on their own. Others try to bring change from within. Thus, the religious landscape of the 21st century may look very different from today’s familiar but conflict-riddled communities.

SEEKING UNITY

A few months before he died in 1996, Cardinal Joseph Bernardin of the Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago decided the only way to achieve unity among the Church’s warring factions was to bring them to the same table, for face-to-face interactions governed by civility and charity. So he launched the Catholic Common Ground Initiative, drawing participants from the Catholic left and right. Since Bernardin’s death, a 33-member committee has continued to meet semi-annually to discuss thorny social and theological issues.

The Initiative has sponsored more than a dozen television programs featuring such opponents as “a by-the-book Opus Dei catechist who sparred with a hip Gen X lay minister, and a social justice sister with little use for Marian apparitions who squared off against a faith-healing priest for whom supernatural wonders are central.” Organizers say these discussions, which are available to parishes on videotape, often conclude with the realization that differences are tactical, while common faith is deep.

The group has tried to create bridges across ideological divides by “starting with the broad middle and then stretching the edges,” says Sister Catherine Patten, the Initiative’s coordinator. “Prayer has been really important; common worship is crucial.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why are fundamentalists so passionate about their beliefs? What is their fear of compromise?
2. Are moderates or liberals too wishy-washy about their faith?
3. How can religious groups achieve unity?
4. Would it be better to stay in a faith tradition, trying to solve the problems from within, or find a more comfortable religious home?
5. What challenges does the modern world present to faith communities?

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PEGGY FLETCHER STACK is religion writer for the *Salt Lake Tribune* and author of a children’s book of world religions, *A World of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1998).

Personal forgiveness runs like a thread through all of the world's religions. The Bible bids Christians to turn the other cheek, the Buddha teaches that freedom from judgment is essential to enlightenment, and the Koran describes Allah's compassion and mercy 192 times and cites his vengeance in just 17 verses. We asked seven people walking different religious paths to describe how their beliefs have influenced them in granting or receiving personal forgiveness for a serious offense.



[Zarinah Abdur-Rahman is a 44-year-old Muslim who works part time for a motor coach company and lives in Ellenwood, Georgia.](#)

[Mrs. Abdur-Rahman's daughter, Bayyinah, was sexually molested as a child by one man and murdered at 20 by another.]

It says in the Koran that Allah forgives and forgives and forgives, but sometimes he exacts punishment. It is conditional. Where there is improvement [in the transgressor], we should forgive because Allah forgives. That is what I try to live by and teach my children. Now let me tell you how I apply what I know. I believe you can hate and abhor the crime without hating or abhorring the person [who committed it]. The boy who killed my daughter, I hate what he did. But I believe he was more than that. I believe he had pain and that God can forgive him. We don't know his past, but God does and God will judge him. Me and you, we can't do that. I believe there is a possibility that God will forgive him and let him enter Paradise. And the fact that I believe that is a form of personal forgiveness, the highest form of personal forgiveness there is.



[Al Rodriguez is a 36-year-old independent house painter and evangelical Christian from Fort Worth, Texas.](#)

I did this big [painting] job for a man and he still hasn't paid me. Even in a situation like that, where the food might be taken out of my family's mouths, the

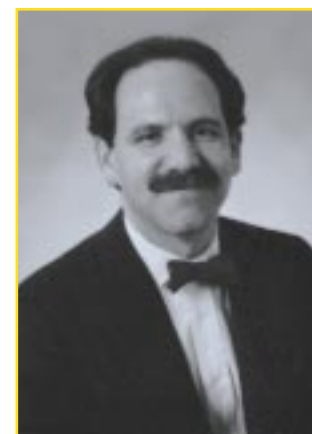
Lord has given me the ability to forgive. What has helped me is trying to be an imitator of Christ. For me, there was always an answer with the fist. But as I began to read through the Gospels and see the things that happened to Jesus, I said, Wow, I haven't had near that much happen to me, yet he was always able to forgive. It all comes down to those wonderful words Jesus spoke on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." That has helped me not hold a grudge against anyone. I am at peace. And my family has not lacked for anything.



[Myrna Lanzar, 62, is a Roman Catholic and retired accounting technician from Oakland, California.](#)

When I was working, I got a promotion, and the woman who was supposed to train me gave me a bad evaluation and I had to leave the position. I was really hurt. Every time I came to work, I had a

pain in my stomach. I could have fought the evaluation, but I chose not to. I left it to God. It took some time, but I have forgiven her. I took Jesus as my model. If he can forgive us, who are mere lowly creatures, why can we not forgive others? If we don't forgive, we are like a sick person. And God does not like that. So, if you want to please God, you have to love one another, although it is not easy. I think part of personal forgiveness is you humble yourself. You leave it to God. If you do that, God will exalt you.



[Simeon M. Kriesberg, an international trade lawyer, is a 47-year-old Reform Jew from Washington, D.C.](#)

Many Jews observe a tradition during Yom Kippur in which they make a list of people they have wronged and ask them for forgiveness. It is a powerful experience. For

the one seeking forgiveness, it is very difficult because you have to expose your own sense of inadequacy. But it makes you confront your shortcomings in a way you would not have to do if you just had to pray privately to God for forgiveness. And the people who are asked to forgive are often very moved. I haven't had an experience where I was asked to forgive and could not. And I think the person who has suffered a wrong and does not forgive is somehow a prisoner of that experience because they are unable to get beyond it. Forgiveness really deepens one's sense of being closer to the Divine because it is one of the more godly things we human beings can do.



[Ed Firmage of Salt Lake City, Utah, is a 63-year-old professor at the University of Utah's College of Law and a baptized Mormon.](#)

God's forgiveness of my fallible humanity has been the beacon of my life. God does not judge me, and I am not to judge others. Part of

doing that is seeing the image of Christ in every human being. I've had to go through my trials in life, and in those situations I know God is telling me to forgive. It is the unforgiven people of this world who commit crimes. That doesn't mean there should never be punishment for a crime, but there must also be repentance, and that cannot be achieved through law. Mercy trumps justice, and mercy means forgiveness, and there you move beyond the law. [No matter the crime], the law is absolutely essential, but completely inefficient. In the end, you are left with words like forgiveness, faith, grace, mercy, and love. To me, that's where forgiveness really is; the rest is only a preliminary.

[Cliff SiJohn, 54, is a casino executive and member of the Coeur d'Alene Indian tribe in Plummer, Idaho.](#)

We had a family situation involving two young men, as close as brothers; one killed the other. The immediate response was for revenge. But our tribal elders brought everyone together in different circles, which are sacred to us. One circle was to do the "work," as it was called, of forgiving the incarcerated boy for the life he had taken. We had to forgive that young man in order to take care of our family. Coeur d'Alene Indians believe our ancestors are messen-

gers who take our prayers to the Creator to help us forgive these boys. The Creator can then send his messengers in the form of birds and animals to bring us medicine. Forgiveness is like a purification rite. It cleanses your heart. And if you have a good heart, when you die you go on the heaven trails.



[Reva Griffith, a Quaker, is a 72-year-old retired administrative-assistant-turned-writer from Kansas City, Missouri.](#)

[Mrs. Griffith's son, Christopher, was murdered in 1986.] When the man who murdered my son was convicted, the judge recommended the

death penalty. My husband and I wrote to him that we were against it because we are Quakers. In a sense I was programmed by the belief of Quakers that there is something of God in everyone and that extends to how you would treat someone who murdered your family. I don't look on that quite as forgiveness, but as choosing not to punish him. But I also believe that little things we do can turn into bigger things, that being as kind and as civilized as possible is being religious, and certainly forgiveness is a part of that. And I have a fairly peaceful feeling inside now, which I didn't have for quite a while.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Is it possible to truly forgive and forget a serious offense like murder, rape, or betrayal? Are there any misdeeds God does not want us to forgive?
2. Is it possible to be too forgiving? Why or why not?
3. Who benefits most from forgiveness, the transgressor or the transgressed upon?

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[Kimberly Winston is a freelance religion reporter who lives in Northern California.](#)

THREE LITTLE WORDS

"It is never easy to say 'I am sorry.' Those are some of the most difficult words in any language. And when someone has said them, then those of us who are believers ought to be ready to move forward to embrace them with the word 'forgiveness.'"

— Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in a television interview with Bob Abernethy on [Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly](#).



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KEY TO RELIGIOUS GROUPS

(Ba) Bah'a'i	(L) Lutheran
(B) Buddhist	(M) Mormon
(C) Christian (general)	(O) Eastern Orthodox Christian
(H) Hindu	(P) Protestant
(I) Islam	(RC) Roman Catholic
(J) Jewish	(S) Sikh
(Ja) Jain	

JANUARY

- 1 FEAST OF ST. BASIL (O) Celebrates the Orthodox liturgy.
- 6 EPIPHANY (C) Celebrates the baptism of Jesus.
End of 12 Days of Christmas.
FESTIVAL OF THE THREE KINGS (C)
- 7 THE NATIVITY OF JESUS CHRIST (O)
Christmas celebration of Orthodox Christians.
- 14 MAGHI (S)
Commemorates a battle in which Sikhs died for their guru.
- 19 'ID AL-FITRE* (I) Breaks the fast of Ramadan.

FEBRUARY

- 15 NIRVANA DAY (B) Commemorates the death of Buddha.
- 16 CHINESE, KOREAN & VIETNAMESE NEW YEAR –
YEAR OF THE RABBIT (B) A two-week festival,
where each year is symbolized by a different animal.

- 17 ASH WEDNESDAY (RC,P) Beginning of Christian Lent,
period of preparation for Easter.
- 22 EASTERN ORTHODOX LENT (O).

MARCH

- 2 PURIM (J) Celebrates deliverance of Jews
of ancient Persia from destruction.
- HOLI (H) Spring festival featuring bright colors,
pilgrimages, and bonfires.
- 2-20 MONTH OF FASTING (Ba).
- 18 BIKARAMAJIT (H) Hindu New Year.
- 21 NAW-RUZ* (Ba) Bah'a'i and Iranian New Year.
- 25 THE ANNUNCIATION (C) Remembering the Archangel
Gabriel's visit to Mary, announcing the wish for her to
become the mother of Jesus.
- 26 RAMNAVAMI (H) Anniversary of the birth of Rama.
- 28 'ID AL-ADHA (I) Islamic festival of sacrifice.
- 28 PALM SUNDAY (RC,P) Opens Christian Holy Week.
- 29 MAHAVIR JAYANTI (S) Birthday of Lord Mahavir.



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APRIL

- 1 MAUNDY THURSDAY (RC,P)
Commemorates the Last Supper.
- 1-8 PASSOVER* (J) Celebrates the deliverance of Jews
from slavery in Egypt.
- 2 GOOD FRIDAY (RC,P) The day of Jesus' crucifixion.

- 4 EASTER (RC,P).
PALM SUNDAY (O) Opens Christian Holy Week.
- 8 WESAK* (B) The anniversary of Buddha's birthday
in Mahayana tradition.
- 8 HOLY THURSDAY (O).
- 9 HOLY FRIDAY (O).
Eastern Orthodox equivalent of Good Friday.
- 11 EASTER (O).
- 13 YOM HASHOAH (J) Holocaust Remembrance Day.
- 14 VAISAKHI (S) Anniversary of creation of the Khalsa
(army of the Pure Ones).
- 14-16 NEW YEAR (B) Cambodia.
- 17 MUHARRAM (I) Islamic New Year.
- 21 RIDVAN* (Ba)
Commemorates declaration of Baha'u'llah in 1863.



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MAY

- 13 ASCENSION DAY (RC,P)
Celebrates Jesus' ascent into heaven.
- 18 MARTYRDOM DAY (S)
Anniversary of martyrdom of the fifth guru in 1606 C.E.
- 20 ASCENSION DAY (O)
Celebrates Jesus' ascent into heaven.
- 21-22 SHAVUOT* (J) Celebrates harvest of first fruits and
giving of the Torah at Mt. Sinai.
- 23 PENTECOST (RC,P) Celebrates descent of the
Holy Spirit upon early Christians.



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30 PENTECOST (O) Celebrates descent of the Holy Spirit upon early Christians.

JUNE

- 24** NATIVITY OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST (RC,P)
Celebrates birth of New Testament figure.
- 26** MA'ULED AL-NABI (I) Birthday of Prophet Mohammed.

JULY

- 9** MARTYRDOM OF THE BAB* (Ba)
Anniversary of the martyrdom of the Bab.
- 24** PIONEER DAY (M)
Mormon observance of arrival of Brigham Young.

AUGUST

- 15** FEAST OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY (RC,O)
Commemorates assumption of Mary into heaven.
- 26** RAKHI (H, Ja) Celebration of love and friendship.

SEPTEMBER

- 2** SRI RAMAKRISHNA JAYANTI (H)
Birthday of Sri Ramakrishna.
- 2** KRISHNA JANMASHTAMI (H)
Celebrates birthday of Krishna.
- 7** PARYUSHANA PARVA (S)
Festival of fasting, friendship, and forgiveness.

- 11** ROSH HASHANAH* (J) 2 days. Jewish New Year.
- 13** KHAMAPANA (S) Day of forgiveness.
- 20** YOM KIPPUR* (J)
Day of atonement, fasting, and repentance.
- 25-Oct. 2** SUKKOT* (J) Festival of the fall harvest.

OCTOBER

- 3** SIMCHAT TORAH* (J)
Festival in which the reading of the Torah is completed and its first book is begun again.
- 19** DUSSERAH (H, Ja) Celebration of good over evil.
- 20** BIRTH OF THE BAB* (Ba) Anniversary of the birth of one of the twin Prophet Founders of the Bah'a'i faith.
- 31** REFORMATION DAY (P, L)
Commemorates start of the Protestant Reformation.



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NOVEMBER

- 1** ALL SAINTS DAY (RC, P,L)
Celebrates lives of all the saints.
- 7** DIWALI (H, Ja) Festival of Lights,
one of four seasonal celebrations.
- 8** DIWALI (S) Festival of Lights,
one of four seasonal celebrations.
- 12** BAHU'ULLAH'S BIRTHDAY* (Ba)
Commemorates birth of the founder of Bah'a'i faith.
- 24** MARTYRDOM (S)
Anniversary of the ninth guru.



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28 FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT (C).

DECEMBER

- 4** HANUKKAH (J) 8 days, Jewish festival of lights.
- 6** ST. NICHOLAS DAY (C)
Named for an ancient Christian bishop.
- 8** FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION (RC)
Celebrates the Christian belief that Mary, mother of Jesus, was born without sin.
- 8** BODHI DAY (B)
Celebration of Enlightenment of Buddha.
- 9** RAMADAN (I)
30 days, fasting to honor Prophet Mohammed.
- 12** FESTIVAL OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE (RC)
Honors the patron saint of Mexico.
- 25** CHRISTMAS (C).
- 26** KWANZAA 7-day celebration of African-American values and traditions.

NOTES

*All Jewish and Bah'a'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.

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BLUCK KELLY/TONY STONE IMAGES

When the birth of Dolly was announced on February 23, 1997, officials at the White House asked the National Bioethics Advisory Commission, a presidentially appointed body, to analyze the ethics of human cloning. Scientists at the Roslin Institute in Scotland had cloned Dolly from the genetic material of another sheep. A few days later, a handful of Commission members, including myself, held a preliminary gathering in Washington, D.C., to plan strategy for the entire Commission's upcoming meeting.

There is a very useful maxim in bioethics: Get the facts straight! We decided to begin the entire scheduled meeting by inviting a scientist who could explain the facts. What techniques had the scientists used to make Dolly? What scientific research could be done using those techniques? Could the same techniques work on humans?

RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES

The next crucial step was equally obvious. We needed a rich and comprehensive gathering of relevant ethical considerations. Where would we find people who had thought deeply about the sorts of

ethical issues raised by the possibility of human cloning? Philosophers had not written much about human cloning. The arguments they offered were well constructed, but they seemed thin and pale compared to the tumultuous response cloning elicited. Still, we wanted to hear what philosophers had to say, along with legal scholars who had thought about the farther reaches of human reproductive technologies. But we decided it would be wise to look elsewhere first – at several of the major religious traditions in the United States.

While faith traditions offer guidance for ethical analysis and judgment, they also have much to say about the relationships of parents and children, and about the limits of tinkering with human reproduction. We invited seven leading thinkers from four religious traditions in the U.S.: Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, Judaism, and Islam.

The Commission's conversation with those theologians in mid-March was a fascinating example of moral dialogue. There were disagreements within traditions, and agreements across traditions. Secular philosophers who were members of the Commission traded insights with rabbis and priests. Virtually all speakers worried about our propensity to exploit what we make, using manufactured objects according to our wishes and whims. Few, however, were ready to condemn human cloning categorically and forever. A rabbi who was also a scientist mused sympathetically about a hypothetical case in which a Holocaust survivor with no living family saw cloning as the only way to maintain the family lineage. Others saw the possibility that human cloning, in exceptional cases and with great caution, might be defensible.

THE ABORTION DEBATE

The debate over the ethics of human cloning, strange as it may seem, is more typical of the interplay between religious and secular perspectives in bioethics than is the debate over abortion. In the contemporary United States, abortion is often seen as the prototype of moral disagreement: religious people on one side, secularists on the other. But this is a gross oversimplification of the social divisions highlighted by abortion. Many deeply religious people do not believe that all abortions are evil, nor do they equate abortion with murder. And most Americans, whether they describe themselves as religious or non-religious, regard abortion as morally undesirable – something to be avoided if possible.

Despite this complexity, many Americans who see abortion as murder cite their religious beliefs as their justification. Because of our experience with abortion, Americans have come to equate religion with intractable – even violent – disagreements in bioethics. As the debate over human cloning demonstrates, the prospects for fruitful dialogue among people with different beliefs, religious and otherwise, are not nearly so bleak.

SEARCHING FOR WISDOM

The conversation that day among presidential commissioners and theologians in, of all places, the Watergate Hotel gave reason for hope as well as for caution about the possibilities for genuine dialogue, compromise, even consensus. The theologians based some of their comments on very specific and particular faith commitments – interpretations of sacred texts, for example. Other people may interpret the identical passage differently, or else not see the text as having the same moral authority. In such disagreements, the tenets of a



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particular faith tradition can make moral compromise difficult or impossible. But in many more instances, the theologians framed their comments to reach reasonable people who shared roughly comparable views about family, human nature, or the wrongs of human exploitation. We do not have to subscribe to every detail of religious belief in order to benefit from a faith tradition's insights into human life and well-being.

The religious traditions represented that day were the antithesis of the stereotype of religion as rigid, inflexible dogma. These were supple sources of analytic rigor and creative interpretation; grounded in rich traditions of belief, but lively and open to new challenges like human cloning.

Ultimately, the Commission concluded that attempting to create a human child by cloning violated ethical principles. It recommended that such research should be prohibited for a period of years, but the ban was not approved by Congress.

What place should religious traditions have in public debate about bioethical issues new and old? Some have criticized the Commission for highlighting religious perspectives. The Constitution demands separation of church and state, they argue, and a presidential commission is a manifestation of the secular state. But this cannot be correct. An issue such as human cloning plunges us into mysterious depths of human self-understanding. It would be ludicrous and unwise to forbid people from talking about their convictions from whatever source, religious or secular. We need whatever wisdom we can find to deal with human cloning and the myriad of other bioethical issues coming our way.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What role should religious beliefs play in determining our public policies with regard to bioethical issues like human cloning?
2. Should research on cloning be allowed to proceed with no restrictions? Or, should all or certain forms of such research be prohibited? Cite your reasons.
3. What insights about prenatal testing and selection could your faith tradition provide to others?

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THOMAS H. MURRAY, a member of the National Bioethics Advisory Commission, is president of the Hastings Center, a research institute devoted to exploring issues in bioethics.

TOMORROW'S MORAL DILEMMAS

Cloning is just one of many bioethical issues that will require dialogue among religious and non-religious persons. Our increasing control over human reproduction, coupled with the decoding of the roughly 80,000 genes that make up the biological ground plan for human life, will give us vastly increased power over the characteristics of our offspring.

Techniques such as amniocentesis and CVS (chorionic villi sampling) yield enough genetic material from the fetus to allow just about any genetic test the prospective parents want — and genetics professionals are willing to perform. New techniques are being developed that would allow us to peek into the genes of in-vitro human embryos even before they are introduced into a woman's womb, or to take a small amount of blood from a pregnant woman's arm and analyze the fetal cells found in it. At the moment, these technologies expand the range of choice, but they do not — at least not yet — give us the power to change our children's genes. That technique, known as gene transfer, is undergoing intensive research. The technologies themselves are blind as to whether they are being used to treat or prevent disease, or to alter human traits in a possibly misguided quest for human perfection.



"This is my body," says the rector of Saint Paul's Episcopal Church, while lifting the bread that will serve as Communion for the Newton Highlands, Massachusetts, congregation. "This is my blood that was shed for you," the priest continues, while consecrating the Communion wine. Parishioners hear these words each Sunday from the Rev. Maureen Kemeza. She is one of a growing number of women clergy whose very presence suggests new meanings for religious messages they preach.

The acceptance of women in ministerial roles marks an important watershed in American religious history. The process has been slower than the acceptance of women in other professions because of the symbolic significance traditionally attached to the male ministry. The priest or pastor represented both social and divine order when he stood before his congregation, leading them in devotions and helping them to know the will of God. The idea that a woman might assume this responsibility represented a shocking reversal of traditional roles, to which some Americans still object.

CHANGING ROLES

While female ministers are still the exception, more and more women are serving their religious communities in lay positions as educators and administrators, theologians and scholars. Women also comprise a high proportion of students in seminaries and theological schools that are training the next generation of religious leaders. About one-fourth of the students at Roman Catholic schools of theology and half the candidates for the rabbinate within Conservative and Reform Judaism are women. Among Protestant denominations that ordain women, at least half of the seminary students are women.

Women's participation in religion is nothing new. Churches and synagogues have depended on them for a host of voluntary activities, from teaching Sunday School and cooking for those all-important socials to raising money and running social service agencies. The American Catholic Church has relied on its women's religious orders to provide the institutional network of schools, hospitals, and orphanages that made Catholic communal life possible. Voluntary associations of Protestant and Jewish women have performed similar tasks.

As far back as the early 19th century, a few women struggled against traditional obstacles to lead their religious communities. Among them was Jerena Lee of Philadelphia's African Methodist Episcopal Church, who heard the call to preach in 1811. Denied the title of licensed preacher, she covered thousands of miles as a traveling evangelist, addressing both black and white audiences. But for most of America's history women were barred from the highest leadership roles because they could not be ordained.

On the eve of the new millennium, the situation has changed. A generation of Americans has grown up seeing women read from the Torah, preach from the pulpit, and administer the sacraments. For these Christians and Jews, women clergy are not controversial. They are an integral part of religious practice.

Roman Catholic women now enter the sanctuary during Mass as altar servers, as lectors who read Scripture, and as eucharistic ministers who distribute Communion consecrated by a priest. The Vatican has repeatedly affirmed the view that women cannot be priests because they cannot represent Jesus in the consecration of the sacraments. At the same time, it has opened to the laity many pastoral roles formerly reserved to priests.

In 1983, the new Code of Canon Law permitted the appointment of lay persons to lead "priestless parishes." While the Catholic Church continues to grow, the number of new vocations to the priesthood declines. Of the parishes left without priests, most are administered by women, either members of religious orders or lay persons. Women also serve in a variety of diocesan functions, from canon lawyers to members of diocesan synods and pastoral councils.

SHOULD WOMEN READ TORAH?

For Jews, a significant change occurred in the 1960s, when Reform and Conservative congregations began calling girls to the Torah, as part of the bat mitzvah ceremony. Boys read the Torah as part of the bar mitzvah ceremony, which marks the assumption of their religious responsibilities as adult males. Jews are divided about whether Jewish law excludes women from such religious duties, or whether it simply excuses them from participation.

In 1983, the faculty of the Jewish Theological Seminary (the rabbinical school of the Conservative wing) voted to admit women to rabbinical study. Reform and Reconstructionist Jews, less observant of Jewish law, have ordained women since the early 1970s. Orthodox women are also showing increased interest in religious pursuits formerly limited to men, including studying Torah.

PROTESTANT OUTLOOKS

Among Protestants, the acceptance of women at all levels of religious leadership can be seen in the election of the Rev. Joan Brown Campbell as general secretary of the National Council of Churches. Campbell heads the country's largest ecumenical organization, which represents 32 Protestant and Orthodox communions comprising 49 million members.

There is a close correlation between Protestants' approach to the Bible and attitudes about women's leadership. Denominations affirming Biblical inerrancy generally prohibit the ordination of women. The largest Protestant group, the Southern Baptist Convention, directed its member churches to cease ordaining women in 1984, when it also endorsed a fundamentalist posture regarding Scripture. The Church of God in Christ (COGIC), the largest African-American Pentecostal church, allows only men to "preach," but permits women to "teach," a distinction often imperceptible in practice. Ironically, COGIC does ordain women for institutional ministries such as military and hospital chaplaincy, but not for local parish leadership.

WHY WOMEN MATTER

As we enter the new millennium, fresh thinking by lay and ordained women has changed the way many

Americans practice their faiths. As women grapple with what it means to be created in the image of God, they raise questions about the male language used to refer both to God and to the faithful. In response, many denominations have revised prayer books and hymnals.

Across the nation, women theologians and scholars are at work recovering forgotten voices of women in religious history. At Harvard Divinity School, Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza suggests fresh ways of reading the New Testament that take into account women's experience in early Christianity. At Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary, Rosemary Radford Ruether teaches feminist liberation theology. And Jaquelyn Grant explores the scholarship and ministry of African-American women at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta.

Women are also examining the ways in which religious traditions restrict their spiritual experience and expression. Seeing sexism as a sin, they call for new approaches to theology and scriptural interpretation. Such thinking, if taken seriously, could finally make women full partners in the religious life of the next century.

ORTHODOX WOMEN RABBIS?

"Orthodox women should be ordained because it would constitute a recognition of their new intellectual accomplishments and spiritual attainments; because it would encourage greater Torah study; because it offers wider female models of religious life; because women's input into p'sak (interpretation of Jewish texts), absent for 2000 years, is sorely needed; because it will speed the process of reevaluating traditional definitions that support hierarchy; because some Jews might find it easier to bring halachic questions concerning family and sexuality to a woman rabbi. And because of the justice of it all."

—Blu Greenberg, "Is Now the Time for the Orthodox Women Rabbis?" *Moment: The Magazine of Jewish Culture and Opinion* 18 (Dec. 1993): 52-53, 74.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What roles do women play in your religious community? How do they differ from men's roles?
2. Can you imagine women playing the most important leadership roles in your religious community? How might that change religious practice?

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ANN BRAUDE is director of the Women's Studies in Religion Program at Harvard Divinity School. Her publications include *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989).



COURTESY OF THE WESLEY THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY CENTER FOR THE ARTS AND RELIGION

Wesley Theological Seminary's Center for the Arts and Religion, with Director Catherine Kapikian (left), students, and artists-in-residence.

"God is interested in a lot of things besides religion," the late Lutheran theologian Joseph Sittler used to quip. Primary among Sittler's "other things" were the arts. In teaching theology or ethics at seminaries and the University of Chicago, Sittler used the novels of Joseph Conrad, the poetry of Richard Wilbur, or the plays of Arthur Miller to capture the essence of religious questions. He was deeply inspired by religious architecture — for example the stainless steel in the chapel at Chicago's Illinois Institute of Technology, which he saw as embodying a contemporary urban aesthetic.

Sittler was a rebel as an early arts advocate in the 1940s, when the Protestant culture dominating the nation still regarded most art, save sacred music, as frivolous or immoral. This view stemmed from the early Puritans who stressed lack of "decoration" and worried (along with members of several other faiths) that believers might worship images as idols.

NEW FORMS OF EXPRESSION

As the nation has become more pluralistic, and an austere "Protestant ethic" no longer dominates, the arts have developed an increasing presence as expressions of faith. Working today, weaver Paula Stewart of Portland, Oregon, who specializes in creating tallit or Jewish prayer shawls, captures the feelings of many religious artists when she says, "My liturgical handweaving reflects my Jewish heritage.... It allows me to experience my faith in a form other than the worship service."

While there is a difference between "sacred art" (that used in specific, designated rituals or settings) and art that incorporates religious or spiritual themes or images (and can appear anywhere), both are enjoying fresh bursts of energy. Art in Eastern Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism incorporates anthropological images of holy persons; Hindu art even portrays deities. But Judaism and Islam do neither, and many Protestants are still uncomfortable with anthropological images of God.

Congregations of many faiths are engaging artists-and composers-in-residence or commissioning paintings and anthems. Parishioners have formed art guilds to weave or embroider vestments or paraments (hangings for an altar or pulpit). Sabbath school classes use workbooks and videos that teach through the arts. Churches and synagogues maintain galleries or exhibit spaces to display the work of professional artists as well as that of their own members.

The types of art appearing in houses of worship are diverse: paintings, hangings, banners, mosaics, weavings, woodcarvings, sculpture, dance, and all kinds of music. Traditional arts such as stained

glass have found new expression in abstract form, or in windows portraying Jesus with African features.

Following recent waves of immigration, the aesthetics of various faiths have influenced North American culture in exciting ways. Last summer Tibetan Buddhist monks created a beautiful sand mandala at the Sackler Gallery in Washington, D.C. From New York's bustling East Side to the heartland's North American Islamic Center in Plainfield, Indiana, stunning mosques display the geometric and non-figurative motifs of Muslim tradition. Temples built by Buddhists from East Asia, and Hindus and Sikhs from India, add to the vigorous architectural mix now characterizing the religious landscape.

There is also more cross-influence among the aesthetic and ethnic traditions of different faiths. Protestants are studying the sacred discipline of Eastern Orthodox icon painting. Native American sacred rituals, dance, and music have influenced both New Age religion and more mainstream faiths. Recent Protestant hymnals contain a wide variety of African-American spirituals and Hispanic hymns.

ROLL OVER, BEETHOVEN

In the "lively" as well as the "classical" arts, the religious voice is strong. Religious novels, especially from evangelical publishers, proliferate. Gospel music flourishes, as do Christian rock and Jewish klezmer. Movies are important vehicles for religious themes, whether in major Hollywood productions like *The Apostle*, *Kundun* (the life story of the Dalai Lama), and *The Prince of Egypt* (an animated version of the Biblical story of Moses), or low-budget efforts such as the gospel music documentary *Say Amen, Somebody*. "Jazz pastors," following New York's late John Garcia Gensel, preside over jazz services.



STEPHANIE RUSHONTONY STONE IMAGES

Dancers representing the shape of a temple.

BODY AND SOUL

At the century's end, the art form best summing up the relationship of religion and the arts may be dance. Thoroughly disapproved of early in the century, sacred dance has slowly but steadily entered the sanctuary doors. A core ritual in African religion, sacred dance has re-emerged in African-American Christian worship. Native American and Hindu religious dances are performed at public events. Major secular media like the New York Times run enthusiastic reviews of dance programs with spiritual themes. Most encouraging, some congregations are forming "dance choirs," using movement the same way music choirs sing.

AN INNOVATIVE MARRIAGE

Catherine Kapikian is a fabric artist whose work hangs in many houses of worship. She is also the guiding spirit of an unusual program at United Methodist-affiliated Wesley Seminary in Washington, D.C., that combines a Center for the Arts and Religion (CAR) with a graduate Program for Theology and the Arts. Subjects include visual arts, sacred music, drama, dance, and literature. For the degree program, CAR staff are currently assembling art on Biblical themes for a course on Hebrew Scriptures.

In CAR's artist-in-residence program, 35 artists from various countries have worked in the studio, attended classes, exhibited in the gallery, and given dance and drama performances. While most have been Jewish or Christian, others have brought Buddhist and Hindu cultural perspectives. Some will later serve congregations in ordained ministry; others will simply incorporate their spiritual development and increased theological understanding into their work.

The seminary is so enthusiastic about the arts program, says Kapikian, that "art now hangs in all the restrooms" because the halls are already filled.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What art forms do you find most expressive of religious thoughts or feelings? How does music, for example, differ from visual art in the way it conveys ideas or emotions?
2. How might we regard art in new ways to enrich religious or spiritual practices?
3. Even without extensive training, are there ways we can create or perform an art work to express feelings of faith?

SUGGESTED READINGS

Apostolos-Cappadona, Diane, ed. Art, Creativity, and the Sacred. A general introduction to the arts in various religious faiths. Continuum, 1995.

Dillenberger, John. The Visual Arts and Christianity in America. Crossroad, 1989.

Karp, Abraham. The Jews in America: A Treasury of Art and Literature. Hugh Lauter Levin Assoc., 1994.

Miles, Margaret. Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies. Beacon Press, 1996.

Rock, Judith and Norman Mealy. Performer as Priest & Prophet: Restoring the Intuitive in Worship Through Music & Dance. Harper & Row, 1988.

Trubetskoi, Evgenii Nikolaevich. Icons: Theology in Color. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973.

Periodicals

Arts: The Arts in Religious and Theological Studies

Christianity and the Arts

Image: A Journal of the Arts & Religion

LINDA-MARIE DELLOFF is arts and books editor of The Lutheran, the monthly magazine of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.



RON CHAPLE/FPG INTERNATIONAL

Across America, gay and lesbian Christians are searching for a way to worship. Many who sang “Jesus Loves Me” in church as children and struggled through adolescence in youth groups feel, as adults, condemned by the institutions that once nurtured them.

As debates rage about the nature and practice of homosexuality, some homosexual Christians don’t discuss their sexual orientation and remain in churches that claim to “love the sinner but hate the sin.” Some join congregations founded specifically by and for homosexuals, such as those in the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches. Some participate in ministries that claim to be able to convert them to heterosexuality. Some stay home. And some find acceptance, even welcome, in the pews of traditional churches.

Theologically, those who oppose recognizing homosexuality as a legitimate sexual practice take a literalist approach to Bible verses that seem to condemn same-sex relationships. Those who advocate a more liberal attitude in the churches say the Bible must be examined through the lenses of experience, science, and later revelation.

CHURCHES IN TURMOIL

Much attention is paid to whether to bless same-sex unions and whether to ordain sexually active gay

men and lesbian women. The 8.5-million-member United Methodist Church typifies the turmoil in mainstream Protestantism. In March 1998, a church trial found an Omaha pastor, the Rev. Jimmy Creech, not guilty of breaking church law for performing a same-sex blessing ceremony. In August, the denomination’s highest court ruled that the prohibition of same-sex blessings by United Methodist clergy or in United Methodist churches is binding. Soon after, a complaint was filed against a United Methodist pastor for performing a same-sex ceremony in Chicago. Before that could be processed, two female United Methodist church leaders in California announced their intention to have their 15-year relationship blessed. More than 60 clergy signed on to participate.

Among other mainstream denominations, the 1.4-million-member United Church of Christ is considered the most open. In November 1998, the Rev. Paul H. Sherry, president of the group, mailed a pastoral letter supporting the full participation of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people in the membership and ministry of the church. Sherry asked that the letter be read from every pulpit in the denomination.

Churches that condemn the homosexual community are giving up any hope of influencing its moral and ethical attitudes, says Bob Gibeling, program executive of Lutherans Concerned/North America, one of several groups for homosexual Christians in mainstream denominations. Rather than encouraging homosexuals to form committed, constructive relationships within the context of religious congregations, many churches drive them away. Says Gibeling: “I don’t think fundamentalists realize that gay and lesbian people can be great allies in spreading the Gospel.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why has homosexuality captured so much church attention when greed, violence, and other practices may be greater threats to society?
2. Should behavior of any kind be a condition for church membership? for ordination?

SUGGESTED READINGS

Brawley, Robert L., ed. Biblical Ethics & Homosexuality: Listening to Scripture. Westminster: John Knox Press, 1996.

Hartman, Keith. Congregations in Conflict: The Battle over Homosexuality. Rutgers University Press, 1996.

Seow, C.L., ed. Homosexuality and Christian Community. Westminster: John Knox Press, 1996.

Siker, Jeffrey S., ed. Homosexuality in the Church: Both Sides of the Debate. Westminster: John Knox Press, 1994.

GAYLE WHITE covers religion for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. She is the author of Believers and Beliefs (New York: Berkley Publishing, 1997).

ST. MARK'S NEW MEMBERS

The Rev. Mike Cordle sees the hand of Providence in the timing of his first Sunday at St. Mark United Methodist Church in Atlanta. In 1990, after preaching to about 90 of the church’s 200 mostly elderly members, he stepped outside with his family to see a parade flowing by. It was his first Gay Pride parade. By his second anniversary at the church, when the Gay Pride parade came by, Cordle and several church members passed out cups of water and leaflets. The next Sunday, a few curious gays and lesbians came to services. Soon others followed. The church developed ministries to meet the needs of gays and lesbians, and they became integrated into other groups and classes. A few older members left, but many more new ones joined. In March 1998, the church took in its 1,000th member.



CORBIS

Violence and terrorism in the name of religion are frequently in the headlines today. Radical Muslims kill Western tourists in Egypt, fundamentalist Jewish settlers gun down Palestinian villagers in Hebron, militant Hindus burn the homes of their Muslim neighbors in India – all over the world, violent extremists who claim religious motives have become a force that cannot be ignored. The United States and Canada have been confronted with a similar phenomenon in the form of anti-abortion extremists who are resorting to violence. There have been six doctors or clinic workers killed since 1993.

Bombings and arson at clinics occur so often now that they are rarely reported in the news. Leaders of most anti-abortion organizations, long committed to non-violence, have strenuously denounced such violence in the name of their cause, and have sought to distance themselves from those who resort to such tactics. The number of anti-abortion adherents responsible for the violence is probably very small, say federal law enforcement officials. Yet, as in other countries and other conflicts, the perpetrators of violence dominate the debate.

WHAT EXTREMISTS SAY

How did it come to this? Some anti-abortion extremists say they have been driven to desperation because 25 years' worth of efforts to stop legalized abortion through Congress or the courts have failed. They argue that violence is justified because abortion is a Holocaust, and each doctor or clinic worker is the incarnation of Hitler. They say that if the anti-abortion movement is truly convinced that the unborn child is an innocent human being entitled to the same protections as a newborn child, then it should be legitimate to stop the murder of children by any means necessary.

Many mainstream anti-abortion activists committed to the pro-life movement are horrified at the killings of doctors, and extremely worried that the killings contradict their message to “respect life.” They maintain that such violence undermines their best strategy for stopping abortion – which is to slowly, gradually change hearts and minds.

Meanwhile, fewer and fewer doctors are willing to perform abortions, fewer medical schools are teaching the procedure, and fewer hospitals and clinics are offering it. “Clearly, violence is absolutely antithetical to everything the pro-life movement stands for,” says Helen Alvare of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington, D.C. “It is particularly heinous when appeals are made to ‘religion’ to justify violence. The purpose both of religion and of the pro-life movement is to build a ‘culture of life’ in which every single human life is respected and promoted. This requires people of faith and people of life to demonstrate such respect to everyone.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you respond to the argument that killing doctors who perform abortions is justified?
2. Can incendiary language lead to violence, and should people who use impassioned rhetoric be held responsible when violence erupts?
3. Do you see any middle ground in the debate over abortion?

SUGGESTED READINGS

Gorney, Cynthia. *Articles of Faith: A Frontline History of the Abortion Wars*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998.

Holly, James L. and John MacArthur. *A Matter of Life and Death: What the Bible Has to Say About Violence in the Pro-Life Movement*. Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1995.

Risen, James and Judy L. Thomas. *Wrath of Angels: The American Abortion War*. Basic Books, 1998.

Laurie Goodstein covers religion for the [New York Times](#).

MURDER: TWO VIEWS

Paul Hill, a former Presbyterian minister who was convicted and sentenced to death for murdering a doctor and clinic escort in Pensacola, Florida, in 1994: “I was not standing for my own ideas but God’s truths, the same truths which have stopped blood baths and atrocities throughout history. Who was I to stand in God’s way? He now held the door open and promised great blessing for obedience. Was I not to step through it?”

Gloria Feldt, president of Planned Parenthood, at a memorial for Dr. Barnett Slepian, killed on October 23, 1998: “People associated with abortion have been vilified, harassed and threatened with the most hate-filled language. That word game has turned deadly. It is time to point the finger where the blame belongs – at the doors of people who spew hate from radio and TV talk shows, Web sites, and pulpits.”

As the second millennium nears completion, the economic gap between the U.S. and third-world countries grows immense. Led by Bill Gates with a \$58 billion fortune, the richest 400 Americans earn nearly three times more than a billion people in India.

As our economic trajectory diverges from the depressed economies of countries overseas, it has become fashionable to portray their plight as separate from our own and self-inflicted. If villagers in Java have been reduced to eating insects, if South Korea's economy shrank nearly 8 percent last year and Thailand's unemployment has hit 20 percent, these foreigners, it is said, like the undeserving poor of the 19th century, have brought their misery on themselves. Their governments practiced "crony capitalism"; their corporations had no accountability; their banks lacked transparency.

But one wonders: How could the former "Asian tigers" turn from models to muddles in just a few months? And what about global interdependence? As the world's leading investor, could the United States have had no impact on events leading to the collapse?

OUR OVERSEAS CONNECTION

In fact, the vertiginous boom and subsequent economic collapse of the Asian nations are inextricably linked with efforts to fight the early nineties' U.S. recession. Alan Greenspan, head of the Federal Reserve, drove interest rates down to their lowest levels since the sixties. Cheap money produced a modest domestic investment boom.

But the real impact was felt overseas. A tsunami of U.S. capital – seeking higher investment returns abroad – hit the newly designated "emerging market" countries. These nations, which were already expanding rapidly, used the huge additional sums to

fund too many projects too fast. The result of this overinvestment and overproduction was falling prices, balance-of-payment deficits, flight of capital, and a world economic crisis.

American efforts to solve the crisis have deepened and prolonged it. When rich countries stumble, they adopt Keynesian deficit-spending programs to get back on their feet. Poor countries have been forced to undergo Herbert Hoover-like debt regimes. The point is to get them earning export dollars to pay back foreign banks and corporate investors. These policies played a role in producing a hundred million new Asian paupers.

There is a humane alternative. The World Council of Churches seeks to link the millennium with the Biblical tradition of the Jubilee Year. In the spirit of the Biblical injunction from Leviticus to "return every man unto his possession," rich nations would cancel foreign debts of impoverished nations. "Debt relief is as relevant today," said 1,000 delegates from the 330-member church group, "as it was thousands of years ago."

How can we turn Biblical sentiment into action? One way would be to tax those who can best afford to pay. A nominal wealth tax on the stocks, bonds, and non-residential property of the Forbes 400 – along with the 1 percent of Americans who own nearly 50 percent of the nation's \$17 trillion in securities – would provide ample revenues to finance global debt relief. The United States is unique among Western industrialized nations in having no such wealth tax. A strong dose of social justice at the start of the third millennium may be just what the Bible ordered.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How does the United States treat third-world debtors differently from debtors in advanced, industrialized countries?
2. Should the U.S. follow the Biblical prescription to forgive debts or do we have an ethical obligation to keep capitalism strong by insisting debts be paid?

SUGGESTED READINGS

Greider, William. One World, Ready or Not. New York: Touchstone, 1997.

Hudson, Michael. The Lost Tradition of Biblical Debt Cancellations. New York: Henry George School of Social Science, 1995.

Henderson, Callum. Asia Falling. New York: Business Week Books, 1998.

International Finance Corporation. Foreign Direct Investment – Lessons of Experience. International Finance Corporation and Foreign Investment Advisory Service, 1997.

ROBERT FITCH teaches in New York University's Metropolitan Studies Program and contributes to the Village Voice, Nation, and Newsday.

SHARE THE WEALTH? THAT DEPENDS

"Few things have been more productive of controversy over the ages than the suggestion that the rich should, by one device or another, share their wealth with those who are not. With comparatively rare and usually eccentric exceptions, the rich have been opposed. The grounds have been many and varied and have been principally noted for the rigorous exclusion of the most important reason, which is the simple unwillingness to give up the enjoyment of what they have. The poor have generally been in favor of greater equality."

– from The Affluent Society by John Kenneth Galbraith (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1984)

RELIGION AND ETHICS NEWSWEEKLY is public television at its best. The series introduces us to important issues in our own faiths as well as to belief systems that may be entirely new to us. This Viewer's Guide has been written to help you look more deeply into themes that emerge in the series. It is appropriate for independent learning, but we think it particularly useful for group study and discussion. The following suggestions will help you incorporate the Guide into your group learning activities.

Although the Guide is not keyed to specific programs, its ten essays cover issues that appear regularly in the television series. Additionally, a center spread lists religious observances for many faiths throughout 1999. Each essay includes:

- * a box that offers an example or commentary on the article's main theme;
- * discussion questions, asking you to examine your own beliefs and to explore the topic in the world around you; and
- * suggested readings, for looking further into the topic.

Finally, the Guide includes online resources for various religions and a list of outreach associates that are involved in community projects related to RELIGION AND ETHICS NEWSWEEKLY.

ORGANIZING A GROUP

Study and discussion groups are regularly sponsored by synagogues and churches, fraternal lodges and women's associations, unions, libraries, and countless community centers across the country. You might ask some friends and/or colleagues to join you at home to watch and talk about the series.

Your group will benefit if the roles and responsibilities of its organizer and discussion leader are clear. Here are some suggestions:

THE ORGANIZER

1. Arrange for a meeting place well in advance.
2. Invite six to ten people — a large enough gathering to ensure a lively exchange, but small enough so that each person has a chance to participate fully.
3. Request (or photocopy) enough copies of this Guide to distribute to all participants.
4. Arrange chairs in a circle around a table. Serve refreshments before each session. This will help your members relax and get acquainted.

THE DISCUSSION LEADER

1. Establish an informal atmosphere.
2. Ask members to introduce themselves and explain their reasons for joining.
3. Keep your opening remarks to a minimum. Guide the discussion, do not dominate it. Ask questions, making sure that everyone has a chance to participate. Draw out the "timid soul" and, as discreetly as you can, control the "speech maker." Have faith in the group.
4. Seek out a variety of opinions. A good discussion leader stays neutral while eliciting different opinions from the group.
5. Summarize — or, better yet, ask a member to summarize — the conclusion the group has reached about that night's issues.
6. Don't be afraid of silence. The group may be thinking.
7. Adjourn the meeting on time.

MEETING SCHEDULE

For continuity, your group should plan to hold regular meetings, ideally once a week. Some groups will want to watch the television show together and then discuss it and the Guide immediately afterwards. Others might prefer to meet a few days after the broadcast. You also might consider meeting every other week or even once a month.

USING THE GUIDE

Let us imagine a typical evening of discussion. Before gathering, the group should choose a particular essay to

focus on. Ask members to read the essay in advance. Let us choose Martin Marty's "Faces of God: The Third Millennium." At your meeting, choose his second discussion question: "Looking out from where we are, does it seem that religion is prospering or declining?" The group should discuss this question from three points of view: what they've seen in the RELIGION AND ETHICS NEWSWEEKLY series; what they've seen in their community; and what they feel about their own lives. This topic could obviously be the subject of an entire evening's discussion. The group might also hear from a member who has read one of Professor Marty's suggested readings, for example, Robert Wuthnow's *After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s*.

Now look at Bob Fitch's "Canceling Debt in Y2K." He cites a recent call by the World Council of Churches to forgive the debts of third-world nations at the beginning of the new millennium. Ask three members each to take the pro and con position, presenting a short summary of each point of view in front of the group. After ten minutes, the larger group may join the discussion.

GROUP ACTIVITIES

The following activities may be used to enhance your meetings:

1. Oral reports — Ask one or more participants to give a brief report on the topic of one essay. For example: for "Learning to Forgive," they could report on their discussions with friends or family, extrapolating ideas about forgiveness.
2. Interviews — Ask members to interview individuals from different religious affiliations about ethical issues covered in the television series. Have them report to the group on what they've learned.
3. Outside resources — Identify books, shrines, and museums of various religions by checking the Web sites listed in this guide. Request literature or visit.

Welcome to RELIGION AND ETHICS NEWSWEEKLY. Good viewing and good reading!

OUTREACH ASSOCIATES

American Jewish Committee
165 East 56th Street
New York, NY 10022
Contact: Rabbi James Rubin, Director of Interreligious Affairs
T: 212-751-4000 (ext. 260/261), F: 212-751-4018
E-mail: 76001.2122@compuserve.com

Congress of National Black Churches
1225 I Street NW, Suite 750
Washington, DC 20036
Contact: Ms. Sullivan Robinson, Interim Executive Director
T: 202-371-1091, F: 202-371-0908

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
Office of Ecumenical & Interfaith Relations
8-10 East 79th Street
New York, NY 10021
Contact: His Grace Bishop Dimitrios of Xanthos, Executive Director
T: 212-570-3593, F: 212-774-0202
E-mail: ecumenical@goarch.org

Hindu Temple and Cultural Society of USA, Inc.
780 Old Farm Road
Bridgewater, NJ 08807
Contact: Dr. M.G. Prasad, Chairperson of the Education Committee
T: 201-216-5571 (also 908-725-4477)

Islamic Cultural Center of New York
1711 3rd Avenue
New York, NY 10029-7303
Contact: Dr. Abdel-Rahman Osman, Senior Imam
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, NY 10016
Contact: Joyce S. Dubensky, Director of Communications
T: 212-545-1300, F: 212-545-8053
E-mail: jdubensk@nccj.org

National Conference of Catholic Bishops
and US Catholic Conference
3211 Fourth Street NE
Washington, DC 20017-1194
Contact: Monsignor Francis Maniscalco, Director of Communications
T: 202-541-3200, F: 202-541-3173

National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA
Office of Interfaith Relations
475 Riverside Drive, Room 868
New York, NY 10115-0050
Contact: Rev. Dr. Bert Breiner, Co-Director
T: 212-870-2156, F: 212-870-2158
E-mail: bert@nccusa.org

National Spiritual Assembly of Bah'a'is of the United States
866 United Nations Plaza, Suite 120
New York, NY 10017-1822
Contact: Ms. Vicky Jones, Director of Public Information
T: 212-803-2500, F: 212-803-2573
E-mail: usopi-ny@bic.org

Native American Rights Fund
1506 Broadway
Boulder, CO 80302
Contact: John Echohawk, Executive Director
T: 303-447-8760, F: 303-443-7776
E-mail: www.narf.org

North American Federation of Temple Brotherhoods
and the Jewish Chautauqua Society
633 3rd Avenue
New York, NY 10017
Contact: Mr. Douglas Barden, Executive Director
T: 212-650-4100, (800-765-6200), F: 212-650-4198
E-mail: nftb@uahc.org

Thirteen · wnet

450 West 33rd Street
New York, New York 10001



ONLINE RESOURCES

BUDDHISM:
Tricycle, the nation's leading journal of Buddhist thought, maintains a site at <http://www.tricycle.com>

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH:
Vatican Web site at <http://www.vatican.va>
Catholic Information Network at <http://www.cin.org>
Jacques Galliot, dissident Bishop of Partenia at
<http://www.partenia.org>

COMPARATIVE RELIGION:
The internet search engine Yahoo! has links to a wide variety of sites at <http://www.yahoo.com/Society>

The Association for Religion and Intellectual Life at
<http://www.aril.org>

Harvard University's Pluralism Project explores the changing face of religion in America at <http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~pluralism>

EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS:
Christianity Today at <http://www.christianity.net>

HINDUISM:
Global Hindu Electronic Network at www.hindunet.org

ISLAM:
General information and resources relating to Muslim belief at
<http://islam.org>

JUDAISM:
Project Genesis Torah Study, sponsored by Jewish Learning Network at <http://www.torah.org>

MAINLINE PROTESTANTS:
United Methodist Church at <http://www.umc.org/>

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY:
Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew at <http://www.patriarchate.org>
Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America at <http://www.goarch.org>
Greek Orthodox dissidents at <http://www.voithia.org>

PAGANISM:
A California-based group of believers in pre-Christian religions of Europe at <http://www.asatru.org>