



The periodical of the Professional Society of Religious Educators

VOLUME 2 NUMBER 5 (October 2016)

EDITORIAL



Welcome to the fifth and final issue of *Roots & Wings* for 2016. Again we offer a variety of articles, newsbytes and resources as an invitation to reflect on classroom practice and to try out new approaches.

While Christmas is two months away, we nevertheless offer a reflection on the ‘strange and holy family’.

We hope you enjoy the issue.

PAUL FALLER

CONTENTS

REFLECTION	A Strange and Holy Family (Stuart Moran)	2
REFLECTION	The Gender of God (Ron Rolheiser)	4
HUMOUR 1	Church and Steak?	5
WEBSITE	Bible Gateway	6
RESOURCE	Teaching Controversial Issues	7
ARTICLE	Understanding Islam; A Guide for Catholic Educators (Part 2)	10
INTERNATIONAL NEWS		
	Climate treaty ratified in race against the clock	16
	FaceTime: Pope Francis and Mark Zuckerberg	18
	Dialogue and Danger: American Catholic Public Opinion and Portrayals of Islam	19
HUMOUR 2	In a Manna of Speaking	21

Catholic Institute of Education
CREATING FUTURES



66 Nelson Road, Booyens, Johannesburg 2091
P O Box 2083 Southdale 2135
Tel: 011 433 1888
Web: www.cie.org.za

REFLECTION

A Strange and Holy Family

(Stuart Moran)

- *Echoing The Word* (Vol. 14 No. 5, 2015)



As we approach Christmas through the season of Advent, the Scriptures can provide a great sense of comfort and spiritual sustenance for Christian believers.

Beautiful texts from the ancient prophets such as Isaiah and the familiar infancy narratives from Matthew and Luke reinforce faith in Jesus who incarnates God's love for the world and who comes among us not in visible glory but as an ordinary child born into a human family. For many Christians, the scene which greets Luke's shepherds of "Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in the manger" (Luke 2:16) is the iconic image of the *Holy Family* so strongly emphasised in popular piety and high religious art alike. The function of God's Word in the Scriptures is not, however, merely to provide support for our preconceived ideas, much less to reinforce

conventional and comfortable images of the kind of people God is leading us into being. When reading the Scriptures we should always be on the lookout for the strangeness of God's way of doing things. In our times in which the very concept of family is under so much reconsideration, it may be that Jesus' own family is a lot stranger than it seems.

To begin with, even the apparently idyllic scene around the manger is touched with strangeness. Why is this newborn child placed in a feed trough for cattle? In Luke's narrative, Jesus has been born a legal descendant of David (through his mother's marriage to Joseph) in David's ancestral hometown, Bethlehem. And yet, for this descendant of kings, there is not even a guest room available for his birth. From the outset, Jesus is a stranger even among those who should be his own people in his own ancestral family home.

Attitudes to Jesus' family in earliest Christianity were ambivalent to say the least. The earliest writings in the New Testament, the letters of Paul, basically say nothing at all about Jesus' early life or his family background apart from Paul's recognition that Jesus was "born of a woman, born under the law" (Gal 4:4). The earliest canonical Gospel, that of Mark, completely ignores Jesus' birth and childhood. The first mention of Jesus' family occurs at Mark 3:21 where the author tells us that when Jesus returned to Nazareth after having appointed the Twelve, Jesus' family "went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind.'" When his unnamed "mother and brothers" arrive and attempt to get Jesus' attention, he ignores them and instead asks the rhetorical question "Who are my mother and my brothers?" Jesus points to the crowd sitting around him and proclaims them to be his mother and brothers, saying "Whoever does the will of

God is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mark 3:31-35). In Mark’s understanding, the *holy family* is not Mary and Joseph (whom he never mentions at all!) but all who do God’s will in imitation of Jesus himself. The radical nature of this redefinition of family usually escapes us. By repudiating his mother in this way, not only does Jesus set aside one of the key precepts of the Torah to honour one’s parents (Exod 20:12), but he challenges his entire cultural world in which blood-relations were absolutely crucial to social order. While Mark’s definition of Jesus’ new family certainly does not exclude the possibility that members of his biological family (including the mysterious “brothers and sisters” of Mark 6:3) may also have qualified for membership of his new family, Mark records no evidence that they ever did. In stark contrast to the scene portrayed by the evangelist John, Mark’s crucifixion scene makes no mention of the presence of Jesus’ mother.

Later New Testament authors adopted a more conventional attitude in their portrayal of Jesus’ family relationships, although, as we have already seen in relation to the manger scene, much strangeness remains. Matthew and Luke independently record traditions that were circulating in the early Christian communities about Jesus’ family background, birth and childhood. While both evangelists provide genealogies for Jesus, Matthew’s is unusual for an ancient genealogy because of its inclusion of four female figures. Scripture scholars have debated for centuries what (if anything) links Tamar, Ruth, Bathsheba and Mary in the genealogy. However, what seems clear is that all of them have something strange about their stories: Tamar becomes pregnant by her father-in-law, Ruth is a foreigner who marries into an Israelite family, Bathsheba becomes King David’s wife after David has murdered her husband Uriah, and of course Mary is found to be pregnant outside marriage. Rather than attempt to hide these potentially embarrassing “skeletons in the closet” of Jesus’ family, Matthew brings them all out in the first chapter of his Gospel, showing that all these women were involved in how Jesus came to be born (Matt 1:1-18). In Matthew’s traditional Jewish worldview, blood-relations remain extremely important, but he reminds us that God can be present and active in even strange and disturbing family situations.

The evangelist Luke, like John, appears to have a special interest in Mary. Unlike Matthew’s infancy narrative which is told mainly from Joseph’s perspective, Luke tells the story through Mary’s eyes. Mary is portrayed as thoughtful, if not entirely comprehending, as she “ponders in her heart” the events in which she has become involved (Luke 2:19; cf 2:51). Her free participation in God’s redemptive plan is emphasised in the annunciation scene (Luke 1:26-38). Luke retells the Markan scene of Jesus’ mother and brothers waiting to see him, but omits the reference to them thinking him “out of his mind”. Through Mary’s response to Gabriel, “let it be done to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38), Mary has already been shown to be one of the people who “hear the word of God and do it” (Luke 8:21) and thus qualifies for membership of Jesus’ new family. Despite this, even the Lukan holy family is strange, at least within its own cultural world. The one and only episode from Jesus’ childhood recounted in the canonical Gospels is Luke’s narrative of the *finding in the Temple* (Luke 2:41-52), although the story might be better named “the running away from home”. In Jesus’ own culture, the story is rather shocking in its lack of deference to parental authority. Ironically, though, this story of a young teenager trying to find his place in the world and assert his independence from his parents is one which feels surprisingly contemporary with modern western families. It is particularly telling, once again, that Jesus here speaks about being, literally, “in the things of my Father”, that is, involved in doing his Father’s will (Luke 2:49).

Jesus’ family as presented in the Gospels provides no simple model for what families should *look* like. But it does provide a model for what families should *be* like: a place where human beings can flourish by hearing the Word of God and putting it into practice. It is this strange and holy quality that all Christian families are challenged to embody.



REFLECTION

The Gender of God

(Ron Rolheiser)

One of the more contentious debates within contemporary circles concerns the gender of God. For centuries, the common, though unreflective, notion was that God was masculine—God the Father! Today there are strong feelings, both ways, about that.

Feminists and others are demanding that the churches change their way of thinking and speaking about God to reflect the fact that God is not any more masculine than feminine. Others, however, are digging in an attempt to defend the more traditional notion.

How are we to conceive of God? Is God male, female, genderless? The debate here is both serious and important. Occasionally, too, it exhibits its own sense of humor, as in the case of Janet Foster, who, arguing as a woman, submits that God can only be conceived of as male:

*God is a woman, the feminists cry,
But any fool knows that's a terrible lie.
He toiled for six days, spent the seventh
in heaven;
If God were a woman, she'd toil the full
seven*

*God can't be a woman, as some people
say,
Or he wouldn't have needed to rest on
that day,
'Cause since time first began and we
women know best,
Only children and man—and God—need a
rest!*

More seriously, though, how is God to be conceived of and spoken about?

There is a double issue involved in grappling with this—a theological one and a pastoral one. The pastoral questions are trickier: How, concretely, do we begin to speak about God if we cease



conceiving of, and speaking of, “him” as male?

Do we use gender-neutral terms—Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier? What would this do, long range, to our conception of God as a person? Is today, when father-hunger is perhaps the deepest longing within our whole world, a good time to start moving away from the concept of God as father?

These are hard questions which, at present, need much study and discussion.

The theological question, however, is clear . . . and that needs unequivocal affirmation: God is as much female as male, as much mother as father. That is beyond serious dispute. Christian tradition is clear everywhere, and especially in the creation story, that male and female both equally image the likeness of God.

Moreover, in discussing the question of God's gender, more important even than explicit scriptural affirmations is the whole question of our theology of God and our language about God.

All proper theology of God begins with, and grounds itself upon, the affirmation that God is, by definition, ineffable. What this means is that, because God is infinite, without boundaries, God is, by that fact too, inconceivable and unthinkable. We can know God, but we can never think God.

Our minds can never capture God in a concept. Even less can we ever accurately speak about God. All of our concepts and all of our words, including those in Scripture itself, are highly inadequate, telling us always more about what we don't know than what we do know about God. No concepts and language about God are even remotely adequate, let alone accurate.

We use the revealed language that the Scriptures give us, not because we pretend that it captures God with any accuracy and adequacy, but because it is less inadequate than other language and we have been given permission by God to use it—and thus, in the apt words of Annie Dillard, can use it without being blown apart from heaven!

But in the end, as the church itself has dogmatically defined (at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215), everything we think about and speak about God is more inadequate than adequate, more inaccurate than accurate.

All of this is doubly true vis-a-vis God's gender. God is not simply male, just as God is not simply female. Nor is God neuter, a genderless force. All thought and language fall short here.

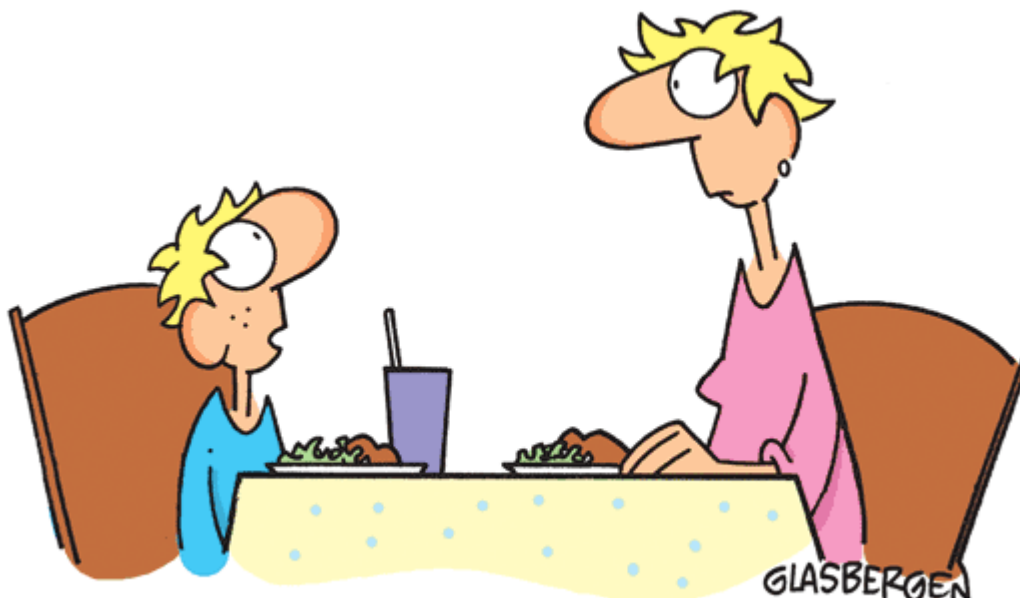
Given the truth of this, none of our personal nouns or ordinary pronouns can be used about God with any accuracy. Perhaps the best route to go here is that used, centuries ago already, by Julian of Norwich who wrote of God:

“As truly as God is our father, so just as truly is he our mother. In our father, God Almighty, we have our being: in our merciful mother we remade and restored It is I, the strength and goodness of fatherhood. It is I, the wisdom of motherhood. It is I, the light and grace of holy love. It is I, the Trinity, it is I, the unity.”

In that unity we move and have our being.

HUMOUR 1

© Randy Glasbergen
glasbergen.com

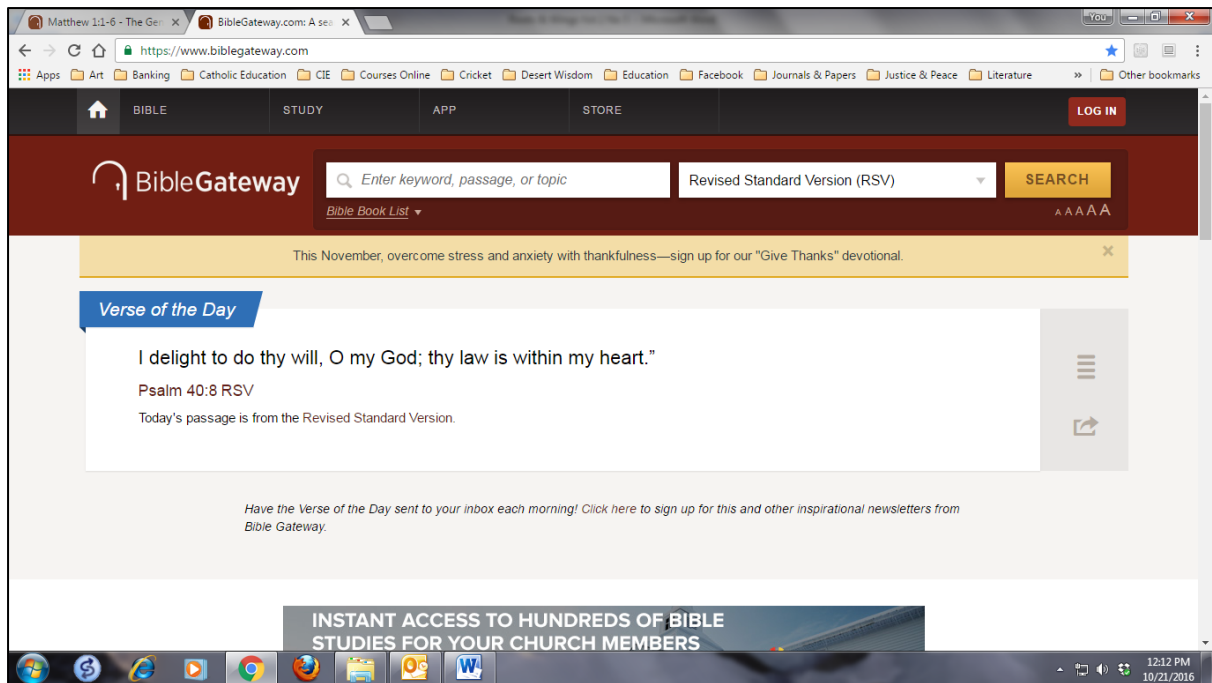


“Some religions don’t eat meat on Friday because there’s separation of church and steak.”

WEBSITE

Bible Gateway

<https://www.biblegateway.com/>



Here is a very useful site, easily accessed through a Google search for the passage you require. The passage is available in a large number of translations and languages - even Arabic and Chinese!

For example, searching for Genesis 1:1 in the Revised Standard Version (RSV) gives us:

Genesis 1:1-2 Revised Standard Version (RSV)

Six Days of Creation and the Sabbath

1 In the beginning God created^[a] the heavens and the earth. ²The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit^[b] of God was moving over the face of the waters.

Footnotes:

- a. [Genesis 1:1](#) Or *When God began to create*
- b. [Genesis 1:2](#) Or *wind*

RESOURCE

Teaching Controversial Issues

(from *Religious Education Leaving Certificate, Guidelines for Teachers* - National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Ireland)

All educators can find themselves dealing with controversial issues in the classroom. Issues of justice and morality, of belief and practice, and of life and its meaning, are at the heart of religious education. Therefore, for the religious educator, controversial issues are encountered almost daily. These issues are controversial because there is no one fixed or universally held point of view. A controversial issue is defined as an area of academic inquiry about which people can hold sincere conflicting points of view. There are often diverse religious as well as secular perspectives on such issues.

Exposing students to controversial issues in their studies enables them to develop their capacity for ethical and moral reasoning and become critically reflective thinkers.

When issues are controversial they are likely to challenge students' values, beliefs, and world-views. This can be very threatening and may even cause distress to some students. Therefore, when controversial issues are addressed in the classroom, teachers need special skills to ensure a positive outcome.

An important aim in teaching about such controversial material is to achieve a classroom atmosphere in which students engage in interesting and informed dialogues, free to express their opinions and relate their experiences, yet remaining respectful of other students and other opinions.

Achieving a balance of freedom within structure is not easy, and discomfort can result if the balance between the two is lost. This can arise from a too tightly-

controlled classroom in which students are afraid to speak, or a too loosely-controlled classroom in which unchecked or uninformed personal opinion monopolises class time. This section offers some guidelines for facilitating discussion to achieve this balance.

Tips for teaching controversial issues

The following tips are aimed at helping teachers keep control of the situation while maintaining open enquiry and dialogue.

1 Make your classroom a safe place in which to ask questions and discuss ideas

Before students can ask questions or discuss controversial issues, they need to feel that the classroom is a safe place in which to ask questions or disagree with classmates without being put down for it. Ground rules for discussion should be established early in the year and reinforced regularly - not just for discussions about controversial issues, but for all discussions.

A sample set of ground rules might include:

- everyone is shown respect
- everyone is given an opportunity to speak in the group
- everyone is listened to – no interruptions
- no put-downs
- everyone's right to their opinion is respected
- everyone is expected to back up their opinion
- everyone has the freedom to change their opinion based on reflective discussion
- no generalisations, e.g. 'all refugees are... all Muslims are...'

[Adapted from *Challenging Perspectives: Cultural Diversity and Equality in Ireland and the Wider World (A resource for CSPE) 2002, CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit.*]

2 Appeal to students' better nature

In introducing a social and moral issue that has the potential to become controversial, teachers can remind students of the importance of respect and tolerance. They might also make a humanitarian appeal to students to remember that prejudiced remarks made in class may offend or embarrass their classmates. Most students do not want intentionally to hurt others, and, with this reminder, they may strive to couch their comments in less inflammatory language.

3 Find out what students know and think about an issue before beginning an inquiry

Find out what they know about an issue, what they think they know but aren't sure about, where their information comes from, and what questions they are likely to have. Their responses can come from direct questioning, brainstorming, group discussions, and journal-writing.

4 Expose students to multiple perspectives

Avoid classroom discussions until students have had an opportunity to research and explore an issue from a variety of perspectives. Remember, exposure to different points of view on a controversial issue is necessary, but insufficient on its own. Students may listen, view, or read only to support what they already think, or to find flaws, omissions, misinformation.

A key habit of mind the teacher seeks to develop through these processes is 'critical openness'. A disposition to be open-minded to others' views and the ability to subject them to critical study. A willingness to suspend judgment and the ability, ultimately, to reach reasoned conclusions that are open to change.

5 Promote dialogue and active listening

Students usually need help in understanding the differences between dialogue and debate. Dialogue aims for understanding, enlargement of view,

complicating one's thinking, an openness to change. Dialogue requires real listening. It also requires humility.

How can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own? How can I dialogue if I am closed to, and even offended by, the contribution of others?

Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

An excellent way to promote listening is by asking students to re-state the perspective of others. Have them paraphrase what they hear another student saying to gain this skill.

6 Use active learning methodologies

Students learn best when actively engaged in the learning. In teaching controversial issues it is important to provide opportunities for various kinds of group discussions, such as pairs, conversation circles, panels, fishbowls. In addition, active learning methodologies can be useful in building empathy (e.g. role-play) and in challenging strongly held prejudices (e.g. a simulation game).

7 Promote critical thinking

Promote skills of critical evaluation and encourage students to interrogate information, its origins and possible biases. Ask critical question to help students to understand the origins of their ideas and attitudes.

An example of critical questioning: Section D: Morality

In this section of the syllabus a number of controversial issues may arise, for example, issues of medical ethics, of relationships and sexuality, violence and war, crime and punishment. It would be useful to help students to critically reflect on their own attitudes, experience and understanding before entering into these issues.

Questions which might be useful include:

- What is your current understanding of cloning/capital punishment/etc.?
- Why do you think/feel that way?
- Where have your perceptions and understanding come from?
- How reliable is this information?
- Where have your images come from?
- What might be the role of the media in influencing how you see this situation?
- What about other influences - friends, family, religion?
- Can you imagine an alternative way of seeing this issue? What might it be like?

When dealing with controversial issues, teachers should adopt strategies that teach students how to recognise bias, how to evaluate evidence put before them and how to look for alternative interpretations, viewpoints and sources of evidence, above all to give good reason for everything they say and do, and to expect good reason to be given by others.

Bailey, Richard (1998) *Teaching Values and Citizenship across the Curriculum* Dept. of Education and Employment, UK

The teacher's role

Examine yourself

What do you, the teacher, think and feel about an issue? Why? Would you tell students at the outset what your views are so that they can allow for possible biases? Or should you not tell them, but guard against any inclinations to manipulate and propagandise?

Be responsive to students' feelings and values

Through such techniques as those outlined above, students' feelings and values are likely to be

revealed. Examining a controversial issue is not a bloodless exercise'. Just as the teacher's role is not to tell students what to think, but to help them learn how to think, so too his/her role is not to tell students what feelings and values to have, but to promote an atmosphere in which they can express them without fear, make them explicit to themselves, and consider their validity.

Model respect and fairness

Show respect for all students and their right to express their views. Show balance in representing opposing positions accurately and fairly. The teacher cannot pretend to be neutral and has a right to express an opinion too. But it is important to state one's own opinion in a way that respects others and does not serve to close down the discussion.

Correct misinformation

One important role for the teacher during a discussion on a controversial issue is to gently correct misinformation. Keep this information simple and to the point. Avoid entering into confrontation or adopting an argumentative stance with a student or group of students.

Emphasise that conflicts are opportunities

Most controversial issues can generate conflict, and a discussion about controversial issues is a good time to remind students that conflicts are opportunities for learning and growth.

Show your humanity

Admit doubts, difficulties, and weaknesses in your own position. Allow the students to question your position too.

Establish a means of closure

Ensure that the discussion is brought to closure with due sensitivity to the feelings that may have been aroused.

Constructive controversy - a method for exploring controversial issues

by David and Roger Johnson

Summary

In this highly structured, cooperative format for exploring controversial issues, students research and present a point of view on an issue, then switch sides and argue for the opposite point of view. Finally, the group tries to come to a consensus on the issues and writes a group report describing the issue and their combined thinking about it.

Advantages

The highly structured nature of 'constructive controversy' makes it useful for students who respond well to structured situations. The process requires students to make use of collaborative skills, and perspective taking and consensus are built into the procedure.

Disadvantages

Some teachers find that 'constructive controversy' comes too close to the old debate model. Its major drawback is that issues must be carefully chosen so that there are at least two positions. That in itself is not a problem, but finding material that represents those positions and is appropriate for students' use can be very difficult. The model requires a great deal of work on the part of the teacher to ensure its success.

ARTICLE

Understanding Islam: A Guide for Catholic Educators (Part 2)

Document of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs in conjunction with the 2013 Mid-Atlantic Catholic-Muslim Dialogue.



This document was produced by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs in conjunction with the 2013 Mid-Atlantic Muslim-Catholic Dialogue. It is the fruit of many years of collaborative effort by Catholic and Muslim scholars of the USCCB's Mid-Atlantic Catholic-Muslim dialogue. It is primarily intended to serve as a basic introduction for Catholic educators who are tasked with teaching the rudiments of Islam to students at the secondary school level, as well as parish leaders responsible for general adult religious education programs—a first-look, if you will, at Islam for students. The Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the USCCB is most grateful to all of the dialogue members for their tireless efforts to bring this document to fruition, and most especially to Dr. Sandra Keating, the principal author. After consulting this document, we would encourage readers to consider Dr. Keating's more advanced essay "What Catholics Should Know About Islam" which includes for those who wish to deepen their understanding of Islam a helpful list of titles for further reading on the topic. This last work is published by The Knights of Columbus and found here:

<http://www.kofc.org/un/en/resources/cis/cis317.pdf>.

(continued)

Islamic Way of Life: The Ummah and Shari'ah

From its very beginnings, the Muslim community, called the Ummah, has been centred on building a well-ordered community in which the innocent and vulnerable are protected. Unlike Christianity, Islam has placed little emphasis on the importance of belief as the unifying characteristic of the community, choosing instead to identify the Ummah with those who express their submission to God through observance of certain practices, ritual and laws. Whereas Christians have generally considered the Church to be the community of those who profess a common faith, Muslims have argued that only God can know the true beliefs of an individual, making faith alone an unreliable indicator of belonging to the community. Thus, the Ummah is defined by the space within which people follow a particular way of life. This way of life, Shari'ah ("path" or "way"), creates the environment in which human beings can most perfectly bring God's justice to Creation. Muslims believe that because human beings are creatures, their ability to create a just society on their own is limited. Thus, it is paramount that every person submits his will to God's as it has been made clear in the revelation.

Unlike Christianity, Islam did not develop a strong central religious hierarchy or clergy. Those who are identified as 'clergy' are usually scholars of law or tradition. Like monastic prayer, Muslim prayer can be performed individually or in community, and does not require a specially trained priest. Traditionally, the leader, or imam, was a man who had been identified as particularly pious or could recite the Qur'an well. Today many imams do spend significant time studying the Qur'an, commentaries and perhaps theology, but there is no formal 'ordination'. Rather, in keeping with the centrality of justice, over time the Ummah developed a system of legal scholars and interpreters who formed the backbone of religious life. In many ways Shari'ah became the unifier of the universal Ummah.

In fact, very few laws can be found explicitly in the Qur'an itself. Rather, Muslims identify Muhammad's practices and those of the early community as the best model. Oral traditions of Muhammad's sayings, practices and legal decisions, called sunnah ("practice") were collected along with an account of the reliability (the isnad) of those who transmitted them into brief reports called ahadith (singular, hadith). The ahadith form the foundation for much of Shari'ah, and Muslims are generally hesitant to deviate from Muhammad's own practice; indeed, many try to emulate it as much as possible, even following him in dress and other daily customs.

By following these rituals and practices, Muslims believe that the Ummah can over time create the perfect society ordered according to God's commands. Later jurists sometimes distinguished areas governed by Muslim rulers and Shari'ah as the Dar al-Islam ("House of Islam", sometimes also called the Dar al-Salam, "House of Peace"), and the lands beyond as the Dar al-Harb ("House of War"), reflecting the expansionist vision of many rulers. In recent times, this distinction has been invoked by those who desire to revive Shari'ah as a counterweight to European and American styles of law.

Duties to God: Practices and Beliefs

Shari'ah consists of the six Pillars of Faith and the Duties to God and to Family and Society. The Pillars of Faith are similar to the articles of the Christian creeds, but differ in that they have been identified by consensus over the centuries (not by an authoritative body such as clergy) and are not recited liturgically. Briefly, they are:

1. Belief in One God.

2. Belief in the Angels. Unlike human beings, angels have not been granted free will. Muslims believe that two or more angels are assigned to each human being to keep a record of all of the deeds and actions until the Day of Judgment.
3. Belief in the Revealed Scriptures.
4. Belief in the Prophets. According to the Qur'an, Adam was the first prophet and from Abraham came a long line of prophets through his two sons, Ishmael and Isaac. Ishmael was the forefather of the Arab people and thus of Prophet Mohammad, and, from Isaac descended Jacob, Moses, David, John the Baptist and Jesus.
5. Belief in the Hereafter. Islam teaches that God created human beings and that each person is born pure without sin. God has given guidance through the prophets, and every individual will be held accountable for his performance in the worldly life before God on the Day of Judgment after resurrection.
6. Belief in the Divine Decree. Islam teaches that everything that is or happens in the universe, from the smallest to the greatest events, is controlled by God and is a part of His eternal plan. This belief is coupled with the perception that all events, happy or sad, in ease or suffering, are a part of God's wise plan and are for the ultimate benefit of humanity.

Shari'ah has been further divided by Muslim scholars into two types of duties: Duties to God and Duties to Family and Society. Although they can never truly be separated, it is recognized that these apply to different aspects of the life of the individual and community. The Duties to God have been summarized in the so-called "Five Pillars". These are not found listed as a group anywhere in the Qur'an, and some Muslims would include others. The traditional Five Pillars are the following:

- 1) Shahada ("declaration of faith"): This is the belief, acceptance and proclamation of the phrase, There is no god but God (Allah), Muhammad is the Messenger of God. Muslims make this statement numerous times in prayer and during other rituals. In normal circumstances, to become a Muslim it is only necessary to repeat this phrase with conviction, preferably before a witness. There is no formal process of preparation or particular ritual necessary to become a Muslim.
- 2) Salat ("prayer"): Muslims pray in the direction of the Kaba (located in Mecca) five times each day as an acknowledgement of submission to the One God worshipped by Abraham. Before beginning prayer, Muslims perform ritual ablutions to purify and prepare themselves. Salat involves repetition of certain prayers accompanied by standing, bowing, prostration and other movements. The times of daily prayer is determined by the position of the sun, much like the monastic Liturgy of the Hours, and may be done alone or with others. A special prayer gathering on Fridays, called Jum'ah, is required of all adult males, while women and children are encouraged to attend, and is usually done in a mosque led by a leader called an imam. This prayer also usually includes two sermons by the imam or other leader.
- 3) Zakat ("almsgiving"): All Muslims with sufficient financial means are obliged to give 2.5% of their annual assets to the poor and needy. This act is considered to be one of the greatest charitable duties, and is done in addition to voluntary charities given to support of the mosque, school, or other institutions.
- 4) Sawm ("fasting"): During the month of Ramadan Muslims fast as an act of worship, as well as a time to reflect upon the moment when Muhammad began to receive messages through the Angel Gabriel. Muslims follow a lunar calendar, so the month moves through the Western (solar) calendar and does not fall at the same time each year. Ramadan is a month of purification and Muslims avoid eating, drinking and sexual activity during daylight hours, while the nights are filled with celebration and feasting, but also with additional acts of worship. Ramadan ends

with the great feast of Eid al-Fitra which is marked by donations of food to the poor, common prayer and feasting with friends and relatives.

- 5) Hajj (“pilgrimage”): The annual pilgrimage to Mecca, the Hajj, is an obligation only for those who are physically and financially able to perform it. Nevertheless, about five million people go to Mecca each year from every corner of the globe. Although Mecca is always filled with visitors, the annual Hajj begins in the twelfth month of the Islamic Lunar year. Pilgrims wear special clothes, simple garments which strip away distinctions of class and culture, so that all stand equally before God.

Most Hajj rituals are traced back to Prophet Abraham, his wife Hagar and his son Ismail. As important as these Five Pillars are, Muslims have always recognized that building a just society requires more. As a result, an entire structure of law and customs grew out of the early practices and legal decisions made by Muhammad and his first followers. As Muslim armies conquered territory, Islamic influence was asserted first through taxation and then the development of full-blown legal systems. In many ways similar to Jewish law, Shari’ah aims to submit every aspect of human life to God’s will. Shari’ah includes observance of food purity (for example, prohibition of alcohol and pork, rules concerning the proper slaughter of animals, and other actions and foods, called halal), regulations concerning marriage, divorce, family life and child rearing, commerce, governance, and criminal activity. Contrary to popular belief, Islamic law is generally very flexible in accommodating particular situations. Very few punishments are prescribed by the law, and in some cases, such as divorce or breach of contract, plaintiffs may seek the council of several judges before accepting a verdict.

Today Muslims generally try to follow one of four major Sunni systems or two major Shi’ite systems of law. The systems, or schools, are characterized by differing views on the role of precedents and accommodation of local customs and culture. A great difficulty for many Muslims is how to observe the tenets of Islamic law in non-Muslim societies, especially when these conflict with the law of the land. For example, polygamy is allowed in Islamic law, but prohibited in most non-Islamic countries. Other difficult situations include child custody in divorce and divorce settlements, banking, usury and interest, and the separate roles of men and women. Some Muslim revivalists have looked forward to the re-establishment of a Dar al-Islam in which Shari’ah can be practiced without restriction again, while others are arguing for a new ‘school’ that can accommodate modern realities. Perhaps the two greatest challenges posed by the modern world are expectations concerning the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims, and the roles of men and women. Shari’ah saw its greatest development during the time in which the Ummah was increasing in power and authority, and reflects the privileged position given to Islam. Although non-Muslim monotheists were tolerated and protected as Dhimmi, historically they were never granted equal status in Islamic societies. Many laws were written to prevent influence or expansion of other religious communities, including prohibitions on building or repairing places of worship, gaining converts, having political authority over Muslims, or public expression of religious beliefs. The enforcement of these rules depended on the local ruler, and there are many notable exceptions of non-Muslims who enjoyed great influence in Muslim society. Nonetheless, the contemporary expectation of the neutrality of state vis-à-vis religion has posed serious challenges for traditional approaches to Shari’ah.

A second challenge is the contemporary shift away from traditional roles for men and women to one of equality and self-determination. Although the Qur’an introduced many regulations intended to protect the dignity of women, such as a prohibition against burying unwanted infant girls, the requirement for the woman’s consent to be married, and the

right of women to inheritance and dowries, there are many aspects of Shari'ah that enshrine a clear separation between men and women, and place women under the protection and authority of men in order to preserve harmony in the community. This problem is certainly not unique to Islam; nonetheless, the position of the Qur'an as the unquestionable word of God and the role of Muhammad as its best interpreter have made it difficult to accommodate contemporary views of women and marriage.

In the final analysis, Shari'ah is first and foremost concerned with promotion of justice and desire to command good and forbid evil. It proposes a well-ordered society that encourages submission to God in every aspect of the person's life and puts the good of the community at the center. As Muslims engage modernity with its plurality of religions and ideologies, it is unclear what role Shari'ah has in its traditional sense. Some are arguing for a modified version, particularly focusing on the duties to God; others maintain that this reductionism is a corrupt accommodation of injustice and undermines true Islamic beliefs. The conclusion of this debate is yet to be decided.

Contemporary Issues

Like so much else, relations between Muslims and Christians have reached a unique moment in our history. On the one hand, tensions and turmoil in the Middle East continue as different political and religious groups vie for power and the right to claim that their understanding of Islam is orthodox. On the other hand, unprecedented movements towards reconciliation between the two communities can be found in every corner of society. In this section we wish to draw attention to only a few of the areas in which the dialogues of life, action, theological exchange and experience are taking up points of conflict and disagreement (Dialogue and Proclamation, 42)

Religious War: Jihad and Crusade

It has become a truism today that religion is a primary source of conflict; indeed some argue that the only way to a peaceful world is to eliminate religious belief altogether. For many people the historical fact of religious war is a serious obstacle to faith. This should be of great concern for all who live and teach the Catholic faith. Coming to terms with past conflict and understanding its ongoing effects in society cannot be done quickly, but should nonetheless be a priority in teaching.

First and foremost, it is important that educators take care not to hand on stereotypes or ideological interpretations of past events. Recent research and study has given us a much more complex picture of the motivations of those who have participated in armed conflict in the past, calling into question the assumed 'religious' nature of many wars. Without minimizing the profound effects that war in the name of religious ideals has had on societies throughout the centuries, it is important to recognize that the vast majority of Muslims and Christians never participated in such conflicts, nor do those conflicts in any way represent what they hold to be the life-giving facets of their religious traditions.

Much, much more work needs to be done in these areas, and educators must strive to promote honest reflection on the role of religious communities in past conflict. Catholics are explicitly called to take to heart the directive in *Nostra Aetate* 3 that urges us to leave the past aside to work for a deeper understanding of each other's beliefs, and to find the common ground of understanding, respect and collaboration wherever possible for the good of all of humanity. This goal should always be apparent in the presentation of the material.

Nostra Aetate and the Common Word

In one of the very last documents to be promulgated, the Second Vatican Council issued *Nostra Aetate* (the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions), which includes a foundational section on Islam in §3. The document outlines in brief terms those aspects of Islam that Catholics can appreciate as signs of God's presence, and that perhaps form the basis for a peaceful common society.

In recent times, a group of Muslim scholars wrote a document in the same spirit entitled *A Common Word Between Us and You* (2007), which has gained widespread praise in the Muslim community. The document is unique, not so much for its content (which can be found in the writings of individual scholars over the centuries), but for its position as a common statement of belief that represents Muslims worldwide. At its heart is the conviction that Christians and Muslims share a common belief in the divine commands regarding love of God and love of neighbour, and that this can be common ground to build upon.

Without covering over differences in faith and practice between the two religious communities, these two documents call Muslims and Christians together to overcome the quarrels and hostilities that have arisen over the centuries (NA 3). They give us hope that with the proper attitude and openness to God's call we can become signs of peace in the world and a positive witness to the children of God living together in harmony.

Religious Liberty

Finally, a significant topic in interreligious discussion today is the necessity of religious liberty for all people in every society. In some cases, it is secular or anti-religious forces that seek to limit religious practice, and in these cases adherents of all religions have a stake in defending religious liberty. But it is unfortunately true that some religious communities promote the limitation on practice of other religions and do not grant the freedom to choose one's religion for oneself. This limitation is a form of coercion, whether implicit or explicit, and violates the deepest convictions of both Muslims and Christians.

Conclusion

The role of educators in shaping future generations of the religious communities in which they live and work is enormous, and care must be taken to ensure that the true faith is passed on while at the same time respecting the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of every individual. Religious educators are faced with a difficult task - on the one hand, they are charged with helping to bring understanding so that past conflict can be put aside and healed, with protecting and promoting the good of each person, and with drawing every human being closer to God. On the other hand, they are given the further task of providing an interreligious component in the overall formation of students in order to assist them in making sense of the context that shapes the experience of people from differing faith traditions—not least with those who are already held in great suspicion and subject to negative stereotypes such as American Muslims. This requires that care be taken not to paint all people with the same brush, as if there are no individuals or disagreements, as if humanity is not on a journey toward the perfection that can only be accomplished by God. Muslims and Christians share the deep conviction that all people are God's creations who are on a journey back to their Divine Source. In the end the task before us is to act in the best possible way, living in the hope that God will accept our work and judge our differences with mercy, and knowing that everything we have received is ultimately from God.

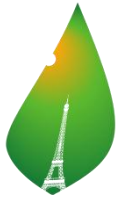
Selected Bibliography

- Nostra Aetate (1965), The Documents of the Second Vatican Council, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html
- A Common Word Between Us and You (2007), <http://www.acommonword.com/>
- Dialogue and Proclamation (1991), Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html
- Keating, Sandra Toenies, What Catholics Should Know About Islam, Veritas Series, The Knights of Columbus, 2008. (available on-line www.kofc.org/un/en/resources/cis/cis317.pdf)
- Mallon, Elias D, Islam: What Catholics Need to Know, National Catholic Education Association, 2006.
- Troll, Christian, Muslims Ask, Christians Answer, New City Press, 2012

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Climate treaty ratified in race against the clock

06 OCT 2016 05:23 (SOUTH AFRICA)



PARIS2015
UN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE
COP21-CMP11

by Marlowe HOOD

The historic Paris climate pact dashed across the ratification finish line Wednesday to diplomatic cheers.

"A turning point for the planet," said US President Barack Obama.

"A defining moment for the global economy," enthused Paul Polman, CEO of Unilever and Chairman of the World Business Council for Sustainable Development.

But the cold, hard reality of what is needed to fulfil the Paris Agreement's pledges will soon bite, experts warned.

Its accelerated entry into force was driven by many things, including the prospect of Republican Party candidate Donald Trump -- who has described global

warming as a hoax perpetrated by the Chinese -- sitting in the White House.

The rapid, joint ratification by China and the United States also set an example hard to ignore.

But the main impetus for locking in the deal was clearly the growing sense of urgency about the looming threat of climate change.

"Time is absolutely of the essence," said Jennifer Morgan, Executive Director of Greenpeace International. "The question is not 'whether', it is 'how fast'."

Almost daily, global warming red flags are popping up.

Every month so far this year has set a temperature record, and 2016 is on track to supplant 2015 as the hottest year ever registered.

Scientists have recently forecast that average global temperatures -- already one degree Celsius (1.8 degrees Fahrenheit) above the pre-industrial era benchmark -- could sail past 1.5 C (2.7 F) within a decade, and 2.0 C (3.6 F) by mid-century.

A maelstrom of superstorms fuelled by rising seas, deadly floods, and drought prompted the world's nations to lower the threshold for dangerous warming in the Paris pact to "well below" 2.0 C.

Reaching that target will require a breakneck, wholesale shift across the globe away from fossil fuels towards clean sources of energy.

Even that will not be enough: we will have to learn how to suck carbon out of the air, say scientists.

- North star -The Paris accord's early validation comes just in time to take centre stage at high-level UN talks in Marrakesh next month tasked with translating its planet-saving vision into policy.

It could also accelerate the process.

"This shifts the focus to implementation and strengthening the commitments under the agreement," said Alden Meyer, a veteran climate analyst at the Washington-based Union for Concerned Scientists.

Countries have informally set a 2018 target for hammering out more than 100 concrete rules and procedures embedded in the climate pact -- some of them highly contentious.

Originally, the agreement left open a four-year window for that process.

"Many details need to be ironed out before implementation can begin," said Harjeet Singh, head of climate change for ActionAid.

They include rules for reporting and verification of emissions cuts, how to disburse hundreds of billions of dollars to climate-vulnerable developing nations, and the establishment of new market mechanisms.

Even more important, 2018 is shaping up to be a crucial "political moment" when countries will feel pressure to revise and deepen voluntary pledges for slashing carbon pollution.

At their current level, these so-called "nationally determined contributions" -- which don't kick in until 2020 -- fall woefully short of the target, and would result in an unlivable 3.0 C (5.4 F) planet by century's end.

Bolstered by a special report from the UN's climate science panel, to be completed by mid-2018, the world's major greenhouse gas emitters will also be expected to deliver detailed national plans, or "pathways", for economic transformation through 2050.

"If you are going to achieve the objectives in Paris, you need a north star that gives you the direction of travel," said Meyer, adding that the United States, Germany and Canada have taken the lead on this.

That north star will likewise be a visible to corporations and business leaders, who realise that they ignore it at their peril.

The new treaty "sends an unmistakable signal to business and investors that the global transition to a low-carbon economy is urgent, inevitable, and accelerating faster than we ever believed possible," Unilever's Polman said in a statement.



FaceTime: Pope Francis & Marc Zuckerberg

(Russell Pollitt SJ)



Earlier this week Pope Francis met with Marc Zuckerberg, co-founder and CEO of the world's biggest social media network, Facebook. The Pope, the Vatican reported, spoke to Zuckerberg about how communications technologies can be used to “alleviate poverty, encourage the culture of encounter and bring a message of hope, especially to the most disadvantaged.”

“It was a meeting we'll never forget. You can feel his warmth and kindness, and how deeply he cares about helping people,” the Facebook CEO wrote on - you got it - Facebook!

Zuckerberg said he and his wife, Priscilla Chan, told the Pontiff “how much we admire his message of mercy and tenderness, and how he's found new ways to communicate with people of every faith around the world.”

Although Francis does not own a cell phone or use a computer, he clearly knows and sees the value of the digital age; especially in terms of how technology can serve in promoting Gospel values, human dignity and evangelisation. Francis has called the internet “something truly good, a gift from God”.

The Pope is not on Facebook but he is on Twitter. The Pope has 20 million followers over the nine language accounts he tweets from. This does not count his Instagram account followers or the monthly YouTube videos he does.

The meeting with Zuckerberg and his wife is the fourth meeting with techies that Francis has had this year. Earlier this year he met with the chairman of Google,

Eric Schmidt, Apple CEO, Tim Cook and co-founder and CEO of Instagram, Kevin Systrom.

The question of how we use technologies better for the purpose of encounter, hope and reaching out to the disadvantaged is one that we must continually grapple with. Sometimes the Church has been rather suspicious of new technologies and resistant to using them. Sometimes we just don't know how to use them. This is where most of our youth will be found: online.

Websites have been setup but often the initial enthusiasm wanes resulting in stagnated, out-dated sites. They affirm the perception that the Church is outdated. Notice how many parish and other Church websites in South Africa haven't been updated for a long time? If we are serious about a culture of encounter, offering a message of hope and reaching out, then we need to be more serious about our online presence.

There is another side to social media. Earlier this year the CEO of Salt + Light Media Foundation, Fr. Thomas Rosica CSB, warned that engagement on social media networks can lead more to a "culture of death" than a "culture of life conversation". He said that some Catholics and Christians "have turned the internet into a cesspool of hatred, venom and vitriol, all in the name of defending the faith!"

Many websites in South Africa, including the Catholic weekly, *The Southern Cross*, have had to shut down their comments section precisely because of the bad language, ad hominem attacks and vitriol that keyboard warriors bash out.

The world of technology puts tremendous power (for good) at our finger-tips. We need to use it more strategically and, when using it, remember that our Christian lives and the way we interact with others extends into our online engagement.

Follow Russell Pollitt on twitter @rpollittsj

Dialogue and Danger

REPORT ON AMERICAN CATHOLIC PUBLIC OPINION AND PORTRAYALS OF ISLAM KEY FINDINGS

AMERICAN CATHOLICS' VIEWS OF ISLAM AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Nearly half of Catholics can't name any similarities between Catholicism and Islam, or say explicitly that there are no commonalities.

When asked about their overall impression of Muslims, three in ten Catholics admit to having unfavourable views. Only 14% of Catholics say they have favorable views. 45% have "neither favorable nor unfavorable" views. 11% are unsure.

Catholics are less likely than the general American public to know a Muslim personally.

A majority of Catholics correctly identify prayer and fasting as important parts of Muslim life, but also incorrectly believe that Muslims worship the Prophet Muhammad.

Catholics who know a Muslim personally, or who have participated in dialogue or community service with Muslims, often have very different views about Islam and interfaith dialogue than those who haven't interacted with Muslims.

Those surveyed who consume content from Catholic media outlets have more unfavorable views of Muslims than those who don't.

CATHOLIC MEDIA OUTLETS' PORTRAYAL OF ISLAM ONLINE

From October 2014 to September 2015, nearly 800 articles referencing Islam or Muslims appeared on major American Catholic websites.

In prominent Catholic outlets, half of the time the word "Islamic" is used, it is in reference to the Islamic State terrorist group.

The headlines of Catholic articles dealing with Islam have a negative sentiment overall, and the primary emotion conveyed is anger. Of the online Catholic outlets examined, *Catholic Answers* and *Catholic Culture* had the most negative sentiment in their titles related to Islam. Only one outlet had positive headlines about Islam: *American Catholic*.

Often, the words, gestures, and activities of Pope Francis frame discussions of Islam in Catholic outlets. Mentioning Pope Francis often, or not at all, seems to impact the sentiment conveyed in headlines about Islam. The outlets with the most negative sentiment in their headlines about Islam were also those that mention Pope Francis the least, and the outlet with the most positive

sentiment mentioned Pope Francis the most.

FOR-SALE RESOURCES OF ISLAM

There are over 100 books, audio programs, and DVDs from American Catholic publishers that discuss Islam. Many of these attempt to introduce Catholics to Islam or compare Islam and Christianity.

- The two books on Islam sold by the most Catholic publishers are *Inside Islam*, by Daniel Ali and Robert Spencer, and *The Bible and the Qur'an* by Jacques Jomier.

- The top two words used in book titles about Islam are "world" and "dialogue," suggesting that Islam is viewed a distant religion but one that Catholics can be connected to through conversation and relationship.

- Differences between Christianity and Islam are often highlighted in introductory and comparative materials. "Differences" is the most frequent word used in the descriptions of these books. Despite the emphasis on differences found in these materials, many of them still intend to encourage Catholic readers to dialogue and work with Muslims.

- The primary emotion in the titles of Catholic books on Islam is fear. The materials that introduce Catholics to Islam or compare Islam and Christianity have an overall negative sentiment in their titles.

- Authors of a plurality of introductory or comparative resources on Islam hoped their readers would engage in dialogue after reading their material. Others hoped readers would evangelize Muslims, grow in their faith, or judge Islam for themselves as a result of digesting the content.

CATHOLIC AUTHORS ON ISLAM & CONNECTIONS TO ISLAMOPHOBIA

- Prominent Catholic authors of introductory materials on Islam take

varied approaches to the religion in their work, with some recounting their experiences of dialogue and others focusing on evangelization or how Islam is a threat.

- A number of individuals in the Islamophobia industry have impacted American Catholic discussions about Islam. In some cases, Catholic publishers, news outlets, and prominent figures have promoted their views. The work of author Robert Spencer, who leads an organization that has been named an anti-Muslim hate group by the Southern Poverty Law Center, has been distributed widely by Catholic outlets and institutions.

- Three Catholics who write regularly on Islam for Catholic outlets maintain connections to anti-Muslim groups and activists.

MATERIALS ON ISLAM IN D.C. CATHOLIC BOOKSTORES

- All three Catholic bookstores in Washington, D.C. sell multiple books on Islam, and say that providing an orthodox Catholic perspective is a criterion for the books they sell.

- Books by Robert Spencer are also sold at two of these bookstores, but it is unclear if those running the bookstores are familiar with his positions or activities.

#CatholicMuslimBridge

bridge.georgetown.edu.

Twitter: **@bridgeinit**

Facebook: **facebook.com/gubridgeinit**

Instagram: **bridgeinit**

Snapchat: **bridgeinit**

HUMOUR 2



Professional Society of Religious Educators