

INTERFAITH INSIGHTS

Truth, humility should go hand in hand in interfaith talks

Note: In 2012, MLive.com was a partner in the "Year of Interfaith Understanding." The success of that project led to an ongoing effort to build interfaith understanding in Michigan. This column, *Interfaith Insights*, is one such effort. It is coordinated by Douglas Kindschi, director of the Kaufman Interfaith Institute at Grand Valley State University, and is written by Kindschi and others in the interfaith community.

By Douglas Kindschi

A n issue that often comes up when promoting interfaith understanding is the



Kindschi

question of truth. If we are to respect all religions, do we have to accept all religions are true? No.

That is a form of relativism that ends up denying that any truth exists. Does accepting my religion as true mean that I must judge every other religion to be false? Again, my response is no. For anyone to assume he or she possesses a full understanding of truth is to assume an almost God-like position. All religions teach not only

hospitality to the stranger, but humility, as well. I believe to take one's religion seriously means to not assume one is God or has a complete understanding of God's ways.

It was with this attitude that, in a past column, I discussed the concept of "thick dialogue," in which participants are encouraged to express their full faith commitment, to affirm what they believe to be true. But this includes the expectation that the other parties are free to express the fullness of their faiths, too. This is what happens when one proceeds in a spirit of respect. Respecting another person does not mean

we agree with everything they say. Even best friends and family members don't always agree. Furthermore, by respecting the other person, we not only open the opportunity for understanding that person, but also the opportunity to better understand ourselves and our beliefs.

We can affirm our beliefs while at the same time having an attitude of humility. Perhaps the greatest scientist of all time, Isaac Newton, after having discovered great truths in science said: "I do not know what I may appear to the world, but to myself, I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the sea-shore,

and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me." He sought truth, but in a spirit of humility.

A more current scientist and philosopher, Michael Polanyi, states in the introduction to his book, "Personal Knowledge," "The principal purpose of this book is to achieve a frame of mind in which I may hold firmly to what I believe to be true, even though I know that it might conceivably be false." I wish all scientists had this kind of humility as they proclaim

what they take to be true.

I also hope those of us seeking truth and meaning through our religious faith will not assume we speak for God. As finite creatures, I trust we will take the attitude of Saint Paul, who in my Christian tradition said: "For now we see through a glass darkly; but then, we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known."

I do not possess ultimate truth, but I humbly seek and hope for that time when "I will know fully, even as I have been fully known."

Email: interfaith@gvsu.edu