

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Exploring 'deep ecumenism' of one's own and other traditions

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Different religions ask different questions, have different rituals and practices, and tell different narratives about what is important.

Last week, we discussed these differences but also suggested we can learn from those who are different from us. There is value in diversity; when everyone thinks alike, there is little room for growth.

But there are also ways in which the various religious traditions agree and have common values.

The Year of Interfaith Service is based on the principle that all religious traditions, as well as secular perspectives, promote service to others as a basic

value to be shared and encouraged. It is in this way that we have come together to serve, and



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thereby, also learn and understand. Another important approach in the inter-religious discussion involves those teachings we have in common.

Karen Armstrong has proposed all religions have in common the concept of compassion, and Hans Küng said we all agree on the Golden Rule as a basic commitment across all religions.

Others have promoted the concept of "deep ecu-

menism," which focuses on love as central. In his book "One River, Many Wells," the author and Episcopal priest Matthew Fox quotes the Sufi mystic Rumi, who talks of the depth of religious experience as seen through Love.

"For those in love, Moslem, Christian, and Jew do not exist..."

"Why listen to those who see it another way — if they're not in love — their eyes do not exist."

The Buddhist writer Thich Nhat Hanh also seeks the deep approach to interfaith work when he said, "Through the practice of deep looking and deep listening, we become free, able to see the beauty and values in our own and others' traditions."

Matthew Fox points out

that in order to see the beauty and value in the others' traditions, one must look and listen deeply into one's own tradition.

Our various scriptures and religious figures also set goals and visions that have remarkable similarity.

The Hebrew prophet Micah proclaims, "What does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)

Jesus said in discussing the final judgment, "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave

me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me.'" (Matthew 25:34-35)

And from the Quran: "You who have believed, be persistently standing firm for Allah, witnesses in justice, and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is acquainted with what you do." (Sura 5:8)

With these visions of justice and love at the roots of our religious traditions, it is puzzling and disheartening to see more emphasis put on religious loyalty rather than on religious vision.

Defending and protecting what we have too often overrides taking the risk for what we might achieve.

During the Year of

Interfaith Understanding in 2012, we made the distinction between thin dialogue (where one narrows one's faith so much that you can agree with anybody) and thick dialogue (where you bring the thickness of your faith to the table but in the spirit of respect toward the other's thick faith).

While exploring differences through thick dialogue can lead to new understanding, we also can learn by going deeper into our own understanding and in this way discovering the deep ecumenism of other traditions, as well.

Both ventures develop relationships that bring us closer to ultimate reality which we call God.

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