

The Golden Rule

Editor's Note: The contents of this article were first presented by Dr. Thomas A. Shipka as a radio commentary broadcast on WYSU-FM 88.5 on 31 March 2005.

Religion routinely figures into conflict and violence. One thinks, for instance, of Hindus and Muslims in South Asia, Muslims and Christians in the Sudan, Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, Sunni and Shia Muslims in Iraq, and Islamic extremists, among others.

British philosopher John Locke understood the tendency of religious groups to be intolerant of outsiders, and this prompted him to make a case for toleration in the 1680s in his famous "A Letter Concerning Toleration." Locke wrote that all churches should "lay down toleration as the foundation of their own liberty, and teach that liberty of conscience is every man's natural right, equally belonging to dissenters as to themselves" ("A Letter Concerning Toleration," in *On Politics and Education*, ed. Howard R. Penniman [Toronto: D. Van Nostrand, 1947], 59). Locke said that the only legitimate tools that a religious group may use are "exhortations, admonitions, and advices" (*ibid.*, 30). Locke's "Letter" influenced the founders of our nation and helps to explain the First Amendment to the Constitution, which says in part that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

One way to promote tolerance among our religions is to emphasize what they have in common instead of what separates them. Listen to these statements:

1. "Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful" (*Udana-Varga* 5:18).
2. "Do not do to others what you do not want done to yourself" (Confucius, *Analects* 15:23).
3. "Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain, and your neighbor's loss as your loss" (*T'ai Shang Kan Ying, P'ien*, 213–218).
4. "In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you" (Jesus, Matthew 7:12).
5. "Do not do unto others whatever is injurious to yourself" (*Shayast-na-Shayast* 13.29).
6. "One should treat all creatures in the world as one would like to be treated" (*Mahavira, Suttrakritanga*).
7. "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor" (*Hillel, Talmud, Shabbat* 31a).
8. "Not one of you truly believes until you wish for others what you wish for yourself" (Prophet Muhammad, *Hadith*).
9. "Lay not on any soul a load that you would not wish to be laid upon you, and desire not for anyone the things you would not desire for yourself" (Baha' u'llah, *Gleanings*).
10. "This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you" (*Mahabharata* 5:1517).
11. "I am a stranger to no one; and no one is a stranger to me. Indeed I am a friend to all" (Guru Granth Sahib, p. 1299).

I have just quoted to you verbatim from the sacred teachings, respectively, of Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Judaism, Islam, Bahá'í, Hinduism, and Sikhism. The great religions offer us the same basic rule to guide our conduct—the Golden Rule.

So often, we become immersed in the doctrines, scriptures, rituals, and traditions of our own church or sect. Meanwhile, we forget what the world's religions teach in common, and we forget what unites 6.2 billion of us across the planet as members of the human family.

To promote toleration, mutual respect, and collaboration among religious groups in a troubled world, we can start by renewing our own commitment to the Golden Rule.

—Dr. Thomas A. Shipka
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Book Review

Tarunjit Singh Butalia and Dianne P. Small, eds. *Religion in Ohio: Profiles of Faith Communities*.

Athens, OH: Ohio University Press in association with the Religious Experience Advisory Council of the Ohio Bicentennial Commission and the Interfaith Association of Central Ohio, 2004. xviii, 412 pages. ISBN 0-8214-1552-2. PB \$16.95.

Religion in Ohio: Profiles of Faith Communities seeks to raise awareness of Ohio's historical-religious landscape with a view to furthering the pluralistic enterprise of interfaith dialogue. Part of a celebration of Ohio's bicentennial, the book traces both the individual and group efforts put forth over the last two centuries in the name of developing an integrated, faith-based community.

The book is grounded upon the notions of developing tolerance and promoting understanding, and the contributors and editors recognize that not all faith-based acts have proceeded peacefully. There is a clear recognition that only after taking into account the faults of the past can one truly praise the progressive development toward religious pluralism. And this is precisely what *Religion in Ohio* does, for it evenly contrasts the good and the bad: it provides a thorough account of the movement toward unification in the face of adversity while also highlighting the problems and complications of fanaticism, prejudice, and racism.

The two introductory essays establish the mood and purpose of the book. In "More Than Two Centuries of Religion in Ohio," Donald Huber lays the foundation for the historical origins of religion in Ohio. Through a description of the "religious topography" of the past (1), awareness is raised of the spiritual diversity of the present. Given this multiplicity, Steven R. Dimler, in the second essay, "Our Common Future," asks the reader how we, as a community, are to respond to questions of pluralism and plurality: are we merely seeking religious diversity or working to establish a community in which people actively engage one another and their religious differences?

As if to answer its own question, the next section details the various facets of Ohio's spiritual plurality. The editors successfully profile the numerous faith-based communities that populate the state by providing a compendium of historical facts for each. Reflecting the religious landscape of Ohio, the bulk of the profiles consist of the various Christian denominations and their historical foundations, but non-Christian faith communities, such as those including adherents of Judaism and Jainism, are also profiled.

Each profile is structured so as to provide information regarding the historical foundations, the beliefs, and recent demographics of a given faith community, in addition to providing further resources available for each religious tradition. In many respects, the information enables the reader to obtain a historical and theoretical understanding of the many forms of faith. However, in addition to this, the book also provides contact information for a member from each tradition. This allows an individual the opportunity to more concretely compare and contrast that which may be unfamiliar (e.g., the Bahá'í Faith, Buddhism, Hinduism, Jainism, Native American spiritual traditions, and

Zoroastrianism) with that which might be more familiar (the Western monotheistic religious traditions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam), not simply by way of conceptual knowledge, but by actually engaging a member of another community.

One of the unique features of the book is that each profile is composed by a dedicated member *within* the faith community. The double significance is such that the recognition and active striving toward religious and spiritual plurality is rooted within the community and not just in the scholarly realm. In other words, *Religion in Ohio* is both an effort to explore the intellectual understanding of varying types of faith as well as a concrete push toward making religious plurality an everyday reality.

For the average student of religion or the general reader, the static presentation of historical facts may frequently detract from the overall theme of this book; however, for the historically oriented individual, this book will appear rich and deeply satisfying. Nevertheless, *Religion in Ohio* should be praised as a valuable sourcebook for Ohioans who seek to broaden their spiritual horizons.

—Ermine L. Algaier IV
BA, *Religious Studies*, 2003

Article Summaries

Hosek, Pavel. "Towards a Public Theology of Religious Pluralism." *European Journal of Theology* 14 (2005), 1:27–36.

Hosek begins with a discussion of theological methodology, saying that a contemporary theology must be put in a spatiotemporal context. He encourages the development of a public theology of religions, which would include guidelines for interreligious dialogue and cooperation. Hosek identifies three categories of Christian theology of religions: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. Throughout church history, exclusivism, or particularism, has been the traditional view; it claims that salvation can only occur through Christ, so this viewpoint has been a main impetus for evangelism. Inclusivism, which, Hosek says, has been the official view of the Roman Catholic Church, especially since Vatican II, claims that God's covenant is with humankind and that salvation is not limited to Christians; thus, even non-Christians are saved through Christ. Pluralism views all religions, generally speaking, as equal; Hosek says that pluralism lacks biblical support and is, instead, based on humanistic arguments. He then identifies three categories of contemporary interreligious activities: interreligious dialogue about doctrines and concepts; common spiritual practice, in which adherents of different faiths worship together and in which Hosek finds no substantial benefit; and interreligious dialogue on social and ethical issues, which focuses not on religions, but on ideals such as justice and peace that are common among religious principles. Hosek cautions against interreligious dialogue that seeks similarities among religions without honoring each faith's linguistic character, meaning that religious principles should not be taken out of context for the sake of comparison; however, he says that dialogue about the doctrines of different religions should be undertaken. He strongly encourages social-ethical dialogue since it focuses on people of different faiths joining together to advance peace and justice and not on seeking commonalities among the religions.

Golomb, Paul. "A Matter of Time: The Jew, Christian, and Muslim in Conversation." *CrossCurrents* 54 (2005), 4:18–36.

Golomb focuses on the difficulties of interfaith dialogue among Jews, Christians, and Muslims due to the subjectivity that has arisen out of the personal mystical experiences that have been recorded, usually in sacred literature. He says that every mystical experience, when communicated, must be contextualized to take into account the religious beliefs of the individual who had the experience. Those beliefs directly affect how one perceives the divine. In addition to these communication hurdles are the temporal differences inherent in the faiths under discussion: Theologically, Jews draw on their past, Christians await a future salvation, and Muslims find God in the present. Judaism attempts to preserve the unmediated experience of God that Jews had at the foot of Mt. Sinai, and Jewish scripture is the story of how people acquired their faith in the face of so much opposition and resistance and ends before humans are redeemed. Christianity calls on its adherents to bear witness to their faith patiently, for God will be here at any moment, as evidenced through Jesus' promise to return. For Muslims, God speaks directly to the readers of the Qur'an, and nothing stands between God and the believer. Golomb briefly describes the work of William Alston, an analytic philosopher, who attempts to show the consistency and universality of the mystical perceptions of members of different faith communities. Golomb reasons that whatever one believes to be self-evident about the divine is often meaningless to those outside the faith community from which the belief arose, for adherents of one religion cannot truly evaluate the beliefs of those professing a different religion. When engaged in interfaith dialogue, participants need to remember the similarities among their respective beliefs but also understand that, due to the need for contextualization of religious beliefs, such dialogue can be daunting.

—James J. Sacco

Suggestions and Contributions

If you have suggestions for future articles in *E Pluribus* or would like to contribute an original piece, please contact James Sacco in the Center for Islamic Studies at 330-941-1625 or at jjsacco@ysu.edu. We encourage submissions on pluralistic and interfaith activities at Youngstown State University and in the Mahoning Valley. We are also looking for individuals to tell our readers about what their religious faith means to them; these personal stories may be published in the Reflections on My Faith series. Submissions intended to proselytize will not be accepted.

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