

## 4 Building Abrahamic Partnerships: A Model Interfaith Program at Hartford Seminary

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### Professional Background and Institutional Context

Since June of 2004, Hartford Seminary has sponsored an interfaith training program for Jews, Christians, and Muslims called *Building Abrahamic Partnerships (BAP)*. An eight-day intensive course (*BAP I*), aimed at developing basic concepts and skills, is offered every January and June as part of the Seminary's Winter and Summer terms. In addition, since 2007 advanced-level leadership training has been offered in the summer (*BAP II*, primarily for veterans of the basic course). I have served as *BAP* Program Director since its inception, as Faculty Associate in Interfaith Relations at the Seminary. In this capacity I have designed, coordinated, and taught in both courses. My responsibility also includes financial and logistical administration, enlisting other members of the teaching staff, and recruiting participants.<sup>1</sup>

In this paper I describe briefly the elements of the advanced *BAP* training and the skills needed for professional interfaith leadership. But my primary focus is the basic *BAP* course, which as of July, 2009 has been offered eleven times.<sup>2</sup> This reflection is a preliminary assessment of its effectiveness as a model for adult-level interfaith

<sup>1</sup> Tuition income alone could not cover the costs of the program. I am profoundly grateful to the three foundations whose funding has made *BAP* possible: The Henry Luce Foundation, the William and Mary Greve Foundation, and the Alan B. Slifka Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> The full course syllabus, which is appended, provides an overview of the content and character of the experience.

education. The course is still evolving, partly in response to participants' evaluations and accounts of their experiences.<sup>3</sup>

Hartford Seminary is known nationally and internationally as a Christian institution for theological education with the highly regarded Macdonald Center for Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations. My appointment to the faculty in the fall of 2002 added a Jewish dimension to the communal life and academic program of the Seminary, as it deepened the school's commitment to, and capacity for, interfaith study and conversation. That conversation was broadened from a bilateral dialogue to an Abrahamic trialogue, while retaining the specialized focus on Christian-Muslim relations. My role as *BAP* Director also reflects my own professional interests and commitments. From 1978 until 2002, I lived in Jerusalem and was active, as a dual American-Israeli citizen, in various interreligious peacemaking efforts involving Jews and Palestinians. In the 1980's I directed the *Oz veShalom-Netivot Shalom* religious peace movement, and from 1991 until 2003 I co-founded and co-directed the Open House Center for Jewish-Arab Coexistence and Reconciliation in Ramle, Israel.<sup>4</sup> For over twenty years I also taught Jewish tradition and spirituality at several Christian institutes and ecumenical centers in Israel.

Educational initiatives like *BAP*, while so urgently needed, are tragically stymied in the Middle East right now by political, cultural, and psychological obstacles. The success of *BAP* is partly due to its setting, the United States in general and Hartford Seminary in particular. The Seminary's history of sponsoring interreligious encounters, studies, and events is one conducive factor. Another factor is that Hartford is situated in the heart of New England—a generally liberal and tolerant region—making it accessible to students along the east coast, from Washington, D.C., to Maine. Some of the almost 300 participants in the eleven basic *BAP* courses conducted so far have come from more distant places, including Alabama, Colorado,

<sup>3</sup> A systematic evaluation of the *BAP* program is being undertaken this summer (2009), using e-mail questionnaires and selective phone interviews with past participants.

<sup>4</sup> For information on *OZ veSHALOM-NETIVOT SHALOM*, see [www.netivot-shalom.org.il](http://www.netivot-shalom.org.il); for information on *OPEN HOUSE*, see [www.friendsofopenhouse.org](http://www.friendsofopenhouse.org). See, also, my research report "Healing the Holy Land: Interreligious Peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine," Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, *Peaceworks* No. 51, September 2003, accessible through [www.usip.org](http://www.usip.org)

Wyoming, California, western Canada, the Netherlands, Israel, Syria, Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Nigeria, Indonesia, Singapore, Pakistan, and St. Thomas, Virgin Islands. Since there are sizable Jewish and Muslim communities in New England, we can draw students (degree candidates and auditors) from all three traditions relatively easily. In addition, there are already scores of American and international Muslim students in the Seminary's degree programs and its unique Islamic Chaplaincy program.

Equally important is the presence of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities in the greater Hartford area. This allows for visits to synagogues, mosques, and churches for the worship experiences built into *BAP*. The local congregations that have welcomed *BAP* students to their prayer services have been gracious and accommodating. The ongoing relationships with local congregations are beneficial for the *BAP* participants who interact with them, for the congregations that are enriched by the curiosity and insights of the visiting students, and for Hartford Seminary in sustaining relationships with local communities of faith.

One more introductory point: using the term "Abrahamic" in the name of the program evokes the figure of Abraham/Ibrahim, a shared spiritual ancestor and role model for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Such terminology is not unique to *BAP*. Many interfaith dialogues use "Abrahamic" as an alternative to "monotheistic." Aside from the symbolic and sentimental value of using Abraham in this way, the wisdom in this choice is debatable. In the compendium of supplemental readings for the basic *BAP* course, I include two articles that question whether Abraham is a unifying figure at all. Both articles are written by rabbis. Their reservations are motivated by different factors, but their conclusion is the same: each of the three traditions has "its own Abraham," and evoking the patriarch risks fostering division as readily as harmony.<sup>5</sup> Another problematic issue is raised by Prof. Ingrid Mattson, my Hartford Seminary and *BAP* colleague, who is currently serving as President of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). She rightfully cautions that holding up Abraham/Ibrahim for

<sup>5</sup> Alon Goshen-Gottstein, "Abraham and 'Abrahamic Religions' in Contemporary Interreligious Discourse," in *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue*, Volume 12, Issue 2, 2002, pp. 165-183; and Rabbi Avi Safran, "Avraham Avinu—the 'interfaith superstar,'" in the *Connecticut Jewish Ledger*, October 11, 2002, p. 11.

veneration and emulation risks excluding Sarah and Hagar (and potentially all women) from the picture.

### Program Rationale and Goals

To my knowledge there is no Jewish-Christian-Muslim training program similar to *BAP* at any other seminary or religious studies department.<sup>6</sup> The lack of other such initiatives, almost eight years after September 11, 2001, amazes me. By now it should be abundantly clear that all our faith communities need help to overcome mutual ignorance and estrangement. Because this is a painful process, we need trained clergy, educators, and facilitators to help us confront the exclusivism and triumphalism that have, at times, turned each of our sacred traditions into a weapon of unholy war.<sup>7</sup> In a U.S. Institute of Peace *Special Report* issued in February, 2003, Rev. Dr. David Smock, who directs the U.S.I.P.'s Religion and Peacemaking Initiative, wrote:

The overarching question is how to develop interfaith trust in the prevailing atmosphere of fear and mutual suspicion. In situations of trauma, as experienced continuously in the Middle East and as experienced in the West since 9/11, people

<sup>6</sup> A U.S. Institute of Peace *Special Report*, written by Rev. Dr. David Smock and entitled "Teaching about the Religious Other" (Washington, D.C., July 2005), summarizes presentations by 16 participants in a two-day workshop on programs and curricula for teaching about the Abrahamic Other, in America and abroad. I took part in that workshop, sharing information about the *BAP* program (see p. 4 of that report).

<sup>7</sup> For examinations of how our understandings of the sacred can be used to justify violence, see R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000; Charles Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002; Oliver McTernan, *Violence in God's Name: Religion in an Age of Conflict*, Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2003; Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001; and Ian Markham and Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', editors, *September 11: Religious Perspectives on the Causes and Consequences*, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002. For an analysis of how Abrahamic religions (Judaism and Islam especially) can be forces for both conflict and reconciliation, see Marc Gopin, *Holy War, Holy Peace: How Religion Can Bring Peace to the Middle East*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

are likely to turn inward. Accordingly, they have great difficulty in reaching out to the religious ‘Other.’ The prevailing attitude is often that no one’s suffering can compare to our own suffering. In this climate of victimhood, the Other—whether nation, ethnic group, or religious community—is often labeled simplistically and unhelpfully as either good or evil.<sup>8</sup>

Overcoming ignorance is one challenge. Imparting information to enhance knowledge and understanding is standard fare for institutions of higher learning. This is certainly one of the aims of the basic BAP course. Three full days are devoted to presenting the basics of each tradition: historical development, beliefs and practices, denominational variety, and attitudes towards other faiths. Yet there is another challenge that such a program has to address to be effective: helping participants overcome their fears and suspicions of one another.<sup>9</sup> Conditioned reflexes, including competing victim scripts, are very difficult to transform. Building trust takes time. It also takes a willingness to acknowledge and question one’s own ego-based and emotional investments: the need to be right, the assurance of being special if not superior, resistance to change, and loyalty to a faith community with its history and behavioral norms. For most Jews and Christians, BAP is their first opportunity to engage Muslims and experience prayer in a mosque. For most of the Muslim participants, it is their first encounter with Jews and the inside of a synagogue. Such face-to-face encounters, and the crossing of experiential thresholds, demand a level of openness and vulnerability which few people have the courage to risk.<sup>10</sup> Those who rise to the challenge may have to confront suspicions from co-religionists -- even accusations of disloyalty. This is not an easy burden to carry. An interfaith activist soon learns that

<sup>8</sup> David Smock, “Building Interreligious Trust in a Climate of Fear: An Abrahamic Trialogue,” *Special Report 99*, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, February 2003, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> For a Jewish approach to these challenges, see Jonathan Magonet, *Talking to the Other: Jewish Interfaith Dialogue with Christians and Muslims* (London: I. B. Taurus & Co., 2003), especially Chapter Two, “The Challenge to Judaism of Interfaith Dialogue” (pp. 11-22), and Chapter Eight, “Risk-taking in Religious Dialogue” (pp. 90-106).

<sup>10</sup> One of the reasons the course includes several shared *kosher/halal* meals, starting with an opening dinner, is to create a gastronomic and cultural “comfort zone” for mutual engagement.

*interreligious* cooperation needs to be complemented by *intrareligious* work in our respective communities. The latter keeps us grounded in our own traditions and communal loyalties. At the same time, it enables us to sensitize our co-religionists to the challenges and benefits of interfaith encounter.

How much can be accomplished in a one-week course? Surprisingly, a great deal—though everyone involved in BAP acknowledges that the January or June basic course is only the first step in a lifelong journey toward deeper understanding and, ultimately, spiritual fraternity and solidarity. The four stated goals of that course reflect serious intellectual and emotional challenges: (1) *educating participants about the beliefs and practices of the three Abrahamic traditions*; (2) *creating a supportive learning community in which clergy, lay ministers, religious educators, and chaplains can forge mutually beneficial relationships across communal boundaries*; (3) *helping participants acquire pastoral skills useful in interfaith work*; and (4) *developing leadership strategies for promoting interfaith relations in increasingly heterogeneous societies*.

To achieve these goals, I have assembled a teaching staff for each round of the basic course comprised of five or six Hartford Seminary faculty members<sup>11</sup> and three “pastoral adjuncts,” clergy from each of the traditions with experience leading local congregations. The Seminary professors other than myself are present for designated segments of the program, while the rabbi, minister, and imam accompany the course with me from beginning to end. The three clergy adjuncts are expected to share their theoretical and practical expertise and to intervene when pastoral difficulties arise. Personal discomfort can provide a potentially rich learning opportunity for that individual and the whole group. Each BAP round has ample opportunities for turning irritation into insight, and to address such opportunities, we have evolved a two-pronged strategy:

<sup>11</sup>To ensure that the Seminary as a whole has a stake in the BAP program and that its varied resources are tapped for the benefit of the participants, the faculty members who teach in the basic course represent all three of the school’s centers: the Center for Faith in Practice, the Macdonald Center for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations, and the Hartford Institute for Religion Research.

- At the outset of the course, participants are told that their comfort zones will be challenged during the week and that we need a consensual agreement to maintain fidelity to our overall goals. A list of ten ground rules for respectful dialogue, as opposed to debate, is read aloud and adopted, sometimes with an addition or amendment. When necessary, these ground rules are reiterated during the course to bring the group back to its agreed-upon norms for communicating;
- When someone hears a statement that disturbs or offends, s/he is encouraged to say “Ouch!” so that the group can address that person’s feelings in real time. Often the “ouches” are sparked by one person speaking on behalf of an entire faith community, with co-religionists feeling misrepresented. Conversely, if someone experiences surprise and delight in learning something new, s/he is encouraged to say “Wow!” The late Krister Stendahl, my Christian mentor and friend, called this “holy envy,” and he considered such an experience to be the ideal outcome of interreligious encounter. In *BAP*, there are usually more “ouches” than “wows,” requiring sensitive and effective leadership to facilitate the group process productively.

### Content of *BAP I*

The content of the basic *BAP* course is about half academic and half experiential, in keeping with its intellectual and affective goals. Students taking the course for credit are required to submit two assignments: a 15-to-20-page research paper or an approved artistic project with rationale and bibliography; and a personal journal recording the student’s insights and feelings during the week.<sup>12</sup> The academic element of the program consists of:

- Three days devoted to each of the three traditions, mixing frontal presentations and facilitated discussions. These include treatments of controversial topics, often the subjects of widespread misconceptions and prejudices—for example, what Israel and Zionism means to Jews, what the Trinity means to Christians, or what *jihad* means to Muslims.

<sup>12</sup> I have the privilege of reading and grading the materials submitted. The journals, in particular, have taught me a great deal about how the course, including interactions outside the classroom, impacts the students.

- Two evening sessions devoted to specific subjects. On the second evening, we address “What Do We Mean by Spirituality?” with interfaith triads sharing accounts of personal religious experiences before three clergy adjuncts offer their reflections and on the third evening we explore the topic “Religion and the Media,” with professional journalists from the newspaper and television industries sharing examples of their work.
- Three half days of comparative text study, in four small groups and then plenary discussions. The texts we choose for examination are of two kinds: passages that evoke inclusive justice, peace, and loving behavior; and others that are problematic, at least to outsiders, for they seem to summon the faithful to exclusivist or belligerent behavior toward those who are different. In the first rounds of the course, the text study took place before the day-long introductions to the three faiths, but we found that it is more effective to have the overviews first and then the text study, to make the passages more meaningful to those who are not familiar with their neighbors’ scriptures.

The experiential dimension of the basic course includes:

- Worship in a mosque on Friday, a synagogue on Saturday, and a church on Sunday, followed by group discussions of the respective prayers and practices;
- Two to three artistic or symbolic exercises providing non-analytic (“right-brain”) modes of self-expression;<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> At the opening dinner one of two exercises is used for self-introductions and initial group bonding:

(1) three condiment containers (clear salt and pepper shakers plus an opaque bottle of soy sauce) are presented as representing Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Participants are asked to group them so that two traditions (represented by the salt and pepper shakers) are deemed closer in nature than either is to the third (the soy bottle), and to explain this choice in their self-introduction. Three alternatives are possible, and each is valid according to its own criteria for relating the faith traditions. Many Jews and Christians use the soy bottle to represent Islam, which is “opaque” to them. Often Muslims and Jews see Christianity as the “opaque” and distant Other, finding more affinities between Islam and Judaism as ways of life centered on normative behaviors like dietary rules. A few students resist the premise of the exercise, and they either refuse to do it or they change the rules, e.g., by suggesting that the ingredients of all

- In addition to seven *kosher/halal* meals eaten together, long lunch and dinner breaks to encourage fellowship and networking--many participants have reported that these unprogrammed mealtimes are a rich and essential part of the course, allowing them to cross boundaries, overcome fears and prejudices, and forge new friendships;
- In recent rounds of *BAP I*, a four-part “fishbowl” exercise<sup>14</sup> focusing on Israel/Palestine and extending over three days, as a way to practice compassionate listening around one of the most controversial and polarizing topics in Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations; at the end of each afternoon session on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, members of one faith group sit in an inner circle and speak in turn (for 3 minutes each) on what the events in the Holy Land mean to them, while members of the other two faith groups form an outer circle, listening without

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three containers be poured into one vessel; or (2) an 8” x 11” piece of paper with a serrated border, representing a postage stamp, is given to each student. Everyone is asked to draw his or her own religious stamp, serving as an “ambassador” image to adherents of other religions. Colored markers are provided, and each person gets a chance to share her/his stamp and explain its symbolism.

On the last day of the course, before the closing dinner, one of two creative and fun exercises is used to achieve closure to the week-long experience: (1) in one exercise, large A3 sheets of paper are disseminated, each with a blank circle surrounded by the words *shalom* (in Hebrew), *a-salaam* (in Arabic), and *peace*. (These were created by Artists for Middle East Peace in Lexington, MA). Most participants use colored markers to draw their visions of interreligious peace. Others make collages out of colored paper. Then the group members share their creations in turn, while sitting in a circle, after which they all walk around the circle in silence, looking closely at each of the artistic visions placed on the chairs; (2) the alternative exercise has the group divide into three Jewish-Christian-Muslim construction teams. Each team is given a box of Legos and is asked to design together a sacred space/environment in which all feels welcome and included. The process of “negotiation” and mutual accommodation, over symbols and spatial configurations, yields rich learning opportunities. After all three groups have finished, each shares its design and something of the group dynamics that went into constructing it.

<sup>14</sup> See Ron Kraybill and Evelyn Wright, *The Little Book of Cool Tools for Hot Topics: Group Tools to Facilitate Meetings When Things Are Hot*, Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2006, pp. 54-55.

commenting; on Thursday, most of the evening session is devoted to processing these “fishbowl” experiences; also, those who are journaling during the week have an opportunity to record their reactions along the way.<sup>15</sup>

Over eleven rounds of the basic *BAP* course, some common denominators stand out in regard to content. On the day devoted to Jewish tradition, the brief introduction to the meaning of *Shabbat* and how it is observed by Jews invariably elicits “wows” from Christians and Muslims. Participants are generally intrigued by unfamiliar spiritual disciplines in each other’s lives, and Sabbath observance is one such practice.

For Islam, it is the *hajj* pilgrimage and the five daily prayers that evoke “wows” of “holy envy” among Jews and Christians. Prof. Ingrid Mattson, in her presentation, counters misconceptions about Muslim women and helps the students understand the difference between the teachings of Islam and the different cultural manifestations (including distortions of that normative tradition) in nominally Muslim societies. Christians react in different ways upon learning that Muslims revere Jesus and Mary but do not accord them divine or superhuman status. Some Christians are pleased by this positive outlook toward their Lord and his mother. Others are disturbed, feeling threatened by another tradition that has its own view of Jesus, as prophet rather than savior. The Jewish participants, on the whole, are fascinated by this conversation but are outside it, since Judaism has (alas) essentially ignored Jesus.

On the day allotted to Christianity, Prof. Ian Markham<sup>16</sup> has begun with a very effective exercise, evoking surprise and irony. On the blackboard he writes the word “God,” followed by “Trinity,” “Incarnation,” “Bodily Resurrection of Jesus,” “Virgin Birth of Jesus,” “Hell, Demons, and Satan,” “Substitutionary Atonement,” “Historical Inerrancy of Scripture,” and “The Incompatibility of Christianity with Evolution.” He then asks the Christians to raise their hands if they believe in God. All the Christians raise their hands. Then he goes down the list, and hands drop as the different Christian doctrines are

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<sup>15</sup> See the appendix on the “fishbowl” exercise and the insights drawn from the June, 2009, rounds of *BAP I* and *BAP II*.

<sup>16</sup> The Very Rev. Ian Markham is the former Dean of Hartford Seminary. He is currently President and Dean of Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, VA.

considered, with the more liberal Protestants experiencing increasing discomfort, doubt, or outright disbelief. Markham then asks the Muslims in the group to do the same exercise. The Christians (and Jews) are amazed to discover that the Muslims affirm more of the classical Christian doctrines than do many of the Christians, since they are also taught in the Qur'an. This is a wonderful teaching moment, as Muslims and Christians, with Jews joining in, discuss the authority of sacred texts, the nature and meaning of revelation, and the place of subjectivity and rational criticism in the interpretation of scriptures. These concerns surface again when we study texts in all three traditions on Thursday and Friday.

Understandably, the "fishbowl" exercises on Israel/Palestine are emotionally charged; but this technique allows participants to address the issue, and the feelings evoked by it, in safe, *instructive*, and *constructive* ways. Ideological polarization, even long-held grievances and recrimination, can be supplanted by empathy, alternative angles of perception on a painful subject, and envisioning strategies for healing the personal and collective wounds engendered by the tragedy in the Holy Land.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>In the early rounds of *BAP I*, before we incorporated the "fishbowls," Imam Yahya Hendi (Muslim chaplain at Georgetown University and an M.A. graduate of Hartford Seminary) was the Muslim pastoral adjunct. The example of a Palestinian-American imam and an Israeli-American professor overcoming enmity and embracing one another in mutual affection served, in its own way, to model a path toward reconciliation. See Yehezkel Landau and Yahya Hendi, "Jews, Muslims, and Peace," in *Current Dialogue*, Vol. 41, June-July 2003, Geneva: World Council of Churches, pp. 12-13. In case the reader thinks that the *BAP* "laboratory" has produced some wonder drug to cure the pathological fallout from the Middle East, it is worth citing some sobering reminders of what the "real world" is like. In the June, 2007, round of *BAP I*, a painful but educationally powerful incident occurred in my modern Orthodox synagogue in West Hartford, following *Shabbat* morning prayers. The rabbi conducted a question-and-answer session for the *BAP* students and some members of the congregation, as he had done several times before. This time the Middle East situation became the focus for intense, and increasingly bitter, exchanges. A few Jewish congregants got defensive and made some bellicose statements that hurt the Muslim students (including four women from Damascus, Syria, studying at Hartford Seminary) and that shattered the "safe" learning environment we had been creating all week. Later that afternoon the whole group re-convened at the Seminary to process what had happened.

## Holistic Interfaith Engagement

A few additional aspects of *BAP I* are worth highlighting. The formal worship in the mosque, synagogues, and churches toward the end of the course, as well as the devotions offered by participants at the start of each morning and afternoon session, are two complementary experiences that are spiritually and symbolically enriching. In the discussions over lunch that follow the public prayers on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, participants ask clarifying questions and share "ouches" and "wows" that emerged for them during the worship. By the end of the week, Jews and Christians have generally overcome any initial apprehensions about entering a mosque, a new experience for almost all of them. The Christian and Jewish women feel solidarity with their Muslim sisters at the mosque, as they don headscarves (helped by the Muslim women in the group) and share the same-gender piety in the women's section. Here is a poem written by a U.C.C. pastor, Rev. Laura Westby, following her experience at the mosque:

Hair covered  
Forehead to the floor  
There I found You, at last

Nose to the carpet  
Smelling fibers and feet  
There I inhaled the Blessedness

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Many tissues were consumed as students and teachers shared their pain over the verbal assault, along with mutual affection and care. Despite the shock and pain caused by this experience, it proved beneficial in taking the group to a deeper level of empathy and solidarity with one another. It did challenge me, however, to engage more deliberately in *intrafaith* work, especially with my rabbi, before subsequent *BAP* groups were brought to that synagogue. A similar incident, in reverse, happened this past June (2009) in the local mosque, where the hosts invited a Palestinian-American speaker to present a partisan viewpoint on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the lunch that followed mid-day prayers there. Once again the group felt that its "safe" space, and the consensual ground rules governing our conversations, were violated. What both incidents demonstrate is the necessity to sensitize host communities before *BAP* groups are brought to their places of worship for discussion. Until this is done (and so long as the Middle East remains a source of bitter feelings), it is probably better for the group to attend the respective weekly prayers and then move to a neutral venue (like the Seminary) for the shared meals and the discussions about the experiences of communal prayer.

Eyes closed  
 I was at last blind to all  
 But Your Presence

Bowing and bending I danced the holy round  
 Foreign words in my ears  
 You spoke silence

In this alien place  
 Where I was guest  
 I knew You, the One I have been seeking  
 The One who found me  
 On the floor of a mosque  
 And called me beloved.

Through their first-ever experience at a synagogue, whether modern Orthodox or liberal, Muslims develop a deeper appreciation of how Jewish tradition and the Hebrew language are very close to Islam and Arabic. Heba Youssef, a Muslim woman in the January, 2009, round of *BAP I* and a student at Hartford Seminary, attended *Shabbat* morning prayers at my modern Orthodox synagogue and wrote about the experience in her journal:

I enjoyed just observing the people and how the young ones were playing around with each other, how the older ones were more focused, how everyone was dressed and also all the rituals that took place. The ceremony of removing the Torah from its safeguarded spot; the bowing, the chanting and the designation of specific duties were all pretty fascinating to me.

We mingled a little afterwards with some of the people there and I met this nice young Jewish couple who had just recently gotten married. It was nice because they were about my age and we were discussing kosher spots in the area (because for Muslims kosher = halal) and we had a great conversation about how hard it is to find decent places for us to eat! It's nice to see how much people of faith actually have in common.

And a Catholic participant in another round of the course had what she called a “theophany” when the Torah scroll emerged from the Ark and was carried around the synagogue, with congregants singing and kissing it as it passed.

On Sunday, the discussion over lunch following the Episcopal and U.C.C. church services helps to clarify denominational differences among Christians, and it allows Jews and Muslims to honestly share any discomfort they may experience in Christian worship. This emotional estrangement is particularly acute for Jews when a New Testament reading, hymn, or sermon refers negatively to “scribes and Pharisees,” or “the Jews” in the Gospel of John are castigated, or some other subject that has engendered Jewish-Christian animosity over the centuries arises.<sup>18</sup> These are the moments, holistically engaging head and heart and gut, where I believe *BAP* is most interpersonally genuine, spiritually and ethically concrete, and ultimately transformative in positive ways. For it is, above all, the hurt and the fear which we all carry that we are challenged to confront honestly and work through together. Theological discussions take us only part of the way toward reconciliation. Without the honest exchange of negative feelings and conditioned resistances, we are not being true to ourselves or to one another, and we are not living up to what this moment in history demands of us. Instead, we are playing it safe by remaining superficial and abstract. It is necessary, but insufficient, for example, for Christians to examine, together with Muslims and Jews, the theological underpinnings of Christological prayers and hymns, or the meaning of a sacrament like the Eucharist. What Christians also need to know and understand is that most Jews and Muslims will react to these central aspects of Christianity with profound spiritual and emotional dissonance, sometimes even revulsion, engendering self-protective distance. This response is far deeper than cognitive disagreement. It is a kind of “spiritual allergy” -- a discomfort that touches the soul. And it is precisely this kind of reaction—by anyone in an Abrahamic dialogue—that needs careful and caring examination, once sufficient trust has been established within the group.

<sup>18</sup> See my “Foreword” to Daniel J. Harrington, SJ, *The Synoptic Gospels Set Free: Preaching without Anti-Judaism*, New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2009, pp. ix-xii; and my essay “Pope John Paul II’s Holy Land Pilgrimage: A Jewish Appraisal,” in *John Paul II in the Holy Land: In His Own Words*, Lawrence Boadt, CSP, and Kevin di Camillo, eds., New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005, pp. 129-156.

A Jewish psychologist, Marcia Black, shared her experience in the program with members of her Amherst, MA, synagogue during a *Shavuot* sermon in June, 2005:

Through my encounter with Muslim and Christian prayer, I understood more clearly our rabbis' entreaty that prayer be the vessel for the eternal fire of Divine love that burns away the separate self. ... with a heart of humility, we need to listen to these and those voices, Muslim, Christian, Jewish so that the agony of splintered time will cease, so that we may find our way to *shleimut*, wholeness.

It is worth adding that there is a deliberate attempt in both the basic and advanced courses to include musical selections and artistic exercises, in order to add an aesthetic dimension that engages the heart and soul as well as the intellect. There is also a conscious attempt to make the *kosher/halal* meals that are eaten together experiences of consecrated fellowship. Blessings from all three traditions are offered before the food is taken. All these exercises and experiences are ritualistic expressions of community across theological boundaries, and they create soulful bridges that allow for less inhibited exchanges in the classroom.

When people of different faiths share a prayer experience, the question that arises is: are they praying together as one fellowship, affirming a common set of religious truths, or are they spectators in each other's worship settings? Either mode of worshipping together is possible, and each has its own legitimacy and value depending on the desired outcome.<sup>19</sup> Any of us may choose to opt out of a prayer experience because of conditioned resistances or sincere theological reservations. For example, in the very first *BAP I* course, some conservative participants (primarily Muslims) felt uncomfortable when

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<sup>19</sup> On the last day of *BAP II*, the advanced training, participants experience both kinds of worship: single-faith liturgies and inclusive devotions, both designed by participants in the course. For an example of a Christian participant observer analyzing Jewish prayers and customs, see Harvey Cox, *Common Prayers: Faith, Family, and a Christian's Journey Through the Jewish Year*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001; and for a chronicle of a Jew's journey through Christian and Muslim devotional rites, see Yossi Klein Halevi, *At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden: A Jew's Search for God with Christians and Muslims in the Holy Land*, New York: William Morrow, 2001.

the U.C.C. church we attended gave its blessing to same-sex relationships through some hymns included in the worship. Over lunch afterwards, some of the participants shared their discomfort and said they would have preferred to watch the service from the balcony, establishing a clear distance from the congregation. In subsequent rounds of the course, this option was offered to the students in order to prevent such spiritual discomfort.

### Other Factors in the Success of *BAP*

I want now to reflect on the intersection of the qualitative and the quantitative dimensions of *BAP*. In order for the program to succeed, there has to be in each round a critical mass of Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Ideally there should be a minimum of eight from each tradition, to ensure sufficient diversity in the small groups. This recruitment goal requires a lot of effort, and it sometimes necessitates allocating scholarship assistance to achieve parity among the three subgroups. A minimum number from each faith yields two interrelated outcomes. The first is "safety in numbers" for the participants, not feeling so "alone" or underrepresented in one's own subgroup. The second is a more enriching experience for everyone in the course, with a strong and diverse group representing each of the Abrahamic faiths. Once assembled, the participants need to feel that their needs are honored, that everyone is treated equally with no favoritism shown, and that the ground rules for respectful communication are adhered to. In the classroom and outside, the pastoral support of the teaching staff is sometimes required to meet these needs. At other times the participants themselves demonstrate mutual solidarity by supporting one another emotionally and practically (e.g., carpooling from the hotel to the Seminary or sharing a picnic in a nearby park).

One experience in the second round of *BAP I* is worth noting (especially since it is, until now, unique). Among the participants were six African-American Christians, a sufficient number to make race as relevant an issue as religion. This necessitated greater sensitivity and responsiveness, from the other participants as well as the teaching staff. It also brought additional "ouches" and "wows." One Jewish participant, for example, objected to the use of the term "Zion" by African-American Christians, sparking a difficult but educationally valuable discussion. One adaptive outcome was to add an optional visit to an A.M.E. Zion church service on Saturday evening.



The teaching staff for a program like *BAP* clearly needs to have the pedagogical skills needed for both interfaith exploration and community building. The pastoral skills of the three clergy adjuncts and the program director are crucial. The professors who are present for shorter periods also need pastoral sensitivity, along with their academic expertise, in order to teach effectively within this framework. Frontal lectures, which may be sufficient in other courses, need to be enhanced and deepened by facilitated discussions on the relevant material. The formal text study oscillates between small group examination of assigned passages and plenary discussions in the main classroom, with the professors and pastoral adjuncts co-leading these sessions. The students, for their part, come to appreciate the unique gifts of each faculty member. Some students may see the teachers as “official” representatives of their respective faiths. When this role is projected onto a teacher, a student may be disappointed if his or her tradition is presented in a way that does not conform to preconceived notions. This frustration can be minimized if the issue is addressed directly by the teachers themselves. The course staff includes both academics and clergy adjuncts so that the intellectual, spiritual, and emotional dimensions of interreligious encounter are honored and addressed. As I say at the opening dinner, the course is not called “Interfaith Relations 101,” but rather “*Building Abrahamic Partnerships*,” because we are engaged in an active process of forging and nurturing relationships. This is a process that takes effort. It requires compassionate acceptance of each person’s uniqueness, and it tests our commitment to work together for a common goal.

The characteristics of the sponsoring institution—both its advantages and limitations—also need to be considered. At Hartford Seminary, white American Protestants have been in the majority since the school was founded in 1834. They still are the predominant group, welcoming into their midst Muslims and Jews, along with Catholics, evangelical Protestants, and racial or ethnic minorities, as part of the school’s mission to foster conversation across communal barriers. No one is explicitly privileged or favored as a result of the Seminary’s history, but some implicit cultural norms and nuances are inevitably at work. My Muslim colleagues and I are sensitive to the conditioned apprehensions, the cultural cues, the gestures of hospitality, the dietary requirements, the prescribed prayer times, and the nonverbal communication styles of Muslims and Jews. This sensitivity serves to make the ambiance at Hartford Seminary more inclusive for *BAP* participants, especially non-Christians. And this inclusiveness helps to

overcome feelings of marginality or alienation that representatives of minority groups might otherwise feel.

Another feature of the sponsoring institution is its academic “neutrality,” which tends to relativize the truth claims of any religious tradition. On academic turf, even with the Christian roots of Hartford Seminary, Jews, Christians, and Muslims can meet as intellectual and spiritual equals. This adds to the safety factor: no one need fear that the institution is promoting a particular theology. In fact, Hartford Seminary now sees, as one of its central goals, the promotion of interreligious dialogue and understanding. This makes the Seminary a suitable place for conducting Abrahamic conversations. If *BAP* were sponsored by a synagogue, church, or mosque—or an agency like the Synagogue Council of America, the National Council of Churches, or the Islamic Society of North America—the underlying assumptions and resulting dynamics would be quite different. Once none of the faith traditions is privileged, the power dynamic shifts to favor all of them rather than any one. By this logic, it might be argued that a religious studies department in a secular university would be an even better setting for *BAP*. But a counter-consideration, no less compelling, is that Hartford Seminary’s ethos encourages spiritual expression, not only intellectual exploration. Devotional experiences within the classroom or chapel, over shared meals, and at the various houses of worship are celebrated rather than just tolerated or analyzed intellectually, as might happen at a university.

Another political consideration is that of gender equality and inclusiveness, given that each of the three Abrahamic faiths has a history of male dominance or patriarchy. Within *BAP* we try to ensure equal representation of women and men on the teaching staff and, if possible, a gender balance among the participants. Despite our best efforts early on, it was only from the fourth round of *BAP I* onwards that we succeeded in pairing an academic from the Seminary faculty with a pastoral adjunct of the opposite sex. I believe this contributed to making the subsequent courses more successful. The gender balance also pre-empts a collective feminist “ouch,” as occurred in the second round of *BAP I*, when some Christian women demanded time in the program to present their own perspective on Christianity. Having women clergy and professors on the teaching staff provides female role models for both women and men, demonstrating that women have their own distinctive contributions to make toward interreligious partnerships.

One final observation regarding the composition of the *BAP* teaching staff and the participants: by restricting these courses to Jews, Christians, and Muslims, the wisdom of other faith traditions (including those of the Far East) is not being tapped, even though passing references may be made to them. This is an obvious limitation and, I would add, a loss. (My own conviction is that adherents of the Abrahamic religions, which originated in the Middle East, need to develop greater humility and compassion, qualities associated more with the traditions of the Farther East). At the same time, there is a commonality of worldview and self-understanding that Jews, Christians, and Muslims share—including belief in God’s oneness, a reverence for sacred texts, and values grounded in a common prophetic heritage—that would be lost, or at least diluted, if the triad were expanded to a larger multi-faith purview.

### The Advanced *BAP* Training

After examining the challenges and achievements of *BAP I*, I want to offer some brief reflections on the advanced *BAP II* training, which Hartford Seminary has so far offered three times within its Summer session (2007, 2008, and 2009—see the appended syllabus from the most recent round). Like the basic course, *BAP II* begins with a dinner on Sunday evening, allowing the participants—most of whom took part in *BAP I*—to introduce themselves and enjoy an initial experience of fellowship. The rest of the course runs from Monday morning until Friday evening. The primary goal, which shapes the content of the course, is to help participants develop conceptual frameworks and practical skills or tools for interfaith leadership. The second major goal, a process objective as in *BAP I*, is to create an educationally enriching interfaith community based on trust and respect. The combination of competent resource people as instructors and facilitators, the variety of educational experiences during the week, and above all the chemistry of the group, all contribute to the success of this course.

Rev. Karen Nell Smith and Imam Abdullah Antepli (both participants in *BAP I*), have served as my co-facilitators for all three rounds of *BAP II*. The theoretical and skill areas we focus on are:

- Facilitating interfaith activities (events, dialogue groups, and workshops);

- Compassionate listening and nonbelligerent communication;<sup>20</sup>
- Understanding group dynamics and multiple identities in interfaith settings;<sup>21</sup>
- Healing personal and collective trauma;<sup>22</sup>
- Comparative study of sacred texts from the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, and Qur’an;<sup>23</sup>
- Spiritual resources for conflict transformation, and
- Designing interfaith worship experiences

We have chosen five symbolic themes with universal resonance for the devotional offerings that begin each day: *light/fire*, *water*, *earth/soil*, *tree*, and *bread-and-table*. The opening dinner features an exercise in which everyone shares an object that has some personal symbolic meaning, as a means of self-introduction. Each participant places his or her object on a table in the center of the room, which has on it beforehand a candle and copies of the three sacred scriptures—this table is the central point of reference and reverence for the whole week. The candle is lit at the start of every morning, afternoon, and for the one evening session. These and other ritual elements lend the course a sacramental dimension, making it more than a strictly academic program. They also provide some spiritual coherence to the disparate experiences throughout the week.

Guest trainers share their theoretical and practical expertise on two of the five days (see footnotes 20-23). On the other three days, the various sessions are led by one or another of the three co-facilitators, while the other two serve as supportive allies, ready to intervene when

<sup>20</sup> Gail Syring and Jan Bennett, who are trained in the “Nonviolent Communication” methodology of Marshall Rosenberg, lead this session on Tuesday morning.

<sup>21</sup> Tamar Miller, trained in social work and public administration, conducts this Tuesday afternoon session

<sup>22</sup> Tamar Miller also leads this session, which we included for the first time in the 2009 round of *BAP II*

<sup>23</sup> In 2007 and 2008, Prof. Raquel Ukeles facilitated this Wednesday session; in 2009 Prof. Mahmoud Ayoub from Hartford Seminary and Rabbi Or Rose from Hebrew College teamed up to lead this day-long examination of Biblical and Qur’anic texts, focusing on the experience and role of prophecy in our respective traditions

called for and scribing for one another on large post-it sheets which are then affixed to the classroom walls. Karen Nell, Abdullah, and I model distinct pedagogical styles or modes, letting the group know when we are shifting from one to the other. In the mode of **training** or **instruction**, one of us presents the rationale and concrete “hows” of a particular methodology. The second mode, which we use more often, is **elicitive facilitation**, framing a subject and then drawing forth from the group its collective wisdom.

Friday is devoted to the practicalities of designing interfaith worship. This challenge is deliberately scheduled on the last day of the course, to allow trust and familiarity to develop beforehand. There is also a very practical concern reflected in this choice: early in the week, the group is divided into two Jewish-Christian-Muslim teams of “liturgists,” so that they have ample time (during breaks and evenings) to design the two interfaith worship experiences. The day’s program moves back and forth between single-faith prayers (in each of the three traditions) and the two inclusive worship opportunities. Group discussions are conducted following each of these devotions, which can include prayer, readings from texts, song or chant, sounds from sacred instruments—drums, bells, chimes, or a *shofar* (ram’s horn)—silence, and body movement.

Prayer is a very personal act of faith, even when done in a communal setting; so talking about it, let alone planning it, with others from a different tradition (or another branch of your own), can raise sensitive issues that are often not addressed in interfaith encounters. In the 2007 round, a Christian participant asked the Jews how they feel when Christians adopt Jewish prayers like the “*Sh’ma Yisrael*” affirmation of God’s Oneness. A rich discussion about the asymmetrical relationship between Judaism and Christianity, along with the dangers of “spiritual plagiarism,” ensued. In these honest conversations, Jews have an opportunity to share their fears and negative reactions when encountering a cross or other symbols in a church. We also address the sense of self-negation or inauthenticity that Christians often feel when asked to give up Christological language in order to accommodate Jews and Muslims in common worship. Should they ever comply, and, if so, on what occasions?

In all three rounds of *BAP II*, the interfaith worship services have been truly inspirational and a memorable highlight of each course. They demonstrate how closely connected the participants are by the end of their week together. The process of accommodating different

theologies and liturgical styles, and the opportunity to present the fruits of creative collaboration to the rest of the group, yield spiritual gifts that are genuine blessings for everyone.

Evaluation forms indicate that the students in *BAP II* take from the course a set of concepts, skills, and sensitivities that can empower them both personally and professionally. Their interfaith leadership “tool kits” are enhanced, and the practical lessons can be applied in their particular work settings.

### A Theological Underpinning for *BAP*

As I work for mutual understanding and solidarity among Jews, Christians, and Muslims, my own theological assumptions are constantly challenged. A key question is whether one can develop a theology, or multiple theologies, of religious pluralism to undergird the building of Abrahamic partnerships. One theology, acceptable to all, that accounts for religious diversity within God’s plan is inconceivable. The three traditions have disparate understandings of why the One God has allowed different, mutually irreconcilable theologies to coexist.

One can, of course, bracket the theological dimension entirely and promote interreligious encounter on the basis of practical necessity: humanity as an endangered species that requires collective effort in order to survive. No talk of redemption or reconciliation is necessary, according to this utilitarian perspective. But *BAP* has a deeper goal. It seeks to heal the historic wounds that have traumatized us and left us, as Abrahamic siblings, estranged from one another. It has a vision of interreligious reconciliation and cooperation that is hopeful—one might even say messianic—for it is rooted in our shared summons to emulate God by living lives of justice, peace, and love. To overcome our deep-seated fears and to bring us closer to the hoped-for Kingdom of God, we need new religious paradigms. One of the obstacles to such new, visionary thinking is the narrow way in which our traditions have formed our identities.

Redefining our particular identities in other than dualistic ways (us vs. them, theologically valid vs. heretical, saved vs. damned, righteous vs. sinful), requires humility and an appreciation for human diversity as a blessing rather than a threat. The intellectual challenge of dialectically affirming the Oneness of God and the multiplicity of

theologies is compounded by the emotional challenge of transcending our victim scripts and demythologizing the adversarial relationship with our traditional “enemies.” Long-standing conflicts over land, power, or economic resources have been, all too often, “theologized” into cosmic struggles between God and Satan, Virtue and Evil, or the forces of Light and Darkness. In this way our religious identities have been skewed by simplistic and essentialistic thinking, along with emotional investments in self-referencing understandings of love and loyalty. *BAP* encourages participants, in a relatively “safe” setting, to undertake transformations in both, the intellectual and the emotional spheres. The theological link between the two is the symbolic transfiguration of God (favoring more than one faith community), *of ourselves* (seeing ourselves as distinct but not superior or victorious over others), and *of our relationship with others* (as allies or partners rather than adversaries).

Sadly, none of our traditions has adequately prepared us for this theological transfiguration, and that is why programs like *BAP* are needed. At this point in history, humanity is in dire need of more inclusive religious concepts and norms—what may be termed “paradigm shifts.” We need new understandings of what it means to be faithful to God and to one another. One direction for my own theological thinking is exploring the implications of seeing the One God as a “multiple covenanter,” inviting all of humanity (through Noah) and then different faith communities into complementary relationships of sacrificial service for the sake of God’s Creation. This may be one helpful paradigm of inclusiveness and mutuality; there are many others worth exploring. We need to experiment with new ways of doing theology together, new ways of living together, and new ways of integrating the two. Familiar spiritual practices like prayer and text study can be transformed through interreligious engagement and creativity. In this spirit, *BAP* participants are pioneers venturing onto unfamiliar terrain, where we are all equal in God’s sight and where we all have unique insights to contribute toward a future of shared promise and blessing. Let us recall that in the Biblical account (Gen. 12:3), Abraham is promised: “In you all of the families of the earth shall be blessed.” It does not say that all of humanity will merge into one family. The verse implies, instead, that distinct family and faith identities will remain, but that we will all share a common blessing. *BAP* is one step on a journey toward that shared blessing. Its theological underpinning, which I would call “pluralistic, multi-covenantal monotheism,” together with a holistic pedagogy that

integrates the cognitive, the affective, the aesthetic, and the spiritual dimensions of religion, together create an educational model that, I believe, could be replicated or adapted in other seminary settings.

## Conclusion

As Jews, Christians, and Muslims sharing a fragile planet in a time of collective peril, we are called to face one another in repentance and humility. We all proclaim a messianic future unfolding and anticipated, but we have all failed to translate those proclamations into effective action. Instead, we have undermined our own beliefs and aspirations. We desecrate what we call holy, and we become our own worst enemies. Entrenched fears rooted in past or present traumas cripple our imaginations.<sup>24</sup> Instead of envisioning a future in which we are all redeemed and blessed, we compensate ourselves for our insecurities by fantasies of unilateral victory and vindication.

We need new theologies of inclusiveness that simultaneously affirm, the oneness of God and a plurality of ways to worship and serve God. We also need new models of religious and interreligious education. And we need pedagogies that help us grow in faithfulness to

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<sup>24</sup>For a helpful way of conceiving the process of interreligious transformation, in the service of inclusive justice and reconciliation, see John Paul Lederach’s *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). Lederach argues (especially in pp. 31–40) that peacebuilding is both a skill and an art requiring “moral imagination” in four distinct “disciplines”: (1) adversaries need to “imagine themselves in [a positive] relationship” by “taking personal responsibility and acknowledging relational mutuality”; (2) parties in conflict need to “embrace complexity” and adopt a stance of “paradoxical curiosity” in order to rise above dualistic antagonism and, instead, “hold together seemingly contradictory social energies in a greater whole”; (3) space needs to be provided “for the creative act to emerge” and allow the estranged adversaries to “move beyond the narrow parameters of what is commonly accepted and perceived”; and (4) to move beyond enmity and violence (what is known) to the prospect of peaceful relations (the unknown and mysterious) requires a capacity to take risks “without any guarantee of success or even safety.” Lederach deepens the last point by connecting “the deeper implications of risk and the longer-term sustenance of vocation.” The vocation of interreligious peacemaking requires these different “disciplines,” or leaps of faith-imagination, in the areas of theology, spirituality, and ethics.

the tradition of our forebearers while we learn from the traditions of our neighbors, affirming them as valid and mutually enriching. Above all, we need new understandings of those neighbors. We must come to know them not only intellectually through increased factual knowledge—*yeda*’ in Hebrew, a cognitive knowing based on new *information*. More important, and urgently needed, are new heart-understandings of each other, grounded in mutual affection and appreciation. In Hebrew this is *da’at*, the kind of intimate knowledge and spiritual *transformation* that Adam and Eve shared after leaving the Garden and its childlike innocence.<sup>25</sup> None of us are innocent of wrongdoing. At one time or another, each of our religious traditions has been complicit in domination and mass slaughter.

If we are to write a new historical chapter that redeems our tragic past and present, we need collaborative initiatives in mutual re-education. We should be corrective mirrors for each other, so that we do not repeat our past mistakes. Many of those mistakes originate in the act of projecting evil onto others rather than acknowledging it in ourselves. If we can be helped to see our own limitations and moral lapses through the eyes of our Abrahamic siblings, we have a chance to truly experience the Kingdom of God on earth. The beginning of redemption is the humble recognition that we need one another to be redeemed. *BAP* is one modest effort to foster that recognition among Jews, Christians, and Muslims and to develop a praxis of partnership in that spirit.

In summary, the pedagogical praxis modeled in the BAP program aims for a redemptive transformation of Abrahamic relationships by *expanding knowledge* about each other’s faith traditions, *evoking and healing legacies of pain* within a safe and supportive learning environment, and *building a spiritual community* in which everyone is nourished and blessed. I am grateful to all of my colleagues—teachers and students—who have joined in this pioneering effort to explore an interior terrain linking mind, heart, and spirit. We engage in this undertaking with the hope of becoming better interfaith leaders and peacemakers in the wider society.

<sup>25</sup> For examples of such transformation of the heart, see Yossi Klein Halevi, *At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden*, *op. cit.* (fn. 19), and Donald Nicholl, *The Testing of Hearts: A Pilgrim’s Journey*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1998.

## **COURSE SYLLABUS**

Building Abrahamic Partnerships (*BAP*)  
(DI-650)

May 31–June 7, 2009

*BAP* Program Director: **Prof. Yehezkel Landau**

Course Faculty: Prof. Yehezkel Landau, Prof. Ian Markham, Prof. Ingrid Mattson, Prof. Mahmoud Ayoub, Prof. David Roozen, Rabbi Debra Cantor, Rev. Dr. Brita Gill-Austern, and Imam Abdullah Antepli

**Course Overview:** Hartford Seminary, building on its strengths as an interfaith, dialogical school of practical theology, has designed this innovative program to be a practical resource for Jews, Christians, and Muslims who seek a solid foundation in interfaith ministry. The format is an 8-day intensive training program, beginning with an informal dinner on May 31 and concluding with a dinner on June 7.

**Course Rationale and Objectives:** Our society needs a new kind of religious leadership, grounded in a particular tradition and, at the same time, able to interact effectively with other faith communities. This is especially true given the prevalence of fear and mutual suspicion, exacerbated by violence committed by religious extremists. We need to develop educational strategies to overcome the ignorance that leads to prejudice, which in turn leads to dehumanizing contempt, which in turn breeds violence.

The goals of the course are fourfold:

- Educating participants about the beliefs and practices of the three Abrahamic traditions
- Creating a supportive learning community in which clergy, lay ministers, religious educators, and chaplains can forge mutually beneficial relationships across communal boundaries
- Helping participants acquire pastoral skills useful in interfaith ministry
- Developing leadership strategies for promoting interfaith relations in our pluralistic society

**Course Content:** Topics for discussion and shared experiences will include:

- Presentations clarifying the tenets and practices of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
- Historical overviews of the three traditions and how they have interacted in history
- Shared text study using source material from all three traditions
- Visits to a mosque, a synagogue, and a church for worship and subsequent discussion of those liturgical experiences
- Demographic and sociological data on Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities in America
- Skills and sensitivities needed to establish and sustain effective interfaith partnerships
- The role of the media in creating images of one another, and strategies to counter negative media stereotypes
- Developing ideas for joint interfaith projects in local communities

**Methods of Delivery:** Lectures, panel discussions, text study, artistic exercises, sacred music, videotapes, facilitated discussions, interpersonal exchanges in small groups, extended exercise (over several days) in deep listening and honest dialogue, visits to houses of worship, shared meals

**Methods of Assessment:** For those taking the course for credit, class participation will count for 20% of the course grade; a daily journal of one's reflections on the experience will count for an additional 30% of the grade; and a final paper approximating 15 double-spaced pages will count for 50% of the grade. **The paper and the journal reflections are due by September 1, 2009.** The final paper should relate to one or both of the two themes addressed by the course: (1) theoretical approaches to improving interfaith relations, and (2) practical strategies or initiatives aimed at promoting Abrahamic partnerships. It is recommended that a student consult with one or more of the course faculty before writing the final paper, to get input on how to approach the intended topic and what resources to use in researching it.

### Course Schedule and Readings

(Note: the four assigned books, which are required of credit-seeking students, are available from the Hartford Seminary Bookstore; the "suggested readings" are optional and are meant primarily for those seeking additional resources for course papers).

**Sunday, May 31:** Informal opening dinner, 6:30 p.m., in the Seminary Meeting Room (ground floor, to the right of the lobby). Preliminary introductions and general overview of the course program; an interfaith exercise as a way of engaging one another; distribution of materials, including a looseleaf collection of *Supplemental Readings*. "Before" questionnaires will be handed out for completion that evening.

**Monday, June 1: Morning session, 9 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.**  
Welcome by course faculty; explanation of course objectives and requirements; ground rules for interreligious conversation for adoption by the group

SUGGESTED READINGS: *"The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious, Interideological Dialogue"* by Leonard Swidler, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 20:1, Winter 1983 (September, 1984, revision); NOT WITHOUT MY NEIGHBOUR: ISSUES IN INTERFAITH RELATIONS by S. Wesley Ariarajah, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1999, chapters 1, 2, and 3 (both in *Supplemental Readings*) Introduction to Jewish identity, beliefs and practices; Biblical and Rabbinic (Written and Oral Torahs); and contemporary Judaism in its different forms (*Prof. Yehezkel Landau and Rabbi Debra Cantor*).

ASSIGNED READING: *CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM: AN INTRODUCTION TO JUDAISM FOR MUSLIMS* by Reuven Firestone, New York: Ktav Publishing House/ American Jewish Committee, 2001.

SUGGESTED READINGS: JEWISH LITERACY by Joseph Telushkin, New York: William Morrow and Company, 2001; JUDAISM: REVELATION AND TRADITIONS by Michael A. Fishbane, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1987; SACRED FRAGMENTS: RECOVERING THEOLOGY FOR THE MODERN JEW by Neil Gillman, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1990; A JEWISH THEOLOGY by Louis Jacobs, New York: Behrman House, Inc., 1973; THE SEVENTY FACES

OF TORAH: THE JEWISH WAY OF READING THE SACRED SCRIPTURES by Stephen M. Wylen, New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005; THE JEWISH WAY: LIVING THE HOLIDAYS by Rabbi Irving Greenberg, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1988; STANDING AGAIN AT SINAI: JUDAISM FROM A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE by Judith Plaskow, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991; ON WOMEN AND JUDAISM: A VIEW FROM TRADITION by Blu Greenberg, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1981; LIVING JUDAISM by Rabbi Wayne Dosick, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1998; FINDING OUR WAY: JEWISH TEXTS AND THE LIVES WE LEAD TODAY by Barry W. Holtz, New York: Schocken Books, 1990; THE JEWISH APPROACH TO GOD: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION FOR CHRISTIANS by Rabbi Neil Gillman, Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2003; ONE PEOPLE, TWO WORLDS: A REFORM RABBI AND AN ORTHODOX RABBI EXPLORE THE ISSUES THAT DIVIDE THEM by Ammiel Hirsch and Yosef Reinman, New York: Schocken Books, 2002; TALKING TO THE OTHER: JEWISH INTERFAITH DIALOGUE WITH CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS by Rabbi Jonathan Magonet, London/New York: I. B. Tauris, 2003.

Afternoon session, 1:45 to 4:45 p.m.

Introduction to Jewish tradition, continued, with attention paid to stereotypes and misunderstood aspects of Judaism, including: election/chosenness, Torah as “sacred teaching” rather than legalistic rules; the land and state of Israel, and the connection between Zionism and Judaism (*Prof. Yehezkel Landau and Rabbi Debra Cantor*) First of three “fishbowl” exercises on Israel/Palestine, with Jewish participants speaking and Christians and Muslims listening deeply without interruption or comment.

SUGGESTED READINGS: ISRAEL: AN ECHO OF ETERNITY by Abraham Joshua Heschel, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1969; A LAND OF TWO PEOPLES: MARTIN BUBER ON JEWS AND ARABS, edited with commentary and new preface by Paul Mendes-Flohr, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005; IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL by Amos Oz, London: Flamingo/Fontana Paperbacks, 1983; VOICES FROM JERUSALEM: JEWS AND CHRISTIANS REFLECT ON THE HOLY LAND, edited by David Burrell and Yehezkel Landau, New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992; AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE GARDEN OF EDEN: A JEW’S SEARCH FOR

HOPE WITH CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS IN THE HOLY LAND by Yossi Klein Halevi, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002; THE END OF DAYS: FUNDAMENTALISM AND THE STRUGGLE FOR THE TEMPLE MOUNT by Gershom Gorenberg, New York: The Free Press, 2000; HOLY WAR, HOLY PEACE: HOW RELIGION CAN BRING PEACE TO THE MIDDLE EAST by Rabbi Dr. Marc Gopin, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002; *HEALING THE HOLY LAND: INTERRELIGIOUS PEACE-BUILDING IN ISRAEL/PALESTINE* by Yehezkel Landau, PEACEWORKS No. 51, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, September, 2003; “*Jews, Muslims, and Peace*,” by Yehezkel Landau and Yahya Hendi, CURRENT DIALOGUE, No. 41, June-July, 2003, Geneva: World Council of Churches, pp. 12-13 (in *Supplemental Readings*); THE TESTING OF HEARTS: A PILGRIM’S JOURNAL by Donald Nicholl, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, Ltd., 1998; HEALING ISRAEL/PALESTINE by Rabbi Michael Lerner, San Francisco: Tikun Books, 2003; THE LEMON TREE: AN ARAB, A JEW, AND THE HEART OF THE MIDDLE EAST by Sandy Tolan, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2006.

Evening session, 7 to 9 p.m.

Small-group sharing of encounters with the sacred or transcendent, followed by a panel discussion on “*What Do We Mean by Spirituality?*” co-led by *Rabbi Debra Cantor, Rev. Dr. Brita Gill-Austern, and Imam Abdullah Antepli*. Relevant topics include: comparative mysticism; language as a medium of spiritual devotion, including gender-specific references to the Divine; silence, meditation, chanting, and body movement as alternative modes; liturgical commonalities and differences in styles of prayer; how prayers in one tradition are heard/experienced by adherents of another, especially prayers that refer to the Other.

SUGGESTED READINGS: JEWISH SPIRITUALITY: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION FOR CHRISTIANS by Rabbi Lawrence Kushner, Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2001; A GUIDE TO JEWISH PRAYER by Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz, New York: Schocken Books, 2000; MAN’S QUEST FOR GOD by Abraham Joshua Heschel, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1954; ENGENDERING JUDAISM by Rachel Adler, Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 1998; SHE WHO DWELLS WITHIN: A FEMINIST VISION OF A RENEWED JUDAISM by Lynn Gottlieb, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995; JEWISH PRAYER: THE ORIGINS OF THE CHRISTIAN LITURGY by Carmine

Di Sante, Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1991; PRAYING THE PSALMS by Walter Brueggemann, Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 1986; EXPLORING CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY ed. by Bruce H. Lescher and Elizabeth Liebert, SNJM, New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 2006; THE ESSENTIAL WRITINGS OF CHRISTIAN MYSTICISM, ed. with introduction by Bernard McGinn, New York: The Modern Library/Random House, 2006; THE INTERIOR CASTLE or THE MANSIONS by St. Teresa of Avila, Rockford, Illinois: TAN Books and Publishers, 1997; FRANCIS OF ASSISI'S *CANTICLE OF THE CREATURES: A MODERN SPIRITUAL PATH* by Paul M. Allen and Joan deRis Allen, New York: Continuum, 2000; THE SINGER AND THE SONG: AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF THE SPIRIT by Miriam Therese Winter, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999; SON OF MAN: THE MYSTICAL PATH TO CHRIST by Andrew Harvey, New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1999; PRAYING WITH ICONS by Jim Forest, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997; MUSLIM DEVOTIONS by Constance E. Padwick, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1996; THE BOOK OF ASSISTANCE by Imam Abdallah Ibn Alawi Al-Haddad, Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2003; THE SOUL OF RUMI: A NEW COLLECTION OF ECSTATIC POEMS, translations, introductions, and notes by Coleman Barks, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2001; THE WAY OF PASSION: A CELEBRATION OF RUMI by Andrew Harvey, New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 1994; MY SOUL IS A WOMAN: THE FEMININE IN ISLAM by Annemarie Schimmel, Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 1998; MUSLIM PREACHER IN THE MODERN WORLD by Richard T. Antoun, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989; THE EARLY MUSLIM TRADITION OF DREAM INTERPRETATION by John C. Lamoreaux, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002.

**Tuesday, June 2: Morning session, 9 a.m. to 12 noon**

Introduction to Muslim beliefs and practices, with attention given to cultural variety within the Islamic *umma*/global community (*Imam Abdullah Antepli*)

**ASSIGNED READINGS:**

*THE STORY OF THE QUR'AN: ITS HISTORY AND PLACE IN MUSLIM LIFE* by Ingrid Mattson, Malden, MA/Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008. *THE HEART OF ISLAM: ENDURING VALUES FOR HUMANITY* by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002.

**SUGGESTED READINGS:** ISLAM: RELIGION, HISTORY, AND CIVILIZATION by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, New York: HarperOne, 2001; ISLAM AND THE MUSLIM COMMUNITY by Frederick M. Denny, Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 1998; WHAT EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ISLAM AND MUSLIMS by Suzanne Haneef, Chicago: Kazi Publications/Library of Islam, 1996; READING THE MUSLIM MIND by Hassan Hathout, Burr Ridge, IL: American Trust Publications, 1995; THE COMPLETE IDIOT'S GUIDE TO UNDERSTANDING ISLAM by Yahiya Emerick, Indiana: Alpha Books, 2002; UNDERSTANDING ISLAM: A GUIDE FOR THE JUDAEO-CHRISTIAN READER by Jerald Dirks, Maryland: Amana Publications, 2003; THE FAITH AND PRACTICE OF AL-GHAZALI by W. Montgomery Watt, Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1982; THE STORY OF A MOSQUE IN AMERICA by Dr. Faroque Khan, Westbury, NY: Islamic Center of Long Island, 2001; DAUGHTERS OF ANOTHER PATH: EXPERIENCES OF AMERICAN WOMEN CHOOSING ISLAM, by Carol L. Anway, Lee's Summit, MO: Yawna Publications, 1996; TO BE A EUROPEAN MUSLIM by Tariq Ramadan, Leicester, UK: The Islamic Foundation, 1999; MUSLIMS AND JEWS: BUILDING A HOPEFUL FUTURE, edited by Norman Hosansky and Mazhar Jalil, Columbus, OH: The Islamic Foundation of Central Ohio, 2003.

**Learning lunch, 12 noon to 1:30 p.m.**

Presentation and discussion facilitated by *Prof. David Roozen* on three topics:

“*Motivations for Participating in Interfaith Dialogue,*”

“*The Nature and Sources of Prejudice*” and

“*Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Congregations in America: Current Trends*”

**ASSIGNED READING:** “*Meet Your Neighbors: Interfaith Facts*” booklet, Faith Communities Today/Hartford Institute for Religion Research, 2003 (distributed Sunday evening)

**SUGGESTED READING:** THEY AND WE: RACIAL AND ETHNIC RELATIONS IN THE UNITED STATES (5<sup>th</sup> Edition) by Peter I. Rose, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997.

**Afternoon session, 1:45 to 4:45 p.m.**



Presentation and discussion on stereotypes and misunderstood aspects of Islam, including rights and opportunities for women, Greater and Lesser *Jihad*, attitudes towards non-Muslims, and concepts of the afterlife (*Prof. Ingrid Mattson*)

Third of three “fishbowl” exercises on Israel/Palestine, with Muslim participants speaking and Jews and Christians listening deeply without interruption or comment.

**SUGGESTED READINGS:** QUR’AN AND WOMAN: REREADING THE SACRED TEXT FROM A WOMAN’S PERSPECTIVE by Amina Wadud, New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999; “BELIEVING WOMEN” IN ISLAM: UNREADING PATRIARCHAL INTERPRETATIONS OF THE QUR’AN by Asma Barlas, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2002; MUSLIM WOMEN IN AMERICA: THE CHALLENGE OF ISLAMIC IDENTITY TODAY, by Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad, Jane I. Smith, and Kathleen M. Moore, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006; WINDOWS OF FAITH: MUSLIM WOMEN SCHOLAR-ACTIVISTS IN NORTH AMERICA edited by Gisela Webb, Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000; “*Islamic Ethics of Killing and Saving Life*,” special issue of THE MUSLIM WORLD, guest editor Jonathan E. Brockopp, Vol. LXXXIX, No. 2, April 1999; REBELLION AND VIOLENCE IN ISLAMIC LAW by Khaled Abou El Fadl, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press; NONVIOLENCE AND PEACE BUILDING IN ISLAM: THEORY AND PRACTICE by Mohammed Abu-Nimer, Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2003; “*Stopping Oppression: An Islamic Obligation*,” by Ingrid Mattson, in SEPTEMBER 11: RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES ON THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES, edited by Ian Markham and Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi’, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002, pp. 101-110 (in *Supplemental Readings*); QUR’AN, LIBERATION & PLURALISM by Farid Esack, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1997; COMMANDER OF THE FAITHFUL: THE LIFE AND TIMES OF EMIR ABD EL-KADR by John W. Kiser, Rhinebeck, NY: Monkfish Book Publishing, 2008.

#### Evening Discussion, 7 to 9 p.m.

A conversation on “*Religion and the Media*” with guest presenters *Anisa Mehdi*, producer of TV documentaries including “*Inside Mecca*,” and *Tamar Miller*, consultant to social change organizations with a

focus on the Middle East and initiator of a radio series called *The PeaceBeat* >>> *some good news, some of the time!*

#### Wednesday, June 3: Morning session, 9 a.m. to 12 noon

Introduction to Christian beliefs and practices, including an overview of different Christian denominations (*Prof. Ian Markham* and *Rev. Dr. Brita Gill-Austern*)

**ASSIGNED READING:** *UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE* by Ian S. Markham, Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2008.

**SUGGESTED READINGS:** CHRISTIANITY: A VERY SHORT INTRODUCTION by Linda Woodhead, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004; CHRISTIANITY 101: TRACING BASIC BELIEFS by James W. White, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006; INTRODUCING CHRISTIANITY by Michael Keene, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998; TO BEGIN AT THE BEGINNING: AN INTRODUCTION TO THE CHRISTIAN FAITH by Martin B. Copenhaver, Cleveland: United Church Press, 1994; “*Dietrich Bonhoeffer*,” and “*Psalm Eight*” from THE DEATH OF ADAM: ESSAYS ON MODERN THOUGHT by Marilynne Robinson, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998, pp. 108-125 and 227-244 (in *Supplemental Readings*); CREDO by William Sloane Coffin, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004; MY STRUGGLE FOR FREEDOM: MEMOIRS by Hans Kung, Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003; PRACTICING OUR FAITH: A WAY OF LIFE FOR A SEARCHING PEOPLE, edited by Dorothy C. Bass, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997; MANY MANSIONS: A CHRISTIAN’S ENCOUNTER WITH OTHER FAITHS by Harvey Cox, London: William Collins Sons & Co., 1988; COMMON PRAYERS: FAITH, FAMILY, AND A CHRISTIAN’S JOURNEY THROUGH THE JEWISH YEAR by Harvey Cox, Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001; MUHAMMAD AND THE CHRISTIAN: A QUESTION OF RESPONSE by Kenneth Cragg, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984; THE MONKS OF TIBHIRINE: FAITH, LOVE, AND TERROR IN ALGERIA by John W. Kiser, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2002; JOHN PAUL II IN THE HOLY LAND: IN HIS OWN WORDS, with Christian and Jewish Perspectives by Yehezkel Landau (in *Supplemental Readings*) and Michael McGarry, CSP, edited by Lawrence Boadt, CSP, and Kevin di Camillo, New York and Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005.

Afternoon session, 1:30 to 4:30 p.m.

Stereotypes and misunderstood aspects of Christianity, including: the doctrine of the Trinity; the Passion and Crucifixion of Jesus; and the meaning of evangelism: mission or witness? (*Prof. Ian Markham and Rev. Dr. Brita Gill-Austern*)

SUGGESTED READINGS: THE MEANING OF JESUS: TWO VISIONS by Marcus J. Borg and N. T. Wright, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1999; PAIN AND POLEMIC: ANTI-JUDAISM IN THE GOSPELS by George M. Smiga, New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992; PREACHING WITHOUT CONTEMPT: OVERCOMING UNINTENDED ANTI-JUDAISM by Marilyn J. Salmon, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006; CHRIST KILLERS: THE JEWS AND THE PASSION FROM THE BIBLE TO THE BIG SCREEN by Jeremy Cohen, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007; PONDERING THE PASSION: WHAT'S AT STAKE FOR CHRISTIANS AND JEWS? edited by Philip A. Cunningham, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004; "The Rehabilitation of Mission," presentation by Prof. Dale Bishop delivered at Hartford Seminary, February 12, 2004 (in *Supplemental Readings*).

**Wednesday evening: OFF, OPPORTUNITY FOR SOCIALIZING OR REST**

**Thursday, June 4:** Morning session, 9 a.m. to 12 noon  
Interfaith text study: understanding the ambivalence of sacred texts—the exclusive as well as inclusive dimensions, the messages that seem peaceful and those that seem intolerant or violent—using selected passages from the Hebrew Scriptures, New Testament, and Qur'an (morning session devoted to Christian texts, led by *Prof. Ian Markham and Rev. Dr. Brita Gill-Austern*)

SUGGESTED READINGS: THE AMBIVALENCE OF THE SACRED: RELIGION, VIOLENCE, AND RECONCILIATION by R. Scott Appleby, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers; "Violent Faith," by Kelton Cobb, in SEPTEMBER 11: RELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVES ON THE CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES, edited by Ian Markham and Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002, pp.136-163 (in *Supplemental Readings*); VIOLENCE IN GOD'S NAME: RELIGION IN AN AGE OF CONFLICT by Oliver McTernan, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003; WHEN RELIGION BECOMES EVIL by Charles

Kimball, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002; THE DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF THE BELOVED SON: THE TRANSFORMATION OF CHILD SACRIFICE IN JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY by Jon D. Levenson, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993; THE SACRIFICE OF ISAAC IN THE THREE MONOTHEISTIC TRADITIONS, edited by Frederic Manns, Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1995; VIOLENCE AND THE SACRED by Rene Girard, Baltimore/London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979; THE BIBLE, VIOLENCE, AND THE SACRED: LIBERATION FROM THE MYTH OF SANCTIONED VIOLENCE by James G. Williams, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991; CONSTANTINE'S SWORD: THE CHURCH AND THE JEWS by James Carroll, Boston/New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001; THE ART OF FORGIVENESS: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS ON HEALING AND RECONCILIATION by Geiko Muller-Fahrenholz, Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997.

Learning lunch, 12 noon to 1:30 p.m.

Presentation and discussion facilitated by *Prof. Mahmoud Ayoub* on "Shi'ite Islam and Shia-Sunni Relations"

SUGGESTED READINGS: A MUSLIM VIEW OF CHRISTIANITY: ESSAYS ON DIALOGUE by Mahmoud Ayoub, edited by Irfan A. Omar, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007; THE CRISIS OF MUSLIM HISTORY: RELIGION AND POLITICS IN EARLY ISLAM by Mahmoud M. Ayoub, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2005; SHI'ISM, Second Edition, by Heinz Halm, translated by Janet Watson and Marian Hill, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004; A SHI'ITE ANTHOLOGY, Selected and with a Foreword by 'Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i, translated with explanatory notes by William C. Chittick, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981; THE SHIA REVIVAL: HOW CONFLICTS WITHIN ISLAM WILL SHAPE THE FUTURE by Vali Nasr, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006.

Afternoon session, 1:45 to 4:45

Continuation of interfaith text study: inclusive and exclusive passages from the Jewish tradition, led by *Prof. Yehezkel Landau and Rabbi Debra Cantor*

Evening session, 7 to 9:30 p.m.: Sensitivities and Skills for Interfaith Partnerships. Processing the three "fishbowl"

exercises and people's reactions, leading to a general discussion: what kinds of communication skills are required for establishing and sustaining interfaith relationships? How can we listen more compassionately and speak with sensitivity to the Other's situation? To what should we give attention in reaching out to or hosting someone from another faith community?—e.g., language that honors the Other, sacred calendars, prayer times, dietary restrictions, etc. How do we find common ground, or at least agree to disagree respectfully, on controversial issues such as proselytizing, shared worship, and intermarriage? (discussion facilitated by *Imam Abdullah Antepli*, *Rabbi Debra Cantor*, and *Rev. Dr. Brita Gill-Austern*)

**Friday, June 5: Morning session, 9 a.m. to 12 noon**

Continuation of interfaith text study, inclusive and exclusive passages from the Islamic tradition, examining the principles and methodologies for Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*), led by *Imam Abdullah Antepli*.

Mid-day: Visit to mosque in Berlin, CT, hosted by *Imam Prof. Ali Antar* and *Prof. Fatma Antar*, followed by lunch and a discussion led by the Antars

Evening: Shabbat prayers and dinner at Congregation B'nai Sholom in Newington, CT

**Saturday, June 6:** Visit to modern Orthodox or liberal synagogue for Sabbath morning prayers, followed by lunch and discussion at Beth David Synagogue led by *Rabbi Yitzchok Adler*

**Remainder of Saturday: OFF, OPPORTUNITY FOR SOCIALIZING OR REST**

**Sunday, June 7:** Visit to Immanuel Congregational Church or Trinity Episcopal Church for Sunday worship, followed by lunch and discussion at the Seminary.

Late afternoon, 3:30 to 6 p.m: Artistic exercise and closure on the week's experiences; "After" questionnaires distributed for completion before leaving

Evening, 6 to 9 p.m: Closing dinner and farewells...*SHALOM, SALAMAT, PEACE*

### **BUILDING ABRAHAMIC PARTNERSHIPS: THE “FISHBOWL” EXERCISE**

The “fishbowl” exercise is a very simple one, in terms of structure and what the participants are expected to do. Yet its simplicity belies deeper challenges: taking on the discipline of active, compassionate, and respectful listening; and using a spiritual lens through which to view, and ideally transform, situations of conflict.

In *The Little Book of Cool Tools for Hot Topics*, Ron Kraybill and Evelyn Wright devote two pages to this exercise.<sup>1</sup> They write: “One group sits in a circle and has a conversation, surrounded by a larger circle of listeners. Only people in the inner circle can speak; the surrounding group listens in silence. Usually both groups [in the case of *BAP*, three groups] get a turn in the inner circle. This is a simple, sturdy, flexible tool that can serve dialogue, analysis, or decision-making.”

In the spirit of flexibility, one change we have made is to have each member of the inner circle speak for UP TO THREE MINUTES, so that each participant in *BAP* has an equal chance to talk, and two opportunities to actively listen. We have not extended the sharing to a full conversation within the inner circle, but that is still an option.

In recent rounds of *BAP*, we have chosen for this exercise what is usually the most contentious, and often painful, topic impinging on Jewish-Christian-Muslim encounters everywhere: the ongoing tragedy in the Holy Land/Israel/Palestine. Each of these names for the territory suggests different associations—and all thoughts and feelings related to this subject are welcome and valuable for the overall process of deepening understanding, of the topic and one another. In a climate of political polarization, often fraught with intense passions, we are trying to develop (inter)religious perspectives on this conflict and dialogical skills that can help transform its potentially negative ramifications in our own lives.

To help focus the exercise, two questions are posed: ***(1) Does the land itself, called holy by different faith traditions, have any degree of sanctity or special significance for you, and, if so, in what sense? (2) How does the conflict over it, throughout history and today, affect your own identity as a Jew, a Christian, or a Muslim?***

Over the course of the week-long *BAP I* course, we have a sequential process for conducting the exercise. On Monday (devoted to Judaism), the Jewish participants, both students and teachers, comprise the inner circle, with the Christians and Muslims listening outside the circle without commenting. On Tuesday (Islam day), the Muslims make up the inner circle; while on Wednesday (Christianity day) it is the Christians’ turn in the inner circle. While it is permissible to engage one another outside the class setting, and *BAP* participants are encouraged to journal about their experiences throughout the week (including the different stages of the “fishbowl”), the formal processing of the three exercises BY THE WHOLE GROUP happens on Thursday, as part of the evening program on “Sensitivities and Skills for Interfaith Dialogue.”

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<sup>1</sup> Ron Kraybill and Evelyn Wright, *The Little Book of Cool Tools for Hot Topics: Group Tools to Facilitate Meetings When Things Are Hot*, Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2006, pp. 54-55.

## **Summary of fishbowl exercises in BAP I, June 2009**

In the fishbowl exercises I learned:

- that there is a lot of pain everywhere, on all sides, in personal stories
- that people carry feelings of being victimized (past, present, and future)
- that it is good to share pain when others are sincere—in a safe space, where the barriers are lowered and people grow closer to one another
- that it is helpful for evoking empathy for different narratives
- it was a good time of story-telling and truth-telling
- that “holy envy” can include identifying with another’s suffering
- that the suffering includes me, and I am more involved than I thought I was
- that Jews recognize the suffering of Palestinians, too
- to know the person in front of me, changing my prior thoughts about others’ caring for me (including other Muslims)
- how to create such a container, without arguing back
- about the need for closure
- I was reminded that I have a way to defend against pain by sectioning it off
- that keeping to 3 minutes is very helpful, so that the testimonies do not go on and on
- there are more dimensions to what I don’t know than I was aware of—I now have more lenses to look through
- I was surprised by the lack of anger, and I felt profound sadness
- that there *was* anger there, but it was not expressed overtly
- how to express anger constructively
- there was not enough time—I wanted to hear more and to speak more
- that a physical embrace after a cathartic experience is very important
- that I need to hear multiple narratives
- I had hope in God, that something good will come for us all...*insha 'Allah*
- that the exercise was a little fake/contrived, and I felt a need to be really careful
- that I need to move to deeper dialogue
- that I feel disconnected from this issue and left with the question: what do I do about it?
- that such a container was wonderful, helpful; the chapel was a better space, set apart and sacred
- it was good to have the Christians’ testimonies last
- the intensity of immersion was helpful to confront emotional defenses
- how much pain can be handled
- safety, trust, and care allowed so much to come out
- I need to listen
- the language blew my mind
- I never heard that “the land” was part of my faith
- what “we” are allowing to happen never goes away
- risk-taking in the face of not knowing how we are being heard
- the need to detach oneself in order to move on
- the calmness and attitude of the facilitators are important
- the community itself creates healing
- where do we go next in terms of action?

### **Summary of fishbowl exercise in *BAP II*, June 2009**

In the fishbowl exercise I learned:

- that everybody hurts from the conflict in Israel/Palestine
- that people can listen respectfully, even through the pain
- many hold the physical/territorial as holy, although I consider it a romantic myth
- those engaged in interfaith work have far more in common (than what divides)
- there is much commonality
- holiness is meaningless without peace and security
- how much compassion is among us for all sides—this process is indeed transformative
- the pain has not extinguished the hope
- it had not occurred to me how the Israel/Palestine conflict clouds the big picture for many Muslims
- truthfulness and sincerity
- people are willing to take risks
- no anger was directed, no blaming or name-calling; instead, the pouring out of love and concern for those in pain—this was a surprise
- again, how important ground rules are...they shaped the space and gave each person an equal opportunity, and from that foundation we could be generous in offering those who needed it extra time
- objective timing makes me feel safe as a participant and an observer/listener
- Thursday is a good day to do this exercise, with sufficient trust established
- a common hope can spread from a small group to wider ones
- we don't have to shy away from difficult topics
- this exercise allows you to speak from the heart
- this is a rare opportunity to speak about a difficult issue and a chance for healing
- I'm uncertain where to go from here