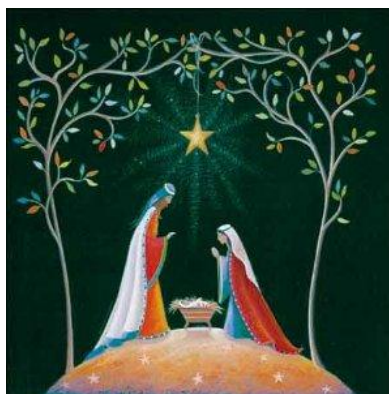




The periodical of the Professional Society of Religious Educators

VOLUME 1 NUMBER 5 (November 2015)

EDITORIAL



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

As the year draws to a close we wish you a well-earned rest and refreshment of spirit this Christmastime.

We hope you enjoy the issue.

PAUL FALLER

CONTENTS

REFLECTION	Stardust! (Richard Rohr)	2
REFLECTION	The Communion of Saints (Ron Rolheiser)	3
WEBSITE	New Advent: Catholic Encyclopaedia	5
HUMOUR	New Answers to Old Questions	6
ARTICLE	Milestones in Modern Jewish-Christian Relations	6
STORY	Kayla Mueller's encounter with a suffering God	11
NEWS		
LOCAL	Meditation Seminars	14
	New human-like species discovered in S Africa	16
INTERNATIONAL	Synod on the Family	18
	The World Parliament of Religions	19



Christmas signals birth, new life and the fullness of life. Following the star and looking ahead, what new life can we bring to Religious Education? What new life will Religious Education bring to our learners?

REFLECTION

Stardust!

(Richard Rohr)



Veil Nebula Supernova Remnant (detail) Hubble Space Telescope

Science has actually found evidence of the light that burst forth at the moment of creation. "If we look up at night, the space between the stars seems black, but radio telescopes reveal that it contains a faint background glow--cosmic microwave background radiation. This is the primordial light released when the universe exploded into being at the time of the Big Bang. That radiation survives as a cosmic relic."

Astrophysicists tell us that 95% of the known universe is dark energy and dark matter and seemingly empty space--not

open to our analysis it seems. Yet we now know that all that darkness is objectively not darkness at all; what looks to the human eye like darkness is actually filled with billions of neutrinos--which are light. This sounds to me like John's Gospel: "A light that shines on in the dark, a light that darkness cannot overcome" (1:5).

John goes on to say, "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world" (John 1:9). So the true light, or what I'm going to call consciousness, precedes and connects and feeds all else. Being is not just love, but it is light. Note that the creation story itself says that the moment of creation is precisely the creation of light. The first words God utters in Genesis are: "Let there be light!" And the first words about God are: "God saw that the light was good" (1:3-4). Of course, light implies an ability to see, to be aware, to be conscious. This is always "coming into the world" (in Greek, *erxomenon eis ton kosmon*), which might just be the first biblical indicator of what we eventually call evolution.

Ilia Delio writes that Teilhard de Chardin "spoke of evolution as the emergence of consciousness and complexity. As entities become more complex in nature, consciousness increases or develops. . . . [Teilhard] sought to articulate a new philosophy based on the energy of love. [His] ontology of love [is] thus a radical shift from the world of being as substance to a world of love-energy and consciousness." In other words, the very physical structure of the universe is love or mutual allurements.

This utterly grounds our deeper notion of God as Being itself, rather than God as a Being, alone and apart. Both Franciscan John Duns Scotus and Dominican Thomas Aquinas said *Deus est Ens*, God is Being itself. Duns Scotus, however, went further and taught about "the univocity of being," meaning that we can speak with "one voice," consistently and truthfully, about a rock, a tree, an animal, a human, an angel, and God. Aquinas said they were the same being "only by analogy." You see why I am happy to be a Franciscan!

The mystery of cosmic incarnation, when taken to its theological conclusion, leads us to enjoy a very real participation in the same single state of Being, to varying degrees and with different qualities. This eliminates any radical distinction between things, peoples, and creatures because Christ existed in all matter from the first moment of the Big Bang. Remember, "There is only Christ! He is everything and he is in everything" (Colossians 3:11). Now astrophysics tells us that the same molecules which existed at the beginning are still reshaping the universe now into endlessly new forms.

All those songs about you being stardust are quite literally true.

REFLECTION

The Communion of Saints

(Ron Rolheiser)



At any given time most of the world believes that death isn't final, that some form of immortality exists. Most people believe that those who have died still exist in some state, in some modality, in some place, in some heaven or hell, however that might be conceived. In some conceptions, immortality is seen as a state wherein a person is still conscious and relational; while in other concepts, existence after death is understood as real but impersonal, like a drop of water that has flowed back into the oceans.

As Christians, this is our belief: We believe that the dead are still alive, still themselves and, very importantly, still in a living, conscious, and loving relationship with us and with each other. That's our common concept of heaven and, however simplistic its popular expression

at times, it is wonderfully correct. That's exactly what Christian faith and Christian dogma, not to mention deep intuitive experience, invite us to. After death we live on, conscious, self-conscious, in communication with others who have died before us, in communion with those we left behind on earth, and in communion with the divine itself. That's the Christian doctrine of the *Communion of Saints*.

But how is this to be understood? Not least, how do we connect to our loved ones after they have died? Two interpenetrating biblical images can help serve as an entry-point for our understanding of this. Both come from the Gospels.

The Gospels say that at the instant of Jesus' death, *the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth shook and the rocks were split. The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.* (Matthew 27, 50-52) The Gospels then go on to tell us that on the morning of the Resurrection several women came to Jesus' grave to anoint his dead body with embalming spices, but rather than finding his dead body, they meet instead an empty grave and two angels who chal-

lence them with words to this effect: *Why are you looking for a live person in a cemetery? He isn't here. He's alive and you can find him in Galilee.* (Luke 24, 5) What's contained in these images?

As Christians, we believe that we are given eternal life through Jesus' death. Among other images, the Gospels express that in this metaphor: Jesus death, they tell us, "opened the tombs" and emptied graveyards. For this reason, Christians have never had a huge cult around cemeteries. As Christians, we don't do much in the way of spiritual practices around our cemeteries. Why? Because we believe all those graves are empty. Our loved ones aren't there and aren't to be found there. They're with Jesus, in "Galilee".

What's "Galilee", in terms of a biblical image? In the Gospels, Galilee is more than a place on a map; it's also a place inside the Spirit, God's Spirit and our own. In the Gospels, Galilee is the place where, for the most part, the good things happen. It's the place where the disciples first meet Jesus, where they fall in love with him, where they commit themselves to him, and where miracles happen. Galilee is the place where Jesus invites us to walk on water. Galilee is the place where the disciples' souls enlarge and thrive.

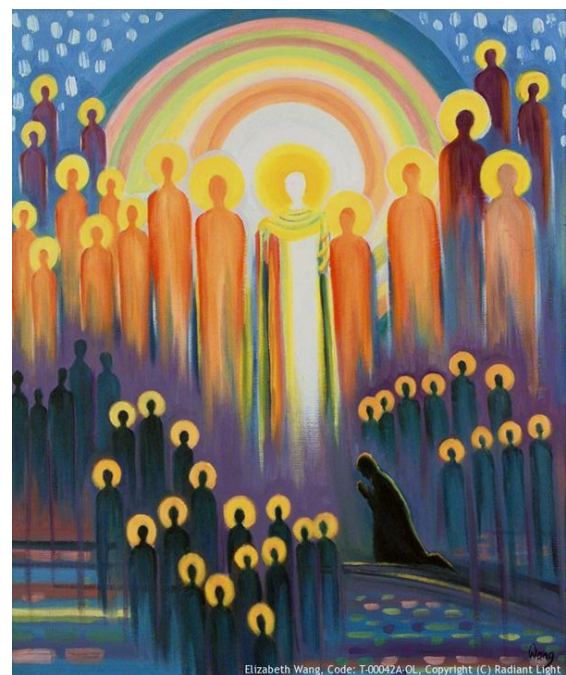
And that is also a place for each of our deceased loved ones. In each of their lives, there was a Galilee, a place where their persons and souls were most alive, where their lives radiated the energy and exuberance of the divine. When we look at the life of a loved one who has died we need to ask: Where was she most alive? What qualities did she, most-uniquely, embody and bring into a room? Where did she lift my spirit and make me want to be a better person?

Name those things, and you will have named your loved one's Galilee - and you will also have named the Galilee of the Gospels, namely, that place in the heart where Jesus invites you to meet him. And that is too where you will meet your

loved ones in the communion of saints. Don't look for a live person in a cemetery. She's not there. She's in Galilee. Meet her there.

Elizabeth Johnson, leaning on Karl Rahner, adds this thought: "Hoping against hope, we affirm that they [our loved ones who have died] have fallen not into nothingness but into the embrace of the living God. And that is where we can find them again; when we open our hearts to the silent calmness of God's own life in which we dwell, not by selfishly calling them back to where we are, but by descending into the depth of our own hearts where God also abides."

And the "Galilee" of our loved ones can also be found inside our own "Galilee". There's a deep place inside the heart, inside faith, hope, and charity, where everyone, living or deceased, is met.



Ron Rolheiser
San Antonio, Texas
November 1, 2015.
Website: www.ronrolheiser.com

WEBSITE

New Advent The Catholic Encyclopedia

<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/a.htm>

Teaching in a Catholic school, you are bound to come across names, terms and references that are unfamiliar to you. The Catholic Encyclopaedia at the above link is an inexhaustible source of information.



FROM...

[Aachen](#) - In French, Aix-la-Chapelle, the name by which the city is generally known; in Latin Aquae Grani, later Aquisgranum

[Aaron](#) - Brother of Moses, and High Priest of the Old Law

[Abaddon](#) - A Hebrew word signifying: ruin, destruction (Job 31:12); place of destruction; the Abyss, realm of the dead (Job 26:6; Proverbs 15:11)

[Abandonment](#) - A term used by writers of ascetical and mystical books to signify the first stage of the union of the soul with God by conforming to His Will

[Abba](#) - Aramaic word for father.....

...TO

[Zurbaran, Francisco](#) - Artist born in the suburb of Fuente de Cantos in Estramadure, on the boundaries of Andalusia, Nov., 1598

[Zurich](#) - The capital of the Swiss canton of the same name

[Zurla, Giacinto Placido](#) - Cardinal Vicar of Rome and writer on medieval geography, born at Legnano of noble parents (1769-1843)

[Zwettl](#) - Cistercian abbey in Austria

[Zwingli, Ulrich](#) - Founder of the Reformation in Switzerland, born at Wildhaus in Switzerland (1484-1531)

[Zwirner, Ernst Friedrich](#) - Architect born at Jakobsvalde in Silesia (1802-1861)

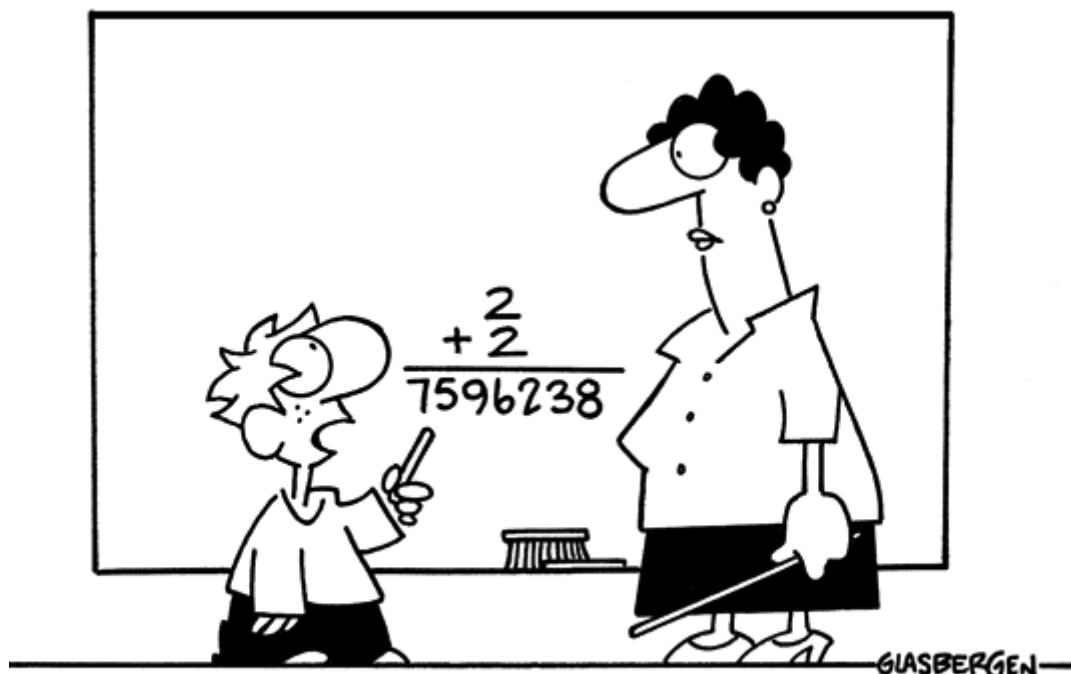
You can download this encyclopaedia together with other useful resources from this website for \$19.99. Click on the line below to follow the link

[get the full contents of this website as an instant download](#)

HUMOUR

How does this apply to Religious Education?

Copyright 2005 by Randy Glasbergen. www.glasbergen.com



“In an increasingly complex world, sometimes old questions require new answers.”

ARTICLE

Milestones in Modern Jewish-Christian Relations

(Compiled by Sr. Lucy Thorson, NDS and Murray Watson)



“... you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in ... to share the rich root of the olive tree ... remember that it is not you that support the root, but the root that supports you.”
(Romans 11:17-18)

Since the Second World War, the Catholic Church has been involved in a deliberate process of rethinking its relationship to Judaism and the Jewish people. Especially in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, Catholic-Jewish relations have improved tremendously on local, national and international levels.



Then Cardinal Jorge Bergoglio (now Pope Francis) lights the Hanukkah menorah

As several Jewish and Catholic leaders have noted, there have probably been more positive encounters between Jews and Catholics in the last sixty years than in the previous fifteen hundred. These years have been a time of renewal, hope and growing cooperation between these two faiths evidenced by the multitude of Catholic-Jewish dialogue groups, organizations and institutions that have emerged throughout the world since Vatican II.

The following listing of events provides a taste of how relations between Catholics and Jews have been changing and developing in recent decades - and this is a journey that has only just begun.

1947 Ten Points of Seelisberg

An international conference of Jews, Protestants and Catholics, gathered in Switzerland to confront the reality of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust, issues a series of ten principles to guide Christian teaching and preaching when referring to Jews and Judaism.

1959 Good Friday Prayer

Pope John XXIII modifies the intercessory prayer for the Jews in the Church's Good Friday liturgy by suppressing the term "perfidious (faithless, unbelieving) Jews." Over the years, the prayer continues to undergo revision to bring it more in keeping with the renewal in Church teaching about the Jews and Judaism.



1960 Pope John XXIII and Jules Isaac

Jules Isaac, a noted French Jewish historian, presents Pope John XXIII with historical documentation on Christian anti-Judaism and attitudes which contributed to the Holocaust.



1965 Nostra Aetate

Called by Pope John XXIII, the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) issues *Nostra Aetate* (The Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions.) *Nostra Aetate* No. 4 addresses the issue of Christian attitudes towards the Jewish people. This document marks the end of a long era in the history of Catholic - Jewish relations and the beginning of a new age of dialogue between the two ancient communities.

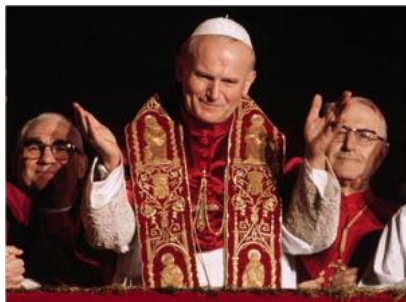
1974 New Vatican Commission

What was formerly the Office for Catholic- Jewish Relations - created in 1966 and attached to the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity - is renamed the Holy See's Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews.

1974 "Guidelines and Suggestions for Implementing the Conciliar Declaration *Nostra Aetate* (No. 4)"

This Vatican document proposes some concrete suggestions born of experience to help to promote in the life of the Church the attitudes towards the Jewish people articulated in the 1965 declaration *Nostra Aetate* No.4. In particular, this document encourages Christians to "acquire a better knowledge of the basic components of the religious tradition of

Judaism and to learn by what essential traits the Jews define themselves in light of their own religious experience.”



1978 Karol Wojtyla elected Pope

From the beginning of his twenty-six year pontificate, the newly elected Pope-John Paul II-sets out to build a new relationship between the Church and the Jewish people.

1980 Pope John Paul II - A Covenant Never Revoked

Addressing the Jewish community in Mainz, West Germany, John Paul II insists on the eternal validity of God's covenant with the Jews, a theme repeated in subsequent Church teachings.

1985 “Notes on the Correct Way to Present Jews and Judaism in Preaching and Catechesis in the Roman Catholic Church”

This Vatican document provides a helpful reference for those who teach and preach about Jews and Judaism and wish to do so in accord with the current teaching of the Church.



1986 Pope John Paul II Visits Rome Synagogue

John Paul II becomes the first Pope in history to visit Rome's chief synagogue. In his speech he reiterates the Second Vatican Council's condemnation of all discrimination toward the Jews and states: “The Jewish religion is not ‘extrinsic’ to us, but in a certain way is ‘intrinsic’ to our own religion. With Judaism therefore we have a relationship which we do not have with any other religion. You are our dearly beloved brothers and, in a certain way, it could be said that you are our elder brothers.”



1993 Israel - Vatican Accord

Israel and the Vatican establish full diplomatic ties, easing decades of diplomatic tensions between the two states.

1997 Vatican Symposium “Roots of Anti - Judaism in the Christian Milieu”

Addressing the symposium, John Paul II says, “In the Christian world ... erroneous and unjust interpretations of the New Testament regarding the Jewish people ... have circulated too long engendering feelings of hostility toward this people.”

1998 “We Remember: A Reflection on the Shoah”

In a long-awaited document on the Holocaust, the Church expresses repentance for those Christians who failed to oppose the Nazi persecution of the Jews.



2000 Visit of Pope John Paul II to Israel

Following a Lenten liturgy in which he prayed for God's forgiveness “for those who have caused these children [the Jews] to suffer” Pope John Paul II undertakes a historic visit to Israel, during which he visits Judaism's holiest site, the Western Wall, and places in the Wall a copy of his Lenten prayer

2000-2002 Historic scholarly documents

In 2000, an interdenominational group of Jewish scholars issues *Dabru Emet*, a consensus document offering eight suggestions about how Jews and Christians might better relate to one another. In 2002, the Christian Scholars Group on Christian-Jewish Relations publishes its response to *Dabru Emet*, entitled “A Sacred Obligation”.

2002 “The Jewish People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible”

The Pontifical Biblical Commission publishes a thorough study of the relationship between the New Testament and the Hebrew Scriptures. The document notes that Christians have much to learn from Jewish interpretation of the Bible and confronts the problem of anti-Jewish passages in the New Testament.

2002 Bilateral Commission of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate and the Holy See



As a result of Pope John Paul’s visit to the State of Israel in 2000, the Chief Rabbinate of Israel and the Holy See established a joint commission which has continued to meet annually, to address topics of shared concern, and to strengthen the relationship between the Vatican and the religious leadership of Israel. Together they have explored the role of Scripture in each faith’s central teachings, the sanctity of human life, freedom of conscience, reli-

gious education and other significant matters.

2005 Joseph Ratzinger elected Pope

As a cardinal, Pope Benedict had been a close collaborator with Pope John Paul II in many of his historic interfaith initiatives and writings. In his homily for the Mass inaugurating his papacy, the new Pope specifically mentioned the Jews among those to whom he extended greetings: “With great affection I also greet ... you, my brothers and sisters of the Jewish people, to whom we are joined by a great shared spiritual heritage, one rooted in God’s irrevocable promises”. His first official correspondence as Pope was a letter of congratulations to the Chief Rabbi-emeritus of Rome’s Great Synagogue, Dr. Elio Toaff, on the occasion of his 90th birthday.



2005-2010 Pope Benedict visits to three synagogues



In August 2005, as part of his pilgrimage to Germany for World Youth Day, the Pope visited the synagogue of Cologne, where he said: “We must come to know one another much more and much better. Consequently, I would encourage sincere and trustful dialogue between Jews and Christians ... Our rich common heritage and our fraternal and more trusting relations call upon us to join in giving an ever more harmonious witness”. On April 28, 2008, Pope Benedict was the guest of Rabbi Arthur Schneier and the congregation of Park East Synagogue. In his remarks, the Pope said: “I find it moving to recall that Jesus, as a young boy, heard the words of Scripture and prayed in a place such as this,” and he encouraged everyone present “to continue building bridges of friendship”. In January 2010, Pope Benedict marked Italy’s annual “Day for Judaism” by visiting the main synagogue of

Rome, repeating the historic visit first made by his predecessor. There, he invited Jews and Christians to come together to proclaim the religious and ethical teachings they share: “Reawakening in our society openness to the transcendent dimension, witnessing to the one God, is a precious service which Jews and Christians can offer together ... Bearing witness together to the supreme value of life against all selfishness, is an important contribution to a new world where justice and peace reign ...”.



2005 Papal recommitment to the vision of Nostra Aetate

On the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of Nostra Aetate’s promulgation, Pope Benedict wrote: “The Jewish-Christian dialogue must continue to enrich and deepen the bonds of friendship which have developed, while preaching and catechesis must be committed to ensuring that our mutual relations are presented in the light of the principles set forth by the Council”.

2007 Pope quotes Jewish rabbi-scholar in his own book about Jesus

In April, Pope Benedict published the first volume in a trilogy, “Jesus of Nazareth”. In it, he quotes extensively from a 1993 book by Rabbi Jacob Neusner, a distinguished scholar of Judaism, called A Rabbi Talks With Jesus.



2009 Visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Israel and the Palestinian Territories

From May 8 to 15, Pope Benedict visited the Holy Land, meeting with religious and political leaders in both Israel and the Palestinian Territories, visiting major Jewish sites and expressing the solidarity of the Catholic Church with the peoples of that region.

2009 International Council of Christians and Jews issues “A Time For Recommitment” (The Twelve Points of Berlin)

More than sixty years after the ICCJ published its seminal “Ten Points of Seelisberg,” the “Twelve Points of Berlin” is issued in July, as an attempt to address key topics in Jewish-Christian relations in the light of the considerable progress in this dialogue, and to provide guiding principles for the future.



2011 25th anniversary of Pope John Paul II’s Assisi Day of Prayer



On October 25, Pope Benedict reprised his predecessor’s historic interreligious gathering in Assisi, by inviting the world’s religious leaders to come together again, and to pray for peace in the world. Three hundred religious representatives accepted his invitation. In speaking of the shared religious aspiration of peace, Pope Benedict said: “We will continue to be united in this journey, in dialogue, in the daily building of peace and in our commitment to a better

world, a world in which every man and woman and every people can live in accordance with their own legitimate aspirations”.

2013 Historic Papal Transition

Pope Benedict XVI resigns the papacy on February 28. On March 13, Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio is elected as Pope Francis. One of the new Pope’s first acts is to send a message to Rome’s Jewish community, informing them of his election, and inviting their presence for his installation Mass.



It was quickly revealed that Pope Francis had a longstanding and warm relationship with Argentina’s Jewish community, and had published a book of his conversations with Rabbi Abraham Skorka, a close friend and colleague [in English: *On Heaven and Earth: Pope Francis on Faith, Family, and the Church in the Twenty-First Century*, 2013].

In April, Pope Francis accepts the invitation of visiting Israeli President Shimon Peres to come to Israel.

2014 Papal visit to the Holy Land

From May 24 to 26, Pope Francis pays his first papal visit to the Holy Land, visiting Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Territories, accompanied by his good friend Rabbi Abraham Skorka and Omar Abboud, a leader of the Muslim community in Argentina. The Pope’s visit was intended to promote a message of peace, reconciliation and interfaith dialogue. It also specifically marked the fiftieth anniversary of the historic visit of Pope Paul VI to Israel, when that Pope met Athenagoras, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople.

Pope Francis accepts the invitation of the Israeli government to visit the Holy Land. From May 24 to 26, the Pope visits key Biblical and historical sites in Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Territories, meets with Jewish religious and political leaders, and with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

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STORY

Kayla Mueller’s encounter with a suffering God

When Kayla Mueller’s death was confirmed earlier this week, statements from political leaders, including President Barack Obama and Gabrielle Giffords, offered litanies of the good

works performed by the 26-year-old captive of Islamic State militants.

After she graduated college in 2009, Kayla worked with humanitarian aid groups in northern India, Israel and Palestine.

She returned home to Arizona for one year, in 2011, spending her time at an HIV/AIDS clinic and volunteering at a women's shelter at night.



In 2012, the war in Syria and its resulting refugee crisis compelled Kayla to travel to the Syrian/Turkish border, where she worked with Support to Life and other humanitarian organizations. Her local Arizona newspaper chronicled her work with Syrian children. The article describes her playing, painting, and drawing with children in refugee camps and recounts an incident where she was able to reunite a man with a 6-year-old family member after a bombing.

"For as long as I live, I will not let this suffering be normal. [I will not let this be] something we just accept," Kayla told the reporter at the time. "It's important to stop and realize what we have, why we have it and how privileged we are." In August 2013, two months after that article was published, Kayla was kidnapped as she was en route to catch a bus to Turkey after leaving a hospital in Aleppo.

Since the announcement of her death, a common refrain has been that Kayla did more in her 26 years than many do in a lifetime. That certainly is true. But I also believe that Kayla was able to grasp a deeper understanding of God than most people do during their lifetimes.

That truth became clear in the statement released by Kayla's family soon after the world learned about her death. Their brief statement begins with a quote

from a letter that Kayla wrote to her father on his birthday in 2011:

"I find God in the suffering eyes reflected in mine. If this is how you are revealed to me, this is how I will forever seek you. I will always seek God. Some people find God in church. Some people find God in nature. Some people find God in love; I find God in suffering. I've known for some time what my life's work is, using my hands as tools to relieve suffering."

Kayla was no more than 23 years old when she wrote those words. To encounter God in joy, peace, and love is its own spiritual gift, but to see God's face in the eyes of those who suffer unspeakable violence and desolation is a charisma that is rare at any age. I'm not sure that even great spiritual writers like Dorothy Day and Elie Wiesel came to such a realization about God in their early 20s.

I'm not sure which Christian denomination Kayla was from, and it doesn't matter. In what little writing we have of hers, she demonstrates that she truly understood the Gospel that Jesus was trying to preach to all of us.

From what little we know of her life in captivity, it is clear she tried to practice one of Jesus' most challenging teachings: "Love your enemies." She did not treat her captors with hostility. The Guardian reports that Kayla, in fact, "tried to teach her guards crafts, including origami."

"She did ordinary things in extraordinary measure," said Kathleen Day, head of United Christian Ministry at Northern Arizona University, where Kayla was a student.

I have little doubt she also prayed for those who were persecuting her.

If anyone had a reason to be angry with Islamic fundamentalists, it would have been Kayla, but in a letter she wrote to her family from prison in August 2013, she shows not a shred of bias or hate.

Any resentment she harbors seems directed at herself for the pain she has caused her family. "I will never ask you to forgive me as I do not deserve forgiveness," she wrote.

If anyone had a reason to curse fate, it would have been Kayla. But she does not complain or wallow in self-pity. Instead, she is entirely self-giving. "If you could say I have 'suffered' at all throughout this whole experience it is only in knowing how much suffering I have put you all through," the letter states.

Kayla did not know if she would face death when she wrote that letter to her family, but her words suggest an experience of God that one often sees in other imprisoned would-be martyrs, like the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. She wrote:

"I remember mom always telling me that all in all in the end the only one you really have is God. I have come to a place in experience where, in every sense of the word, I have surrendered myself to our creator b/c literally there was no else ... + by God + by your prayers I have felt tenderly cradled in freefall."

In an especially powerful demonstration of spiritual maturity, Kayla does not suggest that God somehow wills all of this suffering or that suffering has some higher purpose. Instead, she sees the darkness surrounding her for what it is and summons up the strength and vision to find grace in it:

"I have been shown in darkness, light + have learned that even in prison, one can be free. I am grateful. I have come to see that there is good in every situation, sometimes we just have to look for it."

The circumstances of Kayla's death remain uncertain. But regardless of wheth-

er her demise ultimately was caused by the dark forces of religious fundamentalism or retaliatory violence, there is little doubt that her death should be considered a martyrdom. Kayla's faith inspired her to take great risks to love the afflicted, heal the wounded, and comfort the exiled. Her deep desire to be a force for good in a shattered place led to her capture and death.

Over the past several decades, a perverse form of Christianity has emerged in American culture: a Christianity that conflates the glorification of God and guns, that incites the hatred of Muslims, that sees wealth and power as signs of God's blessings. Kayla's understanding of God and her way of practicing Christianity are much-needed antidotes to these aberrations.

Kayla's Christian faith, I think, speaks to generations of people disaffected by Christianity, who are wearied by the unseemly connections between religion and politics and are even wearier of the narrow, divisive understanding of God peddled by so many churches.

This week, many people have been inspired by Kayla's work and her courage. But I hope they will also be inspired by her words, which reveal a radical encounter with a suffering God. I hope they will be moved by the profound spirituality of this young woman, whose extraordinary deeds arose out of her longing to see the face of God in the eyes of the most marginalized in our world.

[Jamie L. Manson is NCR books editor. She received her Master of Divinity degree from Yale Divinity School, where she studied Catholic theology and sexual ethics. Her email address is jmanson@ncronline.org.]

LOCAL NEWS

Meditation Seminars

Teaching Meditation to Children

Presenters



At the suggestion of Fr Laurence Freeman, current leader of the World Community for Christian Meditation (WCCM), Dr Cathy Day and Mr Ernie Christie of Catholic Education, Townsville, Australia, were invited to South Africa to share their story and experience with teachers in Catholic schools. Both have been intimately involved in a 10-year project in their home diocese, introducing and supporting meditation in 31 schools. On the basis of their experience they have been invited to run seminars far and wide - in the USA, Ireland, UK, Poland, Singapore, Indonesia and at

home across Australia.

Seminars

The nine seminars which took place in Durban, Pretoria, Johannesburg, Bloemfontein and Cape Town, comprised the following elements:

1. The Townsville story: A brief explanation as to how Christian Meditation has been developed and embedded into Catholic school prayer practice across a system of Catholic schools
2. What is Christian Meditation? A video, *Learning to Be* with testimonies from teachers and students in the Townsville diocese
3. Experience of the practice
4. Exploration of key concepts
5. A second video, *Teaching Children to Meditate*, illustrating ways of implementing the practice in schools
6. A look to the future - what shall I do?

The attendance - 550 - overall was reasonable and encouraging, though a little below the hopes of the organisers who were aiming to cover the costs of the seminars which included airfares from Australia, internal travel and accommodation, catering, and the hire of venues in some instances.

Feedback

The following email messages were received subsequent to the seminars. They

Fri 2015/10/02 11:38 AM

Thank you for the Teaching Meditation Seminar on Tuesday. The experience has stayed with us all week and my niece who came with us and who is suffering from a breakdown with panic attacks and has not been able to sleep for weeks had a full night's sleep with no sleeping pills on Tuesday night. Alleluia!

Yours sincerely....Johannesburg

Wed 2015/09/30 07:49 AM

Thank you so much for putting together the exciting course yesterday on Christian Meditation. I am looking forward to adding it to the RE programme I cover with my Grade 4 - 6s at St Teresa's and eventually introducing it next year as whole school meditation as part of our assembly time. Please could I order a chime from you, and could you let me know what the most suitable form of payment would be.

Many thanks
SS, LO and RE Teacher, Grades 4 - 6,

Sat 2015/09/26 12:35 PM

Many of you may have not even noticed this event or meant to enquire and then forgot...



Last night we attended "A WAY TO PEACE: TEACHING MEDITATION TO CHILDREN" (& Contemplative Prayer) presented by Dr Cathy Day & Ernie Christie of Catholic Education, Townsville (Australia) in our Parish Hall. (The CWL served an amazing finger food supper and refreshments - most appreciated!)

Well we were quite blown away and wish everyone could have had attended and had this knowledge imparted to them; the focus is on children but we are all in need of this (His) way to balance our lives and find the true peace that Christ intends - not only for ourselves personally but also for shining His Light & Peace

in this frenetic world. The testimonies from the children and adults alike were so encouraging and insightful as well. So heart-warming to see them and the results in action.

A 2½ hr life changing event. Very easy to understand and absorb, presented so interestingly! We cannot emphasise enough how valuable this teaching is. Take off work/arrange a babysitter - just do whatever you have to - to get there!!

There will possibly be a Meditation Group at St Charles' in the not too distant future. It was suggested and is being looked into.

If only all the teachers, psychologists and other 'professionals' would also learn and do this; then impart these God given ways to deal with our collective stress and ADD and many other dysfunctions of our day. (You'll see why if you go along!)

Additional helping literature/resources and pamphlets are given, plus a valuable booklet "Christian Meditation YOUR DAILY PRACTICE" is available for R20.

Thu 2015/09/24 03:33 PM

Thank you for bringing Ernie and Cathy to Durban on 21 September. I managed to encourage all the Pre-Primary and Junior Prep teachers to attend and booked long in advance. They all embraced the experience and have been enjoying trying out Christian Meditation in their classes over the last two days. The children have responded positively already and have been asking the teachers each day to give them time for this.

Kind regards... HOD: Junior Prep

What of the Future?

Participants were invited at the conclusion of the seminar to indicate on a form which of the following services from CIE they might be interested in:

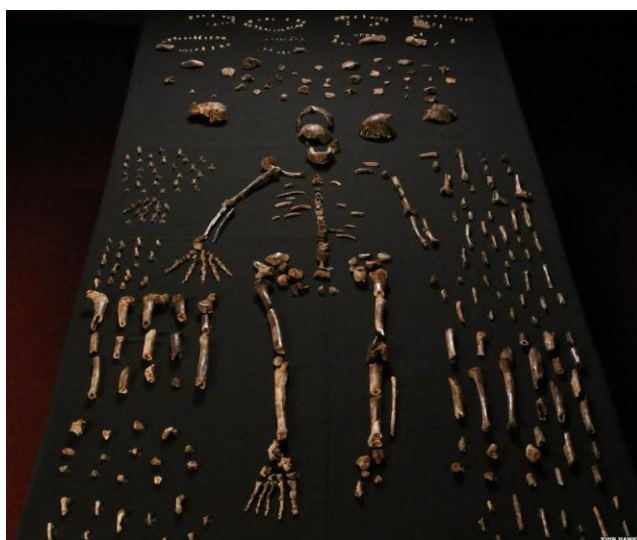
- Introductory workshops for teachers and/or parents
- Supporting materials for the implementation of meditation
- Regular printed materials and newsletters for enrichment
- Courses for teachers of meditation

143 replies were received and these are being processed with a view to devising a follow-up strategy for 2016 and beyond.

New human-like species discovered in S Africa

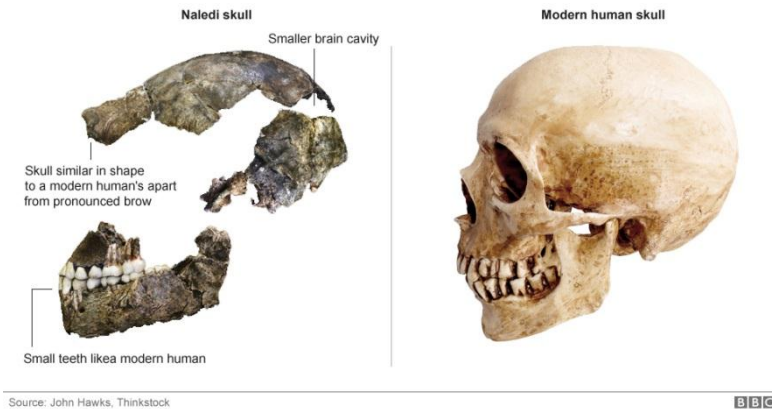
By Pallab Ghosh Science correspondent, BBC News, Johannesburg
10 September 2015

(Extract - for the full article go to <http://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-34192447>)



Scientists have discovered a new human-like species in a burial chamber deep in a cave system in South Africa. The discovery of 15 partial skeletons is the largest single discovery of its type in Africa. The researchers claim that the discovery will change ideas about our human ancestors. The studies which have been published in the journal *Elife* also indicate that these individuals were capable of ritual behaviour. The species, which has been named *naledi*, has been classified in the grouping, or genus, *Homo*, to which modern humans belong.

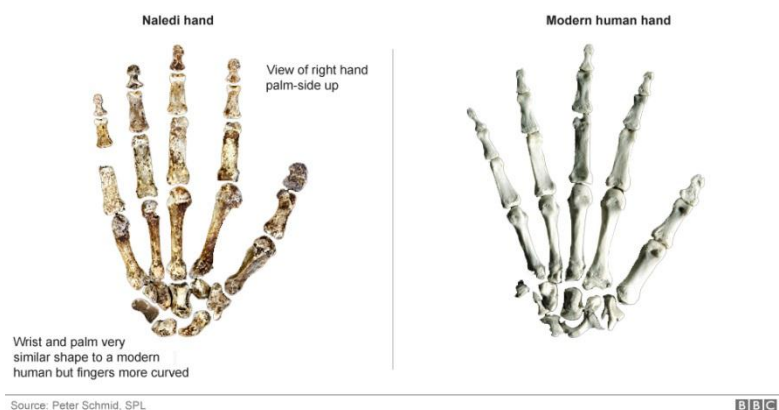
The researchers who made the find have not been able to find out how long ago these creatures lived - but the scientist who led the team, Prof Lee Berger, told BBC News that he believed they could be among the first of our kind (*genus Homo*) and could have lived in Africa up to three million years ago. Like all those working in the field, he is at pains to avoid the term "missing link". Prof Berger says *naledi* could be thought of as a "bridge" between more primitive bipedal primates and humans. "We'd gone in with the idea of re-



covering one fossil. That turned into multiple fossils. That turned into the discovery of multiple skeletons and multiple individuals. "And so by the end of that remarkable 21-day experience, we had discovered the largest assemblage of fossil human relatives ever discovered in the history of the continent of Africa. That was an extraordinary experience."

Prof Chris Stringer of the Natural History Museum said *naledi* was "a very important discovery". "What we are seeing is more and more species of creatures that suggests that nature was experimenting with how to evolve humans, thus giving rise to several different types of human-like creatures originating in parallel in different parts of Africa. Only one line eventually survived to give rise to us," he told BBC News. I went to see the bones which are kept in a secure room at Witwatersrand University. The door to the room looks like one that would seal a bank vault. As Prof Berger turned the large lever on the door, he told me that our knowledge of very early humans is based on partial skeletons and the occasional skull.

The haul of 15 partial skeletons includes both males and females of varying ages - from infants to elderly. The discovery is unprecedented in Africa and will shed more light on how the first humans evolved. "We are going to know everything about this species," Prof Berger told me as we walked over to the remains of *H. naledi*. "We are going to know when its children were weaned, when they were born, how they developed, the speed at which they developed, the difference between males and females at every developmental stage from infancy, to childhood to teens to how they aged and how they died."



A chronology of human evolution

Ardipithecus ramidus (4.4 million years ago) : Fossils were discovered in Ethiopia in the 1990s. Pelvis shows adaptations to both tree climbing and upright walking.

Australopithecus afarensis (3.9 - 2.9 million years ago) : The famous "Lucy" skeleton belongs to this species of human relative. So far, fossils of this species have only been found in East Africa. Several traits in the skeleton suggest *afarensis* walked upright, but they may have spent some time in the trees.

Homo habilis (2.8 - 1.5 million years ago) : This human relative had a slightly larger braincase and smaller teeth than the australopithecines or older species, but retains many more primitive features such as long arms.

Homo naledi (Of unknown age, but researchers say it could be as old as three million years) : The new discovery has small, modern-looking teeth, human-like feet but more primitive fingers and a small braincase.

Homo erectus (1.9 million years - unknown): *Homo erectus* had a modern body plan that was almost indistinguishable from ours. But it had a smaller brain than a modern person's combined with a more primitive face.

Homo neanderthalensis (200,000 years - 40,000 years) The Neanderthals were a side-group to modern humans, inhabiting western Eurasia before our species left Africa. They were shorter and more muscular than modern people but had slightly larger brains.

Homo sapiens (200,000 years - present) Modern humans evolved in Africa from a predecessor species known as *Homo heidelbergensis*. A small group of *Homo sapiens* left Africa 60,000 years ago and settled the rest of the world, replacing the other human species they encountered (with a small amount of interbreeding).

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

Synod on the Family (4-25 October)

Pope, closing synod, calls for more open-hearted Church

VATICAN CITY | BY [PHILIP PULLELLA](#)

Pope Francis closed a contentious bishops' meeting on family issues on Sunday calling for a more open-hearted, compassionate Church rooted in people's lives and not a programmatic, arid one that fears changes and challenges.

At the end of the three week gathering, the bishops agreed to a qualified opening toward divorcees who have remarried outside the Church and currently cannot receive communion.

But the final document effectively side-stepped the issue of whether the Church should use more welcoming language towards homosexuals - a topic that threw a preliminary meeting into turmoil a year ago.

On Saturday, the pope excoriated Church leaders who he said sometimes bury their heads in the sand and hide behind rigid doctrine while families suffer..

The overall results appeared to be a qualified victory for Francis, who is the final arbiter and will now write his own major document on family issues.

"A faith that does not know how to root itself in the life of people remains arid and, rather than oases, creates other deserts," he said on Sunday.

The pope has stressed since his election in 2013 that the 1.2 billion-member Church should be open to change, side with the poor and rid itself of the pomp and stuffiness that has alienated so many Catholics.

The synod avoided the very real possibility of ending in a total deadlock on some issues but the fact that conservatives came very close to defeating the articles on divorcees underscored the deep divisions that remain in its wake.

The conservative Voice of the Family group said the meeting had left a "a crisis of trust" between the faithful and Church leaders over the opening to divorcees, which it said would lead to "the scandalizing of the faithful, not least our children and grandchildren."

Father Tom Reese, a progressive analyst for the National Catholic Reporter, said that the synod was a defeat for "those

(conservatives) who wanted to emphasize the law over mercy, who were opposed to any changes in Church practice."

COMPASSION

The pope continued his theme of a more compassionate, more listening Church in his Sunday homily of a Mass with the bishops in St. Peter's Basilica.

He weaved his comments around the Bible story of Jesus stopping to restore sight to a blind man while his apostles had not been moved by the man's cries.

"This can be a danger for us: in the face of constant problems, it is better to move



Pope Francis leads a mass to mark the closure of the synod on the family in Saint Peter's Basilica at the Vatican, October 25, 2015.

on, instead of letting ourselves be bothered ... our hearts are not open," Francis said at the Mass, attended by the synod's 270 bishops.

He said Church leaders needed to beware "a scheduled faith" where everything was programmed, and a condescending point of view where "whoever bothers us or is not of our stature is excluded".

The pope's tough speech on Saturday night was the latest in a series of his admonitions to his bishops to be more flexible and merciful without changing basic doctrine.

In it, he appeared to criticize the ultra-conservatives who nearly derailed some of the synod's openings.

He said the synod had "laid bare the closed hearts which frequently hide even behind the Church's teachings or good intentions, in order to sit in the chair of Moses and judge, sometimes with superiority and superficiality, difficult cases and wounded families".

(Reporting By Philip Pullella; Editing by Ros Russell)

The World Parliament of Religions (15-19 October)



Dear Friends,
Wow.

If you were there you already know it: it was simply amazing.

The major news reports are echoing what people keep telling me. "This was the best Parliament ever!"



It was a milestone:

- Nearly 10,000 participants
- It was the first women's assembly
- It was the first live streamed Parliament: 28,000 views there
- The largest number of programs with 1,800 presenters
- The largest number of exhibitors and films including Oprah's Belief
- The original documents of Gandhi and pieces of art in the cultural hall
- The first Mayor's panel on compassionate cities along with the first panel of police chiefs
- Imam of Mecca for the first time attended the Parliament

And who says there is no free lunch in America, Sikhs came with kirpan and conquered the Parliament by sharing their langar tradition all five days.

People were saying "thank you" and "congratulations," but their lit faces were way ahead of their words. They meant every word of it. Spirits were simply uplifting.

My heart is filled with gratitude for each of you who attended or made it possible.

The Charter for Compassion and the United Religions Initiative stood with us from day one when we announced the Parliament in Salt Lake City. The Salt Lake Interfaith Roundtable converted a Parliament venue, for the first time, into a sacred space and organized a beautiful night of Sacred Music in the Salt Lake Tabernacle.

Thank you to our hosts with the most: the Utah Governor's Office, two mayors- Ralph Becker and Ben McAdams, and Visit Salt Lake. The Rotary, the State of Utah, KAICCID and Claremont Lincoln University stepped up as major sponsors of the 2015 Parliament. These generous gifts afforded our producing much of the work which went into this event, gave us a Golden Banquet, and helped multiple speakers make the journey to the Parliament.

It was sincerely a joy for me to announce that:

- women and young people under 30 made up just more than 65 percent of participants at the 2015 Parliament!
- The majority of all emcees were women

I was honored to open the Parliament following the extraordinary procession of the indigenous peoples of Utah with the following words:

With the permission of the indigenous community, the original people of this land, on behalf of the board, with love in my heart, compassion in my mind and smiles on our faces, to reclaim the heart of our humanity, I declare this 6th Parliament of the World's Religions open.

And people kept their smiles on all five days long, although there were a lot of tears at heartfelt moments.

An executive team of fantastic women led efforts for the past year to bring it all together from Utah. Hundreds of volunteers were lined up each day at dawn to help our guests from around the world make their way to the hundreds of surprises awaiting every corner of the convention center.

And let's not forget the team of the Salt Palace, who were with us at every step to welcome the global interfaith movement, making special accommodations in respect to our diversity and unique requests.

I also want to give a resounding personal thanks to a beautiful Parliament staff that gave immeasurable energy, talent and time to make this event all it became: Stephen Avino, Lindsay Bartolini, Rayna Burke, Chelsea Canada, Amali Dabarera, Geoff Doiron, Michael Donahue, Dr. Larry Greenfield, Debbie Holstein, Molly Horan, Nafia Khan, Mendel Kranz, Donna Lake, Dr. Mary Nelson, Tracy Nicholas, Daniel Pacheco, Miriam Quezada, Sara Rahim, Brian Savage, Austin Sisson, Rangie Sin, Jacob Smyth, Susan Soleil, Haley St. Paul, Daniel Wolff, and volunteers who gave time to help out, including Chair Emeriti Howard Sulkin, Bob Thompson, and some great guys named Ted Miller and Frank Imhoff.

Chairing the 2015 Parliament of the World's Religions is a memory I will forever treasure.

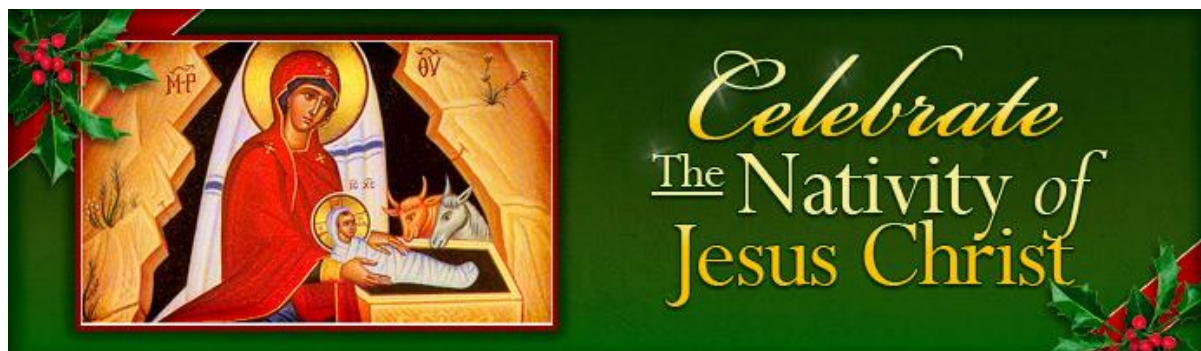
Thank you so much for your faith in the Parliament of the World's Religions.

Now let us get to work with the commitments we made. If you haven't signed the declarations, [what are you waiting for?](#)

In Peace,



Imam Abdul Malik Mujahid
Board Chair Parliament of the World's Religions



Professional Society of Religious Educators