



# The periodical of the Professional Society of Religious Educators

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## EDITORIAL



Welcome to the fourth issue of *Roots & Wings* for 2016. Again we offer a variety of articles, newsbytes and resources as an invitation to reflect on classroom practice and to try out new approaches.

We hope you enjoy the issue.

PAUL FALLER

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# REFLECTION

## Strangers Can Bring God's Revelation

(Ron Rolheiser)

There is a tradition within Christianity, strong in Scripture and in the early church but now sadly in danger of dying, of welcoming the stranger.

In the early church there was a custom of welcoming the strangers with the belief that they, being foreigners, were specially privileged in their capacity to bring new promise and fresh revelation from God. It was with this in mind that the author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote: "In welcoming strangers some of you have entertained angels without knowing it."

Thus, every family was encouraged to set aside a room in its house to serve as a guest room, a room within which strangers could be welcomed and hospitality shown to them.

In Scripture, God's promise, revelation, and new truth are most often brought not through what's familiar or through those whom we know and who are like us, but through a stranger or an angel (an angel being even more foreign than a stranger). Thus, for instance, we see: Sarah and Abraham receive the promise of a son not from a family member, a neighbor or the local doctor, but from a stranger who has wandered in to their camp at night and to whom they have shown hospitality. Jacob meets God by wrestling with a stranger. Christ is visited in the crib not by the Jewish rulers but by the Magi, strange foreign kings. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, the wounded man is helped not by his own kinsfolk and those who were of his own religion, but by a Samaritan, a stranger. With the stranger lies surprise, new possibility, contact with that part of God and reality that we have never experienced before.

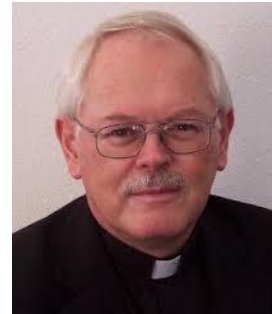
Why is that? Would it not be more logical, and indeed in line with the principles of the incarnation, that God should speak to us most deeply through that which is familiar to us?

The familiar is important. In the end, the real test of charity is our own family. Charity begins at home. However, precisely because it is home, it is not the place where we are often surprised. It is too familiar and because it is so familiar it is also not the place where we are likely to have our hearts stretched. God is not familiar. God is other. Accordingly, those who are other to us, strangers, are in a privileged position to reveal God to us.

As Parker Palmer puts it: "The role of the stranger in our lives is vital in the context of Christian faith, for the God of faith is one who continually speaks truth afresh, who continually makes all things new. God persistently challenges conventional truth and regularly upsets the world's way of looking at things.

"It is no accident that this God is so often represented by the stranger, for the truth that God speaks in our lives is very strange indeed. Where the world sees impossibility, God sees potential. Where the world sees comfort, God sees idolatry. Where the world sees insecurity, God sees occasions for faith. Where the world sees death, God proclaims life.

"God uses the stranger to shake us from our conventional points of view, to remove the scales of worldly assumptions from our eyes. God is a stranger to us, and it is at the risk of



missing God’s truth that we domesticate God, reduce God to the role of familiar friend.” (The Company of Strangers, p. 59).

There is a double challenge in that: The first has to do with racism, sexism, provincialism and sectarianism of all sorts. Invariably we are afraid of, and unwelcoming to, strangers—be they different vis-a-vis race, color, creed, gender or sexual orientation. We fear what is different from ourselves. We are comfortable only with our own.

However, within our circles much of the otherness of God cannot be revealed. Within familiar circles, good as these might be, there is too little in the way of promise, of newness. God can speak only a limited word here.

Nothing is impossible with God, but that is only true when we move outside of our own circles. Like Jacob, we must wrestle in the dust with the stranger. Who knows? The person who puts out your hip might well be God!

But we must welcome the stranger in another way too. In a world and in a church polarized by competing ideologies and torn by factionalism, we must welcome the stranger, show hospitality to, those who are different from ourselves: Conservatives must welcome liberals and liberals must welcome conservatives. We are strange to each other.

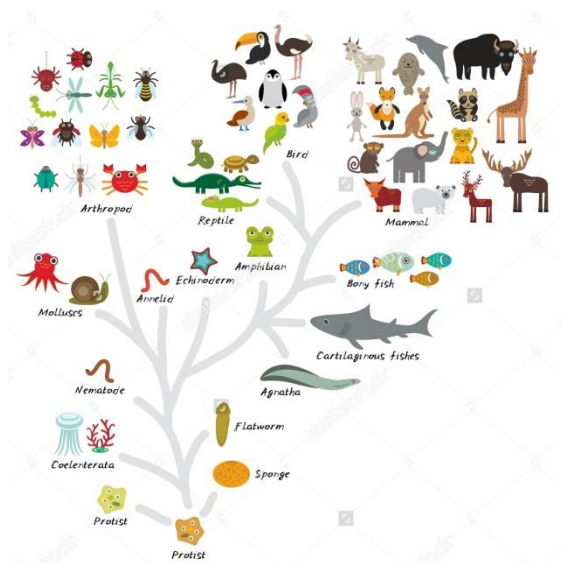
Feminists must welcome those who are afraid of them, and those who are afraid of feminism must welcome feminists. The same is true between pro-life and prochoice. In welcoming the stranger, in showing real hospitality to those who seem foreign to us, whom we do not understand, we are given the opportunity to hear new promise, to hear a fuller revelation of God.

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## REFLECTION

### Evolution’s Ultimate Wisdom

(Ron Rolheiser)



Evolution, Charles Darwin famously stated, works through the *survival of the fittest*. Christianity, on the other hand, is committed to the *survival of the weakest*. But how do we square our Christian ideal of making a preferential option for the weak with evolution?

Nature is evolutionary and, inside of that, we can perceive a wisdom that clearly manifests intelligence, intent, spirit, and design. And perhaps nowhere is this more evident than how in the process of

evolution we see nature becoming ever-more unified, complex, and conscious.

However, how God's intelligence and intent are reflected inside of that is not always evident because nature can be so cruel and brutal. In order to survive, every element in nature has to be cannibalistic and eat other parts of nature. Only the fittest get to survive. There's a harsh cruelty in that. In highlighting how cruel and unfair nature can be, commentators often cite the example of the second pelican born to white pelicans. Here's how cruel and unfair is its situation:

Female white pelicans normally lay two eggs, but they lay them several days apart so that the first chick hatches several days before the second chick. This gives the first chick a head-start and by the time the second chick hatches, the first chick is bigger and stronger. It then acts aggressively towards the second chick, grabbing its food and pushing it out of the nest. There, ignored by its mother, the second chick normally dies of starvation, despite its efforts to find its way back into the nest. Only one in ten second chicks survives. And here's nature's cruel logic in this: That second chick is hatched by nature as an insurance-policy, in case the first chick is weak or dies. Barring that, it is doomed to die, ostracized, hungry, blindly grasping for food and its mother's attention as it starves to death. But this cruelty works as an evolutionary strategy. White pelicans have survived for thirty million years, but at the cost of millions of its own species dying cruelly.

A certain intelligence is certainly evident in this, but where is the compassion? Did a compassionate God really design this? The intelligence in nature's strategy of the survival of the fittest is clear. Each species, unless unnaturally interfered with from the outside, is forever producing healthier, more robust, more adaptable members. Such, it seems, is nature's wisdom and design - up to a point.

Certain scientists such as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin suggest that physical evolution has reached its apex, its highest degree of unity, complexity and consciousness, inside the central nervous system and brain of the human person and that evolution has now taken a leap (just as it did when consciousness leapt out of raw biology and as it did when self-consciousness leapt out of simple consciousness) so that now meaningful evolution is no longer about gaining further physical strength and adaptability. Rather meaningful evolution is now concerned with the social and the spiritual, that is, with social and spiritual strength.

And in a Christian understanding of things, this means that meaningful evolution is now about human beings using their self-consciousness to turn back and help nature to protect and nurture its second pelicans. Meaningful evolution now is no longer about having the strong grow stronger, but about having the weak, that part of nature that nature herself, to this point, has not been able to nurture, grow strong.

Why? What's nature's interest in the weak? Why shouldn't nature be happy to have the weak weeded out? Does God have an interest in the weak that nature does not?

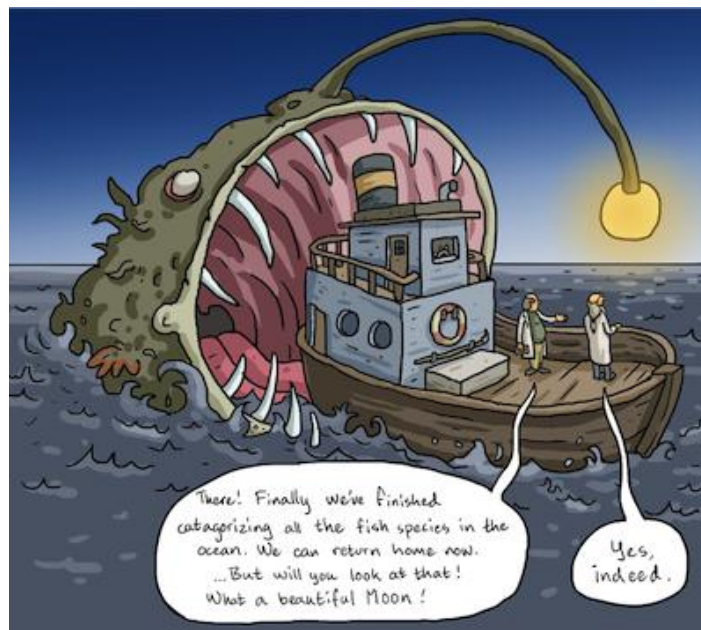
No, nature too is very interested in the survival of the weak and is calling upon the help of human beings to bring this about. Nature is interested in the survival of the weak because vulnerability and weakness bring something to nature that is absent when it is only concerned with the survival of the fittest and with producing ever-stronger, more robust, and more adaptable species and individuals. What the weak add to nature are character and compassion, which are the central ingredients needed to bring about unity, complexity, and consciousness at the social and spiritual level.

When God created human beings at the beginning of time, God charged them with the responsibility of “dominion”, of ruling over nature. What’s contained in that mandate is not an order or permission to dominate over nature and use nature in whatever fashion we desire. The mandate is rather that of “watching over”, of tending the garden, of being wise stewards, and of helping nature do things that, in its unconscious state, it cannot do, namely, protect and nurture the weak, the second pelicans.

The second-century theologian, Irenaeus, once famously said: *The glory of God is the human being fully alive!* In our own time, Gustavo Gutierrez, generally credited with being the father of Liberation Theology, recast that dictum to say: *The glory of God is the poor person fully alive!*” And that is as well the ultimate glory of nature.

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## HUMOUR





## WEBSITE

### The Religion Teacher

<http://www.thereligionteacher.com/>



The Religion Teacher provides practical resources and teaching strategies to help religious educators transform the lives of the young people they teach.

As religion teachers or catechists, we need practical resources and teaching strategies to help us meet our students' greatest needs. They need our help. They need us to be the best teachers and catechists we can be.

Whether you are a veteran teacher or have no educational background at all,

you will find the [practical resources](#), [activities](#), [lesson plans](#), [prayers](#), and [teaching strategies](#) at The Religion Teacher to be great supplements to your work in Religious Education.

A sample of the resources available on this website is featured below. See 'Beatitudes Activities: 11 Teaching Ideas for Religious Educators'.

## RESOURCE

### Beatitudes Activities: 11 Teaching Ideas for Religious Educators

<http://www.thereligionteacher.com/beatitudes-activities/>



One of the most commonly requested topics from teachers, catechists, and fans of The Religion Teacher has been the Beatitudes. I cannot believe this is the first time I've ever written or created something about this important set of teachings of Christ. I took a little time and did some brainstorming on all of the different ways I might teach the Beatitudes to young people today. Here are a few of my favorite Beatitude activity ideas from my list.

#### 1. Rewrite the Beatitudes in your own words.

Similar to the [Ten Commandments activity](#) ([link](#)), students will be able to come to a deeper understanding of what each beatitude means if they

are able to paraphrase what Jesus actually said. You will have to do some work to define and explain terms like meek, poor in spirit, righteousness, etc. (Download a worksheet for this activity. See below.)

## **2. Create hand motions for each beatitude.**

It is very likely that in order to teach the Beatitudes, you want them to memorize or at least come to understand what they mean when reading them. One way to accomplish both tasks is to create hand motions and gestures to help remember and understand each one. For example, the students could make crying gestures for “mourn” and rub their stomachs for “hunger and thirst for righteousness.” Give them the opportunity to come up with the gestures and hand motions to help them remember them.

## **3. Draw a symbol next to each beatitude.**

If you give the students a print out of the Beatitudes, have them draw a symbol or icon next to each one to help them remember what they are and what they mean. For example, they might draw a heart for “Blessed are the clean of heart” and the peace sign for “Blessed are the peacemakers.” They could draw a shouting face for “Blessed are you when they insult you...” They could even pick out and draw some “emojis” to go along with each Beatitude. (Download a worksheet for this activity. See below.)

## **4. Match the Beatitudes.**

Split each Beatitude into two parts and use the [Matching Game Template](#) to create cards to use in centres or as practice at the students’ desks. Save some time for creating the cards in class. It takes a little while to cut out the pieces and colour the backs to make sure you are matching the beginning of each Beatitude to its end.

## **5. Compare and contrast the Beatitudes and the Ten Commandments.**

Using a [Venn Diagram](#), have the students compare and contrast the Beatitudes with the Ten Commandments. Have them label one circle “Beatitudes” and the other circle “Ten Commandments” and give them Bibles or written copies of them. Allow the students to be creative in the things they write down as differences and similarities, but challenge them to think deeply about the meaning of the words in each set of precepts.

## **6. Create a Beatitudes collage.**

Gather magazines and give them to the students to cut out clippings to make a collage for all or just one of the Beatitudes. It might be best to assign each student one Beatitude and have them present the collage to the class. Post the collages on the walls when they are finished. (Download a worksheet for this activity. See below.)

## **7. Create a Beatitudes journal.**

Have the students pick one Beatitude each day and write about how they lived it throughout the day. Make it an ongoing project and ask them to share their experiences along the way. If they are really committed to it and doing each Beatitude on the same day, commit yourself to living it with them and praying for them to live each Beatitude to its fullest each day.

## **8. Match a Beatitude to a famous person.**

Once the students have a good understanding of what each Beatitude means, give them some time to think of a famous person who exemplifies each Beatitude. If you have some extra time, have them copy out or cut out pictures of these famous people and paste them on on a sheet of paper or worksheet with all of the Beatitudes. (Download a worksheet for this activity. See below.)

## 9. Match a Beatitude to a character in a book or movie.

In the last idea, the students matched the Beatitudes to a real and well-known person. In this version of the activity, the students think of fictional characters that exemplify each Beatitude from books and movies. Like the last idea, have them copy and paste pictures onto a separate document as a part of this activity. (Download a worksheet for this activity. See below.)

## 10. Rewrite “happy” instead of “blessed” and discuss.

It’s commonly said that what Jesus meant when he said “Blessed are . . .” is really “Happy are . . .” This changes the perspective on the Beatitudes because it shows that living each one not only results in a blessing, but it makes a person happy and joyful about life. This is a great way to counteract the impression that doing what is right has to be hard.

## 11. Pray with the Beatitudes.

Start your [class prayer](#) with the Beatitudes. Turn each one into a prayer. For example:  
*Lord, make me poor in spirit, so I can receive the kingdom of heaven.*  
*Lord, when I mourn, help me find comfort.*  
*Lord, make me meek, so that I may inherit the land.*  
*Lord, help me to hunger and thirst for righteousness, so I may be satisfied.*  
etc. (Download a printable handout with these prayers. See below.)

If you want to save yourself some time and just download some printable Beatitudes handouts and use them right away, click on the link below and enter your email address:

### Get the Beatitudes Worksheets

This download includes the following printable Beatitudes worksheets:

- Rewriting the Beatitudes Worksheet
- Beatitudes Symbols Worksheet
- Beatitudes Collage Worksheet
- The Beatitudes of a Famous Person Worksheet
- The Beatitudes of Fictional Characters Worksheet
- A Beatitudes Prayer Handout

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## ARTICLE

### Understanding Islam: A Guide for Catholic Educators (Part 1)

Document of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs in conjunction with the 2013 Mid-Atlantic Catholic-Muslim Dialogue.



*This document was produced by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs in conjunction with the 2013 Mid-Atlantic Muslim-Catholic Dialogue. It is the fruit of many years of collaborative effort by Catholic and Muslim scholars of the USCCB’s Mid-Atlantic Catholic-Muslim dialogue. It is primarily intended to serve as a basic introduction for Catholic educators who are tasked with teaching the rudiments of Islam to students at the secondary school level, as well as parish*



leaders responsible for general adult religious education programs—a first-look, if you will, at Islam for students. The Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the USCCB is most grateful to all of the dialogue members for their tireless efforts to bring this document to fruition, and most especially to Dr. Sandra Keating, the principal author. After consulting this document, we would encourage readers to consider Dr. Keating’s more advanced essay “What Catholics Should Know About Islam” which includes for those who wish to deepen their understanding of Islam a helpful list of titles for further reading on the topic. This last work is published by The Knights of Columbus and found here: <http://www.kofc.org/un/en/resources/cis/cis317.pdf>.

## Introduction

Today we are bombarded with conflicting versions of Muslims and Islam in the media. This guide is intended to help all people involved in catechesis and education in the Roman Catholic Church to present Islam accurately and in ways that preserve and promote “together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare, as well as peace and freedom” (*Nostra Aetate* 3). In spite of the many conflicts and hostilities that have arisen between Muslims and Christians over the centuries, as Christians we are called to reject violence and to live in fraternal love with all human beings. This document intends to identify some of those beliefs and values that Muslims and Christians have in common, as well as some differences, so as to assist those whom we are teaching to live harmoniously together with understanding and respect and to work for peace more effectively.

## Understanding Islam and Muslims

The name *Islam* means “submission” and those who submit to God are *Muslims*. The terms have the same Arabic root as the word for peace, *salam*. Muslims believe that peace comes through the submission to the one and only God. Although it is often associated with Muslims alone, the name of God in Arabic, Allah (*al-Lah* - “the God”), is the same name used by Christians and Jews. When saying the name of Allah, Muslims generally say: “*Subhanahu wa ta’alaa*”, which means “May He be glorified and exalted”. Muslims and Christians share many common beliefs in their worship of a single Creator God who loves creation and who commands that His most cherished creations, human beings, love Him, one another, and His creation.

In some ways, however, Muslims and Christians have profoundly different beliefs. Muslims do not believe in the Trinitarian nature of God, nor do they accept that Jesus Christ is God incarnate. They believe, however, that Jesus is one of the five most distinguished Prophets of God sent to mankind. Christians, on the other hand, do not recognize Muhammad as a prophet, and do not accept many aspects of the message he preached, including dietary restrictions, polygamy, and other teachings discussed below. For Muslims, Muhammad is the recipient of God’s final revelation, the *Qur’an*, and the model for all human beings, in much the same way as the Virgin Mary is for many Christians. But Muhammad’s role as prophet, law giver and military leader is more similar to that of Moses in the Old Testament. Muhammad is not worshipped by Muslims - he is recognized by them as the final Prophet, the Seal of the prophets, sent by God and is the object of great reverence and devotion. Christians do not accord Muhammad the same status as the biblical prophets, but may regard him as a prophetic figure on such issues as charity and the protection of the poor, widows and orphans.

## Muhammad and the Beginnings of Islam

Muslims believe that Islam originated with the creation of humanity. According to Islam, the first man, Adam, was the first Muslim and first Prophet of God, and Muhammad was the last of a long line of Prophets whom Allah sent to guide mankind. Muhammad was born at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century into a complex society made up of nomadic and sedentary tribes, many of whom were involved in caravan trade. Much of pre-Islamic Arabia is shrouded in mystery, but it is fairly certain that well-established communities of Christians and Jews of various denominations lived alongside a variety of polytheistic and monotheistic groups before Muhammad's time. At the center of trade and religious life was the city of Mecca. This city was home to an important shrine, the Kaba, that contained idols worshiped by the many Arabian tribes. According to Muslim tradition, the Kaba is in reality the House built by Abraham and his son Ishmael for the worship of One God. However, over the passage of time the worship of One God faded away and polytheism became widespread.

Muhammad had been born into a powerful tribe, the Quraish, but his position as an orphan from a young age left him very vulnerable. His awareness of this vulnerability made him particularly sensitive to the plight of widows and orphans, and many of the rules and customs he later institutes reflect his concern for those without protection in society. Fortunately for Muhammad, his uncle took him in and taught him the caravan trade, at which tradition says he excelled. He eventually married Khadijah, who was herself a successful merchant. Although he had many children, at his death he was survived by only one daughter, Fatima.

Around the year 610 AD, Muslim tradition says that Muhammad began receiving the revelation from God when the Angel Gabriel commanded him to recite what would be given to him in his native language of Arabic. His followers believe that over the next 22 years, until his death, he continued to receive these messages. At first he and the small group of followers he gathered around himself believed that the messages were intended to draw Arabic-speaking polytheists to the monotheism preached by the prophets of the Jews and Christians. Later he came to see that the messages are not exactly the same as what is contained in the Bible, but rather are given to confirm, correct and continue what Jews and Christians had already received. This idea has had significant impact on the relationship among Jews, Christians and Muslims over the centuries.

Although Muhammad's message was welcomed by some of his fellow Meccans, tradition says that many were afraid it would destroy the custom of pilgrimage to the Kaba and other shrines. As a consequence of the threats he received, in 622 in an event known as the *Hijra* (emigration), Muhammad and his followers moved to a small oasis in the north. This oasis becomes known as the City of the Prophet, *madinat al-nabi*, or simply Madina (modern-day Medina). Muslims count this year as the beginning of the new era and the year 622 is year one in the Muslim calendar.

## The Formation of the Muslim *Ummah* in Madina and Conquest of Mecca

It was in Madina that Muhammad and his followers began to establish the basic structure of what would become the Muslim community, the *Ummah*. Muhammad had been invited by local tribes to be an arbiter, a type of judge who negotiated peaceful settlements. His followers paid close attention to the ways he put the revelations he had received into practice, and they passed these on in the form of short accounts. The practices, or traditions, established by Muhammad are called *sunnah*, and were passed on in narratives

called *ahadith*. The *sunnah* and interpretations of them were developed into the second source of Islamic Law (*Shari'ah*), after the Qur'an.

One can see many close parallels between central values of Jews and Christians and the legal precedents set by Muhammad in this period. For example, the *sunnah* protect the rights of the poor, women and children, and are especially concerned with justice for widows and orphans. Muhammad became known for his honesty and truthfulness, and he has been regarded as a model for all Muslims over the centuries. When mentioning the name of Muhammad, many Muslims will say "*Salallahu alayhi wa sallam*", meaning "May God honor him and grant him peace".

During the time in Madina, Muhammad's small community grew and he raised a small band of armed men that engaged in various raids. Eventually they clashed with the armies of Mecca, capturing the city in 630. His first act when he entered the city was to cleanse the Kaba and rededicate it to the One God. Muhammad's conduct towards the conquered peoples of Mecca is significant, and it set the precedent for Muslim expansion in the following centuries. Those who had been defeated were given a choice. If they were polytheists they could resist and be executed or enslaved, or they could accept the message of monotheism and recognize Muhammad as the prophet of God. Jews and Christians, since they were monotheists whose prophets were recognized as forerunners of Muhammad, were given the possibility of submitting to Muhammad's authority and paying a special tax, the *jizyah*, based on the qur'anic verse in Surah 9:29, in return for the freedom to practice their religions within certain limits. This became the practice of Muslim conquerors in the centuries following Muhammad's death.

As a result of the continued success of his army, Muhammad's fame as a military leader spread and many tribes in Arabia, following the ancient custom, came to pay him tribute and swear their allegiance. After a brief period during which Mecca was established as the center of worship and pilgrimage for the Muslim community, Muhammad died in 632 AD. With his death, a dispute arose as to who should succeed him - his closest male heir, or a person elected from among his followers. Some argued that Ali, his cousin and husband of his daughter Fatima, was the natural successor. The majority, however, favored Abu Bakr, who was one of the first followers of Muhammad. Although Ali was eventually chosen as the fourth successor, or *caliph*, his death set in motion a deep division between the *Shi'a* (*Shi'at Ali* - the 'partisans of Ali') and the *Sunni* (those who follow tradition) that exists even today. The Shi'a came to dominate Persia, modern day Iran, but remained a minority. Today approximately 10% of Muslims worldwide are Shi'ites, while 90% are Sunni.

After Muhammad's death, his successors and their armies enjoyed phenomenal military success as they gained territory from western India through North Africa and into Spain and southern France. Most of these areas were populated by Jews, Christians and adherents of various Persian religions. Although initially very few converted to the religion of their rulers, over the next few centuries Islam grew until it represented the majority in some places. The *Qur'an* contains a strong prohibition against coercing monotheists to convert, but heavy taxation of non-Muslims, as well as the attractiveness of some Islamic teachings, led to the conversion or emigration of Christians, Jews and Zoroastrians.

The peace and stability created by the unification of warring empires under Muslim rule allowed a cultural flowering that had worldwide significance. Muslim thinkers sought to articulate their religious beliefs and connect them with ancient traditions of philosophy and science, collecting important Greek, Persian and Syriac texts and supporting their translation into Arabic. As a consequence, Islamic culture was host to an explosion of advances in the sciences, medicine, philosophy, mathematics, agriculture, bookmaking,

art and architecture which made their way through Spain to become the catalyst for the European Renaissance.

The Mongolian invasions in the 13th century brought indescribable destruction to the centers of Muslim and Christian (particularly that of the Assyrian Church of the East) learning and culture of the east, creating space for the rise of the Ottoman Turks. The empire took its name from Osman I, the leader of a small Turkic tribe that had filled the power vacuum left by the demise of the Seljuk Turks in 1300. The Seljuks had converted to Islam earlier, paving the way for other Turkic tribes and eventually the Mongolians to convert as well. After a complicated shift in power, an alliance of Turkish tribes conquered Constantinople and made it their capital in 1453. In a grand symbolic gesture, the ancient cathedral *Hagia Sophia* was converted into a mosque and the name of the city changed to Istanbul. The Ottoman Empire grew rapidly and at its height nearly one third of the world's population lived under Ottoman rule. Ottoman armies presented a constant threat to Eastern Europe, and were only definitively defeated in 1683 outside of Vienna. Subsequent European imperialism during the 18th and 19th centuries resulted in another shift in power, eventually bringing nearly all Muslim territories under European control.

The modern period has brought many changes to areas of Muslim-majority populations. Following the First World War, the caliphate was officially abolished, leaving the *Ummah* without a symbolic unifier. Although the caliphate was not a monolithic institution, for many Muslims its dissolution represented the fragmentation of the Muslim community. In the last century, many movements have proposed different responses to modernity, a process which has engaged Muslims worldwide.

Today Muslims can be found in nearly every country in the world, and more and more, they are neither Arab nor Arabic-speaking. In fact, the largest populations are found in Indonesia where Islam was introduced through trade with India in the 11th century. In these and many other places, Muslims live side by side with non-Muslims, integrating their deeply held beliefs in diverse societies and cultures.

### Islamic Scripture: The *Qur'an*

Muslims centre their religious life around a text known as the *Qur'an*, which means "recitation". The *Qur'an* is the collection of verses Muslims believe were given by God to Muhammad throughout his life. Muhammad came to understand the experiences during which Angel Gabriel told him to "recite" what would be given to him as moments of divine revelation. The recitations were memorized and passed on orally and were written down and memorized by his followers until they were collected together in a single book not long after his death.

The Islamic understanding of revelation is very different from that of Catholics. Muslims believe that the messages Muhammad received are essentially literal excerpts from a divine Book that contains God's will and guidance for the whole human race. Thus, Muslims believe, the actual text, even the language of Arabic, is God's Word. It is not the product of human writing, thought, or activity, even though certain verses may have been "sent down" as guides for particular occasions. For this reason, Muslims hold that the *Qur'an* is *literally* God's word and should be read in the original Arabic.

Tradition maintains that the *Qur'an* was collected by the first Caliph, Abu Bakr, while the third caliph, Uthman, standardized the recitation and script in the year 651 AD. In order to emphasize its timelessness, it was not organized according to the dates in which Muhammad received it, but rather into *surahs*, or chapters, generally from longest to shortest. Each *surah* is given a name to remind the reader of its contents. Thus, after the

Opening, *Surah 2*, entitled “The Cow”, is the longest of the *surahs* and contains a story of a cow sacrificed by the Israelites.

Among the many themes found in the *Qur’an*, four stand out. The first is the command to *worship the One God*, Allah. A central teaching of the *Qur’an* is *tawhid*, the absolute Oneness of God, which means that only the Lord and Creator of the universe may be worshiped, and that nothing in one’s life can be placed equal to or before God. For Christians, it is important to recognize that the *Qur’an* explicitly rejects the worship of God as Trinity and the belief that Jesus Christ is the Son of God as contradicting the teaching of *tawhid*.

A second theme is that God has given the same revelation to various *prophets* throughout human history, beginning with Adam and ending with Muhammad. Many of the notable figures of the Old and New Testaments, such as Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Zachariah, and Jesus, are recognized in the *Qur’an* as prophets. Whereas Jews and Christians have understood prophets to be first and foremost persons who interpret and remind the community of the obligations of the Covenant with God, Muslims hold prophets to be those men chosen by God to receive the warning to do good and to avoid evil. Thus, the message received is always the same. Muhammad is believed by Muslims to have received the final confirmation and authoritative version of all previous revelations, and so he is the last prophet, the Seal of the prophets. Thus, Muslims do not think of themselves as belonging to a *new* religion, but rather to the final community that has received God’s original message.

These first two themes are summarized in the phrase, called the *Shahada* (“declaration of faith”), repeated by Muslims many times each day: *la ilaha ila l-Lah, Muhammad rasulu l’Lah* (“there is no god but God (Allah) (and) Muhammad is the Messenger of God”). This forms the centre of Muslim belief.

The third theme follows as a consequence from the first two - the obligation to *command what is good and forbid what is evil*, which is the basis of justice (*‘adl*). Those who do this will receive their reward in Paradise after the Day of Judgment. Those who do what is evil and do not repent before they die will suffer eternal damnation. The goal of the Muslim community is to create an environment in which it is easy to do good and avoid evil, and so form a just society that submits itself wholly to God’s will.

A fourth important theme tied closely to the previous three is the expectation of the future bodily Resurrection from the Dead. In the *Qur’an*, this event is often referred to as “The Hour”; it is the Day of Judgment when all of Creation will finally come to an end and every person will stand before God. At that time their good and bad deeds will be judged, and no one else can answer or intercede for another person except by God’s permission. Following the consequences of a person’s earthly deeds, punishment and reward are allotted by God’s judgment. Because human beings are bodily creatures, Muslims have generally emphasized the physical nature of the reward and punishment, and detailed descriptions of both are found in the *Qur’an* and in tradition.

Many more themes can be identified in the *Qur’an*, but these are considered central. Most importantly, the *Qur’an* is regarded by Muslims as a complete guide for humanity, and is meant to be applied to every aspect of everyday life.

(To be continued)



## INTERNATIONAL NEWS

### Medal from the Queen for young SA Catholic

The Southern Cross, August 3 to August 9, 2016



*Young South African Jessica Dewhurst receives a medal from Queen Elizabeth II for her justice advocacy work.*

A young Catholic is receiving wide recognition for her advocacy work in justice and development— even from the queen of England.

Jessica Dewhurst, 24, is the justice desk coordinator of the Edmund Rice Network, whose work has been reported on in *The Southern Cross*.

The Edmund Rice justice desk of south-central Africa was launched in 2013 with Ms Dewhurst at the helm.

“Our purpose is to advocate, educate and equip in the area of human rights, justice and advocacy,” said Ms Dewhurst, a parishioner of St Michael’s parish in Cape Town.

“We operate in South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe but also offer our support, expertise and educational materials to various other groups across the globe,” she said.

“We form a part of the wider Edmund Rice Network, inspired by the charism and ethos of Bl Edmund Rice,” founder of the Christian Brothers, she said.

The justice desk runs various programmes, some in partnerships with like-minded organisations.

- Raising awareness through presentations, talks, and so on.
- Justice and advocacy campaigns in schools across south-central Africa.
- The Umoya project, a volunteer project in Khayelitsha, Cape Town, focusing on caring for 70+ mentally and physically differently-abled elderly and abandoned men and women.
- The In-Reach programme, with personal mentorship and coaching of vulnerable youth so that they may gain fulltime employment.
- Human rights training to vulnerable groups, civil society, government, NGOs, and schools.
- The Youth Ambassadors programme, with personal mentorship of high-school youth. This programme encourages, trains and supports students as they run justice campaigns in their schools.

“I volunteered in multiple NGOs while in high school, working with children infected or affected by HIV/Aids, refugee children, and children who have been victims of physical, sexual and emotional abuse,” Ms Dewhurst said.

While serving the Edmund Rice Network as their youth coordinator, she completed and received The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award, and The President's Gold Award for Youth Empowerment, which she received from President Jacob Zuma.

A graduate in social sciences from the University of Cape Town, Ms Dewhurst earned an honours degree in social development, focusing on children's rights, and a master's in the same field, focusing on human trafficking.

She went on to study human rights and justice at the United Nations in Geneva, Switzerland, and is currently completing another degree in international leadership with the University of Cambridge.

In June she travelled to London to receive the Queen's Young Leaders Award for 2016, which celebrates exceptional people aged 18-29 from across the Commonwealth who are taking the lead in their communities and using their skills to transform lives.

In London she spoke at the residence of the security-general of the Commonwealth, and at the Prime Minister's residence at 10 Downing Street.

She also received her medal from Queen Elizabeth II at Buckingham Palace.

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## A Call to Resistance and Recommitment



*from Larry Greenfield  
Executive Director, Parliament of the World's Religions*

The Parliament of the World's Religions has a focused commitment to address issues of violence. It is one of three critical issues that hold priority in our mission and work.

The recent rash of egregious violence has been shocking; not only because of the sheer number of incidents, their frequency, their aberrant severity, and the amount of lives lost and injured, though all of these are important in their own right.

It is disturbing because of the trends that have begun to emerge. Violence, it seems, is increasingly being employed as a method of resolving personal, interpersonal, social, political, and religious conflict. It is showing itself as a common response to everything from petty objection to deep rage, and in the last few weeks, revenge.

It's been little more than a generation since a nonviolent movement for civil rights succeeded in liberating America from the shackles of much of the unapologetic institutionalized racism. Yet the insidious roots of racism have continued to sprout, often lethally in instances of police brutality. And we are now seeing violent reaction.

Recent political rhetoric indicates that two of the most visible superpowers on earth - the UK and the US - intend to reject the building blocks upon which they were founded: those

of a pluralistic, united, “better together” society. New building blocks are being constructed to create borders and walls.

Our national military ideologies directly and indirectly contribute to a culture of killing, both “at home and abroad,” by teaching our soldiers and citizens that it is acceptable to kill other human beings because someone has designated them as “the enemy.” Military violence has reached extreme levels of both normalization and depersonalization as our drones mechanistically murder “targets” and civilians alike.

The message is clear: “We are giving up on peace.”

The result is the rejection of human beings from equal inclusion in both our cultures and territories, whether they be fellow citizens or future neighbours.

In 2015, the Parliament of the World’s Religions called those gathered in Salt Lake City, and our community around the world, to endorse a declaration decrying War, Violence, and Hate Speech, and to commit to bringing about transformative action on a personal and societal level.

Over the past year, the Parliament has responded to several tragic world events, through spiritual meditation and prayer, through training, through resources for reflection and education, through solidarity and embodied solidarity, through “sorrow and distress,” through calls to action, and through reminders of the past.

But as our world goes through these cycles of strife, I urge you on behalf of the Parliament to:

**Recommit** to the material presented in the declaration against War, Violence, and Hate Speech from the 2015 Parliament.

**Resist** the temptation to be satisfied with simple, uncomplicated answers. The incidents of violence, hate, and exclusivist rhetoric around our globe stem from a multitude of factors, and to pick one to the exclusion of others ignores the nuances of and motivations behind each tragedy. Don’t distance yourself from the issues because they don’t touch you, or remove yourself from the challenge of making this world better because it seems like a futile effort. Instead, allow yourself to be confused, to be shocked, to be hurt, and use that emotion to spur your personal action.

**Remind** yourself that there is wisdom and power both within and beyond yourself. Draw on the best parts of your religious traditions. Dig into the wealth of accumulated knowledge that comprises your faith. Even as you recognize your own power, join together with others; it is easier to be discouraged, to feel futility, when you are acting alone.

**Remember** the times when non-violent action made a difference. Remember Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Martin Buber, Khān Abdul Ghaffār Khān, Daniel Berrigan, Thich Nhat Hanh, Toyohiko Kagawa, Nelson Mandela, Adolfo Pérez Esquivel. Stand with the people who are seeking reform at all levels, with government and law enforcement officials who are trying compassionately to de-escalate extremism and to reach out to those in society who might be prone to extremist ideology and targeted violence. Violence speaks quickly and loudly. Working for peace is long arduous, but the results resonate and have the power to be world-changing.

## Human Values Foundation: Stories on Values Competition



WORLD  
VALUES  
DAY

Human  
Values  
Foundation  
Life-enriching values for everyone



### Stories on Values - by Children for Children

#### How to Enter

- The Human Values Foundation (HVF) **Stories on Values competition** is being held to mark **World Values Day (WVD)**. It is open to children at infant, primary and junior schools (i.e. schools educating children up to the age of 11) or at other child-focused organisations (such as Scout or Guide groups) anywhere in the world. The competition is intended for all children between 7 to 11 years of age; it is not open to children over the age of 11.
- Stories can be fictional or based on real experiences. They should be in English, be original, and be centred around a value chosen from the list below.
- Stories should be no more than 300 words long.
- Handwritten stories are acceptable provided the handwriting is clear.
- The story can be illustrated by a colour or black-and-white illustration (an A4 drawing, painting or poster) but this is not obligatory. The illustration can be by a different child.
- The writer (and if relevant the illustrator) should be identified at the top of the first page of the story by their full name and age. If we publish the story we will include only the **first** name and age and the country of the writer and we will not name the school. Full names will be used only for the issuing of certificates (see **Certificates** paragraph below) to be sent to the relevant school or organisation, and will otherwise be kept confidential.
- The story must be scanned and emailed to us at this email address **[yes2values@hvf.org.uk](mailto:yes2values@hvf.org.uk)** by the child's school or organisation **by 14 October 2016 at the latest**. It would be helpful if you send entries as early as you can. Please make sure the name and full address of the school is included in the covering email together with a contact name and telephone number for the school/organisation.
- We will contact winners of prizes and those whose stories are published but apart from that we will not be able to give feedback on entries.
- Entrants retain their copyright but by entering this competition the writer, illustrator and school give HVF and WVD a perpetual royalty-free licence to publish and use the story in all their written and digital publications and across all media including their websites and social media platforms and other online platforms, and in a booklet to be published after the Day. The HVF may consider publishing selected stories as part of its [Education in Human Values lesson plans](#). The same terms apply to any drawings, paintings and posters that are sent in. By entering the competition the writer, illustrator and school agrees that the HVF may at its sole discretion edit, adapt, abridge or translate the entry if deemed necessary.
- **Certificates** will be awarded to all writers and illustrators of the stories that are published by the Human Values Foundation and to their schools or relevant organisations.

- **Prizes:** A prize of £100 worth of book tokens will be awarded for the best story to the writer’s school or organisation towards books for their library; a prize of £50 worth of book tokens will go to the school or organisation of the writer of the second best story; a prize of £25 worth of book tokens will go to the school or organisation of each of the next 6 runners-up.
- The HVF reserves the right to amend these terms and conditions of entry or cancel this competition at any stage, if deemed necessary in its opinion, or if circumstances arise outside of its control. The HVF cannot accept any responsibility whatsoever for any technical failure or malfunction or any other problem with any server, Internet access, system or otherwise which may result in any entry being lost or not properly registered or recorded. Proof of sending is not proof of receipt. These terms and conditions of entry are governed by the laws of England and Wales.



### List of Values

*Please ask your children to choose a value for their story from the following list:*

TRUTH	LOVE	PEACE	RIGHT CONDUCT	NON-VIOLENCE
Curiosity Discrimination Equality Honesty Integrity Intuition Optimism Quest for Knowledge Reasoning Self-analysis Self-knowledge Spirit of Enquiry Synthesis Truthfulness	Caring Compassion Dedication Devotion Friendship Forgiveness Generosity Helpfulness Inner Happiness Joy Kindness Patience Sharing Sincerity Sympathy Tolerance	Attentiveness Calmness Concentration Contentment Dignity Discipline Endurance Focus Happiness Honesty Humility Inner Silence Optimism Patience Reflection Satisfaction Self-acceptance Self-confidence Self-control Self-discipline Self-respect Understanding	Cleanliness Contentment Courage Dependability Duty Ethics Gratitude Goals Good Behaviour Healthy Living Helpfulness Initiative Leadership Perseverance Proper use of time Resourcefulness Respect Respect for other people’s things Responsibility Sacrifice Self-confidence Self-sufficiency Simplicity Unity	Appreciation of other cultures/backgrounds Brotherhood/Sisterhood Citizenship Compassion Concern for all life Consideration Co-operation Equality Forgiveness Global Awareness Good Manners Loyalty National Awareness Respect for Property Service to Others Social Justice Unity Universal Love Unwillingness to hurt



**Professional Society of Religious Educators**