

INTERFAITH NEWS

FALL 2020



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VIRTUAL INTERFAITH THANKSGIVING GATHERING:

Seeing Peace with "2020 Vision"

Sunday, November 8, 2020

4:00 pm – 5:15 pm CT



**Online and accessible to all
Join on zoom or by live-stream**

This year is the 35th year of our beloved annual Interfaith Thanksgiving tradition, but it is a different year than most. Sponsors are the Heartland Alliance of Divine Love, the Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council, and The Interfaith Center at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio.

Due to the coronavirus pandemic and in order to bring the joy of interfaith gratitude to our community, the Interfaith Thanksgiving Gathering will be a virtual event this year.

There are a number of ways to join this online event:

- Simply click on this link to participate in this event:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85749139939?pwd=VTJINUV1MDIhTVoxSFdOQkVWdjVQUt09>
- You can register FOR FREE on Eventbrite at <https://www.eventbrite.com/e/interfaith-thanksgiving-gathering-tickets-121433768671> and the link will be sent to your Inbox.
- The event will be live-streamed on the Heartland Facebook page: www.Facebook.com/HeartlandADL.

There is NO COST for this event – everyone is invited to participate and everyone is welcome!

As always, a highlight of the event will be the offering of prayers from the multitude of faiths and religious traditions in the greater community.

Even in the midst of this most unusual year, there is much to be grateful for and this year's Gathering will acknowledge that situation. The Gathering will have a dual focus: to remember and honor all those who have been lost during this pandemic and their loved ones and to celebrate and thank the "heroes of the pandemic" – the health care workers, first responders, and spiritual workers who have helped families which lost loved ones

Heartland ADL also chooses a charity each year to receive collection of donations. This year, in consideration of the unprecedented need, the chosen charity is Harvesters. We invite you to send your donations to Harvesters at www.harvesters.org

Look for additional information about the dinner on the Council website (www.kcinterfaith.org), the Heartland-ADL website (www.HeartlandADL.org) and the Heartland Facebook page.

United in Peace We Ride!

- Bennette Seaman
Church of Scientology



Officer Byrd and Bennette Seaman of the Church of Scientology

2020 has been a challenging year everywhere. In addition to the pandemic which has spread around the globe, the protests throughout our country over police violence, and our own community already setting the highest homicide rate in history for the KC Metro area, groups are coming together to spread messages for peace, less violence, and for change. The Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council co-sponsored the first "United in Peace Ride" in Kansas City, with the local Church of Scientology, Councilman Brandon Ellington, the United in Peace Foundation, and other Kansas City organizations on September 20, 2020. The ride started and ended at Spring Valley Park. 88 vehicles registered at the start and drove through Kansas City, MO, into Kansas City, KS and then back, displaying "United in Peace" flags, but 145 vehicles returned, as others joined in along the route. The purpose of the ride itself was to show a united message for peace in our communities by bringing people together from different religions, races, and cultures – as we all share a common desire for everyone to live together in peace and to end the violence.

At the park, a peace rally took place with speakers from different organizations, both before and after the actual ride, all encouraging more involvement and a spirit of togetherness to bring about change. Entertainment was provided by local drill teams, singers, and rappers, who all volunteered their performances

and supported the same message. One local rapper even created a new song for the "United in Peace" ride and debuted it at the event. Local grocery stores donated the food and water which was served after the ride. Local non-profits set up booths to get information out to the community. However, the best part of the event was the diversity in those who gathered and the feeling of love and unity that permeated the entire event. The United in Peace Foundation, along with the Church of Scientology, and Councilman Brandon Ellington are also united in the distribution and use of The Way To Happiness book, a non-religious common sense guide to better living written by L. Ron Hubbard in 1981. This book being the first moral code based on common sense, was written to address the moral decline in society and lay out a path back to a more moral society. The book was not only distributed at Spring Valley Park during the peace rally - volunteers walked the route of the peace ride the day before and distributed fliers about the ride and the book, encouraging recipients to share the book with others who are in need of a new path. The next United in Peace Ride will be held on Sunday, November 1, 2020 from 2:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m. starting and ending at the Mohart Multipurpose Center, 3200 Wayne Ave, Kansas City, MO. During the winter months, United in Peace events will continue approximately every 6 weeks. The actual rides will take place based on weather conditions, over the winter months. The Church of Scientology of Kansas City will continue handling the organization of these events. For more information or to sign up to participate, please contact Bennette Seaman 816-803-6301. In her own words: "We want these Peace Rides to continue to grow in diversity and participation as we work together to spread a positive message for Peace in our area. In addition, we want to demonstrate within our communities that coming together and working with one another is how we will bring

positive change for everyone and less violence in our streets, as we reach out and help those in need, together!" A video of the ride, featuring the new song written and performed by Tha Real Kodde One, can be found on youtube: <https://youtu.be/eqUllTOoio0P>

AIDS TO READING & APPRECIATING SCRIPTURES OF FAITHS OTHER THAN YOUR OWN

By Lawrence Guillot

The first two goals of the GKC Interfaith Council are--

1. *To develop deeper understanding within the community of each others' faiths and traditions, and to foster appropriate bilateral and multilateral interfaith dialogue and interaction, and*
2. *To model spiritual and religious values, especially mutual respect and cooperation, in a society often intolerant of cultural and religious diversity.*

One way to actualize both of these goals is to learn more about the scriptures, the "sacred" writings, the "classics" of a religious faith tradition other than your own. This can be particularly interesting or exciting, especially when you have begun to develop some interest or even curiosity about a specific faith other than that of your birth and early education. If you really want such an experience to be doubly rewarding, you might do it by making a connection to the resources of that other religious tradition and would include learning about its "sacred texts" and "classics".

In this article, I will try to help by suggesting three ways to get you started—or, if you started something like this once before and let the effort slip, then, to fast track your restart.

- One is to include in your reading

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a *writer* or a book or some selected spiritual writings of another faith, a classic.

- A second way is to expand your spirituality by including in your meditation practices *sayings and reflections by spiritual masters from other traditions*, reflections that have nurtured the spiritual values of thousands, perhaps millions of persons of faith.

- A third way would be a systematic exploration of the sacred texts of the world's most revered religious traditions by *using an anthology* specifically created to aid such an exploration.

We'll do a bit of mix and match. Here you find information about some 20 books that will help you in your embrace of one of these approaches

The first way is practically boundless, because every tradition has dozens of "classics", books old and young that have been very popular and oftentimes inspirational. These books usually embody the world outlook and spirit of a tradition. Biographies do this through the life of a revered or highly respected representative of the tradition.

Examples would be the *Dalai Lama's The Art of Happiness* (1998; 2009) or his *My Spiritual Journey* (2011), an autobiography. Also *Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh's The Miracle of Mindfulness: A Manual of Meditation* (1975, rev ed 1987) has influenced millions in and beyond the tradition of its origin. Similarly, *The Autobiography of a Yogi*, by *Paramahansa Yogananda* (1946, 1951, multiple editions, online versions, 1998, 2009) provided a window into the world of Hinduism and Vedanta for several generations of Europeans and Americans.

Abraham Heschel was a twentieth century Jewish rabbi whose *Man is Not Alone* (1951), *God in Search of Man* (1952) and *The Prophets* (1962) have provided a world-wide audience a fresh and inspirational insight into Jewish tradition. *Martin Luther King's* Protestant Christian faith gave him the

basis and strength for his civil rights advocacy that helped to inspire and change a nation. *Strength to Love* (1963), *I Have a Dream* (1963), *Autobiography* (1978) and *The Words of Martin Luther King*, edited by Coretta Scott King (1980), in turn, have inspired others religiously and civically.

A contemporary, *Sister Joan Chittister*, OSB, has been an inspiration to Catholics and non-Catholics alike, and especially those appreciative of a feminist perspective. Her *In Search of Belief* (1999, 2007) is a fresh look at a statement of Christian beliefs almost as old as Christianity itself; *Called to Question* (2004) is a memoir but speaks to the questions of the contemporary mind; *Becoming Fully Human* (2005) is a book of aphorisms that would invigorate anyone's spiritual meditations.

The second and third ways will be illustrated by a description of *seven different types of anthologies of sacred texts*.

An outstanding collection of diverse texts selected by Eknath Easwaren to serve as a basis for meditation make up *God Makes the Rivers to Flow: Sacred literature of the world* (1982, 2009). Easwaren was a native of India who came to California early in his life and was the first person to teach an academically accredited course in meditation in the U.S. (1968). Here are 150 texts from 75 spiritual classics appropriate for spiritual reading and meditation. The book also has a chapter that guides you in the process of meditation. It is a classic of classics. Many texts can inspire, but he reminds us, be careful in choosing a guide for instruction. "Meditation is supreme among all those tested means for personal change. Nothing is so direct, so potent, so sure for releasing the divinity within us." (19).

Designed for wide use, perhaps with an eye to being a gift volume, is Bonnie Louise Kuchler's *One Heart: Universal Wisdom from*

the World's Scripture (2003). Kuchler, a writer and editor of popular materials, here proposes a spirituality that draws on the world's wisdom traditions in eight thematic chapters, each introduced in a personal way by Andrew Harvey, a well-known writer on spiritualities. The themes are the heart of compassion, acceptance, humility, integrity, faith, wisdom, discipline and surrender. Each of these core values is exemplified by six to ten actions, and each action is supported by one or more sayings or aphorisms from each of seven world religions (omitting Sikh and Shinto). A bibliography and list of sources allows you to trace the sayings to the volume or translation from which they were taken.

Also designed for wide popular use is Joan Chittister's *Welcome to the Wisdom of the World: And Its Meaning for You* (2007), described as "universal spiritual insights distilled from five faith traditions." Her unusual approach was to take experiences and concerns of persons writing to her or engaging her after lectures and producing a set of five questions based on their issues. After introducing a question set, she provides representative texts from one of the five traditions, using them as responses to the issues. Then she comments on the text. Her conclusion is that the great religious traditions have the capacity to respond to humanity's universal existential concerns. Given that the texts, marshalled to meet the 25 issues in the five sets, are reproduced without identifying the source documents, her introduction qualifies as an anthology of sacred texts only in a minimal way.

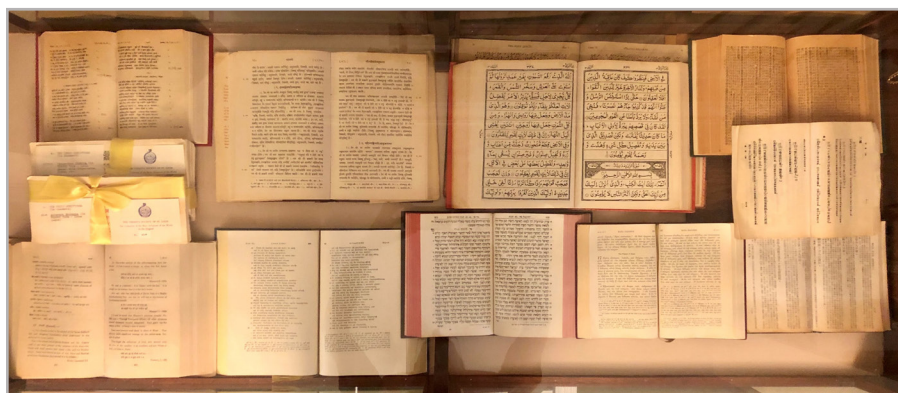
Still different but similarly experiential and existential is Matthew Fox's *One River, Many Wells: Wisdom Springing from Global Faiths* (2000, 2004). Fox is an Episcopal priest, author of some 20 books focused on spirituality and "creation theology." He is the founding president of the University of Creation Spirituality. Here, he goes "to the core of religious

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traditions...to find the spirituality that is in there.” He divides the exploration into five broad sections: on creation, divinity, ourselves in our journey, the future—what the divine is asking of us, and conclusions. In the first four sections, he develops 18 themes in a narrative interwoven with quotations (bolded) from wisdom traditions throughout our history into modern times. The concluding section is a reflection on “deep ecumenism” and 18 themes become the “new myths and visions” of our times with which we can go forward. Sources of quotations are provided through extensive notes (441-59) linked to 93 bibliographic resources (461-64).

The next three anthologies are based on a more traditional academic approach. If you are one of the millions who first engaged world religions through Huston Smith’s *The World’s Religions* (1991 ff) that first appeared under the title *The Religions of Man* (1958 ff) and particularly if you still have a copy, then Philip Novak’s *The World’s Wisdom: Sacred Texts of the World’s Religions* (1994) is an anthology you might especially consider, as it directly mirrors and illuminates Smith’s classic text. As Smith does, Novak omits the Sikh and Shinto traditions and adds “primal religions.” Novak selected texts based on their inspirational and instructional value and how they illumine Smith’s narrative. With its preliminary introduction to each chapter and frequent short notes introducing texts, however, Novak’s anthology can well stand on its own. Whether used on its own or as a two-for-one while reading Smith, the Novak anthology is a fine learning guide.

Ninian Smart is widely recognized globally as a pre-eminent scholar of world religions. Along with a BBC television series, he is also the author of *The World’s Religions* (1992, 2nd ed) and editor of *Atlas of the World’s Religions* (1999). Here, together with Richard Hecht, Ninian Smart created *Sacred Texts of the World: A Universal Anthology* (1982, 1984 ff). His anthology is a



The Vedanta Society of St Louis chapel contains this collection of scriptures: Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Confucianism, Christianity, Islam, Taoism, Judaism, and Buddhism.

scholar’s dream. Consistent with his other works, he had arranged his selection of texts for each tradition under six categories, as: sacred narrative, doctrine, ritual, institutional expression, experience and ethics. To each chapter on a faith tradition, he adds an historical update and a bibliography. In compiling *Sacred Texts of the World*, Smart covers, along with the basic nine traditions, sections on texts of the ancient near east (“the powerful dead”), Jainism, small-scale traditional religions, new religions and secular worldviews, giving this collection a wonderfully wide scope. While each religious tradition is presented separately, you can compare any two or more traditions through comparing the narratives of any of the six categories.

Finally, for this guide, there is another scholar’s delight where the scope is comprehensive and the scholarship prestigious, namely: *World Scriptures: A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts*, edited by Andrew Wilson, with a Foreword by Ninian Smart (1995). This is a massive, impressive work carried out by 40 diverse contributors and advisors under the auspices of the International Religious Foundation, at the initiative of the Unification movement, spurred by a United Nations movement for world peace.

It begins with a detailed 25-page overview of the sacred texts of 11 religious faiths and adds

new religions of the 19th and 20th century, along with tribal religions from five continents. The basic structure divides the whole into five parts, similar to basic themes of a theological text: (1) Ultimate Reality and the Purpose of Human Experience; (2) Evil, Sin and the Human Fall; (3) Salvation and the Savior; (4) The Religious Life, and (5) Providence, Society and the Kingdom of Heaven.

Ninian Smart remarks in the Foreword: the collection “has some flavor of Unificationism... (but has) a logical and orderly way of comparing and contrasting the wide range of material (and)... therefore provides us with a collection that is illuminating.” Each part and its subsections has a short introduction. Footnotes throughout address unusual or tradition-specific words. The editors have added a 47-page list of sources from 19 identified traditions, plus a detailed index of subjects. Used alone or in conjunction with an alternate approach, like that of Ninian Smart, you now have a marvelous introduction to the breadth and depth of the world’s wisdom traditions.

A Post-Survey Bonus

If you have made it this far, you may be interested to know that Karen Armstrong, the indefatigable chronicler of our world’s religions founders and histories and the author of two histories of humankind’s

understanding of God, has just released her latest book: *The Lost Art of Scripture: Rescuing the Sacred Texts* (2019).

It is written for the scholars and literary elite, at 400 + detailed pages, with 30 pages of bibliography listing well over 500 publications, and another 30 pages of notes documenting more than 1500 citations.

There is an introductory chapter, pleading the cause of right brain thinking, the *importance of poetry, of imagination, and of the religious impulse that pushes or pulls us toward transcendence*. There are 13 chapters, basically a unique, at least unusual, history of the religious impulse and institutional religions viewed by their hermeneutics, their way of interpreting their relationship with the divine.

Armstrong concludes with a chapter, a “post-scripture” reflection, positing that scriptures were always connected with ritual and were never a recitation of incontrovertible doctrines; rather they were to transmit a worldview, a ‘mythos’, a movement toward transformation.

Two mental frameworks work against a genuine appreciation of the scriptures of our world faiths, she contends. *One is external*, a rationalistic empiricism that limits all “reality” to physical, measurable experiences. *The other is internal*, a fundamentalism that interprets the written words of documents recorded years ago, in other languages, of other cultures, at other periods of history, through a literalistic understanding of what the words may mean in common parlance today, with no consideration of literary genre. Numerous examples illustrate that all our religious traditions have our pockets of fundamentalists that subvert rather than enhance the meaning and relevance of the sacred texts.

“Religion is often regarded as irrelevant to modern concerns. But whatever our beliefs, it is essential for human survival that we find a way to rediscover the sacrality of each human being and resacralise our world”

(419). Interpreting and appreciating the “sacred texts” of our religious traditions will help to that end, but in doing so, the “art of scripture” should not be neglected.

A check out at Amazon.com indicates that all of the books mentioned above are available for sale. Many can be found in large public or university library collections.

If you are a voracious reader or intensely curious about all this and like to have a longer bibliography with an annotated list of 21 anthologies, replete with publishers and most with page numbers, send an email with a request to guillotlawrence@gmail.com.

ON FIFTY YEARS OF MINISTRY

-The Reverend Vern Barnet, DMn

Your generous editor has asked me to write on the fiftieth anniversary of my ordination. As I write, the impossibility of mentioning all who have given me so much these years is almost paralyzing. I don't fear vilification; that has happened, viciously and publicly, from a few religious officials after 9/11, but changed leadership and common interests now have strengthened an understanding of our pluralistic life together.

A friend once asked whether I valued my doctorate or my ordination more. I answered that my doctorate only indicated a presumed competence, but my ordination imposed on me a vision and a mission, a direction and commitment for life. Recently Central Seminary asked me to create a new course on ministry in

an age of pluralism, and the Episcopal bishop has asked me to serve on the diocesan Commission on Ministry, so for me the question of what it means to be a minister remains a burning question even in my so-called retirement.

For me, ordination requires confronting the questions everyone has about life by wrestling with them myself day by day. I become neither a saint nor a sage, but I should be able to be a companion to others in discerning what things matter and what things mean, perhaps even transcendently, in individual suffering and satisfaction, communal disorder and harmony, and global endangerment and restoration. I must continually reflect afresh upon others' and my own inward experiences and gain some skill in illuminating what really counts. Ordination is, as one of my own ministers told me, an invitation to failure. Still, pursuing this path has enriched my life beyond measure, and maybe I've added to others' lives along the way.

My organization is the World Faiths Center for Religious Experience and Study, founded in 1982, as I was serving my third parish. I had planned to be a simple parish minister, but invitations to teach kept pulling me into the academy part-time, and an extraordinary dialog happens between my head and my work, between theory and practice. The University of Chicago already predisposed me to a multi-disciplinary approach to religious questions, integrating everything from painting to physics to pastoral care.

When I discovered how enriching friendships with folks of different faiths were, I took CRES full-time in 1985. In 1989, I founded the Interfaith Council as a program of CRES. In 2005, I helped it become independent. I also coordinated the Christian Jewish Muslim Dialogue Group for its first three years.

As the Council was organized, I worked with the KC Press Club and others with a conference on religion

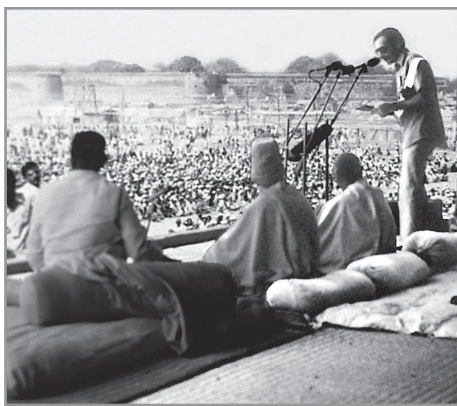
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and the media. This led to changes in The Kansas City Star's faith coverage including, in 1994, a professional offer to write a weekly column. Over 18 years, in 947 columns, I promoted understanding of local activities and concerns, and in the process came to know many more religious, civic, artistic, business, education, and political leaders, local and in the US House and Senate, sometimes asking my advice.

The day after 9/11, Congressman Dennis Moore called on me to organize a public metro-wide interfaith observance for the next Sunday. Some said that attending this event was the first time they dared leave their homes. Six weeks later, a three-day conference Gifts of Pluralism convened that I had envisioned and organized with over 250 religious, civic, business, and political leaders. That consultation still resonates in many ways, finding wisdom from primal, Asian, and monotheist faiths to transform our environmental, personal, and social crises into wholeness. Jackson County then commissioned a five-county task force which I led for most of a year to produce a 77-page report and recommendations to enhance religious comity.

For the first anniversary of 9/11, with the Council, the United Way, and others, I prepared a metro-wide observance which began before dawn outside City Hall with a brass ensemble from the KC Symphony and, with police escort, continued with a march to Grace and Holy Trinity Cathedral, prayer, and an evening assembly with the mayor speaking, the governor and his family introduced, and contributions from the Lyric Opera and the Kansas City Ballet. That observance opened with Jewish and Muslim children singing together songs of peace, part of a national CBS-TV half-hour special on interfaith activities here.

Harvard's Pluralism Project and Religions for Peace at the UN Plaza selected Kansas City for its first two-week residential National Interfaith Academies for Religious Professionals



and Students in 2007. I was the site-visit facilitator and one of the international faculty. The Pluralism Project considered Kansas City then "to be truly at the forefront of interfaith relations."

In addition to interfaith travel (the 1985 photo shows me speaking to 500,000 on the banks of the Ganges), my work has focused on spiritual formation, worship, and life transitions such as weddings and coming-of-age recognitions. For 16-year-olds in my last parish, I developed a comprehensive, year-long program published by my denomination, and, later, a similar training for teens of several faiths through CRES. In secular terms, I designed the curriculum and, for several years, led the team for the Overland Park Rotary Club's Youth Leadership Program. With four other ministers, I founded a liturgical order which led monastic retreats around the continent for clergy and lay people. I edited and wrote for a book on worship. Because what passes for worship today is mostly a secular exercise, I itch to write about a postmodern practice.

With Steve Jeffers and two others, I edited and wrote for the 740-page The Essential Guide to Religious Traditions and Spirituality for Health Care Providers, endorsed by Mayo's and the American Academy of Family Physicians. In 2021, I expect a second edition of my 154-sonnet prosimetrum, Thanks for Noticing: The Interpretation of Desire, drawing on religions of the world.

The dozens of local and national

civic and religious awards cannot expunge my major institutional failure, foretold early by a non-profit expert who said that I would spend all my time trying to provide programs without financial support or I would be consumed with raising money and have no time for programs. I focused on programs and services, though my own resources were depleted. I've been able to continue with support from a small number of friends, honoraria, and adjunct teaching.

Remembering my mistakes and faults helps me be a little more tolerant of others. While my rough edges still need a lot of smoothing, I have certain contributions I would like yet to make; and as time is running out, I keenly value the blessing of friends and circumstances.

These fifty years, captivated by both the academy and the lives of others – theory and practice – have brought me to where every question I have ever had about how the world unfolds is resolved. Does God exist? Why do people suffer? Do we have free will? What is death? What am I to make of the contradictory claims among the many religions? By what measures may I live a worthy life?

Rumi writes, "Awe is the salve that will heal our eyes." When my eyes are open, it is a wonder just to be. For this I am grateful. I can best express this gratitude by serving others. Whatever our vocation, these three – awe, gratitude, and service – may be a holy cycle of renewal.