

The Dignity and Dangers of Diversity

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Date: 15 October 2017

Preacher: Dr. Olav Slaymaker

[0 : 00] So I'm wanting to remind us about the quadrilateral that Learners Exchange has tried to maintain.

The quadrilateral involving Bible studies, Anglican traditions, great women and men of God, and the Church in the world.

So I'm saying nothing about the first three, but I'm trying to address, I'm not entirely confident that I have the solution, but trying to address the matter of our witness in the world and in the context of the assumption in our society that diversity, infinite diversity, is always beneficial.

According to our youthful Prime Minister, this is something that Canada does very well. Do you agree?

I guess I'm going to suggest that diversity is in general a good thing, but that fragmentation, seen particularly in the history of our Protestant Church, and also in the light of the two largest monotheisms exchanging insults, a very serious and sad issue.

[1 : 43] So how to get from the point of appreciating diversity to the point of expressing concerns about the difficulties that result from diversity is the essential point, which our distinguished leader did not quite summarise in the introduction.

So I am assisted by rather inadequate writing, but I hope that some of it can be read.

The first point being, what on earth is the dignity of difference? It's an expression that was coined by Rabbi Jonathan Sachs, the chief rabbi of the Commonwealth for a period of 15 years, recently finished, in describing the glory of the created world in its astonishing multiplicity.

The thousands of different languages spoken by mankind, the proliferation of cultures, the sheer variety of the imaginative expressions of the human spirit, in most of which the voice of wisdom can be heard.

The world is not a single machine, but it's more like a complex interactive ecology, in which diversity is of the essence.

[3 : 30] At the very least, that realisation should make us better listeners. No civilisation has the right to impose itself on others by force.

This is why God asks us to respect the freedom and dignity of those who are not like us. In Exodus 23, verse 9, we read, Do not oppress a stranger, for you know what it feels like to be a stranger, for you yourselves were once strangers in the land of Egypt.

In other words, you have to know the experience of being a stranger in order to appreciate the stranger. But more than that, the stranger had a priority amongst the Israelites, which is expressed in detail in Leviticus.

So I hope you see the essential motivation for a discussion of diversity.

Diversity in all its forms. Geodiversity. Biodiversity. Cultural and religious diversity. There is something to be learned from each of these concepts.

[5 : 04] Hopefully the second page is also still visible. At least in the front row. Is there intrinsic value in diversity?

If so, how do we measure it? How do we appreciate it? In what ways do we express the value in diversity? In contemporary Canada, there's a strong emphasis on embracing diversity, with the underlying assumption that diversity is a good thing.

For example, at national, regional, and local levels, we express pride in Canada, pride in British Columbia, the greatest place, pride in Vancouver, the greatest city.

All this is encouraged without any essential reference to God. But more interestingly, perhaps, is this pride in citizenship is expressed in the face of globalization, which is also in general thought to be a good thing, as it enables a sense of a global community, but which at the same time flattens the earth.

Books of substance have been written on this topic. I say recently, well, at my age, the last 15 years, seems recently. But you may well have come across a book by Fukuyama called The End of History.

[6 : 41] And I'm sorry to see that George is here to declare the end of history. This is on the basis of the thought that Marxist-Leninism had been conquered and the whole world would now become a Western liberal democracy.

Another even more disturbing book in 2005, written by Friedman, called The World is Flat, suggested the end of geography. From the perspective of a professional geographer, this is not a popular conclusion.

But more interestingly, and more importantly, these predictions have very quickly been invalidated. Not only the fact that George and I are still here, but these are prophecies and predictions based on a lack of taking into account God's work in the world, lack of taking into account sense of proportion and scale over time, and so they've now been dumped in the second-hand box.

But they did have significant surprise impact while they lost it. In my view, though I'm open to correction here, Rabbi Sachs is the first heavyweight religious person.

I don't know whether that's an appropriate way to describe him. He's a relatively short man, but he's very strong in expression. The very first heavyweight religious person to take aim at the end of history and geography arguments.

[8 : 26] Significantly, he points out that in each case, God is left out of the discussion. He also makes some important claims for Judaism and writes extensively about the claims of the three great monotheisms.

he being a conservative Jew, he being a very deep reader of the Bible, emphasizing the common legacy of the monotheisms, being particularly emphasizing Genesis.

When we're called the people of the book, he says the Muslims, the Christians, and the Jews are entirely together in the book of Genesis.

Before you put your hand up and say, well, I know that there are different interpretations, he is suggesting that we should read Genesis more deeply than we've been accustomed to do.

And I don't mean in terms of looking for the evidences of proof of Noah's flood, but I mean looking deeply at the nature of the storytelling that is contained in Genesis and the very intricate way in which that is expressed.

[9 : 46] So I'm asking whether there's any intrinsic value in diversity. And at the risk of boring you on something that I'm interested in, geodiversity concerns the world of inorganic objects.

Believe it or not, the huge variety of rocks, I see your faces are glazing over. A huge variety of rocks outcropping at the earth's surface has intrinsic value.

Unfortunately, medieval and renaissance writers deplored the rough and disorderly shape of the earth and infestation by mountains which prevented it from being the perfect sphere that God must surely have intended to create.

But the great variety of precious stones that is discussed in the last chapters of Revelation, you may recall that we have recently looked at that book, the great variety of precious stones gives a hint as to the value of rocks.

We don't always make the association between precious stones and rocks, but all you have to do to make that connection is to break open any variety of rocks and look inside.

[11 : 17] The variety of abiotic nature on which biodiversity depends is astonishing if you have the view that rocks are merely what they appear to be from the outside.

We studied Revelation and found out that jasper, sapphire, agate, emerald, onyx, camille, carnelian, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysoprase, jacinth, and amethyst, you will recall.

All these jewels that adorn the city of God can be found inside dirty, gray, and uninspiring rocks. God's creativity is found within every rock if we take the time to look.

Jasper is a reddish chalcedony, a variety of the mineral quartz, sapphire is a blue chalcedony, and chrysoprase is a green chalcedony. Many of them are varieties of quartz, and quartz you will find in abundance in the North Shore Mountains, so please take your geological hammer next time you go to the North Shore Mountains.

You may well find one of those jewels in the rocks that you happen to crack open. What I'm simply saying is that geodiversity is of the essence of God's created order.

[12 : 36] biodiversity is of the term biodiversity, which comes up very frequently in the news and in the literature, biodiversity essentially depends on the existence, not only of God's creation, but of the fact of geodiversity.

And what is biodiversity? Well, it's essentially, it's classified into two kinds of diversity. diversity, one is genetic diversity, which is concerned with conserving the genetic pool, and an ecosystem diversity, which maintains and enhances habitats.

We get the concept of a keystone species, which is essential to survival, but we often don't know which is or are the keystone species.

Hence, there's this extreme concern about conserving as much of the ecosystem as possible, in case we happen to kill off a keystone species.

I'd like you to hold on to that thought as we look at cultural and religious diversity, because there is a sense in which one can look at the keystone elements of the religious and cultural diversities, and which is important for us to think about.

[14 : 06] Cultural and religious diversity give color and a sense of security to people. I was present at a Central Asia seminar on Friday, at which participants were dressed in the national costumes of Kazakhstan, Afghanistan, Sinkyan, and all sorts of stands, national colors, music, dancing, were in evidence.

It's true that the immense power of globalization has some positive political aspects, including the defeat of fascism and communism, but benefits are unevenly spread by globalization.

globalization. As you know, the combined wealth of the three richest billionaires is more than that of 600 million inhabitants of the global south. The global corporation has a deciding vote in today's global economy, with 51 of the hundred largest economies being corporations and the minority nation-states.

In other words, God's God-given cultural diversity is often overwhelmed by the global marketplace.

But cultural diversity and religious diversity depend not only on God's creation, but also upon biodiversity, geodiversity, and the whole richness of the created order.

[15 : 39] which is what I believe Rabbi Sachs is talking about when he talks about the astonishing multiplicity of the created world. Well, you say, well, we're in a church here, so we should find out what the Bible says about this.

There, look at that. What does the Bible say about diversity? I'm going to look at this more particularly from the perspective of both Job and Genesis, and try to draw some conclusions from those passages.

In the case of Job, the last few chapters of the book of Job engaged the topic of diversity with God at the center.

What is the line that God takes? Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Or who laid the cornerstone, interesting, when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?

Now, apart from the beauty of that verse, the word cornerstone, we hear a lot about Jesus as the chief cornerstone, but in this context, I'd like you to think also of the cornerstone being God's created cornerstone, and that we need to pay attention to the fact that the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy at the creation.

[17 : 45] In other words, God gives Job a lesson in geodiversity and biodiversity. If you look at the list of things that God says Job should look at, it's essentially a list of geodiversity and biodiversity.

And I think it's important to note that connection, because here we are, we've got talk in the secular world about geodiversity and biodiversity, and people think it's a great thing, but no reference to God.

So the essential value of the diversity, from our perspective, is that it's God's created order. And so I think it seems to me that it's very difficult sometimes to recognize the connections between some of these ideas and some of the realities of the creation.

Now, Job has a rather simple view of God as the God of order and a God who can be logically explained. So he also points out that the easiest way of understanding God is as the God of order and a God who can be logically explained.

This leads to his simplistic understanding of God and neglects the whole area of mystery. By the end of the book, God asks Job, is there any aspect of the created world that you really understand?

[19 : 14] and we could ask this of the best scientists in the world today, is there any aspect that you really understand?

We will be visited once again at UBC by Mr. Dawkins this fall. The man is a brilliant scientist but completely ignorant with respect to the reality of the understanding that he doesn't have.

It seems to me that this is an interesting parallel between Mr. Dawkins and Job. God asks, is there any aspect of the created world that you really understand?

We should all ask ourselves that question in the context of the huge progress that science has made in things, methods, ideas, but really do we understand the created world?

Complexity, unpredictability, and diversity are of the essence of my activity in the world, says God.

[20 : 33] So diversity is something that is core to God's essential assessment of his creation. So that's a brief comment on Job, but it's fascinating, I think, to read Job with that perspective in mind, that there's so much that we can gain from evaluating diversity in this way.

thing. But what this Rabbi Sachs is all about is arguing that Genesis summarizes and reconciles the problem of globalism versus nationalism.

Now you wonder, how did I jump from that previous point to that? Well, these are two quite separate issues, of course. What Sachs argues is that the first 11 chapters of Genesis via the unique Noahic covenant, which is a covenant made not just with people, but with the created order, and the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11, we see a trend towards globalism, which ends in disaster.

The rest of Genesis emphasizes family, tribe, and nation, as from Genesis chapter 15. Judaism, he says, is strictly national.

It is an explicitly Judaic interpretation of diversity, which has relevance to humanity, both secular and religious, and creates a new paradigm of mutual acceptance instead of factionalism.

[22 : 31] He argues from Genesis that God has created difference through the creation of many cultures, the diversity of faiths and individual civilizations, all with only one place to live, our blue planet Earth.

Can we make space for this difference? He argues, and I'm going to suggest this may not be entirely helpful, but he suggests there need to be two theologies, a theology of commonality and a theology of difference, God and that this is exactly what Judaism has done by contrast with Islam and Christianity.

He says, God has spoken to mankind in many languages, through Judaism to Jews, Christianity to Christians, and Islam to Muslims. No one creed has a monopoly on spiritual truth.

The God of Abraham is the God of all mankind, mankind, but the faith of Abraham is not the faith of all mankind. He argues that the ability of Judaism to deal with both local and global issues contrasts with the globalism that both Islam and Christianity have adopted, and that therefore some of the great clashes that have occurred historically and continue to be a problem derived from the fact that Christianity and Muslim and Islam declares that their creed has a monopoly on spiritual truth.

Now, I'll tackle that in a moment, but Rabbi Sachs' argument that difference is always good as demonstrated by the uniqueness of the history of Judaism, reconciling nationalism and globalism, sits comfortably with his conclusion that no one religion has a monopoly on the truth.

[24 : 47] Now, it's interesting that his book was banned from the synagogues in London of the conservative Jewish community because it was claimed that he was too favorable towards relativism.

And so one can see here there's a problem. But I'm asking, or at least I'm finding myself challenged by the way in which he approaches this question of diversity and the way in which renationalism and globalism are reconciled in the history of Judaism.

What we need to ask is, what if God's initiative in choosing the Jews was a way of leading mankind to himself through the unique revelation of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection?

His argument does not sit comfortably with the reality of God's activity in the unique history of Judaism and the reality of the incarnation in Christ.

So there's a limit to what we should be accepting from Rabbi Jonathan Sachs, but it has so many interesting aspects that I find it's worth considering very carefully.

[26 : 12] That is a big picture view of what Sachs is saying, and then there's a more local scale view which is rather more impressive from the point of view, the exegesis of Genesis.

He starts with the question, why does our common book, Genesis, Genesis is the common book for the three monotheisms, emphasize storytelling and not philosophy?

why is it that Jews, Christians and Muslims, spiritual children of a common father, namely Abraham, have been at loggerheads for so long?

The crusades, the jihads, the forced conversions, inquisitions, burnings at the stake, programs and suicidal terrorism, perhaps its sibling rivalry because we're so close to each other in our heritage.

But, and this is the most important and positive thing that Sachs says, try reading Genesis at five different levels.

[27 : 41] And I think this is something quite startling, at least from my perspective, quite startlingly valuable from my perspective. He says, look at the stories of the main characters from five vantage points.

A superficial reading is that primogeniture, miniature, has been overturned. Namely, the older guy has been superseded by the younger guy and happens over and over again.

Ishmael and Esau are deprived of birth rights, and they were the older guy. This is the standard reading, which is not new to anybody here.

The second level of reading, is look at this Genesis from the vantage point of fathers. It's just a special appeal for fathers.

Abraham loved Ishmael. Isaac loved Esau. and there are interesting distinctions between the nature of the inheritance in each case.

[29 : 09] Ishmael was not thrown out and Esau was not thrown out. They came to rather successful endings from the vantage point of fathers.

A third level of reading, he suggests, is where are your sympathies drawn as you read through Genesis? For example, between Hagar and Ishmael, where are your sympathies drawn?

between Isaac and Esau, where are your sympathies drawn? There's really a deep sympathy to the succession that is not part of the thin red salvation history that we understand through the Abrahamic covenant.

fourthly, and most interestingly, what is the final scene in each story? Isaac and Ishmael stand side by side at their dad's funeral.

I don't know if you've actually noticed that. Jacob and Esau have a spectacular reconciliation. Joseph and his brothers show the most wonderful reconciliation, deeply emotional.

[30 : 54] The final scene in each story suggests that reconciliation has been achieved through these experiences. And finally, Mr.

Sachs says, ask the question, how do Jews read Genesis? How do Christians read Genesis? And how do Muslims read Genesis?

So there's a deep exegetical concern, and this man is an expert in the original literature here, and he comes to some very important conclusions about the value of variety and diversity in this whole history of Genesis.

So we could go on at length, but these are the three points that I get from the readings. One in Job, the embeddedness of diversity in God's creation, creation, the nature of the reconciliation of globalism and nationalism through the history of the Jews from Genesis 15 onwards, and the way in which diversity is approved of in the stories within Genesis itself.

instead of seeing all the credit going to the people of the Abrahamic province, there's just as much evidence that there was approval of the other descendants of Abraham.

[32 : 47] And that is a rich thought. It doesn't solve the past enmities. It doesn't solve the problems of relationships between different religions and cultures, but it does allow one to appreciate the intrinsic value of diversity, not just in biodiversity and geodiversity, but in cultural and religious diversity.

So there's some intrinsic values adjusted by the scriptures that I've referred to, but of course there are difficulties created by diversity.

It would be silly to disregard them. I suppose that the most fundamental problem is the one that I've mentioned, that the uniqueness of God's intervention in history is something that you can't reconcile with the sort of general view that everything is good, everything is diverse, and we say, good show.

In fact, the most important part of our faith depends upon the incarnation. God came into this world as a human being, and he lived and died, rose again for us.

That, of course, does not form a part of Mr. Sachs' discussion. So the difficulty created by cultural and religious diversity and other kinds of diversity is that it tends to ignore uniqueness.

[34 : 41] It's very difficult for either science or social science or general thinking to deal with uniqueness in the way that we become accustomed to in the scientific way of thinking.

Then, having said that, there are other issues which are, well, headed by the systemic discrimination that we seem to prefer as human beings.

We seem to prefer to encourage systemic discrimination rather than accepting the variety of cultural and religious diversities.

And that's another talk on its own. But I want to make the link back to the question of the ecological nature of our culture and our religious tradition.

There seem to me to be keystone principles without which humanity is likely unsustainable.

[36 : 13] Compassion, conservation, and conciliation are, it seems to me, keystone principles without which it's unlikely that humanity can survive for many generations.

and if these are indeed keystone principles of compassion, conservation, and conciliation, I'm not talking here about converting the world to Christianity, I'm talking about the survival of our society, then it seems to me that these keystone principles are difficult to apply unless we value diversity.

almost all humanity aspires to live within a social order that permits living together collectively in a respectful and harmonious way.

Toleration, mutual respect, and celebration are stages in the achievement of sustainable relationships. We start by tolerating the other, we develop a sense of mutual respect, and then ultimately celebrate together with other diverse groups.

It's not a question of conversion to another faith, it's a question of living respectfully and within a respectful, harmonious social order.

[38 : 08] diversity is not just theological, but the difficulties created by cultural and religious diversity are not just theological, but they're clearly the rigidity of systems that have grown up as discriminatory, which we have even in our own Canadian society.

I've had the privilege over the last year or two to welcome new immigrants to Canada. The enormous excitement of new immigrants arriving in Canada, seeing what they have been told is a discrimination-free society.

and they soon are disillusioned. It's not easy. We have a reputation as a country of being accepting and of being very friendly.

And of course these people, when they're just being accorded citizenship, they've been waiting for years to actually get this acceptance. So there's a wonderful atmosphere of celebration as these folks become Canadian citizens.

Then this follows the reality of how difficult it is to deal with diversity, and for very many reasons. So after all this, what is the conclusion of this talk?

[40 : 00] the book of Genesis is authoritative for all monotheists, that is to say, Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

They read them in different ways, and together they represent a little less than 50% of the world's population. So there's another issue which isn't handled here, about other religions beyond the three monotheisms.

But if the book of Genesis is authoritative to all monotheists, can we not start the conversation between Jews, Muslims, and Christians by rereading the stories of Genesis together?

other? That seems to me to be the most positive conclusion that I can come to, given that I have some severe reservations about the ignoring of the fact of the incarnation in Rabbi Sachs' book.

So why do I take Rabbi book? Well, there are two books here. One is called The Dignity of Difference, oddly enough. One is called Not in God's Name. Why do I refer to a conservative Jew in an Anglican respectable congregation like this one?

[41 : 28] Well, I haven't seen, as I mentioned before, much engagement by our senior Christian writers on this question.

And, as I say, I may be quite wrong on this. If I think that the last 15 years is recent, then, of course, it's quite probable that I'm missing some major contributions.

But I came across these books and discovered some surprising things that I hadn't seen in Genesis or in Job before.

And I think to that extent, if an old guy like me can see new things through the wisdom of a conservative Jew, then maybe others can also find that helpful.

And really, the fundamentalist violence that we see in our world today could quite possibly be the result of simply misreading God's Word.

[42 : 38] So that the careful attention to the book of Genesis and the book of Job, both of which are part of that common tradition, could be the starting point of some very positive reduction in the intensity of the violence which seems to be growing all around us.

So that is my conclusion, and I'd be happy to take questions and can't possibly promise to answer the questions. John?

Just curious, how did you end up getting the Order of Canada? That sounds not true. Well, anyway, that's an interesting story.

One doesn't know, in fact. But the Order of Canada is meant to be a recognition of contribution to Canadian life.

Hence my emphasis on the fact that we're proud of Canada BC Bank or something. There's always a personal bias. So, you know, I mean, it's a different thing than the academic medals that one gets.

[43 : 54] The academic medals are for knowing more about rocks. But the Order of Canada suggests that you actually can break open a rock and look inside it.

Martin? You didn't talk much about the Tower of Babel. So, the first reading, the simple reading of the story is the diversity of languages is a curse of God.

But there are also readings of it as a blessing. What does Sachs go for? Sachs goes for it as a blessing. Yeah, which is an interesting thing.

But he feels it's a blessing, but it's abandoned because of the need to take particularities of the Jewish family more seriously.

So, you say the blessing is abandoned. I don't understand what you mean. Well, his view that the Tower of Babel is a blessing is abandoned by him after going on to the next part of the history.

[45 : 07] So, he sees it as a way of interpreting globalism at the early stage and then he says, well, really, if we'd kept on going in that direction, we would never have emerged as a distinct society.

Yes? Well, I'm going to risk venturing into some confusion here.

Late in your remarks, you sort of reached a kind of high point of positive outlook with your three C's.

I'm not sure I can remember what they were, but I remember that there were three C's. Starting with compassion. Conservation and conciliation. Yes. And I much appreciate that, but I think what's happening on a very large scale with your what I would call your dialectic is that you are leaning very much toward the positive end and explicating that, which is valuable.

But I think we need to look at the negative side as well. And in my own ruminations on these things, where I go for the negative side is the work of René Girard.

[46 : 36] I don't know if you're acquainted with that or not. And the foundation of scapegoating and jealousy and that sort of thing in every human being in terms of putting something outside and treating it bad in order to have a social society.

Would you comment on that? I will certainly try. Girard is quite central to the discussion by Sachs as well.

I think my overwhelming negative reaction to the thesis is so focused on the incarnation that it doesn't really become as subtle as Girard in that sense.

So my view is that these principles are actually keystone principles.

They can be applied by an intelligent and humane society.

[47 : 54] and it's not necessary to have sibling rivalry dominate the whole of that society. do you want to come back on that?

It seems to me that Girard is saying that the solution is ultimately a kind of self-sacrifice in becoming aware of what is going on and refusing to do that.

And I'm not sure that without the Christian perspective you can do that. Would you agree? Yeah, that's a fair point.

Yes, Harvey. This good author, a Christian response to him would start with, it seems to me, we love our enemy. The enemy is the ultimate outsider, the ultimate other, but we, our Lord says you love the other.

How you work that out, how that is parsed out is very challenging. You can't go, you have to start there. The other will be loved, even if the other is your enemy.

[49 : 15] Working that out is very challenging. I wonder if the Christian tradition has really worked this out yet. We're still struggling with the other as enemy and loving the other.

Well, I think that Sachs does actually direct attention to the uniqueness or the earliness of the Jewish appreciation of the other.

He feels that this is the first religious tradition to actually speak highly of the enemy.

That in effect, the stranger is to be taken care of in exactly the same way as the view. And so he says this precedes all the teachings of Jesus with respect to loving one's enemies.

That in effect, that was the background of Jesus' expansion of that concept. It's also intrinsic in the Ten Commandments that that is the...

[50 : 29] So it seems to me that that... the starting point for me was that Exodus passage which... they were directed to look after the stranger, which was really quite extraordinary 3,000 years ago, 4,000.

Yes, please, Gina. Well, there's six discussions I would like to have with you about this, but I'll have one thing to say. I don't think that togetherness was a part of the Abrahamic start of faith at all.

Everything was directed toward development of this little group of people toward worshipping the God who had led Abraham out of her, where he would have had a nice, diverse population, allowing him to meet Hittites but not go and live with them.

All of this kind of stuff surrounded by people who believed something else and then a law that said you cannot even eat with those people that might be eating pork or shellfish or something like this.

[51 : 53] You know, a lot of the law was, in my view, intended to induce separateness, come you apart, you know, in a sense. and the conflict for me is that both Christianity and Islam are proselytizing religions.

Go out there and spread the message, which is just so different from Abraham's experience. So how would he reconcile those things or does he care?

So that was my point. She's making that statement that Christianity and Islam are acting globally and see as important to convert the whole of the world to their faith, which is quite different than the Jewish, as you know, the Jewish tradition that does not go out and proselytize makes it quite hard for you to join the Judaic faith.

So with respect to being separate and so on, yeah, we've had a great tradition of being separate and I'm not sure it's got us very far. Separation part is a very tricky one.

For someone being brought up in the Plymouth Brethren context, I see it as totally life denying and something that's had a rather serious negative impact.

[53 : 17] I understand, of course, the necessity for separation as it was in that historical context, but it seems to me that it's far more, well, there's far more potential in looking at the contribution to the community rather than our contribution to being separate.

As you know and have heard many times from me, there is a little corner in heaven where the Plymouth Brethren gather, but nobody knows about it. So, you know, it doesn't seem to me in the long run that's a terribly helpful way to go.

Colleen. Oh, I was just thinking about you have described very well the this reaching for the other in the Jewish context, and as Christians we know we're supposed to love your enemies, and then I was thinking about a germ of something I heard about Islam, and what I don't know about Islam is huge, but apparently even people who are ultra-jihadists, if they come across in their holy war, people of the book apparently would have been treated differently than your basic infidel.

So there's even, you know, that's not exactly love to your enemy, but there is a hint, a whiff of what we're talking about today, even in Islam, even in extreme Islam, which I find fascinating when you put in context with the other things you have been talking about.

Well, I think that's a very interesting point, because that is actually referred to in the dignity of difference discussion, and how ultimately there is a way of reconciling through this emphasis and a rereading of Genesis that that would be possible.

[55 : 18] So I think that we're so dominated by the negatives. I mean, how many of us have close Muslim friends? It was great to have Nabil talk to us a few weeks ago.

You see, I mean, they're actually mixing with people from an Islam background. But I mean, I tried to reflect on this. I knew one Jewish person in high school.

I didn't know any Muslims, didn't meet any Muslims until I went to university. And it was not until much later that I had any close relationship with Muslims.

So the whole be separate is essentially where we're at in that context. So how do we overcome that degree of separation, especially given the fact that there's so much violence entailed in the present scene?

So I just think that it's a very optimistic note in terms of actually each of these three monotheisms is a people of the book.

[56 : 32] And although it's not a people of the same book as you go right through the scripture, but at least Genesis and Job and a number of other parts of the Psalms, for example, all part of that same tradition.

And that's why I think that these principles of compassion, conservation, and conciliation are really possible ways forward in the ecology of our religious traditions.

I don't underestimate the difficulty, but I like to think that there may be a way forward in this. And that's why I appreciate Sachs's effort.

I should say a few more things. Sachs came to this sort of concern as a result of being present at the 9-11 event.

And he was part of the religious group that prayed for the fate of the 3,000 or so people killed killed by that terrorist attack.

[57 : 50] And so his whole life's work changed as a result of that event. And so he's apparently did not have as active an interaction with Christians and Muslims as he has had since that time.

and that's why he's writing and searching for a way forward. And if we can see that there is a chance, then it seems to me that's a hopeful sign.

So I may be too optimistic and I don't wish to understate the impossibility of compromise with respect to the Incarnation.

this is clearly and obviously a sticking point. But perhaps we can try harder than we have done in the past.

Oh, yes, George. I won't say anything about how geographers or historians can do in heaven. It seems that the eternity and timelessness might not the rocks.

[59 : 03] coming to this vast topic that you've put before us very engagingly and challengingly, Olaf, thank you for this.

I'm just going to say a couple of things. I don't know where they're going to go, but you can maybe respond to some of them. In our lifetime, it strikes me that in terms of the unifying principles, of Canadian culture, Western civilization, if we look at it expansively, the incarnation was not a scandal.

You've referred to this big problem at the center of a functioning diversity system, which recognizes, tolerates, and encourages difference.

With all the virtues, I think, we all do it on, they are compared to the alternatives. But in coming to the age of pluralism, which is the more general, I think, theoretical level of when we look at individual differences and diversity.

You know, how this is an ideology which strikes me as being, indeed, ideological, and the most functional and attractive ideology embraced by the Western cultural, political, social elites in a post-Christian era.

[60 : 55] How do you work that with the scandal of the cross and of the incarnation? Because it strikes me that the very elites that most embrace, and most, in a sense, propagate the ideological nature of contemporary modern pluralism, these elites are hostile to all religions, and most particularly Christianity, which is the religion they're coming out with.

So, I guess the point of question would be the relationship between the monotheistic religions. Islam seems to have more popularity amongst the elites than the other two monotheisms.

But what is the relationship that might be more suitable in shaping the nature of pluralist ideology and politics as we see the various conflicts that are there in the courts and all over the place in Western civilizations.

Good question. Yes, I mean, this reflects the fact that we work in a secular society and a lot of things have rubbed off on us which maybe shouldn't have rubbed off on us.

But it does seem to be that the incarnation issue has to be tackled head on. And it can't be put forward as the framework for a lecture at UBC because of the force that society exercises against such a discriminatory activity.

[63 : 03] But it can be the central core of one's witness in talking about these matters. So it seems at a personal level one can deal with it.

But at a theoretical level, there is hostility between the frameworks. But I think, you see, that that's why it pains to try to make the analogy between the values of diversity and in the secular world, but which are underpinned by God's creative activity.

And to that extent, there's a conversation. But I don't deny the this is a tricky issue.

Do you have an answer to your question? Well, I think there's a force to get crucified if you try. Harvey, a second question.

He won't be here next week. I know we have to end, but he won't be here, but he quotes a Catholic theologian von Balthasar in his book on in response to Michael Ingram's Many Mansions, the old choice of the heart of this kind of thing.

[64 : 21] Balthasar was asked, are you a pluralist? And he said, no, I'm a Catholic. I belong to the true universal movement that God has given to the world. And the incarnation is for all.

There's our bottom line, is it not? Well, I think there are two parts to that question. Yes, the incarnation is the bottom line, but whether this Catholicity is the answer, that's even narrowing the diversity.

It's an all C. Yeah. So I think there are two aspects of your question. Is that my cue?

I just want to take the opportunity to say thank you for such an intriguing and thought provoking presentation. You've given us much to discuss, much to think about, and as always, you bring it in such an engaging and sometimes humorous style.

Thank you so good. Thank you.