PART II

What Do We Want the Other to Teach About Our Theological Traditions?
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On February 8–10, 2000, the Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding (CCJU) of Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, Connecticut, in cooperation with the Elijah School for the Study of Wisdom in World Religions, Jerusalem, sponsored a conference at the Ratisbonne Papal Institute, Jerusalem, entitled, “What Do We Want the Other to Teach About Our Theological Traditions?” Over 25 scholars from the Middle East, Europe, Canada and the United States were invited to participate at the proceedings with the additional attendance of graduate students from the Ratisbonne Papal Institute and Tantur Ecumenical Institute, Jerusalem, who joined as observers for each of the sessions spread over three days.

One evening of the conference featured a panel discussion on “The Significance of the Pope’s Pilgrimage to the Holy Land for the Three Abrahamic Religions,” followed by an interfaith concert, at the Museum of Islamic Art, Jerusalem. Participants on the panel included His Excellency, Archbishop Pietro Sambi, Apostolic Delegate to the Holy Land, Jerusalem; Rev. Dr. Remi Hoeckman, OP, executive secretary, Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, Vatican City; Rabbi Shear-Yashuv Hacohen, Chief Rabbi of Haifa; Mr. Daniel Rosing, former director of Ministry of Religious Affairs, Israel; Mr. Ibrahim Sarsur, leader of the Islamic Movement in Israel; and Sheik Abdul Aziz Bukhari, Sheik of the Naqshbandian Religious Method, Jerusalem. Over 250 people filled the Museum of Islamic Art to capacity, and several representatives
from the Israeli press attended. Most of the panel agreed that Pope John Paul II was a man of peace and his pilgrimage would be a positive sign that all people need to move beyond violence and hatred to peace, respect and prayer. Archbishop Sambi said, "The sign value of the papal pilgrimage to the Holy Land can renew our relationships with hope and healing." Several of the panel members said that the time was right to place more time and resources not only into furthering political interreligious dialogue but spiritual interreligious dialogue. One panelist suggested that all parties needed to do more listening and less speaking in order to advance the art and goal of mutual respect and love. These comments by the panelists followed less than a week after Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's widow, Leah Rabin, said in Rome, "When the Pope comes to Israel, we will be very enthusiastic and greatly honored. We consider him a great friend. . . . We do not want to deny anyone access to sacred places."

The format of the conference proper included presentations of papers by noted scholars with prepared responses, followed by discussion, critiques and suggestions by all of the participants. A number of themes emerged from the papers and proceedings and are presented briefly here.

LIST OF INVITED PARTICIPANTS

Dr. Asma Afsaruddin, University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana
Rev. Dr. Franz Bouen, White Fathers, Jerusalem
Sheik Abdul Aziz Bukhari, Sheik of the Naqshabandian Religious Method, Jerusalem.
Dr. David Burrel, University of Notre Dame, South Bend, Indiana
His Eminence, Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy, Pontifical Commission for Religious Relations with the Jews, Vatican City State
Dr. Anthony J. Cernera, Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, Connecticut
Dr. David L. Coppola, Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding of Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, Connecticut
Dr. Kahlid Deran, Bethesda, Maryland
Rabbi Joseph H. Ehrenkranz, Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding of Sacred Heart University, Fairfield, Connecticut
Dr. Jamal J. Elias, Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts
Dr. Alon Goshen-Gottstein, Elijah School, Jerusalem
Rev. Dr. Remi Hoeckman, OP, Commission of Religious Relations with the Jews, Vatican City State
Dr. Barry Levy, Professor, McGill University, Montreal
Reverend Michael McGarry, Tantur Ecumenical Institute, Jerusalem
Mr. Daniel Rossing, former director of Ministry of Religious Affairs, Israel
His Excellency, Archbishop Pietro Sambi, Apostolic Delegate to the Holy Land, Jerusalem
Mr. Ibrahim Sarsur, leader of the Islamic Movement in Israel
Reverend Thomas Stranksy, Bethlehem
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Rabbi Stanley Wagner, University of Denver, Denver, Colorado
Rabbi Shear-Yashuv Hacohen, Chief Rabbi of Haifa
There is no single way to teach the theology of another religion, but there is a continuity of identity, religious practice, memory and history that allows for authentic dialogue. One challenge to teaching about another’s theology is that religious thought is not an isolated set of abstract philosophical truth statements written by an individual. Rather, theology is based upon important, shared values, rooted in the community’s ethical and liturgical relationship with God, and born of revelation and the historical lived faith experience of a community. Accordingly, there are layers of truth in theology that only an “insider” can adequately come to understand. Additionally, there are degrees of separation or otherness that are experienced in intrareligious dialogue which may be perceived as greater than in some interreligious dialogue groups.

Teaching about the other’s theology requires that the teacher is attentive to the degrees of otherness and highlight the limitations as well as the possibilities to students for understanding in such a context. Further, there are several different layers of understanding, which do not require agreement or acceptance. These range from simple language or symbolic approximations, to analogy, to correspondence, to shared communal meanings, to “knowing” in an existential or intimate way—the latter meaning representing a more invested, committed understanding, tending more toward acceptance, precisely because it is only able to be consistently experienced by insiders. This consistent insider experience of faith is frequently understood on levels beyond one’s theology and has
characteristics that are more visceral, artistic, relational and dialogical in the contexts of familial and communal relationships or worship. The goal of interreligious dialogue is for the sake of understanding which leads to mutual respect, trust, harmony and peace.

Another consideration when teaching about the other's theological tradition is taking into account the insights and limitations of a postmodern worldview and the importance of being attentive and respectful when using analogies or translating stories and categories across religious traditions. The historical contexts and cultural lenses in which these stories are understood can vary greatly. It should be noted also that reading the Scriptures as a believer or a skeptic has direct consequences on an adequate understanding of the core of another's beliefs. Additionally, there will necessarily be ideological and theological differences, which cannot be ignored. Nonetheless, truth can be found in the midst of different and sometimes contradictory convictions and realities. A common foundational effort that all can work together toward is to restore the central place of God in the world.

Jews, Christians and Muslims enter into dialogue because God has chosen to speak with them and to be in relationship with them first. One possible interreligious theological viewpoint could be to see the Word of God from the perspective of a history of dialogue, a covenantal relationship with a God who has chosen to communicate with a receptive, historical community, and invites humans to live faithful and ethical lives in community. Subsequently, Jews, Christians and Muslims theologize because God has been revealed to them and they want to interpret and share that message of peace, justice, unity, and compassion with the present and future generations. Since God's revelation is heard in many languages, people of faith have a responsibility to share the truth, wisdom and mercy of God with each other so that all can faithfully follow God's will in all of its plurality of expression. That plurality is expressed within and between each religion in multidimensional, multicontextual, and multivocal ways due to the influences of historical circumstances.

A promising theological starting point for teaching about the other is seeing religious beliefs and teachings embodied in the lives of holy, just, wise, or righteous people. Religions can have an important role in highlighting exemplary human beings especially by celebrating the wisdom
and ethical lives of believers. By remembering the sages, saints, prophets, and holy people, as well as what they said and did, the religion and theology of the other can be taught in a way that is theologically accurate and morally appropriate. In this process, opportunities for discovering parallel teachings between religions emerge as well as the implicit communication of the ongoing vitality of the other religion.

More study will need to be pursued in the areas of the intellectual traditions, scriptures, laws, ethics, and prayer and liturgy of each religion. The advantage of pursuing these areas of study together in dialogue is that each religious tradition continues to illuminate the other by its own reflections. In particular, those who are genuinely concerned with protecting the image of God and the love and wisdom of God found in the moral weave of relationships will make every effort to know and understand the other, in spite of the obstacles that normally would interfere with such a relationship.

Teaching what the other wants to be taught about him or her is a profound act of teshuva (an act of reconsideration and repentance for the past, and an invitation to transformation into a deeper relationship with self, others, and God). This teshuva can bring participants face-to-face in honor and equality into a communion (havurah and koinonia), a communion of spirit and heart. To study others with the intention of trying to teach authentically about them, is not only to understand and know them, but is also a process of self-discovery and of knowing God more intimately. One does not simply teach about the other, but specifically the other-in-faith, the other as a son or daughter of God. This joint reflection leads Jews, Christians and Muslims down God’s path of healing.
What We Want the Other to Know About Us

In What Sense Can “We” Instruct the “Other” About Ourselves?

As the first speaker in this conference, I wish to not only address the conference topic from the Jewish perspective, but to make some general remarks about the implied assumptions of this conference, remarks which will obviously be relevant to the different perspectives represented in the conference. My own interest in our topic is twofold. On the one hand, as director of the Elijah School, Jerusalem, where world religions are taught, the question of how to teach world religions in an interfaith context is of obvious interest. The Elijah School’s attempt to strike a balance between academic excellence and interfaith dialogue based on a committed faith stance presents a particular challenge. How does one represent a religion taking into account both its historical and developmental process and its faith claims? The former perspective can lead to a critical view of the religion that at times is at odds with its own self understanding, as formulated traditionally. To a large extent, we have here an expression of the insider-outsider problem in the teaching of religion.

The title of our conference assumes, to a certain degree, that the “we” who instruct the “other” how to teach about us, are in some sense in possession of a truer or better approach to the subject matter, by virtue of our being insiders. Indeed, the Elijah School’s attempt to engage teachers who are insiders to teach their religions makes a similar assumption. Yet the approach at the Elijah School is not necessarily appropriate in other contexts, for one can distinguish between a context of
interfaith dialogue, where one must have an “other” to engage, and other types of academic settings. Can we always claim that only the insider has access to the true way of teaching? It seems obvious that the outsider may often bring not only critical perspective that is lacking in a tradition, but also insight and a new methodology, in light of which a religious tradition can be better understood. The insider-outsider issue will continue to occupy scholarly attention for generations to come. In the context of the present discussion, one must therefore define the sense in which it is considered that there is a “we” who somehow have a say in instructing the “other” in the teaching of religion. Three senses can be suggested:

1. The outsider’s perspective may seem to the insider to be grossly mistaken, bearing false witness to the religion. Such errors are usually in the nature of a judgment upon the religion, and not simply in the order of a mistaken perception. To take the case of Judaism, the claim that can still be heard in certain circles down to present times, that Judaism is legalistic, is such a judgment. Such judgments are usually accompanied by an evaluation of one’s own religion as superior to the religion of the other. Judgments form attitudes, and attitudes govern our relations with concrete others. This leads to the second point.

2. Due to the modern multicultural and multireligious context, study of religions is no longer a purely academic exercise. It bears upon the lives of peoples and communities in contact with one another. There are diverse communities of faith living alongside one another in all parts of the world. There is thus a need for the study of religion in a way that resonates with the lives of the faith communities. The fact that faith communities endow academic positions in the academy, primarily in the U.S. for the teaching of their respective traditions, gives further weight to the demand that the teaching of religions should further the interfaith situation. In other words, there is no purely neutral academic ground in which religion is taught, and the teaching of religion worldwide in some way reflects the interfaith situation. Now, to suggest that because “We” exist, “We” can determine the way in which our tradition is academically represented is far from obvious. It raises a series of problems that demand further consideration. Could there be multiple readings of
a tradition, that of the outsider and that of the insider, the one serving the purely academic study of religion and the other serving the interfaith situation? Might the study of religion controlled by the religious “We” be in some way less academic? And if so, in what way? Would it draw upon different sources? Would it make more room for experience? We have hit the insider-outsider problem here head on, and beyond pointing to the questions that arise for our discussion, I do not feel I have a significant contribution to make at this point. Let me then leave further reflection upon this point for our discussions, and move on to the third dimension, which to me is the most significant.

3. The third sense in which “We” have something to say that is unique, and that can be only heard from the insider’s perspective touches upon the very act of presenting a religion. At this point, I wish to introduce the second perspective, to which I alluded earlier, that informs my presentation. This is not as director of an interfaith study program, but as a teacher of Judaism. Over the past three years I have had the privilege of teaching introductory courses on Judaism to Christian students. The first such course was taught at the Bet Jalla Latin Patriarchate Seminary, and for the past two years I have been offering such a course here at the Ratisbonne Institute. Most of what I have to say in the present lecture is in the nature of both a description and a reflection upon this dimension of my work. Hence, for convenience’s sake, and in order to draw upon my personal experience, I shall for the remainder of the presentation address the question of the “we” and the “other” in terms drawn from my introductory course, and hence shall discuss the parameters and boundaries of the presentation of Judaism in such an introductory course. In parentheses, I should add that for the past months two titles for our conference have been circulating. The one has been what do we want the other to teach about us, suggesting it is the other who is doing the teaching. The second is what do we want the other to know about us. The only significant difference between the two touches on the issue of who is doing the teaching—the insider or the outsider. While the issues touched upon in my presentation are relevant for both titles, they do reflect more closely the concerns of the “to know about us” version of our deliberations.
Getting back now to the third sense in which I find it meaningful to speak of a "we" who have something to say to an "other," let me begin by sharing my experience that there is no simple and straightforward presentation of a religion. The assumption that there is something somehow "objective" in the way in which a religion is presented is fraught with complications. Rather, the presentation of a religion, in my case Judaism, is a matter of construction, as much as it is one of description. It is as much a matter of theology as it is of history of religions. It is as much a matter of the faith of the presenter as it is of laying out what are considered to be the key literary or historical facts. Hence, presenting a religion and teaching about it is ultimately a matter of sharing insight. My claim is that there is a theological insight that informs the work of the insider, and that enables the "we" to present the tradition in a way that will be significantly different from the way in which the religion will be represented by the outsider.

If every act of presentation is also an act of construction, we must weigh the different kinds of construction possible. It is arguable that history of religion provides us with certain descriptive canons, certain guiding principles and questions by means of which we can describe religious traditions. If so, a Muslim scholar may be able to adequately describe Judaism using such academic descriptive canons. Presumably, were she to know all the facts concerning all world religions, our Muslim scholar should be able to proceed to equally describe all religions, completely bracketing her own personal belief. Now, while I seriously doubt that this is really how it is, and while I note that de facto we have fewer and fewer generalists, one must still acknowledge that scholars such as Ninian Smart and Huston Smith do seem to represent such a type of scholarship, where religions are described seriatim, with no concern for the personal belief of the describing scholar. And yet, even while acknowledging the validity of such scholarship, it is but one type of scholarship.

The alternative model, which I wish to present, is one in which theology and history of religions cannot be fully separated, and where religion is not simply presented as some objective data, but is constructed. Indeed, I would argue that there is no one presentation of a religion. There would be as many Judaeisms as there would be presenters of Judaism, and as many Islams as there are presenters of Islam, perhaps for the simple reason that Judaism does not really exist. Religion is an
abstraction of the scholarly or theological mind. The historical, literary, and sociological reality that is being described is always far vaster and wider than anything we describe. Any description is an attempt to give structure and coherence to a mass of data that extends far beyond the confines of our description. In presenting we limit, define, and bring within the realm of our understanding a given phenomenon. At that moment we also create the phenomenon, and call it an –ism, in this case: Judaism. Presentation is thus an act of construction, and hence a theological no less than a historical moment. It is here that “we” have something to say. Because theology is a matter for the insider, because there is an insight that will allow for the shaping of the constructed system, and because ultimately we have the right to expect something more interesting from the theologically informed, that shapes how a tradition is constructed, than from the simple historical presentation of data. All of this suggests that in the “We” there is the power to construct religious traditions in ways that are more enriching, rewarding, and illuminating. It is this third level where I think the “we’s” contribution to the study of religion is most significant. What “we” want the other to know about us is thus ultimately in some sense a construction of our own identity. The presence of the other thus serves as the context for the articulation of my own identity, expressed in the construction of a particular religious system and its presentation to the other.

Introduction(s) to Judaism

Let me do some backtracking, in order to account for how I have arrived at the above suggestion. In preparing for what I thought would be a very straightforward course, introducing Judaism to the Bet Jalla seminarians, I went over some twenty introductions to Judaism. I discovered there were no two introductions that were identical. While all of them described the same phenomenon, they did so in greatly diverging manners. The choice of sources, the ideology, and ultimately the image of Judaism that emerged in these different introductions were ultimately dictated by the personal belief or understanding of the presenter. There was no objective way of approaching the subject, and each presentation was equally subjective, or relative, in the sense of making a series of
choices within the tradition, choices that could have just as legitimately have been made otherwise. Ultimately, none of these introductions did the trick for me, which meant that in order to present Judaism I had to do my own presentation of the sources, and my own construction of the meaning of the system. I soon realized that in fact I am creating one more introduction to Judaism.

It is obvious that my introduction carries no greater authority than any of the other existing introductions. Indeed, the recognition that every construction is an act of subjective representation implies that all are equally valid, and that beyond the personal appeal of my subjectivity and its creative expressions there is nothing inherently more compelling about my approach, when compared to any existing approach to the subject. I did, however, note that in Israel's 50 years of existence no introduction to Judaism was written, that was geared at a non-Jewish audience. There were many introductions written outside Israel, obviously informed by local Jewish-Christian or other relations. There were also introductions to Judaism written in Hebrew for Israel's secular readers. But Israel has not produced a presentation of the Jewish religion, geared at a non-Jewish public. This is telling of the interfaith situation in Israel and of the fact that Israeli concern is largely taken up with internal Jewish affairs and with matters of Jewish physical and spiritual survival. At the same time this seemed to justify one more presentation of Judaism. For a different kind of Judaism might be constructed in independent Israel. Both the range of topics and the range of sources may differ from those featuring in "Diaspora" presentations of Judaism. To take two examples, the role of sacred space or Holy Land, and the theologies of modern Zionist religious thinkers may significantly alter how the tradition is portrayed. Thus, the debt of my own religious self to the thought of Palestine's first chief rabbi, Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, obviously would come through my presentation of Judaism, coloring it in a particular way. Moreover, my choice to present Judaism as a story, to which I shall refer further below, makes the vantage point from which the story is told all the more significant.

The only way to deal with the subjectivity that I see as fundamental to the project of presenting a religion is to expose one's subjectivity. Thus, the Judaism I present is very much my brand of Judaism, informed by my own personal life choices and spirituality. It is a Judaism that is at one and the same time highly dialogical and open to conversation with others
from other traditions, but also drawing on the Jewish tradition's most inward resources. It is, if you will, very mystical, heavily informed by mystical thought, in its many manifestations in Kabbala, Hasidic thought, and the Zionist mystical ideology of Rav Kook. It is, to a certain degree, a unique blend, though perhaps to the same degree that every constructive act draws upon subjectivities that are equally unique.

Let me provide an example of how the subjectivity of the writer is expressed through the choices he makes in presenting his tradition. In my presentation of Judaism, I have included a discussion of the notion of the holy man in Judaism. Following a historical survey of different types of holy men in Judaism, which follows a historical survey of different types of holy men throughout the ages, I finally arrive at a discussion of the Hasidic Zaddik as a culmination of different lines of thought. Now, to feature the notion of the Hasidic Zaddik as normative and representative of Judaism is certainly unconventional. I know of no other presentation of Judaism that has done so. This is left to introductions to Hasidism, as though the Hasidic movement were something other than Judaism. And indeed, for the writers of all the introductions that I have surveyed, this is precisely the case. There is Judaism, defined through some canonical corpus, a definition of which is usually not given to the reader, and then there are other movements, which are somehow tangential to the "real" or "essential" Judaism. Now, the decision to omit reference to Hasidism, and in this case, to its notion of the holy man, and for that matter—to the very notion of holy man, in a presentation of Judaism, is as much of a choice as to include them. What is the basis for exclusion rather than inclusion? Ultimately it reverts to the writer's own sense of what is Judaism, and what is normative and representative about it. Yet, I would argue any such decision is subjective and ultimately arbitrary. It is not simply that one may represent the Hasidic movement and its ideological and social institutions as an equally legitimate part of Judaism as those parts of Judaism that are conventionally described. More significantly, one can argue that here we have a culmination of spiritual tendencies that are manifest throughout tradition, and that find their fulfillment in the Hasidic movement. The point is not which choice is proper. My point is that any decision is a choice, and any choice is ideologically, personally, and subjectively motivated. Rather than achieve the impossible task of describing a core or essential Judaism, one must present
consciously and openly one's constructed Judaism, laying bare one's assumptions and presuppositions.

One of the discoveries I made along the way was that not only is the presentation of Judaism itself a subjective act, but it is created in a context of intersubjectivity. The classroom situation out of which my work grew is here significant. Here I was a Jew, talking to Christians. The presentation of Judaism grew out of the exchange of these two subjective realities. I often asked myself how my presentation might have been different if I had to make it to Muslim students. Surely other topics would have emerged as foci of discussion. Would I have spent as much time on the notion of the Zaddik in speaking to Muslims as I did in talking to Christians, and suggesting affinities between certain Jewish notions of the Zaddik and certain understandings of Christ? One of the facts I noticed about existing introductions to Judaism is that their audience is not clearly defined. Are they addressing a religious other, a secular Jew, a generic intellectual? The question has immediate ramifications. Emil Fackenheim includes in his introduction to Judaism a discussion of whether God hears prayer. I find no need to discuss this topic in my introduction. But this is precisely because I envision a different reader at the other side of the conversation. So, what emerges is that there is no defined "we," in whose name one can talk with authority. "We" has become "we," consisting of a large collection of constructors of religion, presenting their own unique and original construction of religion, while the "other" cannot be simply thought of in the broadest terms, but must be clearly defined. My presentation of Judaism to Christians will look very different from Menachem Fruman's presentation of Judaism to Muslim clergy. Both will be equally valid.

The claim that multiple presentations of Judaism may be equally valid does not rely simply on postmodern sensibilities. Indeed, if there is one message that emerges from the history of Jewish reflection, and which I believe must be incorporated into any presentation of Judaism, it is that Judaism is multivocal. From the earliest strands of biblical thought down to modern times, Judaism supports a rich discourse in which multiple opinions coexist alongside one another. This does not mean, obviously, that any topic can be the subject of unlimited opinions, or that there is lack of consensus concerning everything. Were that the case, Judaism would completely disintegrate. Yet, Judaism cannot simply be presented as a single,
facile, univocal belief. Indeed, what characterizes noncritical, what we may for lack of a better term call fundamentalist, pictures of Judaism is precisely this lack of nuance, and the presentation of Judaism as a univocal message. Therefore, the constructive presentation of Judaism must also be faithful to Judaism’s fundamental multivocality. Historical description tends to present the multivocality of the multiple historical Judaisms. The constructive presentation tends to a more unified presentation. A creative tension must be maintained between these two perspectives. Multiple voices must always be given expression. This expression may be in order to contextualize or to balance the dominant voice expressed in the presentation. Alternatively, the role of the presentation may be to suggest a synthesis between the multiple voices of tradition. In any event, while we cannot define a single position as definitive of Judaism, in terms of content, there is a discourse that is typical of tradition, and which must be captured in a presentation of Judaism. This discourse is itself a major factor by means of which any presentation of Judaism is authenticated. I would suggest this factor as an important complement to the awareness of one’s own subjectivity, and the ways it governs one’s presentation. A responsible subjectivity would be one that is articulated within the wider multivocal and multigenerational discourse of Judaism, expressing itself in dialogue with and in relation to the rich texture of earlier Jewish reflection.

On Jews and Judaism

There is a certain confusion that is characteristic of introductory works on Judaism. This confusion may be particular to Judaism, due to its fundamentally twofold nature. Judaism is both a peoplehood—an ethnic entity—and a system of religious belief and praxis, similar to the other religions discussed in our conference. Now, in the case of Judaism, beyond all the difficulties we have already discovered in our title, the definition of “us” is particularly problematic. Not simply because there are a variety of Judaisms. On a more fundamental level, does this “us” refer to a people or a religion, defined as a religious system of doctrine and action? Are we teaching about the Jewish people in their various historical manifestations, or about the Jewish religion? I take it the task at hand, and the task
which I set for myself in my introduction, is an introduction to a religious system. Hence, its method is theological and draws upon insight derived from the history of religions. Were my choice different, the method might be more heavily historical, attempting a historical presentation of the history of the Jews, including a history of their beliefs and religious practices. A presentation of the Jewish people's beliefs may be more descriptive. A presentation of Judaism as a religious system is necessarily constructive.

The understanding that what I am presenting is Judaism, and not a history of the religious life of the Jews, assumes I am able to locate Judaism somewhere. In which people do I locate it? What texts do I see as representative of a Judaism worth representing? These are matters of choice that are ultimately determined only by my own religious sensibility. The choice to describe Judaism implies one is describing not only a historical reality, such as was lived by the Jews, but rather one is presenting some ideal reality, perhaps an ideal that has never existed. The project thus involves selection. Certain elements of the system will be highlighted in the construction, while other elements that may have played a historical role may be ignored. Certain texts will be featured, while others may not be integrated into an ideal representation of Judaism as a religious system.

A further implication of the presentation of Judaism, over and against a history of the Jewish people's religious life, is that such a presentation of Judaism can become the source for a critique of diverse manifestations of historical Judaisms. If one presents a history of the Jewish people and their religious life, one need not pass judgment on the diverse forms their life has taken. The facts are what they are, and the historian can expose them for what they are. That Jews may have been religious syncretists or gangsters may be historical facts. Both may captivate the historian's imagination. However, both may be irrelevant to a construction of the Jewish religion. A construction of the religion, on the other hand, necessitates taking a stand. One may have the right to pass judgment on amulets as legitimate or illegitimate forms of religious expression. Given Judaism's own declared standards of what prayer should be, one may wish to examine the historical forms of prayer in Judaism, and expose them to criticism. The act of presenting a religion leads us not only to a selection amongst multiple forms of the religion and its texts, but also leads us to an examination and evaluation of the actual forms the religious life has taken.
The Choice of Sources—Normativity and Subjectivity

Let me expound further on the problem of the selection of sources. For the historian, all forms of Jewish life may be relevant. Indeed, if our perspective was that of presenting the historical phenomenon of Judaism to Christians, we might find special interest in certain historical phenomena that may have had particular impact upon Christianity. From a Christian perspective, interest in the Qumran sectarians makes perfect sense. Indeed, any serious historical presentation of historical Judaisms—and I use the term in the plural—following the lead of Jacob Neusner, cannot overlook the community whose theology is captured in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Yet, when we speak theologically we speak of Judaism, in the singular and not in the plural. And when such a Judaism is constructed, there will probably not be room for the Dead Sea Scrolls in it. That is, unless the writer has constructed a Judaism that in some way resonates so deeply with the world view of the sectarians as to revive their world view and to span Judaism from its roots, through the works of the sectarians and down to later manifestations of Judaism that represent a related world view. And yet, if such a Judaism were constructed would it be recognized as Judaism? For that matter, Christian kabbala might also be constructed as a form of Judaism. Are there then any minimal conditions that govern what can and cannot be presented as Judaism, beyond the subjective choices of individual writers?

Two approaches may be taken to this question. One is based on self-understanding, the other is an attempt to apply notions of canonicity and normativity to the description of a religion. The first criterion is probably the ultimate factor that determines what historical Judaism fall within the scope of a theologically constructed Judaism. Ancient Christianity, no less than Qumran covenantors, considered itself to be a Jewish movement. Yet, what ultimately determines the boundaries of Jewish self-definition, as well as of Jewish continuity, is the historical memory of the community, as it carries its own self-identity through the generations. It is important to recognize the utter subjectivity of this category. Yet, at the same time there is probably no other category besides self-understanding that ultimately governs what falls within the scope of Judaism. From a purely phenomenological point of view, the Biblical origins of Judaism may be unrecognizable to present day Judaism. Yet those roots, as well as
the diverse stages and forms of Judaism's Judaisms, are held together by a sense of continuity supplied by the tradition itself through memory and through the continuous recasting of past in terms of present. To take a more contemporary example, Jewish self-identity has decided that the Sabbatean movement is beyond the boundaries of Jewish self-definition, even if the historical study of Judaism is fascinated with the Sabbatean movement. Hence, Sabbateanism is one of many historical Judaisms. It should not, however, figure in a theologically constructed presentation of Judaism. Contemporary secular Zionism presents a challenge in a different direction. While historically one may make an argument that secular Zionism is not really a Jewish movement, indeed some of its own ideologues have argued in that direction, from the theological perspective one might decide to view the Zionist revival as another legitimate expression of Judaism, bearing continuity with Judaism's long story. The criteria are far from historically objective. They reflect ideological choices of a community. Yet, to the degree that the very act of presenting Judaism is itself theologically and ideologically motivated, it must rely on the self-understanding of the religious community, and the way in which it shapes its memory to construct its identity.

There is, however, a second factor that lends the presentation of Judaism a dimension of objectivity. The reason the Dead Sea Scrolls should not come within the purview of a constructed Judaism is not only that the sectarians' memory did not become part of Israel's self identity. It is because their writings did not become part of Judaism's canon. Now, applying notions of canon to the diverse religious phenomena of Judaism is complicated. It is not even clear that some of the classics are canonical. I would refer to Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed or the Rabbi Yehuda Halevi's Kuzari as classics. I would not refer to them as canonical. I would reserve the term canonical for those texts that are universally accepted by all parts of the Jewish people. In this context, it seems to me there are two literary corpora that enjoy such a status. The first is the halacha, from its foundational formulation in the Mishna down to its later articulation in the Shulchan Aruch and its commentaries. Hence, if we seek to portray Judaism we must take into account the place of halacha in its different manifestations, as these shape Jewish life. The second corpus, which for the purpose of the presentation of Judaism is more convenient than the halacha, is the Siddur, the Jewish prayer book. My Christian
friends have taught me that *lex orandi* is *lex credendi* (literally, the law of prayer is the law of belief). The Siddur is probably the most canonical of all Jewish texts. It is significant because, unlike law codes that are read only by scholars, even if these comprise a significant portion of Jewish intelligentsia, and even if significant portions of the Jewish people are trained in reading such codes, the Siddur is read by every single member of the Jewish community without exception. Normative Jewish prayer practice mandates regular prayer, three times daily. While some women practice less than the full halachic mandate, they are nonetheless exposed to the Siddur on a daily basis. The Siddur, along with other liturgical standards, like the Passover Haggada, articulates the community's aspirations as it faces God. It is thus the single most important source for understanding the Jewish religion.

Now, obviously not everything in the Siddur necessarily measures up to the highest religious ideals of a given construction of Judaism. Maimonides' understanding of Judaism and the perfected religious state may not recognize the contents of the Siddur as the ultimate expression of the perfected philosophic-prophetic state. Nevertheless, I would argue the Siddur, along with the *halacha*, provide any construction of Judaism at the very least with checks and balances. I believe, in fact, that they provide much more. I would argue that the ultimate test for the viability of a presentation of Judaism is its ability to make sense of the liturgical heritage, to grow out of it. From the insider's perspective, the good presentation of Judaism should allow the member of the community to reidentify with greater vigor with the liturgical life. In this sense, liturgy not only provides the orienting principle for the entire constructive venture, but also the arena where the theological usefulness of a given theological construct is tested and bears fruit.

Having suggested liturgy and *halacha* as canonical cornerstones for the presentation of Judaism does not mean that all we need to do is a theology of the Siddur or a theology of the *halacha*, and this will provide us with the appropriate presentation of Judaism. Rather, these two canonical bodies provide the basic structure, upon which, historically, multiple superstructures have been created. These superstructures include philosophy, mysticism, piety, and various expressions of Jewish spirituality. Thus, one introduction to Judaism is structured around Maimonides' thirteen articles of faith. One cannot contest the legitimacy of such a presentation. However,
reference to any of the superstructures is ultimately a choice, and, as such, is subjective. There is nothing inherently more compelling about a Maimonidean presentation of Judaism than a kabbalistic representation of the religion. Both are equally valid ways of making sense of the canonical texts, the law, the liturgy and the people’s story. That they are radically different from one another suggests the wide range of ways in which Judaism can be constructed.

Let me spell out the implications of the above to our guiding question: what we would want the other to teach, or know, about us. In light of all the above, one can only say there is no one single way of teaching about us. Nonetheless, whatever way is chosen for the presentation of the religion, it must take into account those elements deemed fundamental to the tradition and its self-understanding. That is, it must convey continuity of identity of the different historical Judaism, presenting them as links in an ongoing chain, forming memory, giving rise to identity. It must also take into account the canonical texts of Judaism, and enable one to make sense of the two key corpora—the halachic corpus and the liturgical corpus. Beyond that, the same diversity and variety that characterize Jewish thought, it must also characterize the way it is presented to those outside Judaism.

Apologetics and Criticism

To present a religion is not a value-free activity. It is not a purely descriptive task. It involves value judgments concerning the subject matter. I originally approached the task of presenting Judaism as a purely descriptive task. As work proceeded, I discovered the work involved me in two types of activity, both of which implied value judgments that went far beyond the presumably neutral task of description. On the one hand, I became aware at certain points that what I was engaged in was a form of apologetics, which led me to reflect upon the place of apologetics in the descriptive work. On the other hand, I also found myself critical of the tradition. By critical I mean expressing a judgment on the concrete historical phenomena of Judaism and of Jewish life, in light of the wider perspective from which my view of Judaism was constructed. It is immaterial whether it is my perspective that is adopted, or some other perspective.
The significant issue, at this point in our discussion, is that the process of presentation of a religion also involves us in making value judgments upon certain historical manifestations of the religion, judgments that are unfavorable. Let me now offer some of my reflections on how I have come to understand the task of presenting my religion with regard to both the positive apologetic perspective and the negative critical perspective.

The first time I considered that what I am engaging in is apologetics rather than a scientific presentation of Judaism, I was horrified. I had, after all, entered this project assuming there was a neutral descriptive, hence scientific, way of presenting Judaism, which would be value-free. That Judaism had to be constructed rather than described meant that I had to read it, to interpret it, and to offer my interpretation as a presentation of Judaism. While engaged in interpretation, I realized it was my task to give Judaism the best possible reading. If you will, this is the famous principle of charity, as formulated in Dworkin’s *Law Empire*. In reading a system we strive to give it the best possible reading. Indeed, the interfaith context may be taken as the context par excellence for apologetics in their highest form. Apologetics is the task of presenting our reality to the other. In the process, we discern, discover and present what may have been hitherto hidden from our own awareness. The apologetic context does not call for invention of false explanation, but for the uncovering of deeper structures of meaning. These become available precisely though the presence of an other who challenges us to the new insight that such a construction provides. If the fruit of the interfaith context is the highest form of apologetics, where does the academic or scientific background of our work come to play?

Two answers come to mind. The first is that in an important way my project differs from that of the uncritical introduction to Judaism. My presentation does not seek to present a truth, a complete system or something final. When Judaism is approached from a perspective that couples theological reflection carried out in an interfaith context, and historical awareness of the varieties of historical Judaisms, what ensues is not a statement of truth but a presentation of forces, movements and tensions, that have to be put together and constructed to create a whole. That constructive moment does not lose touch with its origins. It is a postcritical constructive moment that remains aware of the historical complexities
that are its building blocks, rather than a precritical construction that presents Judaism in a facile and one-dimensional manner.

The second answer is a consequence of the first, and of still greater value. As a reader of Judaism, I am willing to criticize alongside the attempt to give the best possible reading. Offering the best reading does not equal condoning everything in the religion as it is. As already suggested, the formulation of the best possible reading may itself serve as the source of criticism of elements within the tradition. Hence, the presence of the other is not only occasion for uncovering and presenting the finest of the tradition. It is also a context for addressing those parts of the tradition that are problematic. The presence of an other may be necessary to bring those parts out to light in their fullness, as part of cleansing the religion. In other words, precisely because I present my religion in a context that is inescapably apologetic, I will sooner or later find myself making the distinction between positive and negative elements in the tradition, and the corresponding distinction between Judaism, viewed as a complete and ideal system, and the historical reality of the many Judaisms, lived by Jews at different times. The imperfections will be acknowledged as historical realities of the many lowercased judaisms, thus leaving my constructed uppercased Judaism free of the taint of human imperfection. Thus, the apologetic act of presenting my religion to the other provides an opportunity for self-examination and for the raising of an ideal form of religion, that serves not only the outsider to whom I present, but the insider, who thereby is confronted with a new vision of his own tradition.

Let me provide two examples of apologetics, illustrating the difference between the type that is necessitated in the act of presentation of Judaism, and the kind of apologetics that is better avoided. In thinking of the Sabbath and the meaning of the commandment to refrain from labor, one is confronted with the task of introducing the outsider to a fundamental dimension of Jewish spirituality. How the Sabbath is celebrated is radically different from how a Christian or Muslim conceives of his or her own holy day. In presenting the Sabbath, one is engaged in a form of apologetics. Yet, the apologetic task is to bring forth and articulate the internal reality of the religious life in a way that can be understood by someone on the outside. The process is not one in which the reality is distorted or made to look other than what it is. The process is one of sharing and explaining, striving to capture the inner essence of a dimension
of the religious life and to present it to the outsider. What is said to the outsider is, therefore, essentially what is said to the insider, and the apologetic moment is one in which one attempts to convey the inner sense and experience as lived by a member of the religion.

Let me contrast this with an example of apologetics I would wish to avoid. In discussing mitzvot and women’s obligations to fulfill mitzvot, one might be tempted to offer explanations that were suggested by modern apologists, to account for women’s exemption from time-bound commandments. One such explanation is that women need not observe time-bound, positive commandments, such as Sukka and Shofar, because due to their physical nature they have a different relationship to time. Men are in need of sanctification of time through ritual actions. Women have a particular relationship to time through their monthly cycles, and, therefore, do not need the time-bound commandments to shape their attitude to time and its sanctity. Now, in this case apologetics is an attempt to justify a fact of the religion, and to shelter it from criticism. Yet, there is no accompanying educational or spiritual direction that actually directs women to live their relationship to time in light of their feminine physiology. The apologetic moment here serves to justify, protect, and preserve. Beyond providing an interesting and intelligent rationale, it does not filter into education or lived spirituality. I would, therefore, claim that the kind of apologetic move that can be condoned must stem from the attempt to share the inner meaning and experiences as experienced by the practitioners of the religion with the outsider. What is difficult in the eyes of the other must be described, along with the presentation of how it is lived by the insider. Here, justification must give way to testimony. The testimony of the insider as to his or her understanding of the meaning of his/her religious life is the ultimate apologetic move. Improper apologetic seeks to demonstrate something is right or true. Proper apologetics seek to share the experience and significance of the queried fact to the life of the believer. Where such meaning cannot be found, the door is open to querying the ultimate meaning of those portions of tradition. Apologetics must seek to present religion in its best possible sense, in relation to God, while at the same time not seeking to justify all in it that is concretely present, remaining open to exposing the human frailties of the religion.
The difference between the two types of apologetics ultimately boils down to the question of whether in presenting my religion I must present it as perfect. I would argue that one of the factors that distinguishes an academically based approach to religion from a traditional one is the willingness to not view one's religion as something perfect. This is not a necessary consequence of academic training, and there may be individuals or even intellectual communities who may not draw such consequences. Yet, there is something sobering in the academic approach to religion. The historical approach brings to light portions of tradition that the traditional approach may comfortably overlook. The comparative approach suggests that much of what my religion does is claimed by other religious traditions as well. All religion, including my own, is thus recognized for its human component, alongside being a divine revelation, in some sense. The upshot of recognizing religion's humanity is the recognition that it is not perfect.

In the case of my understanding of Judaism, there is still another factor on account of which I approach its presentation without the preconceived idea that it is "perfect." This is my understanding that Judaism is a religion in process. In my presentation of Judaism, I offer the definition of Judaism as the story of Israel's life in God's presence. Story is very different than system. Systems need to be perfect. Stories are essentially in the process of striving toward perfection. Until the story is completed, one cannot speak of perfection. If Judaism is thus still in the process of becoming, I may approach it through a dual perspective. On the one hand, I seek to offer an image of its larger sense and meaning, striving to offer my best possible reading. On the other, I do not seek to justify all that is in Judaism as perfect, and as commensurate with its ultimate goals.

Let me offer some examples of this. Understanding Judaism's notion of election is one of the most difficult subjects, especially when such understanding is not articulated to an audience of insiders, but to an audience of non-Jews. Now, some ensuing attitudes of Jews to non-Jews are problematic. In reflecting upon Judaism as a whole, its larger spiritual vision, and its ultimate message for the non-Jewish world, I am led to consider to what extent some of the negative attitudes to the non-Jew are commensurate with Judaism's own higher ideals, and to what extent they should be considered products of a historical, and hence human, process. A different subject for scrutiny might be prayer. The fact that I present
Judaism to others makes me aware of how these others themselves relate to the same ideals that I present. I find it difficult to speak of Jewish prayer to a non-Jewish audience without feeling a certain embarrassment regarding the way in which prayer is experienced in the traditional Jewish service. Now, Jewish sources themselves make me aware of higher ideals than those that find expression in the concrete circumstances of history and community. In presenting Jewish prayer, do I simply limit myself to the written expressions of the spiritual aspirations of mystically minded authors, or may I also use the occasion to express my reservations concerning the concrete expressions of the communal Jewish life of prayer?

As I understand the moment of presenting a religion to the other, it is a moment of coming to terms with one's own reality, in the presence of the other. The presence of the other forces me to both present my religion in the best possible light, and also to come to terms with its problematic elements. If there are portions of my tradition of which I am ashamed, or that are problematic, how do I handle these in presenting my religion? One strategy might be to ignore them with the goal of presenting my religion in the most favorable light. I consider this to be insincere. Assuming my fundamental attitude to my religion is one of appreciation, admiration and love, these would communicate to my audience throughout my presentation. However, these will be all the more appreciated when accompanied by an open acknowledgement of the difficulties that my tradition historically presents.

At this point an important difference emerges between the insider’s presentation of his own religion and the outsider’s presentation of a religion. It is only the insider who, in the act of honest and open communication with an other, can question the tradition and draw attention to its imperfections. Were an outsider to do this, he would be accused of judging the other in a vein of triumphal religious polemic. Returning then to the insider-outsider issue, we emerge with one further important distinction between the teaching of the insider and the teaching of the outsider. The insider’s presentation, relying, as I suggested, on theological insight in its construction of the religion, may include the type of self-examination and reflection that should be avoided by the outsider.

In thinking of what we want the other to teach about us, I, therefore, do not see the problem primarily as one of locating errors and misconceptions the other may hold, and trying to correct those. These are
potentially endless, and must certainly be corrected as they arise. Yet, the ultimate significance of having an "other" in front of whom I present my religion is that it provides me an honest context for reflection and introspection, allowing me to both offer tradition's highest vision and the frailties of its historical manifestations.

The Power of Questioning

Let me return to an important implication of the notion that to speak of Judaism is to speak of a story, and not of a system. Constructing Judaism necessarily involves one also in projecting the future of the story. Now, Judaism has long envisioned the future. In fact, it has, over the ages, projected multiple images of the ideal future. As long as one is simply engaged in the act of describing historical Judaism, one can content oneself with a historical presentation of diverse messianic expectations. Presenting in a theologically constructive fashion presents challenges here. Let me illustrate one such challenge. In my presentation of Judaism, the temple plays a major role. It is the central spiritual institution through which God's presence is mediated. Its destruction engenders a series of alternatives and substitutes. One cannot understand Judaism's evolution and vision without considering the centrality of the temple. One fundamental expression of its continued relevance and centrality is the continued prayer for the rebuilding of the temple, a pivotal element in traditional prayer. And yet, what is it that one prays for? If I follow the guidelines I suggested above, then the liturgy points to an aspiration of what Gershom Scholem has termed a "restorative nature." The future is a restoration of the past. This would include the reestablishment of animal sacrifices. Must I, in order to be faithful to Judaism, present this as part of Judaism's future vision? The question is raised in part by my own discomfort with the notion, but only in part. For there are visions of the future temple that see an ideal time in which no animal sacrifices will be offered. How do I go about presenting Judaism in a way that is both faithful to the tradition and to my own positioning or identification within the range of possibilities tradition presents? In my work I have taken the direction of posing questions. We may make proclamations about the past. Concerning the future we may raise questions and possibilities.
These will be informed by several factors: first, our understanding of the overarching concerns of the religion, the larger contours of the story; second, by the range of possibilities furnished by tradition; and third, by the personal choice of the writer, a factor I have already suggested is crucial to the entire enterprise of presenting a religion. Thus, in the example just offered, rather than assert the nature of worship in the future temple, I preferred to highlight the aspiration for the future temple in light of what seems to me to have been its primary function—mediation of divine presence. If temple is for presence, then the aspiration for a future temple is an aspiration for the full reestablishment of God's presence amidst His people. The specific forms the future will take must be left up to divine providence and direction. We can only pose the questions to which God must provide the answers.

In my work, the method of posing questions has emerged as an important element in my presentation of Judaism. To understand this, let me return to my thematic approach to Judaism. My work begins with an attempt to define Judaism. My premise is that the religion should be defined in a way that is descriptive of itself, and unique to it, rather than simply as one more instance of a wider category, not clearly defined as such, that we call religion. Hence, my definition of Judaism as the enduring story of Israel's life in the presence of God. There are several points I hope to make through this definition. The first, which I have already addressed, is that Judaism is not a system. The second is that Judaism is related to Israel, and in view of this special relationship should be seen as story. Third, this story is still incomplete and still in process of becoming. It is precisely for this reason that Judaism should not be thought of as a system or even a worldview. On the other hand, it is not simply a story of a people, a matter for folklore or ethnology. It is the story of Israel's life in the presence of God. There are thus two components to this story, Israel's life and the ways in which divine presence is mediated and anchored in and through Israel's life.

There are several implications to this working definition. The first is that in speaking of Judaism we must somehow retain the element of story. It is important to present Judaism as a continued story. The opening chapter of the story is in the book common to Jews and Christians. Its later chapters form the unique story of Judaism. Yet, those chapters should be seen as an extension and a continuation of the foundational
chapter. Hence, in my presentation, which is consciously addressed to a Christian audience (indeed, it may be even inappropriate for a Muslim audience), I try to not simply present Judaism as it is, but as it grows and emerges out of its biblical roots. To tell the story is also to realize that Judaism is multilayered. The Jewish culture of study maintains vital conscious links between the different strands of Jewish tradition. Hence, entry into the story is also entry into a dialogue and conversation among the different layers of tradition, as these relate to one another. The texture of approach to Judaism is not only, as stated above, multi vocal, but also rich in stratification of the conversations of generations. To tell the story is thus to incorporate Judaism’s growth and development into the story of the people and their life in God’s presence.

A further implication of this definition of Judaism brings us back to posing questions. The two poles of my presentation, Israel’s life and divine presence, along with the recognition that we are listening to a story, allow me to juxtapose Judaism and the Jewish people. The spiritual reality of Judaism, as expressed in the points of highest aspiration and contact with divine presence, and the concrete historical manifestations of Judaism, as expressed in the actual manifestations of historical Judaisms are connected in dynamic tension. And there is a danger in the tension that I present. By what authority do I classify certain dimensions of Judaism as belonging to its higher and ultimate essence, manifesting God’s presence in Judaism, and other dimensions as “merely” the concrete historical manifestations of the history and life of the people? Indeed, I would hope I avoid the pitfall of classifying and passing judgment in such a facile manner. Nonetheless, the recognition that religion is composed of these two dimensions does allow us to reflect upon the highest ideals articulated within tradition itself, and upon their relationship to concrete historical manifestations. It is here that the method of posing questions emerges as a significant reflective tool. While it may be wrong of me to pass judgment on certain issues or phenomena, I can pose the question to what degree these phenomena accord with Judaism’s own stated highest vision. Because the story is not complete, I may pose questions regarding its unfolding, questions that may themselves point to the future unfolding of the story.

To what extent does the life of the people, including spiritual, moral and religious life, accord with the higher guiding sense of divine presence?
This is a key question that informs my thinking and my presentation of Judaism. Thus, in presenting Torah study and prayer, and in juxtaposing them, I am not content to simply describe Jewish prayer alongside the practices of Torah study. Rather, I must pose the question of how these practices also mediate divine presence. In so doing, I seek to ground the historical religious manifestations in what I see as their ultimate point of reference. Yet, this attempt goes beyond the description of the phenomena, for it introduces questions, and can serve as a source of religious critique. Has the culture of Torah study affected the life of prayer adversely? How is divine presence related to these religious practices, both in theory and in practice? In what way are these practices ultimately adequate to their own stated goals, or to the perceived inner logic of Judaism? It is because I pose such questions that my presentation is not merely an uncritical praise of Judaism, but a presentation that struggles to uncover the higher sense of Judaism, while presenting its objective manifestations. It is on account of this struggle that the work is theological, not simply descriptive. And rather than the other needing me to explain Judaism to them, I believe I need the other in order to better articulate the questions, issues and struggles, in light of which and through which I can construct one specific, unique presentation of Judaism.

Presenting Judaism—Key Topics

Having presented the wider methodological issues that are implied in my presentation of Judaism, as well as the larger thematic framework from which I have described it, let me now conclude by listing the chapters that I saw fit to include in my presentation. The chapters were chosen with a specific Christian audience in mind. Once again, it is conceivable that someone writing for a Muslim audience might have chosen other subjects for his introduction. The choice of chapters also reflects the balance I found between a purely descriptive approach and a theological-constructive approach to the subject. I open my presentation with a definition of Judaism, the one I have already shared with you: how the story of the people and the divine presence unfolds is then presented through the notion of covenant, and then through other models that are relevant for later periods of Jewish thought. Similarly,
different historical and theological models of understanding are presented in the next chapter devoted to the subject of God. Covenantal, philosophical and Kabbalistic doctrines are seen in historical context and as they apply to a contemporary Jewish attitude to God.

My next section is devoted to mitzvah, commandment. I chose to focus upon mitzvah due to the centrality of the notion of mitzvah to Jewish spirituality. I am also aware of the charge of legalism, with which Judaism is charged, and therefore see the importance of highlighting the role of mitzvah in ways that would counteract this charge. Perhaps the most important factor to bear in mind is this section necessarily follows the first; namely, mitzvah is grounded in relationship. A further approach to the problem emerges as different senses of the term mitzvah, as these unfold in different strands of Jewish thought, are brought to light. These illustrate that the spirituality of mitzvah is not simply one of commandment, but one through which communion is achieved between God and Israel. The next section focuses on one particular mitzvah, one that has indelibly stamped Judaism, and which shapes its spiritual profile for the past two millennia and longer. I refer to the study of Torah. My choice to open with discussions of mitzvah and Torah reflects a choice to begin with the particular and with that which is specific to the religion, rather than with general categories that are universal to religions. Indeed, I would not even title the section on Torah “Scripture,” for I understand the type of activity that is Torah study to be in some ways so specific and unique that I wish to preserve its uniqueness by use of internal categories, rather than resorting to more conventional and general categories of description.

This is not necessarily the case throughout my presentation. The following chapter is devoted to prayer, by all means a universal phenomenon. Of course, in the present context it is juxtaposed with Torah study, in order to highlight its functioning within the systemic appreciation of Judaism. Now, the tension between internal and external categories is obvious in the next three chapters. The next three chapters are devoted to sacred time, sacred space and holy men, in the case of Judaism conceived as indeed primarily a matter for humans. The discussion in these chapters attempts to strike a balance between two modes of discourse. On the one hand, there is a history of religious type presentation that offers categories for understanding how the holy is mediated in these
three contexts. Such a discussion may indeed be relevant for students of other religions. Here, Judaism may indeed be seen as one example of the wider phenomenon of religion, and lessons may be drawn from it that are relevant to a wider appreciation of the phenomenon of religion. On the other hand, I also try to present the internal and specific logic of holiness of Judaism. Sacred time is broken down into Sabbath and Festival, following a fundamental traditional distinction in the nature of sacred time. Sacred time is discussed in relation to specifics of Israel’s story, as expressed primarily in liturgy. Sacred space is presented in relation to Jewish history, and the ongoing quest for the temple and its substitutes. Reference to sacred space is significant in view of the fact that Judaism has been said to downplay sacred space in favor of sacred time. My discussion suggests that if anything, the opposite is true. The discussion is particularly relevant in the contemporary context of Israel’s resettlement in their own designated homeland, God’s space set apart and made holy for them to live on, in accordance with the divine code of holiness. Holy men too are presented as part of the inner, at times unconscious, quest for divine presence and its mediation through changing religious institutions.

The final two chapters are less descriptive and focus on two questions that I believe an outsider would want to understand, and at the same time are fundamental Jewish belief and identity. The first is the notion of election. Following a presentation of holy men and the various ways in which the sacred is expressed in time, space and humanity, a discussion of the holy people fits well both theologically and phenomenologically. Finally, the subject of the messianic hope and the vision of the future is discussed. While the messianic vision is no doubt central to Judaism, I am not convinced that it must find its place in any presentation. Once again, it is clear to me that my choice to conclude the presentation of Judaism with this topic stems from the fact that this issue is central to Christians, whose very name is rooted in Jewish messianic aspiration.

The list of topics covered in the introduction is the fruit of a dialectical awareness that informs my entire work. I speak as an insider, who must adopt a particular perspective in order to talk to an outsider—one specific and particular other, the Christian. In doing so, I both describe and construct. I must speak a language that is at one and the same time the external language of description and the internal language of presentation, with its indigenous categories and particular emphasis. I must at
one and the same time present a history and a theology. I cannot testify to how successful or how unsuccessful my effort has been. In the very least, the significance of the work lies precisely in its conscious attempt to straddle this dual perspective. Its uniqueness is the outcome of the conscious recognition that I speak as a unique individual Jew addressing specific Christian audiences. The type of presentation that emerges in this interpersonal situation is a fruit of the two poles in the process of communication. What emerges is, therefore, necessarily unique. Its ultimate value lies in the way both my self-understanding and the other's understanding of me are formed in an interrelated moment of common understanding. It is such understanding that makes the entire enterprise worthwhile.
David Burrell, CSC

Teaching Christianity as an Abrahamic Faith

Each of the faiths which traces its origin to Abraham has a triadic structure which can be characterized as Revealer, Word, and Receiving Community. The one who reveals is identified with the creator of all-that-is, while the word spoken is the same word by which the universe is created. Yet in each case of explicit divine speech, that word is spoken so that human beings will receive it, and those who receive it will be formed by that same word into a distinctive community. Indeed, any Jew, Christian, or Muslim will find this description familiar, and also recognize that many failures to understand the contours of their religious faith often fail in neglecting one or another of these three realities, or in missing the creative interaction among them. So, for example, “fundamentalists” tend to focus on the word itself, abstracted from the One who speaks it as well as the community which receives it, while revisionists typically concentrate on the word-as-received, in an effort to adapt it to the culture in which they reside.

It is crucial to our thesis that these three are internally related once the Revealer has decided to reveal God’s way to a people. As with creation itself, the initiative is totally with God, so the community has no claims to identity prior to its being called forth by the revealing word, nor need God speak that word. In this sense, all is grace. Yet once spoken, it is equally crucial that it be received freely by the intentional beings to whom it is addressed, so each of these traditions has identified that intentionality with the divine image bestowed in creation. Moreover, free reception gives the ensuing community a sense of ownership of that word, which creates a tension with the way in which it must
also allow itself to be shaped and reshaped by that same revealing word. For as God's own word, this word is not itself part of creation, even though its mode of expression must be. So the revealing word will in one way stand over against the community which it shapes, yet that very community will also need to establish that word's coherence with respect to the intellectual world it inhabits, as well as employ the resources of the revealed word to illuminate the world in which it lives. Whether one calls it interpretation or theology, as "faith seeking understanding" it represents the responsible dimension of humans freely receiving the revealing word of God.

Once this scenario is in place, it becomes clear how a Christian understanding of revelation is internally tied to God's original choice of Israel. Early attempts (such as by Marcion) to sever God's revelation in Jesus from the Hebrew scriptures were deemed heretical, linked as they were to a dualistic picture of creation and redemption, as well as opposing the two covenants to one another. There is, as we shall see, a "new" element in God's revelation in Jesus, so contrasts will be in order, but never opposition. I was reminded of this forcibly when attending a celebration of 75 years of Catholic Christianity in Mbarara, Uganda, in 1975. Startled to think that 1900 had represented a clean slate for introducing this divine revelation to this people, in this portion of the globe, I wondered how the original missionaries had gone about their task. Indeed, how does one begin to talk about Jesus? I was told that these French White Fathers had listened to the people's stories. That gave them two initial good marks: they had learned the language, and they had listened. When they heard these stories, they remarked that they had similar stories. So Paul's famous image of God's revelation in Jesus being grafted onto the trunk of Israel (Romans 11:17), the parent tree planted by God's original word to Abraham and fertilized by subsequent words to Moses, came to life in this account. On reflection, of course, how else could one begin to "talk about Jesus" except in terms set by the covenant under which he was born?

How, indeed, did the earliest believers in Jesus—Jews all—speak of him? By the seamless account of Luke-Acts, as one who continued to astound them with the way he taught, "as one with authority," by contrast with their own certified teachers. And then their disillusion attending his shameful demise, followed by exaltation at his presence to them risen.
Here, in Acts, begin the proto-affirmations of his unique identity before God: "there is no other name under heaven by which. . ." (Acts 4:10–12) Invoking the name of anyone other than "the Holy One" as a way of gaining access to "salvation" would be idolatry; but not so with Jesus' name. Jesus' name may be invoked as God's own name is invoked because he himself is God's revelation. As has often been remarked, there is little that is novel in Jesus' words; what is striking is his presence, presented throughout the gospels as a healing presence. As the first letter of John begins: "This is what we proclaim to you: what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked upon and our hands have touched—we speak of the word of life" (1 John 1:1).

Here the triadic structure shared by all the Abrahamic faiths is stretched to a limit, for the word whereby God reveals the way for rational, responsive creatures to return all that we have received is himself a person, with the result that the community shaped by that word to receive it will be constituted as children of God, brothers and sisters of Jesus. Indeed, to belong to that community is to be reborn "in Christ," as Leo the Great announces in a Christmas sermon:

Though each and every individual occupies a definite place in this body to which he has been called, and though all the progeny of the church is differentiated and marked with the passage of time, nevertheless as the whole community of the faithful, once begotten in the baptismal font, was crucified with Christ in the passion, raised up with him in the resurrection and at the ascension placed at the right hand of the Father, so too it is born with him in this Nativity, which we are celebrating today (Patrologia Latina [PL] Vol. 54, pp. 213–16).

And lest that language be nothing more than a cascade of metaphors, we are reminded by Cyril of Alexandria, commenting on the Gospel of John, that this community is constituted by "the Spirit" which Jesus received at his baptism, accompanied by the divine words: "You are my Son; today I have begotten you" (Matthew 3:17). Yet, since Jesus is Son of God, in what sense do these words announce an event? Cyril explicates:

The Father says of Christ, who was God, begotten of him before the ages, that he is 'begotten today', for the Father is to accept us in Christ,
in so far as he is man. So the Father can be said to give the Spirit again to the Son, though the Son possesses the Spirit as his own, in order that we may receive the Spirit in Christ. The only-begotten Son receives the Spirit, but not for his own advantage, for the Spirit is his, and is given in him and through him. He receives it to renew our nature in its entirety and to make it whole again, for in becoming man he took our entire nature to himself, for it is through Christ that all gifts come to us. (Patrologia Graeca [PG] Vol. 73, pp. 751–54).

This is overwhelmingly rich, indeed metaphysical fare, yet the predilection of Christianity for such exposition stemmed directly from the fact of God's revelation being in Jesus, and not simply from or even through him. That God's word is divine should go without saying, yet early Islamic thought wavered on the issue whether the Qur'an was created or not, anxious as it was to safeguard the distinction of creator from everything else. Not for long, however, for a creator who is mute (or uncomprehending) proved intolerable. Yet to find the word transmuted into a person suggested that what is being revealed is more than a way, but God's own self; while the personal relation with this person Jesus (which the Gospels call "faith") is one which invites us into a comparable relation of filiation with God. So this community is an ontological one, reflecting an inner transformation of human beings into children of God. Again, John:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things were made through him; without him was made nothing that was made. He came into his own and to those who received him, who were born not of the will of the flesh or of man, but of God, he gave the power to become children of God. And the word was made flesh, and dwelt amongst us, and we have seen his glory, as of the Father's only son, full of grace and of truth. (John 1:1, 4, 10–14)

So it was inevitable, one might say, that the identification of Jesus with God's word would take the triadic structure common to all the Abrahamic faiths, and transmute it into a trinitarian divinity with names derived from the new revelation—Father, Son, and Spirit; a divinity ready to receive into its rich inner life all those "who believe in Jesus." Yet the fact remains that it took this community four centuries to clarify
the issues surrounding the affirmations of Jesus' divinity, already implicit in Acts. The explanation seems clear: nothing could contradict the defining affirmation of one God which constituted the original covenant ("Hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one"), and would also form the clarion call of Islam. A God who is Father, Son and Spirit could not thereby be any less One! And that the controversies should turn on the ontological constitution of Jesus, rather than a direct explication of the scriptural language of "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit," incorporates the relation between creation and redemption, since the human and divine natures united in the one person of the Word (in the culminating formula of Chalcedon in 451) reflect both creature and Creator.

We have also seen, however, how the language of Father and of Son will be filled out by that of Holy Spirit, as the one incorporating all believers into the inner life of God so effectively displayed in the person of Jesus. So Trinitarian reflection has always been more than an exercise in higher ontology, for the Spirit's role has ever been one of "divinization," of effecting the transformation of believers into children of God "in the Son." Indeed, the defining characteristic of the new covenant, already implicit in the manner of revelation in the person of the Word made human in Jesus, becomes explicit in the transformed community of faithful. It is this founding fact which accounts for the ubiquity of the language of "grace" in Christianity, a term with both personal and ontological undertones. Yet I would also call attention to its presence in Islam, where the formula for the divine reality of the Qur'an runs parallel to that of Jesus: as Christians believe that the Word of God is made flesh in Jesus, so Muslims contend that the Word of God is made Arabic in the Qur'an. Indeed, Muslims attest that meditative recitation (dhikr) on these words can effect in Muslim believers the same quality of transformation which Christians associate with reception of the body and blood of Christ in the Eucharist. In each case, what is said to transpire is an activity of God transforming the person ("grace"), effected via the mode of revelation proper to each community: the word of God made human in Jesus, and the word of God made Arabic in the Qur'an.

That the revealing activity of God takes place in a person, then, calls forth all the intellectual resources of philosophy to try to express this Creator/creature relation in a way which respects the reality of both. Indeed, the relation of Creator with creature within the person of Jesus
also marks that person as a sacrament: that is, one whose very mode of being reminds us how present the Creator is to all creatures, yet present here so that very relation is displayed in a person. Similarly, Islam reminds its faithful that they are only able to notice how created thing are signs [ayat] of the creator since their minds and hearts have been opened by the verses [ayat] of the Qur'an. So Christianity finds God's presence in bread and wine, water and salt, because these have been transformed by the very words of the Word incarnate. So two defining features of Christian life—doctrine and sacrament—both stem from the grounding fact that this Word is flesh, or human. Moreover, the third term of the triad, the living community, which we have linked with the Holy Spirit, is also referred to as the "Body of Christ." That is, an organic unity prior to the individuality of each of the faithful who make it up, rooted in this person whose divine/human constitution reminds each of us of the call to live by God's own life. So Vatican II explains the public prayer of the church:

Every liturgical celebration, as an activity of Christ the priest and of his body, which is the church, is a sacred action of a preeminent kind. In the liturgy on earth we are given a foretaste of the liturgy of heaven, celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem, the goal of our pilgrimage. (Constitution on Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium, 1963, pars. 7–8.)

Jesus, as the Spirit of Christ, prays in the Christian praying.

Another term for that new life is "grace," which signifies an adoptive relation to God-the-revealer which mirrors in creatures the generative relation of God to God's own Word. As noted previously, all these features of Christian life and thought reflect an unimaginable initiative on the part of the Revealer: not just to speak the divine Word, but to become one of us without ceasing to be that Word, and to do so in such a way as to call us "not servants but friends" (John 15:15). Features like these will inevitably "give offense," as Kierkegaard remarks (in sickness unto death especially), yet that must be part of the package. Again, the pattern can be found in biblical revelation in God's choosing this people as God's very own, or in Islam in God's gifting Muhammad with the Qur'an. In each case—election of Israel, Word incarnate in Jesus, Word made Arabic in the Qur'an—the initiative is completely God's, so no
reason can be forthcoming. Philosophy can discern patterns, as we have here, yet never be able to give reasons, for in each case all is gift, as each of the revelations assures us creation is as well. This is the pattern which Augustine discerned in battling Pelagius: while humans can rightly be rewarded for good actions and punished for evil ones, no one can merit the gift of new life, or election, or hearing the Qur'an recited. These are as gratuitous as our very lives are, and receiving them as freely given reminds us how our lives also are gift—much as refraining from labor on Shabbat is designed to remind us that our work of perfecting God's creation is rooted in the gift of creation itself.

Before moving from vision to practice, a word on the relative role of understanding and judgment seems in order. As one whose practice as a philosophical theologian places me at the intersection of philosophy and theology, I have become conscious of the relative weight which these disciplines place on understanding and on judgment. The mix is never clear, for at times philosophical training will lead one to try to ascertain whether what was said is true, while theological skills may focus one on the manner in which different assertions have been formulated over the centuries, seeking (as Newman did so deftly) to find a pattern or drift in the permutation. Yet in other respects, philosophically trained inquirers may prefer to focus on the sense of the formulations while theologians may be more concerned to ascertain their truth. However those predilections may display themselves in different cases, it is imperative that dialogic inquiries like the present one learn how to distinguish probing initiatives seeking understanding from those who propose a definitive credal formulation. For dialogue especially serves understanding, where finding similarities and differences in formulations and in practices can lead to mutual illumination of one tradition by another. And that enhanced understanding will lead one more surely to judgments regarding one's own and other traditions, since judgment is inherently comparative, as one seeks always for a better way of expressing a revealed truth. (Aristotle's remarks on the relative accuracy of dialectical assertions—"human beings are animals"—and specific ones—"human beings are rational animals"—offers a simple case in point. Both are true, yet the second leads one more properly into the subject matter at hand.) So the pattern proposed here of a triadic structure for Abrahamic faiths will be realized quite differently in each, yet it is proposed to facilitate the "mutual illumination" which
comparative inquiries can achieve at the level of understanding, which is at least indirectly relevant to the subsequent activity of judgment.

The next step in this comparative inquiry focuses on the community’s reception of the revelatory word, and specifically on each community’s way of distorting that revelation. I will call this trait a tradition’s “shadow-side,” adapting Jung’s reading of individual psychology to the dynamics of a group. For Jung, one’s shadow represents the individual dimension of the unconscious, stemming from conditions marking one’s personal history. The shadow is normally exhibited in apparently inexplicable eruptions—“you just pushed his buttons!”—which are often more evident to those with whom we live closely than they are to ourselves. “Family-of-origin” therapy is designed to make us more aware of the sources of these distortions, as a way of alerting us to their presence and giving us skills to neutralize them. This dimension of the unconscious is not itself archetypal, but tied more particularly to our individual histories, and so more easily brought to consciousness. Yet we can remain quite oblivious to it, especially when we occupy a dominant position which demands less accommodation to others’ needs or presence. Yet that hardly serves our own welfare, since left unchecked, such “shadows” can conspire to undermine our noblest aspirations. And what is most germane to our inquiry, it is these features which often shape our initial impressions of a person, whatever other virtues they may possess.

Adapting Jung’s “shadow” to understand how religious traditions present themselves offers a way of detaching a tradition from its founding revelation. We can trace a faith community’s “shadow side” by locating the distortion in the appropriating actions of individuals and groups, rather than in the revelation itself. Among the Abrahamic faiths, it can be said that Christianity casts the longest shadow, perhaps attributable to its prolonged hegemony in the west. (Recall how a dominant status can isolate the one dominating, rendering them unaware of how much they need the “other” to make-sense of themselves—a key premise of this investigation.) The signs of distortion are especially evident in Christian attitudes toward Jews and toward Muslims. These sets of attitudes stem from quite different origins, with the Jews representing a continuing version of the “old” covenant which Christians believed to have been replaced by the “new,” while Muslims came forward with a new revelation in the wake of the definitive revelation of the God of
Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in Jesus. As a result, Christianity could find no theological space for either community, so oscillated between grudging toleration and outright persecution of Jews, while instigating the Crusades to rid the Holy Land of the so-called Muslim menace.

In each case, however, Jews and Muslims represented the “other” who could either call Christianity forth to a richer understanding of itself, or furnish the scapegoat which needed to be eliminated to lay claim to its privileged hegemony, secular as well as sacred. Jews, of course, did not pose the overt threat to that hegemony which the Muslim armies could, but by persisting as a worshiping community in the face of Christian recognition of Jesus as “the Messiah,” they represented an even greater affront to Christian self-understanding. We can appreciate this in retrospect as we note how patristic metaphorical oppositions of “shadow/reality” or “flesh/spirit” prevailed over Paul’s insistence that “God never takes back his gifts or revokes his choice” (Romans 11:29). It is the last phrase which Vatican Council II adopted in its effort to alter the inertial course of centuries of common Christian teaching that the “Old Testament” had effectively been superceded by the “New.” While never enshrined in conciliar pronouncement as church doctrine, these recurring metaphors assured that most Christians adopted that attitude toward Jews. What assured the vilification of Jews, however, was the leitmotif of the Gospels that as Jesus’ own people, they had nonetheless rejected him as “the one whom God had sent”: “he came into his own and his own received him not.” (John 1:11) Yet all of Jesus’ immediate disciples were Jews, of course, so John’s constant reference to “the Jews” as those with whom Jesus was locked in mortal combat is a thoroughly ambiguous reference, usually considered to denominate the power structure, although in times of Christian hegemony its reference became all too clear: all Jews. Moreover, were not the Gospels clear? Did Jews not bear collective responsibility for Jesus’ death? In Matthew, they even took it on explicitly: “Let his blood be on us and our children” (Matthew 27:26).

The Gospels were never intended primarily as historical document, however, but rather as kerygma in the spirit of Hebrew haggadah: a story told so as to elicit a heartfelt response to God’s saving action. In that spirit, rejection of “the one whom God has sent” by God’s chosen people, and notably by their leaders, is directly reminiscent of the exorciations of Israel’s canonical prophets, who never ceased to call their people
accountable for ingratitude to the One who had singled them out, and for failing to "recognize the time of God's visitation." Yet again, it is one thing to excoriate one's own people, and another to vilify an alien people, which Jews quickly became, especially after Constantine. It must be said, however, of any tradition that the best interpretation of haggadic texts comes from the primary context in which they are heard: the liturgy. When John's gospel is read publicly on Good Friday, the assembled congregation is given a role which they take up with gusto: "Crucify him!" Repeated practice of this sort should insinuate in its participants the kerygmatic point of that (and every) Gospel: no one else but I/we is involved in this drama. Otherwise it could not be what it purports to be: the drama of our salvation. As an Anglican friend in Jerusalem loved to remark, when questions of assigning blame for Jesus' death emerged: "I should have thought that any Christian who blamed the death of Jesus on someone else had missed the point of the Gospels!" That is, anyone who had been formed in the practice of hearing the Gospels for the message they were designed to carry could not escape their personal implication, though all would try.

So Christians who would leave Good Friday services and torch the ghetto had indeed missed the point of the Gospel they had just heard, and perhaps were even encouraged to do so by the preacher. Yet this propensity to escape the implications of God's word intended for them puts Christians squarely within the condemnations issued by Israel's prophets to their own people. Indeed, however "new" the revelation of God in Jesus might be thought to be, the dynamics of its reception mirrors Israel's reception of the Torah. Indeed, this strategy dominated Christian writers throughout history, who mined the Hebrew scriptures for paradigms of their own journey of faith, as the Christian community adopted David's Psalms as the heart of its liturgical prayer. This pervasive practice gives the lie to any triumphal reading of the "new" testament as replacing the "old." For even if Christians must regard Jesus' coming as "fulfilling the scriptures," that fulfillment remains a promise in the lives of those incorporated into the new life bestowed in Jesus. Faith remains a journey, only to be fulfilled "on the last day." So existentially, if you will, Jews and Christians journey on similar paths of faith, united in reciting the Psalms as their nourishment for that journey. Their adherence to the goal will differ qualitatively as the mode of revelation
differs, yet their way to that goal exhibits striking parallels. Once this fact is recognized as pervading Christian use of the Hebrew Scriptures, we can see how necessary are the people Israel to Christians becoming what they are called to become.

The relationship between Christianity and Islam differs from the one sketched out with Judaism on a number of counts. First, Christians do not share a book with Muslims as they do, in part, with Jews. Second, unlike Moses, whose Torah formed the heart of "the scriptures" on which Jesus based his mission, Muhammad emerged later as a prophet bringing a new revelation to those who had styled themselves as the "new Israel." Finally, Islam presented itself as the authentic and definitive revelation for all peoples, whereas Judaism was expressly confined to God's people Israel, despite proselytizing tendencies in Roman times. So Christianity and Islam were set in principle on a collision course, which turned into actual warfare as each religious community also staked territorial claims. A poignant example is the fate of the thriving Christian communities of North Africa, associated with Cyprian and with Augustine, in the wake of the lightning expansion of Islam within one hundred years of the Prophet's death. No one seems to know what happened to them, though the macabre pictures of Muslim warriors "spreading Islam by the sword" which stirred western imaginations to "holy wars" against them were certainly far from the truth. As diverse groups of crusaders were to experience themselves, Muslim troops normally engaged in warfare according to rules of engagement quite chivalrous in character. And as Bernard Lewis has remarked in collating Islamic views of the west, Muslims were wont to signal the superiority of Islam by noting how it did not need to be "spread by the sword"—a telling reversal of a stereotype, which should alert western Christians to the extent to which they have laundered the fact and impact of the Crusades out of their history.

But what about the Crusades? I have suggested them as a prime example of the "shadow-side" of Christianity as it encountered Islam. Can they not be more simply explained as economic historians are wont to do, and as a nearly inevitable outcome of the theological collision course just noted, coupled with rival territorial claims? After all, the "holy land" was the prize, where these contrary theological claims had to come in conflict. Historical explanation can never be monochromatic, however, so none of these alternatives is able to cancel out the others. What a
Christian reader finds so perplexing in the literature of the crusades is the way in which reflective spiritual leaders, like Bernard of Clairvaux, became caught up in the frenzy—people who could hardly have countenanced the excesses to which the “crusading spirit” incited collective marauding bands. Something more than economic gain or irredentism seems to have animated this prolonged movement, and prevailed over then classical Christian teaching regarding “just wars” and their conduct.

When we consider the paucity of medieval voices seeking to understand Islam as a way of faith—though a few do stand out, such as Peter the Venerable and later John of Segovia—and the readiness with which each side portrayed the other as “infidels,” we cannot help but see Islam cast as “the other.” And once that reaction-formation is in place, as we have noted with Judaism, nothing can be learned about one’s own faith from that of the other. It is true that disputation were regularly carried on by Muslim and Christian intellectuals in Muslim lands, where the Qur’an itself enjoined an official tolerance toward Jews and Christians, yet disputation were seldom carried out in a dialogic spirit. Nor did the spirit of the time foster “dialogue,” yet the ferocity of the Crusades, with their animosity toward Jews and Orthodox Christians en route to the Holy Land, hardly testifies to the spirit of the Gospels. Indeed, it seems that Islam afforded that “other” which activated in an especially acerbic way the “shadow-side” of Christianity, and there are abundant signs that it continues to do so today.

Yet some voices are beginning to explore the ways in which an appreciation of the dynamics of the Qur’anic revelation can illuminate fresh facets of Christian revelation, in the spirit of “mutual illumination.” The early work of Anawati and Gardet effectively established the comparative study of Christian and Islamic theology, while the recent comparative study of Roger Arnaldez (Three Messengers for One God [Notre Dame IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1996]) brings that art to a fine point. On a more general level, Burrell and Malits’ Original Peace (New York: Paulist, 1997) explores classical Christian affirmations from the focus on creation proper to Islamic theology, yet often eclipsed by the “salvation” narrative in Christian tradition. What may prove yet more telling than these intellectual explorations, however, are the signs of collaboration among Christians and Muslims as people of faith in a western ethos often self-characterized as “post-Christian” or “secular” in character. As Muslim
communities begin to root themselves in pluralistic societies in the west, they cannot but feel an affinity with other religious groups in that society, but will also find themselves adapting to that western ethos in ways which in time will certainly affect Islam in its traditional milieu.

It is notably in those arenas in which the "secularization thesis" appears to be verified most starkly that its gains are increasingly being weighed against concomitant losses, as another generation begins to seek out the resources of their ancestral faith. Much as the human toll and ecological disasters in the wake of state Marxism dramatically displayed the underside of that enlightenment ideology, so a rapacious market economy is showing its underside across the globe. What is becoming clear is that nothing short of a transcendent faith can properly direct human development, or even (as John Paul II has argued in Fides et Ratio ["Faith and Reason"]) restore our faith in human reason. Yet the very communities which stand as vehicles of that faith have discredited themselves in their readiness to espouse an ethnic nationalism, demonize "the other," and even animate inhuman projects of "ethnic cleansing." Is not the challenge to religious communities in the millennium that we face one in which those same communities must so catechize their faithful that nationalist politicians will no longer be able to play the religion card?

Indeed, it is that very challenge which pushes theological inquiry into interfaith issues in our time. Some twenty years ago, in the wake of Vatican Council II, the renowned Austrian theologian, Karl Rahner, offered a radical re-periodization of Christian history in which symbolic dates emerged to bracket what he called nineteen centuries of western Christian history: namely, 70 and 1970 (Theological Studies, 1979). The first recalled the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem and the eclipse of Jewish believers in Jesus by a flood of Greek converts, shifting the vortex of the movement to Rome. Coming as 1970 did in the wake of decolonization and the perspectives launched by Vatican II toward a more inclusive enculturation, Rahner regarded the slim document Nostra Aetate, treating of the Church's relations to Jews and to non-Christian believers, as the most prescient result of that Council. Other extensive deliberations of the Council had represented the fruit of decades of theological preparation, while Nostra Aetate responded to facts of history (including Auschwitz) for which Christian theology had been singularly
unprepared, as it had also been for the extensive mission to "the Gentiles" signaled by 70 CE. It is hardly surprising that Christian theologians, trained within the parameters of the "western Christianity" exposed by Rahner, have been dilatory in appreciating his proposal, much less responding to it. For after all, his fresh periodization leaves the 16th century as a blip on the screen, while most western Christian theology has been fueled by that upheaval. Yet a salutary effect of secularization has been to make those intra-Christian divisions less relevant, as Christianity becomes polarized between an increasingly ecumenical ecclesia, where young people are less tolerant of Church boundaries, and groups grasping tightly an identity which sees both ecumenism and interfaith initiatives as threats to an "integral Christianity (or Catholicism)." This is an understandable response to a world in which we are invited to learn from others rather than demonize them, since "the other" will inevitably elicit both fascination and fear. Again, the capacity of the Christian revelation to be a resource for hope rather than fear offers the crucial test of this millennium.

The hopeful side of our proposal begins with each Abrahamic faith recognizing and acknowledging its shadow-side and begins to mine its tradition for the resources to neutralize those shadows. Here the inner creativity of each tradition can emerge, and in doing so present itself as a beacon in a world torn by conflict—conflict which these same religious groups had often animated. What is most telling about our times, however, is the fact that these resources are best discovered in conjunction with others; that interaction among people of faith will serve to uncover the resources for peace and reconciliation in each. We have already seen how groups firmly rooted in one tradition and able to reach out to others have renewed the face of both, as their collaboration led to a mutual illumination of each by the other. (See especially Scott Appleby's recent work which mentions among others the lay Catholic community in Rome, Sant' Egidio, and its work for reconciliation in diverse parts of the world.) The dynamic of these groups effectively belies the fears of those for whom such collaboration cannot but spell relativism or syncretism. "For authentic interfaith dialogue and effort, like friendships among persons of different faiths, cannot but strengthen the faith of each, as each comes to realize that the God whom they worship differently lies beyond our comprehension. Indeed, classical théologians of each of the
Abrahamic faiths, from al-Ghazali to Maimonides to Aquinas, all acknowledge that we can at best "imperfectly signify" the God who is creator of all-that-is, and that our faith formulations admit of unending development. In our time, that growth will take place within our traditions as we interact with each other, learning how to share in different faiths—the challenge of our millennium.
What Do We Want the Other to Teach About Islam?

Previous speakers and people in general discussion have brought up the point that it is important to be conscious of the audience when one is talking about one’s own religion or another’s. With that in mind, I want to begin by saying that my primary experience of teaching Islam is limited to 18- to 22-year-olds at a prestigious, private, secular, 4-year college in the United States. My students are predominantly white, upper middle or upper class, and very few of them come from religious backgrounds. Without having conducted a formal survey, I would guess that a quarter of my students are Jewish; and about ten percent are so-called minorities (which would be east-Asians, immigrant and foreign Muslims mostly from South Asia, and very few African-Americans). The remainder of the students come from a variety of Christian backgrounds. There are, in all, less than fifteen Muslim students out of a total student body of 1,600 at Amherst College. Most of these are nonpracticing foreign-born students. Only one is African-American. At my institution I am one of three faculty members who teaches anything to do with Islam or the Middle East.

Despite the fact that most of my students are ostensibly Christians and Jews, when I make any Biblical reference in order to clarify a point, I am often greeted with vacant stares from the vast majority of my class. I might also add that I do a fair amount of outreach work, what we call ‘interfaith dialogue’ here. In my experience, most Americans consider Islam and Muslims to be culturally foreign to them and approach Islam
with a combination of ignorance and hostility. These experiences have convinced me that one cannot treat Islam in a similar way to the way one treats Christianity or Judaism in Western academic settings. I do not mean to imply that the case of Islam shares nothing with Christianity's view of Judaism or vice-versa, or to trivialize the very real antipathies that have colored the interaction between adherents of these two religions. I am simply saying that, in the view of most Americans, Christianity is certainly seen as an authentically European or Western religion. Judaism, too, has come to be viewed as a Western phenomenon. In contrast, Islam and Muslims are often viewed as belonging to a different civilization—a distinctly non-European one, and one which is hostile to the West. This is a complicated issue, not made easier by the fact that many Muslims view themselves also as separate from Western civilization. I will address some of these ideas before turning to what I consider to be the central points of Islam and its theology.

The encounter with the West is probably the most important event in the Islamic world in the last two centuries. The Crusades are important, but the meaningful encounter is really a recent one. The outline of what one needs to know about Islam presented here closely follows my textbook, Islam, which is available in five languages. For some reason it is selling very well in Ireland and China, which I cannot figure out!

I would like to emphasize that it is obvious in polemical literature and visible in other literature and art that there is an evolutionary continuity in the West's views of Islam from the period of the Crusades, through the Colonial period, into the present. During the Colonial period, European powers may have had a sense of superiority vis-à-vis their colonial subjects, but their attitude toward Muslims was different from that toward the Chinese or the sub-Saharan Africans. They never perceived the Chinese or the Africans as a genuine military and civilizational threat. There was no special place in hell reserved for a Chinese religious figure as there was for Muhammad in Dante's Inferno. This attitude has persisted over the last two centuries through notions such as the 'White Man's Burden' or European exceptionalism.

Of course, the category of "otherness" was applied to non-Muslims as well, but what set Muslims apart was that they were not a race or ethnicity. They were viewed as a civilization, the civilization that bordered Europe on all sides, except where Europe was bordered by the sea. In the
opinion of many Muslims, the events of the latter half of the twentieth century bear out this view of the world, and it is not uncommon to hear Muslims observe that Colonialism is not over or even to say that the Crusades are not over. They see a European antipathy toward Muslims in German immigration policies, in the unquestioned support given to Israel, in the failure of the West to do anything about bringing war criminals to justice after the horrific war in Bosnia, in the absolute routine with which the most racist and offensive things are said about Muslims in the U.S. media, in the politics surrounding Turkey's attempts to join the European union, in the millions suffering due to the war in Iraq, and in many, many other things.

In observing Western attitudes, I have identified five points that seem the most problematic in attempting to understand Islam and Muslims. Some are characteristic of popular views of Islam; others are confined to the teaching thereof. And these five points are: 1) Islam is seen as essentially Middle Eastern and especially Arab; 2) Emphasis is placed almost exclusively on the classical tradition; 3) Islam is presented as an unusually ritualistic religion; 4) Islam is seen as oppressive toward women; and 5) Muslims are seen as violent. I do not have time to address all five points in detail, but the first three deserve some attention because they are common issues in the teaching of Islam and its theology.

I believe that a problem that is particularly acute in the U.S. is seeing Islam as exclusively Middle Eastern, and of seeing all Middle Eastern non-Israelis as Arabs. In part this is understandable since this region is where the religion started and where Islam's central holy sites are located. Furthermore, as a language of scripture, Arabic occupies a very special place in Islamic civilization and in religious usage. However, events of the 20th century, especially the identification of the Arab-Israeli conflict with Muslims in general, and the shutting off of substantial sections of the Islamic world during the Soviet era, have exacerbated this problem. I would like to point out that the overwhelming majority of Muslims live east of the Indus river, that most Muslims do not speak Arabic, and that the Muslim population of Indonesia is roughly equal to the entire population of Muslim Arabs. If one presented a statistical display of the median Muslim in the world, she would probably be a 16-year-old girl from Bangladesh.
The second point is more complicated because Muslims themselves participate in perpetuating this perception. This is the notion of an Islamic Golden Age, and the problem of people continuing to present the religion as one of the real or imagined era that extended from the 7th until the 11th century. However, many things have occurred in the Islamic world since then and to view these developments as somehow degenerate, illegitimate, or as a corruption of a pure, original Islam is misleading. This misrepresentation is related to my first point, since the big change that occurred at the end of the classical period was the increasing influence of non-Arabs as full-fledged contributing members of the Islamic community. The emphasis on the classical tradition trivializes the real religious lives of many people who do not participate in that version of the religion, but are, nonetheless, Muslims.

Many introductory textbooks about Islam make absolutist statements such as: 'Muslims pray five times a day,' or 'Muslims fast in the month of Ramadan.' I have never had the opportunity to gather empirical data on the subject, but the majority of Muslims certainly do not pray five times a day. If I were to hazard a guess, the majority of Muslims pray less than once a day. To say that they must pray five times a day is not only 'incorrect, but it also grossly misrepresents the nature of these people's religiosity and the relative importance they accord to ritual versus faith. The notion that one must pray five times a day as a ritual obligation, as if it were all or nothing, misses the point. The law is stated as an ideal and each Muslim chooses his or her relationship with God, the relationship between faith and works, and the importance of ritual in their lives.

The last two points are more an issue of cultural antipathy than they are pedagogical problems. I am particularly surprised by the visceral reaction that issues related to women seem to elicit among otherwise liberal and open-minded people in the U.S.—especially among educated women. Rather than try to find points of commonality with Muslim women's experience, I find many of my students (and other people I talk with) are intent on proving that Muslim women are universally and in every way worse off than women in the West, and that this situation is not the result of society or politics or economics, but of a religion: Islam. The curious fact is that Islam is particularly criticized for things that were, in fact, (and sometimes still are), aspects of Western civilization.
that citizens of the modern West would like to transcend. This is an important issue and I think it deserves some elaboration. It is the crux of at least half the problem in representing Islam and the West; namely, that Europeans try to situate Islam and Muslims in Europe's own past as blame-worthy primitives who need to be modernized and become like the West.

So the misguided logic would suggest that since Islamic law does not afford women absolute parity with men, it follows that women must be worse off in every legal way than they are in the West and that the Islamic religious status of women must be akin to and, in fact, worse than what it is in Christian canon law or in Talmudic law. So the myths abound: polygamy is presumed to be unregulated and absolutely licentious; women must not have any recognized religious status or even souls; female circumcision must be religiously mandated and universally practiced; menstruating women must be untouchable; every veiled woman must be the victim of oppression and if she feels otherwise, it must be the result of cultural brainwashing. The truth is, none of these things that I have just mentioned are true of Islamic law or society.

One of the problems with this situation is that the Western attempt to situate Muslims in the West's own past contributes directly to many Muslim attempts at self-definition. Muslims see themselves as heirs to one of the greatest civilizations witnessed in human history, and they feel that their religion has contributed in no small way to the development of that civilization. They believe that their religion is integrally bound to a way of living, to a civilization that they expect to be taken as an equal of Western civilization. At the same time, they frequently find it impossible to reconcile the sense of their own rich history and destiny with the fact that, at present, they are in no position to compete favorably with Western civilization in economic or military terms. Faced with undeniable Western dominance and the view that Muslims are in no way part of the Western world, they frequently strike apologetic and defensive poses regarding their religion. As such, Islam is seen as a religion besieged by the West and that the only way to defend the religion is to circle one's proverbial wagons and retreat into some notion of a "pure Islam." There is a tendency among such Muslims to reject all Western influences, which they see as contaminants. In so doing, they frequently reject aspects of their own religion or culture which are shared with the West.
For individual Muslims who see themselves as beleaguered by the West, the only appropriate reaction is one of social and intellectual resistance. They see other Muslims who are appreciative of Western values or ideas as having surrendered and adopted a posture of defeat. Thus, contrary to how it is frequently presented in the West, Islam is not at all a monolithic religion, but rather one that is buzzing with internal dissent. What makes matters even more acute is that in Sunnism, the religion of the overwhelming majority of Muslims, there is no notion of a formal clergy or a binding canon of law. This has little impact on the basic doctrines of the religion and there are probably some advantages to not having a hierarchical clergy, such as diversity. But it also means that there is no easy way to resolve differences of opinion about how religion should be understood and implemented, nor are there any easy means by which people with strongly divergent views can separate out into denominations the way they do in Protestant Christianity. What this means in practical terms is that there is no denominational difference between the President of Bosnia, a rural woman selling chickens in a market in Indonesia, an Afghan fighter who is part of an insurgency in Kashmir, a suicide bomber who claims to be motivated by religion, or a stripper in a Turkish nightclub. And yet, their views on religion are hardly the same, and it is very misleading to present Islam as monolithic simply because they are all Sunni Muslims.

I realize that what I have said so far may not seem to address what one needs to know about Islam's theological tradition, but I believe it is necessary to address these issues because they underlie the presentation of Islam to Western audiences. Although Islam unquestionably comes from the same religious fountainhead as Judaism and Christianity, its present relationship with its siblings is dominated by the political circumstances of our time. Having said that, now I will turn to more theological issues.

The central shared characteristic of all Muslims is their belief in a God who sent a verbal communication called the Qur'an to a human prophet named Muhammad, who was born in the Arabian city of Mecca and died in the nearby city of Medina in 632. God, His ongoing involvement in His creation, and the human being's unique status as the only created thing whose opinion of God seems to matter to Him, lies at the center of Islamic belief.
The Muslim concept of God: God is commonly referred to by his Arabic name, Allah, but is also called 'the Lord.' Muslims in other parts of the world frequently use their own languages' equivalent word for God. They do not fixate on the term "Allah," although some have started to do so. Western scholarship in Islam has frequently presented the Muslim God as being stern and wrathful, and the relationship of human beings to Him as one of servitude largely motivated by fear of punishment and secondarily by a desire for reward in heaven. For many Muslims, however, the overarching characteristics of God are His nurturing mercy and compassion, and the ideal attitude of the human being toward Him should not be one of fearful obedience, but of gratitude. God's mercy and compassion are proven to many Muslims in everything from the wondrous complexity of the universe to the very fact of human existence. One of the most eloquent chapters of the Qur'an, Chapter 55, using both rhyme and meter, catalogs some of the wonders God has created and expresses a rhetorical amazement at the capacity of human beings to deny God's generosity. I will read a small translation of a section from it:

The Merciful: He taught the Qur'an; He created man. He taught him an intelligent speech. The sun and the moon follow courses computed and the stars, plants and trees bow down in adoration. The sky has He raised high, and He has set up the balance of justice in order that you may not transgress. It is He who has spread out the earth for His creatures. There are fruit and date palms, producing bunches of dates; also corn, with its husks and stalks and sweet smelling plants. Then which of your Lord's favors would you deny?

There are numerous other places where the Qur'an speaks of God's mercy. "And He gives you all that you ask for and if you were to add up the favors of Allah, you would never be able to count them. Indeed, human beings are given to injustice and ingratitude." In the face of God's overwhelming kindness, disobedience to God becomes synonymous with denying his generosity, and evil is therefore the same as ingratitude.

Like the Qur'an, many Islamic theological writings see the entire universe as in a state of obedience to God's law, and the word 'Islam' literally
refers to this state of surrender. Human beings are the only creations that have the capacity to disobey, and they do this by arrogantly thinking that they are self-sufficient—not needing God's support or guidance. There is a very interesting point here: when one looks at the description of God and God's relationship with creation, in the Qur'an God is a nurturer; God is a judge; God is a disciplinarian; God is a protector; God is a guide and ultimately He exercises a very parental type of role. God looks like a parent, but significantly, not once anywhere in the Qur'an is God referred to as a parent or a Father. This is a major difference in the scriptures of Islam versus Judaism and Christianity.

A commonly repeated Islamic tradition states that God is closer to a person than his or her jugular vein, implying that God permeates the cosmos. Islamic systems of ritual observance assume that there is a wakeful, attentive God who listens to and cares about each and every one of His creatures. As I have noted, many Muslims see Islam as submission to Divine law, and anyone who surrenders her or himself to this law is called 'Muslim,' the feminine being 'Muslima.' Religious and pious human beings often prefer to use the words 'Muhsin' and 'Muhsina' or 'Mu'min' or 'Mu'mina,' the former term applying to someone who does good deeds, and the latter to someone who believes or has faith. The word for faith is closely related to the words for safety, security and trust. For many Muslims, having faith automatically implies being in God's protection, secure within the principles of guidance that He has provided.

Muslims believe that God is One, which not only implies divine unity, but also a person's act of affirming that unity. This is a very important theological understanding because human beings participate at some level in the ongoing status of God as unique. It gives human beings a profound and active role in God's entire plan; participation in the religion is through an act—the act of affirming God as One.

Muslims also see their relationship with God as an intimate one in which God's creation of human beings is a blessing and His laws and strictures are not inflictions but an act of grace providing guidance in this life. Many Muslims hold the belief that our life in this world is actually a test for an afterlife. God has provided us with clear guidance through scriptures and prophets, so if we still choose to disobey, we deserve whatever unpleasantness awaits us in the hereafter.
The Qur'an speaks of a time before the physical creation of human beings, when they made a covenant by testifying to God's nature. “When your Lord drew forth from the children of Adam, from their loins, their descendants, and made them testify concerning themselves saying, Am I not your Lord? They said, ‘Yes, we bear witness.’ This, lest you should say on the day of judgment, Of this we were never mindful.” This bearing of witness, or shahada, is the central concept in understanding the importance of human beings in God's plan because it puts them in the position of actively choosing to recognize God's nature and His relationship with them. The Islamic profession of faith is also called the Shahada and consists of uttering the statement: “I bear witness that there is no God but God, and I bear witness that Muhammad is the messenger of God.” Frequently people have heard the statement that Muslims believe there is no God but God, but what often gets dropped is that one is also supposed to say, “I bear witness that there is no God but God.” This is not a passive statement but an active one, not an abstract observation but an affirmation.

For many Muslims, the Qur'an is the single greatest sign of God in the physical universe. In fact, individual verses in the Qur'an are literally called 'signs.' The text refers to itself as guidance for the world—a clear sign for those who can understand. It provides instructions on how to live one's life and acts as a source of ethical guidance in the things for which it does not provide clear instructions. It is a common Muslim belief that, as God's final revelation, the Qur'an contains the sum total of what God plans to reveal to humanity. Therefore, behind the finite literal message of the Qur'an is an infinite reservoir of divine wisdom. The word Qur'an is derived from the Arabic 'to recite' or 'to read,' so the Qur'an is something like a recitation or a collection of things to be recited.

In the prophet Muhammad's understanding, and that of pious believers, the Qur'anic revelations came from heaven where they were preserved on a well-guarded tablet, a concealed supernatural book that existed in the presence of God. Muhammad did not become acquainted with the whole text of the Qur'an at once, but only with isolated sections of it. The Qur'an contains only a few obscure hints as to how it was communicated to Muhammad. In fact, it is from later Islamic text that we know how Muhammad would occasionally go into trances or at other times he would not, and how he would recite it to people around him.
Muslims believe the Qur'an is literally and exactly God's word. There has been considerable resistance to translating the Qur'an from Arabic into other languages until the last two centuries since the Divine Word cannot be perfectly contained in ink and paper. It is still common for bookstores not to write prices on copies of the Qur'an: the appropriate etiquette is actually to go up to the book seller and ask what the 'gift' for the book would be.

Muhammad believed that not only his prophetic mission but also the revelations of the earlier Hebrew prophets and the holy scriptures of the Jews and Christians were based on this original heavenly book. Thus, for Muslims the Qur'an confirms what was revealed earlier: the laws, which were given to Moses, the Gospel of Jesus, and other prophetic texts. All of this raises, in terms of relationships, a challenging and interesting situation because Muslims ultimately see themselves as the updated, revised edition, and in a sense superseding everything that comes before, while at the same time accepting these other scriptural texts as authentic. On that basis, Muslims have an affinity for Jews and Christians, but they do not quite comprehend why Christians would view this supercessionism or fulfillment theology as heretical.

Although the stories contained in the Qur'an and the concept of revelation through a series of prophets are shared with the Hebrew Bible and with the New Testament, the style of the Qur'an is different on two bases. First, the Qur'an is not written in prose or poetry—it is essentially rhyming prose, which makes it easier to memorize than regular prose and gives the verses a rhythmic aesthetic. Second, the Qur'an is not a book in the sense of having a narrative beginning, middle and end or a plot. It is a collection of discrete pieces of revelation and the long chapters occasionally combine pieces of revelation. There are no long, sustained narratives in the Qur'an. Many of the Biblical parallels are actually anecdotal in their reference. Genesis does not exist in the Qur'an so there is no fall of humanity and yet, Muslims have appropriated this and other ideas. The story of Joseph, which is not exactly the same as it is in the Bible, is the most sustained narrative in the Qur'an, and it is a beautiful story.

People read the Qur'an regularly. Those who cannot read Arabic learn the script and mouth the words; those who cannot read at all will pass their fingers along the lines and feel that somehow by doing so they
are deriving benefit. As such, the Qur'an simultaneously becomes a source of prayer and a prayer in its own right; a guide for action as well as a ritual object. Muslims treat the Qur'an with great devotion and Qur'an stands, on which they are quite often ritualistically read, are some of the masterpieces of Islamic art.

In conclusion, Islam can be understood as the ongoing unfolding of God's plan for the universe, which he created and in which he placed human beings as the only creature with the sentience to recognize God's true nature. Two short sections of scripture are particularly valuable in providing a general understanding of how God is viewed by the majority of Muslims. These short sections are included here because they summarize well what Muslim notions are regarding the nature of God. The first is in itself a short chapter, 112, and the second one is a long verse from a long chapter, 2:255. The first: "Say: He is God, the one, the only. God the eternal, absolute. He begets not, nor is He begotten, and there is none like unto Him." The second: "God, there is no God but Him, the living, the eternal. No slumber can seize Him nor sleep. His are all things in the heavens and on earth. Who shall intercede with Him except as He permits? He knows that which is before them and what is behind them. Nor shall they compass any of his knowledge except as He wills. His throne extends over the heavens and the earth and He feels no fatigue in guarding and preserving them, for He is the Most High, The Supreme."

The first verse speaks to the overarching message of the uniqueness of God. The second one reminds us that although God is the sustainer of everything and quite self-sufficient, He has a throne. And having a throne implies that God has certain similarities with being human and is concerned with the actions of individual humans and is involved with all of human history.
PART II ~ WHAT DO WE WANT THE OTHER TO TEACH ABOUT OUR THEOLOGICAL TRADITIONS?

For Further Discussion and Study

How are theological cornerstones such as the revelation of God, the oneness and unknowable mystery of God, covenant, Sabbath, ethical responsibility, Torah, codes of behavior, justice and compassion, prayer and fasting, worship, sacred time and space, holiness and holy people, wisdom, election of the community, and messianic vision understood by Judaism, Christianity, and Islam? Where is common ground, and where is divergence?

How can one teach about Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as valid and evolving in response to God's presence in the world, while also remaining true to one's specific faith commitments which may be contrary or contradictory to the other's? Why would one teach about the other and what could be the personal, social, or theological benefits?

Do the three Abrahamic traditions share a substantial common Scripture? How different are the parallel and common passages if one changes the order, context, or primary focus of the texts included in one's scriptures?

Some have suggested that concepts of grace and prophecy are common to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. How are they similar, different?

What are some common misperceptions or stereotypes of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam?

Do Jews, Christians, and Muslims teach that discrimination of any kind, including religion, is forbidden and God desires diversity of religions in the world? Where are such teachings found?
What is the appropriate balance of describing one's religious identity with the other, rather than over and against the other? How does one deal appropriately and fairly with concepts such as election, fulfillment, or supercessionism when describing another's community or one's own?

For Action in the Community

What preparations and sensitivities can discussion group leaders have to present the other in a way that is adequate, fair and respectful, so that the other recognizes himself or herself in dialogue?

Are there opportunities to find points of concurrence by focusing on the responses (social, political, educational, religious practices, etc.) of each faith community to theological and ethical and issues more than on the theology of the Word, per se.

What are the advantages and disadvantages when living in a unique, set apart, committed religious community? What challenges and opportunities are associated with such a life when relating with the world?

In what ways can Jews, Christians, and Muslims be prophetic participants within society, while also retaining their unique religious identities and preserving their integrity in the midst of pluralism and some unacceptable Western values?