

## BOTH/AND RELIGION

When I was about seven years old, I was tagging along with my mother as she was shopping. We were in a New York-style deli in the Chicago suburbs, and I was enjoying—and trying not to handle—all the very odd items one sees in such a store (round cheese! Whoever thought of round cheese?!).

Now, my family is from Oklahoma on both sides, so although I knew what cornbread was, I had never seen a bagel before. I asked my mother what it was. “It’s a bagel,” she answered offhandedly.

“No, what *is* it?” I insisted. I didn’t want to know what it was called, but what it *was*.

“It’s kind of like a Jewish doughnut.” She answered, still distracted.

“Can we try one?” I ventured. So she put one into a bag, and stuck it in the basket.

When we got out to the car, and I was face-to-face with my bagel, I felt a dread horror come over me. “I’m a Christian,” I thought. “Will God get mad at me if I eat something Jewish?” I was terrified that God would, and never did try the bagel.

I’ve come a long way since then, both in my breadth of culinary appreciation and my religious understanding. In junior college I had a vision of the universe as an enormous, seemingly chaotic, but always glorious cosmic dance. Everything was dancing, the earth, the stars and planets, the angels and demons and animals. The only ones who had forgotten the steps were the humans. Our world religions were our feeble but heartfelt attempts to relearn the steps, and to enter the dance again as best we could.

Since my tradition of origin was Christianity, I went back to the church following my vision, and began to learn the cha-cha.

In my many years dancing as a Christian I have found that I can be a follower of Jesus and very much enjoy the traditions, prayers, theologies—and yes, foods—of various faith traditions as well. It seems that whenever I go off to study another religion, I always come back to my own with a wheelbarrow of new insights, understandings, and even (most important of all) questions.

This became such a joy that I eventually did a doctorate in the religions of the world (with concentrations in Christianity, Hinduism, and Taoism). What I have come to realize after many years of study is that I am part of not just one community, but many. I am a Christian, yes, but I am also an Abrahamic believer, of a shared heritage with Jews and Muslims. I am a Christian, certainly, but I am also a member of the household of all faithful peoples. I am, most of all, a person of faith, and have more in common with an Indian *sannyasin* than I do with a San Franciscan atheist.

Learning to see one’s faith in “both/and” rather than “either/or” terms is a challenge for many people, especially folks who were brought up in religiously conservative environments. But for spiritual directors, it is a necessary skill.

Liz Stout and other SDI members certainly had grand opportunity to explore the kaleidoscope of religious expression this past winter (or summer, depending on what side of the globe you are on) at the Parliament of World Religions held in Cape Town, South Africa. In “Spiritual Directors and Friends Ponder the Parliament,” members and

others who were there write about their encounters with the sacred at a meeting that was sometimes overwhelming with spiritual power. Rather than becoming suspicious of the diversity, they came away with their faith strengthened, deepened, challenged, and stretched into new forms.

Other articles in this issue also struggle with the “both/and” dilemma. In Catherine Grytting’s fine article on energy work in spiritual direction practice, she speaks of energy being both particle and wave. Even so, we are individuals *and* we are connected, we are matter *and* energy, we are locked in time *and* we are eternal. In her article Grytting makes a creative case for seeing both views as necessary and useful.

In William Barry’s “Overcoming the Hermeneutic of Suspicion” another dichotomy is explored: belief vs. critique. When we are companioning another in spiritual direction, do we take the experiences related to us at face value, or do we try to figure out what psychological factors lurk behind them? Barry’s wise advice allows for us to remain detached enough to ask the hard questions, but engaged enough to meet people with wonder right where they are, relishing their religious experiences, holding them as precious and genuine. We are honored to be able to finally reprint this classic article in the pages of *Presence*.

In “Melting the Iceberg: Spiritual Direction for Men” Donald Bisson challenges the notion that for men to be in therapy or spiritual direction,

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they must accept a feminine—or feminist—model. Bisson agrees that a different model must be employed, but also believes that the process of growth is different for men than it is for women. In this article we see how we may more fully invite men into a relationship of healing in terms acceptable—and fruitful—for them.

In Bill Creed’s article on “When Religious Institutions Injure,” we face the difficult and painful reality that so many people of every faith tradition endure: betrayal and abuse at the hands of religious leaders or structures. How can one remain faithful to one’s religion if one has been wounded by it? How can one find forgiveness for the wounder, and eventually peace without walking away from the community or God altogether? A fine example of “both/and” religion, Bill Creed’s article invites us to accompany others on what will be for many the most painful journey they will ever have to make.

And last but not least, in “Ministry: Reaping What We Have Not Sown,” *Presence* Editorial Board member Wilkie Au asks us to ponder the mystery of being laborers in the field, and yet reaping a harvest that we recognize was sown not by us, but by God.

You will find these and many other mysterious paradoxes in the following pages. I hope you will be as delighted and inspired by them as I. And now I must go: there is a bagel down at Brewed Awakenings with my name on it.

—John R. Mabry