

Interfaith News

from the

Jay Phillips Center for Interfaith Learning

From the Director



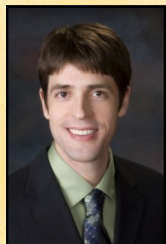
With the launching of this newsletter, I am pleased to express my deep gratitude to Eric Christensen for taking on the job of editor and for producing such an informative first issue. Thanks also to Hans Gustafson and Brenna Horn for their stellar work—Hans as the center's assistant director and Brenna as student leadership coordinator. A CSB junior, Brenna is immersed in interfaith learning in India this semester, an

experience that undoubtedly will yield rich benefits not only for Brenna but for all those with whom she works when she returns to her leadership role with the center next academic year.

I am also pleased to extend a warm invitation to all readers of this newsletter to become more involved with our center, or to become involved with it for the first time. Brenna, Eric, Hans, and I welcome your suggestions for how we might enhance the work of our center, which is to foster interfaith learning, friendship, and service. We are eager to collaborate with you!

—John Merkle

From the Editor



Now that we have settled somewhat comfortably into the new year, our commitment to our resolutions—if we made any—may be going strong, or they may be waning. Many of us find out that the road to our goals is not as linear or as easy as we thought. It seems safe to acknowledge that all people need fresh starts from time to time. The principle of entropy is not relegated to the physics classroom—disorder creeps into our lives time and time again. Hence the perpetual need for renewal and reinvigoration.

The religions of the world offer guidance and

encouragement in this regard. We hope to become better people in and through our religious beliefs and practices. Whatever religious tradition (if any) we find ourselves in, we can be assured that seekers of truth, beauty, justice, peace, goodness, and love are never far from us, whether those people be voices from the past or in the present, from our tradition or from another. Learning from one another can be a source of inspiration and invigoration, and interfaith learning in particular often opens up new avenues of exploration, insight, and commitment.

As we continue through this new year, we hope to provide ample opportunities for you to seek to get engaged in interfaith learning. We invite you to join us on the journey.

—Eric Christensen

SAVE THE DATE
God and Politics
A Spiritual State of the Union

Rabbi Sharon Brous

Monday, March 12

8:00 p.m.

Alumni Lounge, SJU

The Jay Phillips Center for Interfaith Learning is a collaborative enterprise of Saint John's University and the University of Saint Thomas. Its mission is to promote interfaith learning, friendship, and service.

www.csbsju.edu/Jay-Phillips-Center

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February Events

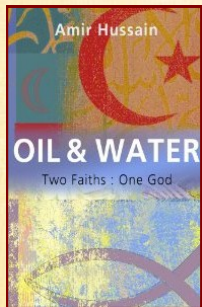
Monday, February 13, 8:00 p.m.
Alumni Lounge, SJU

God and Religious Diversity **A Contemporary Muslim Perspective**

—Amir Hussain



Amir Hussain



As the last of the Abrahamic religions, Islam comes into a world that knows Christianity and Judaism. This means that Muslims have to have a theological understanding of both Jews and Christians in their relationship to God, and of God in relationship to the people of all three monotheistic faiths. As Islam expands out of Arabia and into Asia, it also has to make sense of Buddhism and Hinduism. Professor Hussain will discuss how Muslims understand their relationship to God given the fact of religious diversity and how they might think of religious diversity in relation to God's will.

Amir Hussain, PhD, is professor of theological studies at Loyola Marymount University, a Jesuit university in Los Angeles, where he teaches courses on world religions. He is the author of *Oil and Water: Two Faiths, One God*, an introduction to Islam and Muslim-Christian dialogue, and more than two dozen book chapters and scholarly articles about Islam and Muslims.

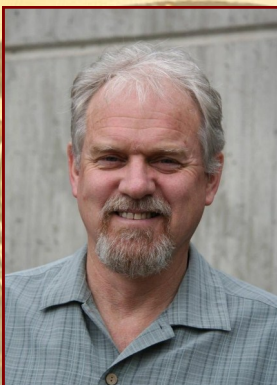
Professor Hussain's book can be found at Clemens Library at CSB (call number: BP161.3 .H87 2006), at the CSB and SJU bookstores, and at his presentation. It's a great read, and we highly recommend it!

Meditation

**The Art of Recognizing Awareness
and Awakening Lovingkindness and Compassion**

—Edwin Kelley

Wednesday, February 29, 4:15 p.m.
Quad 264, SJU



Edwin Kelley

According to Buddhist teaching, awareness, lovingkindness, and compassion are innate qualities of our mind, and meditation is a powerful tool for connecting to these qualities of mind in an ongoing way, anywhere, anytime. Edwin Kelley will expound upon this teaching and explain how, as our skill in meditation grows, our mind becomes more calm and peaceful and our heart more joyful and open, which modern scientific studies are increasingly affirming.

Edwin Kelley has practiced meditation in both the Theravada and the Tibetan Buddhist traditions. He has a postgraduate diploma in Buddhist studies from the University of Sunderland in the United Kingdom. He is a long-time student of the well-known Tibetan Buddhist meditation master Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche and codirector of Tergar International, the organization that oversees Rinpoche's activities around the world.

*As someone who loves to eat and cook, I know that oil and water
can often be combined to produce delicious results.
I see oil and water as necessary ingredients, not as mutually exclusive categories.*
—Amir Hussain

Recent Events



After her presentation, “Waging Peace in the Context of Violent Conflict,” at SJU on Oct. 31, 2011, Rabbi Melissa Weintraub (left), cofounder and executive director emerita of Encounter, an organization dedicated to resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, converses with SJU professor emerita of theology Sister Helen Rolfson. Rabbi Weintraub focused on how face-to-face encounters in the context of violent conflict may promote reconciliation and peace.



In a program titled “Religious Identity and the Buddhist Doctrine of No Self” at SJU on Dec. 7, 2011, Harold Kasimow (left), professor emeritus of religious studies at Grinnell College, and John P. Keenan, professor emeritus of religion at Middlebury College, suggested how Christians and Jews may be enriched through the study of Buddhism. The Jay Phillips Center cosponsored this program with the Colledgeville Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research.



CSB/SJU students on a wilderness interfaith retreat in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area, led by Tiffany Vang (front left) and Brenna Horn (front right). If you are interested in getting involved as a student leader, please contact Hans Gustafson (hgustafson@csbsju.edu). We would love you have you and your ideas become and integral part of our efforts!



Rabbi David Wirtschafter (right), rabbi of the Ames Jewish Congregation in Iowa, engages an audience member after his presentation, “Responding to Contradictory Critiques of Contemporary Religion,” at SJU on Sept. 26, 2011. Responding to attacks on progressive approaches to religion from both staunch traditionalists and anti-religious secularists who stress the incompatibility of science and religion, Rabbi Wirtschafter defended the view that religious teachings need to evolve and that religion and science can be complementary influences rather than competing ideologies.

Men often hate each other because they fear each other; they fear each other because they don't know each other; they don't know each other because they cannot communicate; they cannot communicate because they are separated.

—Martin Luther King Jr.

Book Review and Interfaith News

Beside Still Waters

Jews, Christians, and the Way of the Buddha

Edited by Harold Kasimow, John P. Keenan,
and Linda Klepinger Keenan

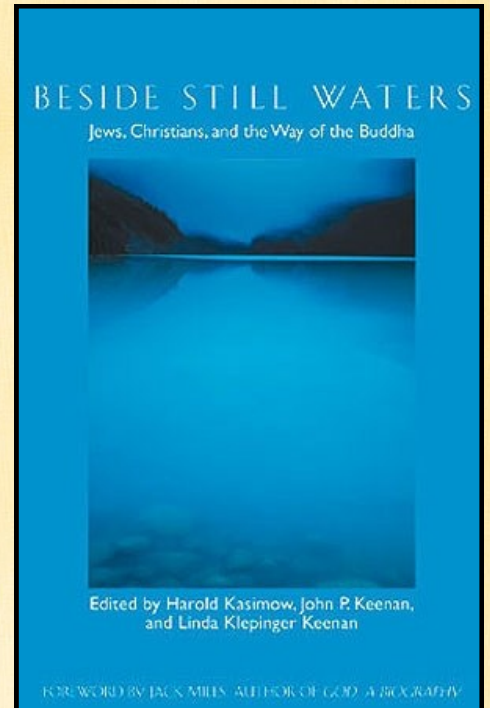
Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2003, 288 pages

For those of you who were able to attend our event on Dec. 7, 2011, “Religious Identity and the Buddhist Doctrine of No Self,” Harold Kasimow’s and John P. Keenan’s names will be familiar. In this book they (along with John’s wife, Linda Klepinger Keenan) have gathered a wonderfully insightful collection of essays by authors who are committed Jews or Christians that have benefitted immeasurably from their encounters with Buddhists and Buddhism.

A common thread woven throughout the book is that one need not stand dispassionately apart from religion in order to have true interfaith conversation. Rather, immersing oneself in a religious tradition (or traditions) is perhaps the best way to begin interreligious dialogue, for who is better able to converse about a tradition than the one who is steeped in that tradition, who *lives* it? Another theme found in many of the chapters is that dialogue is not always about talking; it is also about listening and participating in common practices.

One strength of a book like this is the variety of voices—not all of whom agree with one another—in short, powerful, and personal reflections. In many ways, the book itself is a good example of interfaith learning in action. If you’re looking for a good read on the topic of interreligious dialogue and practice that combines thoughtful, personal reflection with intellectual acuity, then this is a great place to start.

—Eric Christensen



Have a good book about interfaith learning that you would like to recommend?

Post it on our [Facebook wall!](#)

Rabbi Will Berkovitz, “The Priest and the Prostitute: Storytelling as a Holiday Gift to God,” *The Huffington Post*, December 24, 2011. A former rabbi-in-residence with the Jay Phillips Center (fall 2010), Rabbi Berkovitz writes, “Many of the holiest moments in life are not found in church or synagogue or in the cloistered study of sacred literature. No, the sacred moments that sustain and bind us together are the sharing of our common humanity through simple encounter—the telling and hearing of our stories, the passing along of our experiences.”

Paul Brandeis Raushenbush, “Religion Stories of 2011: The Top 11,” *The Huffington Post*, December 6, 2011.

Francis X. Clooney, SJ, “Interreligious Connectivity in 2012,” *In All Things Blog (America magazine)*, January 14, 2012. “Recognizing global interreligious interconnectivity is not and ought not to be labeled a matter of liberal and conservative. . . . [Furthermore,] there does not need to be a trade-off between commitment and openness.”

Anne Marie Roderick, “Rule No. 1 of Interfaith Relations: Faith is Required,” *God’s Politics Blog (Sojourners magazine)*, October 27, 2011. “Religious tension is real and the need for cooperation across religious, spiritual, and philosophical lines is more important now than ever.”

Please share your interests by posting them on our [Facebook wall!](#)

We and our traditions have great riches to gain by opening ourselves to the “other.”

And one part of that gain is renewed appreciation for the riches of our own traditions of origin.

—from the editors’ introduction to Beside Still Waters