Interfaith Dialogue at the Grass Roots

Edited by
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—Rebecca Kratz Mays

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Preface

Can Interreligious Dialogue Make a Difference?

Leonard Swidler

Whenever I am asked the question, "Does the interreligious dialogue you are always talking about ever really make any difference?" I answer with a resounding, *Yes!* and proceed to tell him (it's always a he) about Macedonia.

We were holding our then latest Jewish-Christian-Muslim Trialogue (started in 1978—ten scholars from each religion from around the world participated) in Jakarta, Indonesia, in February, 2000, at the Presidential Palace when my friend and close colleague Paul Mojzes (born in Yugoslavia) received an overseas phone call from Boris Trajkovski, the new President of Macedonia—the then newest of the independent republics from former Yugoslavia. He told Paul that he had read about our Trialogue in Indonesia and asked whether we could come to his country next, since they desperately needed help, which he hoped we might be able to provide.

In fact, Macedonia was falling into civil war. The large majority—perhaps 70%—of the population was Christian Orthodox, but a sizeable minority—perhaps 27%—was Muslim. Most of the Orthodox were ethnically Slavic, and most of the Muslims were Albanian. The religions, especially the two large ones, were more part of the problem rather than the solution, for over the centuries they had never spoken *with* each other, only *at* each other, and then almost always in accusatory tones. And that was very much the case in 2000! They frequently added fuel to the fire.

With the help of President Trajkovski, Paul and I visited Skopje, the capital of Macedonia, in June, 2001, to meet with the President and the leaders of the five recognized religious communities: Orthodoxy, Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Judaism. The most difficult to persuade to support a Trialogue were the Orthodox, for they had the most to lose, but we were eventually able to get all to agree to a Jewish-Christian-Muslim

Trialogue, scheduled for November, 2001.

Later that summer of 2001, however, the political and military situation deteriorated so badly that the Trialogue had to be postponed. After intervention by NATO troops that fall, Paul and I visited Skopje again and once more had to convince all the religious leaders to proceed with the Trialogue, then set for May, 2002.

We hoped that we could 1) draw a dozen or more Macedonian clergy to attend the Trialogue, and 2) persuade the Orthodox and Islamic theological seminaries to allow us to bring a team of one Jewish, one Christian, and one Muslim scholar to lecture at each of their seminaries. As the time for the Trialogue grew closer and the local religious leaders, especially the Orthodox and the Muslim, saw that significant international attention would be focused on this event and their country, they encouraged their clergy to come to the Trialogue, and as a result over 100 attended all four days.

An even more dramatic development took place when Paul and I received a response on the weekend during the Trialogue to our request to send a team of three from the Trialogue to lecture at the Orthodox seminary. They asked us whether we could bring the *whole Trialogue* from the hotel to their seminary the next day, Monday, and asked the Dean of the Islamic seminary to give a lecture at the same time. We quickly recovered from our astonishment and said that we would have to ask the Dean of the Islamic seminary. When we asked him, he said that we would lecture at the Orthodox seminary if the Trialogue would come to his seminary on Tuesday, and the Dean of the Orthodox seminary would give a lecture at his seminary! Miracles happen! And so we had a handshake between the two Deans at the Orthodox and Islamic seminaries, much like the earlier handshake of Rabin and Arafat on the lawn of the White House.

But the miracles did not stop there. Late Monday might the leadership of the Trialogue was suddenly invited to a midnight dinner at the Orthodox Metropolitan's palace, at which a tripartite commitment was hammered out: 1) to establish a Council on Interreligious Cooperation appointed by the respective heads of communities; 2) for the heads of the religious communities, particularly the Orthodox and Islamic, to meet three or four times a year to discuss issues between the communities; and 3) for the Orthodox and Islamic theological schools to begin cooperating in teaching students about each other's religion.

In fact, these three commitments have subsequently been successfully carried out, 1) with exchanges of faculty lectures at the two seminaries and joint student projects even outside the academic year, 2) with the Council on Interreligious Cooperation's working diligently together with the Parliament on laws relating to religion, and 3) with the religious leaders

meeting regularly with the President of the country. Even beyond those, the Council on Interreligious Cooperation organized an ongoing series of one-day training programs for imams, priests, and ministers in several of the larger towns of Macedonia, which have been very successful.

After the extraordinary success of the 2002 Skopje Trialogue, President Trajkovski felt encouraged to continue in the direction of fostering interreligious dialogue and launched the first Ohrid Conference on Interreligious Dialogue in 2003, to which 300 delegates came from around the world. Most fortunately, that initial Ohrid Conference on Interreligious Dialogue was continued by the current Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski in 2007, and plans are laid to continue it on into the future.

Most of those 300 delegates from around the world went back to their countries renewed in their hopes for the difference interreligious dialogue can make in achieving respect and peace. We Jews, Christians, and Muslims now live in a global village where every individual is faced with religious pluralism. We need to learn how to make real the respect and peace across religious boundaries in our own backyards.

Two examples from my own experience add to the many more from the authors in this collection. Years ago I participated in a program called "Living Room Dialogues."

A group of four Jewish couples and four Christian couples was invited to get to know each other as Christians and Jews. They arranged to take turns meeting once a month at a Jewish couple's home, then a Christian's, alternating each month. The beginning is always the toughest time. Most groups choose what for them feels simple and non-threatening. In this group, each person took a turn telling others about his or her own image of "the other," Jew or Christian, as he or she grew up. The simple genius of this starter is that there are no "wrong" answers. "This story" is the image I had of Christians or Jews when I was growing up—that's all. Limiting the sharing to lived experience gave the Jews or Christians the opportunity to "correct" the sometimes strange, perhaps even weird or "off the wall," images each had. Everyone could laugh at the distorted pictures we often hold of each other. The ice was broken.

A second grassroots experience happened at an interreligious dialogue day jointly organized by a number of local organizations. Early in the day the group discussed the ten commonsense guidelines for interreligious dialogue called the "Dialogue Decalogue" (reprinted here in Chapter 1). In the afternoon four of the participants put on a five-minute skit in which one of the "Commandments" was not being observed; the result was a loud shouting match—the opposite of dialogue. Everyone left that day with a very vivid *feel* for the importance of that particular guideline, if

dialogue instead of debate was to take place.

Interfaith dialogue at the grass roots means, for me, doing the work described in this collection as if we were at home in our living rooms able to take turns in serving each other as host or guest. My hope is that this group of authors will meet you where you are and encourage you to help create many fruitful dialogues.

Introduction

Forty religious seekers filled the worship room in the converted barn at Pendle Hill, the Quaker study center in Pennsylvania near Philadelphia. Rabbi Marcia Prager and I sat attentive to each person present as we read a verse from the Genesis creation story, interpreting its meaning from our Jewish and Christian perspectives. "God said: Let us make humankind, in our image, according to our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). We paused to consider the plural pronouns in the passage; Marcia offered commentary from the rabbinical tradition. We then entered into silence for others to speak. A Christian Quaker pastor from Kenya rose slowly to his feet. With respect for the diverse faith perspectives in our group, he spoke with reverence for his tradition and experience. He identified Jesus, as God's companion in creation, saying with God, "Let us make humankind in our image ..."

Encounters such as this one have become more and more commonplace in our pluralistic world. More than ever before, people now live and work with members of other religious traditions. With the click of a computer mouse, we are up close to "the other," the person who is unfamiliar or the custom that we don't understand. Religious congregations are increasingly seeking to engage others in more formal ways. How do we sustain respect and create peace with "the other" without doing harm to the sincerity of a human's striving to live a religious life? In the above instance and in many others, a respectful silence and mutual dialogue can help.

In the opening story at the moment we entered into silence, I could feel persons both soften and stiffen as the differing perspectives on a mutual sacred story hung in the air. The difference was so wide a gap that we chose to encounter the mystery of difference just by being quiet, suspending any further debate or pointed discussion for a time. A deep stillness and sense of peace filled the room as each person had space to ponder, not needing exact agreement or debate. After this time of quiet worship, we took up the next verse. After the class session, over lunch, many animated conversations arose from the quiet opportunity we had experienced.

When agreement seems impossible at worst or difficult at best, what assumptions and approaches can reconcile difference? All the stories in

this collection presume a reconciling and unconditionally loving God at the heart of our encounter with "the other." Based on this assumption, each author offers a contribution toward increasing patience, passion, and understanding in doing dialogue among persons of differing faith traditions. These authors come from long practice in facilitating such encounters and have come to use the word "dialogue" as does Leonard Swidler, religion professor at Temple University, in Philadelphia, whose pioneer work in the twentieth century has done much to promote interfaith activity. He defines dialogue as "a conversation on a common subject between two or more persons with differing views, the primary purpose of which is for each participant to learn from the other so that s/he can change and grow."

Swidler and the other authors in this collection are aware of the groundswell of interest and concern since 9/11 for what can ensue from the absence of dialogue. In assembling these essays, we hope to empower imams, rabbis, pastors, and their congregants to take up the work of interreligious dialogue as a peacemaking activity. We encourage the same intentional work among all religious traditions. For the sake of focus and accessibility, the authors in this collection build on the scholars' trialogues among the Abrahamic traditions—Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. We want to add many others than scholars to the team, including theologians, religious leaders, teenagers and young adults, educators, and congregants for the fruition of the labor. To that end, a less formal understanding of dialogue is encouraged in several chapters. "Conversation" replaces "dialogue" in order to emphasize how interreligious engagement can be more commonplace when some basic understandings are in place.

In Chapter One, "Understanding Dialogue," Leonard Swidler discusses the basic reasons for creating interfaith encounters, delineates ten guidelines for conducting them, and tells some of the story of what can happen for people who take up the dialogue. Then Miriam Therese Winter, in Chapter Two, "Doing Effective Dialogue—and Loving It," describes "circles of conversation" that help make the encounter safe and productive. She and the next author, Eboo Patel, agree that one of the best ways to conduct encounters is to tell stories as the major part of any conversation—most especially in the interfaith youth work Patel does. In Chapter Three, "Storytelling as a Key Methodology for Interfaith Youth Work," Patel and two of his co-workers, April Kunze and Noah Silverman, outline why and how storytelling works so well. Drawing on assumptions about spiritual formation, they help us to understand just how powerful a simple yet sincere conversation can be.

Then, in Chapter Four, "The Next Thing to Dialogue," Edith Howe and

S. Mark Heim discuss a good step to take to help start constructive conversations where a different use of stories happens; they outline in instructive detail how to organize a book study group, choose effective books, and open the conversations that can evolve from reading. How do we begin to learn to do this conversation with skill and with safety? Michael S. Kogan offers us a compelling model in Chapter Five, "Bringing the Dialogue Home," for how the home church or synagogue is a good starting place for doing grassroots interfaith work. By being rooted in our own tradition and knowing it well, we are better able to comprehend the depth of wisdom in a different tradition. Accordingly, then, we move toward a healthy pluralism where engaged contact can expand each person's faith and understanding without creating a sense of threat or loss of one's own particular faith. Khaleel Mohammed, in Chapter Six, "The Art of Heeding," then offers a frank, feisty, and refreshing appraisal of our attempts at this difficult enterprise. He calls us to humility within a renewed vigor of heeding what "the other," the person who represents the unknown and the unfamiliar to us, actually has to say with his or her words and life. Then, in Chapter Seven, "The Power of Hope," Racelle Weiman appeals to our inability to comprehend a God who allows for great suffering. In the face of the assault to our sensibilities of the history of the *Shoah*, she claims the power of interfaith work to inspire our hope as a religious people. She calls on each of the Abrahamic traditions represented in this collection to establish just and peaceful communities.

We want to create practices and programs for real differences to coexist without the beast of fear devouring life, light, and laughter. We hope readers will continue the conversation these writers have started. All of us have had interfaith encounters, both organized and spontaneous. How do we conduct ourselves? Do we recognize our resistances and know how to engage or disengage with appropriate respect? Do we know how to respect the differences even when we don't want to change and to grow? If we want to grow and to change, can we do so safely without mockery or exploitation? Are understanding and tolerance enough? What else is needed? If our own beliefs are shaky, how can the encounter with difference strengthen our own faith without tearing down the other? After all these and other questions are pondered, how do we take responsibility for the most important one: Do we walk with Micah, the prophet, in doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God?

We invite readers to engage this collection with eyes open to the possibilities for interfaith encounters in the churches, synagogues, and mosques in the neighborhoods where you live. We join you in sharing some of the questions and obstacles that we know arise when trying to do interfaith

activities of any kind. We encourage trust in the assumption common to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam: Each of us is an equal before God, held in that reconciling and unconditional love and truthfulness we are intended to practice.

To encourage our practice, Joseph Stoutzenberger writes questions for reflection and suggestions for action at the end of each of the eight chapters. These questions and suggestions can be reframed and inspire different ones depending on each particular occasion for dialogue. Whatever our situation, Maria Hornung's conclusion guides us through three important exercises. First, she describes the many roles within a faith community participants can assume in order to facilitate interreligious engagement. Second, she places Swidler's "Dialogue Decalogue" in context. Finally, she draws on Swidler's stages of change in engaging interreligious dialogue in order to invite each of us to reflect on our own experiences.

This collection adds an epilogue. Why? Good conversation or fruitful dialogue grows out of real-life stories at the grass roots of our communities. After all the questions, suggestions, and discussions about interfaith dialogue, we wanted to share stories of grassroots dialogue as it happens. Achmad Munjid tells the story of his Indonesian people in their struggle to build a home for everyone. In his story, he refers often to the heart of interfaith dialogue happening when friendship is born. In the final story of the epilogue, Marcia Prager and I tell the story of our interfaith friendship, of how, out of each of our search within our own religious tradition for its depth, we found ourselves facilitating a Christian Quaker/Jewish interfaith dialogue. These closing stories of lived experience invite the telling of your own.

Each of us is needed in the work of religious reconciliation. We need many more persons who are skilled in interpreting our sacred texts; we need those who can lead worship with respect for differing practices; we need people who choose to build friendships with the joy of knowing "the other." When the needs are met, we befriend one another as followers of the one God. And perhaps, just maybe, we can catch a glimpse of the peace that is our inheritance as those followers.

—Rebecca Kratz Mays

Please send your suggestions and reflections to rgkmays@hotmail.com and/or Leonard Swidler at dialogue@temple.edu.

Contributors

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Maria Hornung is Coordinator for Interfaith Education at the Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia. She entered the Medical Mission Sisters in 1954, upon her graduation from Ursuline High School in New Orleans, LA. Following education as a pharmacist, she spent twenty-five years living in Africa in the countries of Uganda, Kenya, Nigeria, and Ghana. In her professional work she served as a pharmacist, hospital administrator, educator, and community leader and collaborated with people of many different faith traditions. During her last years in Africa she served as Sector Coordinator for the Medical Mission Sisters' mission in the African continent and as a member of its international governing council. From 1987 to 2003 she worked with new MMS members in North America and served as Sector Coordinator in North America. She received her M.Ed. (1970) and her M.A. (1995) in Interreligious Studies from Temple University. Her book, *Encountering Other Faiths*, was published by Paulist Press in 2007.

Edith Howe practiced law for twenty years before finding herself called to work in the area of interfaith dialogue. In response to the events of September 11, 2001, she formed the "Daughters of Abraham," a book group designed to foster mutual understanding among Muslim, Jewish, and Christian women. This group has met for over five years, and ten such groups have since been formed in the Boston and Washington, DC, areas. Howe is currently pursuing a master's of theology degree at Andover Newton Theological School in Newton Centre, MA, which shares a campus with the Hebrew College rabbinical school. She is an active member of the leadership team of Journeys on the Hill, an interfaith group formed by students at both schools. Journeys on the Hill has organized a number of interfaith events each semester, created an interfaith dialogue and study group, and prompted the offering of interfaith courses at the two schools.

Michael S. Kogan is Professor of Religious Studies and Chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Montclair State University, Upper Montclair, NJ, where he has taught since 1973. He holds a B.A. in philosophy and a Ph.D. in religious studies from Syracuse University, with post-graduate study at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America and Columbia University. He serves on the Board of the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies,* the South Carolina Jewish Historical Society, and the Jewish Studies Program of the College of Charleston. In the fall of 2008 he will become Chair of the Program

of Jewish-American Studies at Montclair State University. He has served as President of the Mid-Atlantic Region of the American Academy of Religion and is Director of the Schnitzer Institute of Adult Jewish Studies. Kogan writes and speaks widely in the field of Jewish-Christian theological dialogue, and, along with numerous articles, he has written *Opening the Covenant: A Jewish Theology of Christianity* (Oxford University Press, 2008), in which this essay first appeared.

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Rebecca Kratz Mays is a Quaker teacher and editor with a B.A. from Earlham College and an M.A. from the University of Pennsylvania. For ten years, she taught "Approaching the Gospels Together" at the Quaker adult study center, Pendle Hill, near Philadelphia, PA, and for twenty years she edited and managed Pendle Hill books and pamphlets. Currently, she directs the Master's Degree progam in English and Publishing at Rosemont College, Rosemont, PA. She is clerk for Friends Association for Higher Education, a consortium of Quaker colleges, universitites, and adult study centers. In her local congregation, Westtown Monthly Meeting, she is clerk for the worship and ministry committee. She currently teaches Quaker faith and practice, facilitates retreats, and co-leads Christian Quaker/Jewish interfaith dialogue workshops with Rabbi Marcia Prager.

Khaleel Mohammed is Associate Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at San Diego (CA) State University. He received B.A.'s from Interamerican University (Religion and Psychology) and Imam Muhammad Bin Saud University (Islamic Law), an M.A. in History and Philosophy of Religion from Concordia University, and a Ph.D. in Islamic Law from McGill University. He was a Kraft-Hiatt Postdoctoral Fellow and Lecturer in Islamic Studies at Brandeis University's Department of Near Eastern and Judaic Studies (2001–03) and has served as visiting professor/lecturer in universities in Yemen, Syria, Canada, and the U.S. He has lectured and written extensively on Muslim-Jewish relations, with articles appearing in the *Middle East Quarterly*, *Islamic Studies*, *Social Science and Modern Society*, and the *Journal of Religion and Culture*.

Achmad Munjid was born to a traditional Muslim family in Central Java, Indonesia, where he was trained in Qur'ān, Hadith, and Islamic Law in a *pesantren* (traditional Islamic boarding school). He holds a B.A. (1999) in English and an M.A. in Comparative Religion from Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia. He is now a doctoral candidate in the Religion Department at Temple University, where he is researching the key Indonesian thinkers of interreligious dialogue. He has presented papers in various conferences and seminars held by American Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS), American Council for the Study of Islamic Societies (ACSIS), New Jersey Council for Humanities (NJCH), and Legacy International. He is now teaching as Adjunct Instructor in the Religion Department of Temple University as well as working as an Associate at The Dialogue Institute.

Eboo Patel is the founder and Executive Director of the Interfaith Youth Core in Chicago. He is the author of *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim—The Struggle for the Soul of a Generation*. Patel holds a doctorate in the sociology of religion from Oxford University, where he studied on a Rhodes scholarship. He writes "The Faith Divide," a featured blog on religion for *The Washington Post*, and has also written for *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Clinton Journal*, *The Harvard Divinity School Bulletin*, and National Public Radio. Patel serves on the Religious Advisory Committee of the Council on Foreign Relations, the National Committee of the Aga Khan Foundation USA, the Advisory Board of Duke University's Islamic Studies Center, and the Board of the Chicago History Museum. He has spoken at the Clinton Global Initiative, the Nobel Peace Prize Forum, and at universities around the world. Patel is an Ashoka Fellow, was named by *Islamica Magazine* as one of ten young Muslim visionaries shaping Islam in America, and has been profiled by PBS and several other media outlets.

Marcia Prager is a Jewish renewal rabbi, teacher, storyteller, and therapist. She is Director and Dean of Ordination Programs for ALEPH: Alliance for Jewish Renewal, and rabbi for the P'nai Or Jewish Renewal communities of Philadelphia, PA, and Princeton, NJ. Her book, *The Path of Blessing* (Bell Tower, 1998/Jewish Lights, 2003), is an exploration of the profound spiritual wisdom that lies in the Jewish practice of blessing. She is the creator of the unique P'nai Or Siddurim (prayerbooks) for Shabbat and other innovative approaches to prayer and liturgy. Her work as a teacher of Jewish spiritual practice includes developing and co-directing the Davvenen Leadership Training Institute at Elat Chayyim Jewish Spiritual Retreat Center in New York. She and her husband Hazzan Jack Kessler travel widely to teach in an array of Jewish and interfaith settings.

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Joseph Stoutzenberger is Professor of Religious Studies at Holy Family University in Philadelphia, PA. He earned his M.A. in Religious Education at Loyola University in Chicago, and received his Ph.D. in Religion from Temple University. He has written and revised numerous high school textbooks in religious studies, and his most recent publications are *You Are My Friends: Gospel Reflections for Your Spiritual Journey* and *The Human Quest for God: An Overview of World Religions*, both published by Twenty-Third Publications. He has been involved in interreligious dialogue for many years, especially in the Philadelphia area.

Leonard Swidler is Professor of Catholic Thought and Interreligious Dialogue in the Religion Department at Temple University, where he has taught since 1966. He is Founder and President of the Dialogue Institute (Interreligious, Intercultural, International), as well as founding editor, together with his wife Arlene, of the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*. At Temple, and as a visiting professor at universities around the world—including Graz, Austria; Tübingen, Germany; Fudan University, Shanghai; and the University of Malaya,

Kuala Lumpur—Swidler has mentored a generation of U.S. and international scholars in the work of interreligious dialogue. He holds degrees in history, philosophy, and theology from Marquette University (M.A.), Tübingen University (S.T.L.) and the University of Wisconsin (Ph.D.). Swidler has published more than 180 articles and 70 books, including: *Jewish-Christian-Muslim Dialogue* (1978); *Religious Liberty and Human Rights* (1986); *After the Absolute: The Dialogical Future of Religious Reflection* (1990); *A Bridge to Buddhist-Christian Dialogue* (1990); *Muslims in Dialogue: The Evolution of a Dialogue over a Generation* (1992); and *Trialogue: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Dialogue* (co-edited with K. Durán and R. Firestone) (2007).

Racelle Weiman is Executive Director of the Dialogue Institute (Interreligious, Intercultural, International) at Temple University. She holds a B.A. in Jewish Studies from U.C.L.A. and an M.A. and Ph.D. from Temple University in the field of Interreligious Studies, specializing in the Holocaust and Interfaith Relations. She received accreditation in mediation at the Truman Peace Institute at Hebrew University, Jerusalem, and pursued postdoctoral research on ethnic conflict-resolution and the religious elements of conflict at the Fletcher School of Diplomacy at Tufts University (1995) and the Program on Negotiation at Harvard University (1997). Prior to her current appointment, she served as founding Director of the Center for Holocaust and Humanity Education, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, OH (2000–06). She has lectured at Haifa University (1986–2000), where she taught and developed projects relating to tolerance education, prejudice reduction, and Holocaust and genocide studies. She held a research fellowship on Professional Ethics at the S. Neaman Institute and served on the production team of television documentaries including the Emmy-nominated *Finding Family*. She has written numerous textbooks and co-authored curriculum and teacher-training materials.

Miriam Therese Winter is professor of liturgy, worship, spirituality, and feminist studies at Hartford Seminary in Connecticut, an international center for interfaith dialogue. An advocate of experiential learning as a gateway to interfaith relations, she has been active in ecumenical, interfaith, and cross-cultural contexts for many years. As a member of the international congregation of Medical Mission Sisters, she has taught throughout Africa, Asia, Australia, Europe, and Latin America. In the 1970s she spent three summers as a faculty member of an interfaith initiative in Jerusalem. Her Folk Mass was premiered at Carnegie Hall in the first ecumenical-interfaith concert in the history of the Hall. Her folk-style songs and contemporary hymns continue to be sung by communities of faith around the world. She has written a number of books on feminist ritual and spirituality and has been inducted into the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame. Winter has a Ph.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary and several honorary doctorates from Roman Catholic universities.

1

Understanding Dialogue

Leonard Swidler

I. The Dialogue of Head, Hands, and Heart

The Universe Is a Cosmic Dance of Dialogue.

Dialogue—the mutually beneficial interaction of differing components—is at the very heart of the Universe, of which we humans are the highest expression: from the basic interaction of *matter and energy* (in Einstein's unforgettable formula: $e=mc^2$—energy equals mass times the square of the speed of light), to the creative interaction of *protons and electrons* in every atom, to the vital symbiosis of *body and spirit* in every human, through the creative dialogue between *woman and man*, to the dynamic relationship between *individual and society*. Thus, the very essence of our humanity is dialogical, and a fulfilled human life is the highest expression of the *cosmic dance of dialogue.*

In the early millennia of the history of humanity we spread outward from our starting point in central Africa, and the forces of divergence were dominant. Because we live on one globe, however, we eventually began to encounter each other more and more frequently. Now the forces of stunning convergence are dominant.

During the era of divergence, we could live in isolation from each other; we could ignore each other. Now, in this era of convergence, we are forced to live in one world. We increasingly live in a global village. We cannot ignore "the other," the person who is different or the custom that is unfamiliar. Too often in the past we have tried to make over "the other" into a likeness of ourselves, often by violence. But this violence is the very opposite of dialogue. This egocentric arrogance is in fundamental opposition to the *cosmic dance of dialogue*. It is not creative; it is destructive.

Hence, we humans today have a stark choice: dialogue or death.