

# Towards a New Approach to Religion & Identity

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# A BRIEF BIO

- Oberlin College, 2000. BA in Religion.
- Worked in student affairs 2001 - 2006
- MEd Candidate at University of Massachusetts Amherst

# Authentic Dialogues

# WHO CARES?

- Civil & political conversations in the US regularly reference religion.
- Pluralistic world means cross-faith interaction.
- Religion can provide a gateway to a student's inner values. Educate the whole student.
- Students want to talk about it.

# Religion vs. Spirituality

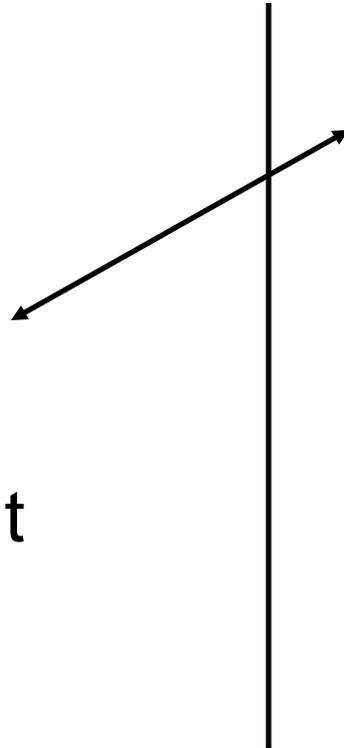
- Family
- Ritual
- Doctrines
- Controlled Environment

- Meditation
- Reflection
- Engagement
- Personal Journey

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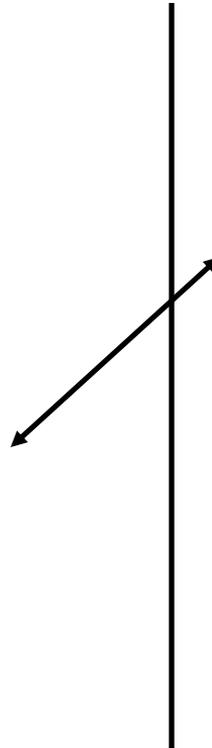
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# THE SPLIT

- Enlightenment-era France
  - Reaction to the contemporary Catholic Church
  - The abuses were labeled religion
  - The valued parts were relabeled spirituality, philosophy, etc.
  - Outlook retains broadly Abrahamic view, does not fit all religions or even all forms of Christianity

# STICKING TO SPIRITUALITY

- Allows us to acknowledge part of a student's worldview while avoiding a dangerous discussion.
- Perpetuates an inherently Christian worldview
  - History of exclusion through inclusion in the US
  - Survey tools for spirituality are visibly biased
- Isolates those for whom religion & spirituality are connected.

[U]niversities are about reason, pure and simple. Faith... has no place in anything but a religious institution, and our society has no shortage of these.

S. Pinker, Feb. 2007

# DUAL PRIVILEGE SYSTEM

- C. Moran's work on Evangelicals and incongruence highlight barriers to discussion of religion faced by Christians.
- Religion hushed to avoid conflict.
- Rise of secularization theory in mass-media (God Delusion) despite wane in academic media.

**CONSIDERING THESE  
BARRIERS, HOW CAN THE  
CONVERSATION CHANGE?**

# PLURALISTIC APPROACH WITH STUDENTS

- Campus climate assessments towards multi-faith tolerance.
  - Have you been made to feel uncomfortable because of your religious identity?
  - Have you ever felt unable to disclose your religious identity?
  - How comfortable do you feel discussing religion in general?

# PLURALISTIC APPROACH WITH STUDENTS

- Multi-faith education to make students aware of differences in addition to interfaith initiatives to build bridges.
- Open the conversation. Encourage the discussion. Be safe space.
- Don't keep chaplains at arm's length.

# CONVERSING WITH STAFF

- Communicate the different traditions and different experiences within the tradition.
- Address weaknesses and biases of current views.
- Provide resources.
- Good luck!

A HYPOTHETICAL  
DEVELOPMENTAL-BASED  
MODEL

# THREE ELEMENTS

- **IDENTITY**
  - What does being X mean to oneself and how is it expressed.
- **COGNITIVE**
  - How developed is the understanding of the faith system within the particular student?
- **INTERACTIVE OUTLOOK**

# INTERACTIVE OUTLOOK

Adapted from D. Eck

- **EXCLUSIVIST**

- Only one truth. Right belief in opposition to other beliefs.

- **INCLUSIVIST**

- Many paths, one truth. All the same at root. Salad bar systems.

- **PLURALIST**

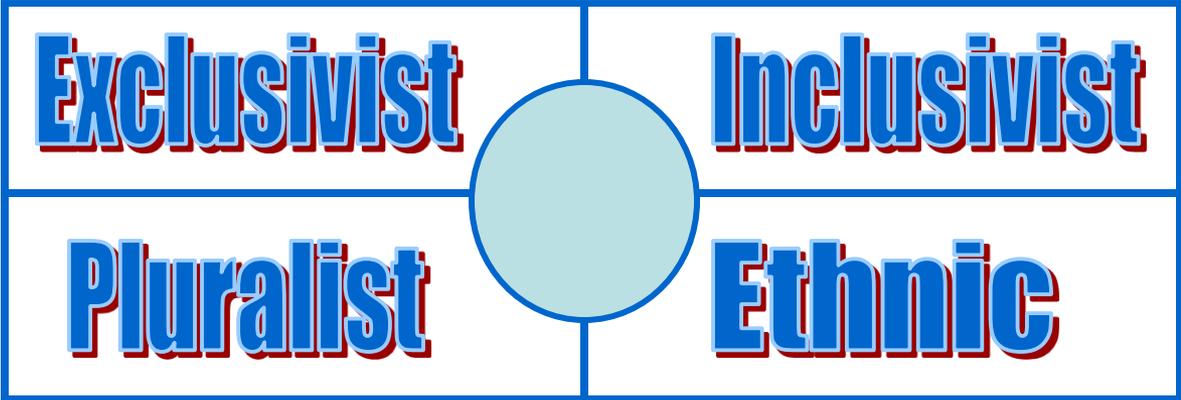
- Multiple viewpoints with similarities but also differences. Differing views are not hurdles to overcome, but points to explore.

# INTERACTIVE OUTLOOK

Adapted from D. Eck

- EXCLUSIVIST / INCLUSIVIST / PLURALIST
- ETHNIC
  - Unconnected to the other three. Can overlap with the above or be distinct.
  - Attempting to name a phenomenon that we currently lack the language to describe.
  - Students whose traditions or behaviors have a religious identification, but whose beliefs do not necessarily include a religious outlook.
  - Whether personally religious or not, still faces religion-based conflicts

IDENTITY



COGNITIVE