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FOR RELIGION AND AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE

tweets while the panel was going, so we canôt tweet questions to her, but hopefully youôll have questions and insights as well from the panel while youôre tweeting.

thereôs a reading group here who has just read your book, so Iôm sure theyôll be very happy to engage you in conversation. So welcome also.

Next is Randy Kennedy, who is the Michael Klein Professor at Harvard L

Cornille: So in light of this, Iôm wondering if this is part of what we understand by the common good, is maybe creating a sphere broad enough to allow the different religious communities to flourish as authentically as possible. Is this one way of framing the idea of the common good in our pluralistic context? Or what are other models of possibly doing this?

Patton: Well, Iôm sort of fascinated by a combination of Nancyôs work and Randyôs work, which is that ï I am so with you on the power of everyday life. I had a very interesting conversation with a scholar who writes Christian commentaries on Buddhist texts and lives in rural Vermont. And my model of pluralism and the common good, which has to do with not only that strangers are inevitable, but there will be more and different strangers in our lives than ever before in our everyday life. Thatôs part of what we need to build up, is a kind of pragmatism of everyday life, a pragmatic pluralism on these questions, which I know youôve written about.

And he said something very interesting. He said, yeah, I live in the woods in Vermont. Iôm not quite sure that I run into as many strangers as you do. And he was right. So one of the things that I was interested in talking to Dean Quigley earlier this morning ï the role of the city, I think, cannot be underestimated. And particularly, if we think about a common good from a religious perspective, something different is happening, of course, all over the United States. We know this. There are ashrams and really interesting Buddhist centers in North Georgia where I frequently travel. Itôs there.

But I do think that the legal questions of everyday life and of common life and the pragmatic questions of everyday life do take shape differently in the city now. And I think the next step for us in thinking about the common good inter-religiously has to do with really looking at the differences in inter-religious engagement in the city and in rural America.

Putnam and Campbell have this really interesting way of talking about my pal Al, who happens to be, and you fill in the blank. And the fact that we run into strangers, to people who are outside our immediate communities, is one of those important pieces that I think we have to pay attention to. How do we create habits of everyday life that make it possible for us not to be afraid of the people we encounter who are not like us?

But the other place where that kind of pragmatic interaction has taken place is in any kind of organization that brings people together around a common cause. And typically, in our inner cities but also beyond cities, religious communities have been places that are sort of nodes of organizing. So a few people from this religious community and a few people from this one and a few people from this one and a few people from that one all get together because they have a common concern in the larger community that brings them together. And it is those partnerships in our larger communities that have often been the places where weôve been able to do the bridging work across our very particular religious traditions.

Aslan: If I may, let me give an interesting example of what Nancy just mentioned, and it goes back to what I was saying before about these anti-Sharia legislations. The original form of the legislation and what was so immediately problematic about it was that it targeted Sharia specifically. It actually used the word Sharia. And so it was very easily overturned because the argument could be made that it was denying First Amendment rights to a particular religious community that other religious communities could have.

So the author of this legislation, a man by the name of David Yerushalmi, who happens to be an Orthodox Jew, changed the legislation to make it more general. Remove the word Sharia and talked about foreign law, foreign religious law. And what happened is that the Orthodox Jewish community in the United States rebelled against the law and actually joined forces with Muslim communities in these various states to fight the law because this law, which was written by their fellow Orthodox Jew for very clearly anti-Muslim purposes, was affecting them. And so you have this very interesting unity being formed based on these common interests that I think in most cases probably would not have formed, as a result of an attempt at obvious bigotry and bias.

Cornille: So if we talk about pragmatic pluralism, though, and these kinds of situations of self-

buried. And she did it for entirely Jewish reasons, but everybody who wanted her to do that came to sit with her. So Muslims came, Buddhists came, secular folk came, whoever. And they needed her to be Jewish in that moment and do that mourning ritual with them.

And there are many, many other really inspiring stories like this. I think we havenôt reflected enough on those tiny moments where we need another religion to be itself. There are three really wonderful stories in the last six months in the newspaper. We have Mohanôs Suits. Mohan grew up in Ahmedabad, was trained in Hong Kong, and he is one of the few people who know how to do kosher suits in a really wonderful way in New York.

And we have a more dramatic example of the Chinese community, that is elderly Chinese are feeling oppressed by folk who pretend to be seers within the community and solve problems but cost a lot of money, and the elderly Chinese donôt know that this is the case. And so a group of shomrim, Jewish protectors, are now protecting the elderly Chinese community against that within their own community.

These are very specific things, and thereôs three more in the last three months, where people are getting together in these really interesting ways because they need the other religion simply to be itself. And I think that that pushes against the idea that there is a common good that someone wants from above, and Iôm not even sure that those forms of interdependence upon which I think we really need to reflect more on would even ï the people involved in those kinds of interdependencies would call it a common good. Theyôd call it probably something else, and I would agree with you that we need another term for those spontaneous forms of interdependency.

And I think thereôs something else about this that is very, very important, which is what do you lose in a common good? Every religious tradition who then becomes part of a common good or a public ï there is a tragedy of the commons, and I donôt think that weôve reflected enough on what every religious tradition does have to give up in order to become part of an American public. And I think that could be our next stage, in a way, of reflection.

Cornille: Maybe we can come back to that question in a minute, but you brought up the example of the common good as something that appears ad hoc a particular situation where we need one another. Usually you think of the

common good as a big system almost that is in place and that somebody has created, which I donôt think is the case either. I think itôs a very open term at this stage, certainly.

So besides these ad hoc situations, what would be ideal situations where the definition or the understanding of the common good can take shape, can get some more contents? How would those come about? Weôve talked about several negative situations. We can also talk about how do we fill it in, but what would be the context in which we can fill in that term or that category of the common good?

Aslan: Well, I think about a friend and colleague of mine, Eboo Patel. Some of you may be familiar with him. He started an organization in Chicago called Interfaith Youth Core, the purpose of which is to bring young people of different religious backgrounds together not to dialogue, which I find very interesting. They donôt sit around and have interfaith dialogue. In fact, thereôs very little of that that takes place at all. Instead, they form these missions where they go out and they do good, whether that means cleaning the streets or helping build a home or feeding people in need. The emphasis is on action.

And what is remarkable about this is that the bonds that are created by these shared participatory experiences in the common good in the way that itôs defined there creates bonds that are far, I think, stronger than any amount of interfaith dialogue could ever do. He calls it interfaith action. So that, I think, is a very interesting example, a concrete example of what youôre referring to.

Ammerman: I think sometimes part of what we need to be willing to just trust is the kind of public that is created within a particular religious community. Omar referred to some of this this morning, that many religious communities ï most religious communities are diverse within themselves. And whenever a group of people is coming together in these kinds of voluntary religious communities all around us, theyôre having to figure out how to organize themselves and how to solve their differences, how to govern themselves. And those experiences in and of themselves, within those somewhat sheltered publics, can also contribute the skills that are necessary, the habits that are necessary for participation in the larger community beyond those enclaves.

I think we need to trust both that process and the fact that, as Laurie said, we need Jews to be Jews. And in these projects together, these are people

coming together, not trying to tell the people next to them, well, weôre really all the same. Weôre telling each other our stories that are our very particular stories, and finding ways that both the work we do inside our communities and the very particular stories that we learn and tell and perpetuate in those communities ï how can they come together then in these other settings in order to pursue work together?

Patton: I very much appreciate your pushing us to describe if not an ideal, a preferred way of building, because we donôt do too well at that project. I think that in general, weôre analyzing and weôre making ethnographies and things, but pushing the normative around us is a huge issue.

I would give two words, and they build on what everyone has contributed up to this point. One is alliance, and the second is irony. What do I mean by alliance? I mean that if you think of what happened after the Sikh tragedy in Wisconsin last year, if you looked at all of the websites from the Sikh temples around America, you saw ï if there was buried in the fifth level of the website, what is Sikhism, here is what the government says about Sikhism, et cetera, suddenly it all went to the top. They were flashing. And it was a very poignant thing to see how much every Sikh community or every gurdwara in the United States felt as if they had to reeducate yet again on every single level.

And Iôm thinking, OK, thatôs great, but shouldnôt there be an alliance? Shouldnôt there be an alliance of educators? In the study of religion, certainly, we have been debating the insider-outsider dilemma for 25, 30 years now. Who has more authority to say what about a religious tradition? What if we instead moved into an explicit ideology of alliance of teaching about Sikhism between insiders and outsiders, so(s)9( )-9(a)4(r)-6(a)20(e)4(t)-21(we

boundary, and at that point, I guess I become intolerant, and I donôt feel embarrassed to say that. It seems to me intolerance is a very dangerous thing. One needs to be very careful about where one draws boundaries. But donôt boundaries at some point have to be drawn, including even with respect to people who are talking religious talk on the other side?

Ammerman: I have to admit my first response to listening to your list of Kungôs supposedly things we all agree on was, what? We agree on those things? Really?

Cornille: Well, I think what he means is ï actually, those were formulated at one of the more recent meetings of the World Parliament of Religions that was a commemoration of the centenary, actually, of the World Parliament of Religions. And he brought leaders from different communities together to formulate this kind of global ethic. But I think we really do agree fundamentally on those principles. What we disagree on is what they mean.

Ammerman: Exactly. (laughter)

Cornille: So the principles themselves are in some ways vacuous until we look at what actually no killing means for a Buddhist and what it means for a Christian or for people from ï but then it becomes interesting. Again, then the second question that I raised is then is the common good really constituted by the different things that we can contribute to a kind of discourse on some kind of ideal society where different religions contribute distinctively and positively to a greater good? Can we think of it in those terms? Or is that too dreamy?

Patton: I mean, I would say with Randy that we very much live in what Wendy Steiner and others have called the paradox of liberalism, which is that we are deeply tolerant of tolerance and deeply intolerant of intolerance, and that is the paradox of liberalism right there.

Where I draw the line, and I think itôs a very interesting one, because weôre all going to draw it in different ways ï and Iôd love to hear your thoughts about this, Randy ï I think in the cultural sphere, we are going to be far more tolerant of intolerance than we are in the legal sphere. And I donôt want to draw an absolute boundary, obviously, between those two, but there is a boundary. Itôs fuzzy. But I would love to hear from you a little bit about where you see legal discourse around intolerance moving

I think thatôs whatôs so remarkable about us. Our religious diversity does those two things. Paradoxically, it encourages you to adopt your religion as an identity in a much more fervent way than you would if you lived in a majority religious community, and then at the same time, it encourages you to synchretize and acclimate your religion to the American cultural identity that is so pervasive.

Patton: I would absolutely agree with that. I think there are two things that we can say further based on your really insightful points. The first is, if Omar is right that we are ï or we were talking about the work that came out that said weôreo i ` d Mg rr ô

I very intentionally set it up otherwise. And I think that people very different than me in this culture have a similar experience of if you just go with the flow, your life can be very limited in terms of who you encounter and the relationships you have an opportunity to build.

So my question to the panel is what are your thoughts about the requirement to foster a sense of desire and intentionality in people to try to figure out how to build relationships with people that they donôt normally encounter?

Ammerman: Iôm going to begin by responding with a reinforcement of the point you made about how easy it would be not to do this. One of the things that Putnam and Campbell point to in their book and that Iôve been observing over the last couple of decades is the increasing echo chamber effect, and the increasing degree to which we are able to surround ourselves only with people who think like us, and that that is certainly being found increasingly even in religious communities, that the religious and political alignments are now much more tightly bound than they were a couple of decades ago.

So the need to be intentional, I think, is even greater than it might have

in the high school, so the high school has a scholarship sponsored by the mosque.

So in a way, the whole town ï

And to be perfectly frank, thatôs our fault. We in academia spend far too much time talking to each other, and not enough time talking to everyone else. We donôt do a very good job, I donôt think, in translating our research and our work to a general audience, to a popular audience. On the contrary, not only do we discourage such things, we tend to actually punish such things.

And I think that it then should not come as a surprise ï and by the way, this is true of almost every academic discipline, not just the study of religion. But I then think it shouldnôt come as a surprise that the response that we get, particularly from the media and from the public, is one of confusion or distrust. I think anyone in this room who is either a student of religion or a teacher of religion has had that experience of being on a plane and having someone ask you what you do, and you say, Iôm a scholar of religion, and they think, oh, did I swear? Oh, my God. They start confessing their sins to you because they donôt understand that you are a social scientist studying a historical phenomenon.

But again, I just have to emphasize this once again ï I think the blame for that resides primarily amongst us. We ourselves need to be engaged in the public marketplace of ideas. We have some very interesting things to say. I always telf " nd t i

Sullivan: I feel like Iôm at town meeting, so I always feel compelled to say my name when I start speaking, because thatôs what we do. Dan Sullivan. I want to commend Mr. Kennedy, first of all, in line with what Mr. Aslan just said, that sometimes you have to come down to the level of the people to really understand whatôs going on down there. And he was brave enough in this academic environment where itôs supposed to be free-flowing ideas to say that there are supposed to be boundaries, too. So I commend you for bringing that perspective to the discussion, Mr. Kennedy.

What I wanted to address as far as diversity goes is the huge problem we have as citizens, especially in light of the Islamic world, where I hear on National Public Radio that 33 medical people have been assassinated by the Taliban in Afghanistan for giving measles and other vaccines to children. And we roll our eyes and shake our heads and say how incredibly foolish and murderous this is, until the second half of the story, when you find out they believed that these medical technicians from the West are withdrawing DNA samples so that they can establish genetic links to Taliban and Al-Qaeda leaders. And then you say, oh my goodness, this is another way that weôve offended their culture and weôve gone looking for culprits to murder.

to have something that is lifelong, a relationship, whatever its basis might be. So thereôs some very interesting stories that have to do with memory that I think a direct answer to your question would be the number one byproduct I see from these small engagements is memory.

For example, the person who holds the keys to the Holy Sepulcher is a Muslim. And that happened because of the Crusades, but eventually all the Christian groups ï you know what would happen if one Christian group had the keys to the Holy Sepulcher, right? So what you see is that that is a hereditary position now amongst Muslims, and Christians need him to be a Muslim.

And he has memory of liturgical changes around the different denominations, changes in liturgy that happened over the course of the centuries, and his family does, too, in a way that no single Christian group does. So if you read interviews with him, he will tell you that, well, the Baptists did that one time, or the Greeks Orthodox did that, and now they switched, and so on. So he has a form of Christian memory that no single individual Christian group could have.

Another wonderful example is the Ner Tamid, the Eternal Light in the Jewish tradition. There was a synagogue that needed a place to worship in Atlanta, so they were hosted by a church, and thatôs very frequent all across America. I think the stories that emerge out of hospitality because of an itinerant religious group are extraordinary, and someone needs to write a book about them. This is a very small, bite-sized example, but that synagogue grew enough to have its own building, but that church still has that room where the Ner Tamid, the Eternal Light, was. Thatôs the Ner Tamid room. Thatôs where the Jews were. Thatôs where we were hospitable to the Jews in this very interesting way.

And so that is the kind of thing that I think is really important, because as soon as religions begin to tell stories about themselves that have to do with hospitality to other religious traditions, youôre going to have a shift in civic life, as well.

Burgard: Thank you. My nameôs Steve Burgard. Iôm director of the School of Journalism at Northeastern. Iôd like to go back to the question of media and public perception for a second, because I was on the editorial board of *The Los Angeles Times* around the time of the 2001 attacks. And as we looked at the Islamic community, we were trying to figure out why there

was such a sense of silence on the part of this group of new Americans in the face of what violent Islam had done in the name of their faith.

So part one of my question is ï

And so I think where I would want to push us is to have each religious tradition from within its own idioms articulate those questions of the common good in a particular way as part of the clarion call to move forward. And then I think you do need to think about what those larger global ethics would look like in international court tribunals, in the Kyoto Accords, et cetera, et cetera. Applying those to very specific international fora would be the way that I would move.

Ammerman: I think itôs really important to recognize that sometimes the so-called bite-sized projects are actually quite global in scope.

Cornille: Someone way, way back.

Reda: My name is Mohammad Reda. Iôm from the Islamic Center of Boston. And I want to ask, how many people were here in Boston on September 11? OK, there are enough people. Anybody seen me or seen anybody from the Islamic Center on the media in Boston? And actually, it was in the media, but people donôt pay attention to that.

On the day of September 11, the religious leaders of all congregations, we met together to have joint prayers for the victims. And we did that all together. I was here. In Boston College, we had in the archdiocese ï actually outside the

Ammerman: And isnôt that an interesting echo of earlier times in our history when many, many immigrant groups that have come here from societies in which democratic participation was not normal? And interestingly, often through organizing in their religious communities, thatôs been one of the bridge spaces in which theyôve learned the ways of participating in American civic life.

Cornille: Erik?

Owens: Hi, thank you all. One of the working assumptions of scholars and maybe many other people, as well, is that if we learn to talk about our deepest differences, weôll be better off, whether thatôs theological differences or racial or cultural or whatever. I wonder if you panelists agree with that premise, and if so, how you would judge our societyôs progress on that mark? And whoôs responsible for making that happen? If that is indeed the case, that talking about our deepest differences will help us somehow to live with those differences, not paper them over with the idea that weôre all the same in some way ï Abrahamic traditions or Americans or whatever ï but talk about differences ï how well are we doing on that and whoôs responsibility is it? Is it NPR? Is it the parents? Is it churches or what?

Ammerman: I would say that I think talking about differences is important, but thatôs not the first place you start. Much of what weôve been talking about for the last however long weôve been up here is the way in which relationships and joint shared work are the places out of which enough trust is built to be able to then talk about the kind of deep religious differences that we may have. My gut feeling about things is that if you start with letôs have a conversation about how much we disagree about X, Y, or Z, that may not get you very far.

Kennedy: Iôm all for talking about differences, but itôs not based on some notion that if we talk about especially radical differences, weôre going to be able to get along better, that thereôs going to be some sort of upshot in terms of better day to day life. Weôre speaking in the bosom of a great university. Iôm interested in talking about things which are important and talking about things which are interesting, and thatôs what intellectuals do. And it might sometimes be that thereôs a collateral effect. Some people, in fact, may be able to live better in the aftermath of such a talk. And if thatôs true, good.

But frankly, if itôs not true ï and my belief is probably that very often, itôs not true ï thatôs not going to dampen my insistence upon doing it, because my insistence upon doing it is not actually predicated on there being a day to day life payoff.

Patton: I would say that there are some very interesting studies that suggest in sociolinguistics that if you begin with the assumption of difference and the purpose of the talk between people is to discover similarities, that relationship is going to last longer than if the assumption is similarity and the talk is about difference. So I would be more in favor of making sure that we begin with an assumption of difference, which is obvious at a certain level, and then move to an exploration of the similarities that are surprising, which is very different than a kind of triumphalism around similarity, which happens so often in interfaith discourse.

There was a wonderful example of that in the World Parliament of Religions, the 100th anniversary, where there was a big debate between two or three religious groups about who was more tolerant than the other. Itôs a very tough conversation to have, right?

The other thing I would say that is very important from my perspective in terms of how weôre doing is I think for every generation in American history, there is one religion that bears the brunt of the conversation about difference. We just saw it. Itôs Islam right now. Before that, it was Catholicism. Before that, it was Native American. You can define your periods how you want. But I do think that part of the reason for that is because we do want one institution or one group to take care of that conversation for us, almost.

And I think we need to move beyond that to that question of the shared cultural burden, so that every institution that we have is going to be talking about religious difference. Itôs not just NPR, but itôs the family and itôs the schools and all those kinds of things. And that gets back to the intentionality that we were talking about earlier.

I also think that we would do really well if we talked better about the great unmentionable in American society still which is class. Talk about an assumed difference. And I think if we integrated into religious conversations, which tend to be very middle-class, with questions about class difference in society, we would have an entirely different kind of conversation, and I would hope that we move in that direction.

Ammerman: I want to say one more word on this subject. One of the things that has been striking me in our conversation all day long is that there have been times in American history where we have been able and willing to expand our sense of diversity and other times when we have wanted to contract our sense of who we are religiously and otherwise, and that those times have probably coincided with times of relative more and less sense of a threat versus hope, and that maybe the way in which we tend to our ability to encompass more diversity is not by focusing on the diversity, but by

be involving the School of Law and the School of Business, because itôs