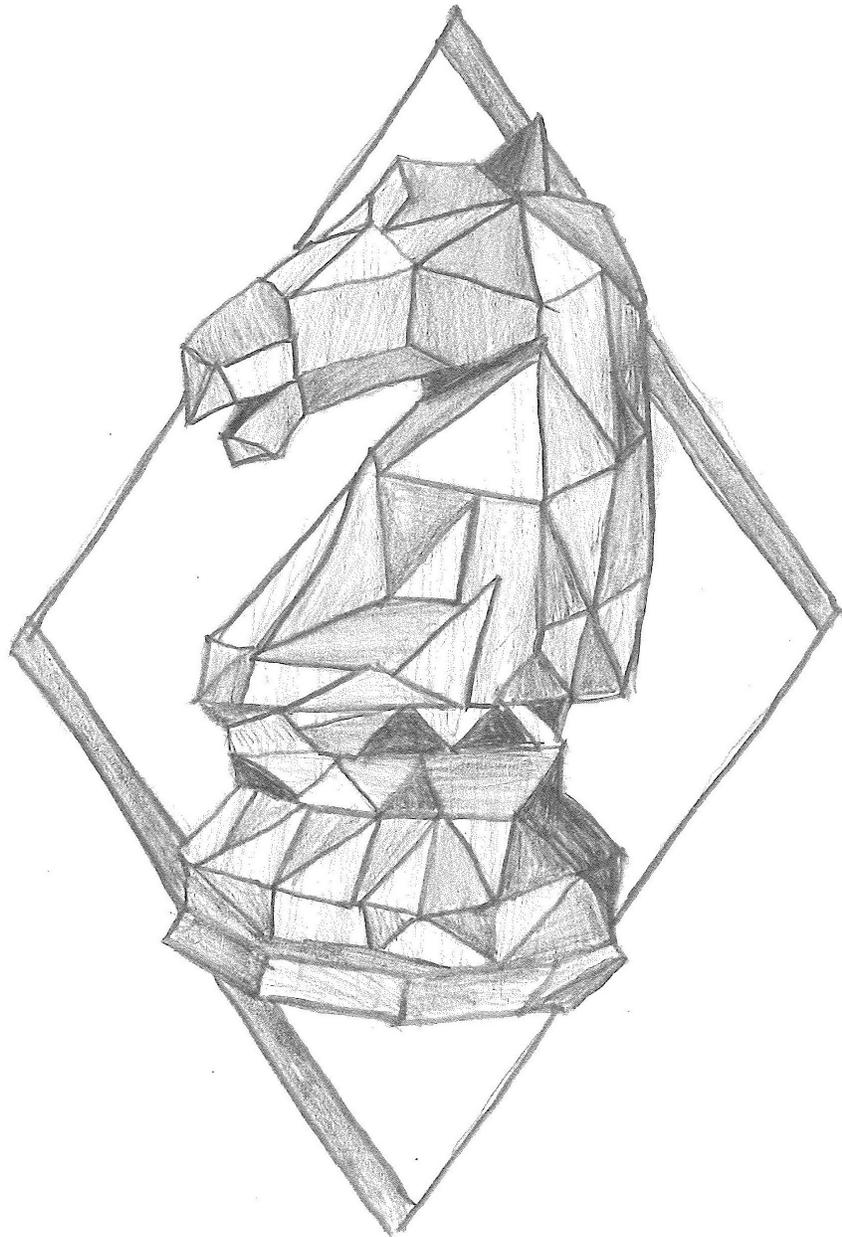


December 2018  
Volume 1, Issue 1

# The Chessboard



“Daring ideas are like chessmen moved forward. They may be beaten, but they may start a winning game.”  
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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# Mission Statement

The Chessboard is a student-run publication that seeks to stoke campus-wide discussions about a host of social, cultural, and political issues. This goal is best embodied in the quote from German philosopher Johann Wolfgang von Goethe that has inspired our name: “Daring ideas are like chessmen moved forward; they may be beaten, but they may start a winning game.” We ask students to use this publication to move their unique ideas forward so they may be contemplated, discussed, and challenged in daily conversations. This “winning game” of considering ideas is a pillar of the liberal arts and critical thinking, and it is a value that we at The Chessboard hope to further at Luther College.

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Funding Provided by Luther College Center for Ethics and Public Engagment  
Printed by Luther College Print Shop  
Email: [lutherchessboard@gmail.com](mailto:lutherchessboard@gmail.com)

# Shedding Light on Dialogue

By Shannon Baker (2020)

Art by Iris Johsnon (2020)

Never in my life have I wanted to be an electrician. Between elementary school and high school, my big career plans shifted from “writer” to “teacher” to “doctor”—and back to “teacher” again, with some writing on the side. Growing up, the glory didn’t lie within the installation of circuit breakers and transformers. And the potential for electrical shocks and burns? I’d rather get a paper cut. But it’s funny; ten years from now, when it’s late and I’ve corrected the last paper and maybe put the kids to bed, I’ll finally settle into my desk chair to write, and all the story ideas that have been frolicking around in my head all day will suddenly stand at attention. But I can’t so much as sharpen my pencil before turning on the light—the light I didn’t install. It’s that, or I’m left sitting in the dark.

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Everyone loves the term dialogue. It’s this fragrant potpourri of inclusion, intentionality, and respect, with just a hint of controversy. It’s the younger, more “hip” cousin of debate, who often reeks of toxic partisanship and is often seen dining with presidential candidates. Where debate is aggressive, dialogue is patient. Where debate is close-minded, dialogue is tolerant. Where debate contains animosity, dialogue contains respect. And with all of these things, dialogue is good. At least, that’s what we want to believe.

“Tolerance” can mean a lot of things, and it’s easy to play the “definition game” when labeling someone as “tolerant” or “intolerant.” At its essence, though, tolerance has something to do with humility. The humble willingness to see that one’s own viewpoint is not the only lens through which people see the world. And to look on a differing viewpoint with politeness and care is to look at it with respect.

Superficially, “tolerance” and “respect” seem like wonderful concepts to practice, and when used to genuinely and impartially facilitate the exchange of ideas, they are. In that capacity, tolerance can be an essential part of dialogue. However, problems arise when the ideas of “tolerance” and “respect” actually stifle dialogue. Ironically, “tolerance” and “respect” can spark fear: The greater a person’s fear of being

labeled as “intolerant” or “bigoted,” for example, the greater the likelihood that this same person will not voice his or her opinion at all.

To label a person as “intolerant” solely on the basis of his or her differing opinion—no matter how “extreme” or “wrong” it seems—renders one’s own tolerance faulty. It is now conditional tolerance, and “respect” becomes its unforgiving, patrolling adjunct with a silencer.

One might say, “So what if Extreme Student A does not voice his or her opinion? True dialogue does business with open-minded moderates.” Does it? It seems like a rather unprofitable business. If the business of dialogue is solely to exchange relatively like-minded ideas, with maybe a little deviation just to make things “interesting,” what profit is there? So often, formal dialogue is seen as something that makes change, raises awareness and facilitates discussion beyond the forum walls. But surface-level dialogue yields surface-level results.

Let’s revisit Extreme Student A. Perhaps this student has rather unpopular views (“unpopular” to whatever present majority) regarding homosexuality. This student believes that to voice his or her opinions would invite backlash and assertions of bigotry, and for that reason, he or she remains silent. The surrounding environment remains “tolerant” and “respectful,” and Extreme



Student A, and other like-minded students, remain unchanged in their opinions, which may actually be bigoted. What's more, Extreme Student A and his or her compatriots cling tighter and tighter to their entrenched beliefs. Lesson learned: It's better to be "respectful" than to voice one's own opinion.

And what has happened? What progress has been made in the good name of sweet-smelling dialogue? Not much at all. Extreme Student A will never voice his or her opinion, and as a result, Extreme Student A's opinion will never be challenged. It will never be discussed, valid counterpoints will never be offered, and weaknesses in opinion will never be exposed. Minds will not be expanded, and no minds will be changed. All for the sake of "tolerance" and "respect."

There is nothing inherently wrong with tolerance or respect. However, in dialogue, it is crucial to facilitate the exchange of ideas beyond the comfortable, cushy surface level. This means the exposure of uncomfortable, possibly even offensive, ideas for the purpose of uncovering what is truly at stake—the unbiased truth. It does not mean skimming the top to avoid controversial or uncomfortable opinions just to preserve the illusion of being "tolerant" and "respectful." Tolerance and opposition are not mutually exclusive. Respect and disagreement are not binaries.

*"...in dialogue, it is crucial to facilitate the exchange of ideas beyond the comfortable, cushy surface level. This means the exposure of uncomfortable, possibly even offensive, ideas for the purpose of uncovering what is truly at stake—the unbiased truth."*

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Dialogue is necessary for change. But how do dialogues get started? Opposing opinions are voiced. Each opinion, as its own lamp, is then directed at the others, exposing the untested underbellies of the other lamps that their wielders might not have noticed.

When a bulb has faced scrutiny and is dim by comparison, it might be time for a change. But how can this light bulb be fixed if it is not allowed to be tested?

This is the wonderful thing about dialogue: An

electrician may change thousands of lightbulbs in a day's work. He will test them, rework them, and fix them. They will burn brighter and better than before. But there comes a time when even the most skillful electrician will, upon returning to his own home, flick the switch and see unpenetrated darkness. And from this he will know that his light bulb, too, is due for a change.

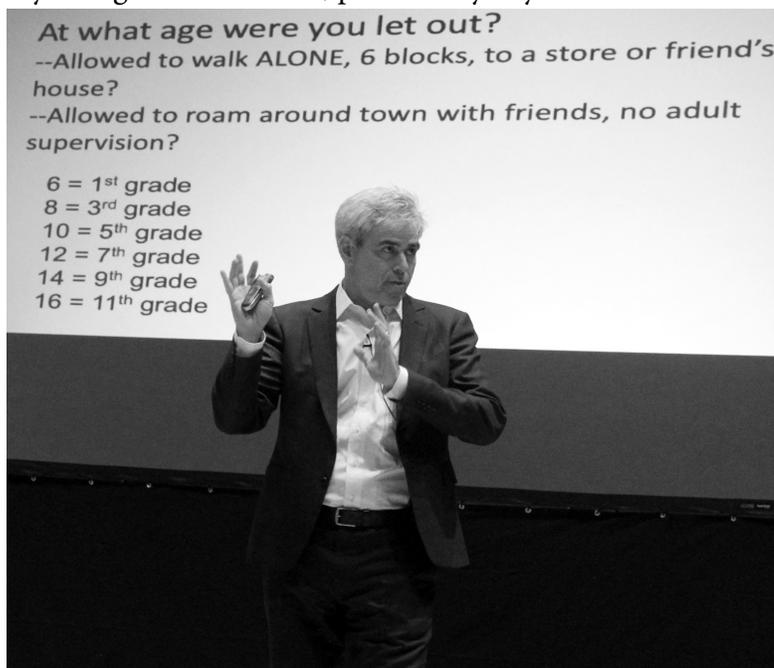
We all need lights. Whether we use ones installed by ourselves or ones installed by others, there always comes a time when the bulb does not burn as brightly as before. To maintain the brightness, dialogue is essential. We must be ready to weigh our opinions and hear the opinions of others, never allowing ourselves to be sequestered in our own private sphere, content with our own perceived (b)rightness. To do so, or to allow others to do so, might be "tolerant" and "respectful," but it certainly isn't dialogue.

# Generalizing Gen Z

By Rebecka Greene (2019)

Photo by Martel Den Hartog (2019)

In the pre-lecture reception for Dr. Jonathan Haidt's visit to Luther College, I got ten minutes of stress-free small talk and one glass of Merlot before I found myself in the precarious position of being the sole student in a circle of twenty staff, faculty, and community members along with Dr. Haidt. Most in the circle had come from our Center for Ethics and Public Engagement sponsored book club, where we had met twice before Dr. Haidt's arrival to discuss our thoughts on his book, *The Coddling of the American Mind*. The two discussions had been energetic, so it was no surprise when several hands shot up the second Dr. Haidt asked for initial thoughts on the book. Trying to avoid attention, I slunk back in my chair and watched as campus mentors engaged in rigorous academic exchange with Dr. Haidt. The conversation fell on the perils of social media, and I made a small comment to an acquaintance seated next to me about how this seemed to be a recurring concern amongst generations older than my own. We drew more attention than intended, because Dr. Haidt then redirected conversation towards me, where I outed myself as the sole "Generation Z" member in the room, and therefore the only student in the room. Face and tone full of genuine curiosity, he asked me to share my thoughts on his book, particularly any concerns.



Jonathan Haidt delivering his lecture, "The Coddling of the American Mind"

"That is, if you've read it," he said with a teasing smile. I had read it—and having done my homework on his critics ahead of time, I happened to know he harbored frustration towards those who critiqued his ideas without reading the book—a fair concern of any author, but one I sought to challenge on behalf of those who might not get this same chance with Dr. Haidt. I explained that my biggest bone to pick was with the way he connects social media to rising mental illness amongst young people. Not because I disagree with him—as I acknowledge the science behind how damaging social media can be—but because such an inarguable correlation imposes 1) a generational divide that assumes Generation Z, unlike any before it, is going off the deep end in every way, and 2) an ignorance to the nuance of mental health in this country.

I shared these and other thoughts with him, all of which he quickly countered with statistics. I do not blame him for being prepared to answer "predictable" questions like my own, as I know this is part of the work of a public scholar. However, I felt uneasy by how hastily he dismissed my concerns as paranoid, claiming they fell right in line with how "my" generation lives day-to-day in "worst case scenario" mode.

I had given the example of Mollie Tibbets, a nineteen-year-old who was kidnapped and killed while on a run in her hometown of Brooklyn, Iowa. As a result, myself and other women I knew felt uncomfortable running alone, especially at night. With a political climate that is growing emboldened and entitled by conservative, anti-woman rhetoric, I decided I could live with running on the treadmill a few times a week. To this, Haidt countered that, just because 9/11 happened in New York City, that does not mean he is going to stop going on walks with his family through the 9/11 Memorial area. A catastrophic mindset, he said, is no way to live a good life.

Other members in our circle nodded in agreement, one mentioning how, when he was younger, there were no qualms about sending children off to play on their own in their local neighborhoods.

Herein lies my big problem with Haidt's argument—it largely ignores the nuances of identities like race, gender, and class. The way parents raise their young girls, or young Black children, is different than how par-

tiki torches to alt-right marches, and shoots up a synagogue, the immediate need of the hurting is not dialogue, or even the more concrete Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Dr. Haidt advocates for, but permission to feel

*“... I pose a question: Is it possible that increased levels of mental illness in young people is indicative of a generation less willing to put up with societal illness? That the hypervisibility of injustice presented by social and other digital media is causing us to emotionally reject the gross oppression we might otherwise be ignorant to?”*

ents raise white boys. The different dangers presented to different groups in our country is a complication worth exploring—and might contribute to why “my generation” is experiencing higher levels of mental illness. To this, I pose a question: Is it possible that increased levels of mental illness in young people is indicative of a generation less willing to put up with societal illness? That the hypervisibility of injustice presented by social and other digital media is causing us to emotionally reject the gross oppression we might otherwise be ignorant to? Either way, I hesitate to endorse “my generation versus your generation” ideas that make young people less comfortable in voicing their grievances about our society, which is what much of the conversation around Haidt's book has become. However, from Dr. Haidt's lecture and book, we can draw important ideas about how to best “cope” with the day-to-day stressors of an oppressive environment. For example, we can try our best not to assume the worst in others (something I saw many classmates do to Dr. Haidt's character before even reading his Atlantic article or book), as it is an important part of a successful dialogue.

like things are as catastrophic as they seem. Then, we can do the work of healing a sick society, so that we may heal “our generation's” distraught psyches.

An aptitude for dialogue can be a key to personal and communal success—as long as we are cognizant of who it is we are badgering into empathizing with the “other.” This is not what Dr. Haidt himself is advocating, but it is what some of his ideas can embolden on the right. Angry members of marginalized communities are asked, especially since the 2016 election, why they cannot just “try to see the other side” of those who disagree with their lives and livelihood. However, when this ideological “other” sits in the White House, carries

# Moving Women Forward

## A Reflection on the 2018 PLEN Seminars

Natalie Cote (2019)

During my semester away in Washington, D.C, I was fully funded by a gracious Luther Alum to attend a PLEN Seminar called “Women in Congress.” PLEN (Public Leadership Education Network) is an organization whose mission is to increase the number of women in top leadership positions influencing all aspects of the public policy process. This seminar gave me insight on how to enter a male-dominated field as a woman and flourish. The major lessons that I took from the many powerful women I heard from, was that we need to assert ourselves in male-dominated fields with extra vigor by seizing all opportunities with confidence. No one is going to let us into these fields, we must demand it.

We can get women into political positions by encouraging them to fight for these positions, educating women on salary negotiation, and continually passing knowledge and experience on to future generations. There are many complaints about lack of women in government. Until recently, there was not a large number of women running for office. Encouraging women to pursue leadership positions is an extremely important piece to countering this imbalance. Women are more likely than men to underestimate their abilities.

A study by the Citizen Political Ambition Panel found that many capable women do not believe they are qualified to run for office and demonstrate a substantial lack of ambition compared to men (Lawless, 2005)<sup>1</sup>. Yet, when women are encouraged to run, they run. Encouraging women is therefore a responsibility that experienced female leaders and men should take on in order to increase female involvement in leadership positions. Organizations like PLEN understand the need for encouragement and they address this in all of their seminars.

One session of the PLEN seminar was dedicated solely to teaching the participants how to negotiate their salaries. As mentioned before, men tend to be overconfident in their capabilities while women underestimate themselves. Because of this, women will generally have a harder time with salary negotiation. The fact that women often don't negotiate their salaries to the same extent as men, is one of the many reasons we see a gender pay gap in our society,

which has been reiterated by many scholars. For example, Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever note that men are four times more likely to ask for higher pay than women with the same qualifications (Babcock and Laschever, 2008)<sup>2</sup>.

If women are educated on how to participate in salary negotiation, they will be better equipped to demand pay that adequately compensates their work. This seminar taught all of us how to engage in salary negotiations and we participated in workshops where we were given the opportunity to practice these skills. Before PLEN, I would not have thought to engage in salary negotiation in my potential future field. I am someone who would be grateful for any job in my preferred field (law). This seminar reminded me of the importance of women learning how to advocate on behalf of themselves within their career, and it gave me the skills to do so. This is something that I believe should be a part of every woman's education before she enters the workforce, resulting in a surge of confidence for women to encourage them to actively pursue powerful positions.

The final theme that I took from my week with PLEN was the importance of women supporting women. The guest speakers all emphasized how essential it is to bring younger women up with you as you advance by teaching them what you know and acting as a support

system. Many women may feel the need to compete with one another, but this will not help increase the number of women in leadership positions. We need to continually band together and help each other. Women supporting women has always been a theme in the feminist movement, but I was able to see how it would specifically apply in a male-dominated workforce. Instead of feeling threatened by younger women joining your field, women must lend a hand and encourage each other to pursue higher positions.

Overall, I believe PLEN is doing a spectacular job at increasing the number of women in leadership positions by encouraging women to run, educating women on salary negotiations, and showing how women can help other women. These are all things that will help increase the number of women in powerful positions, and I believe they are things that every professional woman deserves to know. We can all do our part to create a work environment in which our daughters can access leadership positions.

*“We can all do our part to create a work environment in which our daughters can access leadership positions.”*

1. Lawless, Jennifer; Fox, Richard. It Still Takes A Candidate: Why Women Don't Run For Office. Cambridge University Press. 2005, 21, June.

2. Babcock, Linda. Laschever, Sara. Why Women Don't Ask: The High Cost of Avoiding Negotiation and Positive Strategies for Change. Little, Brown Group Limited. 2005

# The Church and the College

Alex Aakre (2019)

Art by Iris Johnson (2020)

It was during the sharing of the peace at church when the little girl sitting in front of me turned and said very sternly “Luther went to Wartburg.” I blankly stared back at her, “yes he did...peace be with you.” I was unsure of what her comment meant - every good little Lutheran knows dear old Martin was locked away for a year in Wartburg Castle, but why remind me during peace?

My answer came during coffee hour. In the fellowship hall, hung an advertisement for Wartburg College, complete with the slogan “Luther went to Wartburg.” I loved it: here was an ad campaign tailored for Lutherans. I looked around but I could not find a matching Luther College advertisement. This bothered me. I was not just standing in any random Lutheran church, I was standing in Halfway Creek Lutheran Church. This congregation had physically housed Luther College during its first year.

So how did our fiendish foe, from Waverly, earn the right to hang an advertisement in the very nursery of Luther College? Simple, they mailed it to them. Reasonable enough, advertising in congregations is what a college of the church does. So why did Luther not mail Halfway Creek an advertisement? We are a college of the church... kind of.

It seems that Luther has moved away from that distinction. Sure, it is there in subtle ways; the name of our cyber cafe, the vague reference to vocation in course evaluations, and of course College Ministries, whose work I do not mean to diminish in anyway. But in very few places are we

outwardly proud of being a college of the ELCA. Why?

The most common response is for the sake of diversity and inclusion. But what about those attributes go against Lutheranism? When we talk of inclusion, why can we not draw from the example of Katie Luther? 500 years ago, Katie welcomed the homeless, orphans, and plague victims into her home, caring for their needs. If that does not constitute compassionate inclusion, then I do not know what does. When we strive for diversity on campus why can we not work within the global Lutheran church? Eight times the amount of US Lutherans live on the African continent; four times the amount live in Asia. Many of these faith communities are products of mission work conducted by Luther Alumni. It seems

reasonable to draw on such a bond when attempting to diversify our college. Diversity and Inclusion and Lutheranism are not mutually exclusive; they are attributes that can be fully embraced under a banner of the church. Just as much a part of our narrative as any section of the Small Catechism or LBW.

The purpose of a college of the church is to serve the members of that denomination and that sacred status makes us unique. Only 25 of this country's 2,474 four year colleges are ELCA affiliated, two less colleges than a decade ago. Why not emphasize the thing that sets us apart from the other 2,473 colleges and appeal to those who value that? I am not the only faithful youth in this

country. The last ELCA Youth Gathering welcomed over 30,000 high schoolers to San Antonio. It is a demographic who values the ELCA and its institutions, yet it



is largely ignored by Luther. The scholarships designated for ELCA Lutherans are nothing compared to those designated for music, nor are the number of recruiters

the time they deserve.

I'm not saying we have to check confirmation certificates at the door. All are welcome here just as all

*“The purpose of a college of the church is to serve the members of that denomination and that sacred status makes us unique. Only 25 of this country’s 2,474 four year colleges are ELCA affiliated [...] Why not emphasize the thing that sets us apart from the other 2,473 colleges and appeal to those who value that?”*

comparable to what is applied for athletics. But when you forget about a population, they begin to forget about you. Maybe our decline in enrollment is an indication of that.

However, reaffirming our commitment as a college of the church could be our saving grace. In the early sixties, President Farwell traveled and preached at countless congregations, promoting Luther College as a college of the church. Largely because of these efforts, the incoming freshman class in 1964 numbered 608, compared to the 888 students that made up the other three combined grades. If it worked before, why not do it again?

Imagine if Luther had sponsored a speaker at the ELCA Youth Gathering. Someone who told a packed arena how an ELCA college transformed their life and deepened their faith— a statement that is true for countless alumni. Testimonials are an essential tool for recruitment and the ELCA Youth Gathering offers a platform to have 30,000 high school Lutherans hear them. Luther was present but hidden away where my own youth director - a proud Luther Alum - could not find the table.

There exists a disconnect between Luther College and the church it is supposed to serve. However, I offer up an idea to bridge that gap. Reestablishing the Office of Church Relations - a dean level position whose entire job is partnering and promoting Luther with Lutherans across the country. Having a Dean partner and worship with a congregation leaves an impression on youth. Students will remember Luther when the college search begins. This office could also be a benefit to current students; promoting ELCA internship or employment opportunities or bringing faith focused speakers to campus. This office would combine certain roles currently held by several departments but dedicate to them

were welcomed at Luther’s door in Wittenberg. Luther College is a place that should encourage difficult conversations; our namesake would roll in his grave if we did anything different. I just think that if we are going to call ourselves a college of the church, we better darn well be ready to own it and live it out. For it is not something to be ashamed of, it is something that can ultimately make us stronger. The church has always been ready to help Luther through its hard times; now it is time to realize that we need that help more than ever. The church is waiting, we just have to meet it halfway.

# Including Exclusivists

Ashalul Aden and Faye Lee (Class of 2021)

One of the biggest ongoing debates in Interfaith work asks if we should include exclusivist truth claims in Interfaith work, and if so, how does that look? Religious exclusivism is the belief that only one particular religion or belief system is true. In addition, those who identify with religious exclusivism perceive salvation as possible but only within their faith. There are many ways in which people perceive what happens after death. Some people believe that salvation is only within their own faith, while others believe that salvation is for everyone regardless of their faith.

Growing up in Malaysia, which is religiously plural, Faye Lee, a student at Luther College, encountered many friends and family who openly identify with exclusivism. But when she recalls going to her first Interfaith in Action meeting on campus, only two people in the room identified with exclusivism, which surprised her greatly. This could be that many people happen to identify with other ways of perceiving salvation, in which the most popular idea is pluralism. This is due to the fact that pluralism embraces the idea that every religion ultimately leads to one salvation.

Or, it could be because people with exclusivist beliefs find themselves uncomfortable to identify themselves in our community. Faye also noticed that students' conversations about faith tended to drift towards finding common ground between faiths. This was surprising to Faye again, because having lived in a different kind of religiously plural environment, similarities of faith were never really discussed.

Finding common ground is a great way to build bridges between faiths in interfaith work. However, it is crucial to remember that the commonalities between faiths do not give a complete picture about another faith. In fact, we maybe learn around 10% of each faith through common ground. When the time comes for parties to resolve an interfaith issue or religious violence, relying only on common ground makes it very difficult for parties to come to an agreement. This is

because we are only approaching the issue from a small part of faiths that have commonalities, and people begin to start leaning more towards their own perspectives to approach the issue because there hasn't been any opportunity to talk about the differences. When this happens, it is crucial to ask ourselves, "When do I identify with my religion as it is, and not just its common ground?"

Essentially, this question helps us to better understand these others: "Why do interfaith work to begin with?", and "Why talk about coexistence?". It is like an analogy that Professor Victoria Christman, a great professor at Luther College, uses all the time: the differences between a fruit bowl and a smoothie. The goal of interfaith work should not resemble a smoothie. We do not have to abandon our convictions to coexist. We do not have to abandon our convictions to integrate. We do not have to abandon our convictions to understand one another. And most importantly, we do not have to abandon our convictions to keep peace as a goal. Coexistence and interfaith work should be like a fruit

bowl. You do not have to blend in order to have unity.

*“Coexistence and interfaith work should be like a fruit bowl. You do not have to blend in order to have unity.”*

It is understandable how one would be uncomfortable if

they were to sit in a circle with exclusivists who don't agree about how to perceive salvation. That tension is unsettling, and a person obviously wants to feel safe and respected in a dialogue. But what about how we perceive exclusivists? Have we not once thought, that when someone identifies with exclusivism, we merely reduce them to being religiously intolerant? Just because exclusivists have different perceptions of salvation than others, doesn't mean they see others as lesser people. Just because they stand firm in their ground, doesn't mean they're incapable of engaging in civil, meaningful interfaith dialogue with us. In fact, the point of interfaith work is to challenge the barriers between our differences.

Faye's godmother in Malaysia is a Sunni Muslim. Sunni is a sect in Islam. She believes that Sunni Muslims are the only ones deserving of salvation and anyone who doesn't believe in Allah is destined

for eternal damnation. Although she has different perceptions of salvation through the faith she grew up in, she is still family to Faye. Her godmother is the reason why she has made it this far in life today. Throughout Faye's life, her godmother has always helped her through her lowest points in life, and loved her as if she were her own. She's also been an ally to Faye every time she was wronged by others, even when they came from the same faith. Although Faye was born and raised in a Christian family, never once has this come between her and her godmother. Every now and then, they would have raw, faith-related conversations, yet Faye's godmother, an exclusivist, was willing to have a civil, meaningful interfaith dialogue! Faye even acknowledges that her godmother's courage to be honest about her religious stance has contributed to making their relationship stronger. Despite never having found common ground between faiths, it does not define their relationship or their ability to peacefully coexist. Excluding people like Faye's godmother, would simply not be beneficial.

So how should we engage exclusivist truth claims in the interfaith work that we do today? Common ground is a good start, but maybe the best way would be to intentionally build genuine, meaningful relationships with each other. Having interfaith conversations with someone whom you have these relationships with is definitely less intimidating than with a complete stranger. Even if it's just one person you can frequently have these conversations with, it may be more than enough. Faye's roommates -- Iju and Warsan, are two of her best friends. They identify as Hindu and Muslim respectively, and are people with whom Faye has interfaith conversations with every day. These people have a great influence on her interfaith work today with others. They do not agree on everything, but Faye notes that being able to have these conversations has made her more confident in how she engages in interfaith dialogue with others. Excluding exclusivists from interfaith dialogue strips the essence of interfaith work, which is to challenge these barriers between differences for the betterment of our society and for religious harmony. By excluding a huge portion of members within our society, we exclude them from these goals, which will never be reached unless we start including everyone in interfaith work and dialogue.

# Editor's Note

**Would you like to share your thoughts on one of our pieces?**

**Interested in sharing your thoughts on other matters?**

**Want to draw a sketch to accompany a piece?**

**Contact us at [lutherchessboard@gmail.com](mailto:lutherchessboard@gmail.com)**

**Keep the conversation going!**