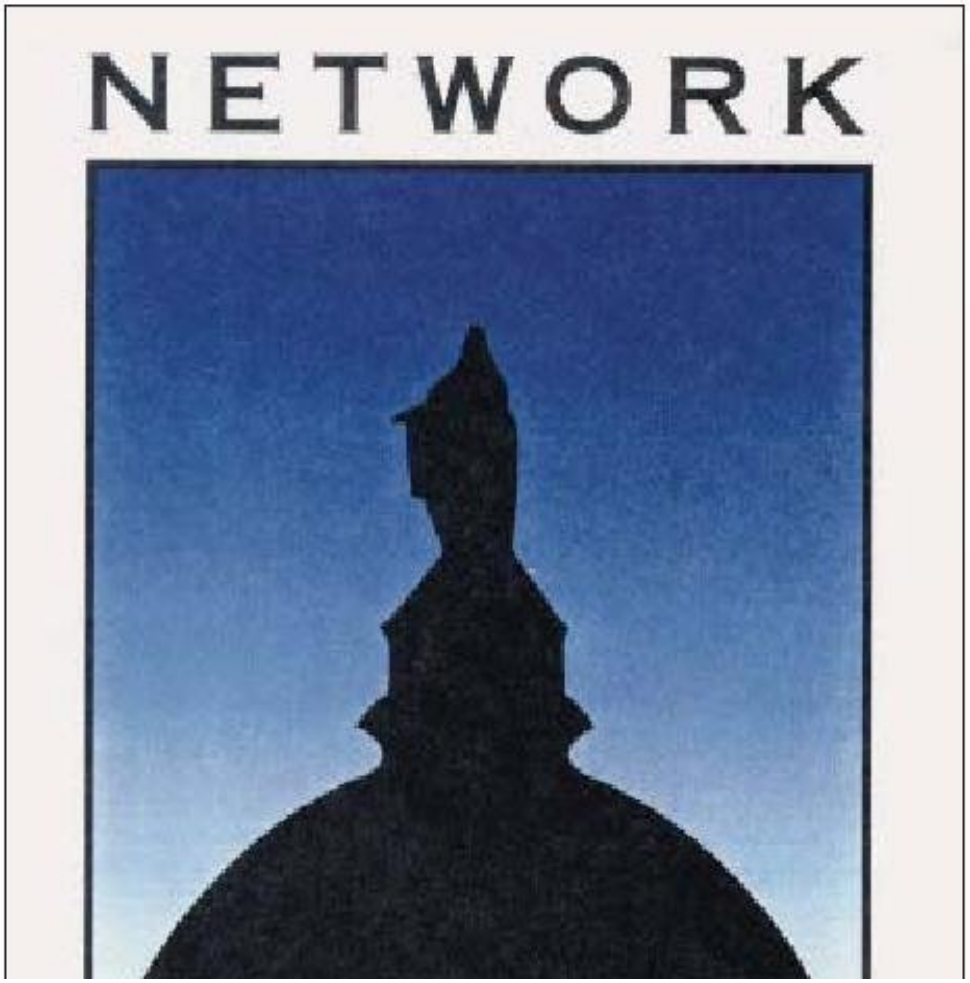
A Roman Catholic Nun Interview on the Future One World Global Religious System

Interview with Interfaith

Maureen Fiedler, a Catholic nun and host of the program "Interfaith Voices"

Many people contend that religious conflict is the number one cause of war on earth. Some even believe that President Bush's War on Terrorism is really a conflict between the Muslim world and the West. The proponents of this belief have given birth to a new mode of religious thinking called Interfaithism. They believe, if respect can be fostered between the different religions of the world, that a new era of peace will result.



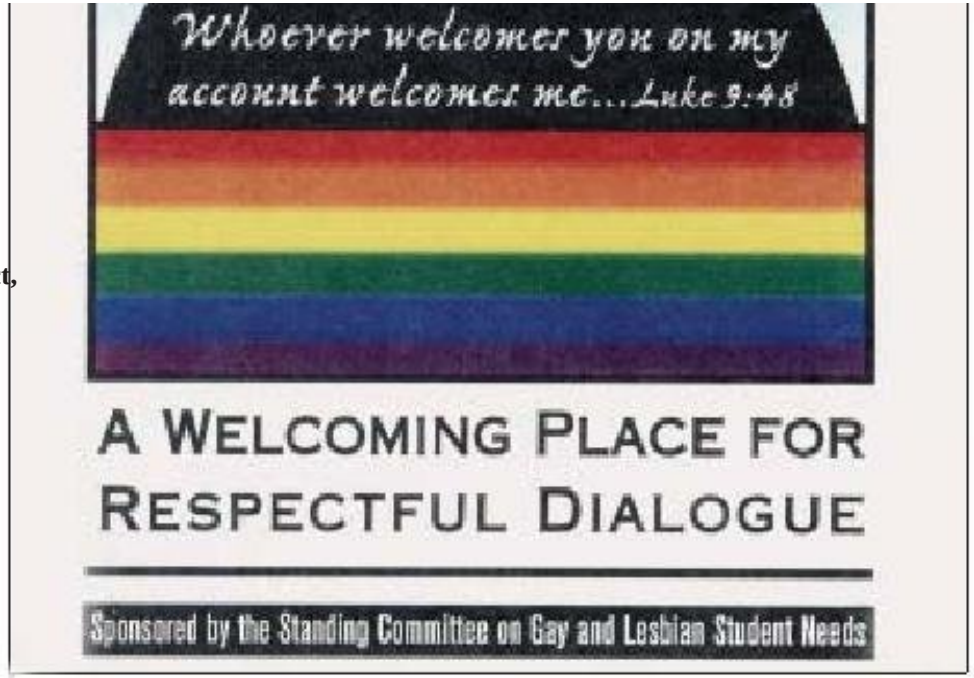
Defining Interfaith

Fiedler: The United States is now the most religiously diverse country on the face of the earth. We know that globalization includes the intermingling of various faith traditions. Many believe that, in the effort to understand and get along with

one another, a dialog is needed to help us understand and appreciate the beauty that is in the different faith traditions of the world.

How did you become involved?

Fiedler: I'm a Roman Catholic. In fact, I'm a nun. I have been concerned with interfaith work, and have been a part of several social justice coalitions on various issues. I have become very aware of the teachings of Judaism, Buddhism, etc., and of a need to understand Islam, which is looming very large in the struggles in the Middle East. I also wanted to promote an understanding, particularly in the media, of not just Islam, but of all faith traditions.



This poster comes from Notre Dame, the famed Catholic university. This gay and lesbian committee is officially sanctioned and acts in an advisory role to Notre Dame's V.

Kill the infidels

Just after 9/11, everybody pulled

out their Korans and asked, "What could have motivated these guys to do that?" Many different views were presented. Some people cited verses such as "Kill the infidels. If you do that there's a special reward in heaven", and concluded, "There's no doubt as to why they did these things." At the same time, others said, "This is not what Islam represents at all. Yes, the Koran may say that, but it is out of context." What's the deal?

Fiedler: It's interesting that you should choose the phrase "Kill the infidels" because that first became famous, not from the mouths of Muslims, but from the mouths of Christians in the Middle Ages who led the Crusades against the Muslims. They were the first ones to use that word. I think it's necessary to look in the Bible where there are plenty of war-like references, particularly in the Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament such as the book of Judges and so forth. These can easily be interpreted as a justification for violence. In all of our traditions, there are things, which, if taken out of the context of the larger faith and the larger teaching, can justify some horrible things.

It's certainly been done with Islam in which people have pulled out phrases from the Koran and used them to justify Jihad. It's been done with Christianity and Judaism as well. I've known Hindus who can do it from the Veda. I think that in all of those faith traditions, the larger message is one of love and compassion

Fiedler: Well, let me preface this with a couple of things. I'm not convinced that religion is at the root of wars. I think wars are mostly fought over raw power, over who controls territory, people, economics or resources. I think religion is used as a theological cover for that and can often intensify conflict because it raises passions that are not raised by some of the other root causes. Regarding religious exclusiveness, I think there is a very dangerous tendency in today's world to say that we have the truth and nobody else has even a part of it. Therefore, in order to be saved, you must be converted to my way of looking at things or the faith tradition into which I was born. I think it is the height of arrogance. Whether the person saying it is a Christian, Hindu, Muslim or Jew, people in all those traditions have said that.

Not to mention Cardinal Ratzinger?

Fiedler: Yes, he was the Prefect of Congregation for Doctrine of the Faith in the Vatican. Catholicism is very famous for that. I think we narrow and limit God and His ability to speak to human beings in different ways, cultures and faith traditions.

Is the Catholic Church Exclusive?

Fiedler: It's mixed. Today, it would be closer to a more exclusive view although

Fiedler: Tradition includes the rituals; it is the way in which a religion is actually carried out, such as having a clergy and a hierarchy, how decisions are made, etc. It is more than doctrine. It includes a lot of the ambiance of religion.

The Muslim Jesus

We have been hearing the term "global spirituality" more frequently. Do the people that you interview on NPR see the emergence of a "global spirituality"?

Fiedler: Yes and no. I certainly have talked to many people, at least Americans, who will characterize themselves as spiritual but not religious, which means different things for different people. They believe in a spiritual life. They have a sense of an eternal or Supreme Being and of a hereafter, but they don't want to be tied to a particular religious denomination.

You say the present Vatican would probably lean toward exclusiveness. I found that interesting in light of the new Roman Catholic Catechism's teaching toward Muslims. It states that "the plan of salvation includes those who embrace the one God, in the first place among whom are the Muslims." I'm assuming that this was approved by the present Pope and the Vatican. Does that accurately reflect where they stand today?

Fiedler: Yes. I think that that would

and understanding one another. The core teaching is not to kill or hate one another. Unfortunately, there are people who will misuse a tradition in all of those faiths.

Religious exclusiveness

In Mikhail Gorbachev's book *Perestroika, he talked about the danger of* religious exclusiveness, which he sees as the root cause for most wars. It is the result of a religion saying, "You must believe this or you will be eternally damned to hell." If the belief is strong enough, the compulsion is to convert all people who do not hold that faith. He asserted that this creates religious strife, which ultimately degenerates into war. What about religious exclusiveness from a Christian viewpoint? Are we to say that people can be saved without faith in Jesus Christ?

they would certainly recognize that Protestantism would be included in the world of salvation. However, the Vatican is very interested in good interfaith relations. Many theologians today have argued the matter. Karl Rahner was trying to deal with the question of how to expect somebody to accept Christ if they had never heard of Him. He said there are places in the world where people were accepting Christ without realizing it as a part of other faith traditions. He said there are many other people who, while embracing other faith traditions, are embracing many of the values of Christianity. He used the phrase, "Anonymous Christians."

What's main the difference between faith tradition and religious doctrine?

accurately reflect where practically all of mainstream Christianity would stand. Muslims, Jews and Christians are often called "the Abrahamic traditions" because they all trace their roots back to Abraham. Muslims recognize, not only Abraham, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and most of the Hebrew prophets, but they also recognize Jesus. In fact, a devout Muslim will use the phrase "Peace be upon him" after the word Jesus, as they do when they talk about Mohammad. There are definitely linkages between those three faith traditions.

But Muslims do not believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

Fiedler: No, they would recognize Jesus as a prophet, and would talk about Him that way.

So that would not be the Jesus of the New Testament.

Fiedler: That depends on how you look at the New Testament. Christians would describe Jesus in many more terms and have a much broader understanding of His role than Muslims would.

Not taking the scriptures literally

As a Roman Catholic nun, how do you approach scriptures such as I John 2:22 that says, "...he that denies that Jesus is the Christ is antichrist." And Acts 4:12, "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Can we say that the Muslims are included in salvation when the Bible seems to teach that to not accept Jesus as the Messiah would throw you into an antichrist position?



In the studio at WAMU in Washington is Sister Maureen Fiedler, host of National Public Radio's "Interfaith Voices," a program that promotes "religious tolerance and interfaith understanding." She hasn't even heard of Baal

Fiedler: First of all, Catholics do not take the scriptures literally. Catholics look at any piece of scripture in terms of the overall message of the Gospel and the teaching of Jesus. No single passage is looked at in and of itself. Let me give you an example. If you read the passage that Paul wrote about women that says, "wives be subject to your husbands", and where Peter says, "Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the forward", we would see that they are reflecting the culture of their time. However, today we

the religions of our world?

Fiedler: I hope it's going to lead us to understand one another and lead us to a more peaceful world. There is a group based in Chicago called the Parliament of World Religions. They have periodic conferences in which people from various religious traditions meet. It's an attempt to understand one another's teachings,

gion was. It's probably an earth-based spirituality of some kind.

That would be a good example. Let's take a look at people who worship nature and the pagan movement. Nature is their god, Gaia.

Fiedler: The Wiccans' tradition is an earth-based spirituality as well. I think

would see them as being in conflict with the Gospel's larger message of love and equality. So, we don't read them literally. At least, most mainstream Christians and I would not. It would be the same with these passages.

Furthermore, in Catholic teaching, there is very strong belief in conscience, and that a person is not just permitted, but required to follow his or her conscience. We should have an informed conscience as well, but even if we are misinformed, we should follow it. I think that people of another faith tradition who genuinely and devoutly believe in Islam, for example, would also be bound to follow their conscience, and that God would love them for doing so.

Accepting Baal worshippers

Where is interfaithism leading cultural context and rituals.

You used the phrase, "global spirituality". I don't think that it means leaving aside a specifically Christian, Muslim or Jewish spirituality. I could be a deeply Christian person, and I can acknowledge that Christ is at the center of my life and spirituality. Yet, I can still love and respect the person who holds at the center of his life Allah, Mohammad, Moses, David, Buddha or Krishna, and try to understand them better.

Would a person who worshipped Baal be included under this big umbrella? In the Old Testament, there were many false religions and false gods. What would the difference be in today's world?

Fiedler: I have no idea what that religious context and rituals. there are genuine spiritualities that have to be respected. I've interviewed these people, and very often I've found them to be deeply spiritual. I can't sit in judgment, nor do I pretend to. I think I would be terribly arrogant. In addition, in the last fifteen to twenty years of Christian spirituality and theology, there is a new teaching called creation spirituality and theology. It tries to incorporate our understandings of creation and the physical earth into our theology and spirituality in the church.

Let's say an Islamic fundamentalist believes in everything in which the 9-11 hijackers believe. Do I have to respect him?

Fiedler: I have to respect him as a per-

son. I don't have to respect his beliefs in the sense that they lead to violence. I would look at this the way I would the version of Christianity that lead to the Crusades, for example.

In what sense are you using the word respect? Do you believe that the 9/11 hijackers are in heaven?

Fiedler: I have no way of knowing. They obviously thought they were going there. From my perspective and from what I think about any world tradition I would highly doubt it.

They believe in the God of Abraham, the Creator. According to the Catholic Church, the plan of salvation includes the Muslims.

Fiedler: Do you believe that the Crusaders went to heaven? They thought that they would if they killed the Muslim infidels. In both cases, I see that as a misuse of a faith tradition.

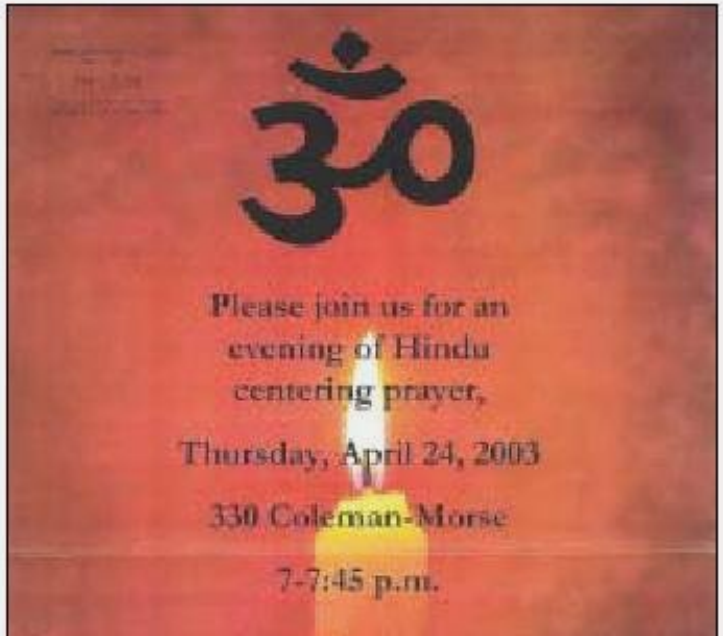
Based on my understanding of what the crusaders' Bible taught, I do not believe they would have gone to heaven.

Fiedler: Right. I don't think any of us can dare to

Fiedler: Sure. It's possible to love somebody without agreeing with them and disagree with their interpretation of, for example, the death of Jesus. However, to them it is a valid belief system. I would say that the vast majority of Muslims in the world probably have never heard any interpretation of the death of Jesus other then what they learned as a Muslim. They would probably find it hard to believe a Christian interpretation.

Thumbs down on proselytizing

I have heard that the definition of Interfaithism is simply the belief that all religions are valid pathways to God. Is that legitimate?



Fiedler: In some sense I agree with that, yes.

In what sense would you disagree?

Fiedler: Let me say why I agree first. For many people it is an honest and conscience-led belief that they have, and it is their pathway to God.

What if it's the wrong belief?

Fiedler: Well, who am I to judge that? I think that's arrogant to be honest with you. I can't say that one belief system is wrong or right. I don't even like those words when it comes to religion and faith.

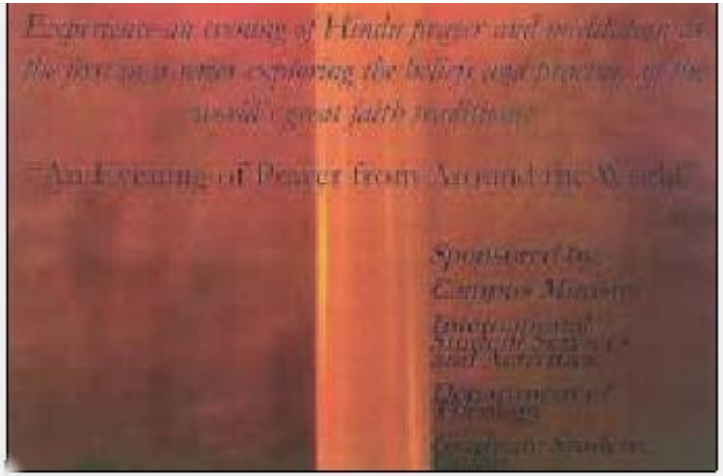
But we both agree that the 9/11 hijackers were wrong. I don't believe that their belief was a valid pathway to God. How do we proselytize people who desperately need to know that Jesus died for their sins?

Fiedler: I'm not a fan of proselytizing. I think people become attracted to a faith tradition, not because somebody preaches at them, but because somebody lives that faith in such a distinctive, loving and compassionate way that it is overwhelmingly attractive to them.

For example, when I read the

make the judgments of God in terms of what happens to somebody in the afterlife.

Does it then follow that to respect a person is to validate their belief system? For example, the Muslim religion teaches that Jesus Christ did not die on the cross, and that the crucifixion story was made up by distortions of the Bible. However, the death of Christ on the cross is very central to the Christian faith. Can't I believe that a religion is wrong and yet not be hateful towards those people? Isn't it possible to love someone even though you don't agree and can't validate him or her?



Another poster found around the Notre Dame campus invited the students of this Catholic institution to "experience an evening of Hindu prayer and meditation as the first in a series exploring the beliefs and practices of the world's great faith traditions." The event was sponsored by Campus Ministry and the Department of Theology among others.

Acts of the Apostles in the New Testament, I think that's how Christianity spread so rapidly. It was so obvious that these Christians loved one another. You do it by living Christianity to its fullest and providing that witness to somebody else. Then they will come to you with questions like, "Why is it that you live more simply than other people, that material goods don't seem to the be all and end all of your life?" That gives you the opening to talk about Jesus.

Jesus said, If you believe not that I am the Messiah, you swill die in your sins." He also said, "He that enters not by the door into

the sheepfold, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber." How do you reconcile those statements with some of the tenets of Interfaithism?

Fiedler: Interfaithism is really an effort to try to come together and understand other faith traditions. I don't look at those as absolutist statements. I look at them in terms of the larger message of who Jesus was and what He did. He didn't turn anybody away. He dealt with centurions and Samaritans. He dealt with all people that came into His world no matter how different their beliefs were from His. He loved and respected them. I think that that's the larger message or the larger characterization within which I would look at that particular statement.

But Jesus had problems with some religions – religion the way the Pharisees and the Sadducees were practicing it.

Fiedler: That was His own religion of Judaism. He had a problem with people whom He felt were misusing Judaism, much as the 9/11 hijackers misused Islam. He was condemning the corruption of religion. Jesus didn't found a religion. Jesus was leading a movement, probably a reform movement within Judaism that, only after His death, later split off and emerged as Christianity.

"I can't say that one belief system is wrong or right. I don't even like those words when it comes to religion and faith.

But did Jesus come to bring a religious convergence is to adopt an interfaith concept.

The critical issue is, if you're going to embrace the interfaith belief system, you cannot take the Bible literally. However, such a position is opposed to scripture. The Bible says in II Timothy 3:16, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." Jesus said in John 5:39, "Search the scriptures; for in them you have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."

This interview gives a pretty accurate depiction of the interfaith movement embraced by the vast majority of today's globalists. There is a world government, and a world religious dynamic taking place here, and it all centers around Interfaithism.





new covenant—the covenant of the New Testament salvation. I think all of us agree on that.

Fiedler: What did a new covenant mean? It meant an agreement to follow the kinds of principles and teachings that He put forward, which, at their core, have to do with people loving and sharing and doing justice, etc.



Interview Comments

If there is to be a global religious system, Interfaithism is the only possible path. According to the prophecies of the Bible, the global religious system is going to lead to perdition. The Bible teaches that there will be a world governmental system and a false prophet who will work in partnership with that system. The only chance there is of such a