

People of Faith in a Culture of Fear  
Oklahoma Council of Churches  
November 13, 2014

This is certainly not the first time I have been with the Oklahoma Conference of Churches. I recall speaking here in the 1980s, when Max Glenn was the executive director; and I was the speaker when Rita Cowan was installed in that position. So I know something of what God has done through this council to serve the people of Oklahoma, to bear witness to God's will for unity, and to build community among those who are diverse. It is a pleasure to be with you again and to sense the high level of energy and to see the expanded range of participants around these tables. May God continue to bless your ministry together.

And it is a particular joy to be here in that your current executive director, Bill Tabbernee, has been a very good friend since the days when he still lived in Australia. Bill, as you know, has been an outstanding leader in theological education, as well as ecumenical ministry, and I am delighted to be with him in this setting.

I invite you, as we begin, to think about stories that have dominated the news in this country in recent months. Let's start with images from Murrieta, California where four months ago buses of unaccompanied minors and women with children, all fleeing violence in Central America, were blocked by angry, screaming adults. In his column about this incident, the Christian evangelical, Jim Wallis, told of a talk he gave last spring on immigration to his son's fifth-grade class in Washington, DC—a class that is racially, ethnically, and religiously diverse. He talked about families separated or deported because they were undocumented, and the students wanted to know: Why doesn't the government fix that? Wallis answered: They say they're afraid. What are they afraid of? "Then it hit me. 'They are afraid of you,' I replied.... 'They are afraid that you are the future of America.'"<sup>1</sup>

Or think about stories involving Edward Snowden who, whatever your opinion of him as a person, has helped reveal the extent to which a concern for "national security" now pervades public policy—complete with color-coded terror alerts that never get below "high." An article last year in the journal *Foreign Policy*—citing examples, from the Patriot Act to the embrace of torture to expanded surveillance—suggests that the U.S. has definitely crossed the line between national security and national insecurity. There are real threats in this world, says the author, David Rothkopf, but, in our anxiety, we

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<sup>1</sup> Jim Wallis, "The Moral Failure of Immigration Reform: Are We Really Afraid of Children" at <http://sojo.net/blogs/2014/07/03/moral-failure-immigration-reform-are-we-really-afraid-children>

have redefined “disproportionate.”<sup>2</sup> Notice how many government programs are now justified on the grounds that they promote security. Immigration is about “securing the border” against infiltration. Health programs are proposed and defended as responses to biothreats. Police departments get more money when they speak of being “first responders.”

There are so many stories that make my point, I hardly know what to include. How about U.S. military spending which, though decreasing from last year to this, is still greater than the next eight highest-spending countries combined.<sup>3</sup> Or reports that the U.S. has 743 prisoners for every 100,000 citizens, while the average worldwide is 148.<sup>4</sup> A number of states, including Oklahoma, now spend more on prisons than on universities, a striking indication that fear has triumphed over hope in political decision making. And just in the weeks since I proposed this topic to Bill, we have had the Ebola crisis with numerous headlines to the effect that, in this country (not Liberia or Guinea, but this country) fear is spreading far faster than the disease. One U.S. Senator has suggested that the Islamic State may use Ebola as a biological weapon, and several have demanded that we close the border with Mexico to keep Ebola out.

There is also a by-now-familiar story from Ferguson, Missouri, with its images of police decked out as if for military invasion. But I am going to reinforce my point by mentioning, not the tragic shooting of Michael Brown, but the equally-tragic killing of Trayvon Martin. “You could smell fear all over the story of Trayvon Martin,” writes columnist Alexandra Petri. “Fear of the nameless, faceless menace of You Shouldn’t Be Here. It’s the fear that makes someone appoint himself neighborhood watchman in the first place, to make sure nothing Out of Place shows up.... Fortunately for the fearful,” adds Petri, “Florida’s ‘Stand Your Ground’ law has their interests at heart. To kill someone, you need not prove that he or she intended you harm. All you need to prove is a real and reasonable fear that your life is in danger.” Petri echoes numerous other commentators when she concludes, “We live in a terrified age.”<sup>5</sup>

Fear, of course, is not a new theme in American history. There have been periods of obsessive anxiety from the Salem witch trials to popular images of “savages” on the frontier, from the anti-alien hysteria (the so-called Red Scare) of the early 1920s to the

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<sup>2</sup> David Rothkopf, “Declaring an End to the Decade of Fear” at [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/08/01/declaring\\_an\\_end\\_to\\_the\\_decade\\_of\\_fear](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/08/01/declaring_an_end_to_the_decade_of_fear), [http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/06/18/scared\\_tactics\\_america\\_foreign\\_policy\\_fear](http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/06/18/scared_tactics_america_foreign_policy_fear)

<sup>3</sup> This information is widely available. See, e.g., [http://pgpf.org/Chart-Archive/0053\\_defense-comparison](http://pgpf.org/Chart-Archive/0053_defense-comparison)

<sup>4</sup> Statistics on incarceration rates are widely available. See, e.g., <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/23/world/americas/23iht-23prison.12253738.html?pagewanted=all>

<sup>5</sup> Alexandra Petri, “The Scariest Thing About Trayvon Martin” at [http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/compost/post/the-scariest-thing-about-trayvon-martin/2012/03/20/gIQAfKILSS\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/compost/post/the-scariest-thing-about-trayvon-martin/2012/03/20/gIQAfKILSS_blog.html)

McCarthyism and bomb shelters of the 1950s. President Roosevelt (FDR) tried to name and subvert the culture of fear that had seized the country as a result of the Great Depression. You probably recall his language: "...the only thing we have to fear is fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance." Other leaders, however, have regarded fear as a useful political tactic. The only way to maintain the size of the military now that World War II has ended, said Senator Arthur Vandenberg, is "to scare the hell out of the American people."

It is hard not to conclude that we are today in the midst of another period in which fear dominates our national psyche. This has been well catalogued by such scholars as Barry Glassner<sup>6</sup> and Peter Stearns,<sup>7</sup> who cite studies showing, for example, that since the 1990s Americans express a growing fear of crime even as actual crime rates have steadily decreased. One very intriguing study compares interviews conducted with more than 200 ordinary Americans after Pearl Harbor with similar interviews following 9-11. Not a single one of the former group expressed fear as the dominant response. The tone was one of long-range confidence, a lack of panic dramatically at odds with the national mood in the fall of 2001.<sup>8</sup>

I will add, parenthetically, that 9-11 did not create our national anxiety; but it encapsulated it in a single event. As Cornel West once observed, 9-11 was "the first time that many Americans of various colors felt unsafe" (a feeling, he noted, that has been all-too-familiar for African Americans).<sup>9</sup> But rather than simply target those who planned and executed the attack, our government universalized it into a fight against Terror—which is guaranteed to keep people afraid and to enlist their support for such things as torture.

I was in the room for the first round of Congressional hearings, chaired by Rep. Peter King, into the "radicalization" of American Muslims. King, you may recall, once declared that "80 to 85 percent of mosques in this country are controlled by Islamic fundamentalists!"<sup>10</sup> (It sounds like something your State Representative, John Bennett,

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<sup>6</sup> Barry Glassner, The Culture of Fear: Why American Are Afraid of the Wrong Things, New York: Basic Books, 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Peter N. Stearns, American Fear: The Causes and Consequences of High Anxiety, New York: Taylor and Francis, 2006.

<sup>8</sup> See Peter N. Stearns, "Fear and History" at <http://www.nnet.gr/historein/historeinfiles/histvolumes/hist08/historein8-stearns.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Ryan Herring, "When Terror Wears a Badge" at <http://sojo.net/blogs/2014/08/14/when-terror-wears-badge>

<sup>10</sup> This was widely reported. See, e.g., <http://www.motherjones.com/mojo/2010/12/radicalization-peter-king>

might have said in the aftermath of the murder of Colleen Hufford.) After the hearing, I was one of several religious leaders to speak at a press conference, all of us pointing to the climate of fear that was driving this charade. Domestic terrorism may be a threat, I said at the press conference, but when fear dominates, it leads us to focus on easy, surrogate targets rather than on real, complex problems. We saw this as well in Switzerland and Italy, where a needed debate on immigration and national character got sidetracked by legislation banning the building of minarets and a boycott of shops selling kebobs.<sup>11</sup>

I appreciate the summary offered by Fareed Zakaria, not only because he is an insightful analyst of U.S. social and political life, but because he sees this country through the eyes of one born elsewhere. “America,” he writes, “has become a nation consumed by anxiety, worried about terrorists and rogue nations, Muslims and Mexicans...immigrants and international organizations. The strongest nation in the history of the world now sees itself besieged by forces beyond its control.”<sup>12</sup> You may have seen the interview with novelist, Marilyn Robinson, in the October 5 issue of the New York Times Magazine. “Fear,” said Robinson, “has, in this moment, a respectability I’ve never seen in my life.” It has become a widely-used excuse for not doing what needs to be done.<sup>13</sup>

In 2008, much of the voting public—including, I suspect, many in this room—flocked to Barack Obama because they thought he could change the narrative—from fear to hope. But, as you know, the change he promised—and, in some sense, embodied—made others even more anxious; and (dare I say it?) he, too, seems to have succumbed to the culture of fear that pervades the Capitol. I don’t need to remind you of the pandering to fearfulness that passed for campaign ads and political rhetoric in the recent campaign. But I will stress that this is by no means limited to one political party by reminding us of an infamous ad from Hillary Clinton in 2008: “It’s 3:00 a.m. and your children are safe and asleep...in a dangerous world. Who do you want answering the phone?”

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Fear, obviously, has a legitimate, even vital, role in human life. Indeed, without it, we would likely all be dead! Fear can move us to marshal our resources in the face of crisis—and (to use Christian terminology) there are real threats in this sinful world. I think, for example, that we should be alarmed by the immediate and potential effects of environmental destruction, and marshal our resources accordingly. There are certainly

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<sup>11</sup> Martha Nussbaum, The New Religious Intolerance: Overcoming the Politics of Fear in an Anxious Age, Cambridge, MA: Belnap Press, 2012, pp.4-5.

<sup>12</sup> Fareed Zakaria, The Post-American World, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008, p. 251.

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/05/magazine/the-revelations-of-marilynne-robinson.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/05/magazine/the-revelations-of-marilynne-robinson.html?_r=0)

reasons why religious minorities in northern Iraq or school children in northern Nigeria or people in the slums of Monrovia would be afraid. But I hope you agree that excessive, obsessive fear is itself dangerous. It can lead us to misperceive the world around us and can undermine our capacity to interact constructively with others. To say it plainly, fear can turn us against the neighbor, corroding the trust and interdependence on which society depends. There are times when fear can unite a community, but more often, if I read history correctly, it divides. (I mentioned to the students in a graduate seminar I am teaching at Seattle University that I was coming here, and they asked to see my presentation—so I sent it to them. Tuesday, I got a response from one, a Roman Catholic nun from Uganda, who wrote, “In my country, we say that fear is False Evidence Appearing Real, and it makes people dangerous.”)

What I want to suggest in the next few minutes is that our religious traditions have a powerful and most needed word to say in the face of this society’s obsessive anxiety. Each of our faith communities—Muslim, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Bahai, Unitarian Universalist, Christian—has spoken extensively about fear and there are remarkable similarities in what we have said.

Please understand. I have no desire “to harmonize” our religious teachings! Our differences are often as interesting and important as our similarities. On this question, however, we do have a great deal of common ground that should enable us—compel us!—to challenge, alongside one another, the assumptions of this fearful culture we all call home. I will try to summarize this common ground in four points, starting with the most basic.

1. Fear is seen as hazardous to spiritual and communal health in all of our traditions. Mahatma Gandhi—speaking, of course, from a Hindu context—states the matter directly in a justly-famous quotation (echoed in a sermon by Martin Luther King, Jr.). “The enemy,” said Gandhi, “is fear. We think it is hate; but it is fear”<sup>14</sup>—because fear keeps us from acting to effect the change we know is needed and because fear is often the root of hatred.

Similar ideas are expressed in the most recent book by the widely-admired Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh, entitled Fear: Essential Wisdom for Getting Through the Storm. “Without fear,” he writes, “we are able to see more clearly our connections to others. Without fear, we have more room for understanding and compassion. Without fear, we are truly free.”<sup>15</sup> Or what about the Sikh religion in which Guru Nanak taught that

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<sup>14</sup> For various images that include this famous quotation, see [https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=Gandhi+the+enemy+is+fear&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&gws\\_rd=ssl](https://www.google.com/search?client=safari&rls=en&q=Gandhi+the+enemy+is+fear&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&gws_rd=ssl)

<sup>15</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, Fear: Essential Wisdom for Getting Through the Storm, New York: HarperCollins, 2012.

humans, to experience God, should cultivate two qualities in their daily lives: to be without animosity and to be without fear.

There are so many admonitions to “fear not” in the Qur’an, the Hebrew scriptures, and the Christian New Testament that I won’t burden you with quotations. But I will quote a line from my favorite of the Hasidic rabbis, Nachman of Bratslav: “The whole world,” he teaches, “is a narrow bridge. And the most important thing is not to be afraid.” (The Jews here probably know this as a Hebrew folk song, “Kol Ha-Olam Kulo.”) Rebbe Nachman urged his followers to have “holy chutzpah” since determined courage, not fear, is needed to serve neighbor and God.<sup>16</sup>

To reiterate, I am not suggesting that our communities mean precisely the same thing when we make such statements about fearfulness. There can be no doubt, however, that our traditions stand firmly and together against those who emphasize fear, especially those who use fear for political purposes.

2. There is one exception to this view of fear as the enemy, an exception expressed in nearly all of our religious traditions, and that is the “fear of God.” There are dozens of passages on the fear of God in the sacred texts of the Bahai religion (“Let God be your fear, O people” is a central teaching of the Baha’u’llah), and passages in the Qur’an urging Muslims to “fear none but Allah” find obvious parallels in the Jewish and Christian scriptures and in the Book of Mormon. All of us who use such language speak of the fear of God, not because God is cruel, but because God is just. Fear of God—that is, recognition of God’s justice—engenders a sense of awe and reverence, but also helps define our moral compass. As Proverbs (a book in the Hebrew scripture) puts it, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”<sup>17</sup>

3. It follows that in all of the traditions just mentioned—Judaism, Islam, Bahai, and Christianity—the antidote to negative fear is trust in the Divine, the Holy One. Because we fear God, because we trust in God’s justice (and mercy), we will not be ruled by fear in human society. The part of my ordination service that I remember most vividly is a sung rendition of Psalm 27: “The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom then shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” I also have special appreciation for this verse from the second chapter (sura) of the Qur’an: “Those who believe, including Jews and Christians..., on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve”<sup>18</sup> (a formulation repeated numerous times throughout this sacred text).

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<sup>16</sup> Various renditions of this folk song are accessible online. See, e.g., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GusLcXuVOJl>

<sup>17</sup> Proverbs 9:10.

<sup>18</sup> Qur’an 2:62.

Let's come at this from another direction. Our traditions teach that anxiety, which is what humans feel when we are insecure, follows from trusting in the wrong things to protect us. If, for example, our sense of worth and personal security are tied to the size of our bank account, then we will likely never have "enough." This, I take it, is what the Baha'u'llah had in mind when he wrote, "In earthly riches fear is hidden and peril concealed."<sup>19</sup> In the Gospel According to Luke, part of the Christian New Testament, Jesus tells a wonderful parable about a rich man who builds bigger barns to protect his stuff—and even if you aren't Christian, you can guess what happens. People who try to guarantee their own security without thought of others often find that the more they accumulate the more fearful they become.

All of this, as you know, also applies to nations. The assumption undergirding much of our public discourse seems to be that it is appropriate, or at least okay, for "us" (however us is defined) to have a hugely disproportionate share of the world's goods, and that using force to get or keep them, if authorized by the state, is necessary and legitimate. But Jesus could have been speaking for all of us when he said that you can't serve God and Mammon (i.e., material wealth). If our choice is Mammon, then we will need all the military power we can amass, all of the walls we can build, to defend it. Indeed, security pursued through military force, as seen through the lens of religion, is the surest path to lasting insecurity—to perpetual fear.

I should note, at this point, that Buddhism does not use the same language of fear of God or trust in God, especially those Buddhist streams that are non-theistic. I suspect, however, that our Buddhist neighbors, if they ever said "Amen," would say "Amen" to much of what I've just presented, though on different grounds. Listen, for example, to the well-known teacher and author in the Tibetan tradition, Judith Lief: "The essential cause of our suffering and anxiety is ignorance of the nature of reality, and craving and clinging to something illusory. That is referred to as ego, and the gasoline in the vehicle of ego is fear."<sup>20</sup>

4. All of us emphasize that fear is countered by recognizing our essential interrelatedness. A typical expression from the so-called Eastern religions comes from the Upanishads: "Who sees all beings in his own self, and his own self in all beings, loses all fear."<sup>21</sup> When Dr. King says that "People fail to get along because they fear each other, [and] they fear each other because they don't know each other," don't know

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<sup>19</sup> See Dale E. Lehman, "Freedom from Fear" at <http://www.planetbahai.org/cgi-bin/articles.pl?article=111&print=Y>

<sup>20</sup> Judith Lief, "Starting on the Path of Fear and Fearlessness" at [http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=3177](http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3177)

<sup>21</sup> Isa Upanishad at <http://alexpeak.com/twr/vedas/001.html>

that they are interdependent, he is operating out of a different metaphysical framework than the Upanishads, but isn't the practical import the same?

All Americans, of whatever religion, may know these words from King's "Christmas Sermon on Peace": "We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly."<sup>22</sup> Such interdependence, which Western traditions ground theologically in the conviction that life comes from a single Creator, means that true security is never achieved through unilateral defense, but through attentiveness to the injustice that afflicts other children of God. The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, puts it succinctly: "There is no security apart from common security." South Korea will be insecure so long as North Korea feels threatened. U.S. security depends, among other things, on reducing the economic disparities that fuel global resentment. Israeli security depends on Palestinians having a stake in the development of the Middle East. Or, in the words of Ami Ayalon, former director of Israel's security agency, "We will have security only when Palestinians have hope."<sup>23</sup>

I want to be clear. Our religious traditions are not blind to the realities of this world. We know that there are real reasons to be anxious—finding or keeping a job, health care for our loved ones, safety for our children. Not a single writer I have quoted denies the threat of terrorism or nuclear weapons. But all of us, if I read this literature correctly, refuse to define life as a zero-sum game in which our security is gained at the expense of others. Seen in religious perspective, life is not a fearful competition but a blessing to be shared by all. Fear is a part of human life; but, at our best, our varied traditions have said we will not be ruled by fear or allow our view of the world to be defined by it. And, because we know that life is interrelated, we will not allow fear to divide the human family.

The perspective I have just outlined is particularly needed in an age when fundamentalist religion captures the headlines. I don't need to tell you that nearly all of our communities have their fundamentalist wings. And fundamentalism, whatever its veneer, is the religious form of the world's anxiety. It draws lines to keep its identity secure by keeping others out. It responds to anxiety by demanding certainty, and, in this way, confuses religion with God—a point repeatedly made by the great Jewish rabbi, Abraham Joshua Heschel. Fundamentalism adopts a mindset of scarcity and, thus, assumes that the goal is to defeat the competition. If we, in turn, set out "to defeat"

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<sup>22</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Christmas Sermon on Peace" in James M. Washington, ed., A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr., New York: HarperCollins, 1986, p. 254.

<sup>23</sup> Ami Ayalon, "Israel's Response is Proportionate to Hamas's Threat" at <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2014/07/22/self-defense-or-atrocities-in-gaza/israels-response-is-proportionate-to-hamass-threat>

fundamentalism, it will betray our message of interconnectedness! But surely we betray our God, our sense of the Ultimate, if we do not proclaim and demonstrate an alternative way of being faithful.

The bigger problem, of course, is that we, too—our religious communities, too—live fearfully much of the time. And our often-suspicious approach to one another, at least historically, is a prime indication. Our world cries out for a witness to what the Christian New Testament calls a “love that casts out fear”; and the most profound testimony we can offer to such divine love is the way we live with one another. The Christians here will know that the verse I just quoted is from the first letter of John. And they will likely remember the next verse as well: “We love because God first loved us.”<sup>24</sup> It is a powerful reminder that self-centeredness is the root of fear. If our well-being is gained at the expense of others, then we will live anxiously. If our status depends on the depreciation of others, then we will live anxiously. If our lifestyle is built on a use of resources that threatens the planet, then we will live anxiously. If our security is based on treating others as enemies, then we will live anxiously. If our sense of community is dependent on exclusion of others, then we will live anxiously. And if our focus is on the preeminence of our religious group rather than the flourishing of this one divinely-given creation, then we will live anxiously.

To put it another way, while divine love can cast out fear, human fear can also cast out love. Unlike grief and empathy, fear does not recognize the full reality of others. It is fundamentally narcissistic and, thus, thwarts compassionate identification with those “outside.”

Speaking now for myself (and as a Christian), the opposite of fear is not invulnerability but hope in God’s future, both for ourselves and for life on this planet. In anxiety, we live in anticipation of possible danger. In hope, we live in anticipation of promised fulfillment. And that frees us to risk life in diverse community rather than in enclaves guarded by neighborhood watchmen.

We have covered a lot of ground in the past few minutes, but I hope that the main point of this presentation is clear: I appreciate the way our religious communities often cooperate on behalf of those in need, the way we often join for advocacy on behalf of this or that piece of legislation. In my judgment, however, we have a deeper witness to make, one that says “no!” to the fearfulness that drives much of our political and social life. Whatever the legislative debates on immigration, we need to help envision a society that is not afraid of strangers. Whatever the legislative debates about guns, we need to help envision a society in which courage is associated, not with the violent, but with peacemakers. And this witness can only be made with full credibility when we make it together.

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<sup>24</sup> 1 John 4:18-19.

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I will end with an example that is truly going where angels fear to tread. As I see it, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a case study in the corrosive effects of fear. Understandable fear. Who can deny that Jews have reason to be fearful, given the history and contemporary signs of anti-Semitism? Who can deny that Israelis have reason to be anxious, given the expressed desire of some militants for their nation's destruction? But I have also experienced the fearfulness—not just anger, but fearfulness—of Palestinian friends in the face of Israel's omnipresent and oppressive security measures—many of them imposed out of fear. And who can deny that this climate of fear on both sides has contributed to a lessening of contact and a breakdown of trust, even as the lessening of contact has led to an increase in fear?

Ethan Bronner, former Jerusalem bureau chief for the New York Times, made this point in a powerful op-ed article this past July (a point underscored in a Palestinian-Israeli roundtable discussion in the September issue of Harper's). Only fifteen years ago, Bronner observes, thousands of Palestinians worked in Israel, learned Hebrew, watched Israeli television, even had Israeli friends. Israelis, in turn, would venture on weekends into the West Bank where they would get their cars fixed, shop for vegetables, and eat the world's best hummus. They attended weddings of Palestinian employees. Some went into business together.

But once the Oslo peace process fell apart in 2000 and the Second Intifada erupted, all that went out the window. The common political wisdom quickly developed that the two communities needed, not greater integration, but complete separation. Communities that once interacted, at least on occasion, are now virtual strangers.<sup>25</sup> Which has, of course, led to increased fear of the unknown Other—just as the historic walls of racial segregation have contributed to fearfulness in such places as Ferguson, and the reduction of foot patrols by police in various cities has made police and community strangers to one another. “The most useful commodity for the merchants of war and hatred,” writes Roger Cohen with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, “is fear.” What we need, he argues, are “interceptors of fear” who help their own group imagine how the world looks through the eyes of those on the other side of the wall.<sup>26</sup> A study, reported in August in the New York Times, found that Israeli and Palestinian teens who

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<sup>25</sup> Ethan Bronner, “A Damaging Distance” at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/07/13/sunday-review/for-israelis-and-palestinians-separation-is-dehumanizing.html? r=0>

<sup>26</sup> Roger Cohen, “Will the Voices of Conscience Be Heard?” at <http://www.handinhandk12.org/news/roger-cohen-aug-2014>

participated together in the Seeds of Peace summer camp showed substantial positive change in their attitudes toward one another.<sup>27</sup>

I don't have a sure-fire plan for peace in the Middle East! But I do have a sure conviction that our religions speak truth when they promote interdependence as an antidote to fear. This is the kind of deep common witness that our religions can offer. This is the kind of deep common witness that our world desperately needs.

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<sup>27</sup> "Peace Through Friendship" at <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/24/opinion/sunday/peace-through-friendship.html>