



INTERFAITH COMMUNITIES FOR DIALOGUE (ICD)

FAITH AND CULTURE IN AMERICAN SOCIETY

Session #1: [The Role of Religion and Culture in Our Society](#)

The Interfaith Communities for Dialogue (ICD) has launched a series of webinars to consider how faith and culture shape each other in the context of American society including major historical and current influences such as immigration, internal migration, and globalization.

In the first session, held on January 15, 2023, the speaker was Reverend Professor Quardricos Driskell, pastor, Beulah Baptist Church of Alexandria, Virginia, and adjunct professor of religion and politics, George Washington University Graduate School of Political Management. Rev. Prof. Driskell's discussion provided a foundation for consideration of the question: does religion shape culture or does culture shape religion – or are they one and the same? His presentation was entitled "Religious Nationalism: The Misunderstanding of Religion and Culture". Citing Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., he underscored the importance of going beyond our own sectional loyalties to develop a world perspective. A brief video on "Misunderstandings About Religion" served as an introduction. The video noted 3 key misunderstandings:

- A belief that religious practices of any particular faith are uniform when, in fact, there is great internal diversity;
- A belief that religions remain static when, in fact, they evolve over time through constant reinterpretation; and
- A belief that religions function in isolation from their political, cultural, and economic context when, in fact, the religious ideas, practices, and stories reflect that context.

This demonstrates that religion is a social, man-made construction inextricably linked to the prevailing culture, and that both undergird social behavior and values. Rev. Dr. Driskell further noted the impact of geography on faith, offering as a case study the way that African indigenous religions inform every aspect of life despite widespread adoption of Christian and Muslim faiths.

Applying this lens to religious nationalism, defined as the relation of nationalism (patriotism) to a particular set of beliefs, Rev. Dr. Driskell suggested that this represents the politicalization of religion and ties a dominant religion to national identity. In the US, Christian nationalism is primarily a political ideology, not a religious one, and is frequently merged with white nationalism and a belief in racial subjugation. Developing religious literacy and a recognition of the growing number of people who are unaffiliated with any particular religious institution, is important to understanding the context and diversity of beliefs that shape our culture. In closing, Rev. Dr. Driskell posed the question: Where do we go from here: chaos or community?

Participants in this webinar were moved into small groups to share their thoughts based on this presentation. Among the discussion questions that others may want to think about further were these: In what ways can faith help us to influence the dominant culture, working towards a more equitable and fair society? In what ways do those whose values are not based in any formal religion influence the broader culture?