



INTERFAITH COMMUNITIES FOR DIALOGUE (ICD)

FAITH AND CULTURE IN AMERICAN SOCIETY

Session #2: [Exploring the Relationship Between Religion and Racism](#)

In the second session, held on March 12, 2023, the speaker was Reverend Adam Russell Taylor, president of Sojourners and author of *A More Perfect Union: A New Vision for Building the Beloved Community*. First coined by the philosopher-theologian Josiah Royce (1855-1916) and popularized by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the beloved community is a global vision of cooperation to share the earth's abundance so that all people thrive. Rev. Taylor's presentation focused on the relationship between religion and racism, which he expanded to include the subtopic: "Where Do We Go from Here: Toxic Polarization or the Beloved Community¹".

Religion has been weaponized to exclude and harm, to prop up slavery and discrimination in all its forms. One of our biggest threats today is a resurgence of white Christian nationalism which is tied to five myths (described by Richard T. Hughes in his book, *Myths America Lives By: White Supremacy and Stories that Give Us Meaning*).

Used to justify racism and white supremacy, these myths include:

- America is a chosen nation – an idea that originated with the Puritans and finds expression in a belief in American exceptionalism.
- America is Christian nation, created as such by our founding fathers -- a view which was a central purpose of the first and second religious revivals which swept the country in the 18th and 19th centuries.
- America is an innocent nation favored by God -- a 20th century formulation asserting that America stands for what is good and righteous, and can do no wrong.

However, religion can also unleash hope, liberation, and transformation through a community rooted in equality, non-violence, and love, where the end goal of both religious and civic values is liberty and justice so that all may flourish. This definition of the beloved community is both aspirational and visionary: Build a society where everyone is valued, respected, and can thrive, where neither punishment nor privilege is tied to race, ethnicity, gender, ableness, religion, or sexual identity. These are goals which can be measured, determining whether policies and practices exacerbate or dismantle inequities, reinforce or level the playing field. To accomplish these goals we must find ways to communicate with white nationalists and, as all religions espouse in some form, to love them because they are our neighbors.

Participants in this webinar were moved into small, facilitated groups to share their thoughts based on Rev. Taylor's presentation. The questions used to guide these dialogues were these: What elements of your faith [or the faith in which you were raised] promote openness and respect for people of all races? What elements of your faith [or the faith in which you were raised] have been used to promote or

¹ borrowed from Martin Luther King, Jr.'s last book, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or the Beloved Community*

justify racist views? What can we do to augment the positive side and dispel the negative within each faith or through interfaith work? How can persons of races and religions other than the dominant one feel more included?

In closing, Rev. Taylor noted six core commitments (as detailed in his book) that are required for building the beloved community: imago dei (we are all in the image of God); interdependence; radical welcome; nonviolence; environmental stewardship; and dignity for all. With the right tools, houses of worship can provide appropriate spaces for difficult conversations based on shared values.