

## Reflections on Interfaith Worship

I share what follows with a degree of trepidation, because I know that some people whom I deeply respect will be surprised and perhaps even offended by it. Other people will read into it a variety of rather narrow parochial prejudices, which are not at all a part of my theological convictions, but which fit their own prejudices. Even so, I feel compelled to write and to share this.

First, let me say what I do believe about interfaith relations. I firmly believe that in this day, when our culture has become much more diverse politically, ethnically, socially, and religiously, it is crucial for us to open and to maintain lines of communication and mutual understanding with those different from us. That is particularly incumbent upon us as Christians, especially in relationship to those of different faiths who share life with us in the secular community. It is only as we know one another and respect one another that we can see ourselves as friends rather than as enemies. Intolerance born of fear has been and continues to be at the root of much of the violence and suffering in our world. To this end I unequivocally support opportunities for conversation, mutual fellowship, and shared activity in the world among people of different faith communities.

Corporate worship, however, falls into an entirely different category, in my opinion. I question whether Christians, Muslims, Jews, Unitarians, devotees of new age spirituality, etc. can together offer worship that is authentic. At its heart, corporate worship is ascribing ultimate worth to another. The one to whom we ascribe ultimate worth in Christian worship is God as revealed in the testimony of the Old and New Testaments, and in Jesus Christ, whom we believe is the unique revelation of God's own self in human form, the eternal Word of God in human flesh. While people of different faiths may come together in assemblies where each community engages in its peculiar acts of worship while others practice a kind of "respectful presence," I do not believe that it is possible for us to draw together in any kind of liturgical amalgamation in which we can as one body bow before the one God. The god of Islam is not the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. The gods of Hinduism, Buddhism, or "The Center for Spiritual Enlightenment" are not the God of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one exception, in my opinion, is joint worship by Christians and Jews because we share a common heritage and because our faith is firmly built upon the foundation laid by the Old Testament witness. Others, in my opinion, skate very close to, if not embrace entirely, the sin of religious syncretism.

In a culture in which more and more people identify themselves as "spiritual but not religious," it is imperative that the Christian church claim "the scandal of particularity." In a culture in which more and more people understand faith not as a matter of God's self-revelation, but of one's own discovery and personal preference, it is critical that the church claim its unique identity as the body of Christ. In a post-Christian culture, it is a dangerous thing for the church to give the impression that

“one way to God is as good as another, for we all worship one God.” The faith endures not because we reduce it to the least common denominator, but because we are willing to remain faithful to whose we are as the people of God in Jesus Christ.

J. Dudley Weaver, Jr.