

An Interfaith Activist's Abcedarius

About 7774 words.

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Aalborg.

When my wife Eunice and I were teaching Computer Science in Aalborg, Denmark, in 1987, many people asked us about the variety of churches in the United States and about the "Church-State conflict". In Denmark, of course, the Lutheran Church is dominant. One person said to us, "Oh, we had a church-state conflict, centuries ago. The State won. Isn't that the natural outcome?" In Denmark, the local Lutheran church is spoken of as "the public church", the way we in the US speak of "the public school." If you don't like your minister, you complain to your legislator to try to get him transferred. Very few people actually attend church.

A few years later, the Iron Curtain was coming down and a delegation of newly arrived students from Hungary arrived at my office at the University of in Memphis, in Tennessee, and asked the question in a different form: "Why is there a different church on every street corner?" I found out that they did know that in the 1600's and 1700's, there had been religious wars in Europe, and that people who wouldn't join the church preferred by the king got in trouble. That was part of their education in communist schools, on the evils of religion. And they knew that people unhappy with the king's choice of church sometimes packed up and moved to North America. "So", I explained, "North America was selectively settled by people who didn't want to have to go to the same church as the people across the street."

Berkeley.

I was a graduate student at the University of California in Berkeley from 1967 to 1969. I'm Jewish, but I walked up the hill to audit a course at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, the Episcopal divinity school. This course in Palestinian Talmud was taught by a visiting Lutheran professor from Germany. Since no English translation of the Palestinian Talmud had been made in 1968, and none of the students in the class had good enough Hebrew for such a difficult text, we worked from a French translation. Unfortunately, due to the professor's limited English, some of the class discussion had to be in German. Luckily, these were the two languages in which I had to pass examinations to get my Ph.D. in mathematics.

Various faculty and student groups at the University of California occasionally wanted to go on strike. Some students and teachers wanted to be recorded as supporting the strike, but didn't want to actually miss class time. Since I was the student on the committee presumed able to speak Episcopalian, I was delegated to speak to the vestries of several Episcopal churches, negotiating permission for classes "on strike" to meet in the churches instead of in their usual classrooms on campus.

CCCO.

The Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors was a group founded by the Mennonites in 1948 to provide counseling to conscientious objectors, people morally or religiously opposed to military service. Services were provided without regard to the religious affiliation or lack of affiliation of the objector. When it was founded in response to the peacetime draft in 1948, the CCCO believed that it was addressing a temporary problem and saw no need for an employee retirement plan. In 1968 and 1969, the government was making its most earnest

efforts to draft me. So I got well acquainted with the CCCO staff, a few of whom were beginning to think about retirement. A couple of years later, the CCCO finally set up an employee retirement plan. Almost immediately after that, the draft was ended.

Duheisha.

In May of 2007 my wife and I visited the Duheisha refugee camp, a Palestinian refugee camp in the Israeli-occupied West Bank near Bethlehem. We were traveling with a group called Interfaith Peace Builders, under sponsorship by the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Quakers. One resident of Duheisha told us, "Living in a refugee camp under Israeli occupation is heaven compared to a living in a refugee camp in Jordan or Syria." We haven't been to one in Jordan, but pictures brought to us from Jordan by our Presbyterian friend Jeffrey Fletcher of Arkansas tend to confirm the impression. Duheisha has some 11,000 people living in about a sixth of a square mile. Features making it relative "heaven" include the fact that, unlike in Jordan, residents are allowed to build upwards, and three and four story buildings are common. Also, the gates are open, so those who can find a job and housing in the almost non-existent West Bank economy can move out. Jordan had never allowed the Palestinians to have their own universities, but the Palestinians in the West Bank were allowed to do so after Israel took over in 1967.

One man in the camp said he could afford to move out, but didn't want to risk falling off the UN refugee list since he might get something in a final settlement. "I know my family can't go back to our original village," he said. "It was plowed up to make room to expand the campus of Tel Aviv University. If they'd give my grandchildren scholarships to Tel Aviv University, I'd call it square." A Muslim friend of mine in Memphis grew up in Duheisha; he has a cousin who still lives there, a physician who is employed at Hadassah Hospital in Israel. We met several people in Duheisha who would seriously consider moving to North America, if they could get visas.

A few months after our very pleasant visit to Duheisha camp, an article in the National Geographic said this was a place so dangerous no Jew would dare to set foot there.

Education.

My grandfather was an orthodox rabbi, and my father rebelled into agnosticism. When in 1961 I went to Kenyon College, in Ohio, I had friends who were pre-divinity students. They asked me what Jews believed about this or about that. I didn't know but I was enough of a student that I tried to find out. When I exhausted the college library, the librarian sent me across campus to the divinity school library. When I asked questions the librarian there couldn't answer, he sent me to the Rev. Richard Henshaw, an Episcopal priest and Professor of Old Testament at the Bexley Hall divinity school. I wound up taking his course in Torah for Christian divinity students, which he taught from an Orthodox Jewish Bible commentary. He had studied at Hebrew Union College, the Reform Jewish rabbinical school in Cincinnati, and his students sometimes called him "Rabbi Henshaw." Under his tutelage, I emerged from Kenyon in 1964 as an essentially orthodox Jew with a very good Episcopalian vocabulary.

While I was at Berkeley, contrary to the impressions formed by both my parents and my Ph.D. thesis advisor, I did not spend all my time demonstrating against the war in Vietnam (although I did a great deal of that) or carousing among the hippies in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco. I did however spend many of my weekends near Haight-Ashbury, at a strange Jewish organization - *qua* - commune known as the House of Love and Prayer, located

on Arguello Street. The “founding father” there was Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, a popular folk singer who taught us a lot about Jewish mysticism. Another influence on me during that time, on his visits to campus, was Rabbi Zalman Schechter, a major leader in a Jewish renewal movement. I was very impressed later when he was a member of a Jewish group that went to Dharamsala to visit with the Dalai Lama and engage in Jewish - Buddhist discussions. At least in circles I’ve moved in, no one seriously objects to the idea that one can be both Jewish and Buddhist.

Faeroes.

In the spring of 1988, my wife and I taught in the Faeroe Islands, a Danish dependency near the Arctic Circle in the mid-Atlantic Ridge between Iceland and Norway. The Faeroes, with a very small population, had a much larger variety of churches than Denmark, and much better church attendance. “If they had the weather we do,” a man said to us, “they would pray regularly, too.” A tourist attraction in the Faeroes is a small stone cathedral begun around 1100 but never finished. The local people apparently objected to the taxes levied by the bishop sent by the king on the mainland to build it, and a mob chased the bishop up the stone wall of the cathedral from which he fell to his death. Some of the protesters may have moved further west to Iceland, but so far as we know none of them reached North America.

Germany.

About the time the Berlin Wall was coming down in Germany, we were visited in Memphis, Tennessee, by a young man from East Germany. “I was very impressed by the Lutheran pastors in East Germany,” he told us. “They were among the few people who could speak out at all, the only ones who had a chance to differ in public with the Communist Party, since they were well respected by many people and if they disappeared, someone would notice.” Our guest didn’t express any strong religious belief, but did express an interest in becoming a minister because ministers had been so important to his life and development. He asked if while he was in Memphis, we could take him to visit an African-American church and a synagogue. We did. We couldn’t have taken him to our neighborhood mosque, which hadn’t been built yet.

Another pair of house guests during that time was a German male homosexual couple, one of whom was a Lutheran parish minister in Hamburg. That was our first close acquaintance with a homosexual minister. He said, “About the time I decided I wanted to enter the ministry, I realized I was a homosexual. I went to the Bishop, who said ‘God loves you.’ Then the Bishop asked if I wanted to be a visible test case, or wanted to be a parish minister. I said I wanted to be a parish minister. The Bishop said, ‘We may have to be careful which parishes we send you to.’”

Hebron.

In our 2007 trip to visit peace activists in Israel and Palestine, we visited the Christian Peacemaker Team, a Mennonite-sponsored group. We visited their headquarters in Hebron, in the occupied West Bank. Hebron is the burial place of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their wives (except for Rachel, buried in Bethlehem). It is a city with substantial violence, hotly contested between the local Muslim population and post-1967 Jewish settlers. Some of the Jewish settlers are such fanatics that they are regarded as terrorists even by the government of Israel. In 1994 a Jew named Baruch Goldstein with an automatic weapon killed 27 Muslims and wounded about 150 others, while they were praying at the Tomb of Abraham.

One thing the Christian Peacemaker Team (which includes many non-Mennonite volunteers)

went to Hebron to do was to escort young Palestinian children who must cross Israeli military checkpoints and roads controlled by the settlers in order to get to school. Their parents are not allowed to accompany them. A few years ago Jewish fanatics attacked the Christian peacemakers, swinging chains at them and breaking bones. The Peacemakers are pledged not to fight back, not even to defend themselves. The Israeli Knesset responded to the attack by directing that Israeli soldiers (who are not well trusted by the Palestinians) should escort the children to school. The Peacemakers watch to see that this happens, and a few days a month they report that the soldiers fail to arrive or to carry out the escort duties.

India.

My wife and I visited a remarkable variety of religious groups and locations when we visited India in 1990. I felt a rather natural attraction to the Jain community. This small religious minority sometimes strikes me as the group in India most similar, in their position relative to the larger religious groups around them, to the Jews in the United States. I was delighted later to have a Jain in one of my classes in Memphis, and to discover a few Jains here. In fact, teaching over the years has turned up a variety of unexpected treats in my classes. I've had a Jewish student from Turkey who grew up in a small village where the local language was still Ladino, a variant of the fifteenth-century Spanish brought to Turkey by the Jews expelled from Spain in 1492 and invited to settle in Turkey by the Ottoman Sultan. They were expelled from Spain the same day Christopher Columbus set sail, so moving to North America was not yet an option for them.

There are interesting dietary differences between religious groups. Muslim "hallal" is strikingly similar to but not identical with Jewish "kosher." Both groups have agreed for well over a millennium that if the cow is too sick to walk, you can't eat it. The FDA has caught on to that only in the last few years. A Muslim friend said to me, "We Muslims get to have shellfish, you Jews get to have alcohol. I'm not sure which of us God gave the better deal." Since observant Jains are strictly vegetarian, they have sometimes been invited to arrange the menus and food service for interfaith dinners in Memphis, even when they are much smaller in numbers than the other groups attending.

Jakar.

In 2002 my wife and I traveled to Bhutan with a group of devout Christian Scientists, visiting Buddhist monasteries clinging to the mountainsides in the Himalayas just south of Tibet. In one discussion I asked, "Can you be both a Christian and a Buddhist?" The Buddhists said, "of course." The Christians present said, "Of course not." Later one of the Christian Scientists asked, "Since you think Buddhist philosophy is consistent with Christian religion, would you allow Christian missionaries in Bhutan?"

"No", said the Bhutanese, "that would threaten our traditional local culture."

The traditional local culture has features a Westerner might find odd, some perhaps left over from the days before the arrival of the first Buddhist missionaries. In some areas of Bhutan there is extensive use of phallic symbols, some of them recalling an early Buddhist missionary to the area called Drukpa Kunley, "the Divine Mad Monk," who apparently advocated sexual ecstasy as a way of understanding the divine. We participated in a rather strange festival in Jakar, in the Second Bumthang Valley. It was obviously a religious festival since the abbot of the monastery was blessing young schoolchildren watching the ceremony. My wife declines to use in our interfaith presentations the rather hard-to-believe pictures of her with an extremely realistic giant

dildo.

Kentucky.

When I arrived to teach at the University of Kentucky in 1969, new faculty were given a questionnaire to fill out. One question asked "What is your religion?"

I wrote "Jewish."

The next question was, "If you are not a church member, what is your church preference?"

Not being a church member, I wrote, "Episcopal".

In each of the next fourteen semesters, I got a plaintive phone call from the student delegated to prepare the chaplaincy mailing lists.

"Which list should I put you on?", a different student asked each semester.

"Both of them," I replied.

I was active with both student groups. The only time this caused a problem was in 1971 when an over-enthusiastic Episcopal undergraduate, obviously concerned for my immortal soul, poured a glass of liquid over my head and recited the formula to baptize me. It took rather lengthy and complex discussions before the Rt. Rev. Addison Hosea, the Episcopal Bishop for the diocese, eventually ruled that this did not actually constitute a valid baptism. The fact that the liquid was a scotch on the rocks had some influence on his decision, although he pointed out that there was adequate water content in the beverage.

In Lexington I was an active member of a local synagogue, Ohavay Zion. Since Lexington didn't have enough Jews to build three different buildings, the Jews couldn't divide on the common US lines of Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. We had to get along with more differences of opinion in a single building. After some discussion, the compromise reached at Ohavay Zion included an agreement that at Friday evening services people would sit quietly and respectfully and "behave as if they were in church." During Saturday morning services people could move around and talk with friends, and kids could play in the aisles, as long as they didn't drown out the Bible readings and sermon. The other place I've seen that behavior, other than orthodox synagogues, is in Catholic churches in Latin America.

Love.

The Presbyterian Church-USA, of which my wife is a member, does not allow non-celibate homosexual ministers. Their denominational magazine has published a letter from my wife arguing that what is most important about ministers' domestic relationships is not whether they are heterosexual but whether they are stable, loving and supportive.

A few years ago I was invited to a conference sponsored by our area Presbytery on the homosexuality issue. I was asked what the Jewish attitude was toward homosexuality. I said that practicing male homosexuality was prohibited by traditional Jewish law. However, there are a great many Jewish laws, and no one, including the great figures of the Old Testament, has managed to obey all of them. I suggested that people might justifiably be just as upset at a clergyman who was homosexual as they are at one who sometimes eats pork, or one who drives an automobile on the Sabbath.

At the (not legally effective) wedding ceremony of one of my nieces to her lady love, with a female Episcopal priest (a relative of one of the families) presiding, both partners identified themselves as brides and each agreed to be the wife of the other. Asked to provide an appropriate bit of Hebrew to include in the ceremony, I adapted a well-known Jewish hymn which includes in the refrain "Bo'ee Kala, Bo'ee Kala": Come, O Bride, Come, O Bride.

Mosque.

Our neighborhood mosque in Memphis is named “Masjid As-Salaam”, which is almost identical in meaning to a synagogue a few miles away, Beth Shalom. Each means “House of Peace”, although I think Masjid is more specifically “prayer house.” My wife and I have worked for several years to increase interactions between Masjid As-Salaam, which we attend most Fridays, Temple Israel, which we attend most Saturdays, and Balmoral Presbyterian, which we attend most Sundays.

We are both members of Temple Israel, even though my wife isn’t Jewish. Before we married I belonged to Beth Shalom, but my wife prefers services with more English and less Hebrew. Many synagogues don’t have any rule that members have to be Jewish, and you can be a member of as many of them as you like, but how many Stewardship Committees, by whatever name, do you want calling on you? Churches usually have a rule that you have to have the right beliefs, and often have a rule that you can only belong to one. As a result, only my wife is on the books as a member at Balmoral Presbyterian, but I’m equally active. Our friend Richard Vosberg said that the last time he was on the search committee for a pastor, candidates were told, “Be warned that we have a Jew who attends every week and will call you on it if you mistranslate your Hebrew.” I once did that to a former pastor. He was not unhappy.

“I’ve been preaching on this passage for thirty years,” he said in his sermon the next time it came up, “and it is wonderful to have a new take on it.”

I haven’t asked what the membership rules are at the Mosque, but I notice we have been put on the e-mail list and last pledge season we got a copy of the mosque annual budget in the mail.

The mosque has called us to say, “At our next Sunday School class, we’ll be discussing the Palestinian problem. Can you be sure to come, and maybe bring another couple of Jews?” They often use materials prepared by Jewish pro-peace groups, to emphasize that the problem in Israel and Palestine is not a dispute between all Muslims and all Jews. The sermon at the end of the Hajj season in January 2009 was almost indistinguishable from a Jewish Yom Kippur sermon. The Rabbi reminds people who only come on holidays they really ought to come every Sabbath, the day God rested, while the Imam reminds the same people that they really ought to come every Friday, the day God created Man.

A Sunday School class at the mosque recently spent six weeks studying the life of Mary, the woman most frequently mentioned by name in the Qur’an. We were told that Jesus was born almost immediately after the Annunciation. As the second Adam, Jesus was made from the same stuff as Adam, and a nine month gestation period was unnecessary. In December 2007, the best Advent sermon I heard was at the mosque. The text was the birth of John the Baptist as recounted in the Qur’an.

The Baptist Church near our summer home has partially solved the membership problem by creating a class of “associate members”, so they can put us on their lists and committees, and of course ask for money, even though I don’t have quite the right beliefs and my wife is a registered Presbyterian.

Nuclear Testing.

One of the first places I started encountering people with a large variety of strongly held and expressed religious beliefs was during the demonstrations against atmospheric nuclear testing, in which I began participating in 1961. Washington seemed a much less rancorous place in those days. Once a group of us were picketing the White House and President Kennedy sent out a tea

trolley. There wasn't enough tea to go around, but it was a remarkably nice touch. It was over tea-and-politics that I first met the Presbyterian minister Rev. Maurice McCracken, of Cincinnati, who introduced me to the Presbyterian Church and became a considerable influence in my religious thinking.

A few years later my father was up for a relatively low-level Presidential appointment, but one which required Senate confirmation. A senator's staff member talked to my father before the hearing. "Here is a list of the anti-nuclear and anti-war demonstrations your son has been in. What would you reply if the Senator asked you your opinion of your son's appearing in these demonstrations?" My father and I were amazed at how complete and accurate the list was, not the first or the last time I've had reason to be startled at the thoroughness of the FBI. My father told the staffer, "My son is young, and thinks for himself, and I'm glad that he cares enough about our country to be thinking about what its policies should be." The question was not asked at the public hearing.

Ohio.

The most organized, peaceful, and immediately effective demonstration I ever participated in was in Gambier, Ohio, in 1964. Desmond Tutu, then a young South African priest, had been invited to speak at Kenyon College. This was at about the time apartheid started in earnest, the time when the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa first publicly pointed out that God had separated the Light from the Darkness, the Day from the Night, and the Waters from the Dry Land, but that it was man's responsibility to separate the Whites from the Blacks.

Dean Almus Thorpe of the Bexley Hall divinity school was driving Rev. Tutu from the Dean's home at one end of the small village to the lecture hall at the other end. As was the custom there at the time, the Dean left his car in the middle of the main street while he went into the Post Office to pick up his mail. Our newly appointed village constable, seeing a strange Black man alone in a car in a village with no local resident Blacks (there were a few Black students) apparently gave Rev. Tutu a rather stern lecture and a ticket for blocking traffic. Rev. Tutu joked about it rather lightly at his lecture. A few days later, the same constable gave a traffic ticket to the eleven-year old daughter of Denham Sutcliffe, everyone's favorite English professor. She was charged with galloping her horse on the center dividing strip of the main street. There actually was a 70-year old town ordinance prohibiting that. The young lady rapidly let everyone in town know that the officer had used "lots of words that my daddy says you aren't supposed to."

A sign appeared outside the college dining hall Sunday before the noon meal. "At 2:00 PM the student body will assemble in front of the Post Office, for the purpose of deposing the village constable." Some 200 students gathered and walked about two miles to the man's home, where we settled into the front yard with the announced intention of playing frisbee and chess and working on our homework there until he resigned. Within a few hours the village council held an emergency meeting and agreed that he needed to be replaced. The town attorney announced to the assembled students that the constable had been formally directed by a village council resolution that until a replacement could be recruited, "You may call a spade a spade, but you are not to call it a God Damned Shovel." We marched back to the college assembly hall, where President Lund of the college remarked on what a fine Spring day it had been to go for a walk, and that we should all have a nice walk in the country together more often.

Presbyterian.

My first acquaintance with the Presbyterian Church, in which I am now an active nonmember, came from the Rev. Maurice McCracken. After meeting him at an anti-nuclear meeting, I took several trips to visit his church on Dayton Street in Cincinnati, sometimes sleeping on his sofa there. Some years later I came to Louisville, Kentucky to attend my first wedding, which was Orthodox Jewish. The same year that Desmond Tutu spoke at my college, Rev. McCracken was defrocked by the Presbyterian Church and he and many of his congregation moved down the block to establish the Community Church of West Cincinnati. The belief among most of its membership was that he was being punished for integrating his church prematurely. His branch of the Presbyterian Church was still debating integration, and McCracken's church was the first integrated church I had ever attended. It was more racially mixed than any house of worship I've ever attended except my neighborhood mosque, 40 years later. The stated reason for defrocking McCracken was that he had "caused conflict with the civil authority," presumably by his extremely strong pacifist stance. In addition to organizing demonstrations against nuclear weapons, he had publicly suggested both resisting the draft and refusal to pay taxes as a way to protest military expenditures.

Quito.

My wife and I have traveled to poor neighborhoods in Quito and to Indian villages in the highlands of Ecuador with a group from FINCA, the Foundation for International Community Assistance. This group organizes groups of women and gives them small loans to start businesses. They do this for women rather than men since the women spend the money they earn on their children, not on alcohol. The women guarantee each other's loans and work together to make their businesses succeed. In some countries the easiest way to recruit such a group of women is with the aid of the local Catholic priest, so FINCA has only limited educational programs for the women. Its groups of women do not discuss, for example, birth control.

A group called Freedom From Hunger gives very similar small loans to village women and has a much more developed educational program. In some countries, FINCA has more elaborately developed financial resources than Freedom From Hunger. In some others, where certain forms of education are required, FINCA subcontracts to Freedom From Hunger to provide the educational presentations.

Rooftop.

I was still in Berkeley during the fight over "People's Park" in 1969. This was a large vacant lot which the students and local street people had started using as a park, and the university wanted to put a building on it. Protesters blocked early efforts at construction. One night the state sent in the National Guard to occupy the entire neighborhood, and threw up a chain link fence around the vacant lot. I lived less than a block away, and National Guardsmen were stationed every few yards on the sidewalk. In fact, a girl was bayoneted on the front steps of my rooming house - nothing that a few Band-Aids wouldn't fix, but inflicted by a bayonet when a young Guardsman was startled by something and turned around too quickly, with his bayonet held out at waist level.

I wanted to see what was going on at the "People's Park," but no one was allowed on the streets immediately around it. The Berkeley Baptist Divinity School was across the street from it, so I entered that building by the back door and went up on the rooftop. A National Guardsman immediately aimed his rifle at me and ordered me down. I consulted an Episcopal priest I knew

at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific, and with his encouragement I put on an academic gown and a black shirt-front with reverse collar to look like a priest. I climbed back up to the roof of the Baptist divinity school, and this time the National Guard allowed me to stand there and watch the scene. Perhaps the National Guardsmen were unaware that Baptists don't wear that form of clerical garb.

Sucre.

Bolivia isn't on the tourist circuit, but deserves to be. My wife and I were in Sucre, Bolivia, with a group from Freedom From Hunger. The group was planning a very long all day bus ride into the mountains, and I had a sudden high fever the night before. In the morning I was obviously too weak for the trip. Later in the day I was feeling slightly better - enough to walk just a few blocks. The local map showed a nearby Church of St. Philip Neri, an Italian saint who lived 1515 to 1595. I knew nothing about him except those dates and his reputation for practical jokes, which I had learned from a humorous poem by Phyllis McGinley. We decided to walk to that church. It was locked, but by then we could see the tower of a larger church, and walked to it. The Metropolitan Cathedral of Sucre, an important early Spanish Colonial capital, has a very large art museum, including whole rooms full of Spanish art on the subject of Joseph and Jesus. As a stepfather myself in my second marriage, I've always thought that the role of Joseph as stepfather is too much ignored in Christian teaching.

After awhile, assured by staff at the Cathedral that the Church of St. Philip Neri was now open, we returned there. It was still locked. Seeing a few college-age girls nearby, we tried to catch them to see if they had any information on how to get in. We failed to catch them, but they led us to the campus of the local university, where we spent several hours with the Chairman of the Foreign Language Department, a teacher of English. She had a few years earlier given birth to triplets, and the city of Sucre had only two incubators, so she had by necessity become an expert on medical care, medical insurance, and some other social issues in Bolivia. It was the most interesting, informative, and memorable day of our trip there.

We never did get into the Church of St. Philip Neri, and I still know very little about him. But somewhere in heaven, I'm sure he is enjoying his practical joke.

Thailand.

We traveled to Thailand with a group from American Jewish World Service, visiting charities with unusual funding problems. We traveled to northern Thailand, to the border of Burma, where we met with people smuggling medical supplies to the rebellious Burmese hill tribes. These tribes, promised eventual self-determination by Britain back in the 1940's, have serious problems. We were told that the Burmese Army uses systematic rape in a deliberate effort to destroy the separate ethnic basis of the tribes. The medical smugglers explained: "When we buy medicines in Bangkok, we get good receipts. When we use the toll highway out of Bangkok, we get good receipts. When we bribe the border guards to let the medicines across the border, funding agencies complain because we don't get a receipt."

There were other interesting problems. If you are a tribe hiding in the jungle, and the army is searching for you, how do you organize education? What equipment do you need to run a primary school, if it must be able to disappear completely on two hours' notice and leave no trace behind? We saw educational charts designed to roll up and slide into a stick of bamboo, so they could be dropped onto the jungle floor and sit there unnoticed.

It is illegal in Thailand to export Thai representations of Buddha. The antique shops have

many beautiful and meaningful centuries-old heads of Buddha, all of which are labeled as having originated in Cambodia. When we visited Cambodia we were told it is illegal to export Cambodian antiquities, and all the Buddha heads for sale in the antique shops are labeled as having originated in Thailand.

Universal Life.

California in the late 1960's was also the home of the Universal Life Church. Kirby Hensley, the church founder, disapproved of the special benefits society gave to churches and ministers. His solution was to attempt to ordain everyone. I think he had ordained about 83,000 people when some friends involuntarily immersed me in a fountain on the Berkeley campus, announced they had ordained me, and sent my name in to get papers from the Universal Life Church. This was four years before I was exposed to Bishop Hosea's reasoning, on the necessity of solemn intent.

The number of ordained ministers passed a million quite rapidly. Ordinations were free, but someone convinced Hensley that he could raise some money to pay for the postage and ordination certificate printing costs by giving an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree to anyone contributing twenty dollars or more. The state of California then charged him with violating the state education code, which prohibited the granting of degrees by educational institutions that were neither accredited nor licensed by the state. I attended the trial. Kirby's basic defense was that he could not possibly have violated the law, since he was clearly not an educational institution. The trial fell apart in some disorder when Kirby got up from behind the defense table, walked across the courtroom, raised his arms, and ordained the entire jury.

When I told the Rt. Rev. C. Kilmer Myers, Episcopal Bishop of California (with whom I had become friendly while arranging classroom space in Episcopal churches) that I had been ordained in the Universal Life Church, he hugged me enthusiastically. "How wonderful. Now you can get the same clerical discount on liquor that I do."

During the "People's Park" episode, when I discussed the National Guard's reaction to my clerical garb with the priest at the Episcopal divinity school, I was told, "At a time like this, the more priests visible on the street, the less likely violence is. You know enough to cope with emergencies, and when you need to call a real priest. Go on wearing the reverse collar for awhile." Neither he nor I thought a Universal Life ordination made me "a real priest", but I dressed as a priest for as long as the National Guard was occupying the route I needed to take between my home and the classes I attended. Many people responded much more favorably to a full-bearded young priest than to a full-bearded draft-age college student, and I actually was able to calm a few tense situations on the street, mainly by listening to people who needed to feel heard.

Vosberg.

Our friend Richard Vosberg is a long-time lay leader at Balmoral Presbyterian Church in Memphis. He is among the members there who have attended local Muslim events with us. While many Jews have visited a church and many Christians have visited a synagogue, visiting mosques is much rarer, and in the present US climate, many Muslims would hesitate to visit a church or synagogue even if tempted to do so. One of the things my wife and I do is try to get people to visit back and forth. We were astounded and pleased when seventeen of our Muslim friends came to a talk we gave at Temple Israel; some others attended a program at Balmoral. One consequence of these efforts is that we were invited to write an essay on teaching about

Islam in synagogues, which was published in a national newsletter for synagogue (Reform Temple) educators by the Union for Reform Judaism.

On May 15, 2008, there was a pro-Palestinian demonstration in Memphis, with many Muslims participating. Two Jews arrived, one bearing a sign saying "Palestinians cheered on 9/11." That man gave his name as Goldstein and told a Muslim that he was a big admirer of Baruch Goldstein, of the Hebron massacre. I wasn't there to see how the ensuing street fight began, but it developed that Goldstein was carrying a very powerful pepper spray, which he used, and a knife and gun which he had not used by the time police broke up the fight. My wife and I heard about it at the mosque the next day, during the social hour after the Friday prayers, and spent over two weeks trying to unwind the problem before it got worse. Richard Vosberg drafted on behalf the Elders of Balmoral Presbyterian Church a letter to the Muslims affirming the right of peaceful demonstration and the right of Americans to remain concerned for the welfare of their places of origin. Using that letter, information on the extreme language that Goldstein was using on the internet, and his claims that the Memphis Jewish Federation supported him "10,000 percent", we explained the situation to the Jewish Federation which made a public statement disclaiming the troublemaker and supporting the right of peaceful demonstration. The local Muslim governing body then thanked the Jewish Federation and a local Muslim leader stated that a potentially serious problem had become a positive experience in building interfaith cooperation.

A Presbyterian minister in another church tapped the District Attorney on the shoulder Sunday morning after church and made sure he was aware of the problem before the police reports reached his desk, so that he could take steps to avoid a trial with Jews and Muslims lining up on opposing sides.

Wisdom.

In 1996 my wife and I dined with the Daughters of Wisdom, at their convent in Malawi. Malawi is one of the very poor land-locked African countries, just northwest of Mozambique. While we usually travel to meet people rather than sightsee, we did take time in Malawi to visit The Shire, the place after which Tolkien named a location in The Lord of the Rings. Our most memorable photograph of The Shire is of a very large herd of hippopotamuses, located directly behind a road sign saying "Beware of Hippos". We also once crossed the path of Indiana Jones, on a Jewish mission trip to the jungle north of Angkor Wat, in Cambodia.

I'd first learned of the wisdom to be gained from nuns when I met Episcopal nuns of the Community of the Transfiguration at a retreat house in northern California, which I visited with a group of students from Berkeley. On my later visits to Rev. Maurice McCracken in Cincinnati, I dined several times with the nuns at the Convent of the Transfiguration there.

In Malawi, we took a special side trip to meet The Daughters of Wisdom. We knew of them because the sister of a colleague of ours when we taught in New Hampshire was a member of this Roman Catholic order, and had spent thirty years as a medical missionary in Malawi. She had been retired back to Maine, where she was having real trouble adjusting. She had been trained as a nurse over thirty years previously. While she had learned a great deal in Malawi, expertise at operating isolated medical mission stations like the one my wife and I visited there was not immediately applicable in Maine. She was retraining as a social worker. The leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in Malawi was being turned over to the locals, and only a few elderly missionaries from France were left as the foreign contingent in the order's work in Malawi. We spoke with elderly foreign priests and nuns who had spent their entire adult lives in

mission work. Then we spoke with a few of the younger African sisters, who had been as far away as California, London, and Calcutta while being educated to prepare them for leadership roles in the order in their home country.

X-rays.

My wife and I have spent a lot of time in areas of Palestine that are considered very dangerous, experiencing no problems. Then she was mugged in Jerusalem, which I think of as safer than Memphis. After dark, in a poor neighborhood in East Jerusalem, a man came up behind us. With one hand he grabbed the handbag she had over her right shoulder. With the other, he pushed her down, hard, downhill onto cobblestones. She was very badly injured. Eunice said in the ambulance after recovering consciousness, "After all the strange places we've traveled, isn't it nice that this happened a ten minute ambulance ride from a very good hospital?" She spent two weeks in Hadassah Hospital, Ein Kerem, near Jerusalem. Her broken shoulder was operated on by an Israeli and a Palestinian surgeon, working together, and she was cared for by both Jewish and Muslim nurses. As she recovered, we had fascinating discussions with the doctors, nurses, other patients, patients' families and visitors. While we had previously visited the Baha'i temple in Wilmette, Illinois, we hadn't had long talks with people there. At the hotel connected with Hadassah Hospital, we had lengthy conversations with people on the staff of the Baha'i international headquarters in Haifa.

When we got home to Memphis, there was a single one-hour period in which we received three phone calls from couples wanting to bring us food and visit with us. One couple was from our church, one from our synagogue, and one from our mosque

Eunice has made a remarkable recovery. But among the souvenirs of this event is a copy we kept of the radiology disk which the hospital gave us to bring back for her doctors in the United States. Most men wonder from time to time what goes on in their wife's head. I now have on my computer a complete set of X-rays and MRI's of the interior of my wife's head, if I can only learn to read them.

Yellow.

We encountered two principal sects of Buddhism in Bhutan, both forms of Tibetan Tantric Mahayana Buddhism. These are the Yellow Hat sect and the Red Hat sect. I was completely unable to understand the difference between them, except the color of the hats worn by the monks. The hat I brought back for a souvenir is one of those worn by the Red Hat monks. I have no idea if wearing this means I've taken a position on some issue.

I enjoy unusual hats, and collect them. When I first traveled in the Palestinian West Bank in 1971, I could wander freely and found most of it very friendly. I purchased a souvenir in Hebron on that trip, in the Palestinian shopping street in the ancient neighborhood nearest the Cave of the Patriarchs. The street was thriving in 1971 but almost all the stores were closed in 2007. Jewish settlers living in the buildings above the street throw both wet and dry garbage down on the shoppers. The souvenir of 1971 was a Palestinian headdress of the sort once worn by Yasser Arafat, a large white cloth with red embroidery and a rope-like arrangement to hold it on the head. I'm very reluctant to wear it anywhere these days, for fear of how it may be misinterpreted. But no one in Memphis seems to mind if I wear a distinctively Jewish skullcap to the mosque, or a distinctively Muslim skullcap to the synagogue. In fact, people at each place have asked where they could get an interesting cap like that.

Zomba.

We were in Zomba, the old British capital of Malawi and still the seat of the parliament. The president and other government offices are in Lilongwe. We were told that the telephone line between Zomba and Lilongwe was out of order about three days a week, because the country is so poor and barren that people cut the telephone poles for firewood. As we walked along, we heard the call to prayer and realized we were standing outside a mosque. This was before we were regular mosque attendees and knew the customs, so we stood by the door looking uncertain until someone invited us in. The mosque was being remodeled and enlarged. The wall between the men's and women's sections had been removed and not yet replaced, and the local women had stayed home that Friday. Where could we sit? Someone put us in folding chairs on the other side of the discolored line on the rug that marked where the wall used to be. After the service, some traditionalists present objected to Eunice having been put in the same space as the praying men, and they got into a heated but very friendly argument over whether the discolored line was a sufficient separation. As the arguments were translated for us, I realized that this was exactly the same discussion, with exactly the same arguments, that a liberal Orthodox Synagogue would have had under exactly the same conditions.

During the remainder of our visit, people would stop us on the street and say "Oh, you are the people who caused that interesting discussion in the Mosque." We had conversations with them that we never would have had otherwise. People who would have regarded us as strangers and outsiders suddenly treated us as friends. Isn't that what it is all about? We cannot afford to treat our neighbors, of whatever faith, as outsiders. And my wife and I have both found that when we go places, and listen for awhile, and speak respectfully, people don't treat us as outsiders.

Edward Ordman