

TWELFTH ANNUAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM REVIEW  
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY  
PROVO, UTAH  
JUNE 17-18, 2025

By Lawrence Edward Carter, Sr, Professor and Founding Dean of the Martin Luther King, Jr.  
International Chapel at Morehouse College

Theme: “Religion, Peace, and Human Flourishing: Understanding the Whys of  
Religious Freedom”

Sub-topic: “Liberal Religion’s Positive and Nonviolent Role in Promoting Peace and Human  
Flourishing”

- Liberal religion challenges the seeker to rise above those lacking in thought, or intelligence, or mindfulness, or self-centered solutions offered as alternatives by our consumer society. Spiritual flourishing is the key to a humane and civilized future. Religion points the way toward aspirations, “spiritual liberation,” that emerges as a life dominated by the love of reason as the art of living.
- Liberal religion’s role makes use of prophetic imagination, the ethical edge of its theology, and moral philosophy in promoting a nonviolent, positive peace and human flourishing.
- Please consider some definitions I find meaningful:
  - 1) Religion as a means toward ultimate transformation. (Frederick J. Streng, Charles L. Lloyd Jr., and Jay T. Allen)
  - 2) Religion as human engagement of ultimacy, which applies to atheists and theists. (Robert Cummings Neville)
  - 3) Religion as the primacy of value and the sharp edge of meaning. (David George Miller)
  - 4) By liberal religion, I mean an emphasis on personal interpretation and reason over strict religious doctrine, promoting individual liberty and social justice. It’s a way of understanding and practicing religion that prioritizes individual experience and critical thinking, often leading to a more inclusive and progressive approach to faith. (Google)
  - 5) Liberal religion’s multifaceted role in promoting peace and human flourishing advocates for a distinctively scriptural pluralism, offering individuals a sense of meaning, purpose, community, belonging, social engagement and cohesion, shaping cultural and moral values as coherently criticised wants, values, worship, learning, providing a framework of options for virtue ethical

cosmopolitan behaviour, a source of social control and positive change. It makes reconciliation possible between Jesus, James Madison, Martin Luther King Jr., Pope John XXIII, Dallin Oaks, Russell Nelson Sr., and Nelson Mandela.

- 6) Positive peace can be defined as the attitudes, institutions, and structures that, when strengthened, lead to a more peaceful society.
- 7) Negative peace is the absence of violence or the fear of violence, without justice.
- 8) Prophetic liberal religions encourage the practice of:
  - A well-functioning government
  - A sound business environment
  - An equitable distribution of resources
  - An acceptance of the rights of others
  - Good relations with neighbors
  - Free flow of information
  - A high level of human education; and
  - Low levels of corruption.
- The practice of religion should be in an affirmatorium of diversity maturity, and “obedience to the uninforgible” virtue ethical options.
- I believe Christianity’s unifying peace potential as the integrity of right relationships is still the key to repairing white Christian nationalism’s broken bargain with participatory democracy. (Jonathan Rauch)
- Joseph Fletcher’s six propositions are required to successfully relate virtue ethics and moral conduct to religious practice:
  1. “Only one thing is intrinsically good, namely, love [aga0e]: nothing else.”
  2. “The ultimate norm of [religious] decisions is love, nothing else.”
  3. “Love and justice are the same, for justice is love [equally] distributed.”
  4. “Love wills the neighbor’s good whether we like [them] or not.”
  5. “Only the end justifies the means: nothing else.”
  6. “Decisions ought to be made situationally, not prescriptively.”
  - Religion’s positive role helps people experience our world through a lens of value creation, bestowing love on everyone we encounter.
- It is a means towards peace and unity, co-creating the beloved economic community, living the ethical meaning of the kingdom of God, teaching the sacredness of all human personality, helping all realize their greatest spiritual magnificence, toward a society of dignitarians, believing all responsible labor has dignity. The highest level of spirituality development is sustainable cooperation. Sustainability is a synonym for justice. If cooperation is not sustainable, then it is

not just. We are spiritual beings living in a spiritual universe. This is demonstrated in our biodata, where you experience health. In society, where you can experience civilization, and the cosmos, where you can experience night and day, the four seasons, and name the constellations.

- Religion offers a foundation of established meaning through doctrines, narratives, practices, traditions, history, revelations, rituals, and symbols, individual faith, and experience.
- Religion's role teaches that moral worth increases in long-term relationships, which is not the same in isolated ethical acts.
- The liberal Christian ontological predilection that the deepest religious response to the question of life's meaning is that human existence is not self-defined, but finds its meaning and purpose in a relationship with the transcendent creator, God, ultimacy. This relationship is understood through the revelation of God in Jesus Christ and the scriptures. This perspective posits that meaning must be created individually, socially, religiously, institutionally, with a collective understanding, rather than being discovered as a given. This is one of the reasons as a Baptist (Christian) follower of Jesus, I am inspired more by "believer's baptism," because conscious choice is involved.
- Religion's role affirms freedom as an ongoing function of the universe; the ability to choose, or "free will," as a fundamental aspect of the cosmos itself, inherent to its creation: guaranteed in Christianity's alignment with liberal participatory democracy:
  - External liberty, Hobbes
  - Ability to act on the basis of one's intentions, Daruch Spinoza
  - Choice between live options,  
William James.
    - Creativity, Alfred North Whitehead.
  - Opportunity, W.E.B. Dubois
    - Social pluralism, John Dewey.
    - Integral lifestyle, Paul Tillich
    - Participatory politics, Robert A. Dahl
- Religion's role in promoting a nonviolent positive peace and human flourishing is grounded in value-based essentialism, where people believe that social groups are characterized by an underlying essence, but that essence is understood as a shared value or belief. Groups are defined by a core set of values rather than physical or biological characteristics. All religions have a shared value of commitment to the norm of their faith. For Christians that means being a serious disciple of Christ. This is why the church of our host university, backgrounded Mormon and

foregrounded Christ; by identifying more strongly with the name of the church, whose Christ it is as a shared value. "... to touch on any meaning is to be cut by the sharp edge of values and disvalues," says philosopher George David Miller.

- The Christian religion's role is rooted in love of God and neighbors. Agape or unconditional/all-conditional love is the key concept in the religion of Jesus. Christ emphasized that love for God and love for others are the foundation of a fulfilling life, with the greatest commandment being to love God wholeheartedly and to love your neighbor as yourself. Jesus instructed his followers to love even their enemies, to do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute you. This extended Jesus' call for love beyond traditional boundaries.
- In Matthew 11:29, Jesus describes himself by saying, "I am gentle and lowly in heart." This description, I believe, promotes peace. He also describes himself with other metaphors: "son of man," "the door," "the way, the truth, the life," "the good shepherd," and "the light of the world," each illuminating an aspect of his divine character and mission. Notice, he never describes himself as "the law," but he did say, "I came not to destroy the law but to fulfill it." He takes the law out of the abstract realm and makes it flesh and blood, and walks among the people. He calls that virtuous incarnation fulfillment of the gospel, the word made flesh. Jesus was clearly a communitarian for improving the quality of living in society. He said, "I came that you might have life and have it more abundantly." Religion's role is about the ethical imperative toward the moral responsibility of lifting others to better lives.
- Values are the sharp edge of meaning. Religion's role, however, is not determined by "whether value presupposes meaning, but how value functions within meaning."

(George David Miller, p. 8)