Article

Beyond Religion

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Research, poetry, and journalism on religion and current affairs

On June 8 and June 9, 2019, the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting held its third annual "Beyond Religion" conference. Over 200 educators, policymakers, activists, and journalists assembled at the National Press Club in Washington, DC to discuss the latest ideas, projects, and developments in the realm of religion journalism. The conference consisted of two workshops and six panels. The topics of discussion included religion and its connection to climate change, global health, conflict and peacebuilding, gender rights, and fundamentalism. In addition to the workshops and panels, the conference spotlighted poetry inspired by Pulitzer-backed journalism.

Poetic Voices on Religious Issues

> ***Anonymous being runs through the rubble street***
> ***The fog muffles the water in violent silence***
> ***Half demolished staircases, leading to half demolished heaven***

> ***The ruins of the city's soul on display***
>
> ***—Selam Weimer, "Aljanat fi Alkharab (Heaven in Ruins)"***

The Beyond Religion poetry contest challenged young wordsmiths to interpret the importance of select pieces of photojournalism. One of the winning poems "Aljanat fi Alkharab" by Selam Weimer, was a reflection on Moises Saman's photo for an article in *the New Yorker*. Ben Taub, the author of that article, was a Pulitzer Center grantee. Weimer and Beatrix Stone both performed their poetry during the conference.

Selam Weimer, one of the winners of the Beyond Religion poetry competition, recites her work at the conference. At the time, Weimer was an eleventh grader at Woodrow Wilson High School in Washington, DC.

Learn about the other winning poets

The Panels

The first day of the conference was dedicated to six panels on religion as it relates to peacemaking, gender, fundamentalism, civic society, and science.

- **The Role of Religion in Building Peace:** *PBS NewsHour* correspondent Fred de Sam Lazaro moderated this panel which sought to emphasize the importance of religion in promoting peaceful resolutions to the world's most difficult conflicts.
- **Gender and Religion:** When politics and religion converge, what effect does this have on women and gender minorities? This was the focus of the discussion between Aarti Singh, Sarah Aziza, Julia Canney, Ana Santos, and moderator Winnie Varghese. This panel represented journalists, nonprofit leaders, and spiritual leaders operating at the

crossroads of gender, politics, and religion.

- **Religion and the Environment:** This panel, moderated by Mary Evelyn Tucker of the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, highlighted the role of Indigenous Peoples and faith traditions in the fight to save the planet. Kalyanee Mam, Tiokasin Ghosthorse, Mindahi C. Bastida Muñoz, and Marianne Comfort shared their expertise on different Indigenous communities and their efforts to maintain a healthy relationship between humanity and the earth.
- **Religion and Fundamentalism:** In this conversation, journalists Indira Lakshmanan, Dalia Mogahed, Amit Madheshiya, Sarah Topol, and Ben Taub examined case studies to address the complicated link between religion and fundamentalism.
- **Faith and Civil Society:** In this dialogue, Amber Khan (producer of Interfaith Voices, the team behind programs including the *God and Government* podcast) joined three Pulitzer Center grantees to explore how faith contributes to justice and injustice in society. Callum McCrae discussed the conflict in Northern Ireland; Phillip Martin discussed the endurance of the caste system across the Indian diaspora; and Iris Zaki discussed the beliefs of second-generation Israeli settlers in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict.
- **The Human Elements of Science: An *On Being* Conversation with Krista Tippett and Erik Vance:** The final panel was a live taping of Krista Tippett's *On Being* podcast. In their conversation, Tippett and journalist Erik Vance sought to reconcile science and religion. They explored the neuroscience of religion, spirituality, and belief. During their dialogue, Vance made the case that empathy toward different lived experiences is the key to bridging religion and science.

The Workshops

- **The Evolution of the Religion Beat:** Krista Tippett of *On Being,* Tom Gjelten of

National Public Radio, and Pulitzer Center grantee Krithika Varagur led this workshop. They facilitated a conversation on how the landscape of religion journalism has changed over time and what is necessary to seriously cover religious issues and communities in the modern age.

- **Covering American Muslim Communities Confidently and Creatively:** The work of the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding informed this workshop, which focused on encouraging better-informed journalism about Islam and Muslim populations.

Highlights from the conference

Learn more about the conference