

# Building Bridges of Respect in Tough Times

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Firefox Northern Ireland: A time of peace | The E... +

http://www.economist.com/node/9164973/print

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**The Economist**

**Northern Ireland**  
**A time of peace**  
**Improbable and exhilarating, self-government is back**

May 10th 2007 | BELFAST | from the print edition

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IN THE end, it was conspicuous for the chuckles. Self-government returned to Northern Ireland on May 8th, as two once-implacable foes took the pledge of office, laughing merrily for the cameras side by side. The Rev Ian Paisley, the head of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), who once talked blithely of killing any IRA man who approached a Protestant home, swore to uphold the rule of law as first minister. Martin McGuinness, Sinn Fein's chief negotiator and once one of the IRA's finest, swore in as deputy first minister. For everything there is a season, the Bible says, and Mr Paisley thinks so too: "I believe Northern Ireland has come to a time of peace, when hate will no longer rule."

Tony Blair, Britain's departing prime minister, will hope so, for as he leaves office peace in Northern Ireland, for which he worked tirelessly during his decade in power, appears his most lustrous legacy. So too will Bertie Ahern, Ireland's premier and another toiler in the peace-process vineyard, for he faces a difficult general election. Most of all, Northern Ireland's almost 2m Catholics and Protestants, at each other's throats for decades, have had enough of violence. Even Mr McGuinness vowed to overcome difficulties and achieve common goals, for "this and future generations expect and deserve no less from us".

Money, as well as fatigue, brought the two sides to this point. The improbable pairing of Mr Paisley and Mr McGuinness was produced in part by fears that the British government would

[+] Feedback

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# ITALIAN IMMIGRANTS.

## WEST AUSTRALIAN OBJECTIONS.

### PROPOSAL TO PROHIBIT.

PERTH, Friday. — This afternoon a deputation representing the federal and state Labour parties waited upon the Minister of Defence (Senator Playford) and asked him to bring under the notice of the Federal Government a request that the language test provided by the Immigration Restriction Act be applied to all Italians on their arrival in the state, the object being to secure their deportation, as their presence here was considered a menace to the prosperity of Britishers.

Senator Playford admitted that the deputation had made out a prima-facie case, and he would bring the matter under the notice of the Minister controlling the department. It was certainly a suspicious circumstance that Italians moved about so methodically after their arrival, and might be taken to indicate that the men came in under some agreement. He did not see how they could prove that the men came out under contract, and the Federal Government seemed powerless in the matter. The only way to meet the wishes of the deputation would be to prohibit Italians altogether, and, of course, while the Government had power to do that straight away, proper notice must be given that Italians must undergo the language test in future. If the Federal Parliament said this should

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## Indian man attacked, set alight in Melbourne

Sat, 09 Jan 2010 18:12:53 GMT

An Indian man has been attacked and set on fire while parking his car in Australia, prompting an angry reaction in India.

The man is recovering in a Melbourne hospital with 30 percent burns to his body.

The incident comes a week after an Indian student was stabbed to death in the same city.

A series of such attacks last year led to protests by Indian students, many of whom have been discouraged from studying in Australia, the BBC reported.

Many Indians have condemned the violence as racially motivated, but the Australian police have not accepted this as motive. Violence against Indian nationals has prompted government warnings on travelling to Melbourne.

JR/SC/MD

# Overarching Questions

How can we, as Christian educators in varying contexts, respond to religious pluralism?

How do we respond to difference?

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# BIG WORLD, Small World

The 'Unknown' is amongst us...

We are confronted by our fears...

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# Structure of the presentation

The world  
in which we  
live

A biblical  
vision of  
our call

Ways of  
imagining our  
world and  
engaging  
difference

Building  
bridges of  
respect

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# The World Today

*An irresolvable and unstable pluralism - the collision and conflict of competing cultures - is and will remain a fundamental and perhaps permanent feature of the contemporary social order, both here in America and in the world.*

(James Davison Hunter (2010), To Change the World: The irony, tragedy & possibility of Christianity in the late modern world, p.202)

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# The Bible on the 'Other'

“When a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. You shall treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.”  
(Lev. 19:33-34)

‘We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. For even Christ did not please himself.’ (Rom. 15:1-3)

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# The biblical call of God's people: faithful presence

“Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, to all the exiles whom I have sent into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: Build houses and live in them; plant gardens and eat their produce. Take wives and have sons and daughters; take wives for your sons, and give your daughters in marriage, that they may bear sons and daughters; multiply there, and do not decrease. But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.”

(Jer. 29:4-7)

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# The biblical call of God's people: faithful witness

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

(Acts. 1:8)

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# Social Imaginary - Charles Taylor

*What I'm trying to get at with [the social 'imaginary'] is something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode. **I am thinking rather of the ways in which they imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations which are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images which underlie these expectations.***

...

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# Social Imaginary - Charles Taylor

...I speak of "imaginary" (i) because I'm talking about the way ordinary people "imagine" their social surroundings, and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms, it is carried in **images, stories, legends**, etc.

But it is also the case that (ii) theory is often the possession of a small minority, whereas what is interesting in the social imaginary is that it is **shared by large groups of people, if not the whole society**.

Which leads to a third difference: (iii) the social imaginary is that common understanding which **makes possible common practices**, and a widely shared sense of legitimacy.

(Charles Taylor (2002), "Modern Social Imaginaries", *Public Culture*, 14(1), pp.91-124, p.106)

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# Social Imaginary - James K.A. Smith

Our ultimate love is oriented by and to a picture of what we think it looks like for us to live well, and that *picture* then governs, shapes, and motivates our decisions and actions.

It is important to emphasize that this is a picture. This is why I have emphasized that we are fundamentally noncognitive, affective creatures. The *telos* [end] to which our love is aimed is not a list of ideas or propositions or doctrines...rather, the reason why this vision of the good life moves us is because it is a more affective...*picture* of what the good life looks like.

Smith, J. (2009). Desiring the Kingdom. Grand Rapids,MI: Baker, p.53.

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# Seeing the 'Other' as Thou

*If I face a human being as my Thou, and say the primary word I-Thou to him, he is not a thing among things, and does not consist of things.*

(Martin Buber. (1996). I and Thou, p.46)

Rather, in encounter, that person is humanised and given the dignity of one who has been created by God.

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# Building Bridges Aims & Objectives

The Building Bridges through Interfaith Dialogue project aims to assist secondary students of different faiths, religions, cultures and values in Years 10 and 11 to build bridges of trust and friendship. They learn key skills of dialogue and share personal experiences of their lives which have shaped them. These serve as foundations to negotiate, respect and engage with each other's differences and commonalities and are important qualities for leaders of our country into the future.

<http://buildingbridgesmelbourne.wordpress.com/>

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# Possible Responses

Christians, in response to other faiths, tend towards being:

Adversarial

hate, violence, argument, debate, challenge

Condemn

Convert

Accepting

relativise, question, understand, embrace

Avoiding

protect, disengage, silence

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# Responses to 'Culture' - James Davison Hunter

Defensive Against

Relevance To

Purity From

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# Responses to 'Culture' - James Davison Hunter

## Defensive Against

*Within the "defensive against" paradigm, difference is always seen as "danger", or at least a potential threat. The "other" who embodies that difference is a stranger and is construed as either a potential ally (through conversion) or as an enemy.*  
p.219

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# Responses to 'Culture' - James Davison Hunter

## Relevance To

*Within the "relevance to" paradigm, maintaining the distinctive character of Christianity has not been and is not the uppermost priority and so the point was and remains to downplay any difference between themselves and the "other".*  
p.220

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# Responses to 'Culture' - James Davison Hunter

## Purity From

*Christians operating in the "purity from" paradigm of cultural engagement tend to construe difference as "darkness". Thus, the only justifiable strategy is to separate from darkness as a community of light...the church itself is seen as the only legitimate structure for safeguarding the faith.*

p.220

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# Interfaith dialogue

Defensive Against  
Either convert or become an enemy

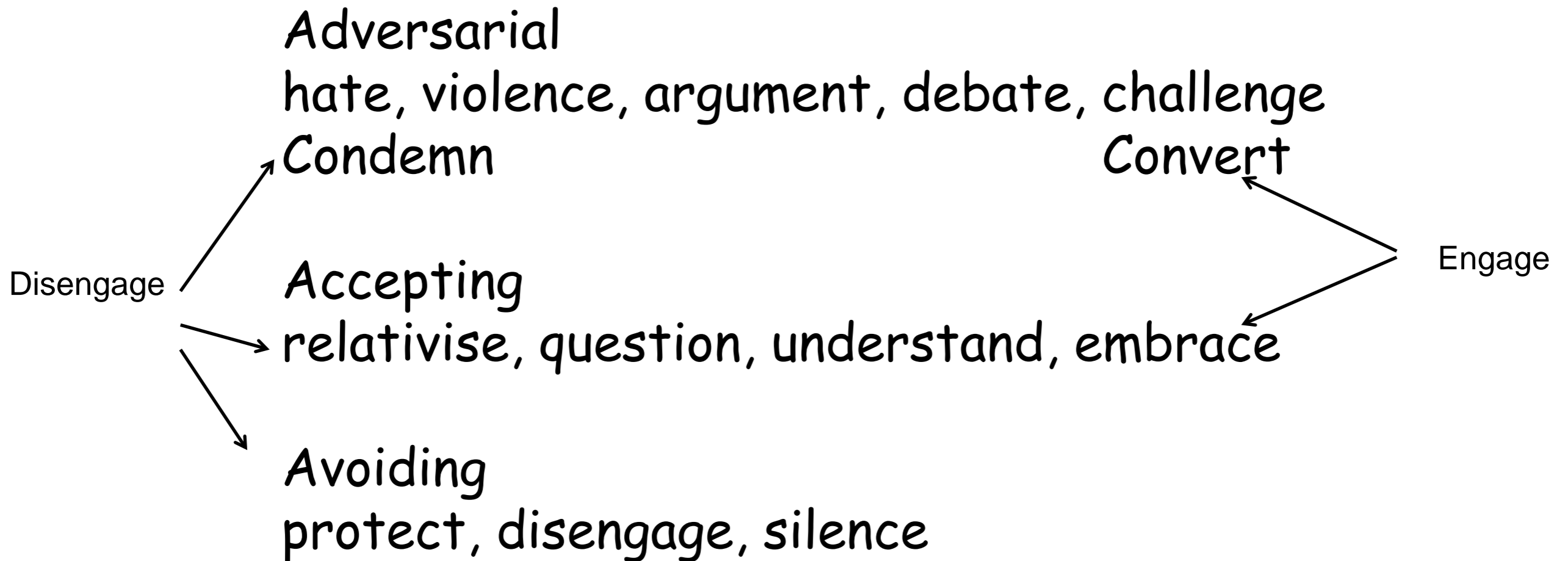
Relevance To  
We are all the same, there are no substantive differences

Purity From  
Do not interact with the 'outside world'

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# Possible Responses



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# Between 'defensive against' and 'relevance to'

*Scripture does not teach that the stranger is not strange to us or that the differences among us are somehow insignificant. But however different, the stranger or the “other” represents neither metaphysical danger nor darkness. When one’s life is “hidden in Christ”, the existence of the other neither threatens nor diminishes.*

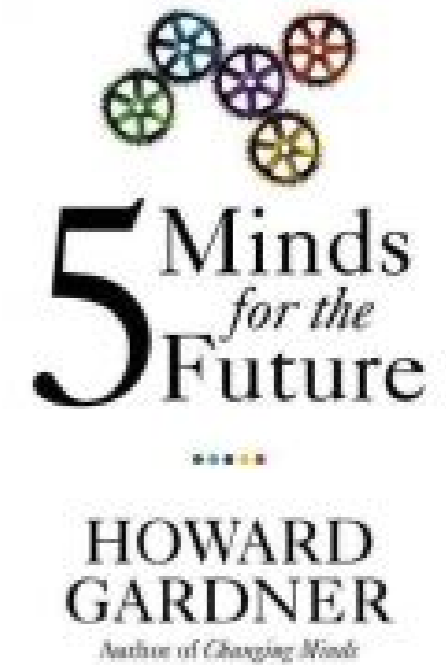
(James Davison Hunter (2010), To Change the World: The irony, tragedy & possibility of Christianity in the late modern world, p.246)

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# The Respectful Mind - Gardner

*humans, must somehow learn how to inhabit neighbouring places – and the same planet – without hating one another...*



*...rather than ignoring differences, being inflamed by them, or seeking to annihilate them through love or hate, I call on human beings to accept the differences, learn to live with them, and value those who belong [to other faith traditions]*

(Howard Gardner (2009), Five Minds for the Future, p.107)

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# Respect...not repudiate or relativise!

*Respecting and understanding the worldviews of others requires neither the repudiation of one's own tradition nor the relativising of all traditions. It requires not the agreement of rational uniformity but the commitment to love others in their particularity – including their particular ethnicity, social class, religious faith, etc.*

*Students may be encouraged both to understand their own way of being and to embrace those of other faiths, thus avoiding insularity and, hopefully, mutual suspicion – though not, of course, disagreement.*

(Doug Blomberg. (2011). "Faith-based schools, free exercise of religion, and inter-faith dialogue:", *CTJ*, 19(3), p.16)

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# Closing Remarks

1) The world we inhabit is pluralistic.

We are connected to others

We are closer to people of other faiths

This requires us to respond.

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# Closing Remarks

2) We need to engage the bible more imaginatively so we can respond alternatively to the “defensive against”, “relevant to” or “pure from” categories

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# Closing Remarks

3) Truly encountering an other - as the Building Bridges program attempts to provide the opportunity for young people to do – is necessary for real change.

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# Closing Remarks

4) Being a faithful presence in all aspects of life is the call of Christians.

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# Closing Remarks

5) We are moved and motivated by social imaginaries – by imagination and practice (cultural liturgies) – more than we are theory and we must respond accordingly.

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# Closing Remarks

6) Humbly treating the stranger as a native is the radical, gospel way.

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# Thank you!

How can we, as Christian educators in varying contexts, respond to religious pluralism?

Questions, Comments, Discussion

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# Afternoon Tea

14:00-14:30

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