

The Fordham Center on Religion and Culture Spiritual *and* Religious: What Can Religious Traditions Learn from Spiritual Seekers?

December 2, 2013
Fordham University | Lincoln Center Campus
Pope Auditorium | 113 West 60th Street

Moderator

Serene Jones

President, Union Theological Seminary

Presenters

Nancy Tatom Ammerman

Author of Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life

Peter Phan

Department of Theology, Georgetown University

Lauren Winner

Author of Mudhouse Sabbath: An Invitation to a Life of Spiritual Discipline

JAMES McCARTIN: Good evening. Welcome to Fordham.

I'm Jim McCartin, the Director of the Fordham Center on Religion and Culture, and it is my pleasure to introduce this evening's panel, exploring the question of what religious traditions can learn from spiritual seekers.

When Americans talk about spirituality, on the one hand, and religion, on the other, we all know what these things mean in our cultural lexicon. Spirituality tends to be shorthand for a personal meaning-making endeavor that is often understood as liberated and liberating, a means of both self-expression and self-realization. Religion, on the other hand, is shorthand often for institutionalized faith, something that is often seen and depicted as limiting upon individuals, demanding their assent to defined doctrines, to established rituals.

But to what extent do these two distinct categories, as they are understood at least in our contemporary culture, reflect the fullness of how people actually approach and experience the sacred or the divine? And to what extent might it be better to envision the spiritual and the religious, not as opposite poles, but as overlapping and contiguous domains? While we're at it, how should we understand the growing number of people who identify as, or at least give evidence of being, multi-religious or inner religious in their orientation?

The underlying premise of tonight's forum is simple: phenomena that have been labeled — things such as spiritual seeking, spiritual but not religious, being multi-religious or inner religious — these, among other names, have long since become influential, signifying, among other things, how over a few generations ordinary people have assumed substantial power in defining and remodeling the life of the spirit according to their own expectations and desires.

Of course, within the context that I am describing, the context of spiritual seeking, there

still persists traditionally designated spiritual leaders, and they still continue to exercise authority. But, as so many variant approaches to the divine have gained popularity, it seems that ordinary people have generally become more spiritually independent, more spiritually self-reliant, and, in a sense, spirit seekers have become everyday religious leaders in their own right, shaping the spiritual and religious landscape along the way.

So out of these circumstances another important question arises: What lessons might today's spiritual teachers seek [sic] long-established faith traditions and religious institutions? As these traditions and institutions look to the future, what lessons might these everyday spiritual leaders have to offer? And how might traditions and institutions fruitfully respond?

We have assembled an expert panel tonight to discuss these and other questions. But before I hand things over to them, let me ask some things of you. Please, first of all, silence your electronic devices. Please do, before you leave, sign up for our mailing list. And please use the cards and pencils on your seats to write out your questions — write legibly, if you will — for our panelists tonight.

Now let me introduce tonight's moderator. Dr. Serene Jones is the sixteenth president of the historic Union Theological Seminary in New York City, the first woman to head the 176-year-old interdenominational seminary. Formerly a member of the Yale Divinity School faculty, she also currently holds the Johnston Family Chair for Religion and Democracy. She is the author of several books, including *Calvin and the Rhetoric of Piety* and *Trauma and Grace*, and is a leading theologian who regularly contributes to scholarly and public discussions on matters of faith, social justice, and public life, which is why we have invited Serene Jones to be here tonight.

Please welcome Serene Jones.

SERENE JONES: Thank you. Good evening.

I want to begin by thanking Jim and the Fordham Center on Religion and Culture for pulling this evening's conversation together. A lot of work went into it.

The most important part of work that went into it came at the very beginning, in just the simple act of imagining this conversation, because it's an unusual conversation to be having. We read a lot in the papers, we go to academic academy gatherings, and we hear a lot about the spiritual-but-not-religious — and on both sides. We hear conversations from religious institutions going on and on and on about what religious communities have to teach the spiritual folks who don't understand how important religion is. And on the other hand, we hear a lot from the spiritual-but-not-religious going on and on about how religious institutions do not quite understand what the spiritual-but-not-religious are about.

The creative energy behind this evening's conversation is this: that these are not two separate worlds but worlds that overlap in deep and sustained ways, and what is happening in our culture today is, at its creative best, at the place where these two worlds run together, where the rivers meet and the tides and the currents swirl together.

Being the President of Union Theological Seminary, I sit daily at the place where these currents run together. Just as a small fact with respect to where our culture is and how I see it, last year at Union, a historically Protestant seminary which has for decades, if not 176 years, been a place where spiritual seekers have come — I would say probably since the beginning they have constituted maybe 10 percent of the student body — last year, for the first time in our applications, the largest single set of students applying to the

Seminary, when they were asked to check the box that described them religiously, checked a box that either said “nondenominational” or “unaffiliated.”

But what is interesting is they are walking through the doors of a seminary. So, clearly, this does not mean nonreligious. So they are spiritual *and* religious. They are walking into a community in which historic religious traditions are the fare of the day, and yet they are not identified on the surface with a particular religious tradition.

Now, what are we learning in this context about what this community of students — and dare I say that they extend beyond those who checked those particular boxes into the broader student body who also checked denominational boxes — dare I say that they reside inside the faculty, and indeed inside the hearts of many? What are we learning from them?

Well, just to start the conversation, here are a few things. What do they have to teach religious traditions? Authenticity matters. Existential depth matters. You can't rely on doctrine. Social justice has to ring true. Music, food, culture matters. Bodily practices have to mean. Buildings are not essential. Community? — hmmm. Organizational life? — hmmm. Suffering? — hmmm. Trauma? — hmmm.

There is a world of conversation to have here. We have assembled in front of you three of the smartest people out there who are thinking about these topics. I am going to introduce all three of them. Each one of them is going to spend about ten minutes talking about their work in these areas, raising some questions for us.

Before I begin introducing them, I want to ask you to pull out from under you — you may have it already in your hands — a card, and I want you to, as you listen to their words and to the conversation that will follow, write down questions that come to you. Following their words and our conversation, we'll be collecting them, and around 7:30 we're going to turn to these questions so that you, as the community gathered, will also have a chance to enter into this conversation. So don't forget. We'll get to a point where you'll have to hold these cards up for us to collect them.

Let me begin with the introductions.

First, we have Nancy Ammerman, who holds a joint appointment in the Sociology Department and the School of Theology at Boston University. She is the Past President of both the Association for the Sociology of Religion and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion. Among the eleven books she has to her name is *The Bible Believers: A Seminal Study of Christian Fundamentalism*, published in 1987, and her most recent publication, released this year by Oxford University Press, is *Sacred Stories: Spiritual Tribes, Finding Religion in Everyday Life*. Could it be more apropos for this evening's conversation? This book has been called “the most in-depth mapping of religious, spiritual, secular sensibilities yet to emerge in the world of religious studies and the sociology of religion.”

We have Peter Phan, who is the Ignacio Ellacuria Professor of Catholic Social Thought at Georgetown University. A native of Vietnam, he is the holder of three doctoral degrees and the former President of the Catholic Theological Society of America. His scholarship ranges from early Christian writers to contemporary theology of death, and from orthodox Christian iconography to studies of global missionary work and religious inculturation. Among his many published works are *Christianity with an Asian Face: Asian-American Theology in the Making*, and *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue*. Both have been translated into multiple languages.

And finally, we have Lauren Winner, an historian of American Christianity who teaches at Duke Divinity School. In addition to her work on 18th-century popular religious practices, which has won her prestigious fellowships at Princeton and Yale, she is among the most noted spiritual writers in contemporary America. In 2003, she released her widely acclaimed memoir *Girl Meets God*, exploring her embrace, first, of orthodox Judaism, then of Christianity. Over the past decade, she has also authored *Mudhouse Sabbath; Still: Notes on a Mid-Faith Crisis*; and, most recently, *Real Sex: The Naked Truth About Chastity*.

It's hard to imagine a more eclectic and acclaimed group of speakers and authors. So I will turn it over to them and ask Nancy to begin our conversation.

NANCY AMMERMAN: Thanks so much, Serene and Jim, and all of you for being here on this winter's eve.

There is a lot of spiritual seeking going on out there. One of the things I want to do here at the beginning of our conversation this evening is actually probably complicate things a little bit and play the sociologist, tell you a little bit about what we know about these various populations of people that we talk about as if we know what we're talking about. And, I dare say, we still don't really know what we're talking about. But what I want to do is start by just dealing with some of the terms and some of the populations.

The Pew Forum has been really helpful to us in doing some really fine research on various populations of people around religion in the United States. Their 2012 Report, *Nones on the Rise* — and for those of you who aren't sociologists in the room, that's spelled n-o-n-e-s; it's not the ones on the bus [Laughter] — *Nones on the Rise* was a report that showed that 18 percent of American adults say "yes" to describing themselves as spiritual but "no" to the question they get asked about religious.

Now, like many surveys, this is actually two separate questions. They are not asking people "Do you consider yourself spiritual but not religious?" They're asking "spiritual" and "religious" and then they cross-tab the two of them.

Now, that one-in-five percentage may seem a little low, if we are thinking about the cultural climate that I suspect many of the people in this room live in, and certainly low compared to the entrants at Union Seminary. Many of us live in the kind of cultural climate where saying that you are spiritual-but-not-religious is kind of de rigeur.

What I want to invite you to do throughout the evening is actually think about your own location and how that location shapes the way you see these questions about what these terms mean.

Now, you may also have been following the news about this growing percentage of Americans who say that they have no connection to a religious tradition, the "nones," and you may have wondered about whether that spiritual-but-not-religious category is the same as that unaffiliated category. The really quick answer to that is absolutely not. In fact, of the spiritual-but-not-religious, according to the Pew survey, only about a third are in the "unaffiliated" category; the other two-thirds actually claim some kind of affiliation with a religious tradition.

Now bear with me a minute. I'm going to run a bunch of numbers by you.

- Of the spiritual-but-not-religious, only a third are unaffiliated.
- Half of the spiritual-but-not-religious attend worship with at least some regularity.

- Two-thirds say that religion is at least “somewhat important” to them.
- Seventy percent pray, at least occasionally.
- Nearly all of them believe in God.
- There is even a conservative evangelical version of the spiritual-but-not-religious where what they are really saying is what matters is “my relationship to Jesus, not what my official religious affiliation is.”

So I think it is important for us to note this evening that the category of the unaffiliated and the category of the spiritual-but-not-religious are not the same thing. And neither the spiritual-but-not-religious nor the unaffiliated, by all the measures we can manage to come up with, can actually be thought of as seekers.

Now, a lot of us run into people who seem to fit all of those categories. They’re seekers, they’re unaffiliated, they’re spiritual-but-not-religious. But if you’re actually looking at the larger population, the people who fit this category are no more likely to believe in more alternative spiritualities; or when you ask them directly “Are you looking for some sort of spiritual fulfillment?” they are likely to say “no.”

In fact, the largest proportion of that unaffiliated category in the Pew report is described as the “nothing in particulars.”

So based on those surveys and on my own research, if I had to describe the people who claim to be spiritual but don’t want to be called religious, I would say that they are open to a transcendent dimension in their lives. And they are fairly sure we’re not alone here in the universe, but they have very little in their lives that actively connects them with a language for describing that or with practices that encourage it. They are lurking around the edges of the religious traditions, but they don’t really want to come in the doors.

What we also know from that survey research is that they are on the edges, outside the doors, for political reasons as much as for religious ones. While there are really very few demographic markers that distinguish the spiritual-but-not-religious from other people, there are political markers. That is, political liberals are twice as likely to say that they are spiritual-but-not-religious as are political conservatives.

At least since the 1990s, research has strongly suggested that the exodus from organized religion is fueled by two factors: One is young adults who are coming of age and have, frankly, had relatively weak religious experience or socialization of any kind; and second, by a strong aversion to the links between conservative religion and conservative politics. They are saying, in effect, “If that’s religion, I want nothing to do with it.”

So it is important for us to recognize that, whatever this group on the margins is, they are there in large measure either because they know very little about what they would find if they opened those doors, and because they are kind of afraid if they did open the doors they would find the ghost of Jerry Falwell.

So if that’s what is going on in this distancing from religion, what about the embrace of spirituality? I don’t have time to go into a great deal of detail here, but let me give you just a little glimpse of what I learned by listening to the everyday life stories of a broad sample of Americans about both their religious affiliations and their non-affiliation.

First, what I learned is that the large majority of stories that they tell about their spiritual lives are, frankly, pretty non-exotic. They are about God and they are about prayer and

they are about worship and gratitude and pleas for assistance, and even the occasional miraculous happening. Those kinds of spiritualities are what I called “theistic spiritualities.” They are focused on God.

But there are a significant number of stories in that archive that I have collected about what I would call extra-theistic spiritualities. That is, they are about the sort of spirituality that is experienced in nature, in art, in beautiful wondrous things that take us beyond ourselves, and finding a sense of purpose in life, in feeling connected to a community, in finding a kind of inner guiding light.

Now, the people who are relatively disconnected from religious communities, those nonaffiliated people, are, as we might expect, the more likely to talk about spirituality in those extra-theistic terms, and the people in the most committed, most conservative religious communities are the most likely to stick with just a theistic kind of spiritual language. But the majority of people out there are actually in the middle somewhere, equally comfortable talking about spirituality both as something that is directly connected to God and something that they find in a much broader kind of experience out there.

So two important points to conclude with. First, spiritual consciousness of both kinds is much more prevalent among people who do participate in religious communities than among the people who describe themselves as spiritual-but-not-religious. I sometimes say I think that’s a bit of a mythical crowd — except maybe they’re all up at Union; I’m not sure. [Laughter]

What I argue in my book is that it is hard to tell sacred stories if you don’t have some spiritual tribes in which to hang out; that is, some conversation partners who also recognize that spirituality is important.

The second important point, though, is that the prevalence of that extra-theistic spiritual discourse inside religious communities means that there really is a bridge with which we can open the door, a bridge to that population outside those communities, the people who may be afraid to come in the door but, if they do, may find that there really is a common language that they can share to begin their journey.

Thank you.

PETER PHAN: Again, let me begin by thanking Jim for the invitation and Serene for her very generous introduction. Had I accepted the position they offered to me at Union Theological in 2004, you would be my president today.

The two key categories under consideration are religious and spiritual. Combine them in various ways and you will come up with four groups: first, both religious and spiritual; second, religious but not spiritual; third, spiritual but not religious; and fourth, neither religious nor spiritual. Whether these four groups are fully and clearly differentiated from each other is hotly debated today.

The Piper Report is of course what you mean by “religious” and “spiritual.” The meanings commonly assigned to these two terms by scholars of religion are by no means uncontested, as a clear-cut separation between religiosity and spirituality does not always obtain in real life.

Furthermore, although it is widely assumed that the religious-but-not-spiritual and the spiritual-but-not-religious are mutually exclusive alternatives, each with its own contrasting sets of doctrinal beliefs, ethical behaviors, and spiritual practice, such an assumption has been shown to be a modern invention.

Finally, sociological and theological characterizations of these two groups with a list of contrasting features have not commanded universal agreement.

Of the four groups, the spiritual-but-not-religious — the SBNR, to be short — has received the lion's share of scholarly and ecclesiastical attention in the United States, as their number is predicted to continue to rise. The study, the 2012 Pew research project, the Religion in Public Life project that Nancy just mentioned, has given a lot of information. I will not go into it.

As important as the SBNR are for the U.S. churches, especially in view of their projected numerical rise, I am profoundly encouraged by the choice of the Fordham Center on Religion and Culture to center our panel discussion on the first group, namely the religious-and-spiritual. Of course, this focus does not mean that we can afford ignoring the challenges of the SBNR. Rather, it puts them in proper perspective.

First, as Nancy has pointed out, religiosity and spirituality are not polar opposites but, rather, often intersect with each other in real life. Pure and unalloyed SBNR are few and far between if their beliefs and behaviors are taken into account and not just their self-descriptions and our theoretical constructions of religion and spirituality.

Furthermore, as Linda Mercadante has noted, there are many church-attending Protestants and Catholics, but it is those that are sociologically classified as religious and religiously affiliated who fit the broad description of the SBNR rather well, and very often identify themselves as such.

Lastly, as Harvard Professor Amy Hollywood has argued, a separation between practicing religion (that is, being religious) and individual religious experiences (being spiritual), especially those who follow the Benedictine tradition, for these people, particularly in the Middle Ages, the separation between religiosity and spirituality makes no sense whatsoever.

In other words, ideally, Christian life, and any other life for that matter, must combine both religiosity and spirituality — communal practice and individual experiences, institutional belonging, and personal devotions, obedience to tradition, and personal religious quest.

Thus, rather than perpetuating the dismissive critique of the SBNR as anti-authority and anti-community spiritual anarchists and narcissists, incapable of permanent commitment and belonging to religious communities — or, in the universe of Princeton University sociologist Robert Wuthnow's more charitable description of them as spiritual shoppers — I propose to view these spiritual seekers of whom the SBNR are a part as trailblazers in the practice of a form of Christian life both religious and spiritual that is especially appropriate for our times.

If being religious today means necessarily being interreligious — and I have argued elsewhere that it is — then the practice of being Christian today must be done in the concrete encounter with other religions in order to learn from their doctrinal beliefs, ethical norms, and spiritual practices. This learning normally takes place not by means of individual and private study, but in a respectful, humble, and prolonged dialogue within oneself (intra-religious dialogue) and with others (interreligious dialogue) in the community of believers of other traditions, in shared life, in collaboration for the common good, in theological discussions, and, above all, in sharing spiritual experiences.

My argument for this kind of hybrid, but not synchronistic, religious practice that is appropriate to and required by our contemporary world is rather complex. But it may be

summarized by recourse to the work of a former theologian of Fordham University, Ewert Cousins. According to Cousins, our 21st century has initiated what he called the second axial period. The notion of axial period, of course, originated with Karl Jaspers, who sees in the period from 200–100 BCE the establishment of religious foundations of humankind and the rise of individual consciousness, individual identity, individual moral responsibility, and self-reflective analytic critical logos. Whereas the axial consciousness released enormous spiritual energy by opening up a new subjectivity and individual path to the transcendent, it has also distanced the human spirit from the earth, matter, nature, and the body. Furthermore, the religions that arose during the first axial period developed independently from each other without extensive communications among themselves, and therefore without being able to be challenged by and to learn from other religions.

In the 21st century, in Cousins' estimation, a new form of consciousness has occurred and is occurring everywhere simultaneously in the world, a transformation so wide and so deep and so different from Jaspers' axial period that it deserves to be called, in Cousins' coinage, the second axial period. Whereas the consciousness of the first axial period is individual consciousness, that of the second axial period is global consciousness — or, to use Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's famous word, planetization.

Whereas in the first axial period the movement is towards divergence, separation, in the second axial period the movement is towards convergence and towards a single planetized community in which the singularity and distinctiveness of each individual is not labile but, rather, is affirmed, but this time in relation with other individuals.

In the global consciousness of the second axial period, the religions, which in the first axial period have arisen independently and separately, must now meet each other in what Raimon Panikkar calls dialogic dialogue and share their treasures and wisdom not to form a global and undifferentiated super-religion, but to enable a richer, more dynamic, more complex form of religious consciousness in each believer.

In some cases, this dialogic dialogue has led to a type of dual or multiple religious belonging. Among Christians, the more famous include the Benedictines; Henri le Saux (the French guy), also known as Swami Abhishiktananda; and Bill Griffith (the British); the Jesuit Hugo Enomiya-Lassalle in Japan; Aloysius Pieris in Sri Lanka, William Johnston in Japan; and Robert Kennedy here in New York; the Dominican Father Oshida again in Japan; the Oblate Michael Rodrigo; the Spanish Indian priest Raimon Panikkar, whom I already mentioned; the American theologian Paul Knitter at Union; the former Episcopal priest Ann Holmes Redding; Roger Gallus [phonetic], who has died; and Roger Maioli [phonetic]; and many others — and the tribe is multiplying.

In many ways, the SBNR are paving the way forward in this global consciousness, complexified through the dialogue of cultures and religions, at the grassroots level, and in much larger scale.

As with any human enterprise the SBNRs' religious quest is flawed, and critics of this form of religiousness have not been shy in pointing it out. But it is important to know that the SBNRs are no more liable to errors and excesses than the religious-but-not-spiritual. The point [?] in the title of our roundtable put it facetiously, to be spiritual *and* religious.

Pope Francis in his recent Apostolic Constitution *Gaudium Evangelii*, speaking of non-Christian religions, says, and I quote: “As Christians, we can also benefit from these treasures built up over many centuries, which can help us better to live our own beliefs.” Amazing words! I would never expect this coming from the pen of any pope. [Laughter]

The spirit, it seems, is blowing in the direction of dialogic dialogue.

Thank you.

LAUREN WINNER: I want to echo the thanks that everyone else on the panel has expressed. It is a real honor to be here. I have to say it's especially an honor to be on a panel with Nancy Ammerman because the first real book about American religion that I read in college was one of hers. So I felt like I was meeting a rock star tonight. It was very exciting. Thank you, Nancy.

I approach this question of what religious traditions and institutions can learn from spiritual seekers very much from a position in mainline Protestant religious institutions. I am an Episcopal priest. I teach at a United Methodist divinity school. In that context, the context of the Protestant mainline, there is an ongoing conversation about spiritual seekers. The conversation is almost tautologically wrapped up in anxiety about what we term the decline of the mainline church. We now know from recent data that that thing that we call "decline" has also infected the Catholic Church and evangelical churches. Whether or not we should call it "decline" is another question.

So, not infrequently, one can hear in these mainline conversations a kind of snippy, anxious condescension that seems to blame all of the problems on the mainline, on the seekers — "If only the seekers would stop seeking and would just get themselves back to their local mainline church, then all would be well." [Laughter]

So I would like to propose alternatively that seekers are a gift to the mainline church and to all churches and all religious communities, because perhaps what the institutional church in the United States needs more than it needs anything else is a witness to remind the church that people are actually quite hungry for a deep connection to God. I would propose that seekers are that witness to those of us in the church. Seekers, whether they wish to or not, testify to the church about people's deep hunger for God and for a connection to God.

Now, that hunger is not absent from the church, and I don't mean to imply that it is. But if you log enough hours at an American mainline church, and probably at a Catholic church or an evangelical church or a Conservative or Reformed synagogue, etc., if you log those hours, it often begins to appear that people are more interested and invested in maintaining their institution and less interested in that vital connection to God.

So what institutional religion can learn from seekers is that we, the institutions, need to get more real and more clear about the actual practice of our faith and more clear and more interested in why our faith matters.

In my own communities, when you talk to people about why their faith matters, why they are at church on Sunday, they are quick to say two things — Nancy may tell me that this is actually sociologically false; this is just my little anecdote — that they are there because church feels like a family to them, that their circle of friends is there; and then they are very quick to say something about service and how being in church gives them an opportunity to do good things and be a good person and perform acts of service.

Now, I think that circles of friends and acts of service are wonderful, and I think they are a part of how we go about being disciples of Jesus, and I don't want to knock them. I do want to ask why we in the mainline skip over things like "How is your prayer life, and how is your life with God, and what does your circle of friends and your service have to do with your prayer life and your life with God?"

So, perhaps in response to seekers seeking that deep connection to God, we in the church and ecclesial institutions can encourage our communities to do something like pray daily or weekly learn something about your own tradition or share something about your faith every week.

One central thing that mainline traditions have learned from seekers is the centrality of practice in religious identity and religious community. It is now something of a commonplace among historians of American religion to say that we will look back one day on the immigration reforms of 1965 as having a huge impact on the American religious landscape.

To grossly oversimplify this commonplace, it is that white American Christians, and particularly Protestants, learned from practitioners of Eastern religions what it might look like to have practice as a central constitutive category in religious life. That discovery led some white Americans to begin practicing Buddhism, but it also led Christians, and I would suggest also in a different way some American Jewish communities, to rediscover the practices that were deep in their own communities' history. So now there is renewed interest in specific Christian practices among American mainline Protestants, renewed interest in contemplative prayer, *Lectio Divina*, spiritual direction, and so forth.

There is also, to me, the staggering reality that the very category of spiritual practice or spiritual discipline has become central to how mainline Protestants talk about what spirituality is, so much so that when I ask my first-semester students at Duke Divinity School to define spirituality or tell me what they think spirituality is, they can't answer the question without reference to spiritual practices and spiritual disciplines, which would not have been the case fifty years ago.

So seekers, in other words, have inspired Western religious institutions to look more deeply into our own traditions' resources, rather than simply cede the terrain of spiritual practice to other religious traditions.

Finally, I think that it is worth considering what religious institutions have to learn from the things that seekers are not looking for. I would suggest that they are often not looking for a financial tie to a religious institution, an ongoing financial tie to a local church and a local denomination. That's what we mean when we talk about the decline of the mainline; we're talking about congregations that will have fewer congregants and fewer dollars.

Having less money will mean chiefly two things for the mainline: it will mean that those communities' relationships to buildings will look different than they looked in the 20th century; and it means that their relationships to a paid clergy will be different. In short, fewer and fewer local religious communities will have a full-time paid clergyperson. That terrifies church people. It terrifies me because my retirement actually depends on that system working for another few decades. [Laughter] But it terrifies congregations of lay people as well.

But I would suggest that there is actually a real invitation there to religious institutions, again speaking from the Protestant mainline. If there is not a full-time clergyperson, well, maybe so much the better. Maybe the mainline will learn how to actually have a priesthood of all believers. If the church shrinks, maybe that is so much the better too.

At Duke we talk a lot about the end of Christendom. Soon there will really be no reason to be in church, except if you want to be a disciple of Jesus and hang out with other disciples of Jesus. There will be no other compelling reason to be in church.

So if the churches gain a few seekers who find their vital connection to God in the church story, in the Gospel, and if we no longer attract people who are in church for business connections or because it's Christendom and so church is cool — well, in fact the people who actually wanted to give their lives to Jesus and to following Him and living like Him, that group has always been a pretty small group of people.

I just want to end on a note that I'm completely cribbing from the historian Leigh Schmidt and his wonderful book *Restless Souls*, which is a history of the rise of spirituality in 19th- and early 20th-century America. In his book, Schmidt talks about Thomas Kelly, who was a mid-20th-century Quaker writer, an acolyte of Rufus Jones. In 1940, Kelly wrote a reflection on secret seekers. Schmidt explains that the term "seekers" gets popularized by Emerson in 1841. In his essay *Circles*, Emerson writes about being "a seeker with no past at his back," etc., and then it becomes a popular term in circulation.

Thomas Kelly picks up the term a century later and Kelly writes this, and it is very consistent with what we have heard before. Kelly is pointing to the secret seekers who are in the 20th-century Quaker meetings and other churches. He wrote that seekers were not just outside the churches; they were in churches and yearning to figure out how to satisfy the deep, deep hunger of their souls in church.

"For today, here in America, here in this meeting or this church service, and hearing your meeting on Sunday morning," he wrote, "are seekers. We are all seekers."

I would like the church to prove Kelly right.

SERENE JONES: Thank you all. So much here to explore.

I want to open up our conversation among you by asking the question of the day, and that is the question about the role that Pope Francis is, surprisingly, playing in the world of the religious and the world of the spiritual. In the world of the spiritual-but-not-religious and the spiritual-and-the-religious — in fact, in all four of your categories — he seems to be moving across those. He is now the most Tweeted person in the world. [Laughter]

LAUREN WINNER: Is that true?

SERENE JONES: Yes, he is, he is the most Tweeted single person in the world right now.

So can you just talk about what is happening there with respect to this conversation, what you see unfolding before us?

PETER PHAN: Since I am the token Catholic on the panel [Laughter] —

SERENE JONES: This is the global consciousness happening, literally.

PETER PHAN: Yes. And since I cited his words at the end of my little presentation — as you know, I rarely cite papal statements, for obvious reasons. [Laughter] But this is one of those statements that you never expect coming from a papal pen. He said explicitly that we have to learn from these traditions so that we may be better Christians ourselves. I mean what else can you talk about the spiritual-but-not-religious? They try to look at — they are not, as you mentioned very well, they are seekers; they are not just leaving the church for just leaving the church. They are seeking. They find in other religions something that can help them to be better Christians, better religious, better whatever. And the reverse is true, by the way, so also Buddhists and Muslims also.

So I find Pope Francis — you remember the first thing he said? “Well, you know, God also loves the atheists” — the fourth category, neither religious nor spiritual — “and God saved them as well.” He said like this, just threw out the line. It made many conservative Catholics very mad.

NANCY AMMERMAN: For me one of the most interesting things about watching this new papacy unfold is the fact that he is the most Tweeted person in the world, how visible he is, what incredibly strong response there has been to him. For me that is a real sign of hope in all sorts of ways, because what I was saying earlier about the exodus from the churches being so tied to political things, that so much of this population of people that are on the outside of organized religion are on the outside of organized religion because all of the public religious figures they have seen in their experience have been bad ideas.

To have Pope Francis out there as someone who, at least for now, seems to be representing such an amazingly humane and open and spiritual and — by golly, you can't get any more religious than being Pope [Laughter]. So, you know, he kind of represents a really important, I think, moment of openness to a new kind of conversation about what it means to be religious in this kind of open, seeking, spiritual way.

LAUREN WINNER: I was fascinated by Jim's opening comment that spiritual seeking is a fundamentally democratic (small d, democratic) action, that it is about people taking authority for their religious and spiritual lives into their own hands.

Did I totally bastardize what you said?

JAMES McCARTIN: No. Thanks.

LAUREN WINNER: Okay.

So then, what's fascinating about the response to the Pope — and I would say what I feel in a smaller way is consistent with mainline communities' panic about not having full-time clergy — is that there is still this concomitant openness to and desire for religious leadership and — yeah! — even ordained religious leadership, holding together what I suppose don't have to be conflicting impulses, but the yearning for leadership, quite clerical leadership, and that democratic impulse seems fascinating to me.

NANCY AMMERMAN: But I think there is another interesting thing that a pope, or somebody like this, can do, and that is to model what it is to speak about life in spiritual terms. If you are not in any kind of ongoing conversation with people who are speaking about life in spiritual terms, it's a kind of toe in the water into that conversation, to at least be able to read the Pope's Twitter feed and respond in that very disembodied kind of way.

PETER PHAN: When I was in Pittsburgh several weeks ago, there was a picture, a photograph, of the Pope embracing four men. I don't know whether you have seen that photograph. The men suffer from some kind of neural disease and are like lepers. He just embraced them.

I found all the comments to be so amazing, because it really responds to what we were saying. I would say, “I am not a Catholic but this man touched my heart. I do not believe in God at all, but this man made me think again.” I mean, again the list of comments — “I am not spiritual, I am not religious, I am neither religious nor spiritual, and vice versa, but this man can make me think again about the role and the message of Jesus.” I think that is what you are talking about, these questions.

They see something genuine. You talked about authenticity at the beginning. Something authentic in religious life touches people.

LAUREN WINNER: I think again in this case, though, heroic. I mean in a smaller scale, in Durham where I live, there are a number of these so-called new monastic communities. They are sort of Protestant and/or ecumenical Catholic worker communities. Watching young Christians in their twenties be totally drawn to these models — that there is a certain heroism in it. So the dance of what you aspire to and what attracts you — you know, I feel like it is so tempting to read the enthusiasm for the new pope as the triumph of good leftist politics. I am very tempted to have that reading, but it remains to be seen.

NANCY AMMERMAN: But that service piece I think is again an interesting one, that part of what people are drawn to is that he seems to actually walk the walk in some rather heroic ways.

You mentioned people say they are at church for friends and the opportunity to do good deeds, and that is in fact sociologically right. And it's not to be sneezed at. You are absolutely right that it is going to lose its power without the worship and the spiritual practice alongside it. But people are recognizing that even to be able to do the kinds of good deeds they want to do in the world, they need a community of people who will support them in doing that and who will remind them of why it is important to do it.

LAUREN WINNER: This really matters to me talking about the Episcopal Church. I wish that we weren't being taped, but here goes.

What the Pope is doing and what my Catholic worker friends are doing is articulating the service in religious and theistic terms, as opposed to saying, "We're just going to adopt the UN's Millennium Development Goals because they are good goals and we are the Democratic Party gathering on Sunday morning." There seems to me a huge difference between that.

PETER PHAN: Absolutely, you are right.

NANCY AMMERMAN: One of the things that really came out very strongly in my research was that the people who were most able to see their lives in spiritual terms and to tell stories about their everyday lives that went beyond the gatherings on Sunday morning or anything else, the people who were able to do that kind of spiritual work in their everyday lives were people who had communities of people with whom they gathered. That meant for most of them in some kind of an organized religious community.

But it wasn't just that they showed up for the sermon. They had some kind of a small group or other kind of ongoing conversation where there was this kind of mixing back and forth of "here's what I'm worried about at work, here is what is happening in my family, here is what is happening in my neighborhood, and we're praying about it and we're talking about it in spiritual terms." So there was this real permeability of the everyday life and the spiritual that they were able to do in these places that were dedicated to doing that kind of work.

SERENE JONES: But just to throw in the mix here, yes, I think it is about spirituality. But what I see if we add something like Occupy Wall Street into the mix is that it is about a sense of community, the possibility of goodness, love, authenticity. I'm not sure it is necessarily about God. I mean just to throw that into the mix — and this gets back to the sort of question of the role in what's emerging, the necessity of God in that mix, or the

necessity of the religion in that mix. Pope Francis, obviously it's religion.

PETER PHAN: In a certain sense, I see our discussion, the issue is very much a Christian issue and probably a Christian-of-the-West issue, being religious-not-spiritual and spiritual-not-religious.

For me, who comes from a different area of the world, the question never arises — never arises — that you have to be spiritual and religious at the same time. Why is this?

The people I cited at the end of my presentation are all people working in the Asian context — India, Japan, China — because for us to be religious is to be spiritual and vice versa.

If you go to Japan, for instance, it is said, I think with some truth to it, that every Japanese is born Shinto, married as a Christian/Catholic, and dies as a Buddhist. [Laughter] Why? You are born Shinto Japanese, married as a Christian because you have such a wonderful celebration — the white veil and the maids and all that [Laughter]. They rent the Catholic Church. If you own a Catholic Church in Japan, you make good money renting out the churches for Japanese weddings. I have seen one. It is booked three years in advance. And when you die as a Buddhist, you are the best Buddhist — you are dead of course, you don't know what is happening, but the biggest celebration is the funeral.

So for me to be crossing borders, being religious and that, it's just natural. It's in our DNA. What the hell? You can baptize. So it's not a real problem for us.

LAUREN WINNER: But I think that question, Serene, gets to something that Nancy said that I thought was very interesting, which I will paraphrase. How I heard it was the assumption that some religious people have that everyone is somehow yearning for the transcendent. Obviously, people may not be yearning for the transcendent. They may be yearning for a community that does politics together.

NANCY AMMERMAN: Actually, most of the nothing-in-particulars aren't even yearning for that community. They don't seem to be particularly interested in joining up with much of anybody to do much of anything.

LAUREN WINNER: What are they interested in, seriously?

SERENE JONES: Seriously, nothing in particular.

NANCY AMMERMAN: Nothing in particular. I think there is a pretty strong segment, roughly 15 percent of the American public, that is pretty disconnected from just about everything. They are not yearning for spirituality and they are not anxious to join up with a group of people to make their community better. They are not interested in politics. They are really pretty disconnected.

For some of those — they are the young and haven't yet found their feet on the ground folks — but most of them are disconnected because they have been left behind in our society.

SERENE JONES: So can we just shift for a moment and talk about that group of people and talk about the spiritual and the religious and all four groups and how we think about that community — call them a community, perhaps a community that lacks community — but how one thinks of, to use a very old-fashioned term, the apologetic work of spirituality and religion in that context and where we are as a broader culture with respect to how

one understands, to use another old-fashioned word, the missionary work of spirituality and religion in our context today? What responsibility is there for spreading one's good news?

PETER PHAN: As one who teaches mostly undergraduates — some graduates, but mostly undergraduates — at Georgetown, which is Jesuit/ Catholic — although the two terms are kind of an oxymoron [Laughter] — but most of our students, half of them, are not Christians. I am teaching a course now of forty students. About thirty of them are not even Christians. I teach a course, death and eternal life, of which I know neither, neither death nor eternal life. [Laughter]

But you could see that these kids, once they are introduced into the classics — this is to answer your questions — when they are introduced to the classics of their own religious tradition — we read the Dhammapada; we read the Bhagavad Gita; we read Christian texts, the Bible and so forth.

As you said, most of them grew up and are left behind. They didn't have the sort of religious formation that people of my age, our age, know. So when you introduce them to this, they see that these classical texts, which represent what a most religious institution can produce, it's a kind of introduction to the spiritual life they have.

So for me the best apologetics for religion is through this, as you have these centers that have reading, meditating, reading, and even teaching these classics of spirituality. That really opened the eyes of the students because they did not know. They simply do not know.

NANCY AMMERMAN: I think your example of the urban monastic communities is a really good evangelization example of people who actually, like missionaries of old, go and live in the places where the Gospel needs to be heard and seen.

SERENE JONES: Lauren, if I was listening to you correctly, at the end you were describing a church that should be quite content with its own —

LAUREN WINNER: Decline.

SERENE JONES: — decline, yes, because it is becoming purer in its decline almost.

LAUREN WINNER: Yeah, I hear the charge of purity. [Laughter] I'm not sure that it's decline, first of all.

SERENE JONES: Purification?

LAUREN WINNER: I would say that as a Christian I don't think Jesus called us to build and then hold onto institutions forever and ever and ever and ever. I don't think that's what He called His followers to do. I think He called His followers to follow Him through their fear and keep following.

I mean I'm like a very old-fashioned Episcopalian. I hope the Episcopal Church is around. I actually think Christendom still works, like people sometimes do come for marriage counseling and stick around, premarital counseling for their wedding.

I think that — this is one of the reasons that Nancy's work is so important — I don't want to say "pure" and "impure," but that people are in church for all of these multiple different reasons and there is motley stuff happening. I think that that's wonderful. I'm just going to keep mixing metaphors. It seems like a bouillabaisse. I'll keep going.

But I don't think that the notion of a religious institution becoming smaller and having significantly less money ought — we ought not be captive to terror in that. I just perceive fear driving — fear and churches that cannot do anything missional because all of their creative energy is going to keep the roof from leaking.

SERENE JONES: Nancy, do you have anything to say about the large disconnected group that you just described in terms of this question?

LAUREN WINNER: Can I ask a question, Nancy? When you say the disconnected group has been left behind, are you saying that there's a specific political economy, that there's a class component to the disenfranchisement?

NANCY AMMERMAN: Yes, absolutely, absolutely.

LAUREN WINNER: Can you say more about that?

NANCY AMMERMAN: One of the things we do know is that people who have very little education, very little income, who are really at the bottom of the economic pile, are less likely to be engaged in religious communities of any kind.

This is true for both Anglo and African-American churches. For many, many years, of course, we have assumed that African-American churches were there in the places they needed to be in order to minister to all social strata within the African-American community. That's increasingly not the case.

So we increasingly are seeing a stratum of American culture that is the economically left behind. And they are also not at home in most of our churches.

There's an absolutely wonderful book by Susan Crawford Sullivan whose title is going to escape me at the moment, but it's about mothers in poverty. She interviews these women about the faith in their lives. They are all very traditionally religious in the sense of all the beliefs. They would look real orthodox on any survey.

But they don't go to church. Partly they don't go to church because they don't feel welcome there because they are single moms. They don't have the right kind of clothes. They don't feel welcome because they just got out of the homeless shelter and got moved into transitional housing somewhere else and they're nowhere near close to the church they used to go to. There are all kinds of ways in which people are disconnected from our religious communities that have nothing to do with spiritual seeking in the way that we usually think about that.

LAUREN WINNER: Can I just ask one more thing to you about that and then I will stop monopolizing you? To what extent is that because spirituality has become a leisure pursuit?

NANCY AMMERMAN: Well, certainly spirituality of the sort that many of us think of — browsing the Barnes & Noble spirituality section of the bookstore — is something that people who have the leisure and the money do. They go on retreats perhaps, buy the books, etc.

SERENE JONES: Before we open it up, any last questions you all would like to ask to each other?

PETER PHAN: I just bought her book. I got it two days ago from Amazon.com. So, please, Christmas is coming. If you are looking for gifts, that's the book you need to have.

SERENE JONES: Okay, here's one: "Do you have any advice or comfort for parents who are trying to raise children to be good people, caring, unselfish, and so on?"

PETER PHAN: I won't answer because I have no children.

SERENE JONES: How does the next generation — and not just their religious life, but their moral life and their moral formation, fit into this? What's the relationship between moral formation and spiritual and religious formation?

NANCY AMMERMAN: I'll jump in here because I do have a kid who is grown. I had the great good fortune of being able to be with her and my husband in wonderful communities of faith that have nurtured her from the days when she was able to learn to sing the Doxology all by herself at four, and stand up on the pew, by golly, and sing it with everybody else, to her days today as a deacon at Calvary Baptist Church in Washington, D.C., and very involved in all kinds of social justice activities.

I think the fact that she was in a congregation that the very first day we visited there every single person who led worship that day was female — this was in the mid-1980s — and where her first-grade Sunday school teacher and her first-grade Sunday school teacher's lesbian partner had a baby that was dedicated in that church. She grew up in a church that knew how to be inclusive, and also taught her to sing and pray and do all those practice things.

So one person's experience.

SERENE JONES: Lauren?

LAUREN WINNER: Not a thing.

Serene, what would you say in answer to that question?

SERENE JONES: I have actually thought about this quite a bit. I have a seventeen-year-old daughter. It's interesting that the spiritual-but-not-religious, I think at least some of the sociological literature suggests that the growing group of them are second generation. So they have been raised in homes where their parents were religious or had some sort of religious formation. So their parents, having drifted away from the church, at least got some sort of moral formation in Sunday school that gave them their political sensibilities that ground their liberal politics.

But their children don't have that. So I think that that generation actually did not pay enough attention to where moral formation happened. So we have a generation that doesn't have that grounding. So it really is a question that you can't take for granted without institutions that pay attention to that.

I don't think it's necessarily the case — although it can happen in the public school system, it's not necessarily the case that that kind of attention is given to it. If it is not going to happen in our religious communities, we do need to pay attention culturally to how it is going to happen.

NANCY AMMERMAN: Raising a moral kid is not something you do by yourself.

SERENE JONES: No.

So here is a question: "Cardinal Dulles once remarked to a *Boston Globe* reporter in a conversation about his spiritual side, 'I hope that there was some spiritual aspect to it, but

I've never had a great taste for what's called spirituality. I think it deals so much with emotions and feelings, and I don't tend to have many emotions and feelings. [Laughter] I tend to have ideas. I was interested in Catholicism ideally and intellectually. I was convinced that it was true. I was interested in truth.' Please comment."

I want to ask this question about the role of the category of truth in reflection on the category of the spiritual. Is it just about the emotions and feelings, or does the category of truth, which is commonly related to the ideas, have some status there?

PETER PHAN: I had a great honor to be his colleague for several years at The Catholic University, where I taught for fifteen years. If you know Avery Dulles, the one word that comes to your mind is that he is a gentleman, truly a gentleman.

I do know from his biography his conversion story when he was at Harvard. Typically, for Avery Dulles, the way his conversion came about was his search for truth. He found in the Catholic Church what he was looking for.

I would say that it is quite similar to Cardinal Newman's *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (The Search for the Truth), the wholeness of truth. Here conversion meant for both Newman and Avery Dulles joining the Catholic Church.

Now, speaking for myself and many other experiences I found, it is not truth in the abstract that converts people in the majority of cases. There are cases, like Avery Dulles, Newman, and many others maybe. But most cases I find it's relationship, truth as embodied in examples, in communities, how they learn.

This conversion is not just towards one community, Anglican or Catholic and so forth, but it is a conversion toward what Lonergan called in his wonderful study being in love with God unrestrictedly, however it goes.

I think that that is what really matters to us ultimately, being religious-and-spiritual and vice-versa, is to allow to feel that through emotion, to examine, leaving some examples — some monks, some nuns, some lay people, some mothers, some people in a neighborhood — that reveal to us sacramentally the love of God, and then you will fall in love with God.

SERENE JONES: Lauren?

LAUREN WINNER: I also think that spirituality is often cast as being about emotions but is not. This gets to the point that Peter made so forcefully, that this is a modern delineation. Part of the modern delineation of the spirituality also has gotten glossed as feminine.

One may not by temperament be particularly emotional, but everyone has affections. I've been teaching Christian spirituality — that is my job title, Assistant Professor of Christian Spirituality — at divinity school for eight years. I still don't know what it is that I have been hired to do exactly.

My father asks me every year when I teach my Intro to Christian Spirituality class, "What is it exactly that you teach? What have they hired you to teach? What is the subject?"

But I'm very clear that the subject is not emotions or feminine affect in the religious life. But it may be — I would say there is a difference between spirituality and Christian spirituality, or spirituality as a category and Jewish spirituality or Buddhist spirituality.

From the perspective of Christian spirituality, I would say there is a shaping of the

affections, and there is a growing in Christlikeness, and there are channels in the church that invite that, and that that is the subject. The subject is not an affective performance of emotion about God.

So study, it seems to me, and intellectual reflection, that is not going to be everyone's mode for shaping of the affections, but for people of certain temperaments that very much is, it seems to me, a big part of Christian spirituality.

SERENE JONES: So where does the gay community find a path to a God-spirit of love? Many have been rejected by churches, synagogues, governments, and individuals. What role does that play in this discussion?

NANCY AMMERMAN: Happily, there are Christian and Jewish and Buddhist communities, and even a few Muslim communities, that welcome gay and lesbian and transgender people. It's hard because there are so many that won't. So it feels scary, I think, for someone who does want to have a community and knows that there are many religious communities out there that will reject them. It's hard to get up the courage to walk in the door. So maybe we need to do some pretty effective evangelization out there to get the word out.

A lot of the religious communities that are welcoming will signal, either by words or by the rainbow or whatever, that this is a safe place to walk in.

SERENE JONES: But just to push this a little bit, I think part of it is, even in this conversation, just identifying the role that the religions' position on sexuality and gender has played in the disaffection that people have had with the category of the religion.

NANCY AMMERMAN: And it's not just gay people who are turned off by that.

SERENE JONES: Right.

PETER PHAN: Listening to you, I am reminded of the statement of Pope Francis again on the way home from Brazil on the airplane. Somebody was asking him the question, "Is there a gay lobby in the Vatican?" because there was a news leaking that there was a gay lobby.

You know, for him as a pope to go out and talk without a script in his hand is an act of courage, an absolute act of courage, to say something off-the-cuff and sincerely and honestly.

He said this, and you all know — this has been Tweeted around the world — he said, "If a gay person sincerely looks for God, who am I to judge?" You know that he said that, right, "Who am I to judge?" Would you ever imagine any other pope before him would say something like that? Cardinal Ratzinger, Benedict XVI, who says homosexuality is an intrinsically disordered tendency. Here is the Pope. He says, "Who am I to judge?"

But turn it around in a positive sense. If I am not supposed to judge, then what kind of church do we open up for these people — for other people, not just these people?

In another interview, he said, "Well, you know, I have not been talking about gay marriage, I have not been talking about homosexuality, I don't talk about contraception. People blame me for it," he said in an interview. He has shifted the conversation that turned people off for this.

So I hope that this is the new spirit in terms of how we treat people: "Who am I to

judge?”

SERENE JONES: Anyone else want to talk about that question?

Here’s an even easier one: “Talk about the rise of consumerism. How has it affected the seekers? Has it reduced the number of spiritual-but-not religious, prosperity Gospel? Has it increased the spiritual-but-not-religious? How does one’s relationship to the market break down around where one finds oneself religiously?”

Go for it. Nancy, you probably have the best way to begin this part of the conversation. You’ve already begun with the disaffected who find themselves not attached to any.

I would say, just to come back a little bit on the question about is spirituality a leisure, the women that you were describing — it’s not that they’re disattached from spirituality, it’s that they’re disattached from religious congregations, which is not about spirituality as leisure. We’re talking about old-fashioned congregations that are out there.

NANCY AMMERMAN: Yes, absolutely.

I’m reminded also of your earlier prodding to think about the Occupy movement. I really think that that movement was a moment when there were some people outside religious communities trying to teach people inside religious communities some pretty important things.

Those important things had to do with our relationship to the market and our relationship to how we make our money, our relationship to what it means to own things and what it means for some people to own things and other people not to own things. It was a really dramatic moment, I think, of spiritual in-breaking.

In many of those encampments there were opportunities for people to do spiritual things. There were chaplains. There were people who were, in effect, trying to listen to that moving of the spirit that happened in our culture.

The question is full of all kinds of interesting places we could go — the prosperity Gospel, the fact that our churches for the most part don’t challenge us around consumerism.

SERENE JONES: Just to come back to Pope Francis, that’s where he has decided to land most intensely. And yet, when he lands there, that’s the thing that people talk about the least. So if you were to pick, of all the topics we have discussed, the one that is the most central for him, it’s the one that only now our conversation has most directly turned to.

Peter?

PETER PHAN: The question you raised is dealt with extensively by Princeton University sociologist Robert Wuthnow in the book called *Religious Diversity in America*. I have just used it for the class.

He divides the religious landscape into three types. The first type he called spiritual markets; the second type he called many mansions; and the third market is one-way only. So three groups.

But to answer the question, he has drawn extensive parallels between what we call consumerism and the spiritual attitude of the so-called spiritual-but-not-religious. He represents them as drifting from place to place, buying, consuming what is to their taste

most palatable.

I find that description is quite a caricature of these people. Yes, there are people who like consuming, going from religion to religion, church to church down the street, finding what appeals to them best. But to the people I know, they are really serious spiritual questers. They are not just simply going and taking whatever they find more palatable to their taste. They are really searching for something.

So the parallel with consumerism — yes, consumerism is dangerous and so forth, but using that as a model to understand what is going on with these spiritual-but-not-religious I think is not very helpful.

LAUREN WINNER: I just want to clarify that my question about leisure pursuits was not — it's something I am pretty interested in, how and when Christian spirituality becomes a leisure pursuit, but not only in the sense that we go out and purchase time at a retreat center. But I wonder if the women that Susan Holloway is writing about in *Through My Own Eyes* — even old-fashioned congregational life takes time. If you have no leisure time because you are working two-and-a-half jobs — so it may be that there is a technical meaning of leisure that I should be more careful about. But that it is an optional activity in our society, and so if you do not have time because you are holding body together, you may not have time to hold body and soul together.

NANCY AMMERMAN: My friend Cheryl Thomson [phonetic] talks about the 11 o'clock Sunday morning hour as the most segregated hour, not just in terms of race, but in terms of class, because it is the single time of the week when the people who have the least control over their economic lives are working.

SERENE JONES: So here is a question that shifts the terrain: “Could each of you say what is the most powerful image that you find available of God today?”

PETER PHAN: The most powerful?

SERENE JONES: You can have two if you want.

PETER PHAN: For me the image is the Good Samaritan — first of all, because he was not a Jew, he didn't belong to the chosen covenanted people; he was an outsider, he was one who was despised. So we think of Christians as being saved. And here the Buddhists, the Hindus, the Muslims, the non-seekers who are neither religious nor spiritual, they are the ones who saved us, the Jews and the Christians. The image to me, therefore, is God as a Samaritan.

The second image coming from that is he looked for the people. The priests passed by, the Levis passed by, they all passed by. He is the one who stopped to take care of it. So I think the God who is a Samaritan, who is an outsider, who is despised, who is not even religiously pure in the views of the Jews, is the one who teaches us the true meaning of being spiritual and religious.

SERENE JONES: Pope Francis is the most Tweeted person in the world, and the Good Samaritan passage is the most Tweeted biblical passage in the world.

LAUREN WINNER: How do you know these things?

SERENE JONES: I don't know. Don't ask me. [Laughter]

PETER PHAN: Being President of Union.

SERENE JONES: I was at a session at the American Academy of Religion on social media and they were talking about religion and social media. It's bizarre stuff to know, but yes, I know these things.

LAUREN WINNER: I have an icon, a Christ the prisoner icon. It is a quite literal-looking icon of a very traditional iconny-looking Christ with jail bars. I find that icon and the passage in Matthew 25, the passage in which Jesus is telling His disciples that when they visit a prisoner or feed a hungry person they are encountering Him, this is entirely particular to me, in that I was drawn partially out of a long season of being quite alienated from God when I began to teach five years ago in a women's prison.

I think that that passage in Matthew 25 is often read in mainline churches, if it is read at all, as sort of marching orders for what are the good deeds you should do — like what should the mission committee or outreach committee be doing? There is this list of things: feed someone, clothe someone, visit the prisoners, etc.

But it seems to me that it is also actually a fairly straightforward set of instructions about where you should go if you want to meet Jesus. So currently in my life that icon read through that in Matthew 25 feels like the most vital image of God.

NANCY AMMERMAN: I'm glad there are theologians on the panel. Being a mere sociologist, I think for me at this point in my life the mother image is a very strong one. If I were Catholic, I would probably have a Mary hanging around somewhere. All of the different ways in which Mary is depicted, both culturally and in terms of the different times in her life, the different seasons of her role in being a mediator between us and God, that is for me an image I have been exploring a lot lately.

SERENE JONES: Thank you.

LAUREN WINNER: What is your answer, Serene?

SERENE JONES: I would say it's most recently a very brilliant colored portrait by Hildegard of Bingen, which is Christ with just brilliant rays of color — it's sort of cosmic in scope, reaching out, sort of around, a sense of the world and life, filled with vitality but also complexity.

I want to give Jim a chance to say any closing words. But before I turn it over to Jim, I just want to thank our panelists for your thoughtful comments, your willingness to just share yourselves.

Thank you all for your questions. There are so many that I couldn't get to. They were wonderful questions. I am going to give them to Jim and I am sure they will be fodder for the next conversation.

Thank you for coming and for listening.

Jim, thank you for this evening.

JAMES McCARTIN: Thank you. They were terrific questions. And of course we had an absolutely outstanding moderator this evening and an outstanding panel. What a rich conversation! I want to add my gratitude to you all.

Thanks to our audience. Thanks also to Patricia Bellucci and Emily Gordon, our student worker, who did so much to bring together this event.

I want to wish you all a very happy holiday season and put you on notice that we have some events coming up in the spring. So be on the lookout.

Take care. Have a good night. Thanks.

[Adjourned: 7:40 p.m.]