abrahamic reflections

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Lubar Institute for the Study of the Abrahamic Religions

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Lubar Institute
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Please Note: The views expressed in this journal are those of the individual students alone and do not constitute statements on behalf of the Lubar Institute for the Study of the Abrahamic Religions.

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A Letter from the Assistant Director

I am writing these lines during graduation weekend. As I walk from my office to get my afternoon intake of caffeine, I see students accompanied by parents, relatives and friends, dressed in robes, wearing the colors of their colleges. Their faces are glowing in a mix of happiness and pride. Graduation is a joyous event. It is an important step in the cycle of life, a weighty one towards adulthood. Though in the midst of the festivities, I could not help but wonder: How conversant are these graduates in matters of interreligious dialogue? More specifically, how "Abrahamically literate" are they when pressed to maneuver in a world many of whose most urgent issues have to do with the struggles among and between Jews, Christians, and Muslims? What can they bring to a world where peace between nations cannot be achieved without peace between religions?

For the last seven years, the Lubar Institute has dedicated itself to preparing undergraduates for the religiously pluralistic world of the 21st century. It has awarded a number of fellowships and organized the Lubar Undergraduate Forum. The *Undergraduate Journal* is in the fourth year of its existence. As in previous years, we were able to equip a small group of students with a basic toolkit for interfaith understanding. Like relatives and friends of graduates, the staff at LISAR is proud of all its distinguished Fellows and students. We are thankful for another year of intensive and fruitful interreligious conversations as well as the friendships our students have built across religious boundaries. And we are particularly happy about the concentrated involvement of our students in this year's White House Interfaith & Community Service Campus Challenge. At UW-Madison, this nationwide campus competition, whose initiator, Eboo Patel, came to speak on our campus at the conclusion of the Challenge, brought together a variety of campus units in an effort to combine interreligious discourse with community service.

The journal articles duly reflect the intensity and curiosity with which our current Fellows as writers approach dialogue among Jews, Christians, and Muslims. A report from a visit to Grace Episcopal Church in downtown Madison, reflections on different community service projects, presentations at student's symposia, ponderings about events involving Thering Fellow James Carroll, impressions from the Muslim Jewish Volunteer Initiative as well as thoughts about Eboo Patel's rousing presentation on April 30th - these articles all together provide solid yet nuanced impressions of last year's students experiences, contemplations, and awakenings.

On behalf of the entire Lubar Institute, I want to close by thanking our project assistant, Ariana Horn, who has been an irreplaceable and exceptional force in working with our students as they write these articles. Without her coordination and editorial help, this journal could not have been completed.

Dr. Ulrich Rosenhagen, Pr.
Assistant Director, LISAR

About LISAR

The Lubar Institute for the Study of the Abrahamic Religions (LISAR) opened in July, 2005, testament to the vision and benefactions of Sheldon and Marianne Lubar of Milwaukee, WI. Concerned about rising religious tensions world-wide and believing Jews, Christians and Muslims to be capable of prolonged and honest inquiry into their common heritages and varying perspectives, they imagined a center that would advance mutual comprehension by mingling scholars with the general public, clergy with laity, and members of different faith communities with the citizens of Wisconsin, the United States, and the world. Through encouraging people belonging to and/or interested in the Abrahamic traditions to engage each other and to find out more about both these several traditions and their intersections, LISAR is dedicated to strengthening the values of religious pluralism so vital for sustaining American civil society and peaceful international discourse.

LISAR's mission emerges from the intimate yet often bitter relations that have historically existed between Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Recognizing that the Abrahamic traditions share common origins and values, that their history has been deeply intertwined for some 1300 years, that much current popular as well as scholarly thinking tends to view them in isolation or as being antagonistic to each other, and that the legacy of misunderstanding and mistrust militates against peace-ful discourse between Jews, Christians, and Muslims, LISAR seeks to cultivate greater understanding of these traditions and their relationships by encouraging on-going discussion of these traditions among scholars, members of those traditions, and the general public.

LISAR carries out its mission by running programs in two linked spheres, the academy and the larger community. The academic enterprise contributes to scholarship and provides intellectual scaffolding for the community-oriented activities, which invite individuals to meet with members of other traditions and which, in turn, inform scholars about emerging issues in the relationships among the Abrahamic faiths. The Institute's academic projects include hosting the annual LISAR conference, offering lectures, publishing scholarly work, supporting initiatives concerning the Abrahamic faiths developed by other departments on campus, and con-tributing to the teaching mission of the UW Religious Studies program. Its community-oriented activities include campus projects such as the Undergraduate Forum and undergraduate fellowships, as well as off-campus works being developed under the auspices of the External Steering Committee, which is comprised of clerical and lay figures from around south-central Wisconsin. The merger of academic and community-oriented activities exemplifies the Wisconsin Idea, articulated by University President Charles Van Hise a century ago, that the walls of the University extend to the boundaries of the state. In the twenty-first century, those walls reach even farther.

Sister Rose Thering Foundation Speaker: Judith Banki

Jaimee Goldish, Student Fellow

I had the privilege to attend a wonderful evening at Hillel sponsored by Mr. and Mrs. Victor Tempkin. This was just one of a series of events in honor of Sister Rose Thering, who worked hard to initiate interreligious dialogue. For this particular event at Hillel, Judith Banki, a University of Wisconsin - Madison alumna, spoke about "Landmarks and Landmines in the Jewish-Christian Encounter." She was very graciously introduced by James Carroll, a close friend and the Sister Rose Thering Fellow for this year.

I went into this event with an open mind, not really knowing what to expect. I was unaware at the time that Mrs. Banki was a UW alum, which made me even more intrigued to hear her story. Also, like me, she had spent several months living in Israel, where she had "a conversion experience," although she said it was more sociological than religious. With our connections through the university, Judaism, and a strong belief in interfaith dialogue, I knew Mrs. Banki would be able to offer me great words of wisdom and advice.

Like Mrs. Banki, I found my extraordinary experiences in Israel to be less religious and more cultural. I met Jews, Muslims, and Christians from all over the world. When I attended my first day of Hebrew, I was shocked to find so much rich diversity in my classroom. The Jewish Americans in the classroom were the minority. There were Muslims and Christians learning Hebrew with me, and for the first time I felt a connection with Israel and Hebrew that was not purely religious. I began understanding the social aspects of Hebrew that brought us together. Israel is not just a country of religious diversity, it is a place of cultural identity. Like Mrs. Banki, my social and historical experiences in Israel were more meaningful than simply my religious affiliation with the Jewish people.

"Like Mrs. Banki, I found my experiences in Israel to be less religious and more cultural."

Mrs. Banki spoke of her own work and the overall transitions and steps toward breaking down the barriers between Judaism and Christianity. She read lines from Christian religious texts about the opinions of Jews. Some of the texts she read took me by surprise. For example, the charges against Judaism for acts of deicide were very unfamiliar to me. Considering that Judaism and Christianity are both monotheistic religions, I found it hard to believe that Jews were criticized for killing G-d.

Once she shared many alarming examples of some of the texts that she came across, Mrs. Banki began to reflect upon the improvements in Christians' understanding of these texts. She spoke about some of the changes and omissions made to Christian texts, a task which was very complicated and controversial. Although the problems have not all been fixed, Mrs. Banki encouraged us that the "progress in the last fifty years is remarkable." Even the mere idea of reading through religious texts to challenge its meaning is a huge step towards understanding other religions. As Mrs. Banki explained, one of the greatest and most effective ways for change is through self-examination and teaching.

After a very fascinating speech about the progression of the Jewish-Christian relationship, Mrs. Banki opened up the floor for questions. When asked how we can further improve interreligious dialogue, she described the need to accept that we are not all alike. Once we can acknowledge and truly understand our differences, we will have the ability to move forward. The only way to enhance the Jewish-Christian encounter is the gain respect for others. We have the foundations and materials, and now we need to work together to improve that relationship.

James Carroll Lecture

Joseph O'Donnell, Student Fellow

James Carroll, this year's Rose Thering Fellow, presented a lecture entitled, "Jews, Christians, Muslims: The Better Future," in which he detailed the lengthy history of violence related to religious conflict. Wishing to end such violence, he postulated a plan for a "common future." This is a powerful and motivating notion, to think that we might one day eliminate conflict between religions. For this reason I was enthusiastic and initially moved by his lecture. But, in giving more careful consideration to key points and his plan, I developed two strong concerns.

First, at the core of Carroll's argument is a claim that predicates religion as the primary source of violence. Though it is easy blame religion for much of the world's violence, there is a deeper cause. People do not individually turn to the texts of their religions and decide to engage in violence. Instead, they are led there by those who claim authority or inspire fear of other religions. These leaders have their own motives—power, control over resources, and vengeance—and religion serves merely as their justification. Removing the religious rationalization, even if possible, would not end violence, it would merely shift the justification. We have already seen this effect in the secular world, with violence generated by nationalism, patriotism, security concerns, and fear of the "other."

Second, Carroll's plan strikes me as impractical and disrespectful of religions. He identifies the problems within religions in need of change, but many of his proposed solutions involve altering the theological foundations of these faiths. For example, he calls for emphasizing revelation over salvation, but, for the majority of the denominations in the Abrahamic faiths, new revelation is no longer possible, while, for many, the concept of salvation in another life is fundamental. Carroll's plan to overhaul religious traditions will not likely find strong acceptance among adherents.

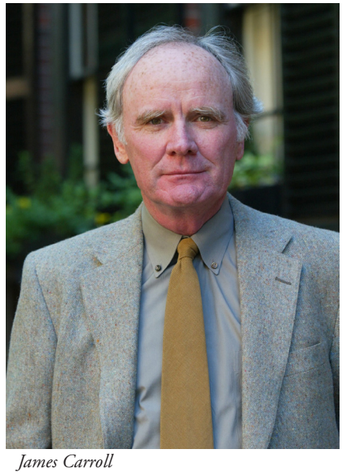
Carroll's plan for a common future seems to sacrifice religion to overcome the problem of violence, but, even if such a hurtful approach to changing religion were implemented, it would only shift justifications for violence rather than eliminating them. There is another way. The night before Carroll's presentation, Judith Banki, Senior Adviser at the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, had lectured on the future of the interfaith movement. As I reflected on her comments, I remembered this poignant idea: we must focus on understanding and respecting the differences between religions rather than seeking to emphasize their similarities.

To that end, education for both children and adults is the necessary change. All religions have at their core a respect for life and a path that emphasizes peace. If people grow to have a deeper understanding of their own religion, they will become less susceptible to religious manipulation. Likewise, education about other religions can prevent the manipulation that thrives on the fear of the "other." No religion can be reduced to a single idea or represented by a single group of followers. Understanding the diversity of beliefs and practices within any tradition breaks the stereotypes which yield violence.

So there is room for change, but not room to change religion. Instead, we must change how we approach religion. We cannot be passive; we must be involved and educated, taking on the personal responsibility to know what it means to be a follower of our God, and not a follower of someone who claims to know better.

James Carroll: Student Conversations

Jonathan Reid, Graduate Student Guest Writer



James Carroll

Thank God for present-day prophets. Sister Rose Thering (1920-2006), the late Dominican nun of Racine, Wisconsin, in October once again found herself honored by generations young and old. A fitting tribute, I think, for a woman whose efforts helped to unshackle succeeding generations from religious bigotry and mistrust.

An outspoken critic of anti-Semitism in all its forms, Thering particularly decried the long-standing charge that Jews were responsible for the death of Jesus, that they had his blood on their hands, in effect, an accusation that had for many years made its way into religious instructional materials, Catholic and Protestant alike. The Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) benefited from Thering's research on the treatment of Jews in Catholic religious curricula, which no doubt informed *Nostra Aetate* (1965), the Council's declaration on the Church's relation to non-Christian religions. That declaration, a revolutionary statement, made dialogue between Jews and Christians possible after centuries of Jewish malignment and persecution in historically Christian areas. Thering's life, as a testament to hope and trust, moves this important dialogue forward and speaks of the need to extend it. A luncheon at the UW-Madison Hillel Foundation helped to realize that aim.

Hosted by the Lubar Institute for the Study of the Abrahamic Religions and made possible by the generosity of Victor and Susan Temkin, the two-hour luncheon celebrated the work and, dare I use the term, ministry of James Carroll, the Institute's 2011-12 Thering Fellow, and Judith Banki, senior adviser at the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding. At the lunch, some thirty UW-Madison students and supporters of the Institute had the opportunity to engage these distinguished figures. Carroll, a former Catholic priest, is best known for his award-winning and best-selling books, notably *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews: A History* (2001). Banki, also a notable author and a UW-Madison alumna, was in the vanguard of interreligious dialogue in the mid-twentieth century and remains a prominent contributor to interfaith understanding, especially between Jews and Christians. Carroll, a practicing Catholic, and Banki, an observant Jew, briefly introduced themselves and opened the floor to questions from students and others.

In the course of their introductions, Carroll and Banki reflected on the importance of the Second Vatican Council's *Nostra Aetate* to their lives. Both Banki and Carroll, whose professional lives were shaped by the Council, acknowledged themselves as children of *Nostra Aetate*. That the Council was called at all was a surprising historical fact, Carroll argued. (He claimed that the Catholic Church, in its nineteenth-century promulgation of papal infallibility, had given the pope more than enough spiritual authority to ensure the authentic transmission of the faith without again convening a church-wide council.)

A compromise figure in the papal conclave, Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, who would become Pope John XXIII, a man Carroll clearly admired, called Vatican II, citing the Church's need for a good spring cleaning. Part of this aim, Carroll suggested, was to address the Church's failure, or its perceived failure, of the Jews during the Holocaust, in particular by keeping silent in the face of atrocity. The Church's need to reevaluate its position in relation to the Jews was one of the underlying issues of the Council, Carroll stated. I would liked to have heard both scholars reflect further on this point.

Students who gathered for the lunch, several of whom reflected personally on religious experiences, also questioned Banki about the status of interfaith dialogue between Jews and Protestants. In 1948, Banki related, the World Council of Churches (WCC), an ecumenical fellowship of Orthodox and Protestant churches, led the charge in condemning anti-Semitism as a sin against God and humankind. The WCC nonetheless maintained its missionary focus on the Jewish community, which, Banki acknowledged, did little to dispel the distrust that had come to predominate Jewish-Christian relations in postwar Europe. Banki admitted the difficulty of characterizing current Jewish-Protestant relations in sweeping terms, but she confirmed that many Protestant communions, particularly mainline denominations, had issued their own statements on the sin of anti-Semitism.

Both Banki and Carroll lamented the fact that, despite efforts to forge new paths in dialogue, interreligious understanding continues to be plagued by ostensible undercurrents of anti-Semitism in U.S. culture. Carroll cited Mel Gibson's film, "The Passion of the Christ" (2004), as one example of us-versus-them thinking finding its way back into the culture, and he argued that films like Gibson's might once again perpetuate the myth of Jews as Christ-killers, the charge that Rose Thering worked tirelessly to expose and undo. Students and others in attendance responded to Carroll's analysis thoughtfully. One student, a Catholic, shared her perception of the film as a sorrowful meditation on the passion narrative in the Gospels. Others also admitted to being moved by the filmmaker's portrayal. Carroll approved their genuine responses to the film as a message of God's love for the world and simultaneously advised the need to further interrogate what he viewed as implicit, and perhaps explicit, anti-Semitic elements in the film.

Dyed-in-the-wool interfaith dialoguers, individuals like Carroll and Banki, who have an authentic interest in advancing honest conversation between Jews, Christians, and Muslims, can't seem to help but speak their piece when it comes to the importance of interreligious understanding. Much like the prophet Jeremiah, who experienced God's call as fire in his bones, they have a word for our time, a word that demands to be shared and a word that, conversely, demands a response, from people of faith and from all others of goodwill.

Thank God for Sister Rose, and thank God for present-day prophets!

Grace Episcopal Church Presentation

Rehman Ur Rauf, Student Fellow

Last year, all the LISAR Fellows, along with Rev. Rosenhagen, were invited for a general question-and-answer session at Grace Episcopal Church, located next to the State Capitol. On the Sunday morning, the event started with a service, after which food was served and then approximately 20 people gathered in a small library within the Church. The event started with a brief introduction of the Fellows. Soon enough, the panel, in which the Fellows were supposed to be answering the audience's questions, turned into a two-way conversation. The atmosphere in the room was very pleasant, and everyone was very welcoming. Although it is generally taboo to talk about religion in public, this congregation was interested in knowing why interfaith dialogue was so important to us. It was a positive experience, because it was apparent that people felt the need for different faith communities to come together and discuss issues as we are moving towards a society which is becoming increasingly multi-cultural. The church members were also interested in learning about what kind of role our University plays in trying to facilitate the religious diversity and to accommodate our religious needs. A great interest also lay in knowing to what extent we are engaging our social circles in inter-faith related discussions apart from the forum.

We, the Fellows, also learned a great deal about the Episcopal denomination of Protestantism in our conversation with our hosts. After coming to know of this intellectually rich tradition, I was not surprised to find that there were a lot of highly educated people in the room. Among us was a History Professor at UW-Madison who said that he tries to not teach history just from Eurocentric view, but also tries to highlight the contributions of other faiths in order to create a better sense of understanding of the contributions of different faiths in our common history. It was inspiring to know that such individuals, whose actions are grounded in sound morals, are also sufficently well-educated and open-minded to acknowledge the positive things other religions can bring to civil society.

"My experience at the Lubar Institute has had a profound influence on the way I see the world."

My experience at Grace Episcopal was one of many that has convinced me that, as much as I feel that we have come a long way (as in our monthly forums and other inter-faith dialogue sessions), I also feel how little we know about each other and how long a way we have to go to understand each other and to create an environment where people will feel encouraged enough to openly share their faiths and outlooks on life and to realize that they are not very different from each other. Not only do we need to see how similar we are, but we must learn to respect and appreciate our differences, as the Qur'an says:

"Unto every one of you We have appointed a [different] law and way of life. And if God had so willed, He could surely have made you all one single community: but [He willed it otherwise] in order to test you by means of what He has vouchsafed unto you. Vie], then, with one another in doing good works. Unto God you all must return; and then He will make you truly understand all that on which you were wont to differ." [Qur'an 5:48]

After graduating from UW-Madison as an engineer, my hope is to become a professor at some university in Pakistan. Pakistan is a majority Muslim country, but it also houses Christian, Hindu, and Sikh populations. Religious intolerance is pervasive within Pakistan, contrary to the dream of its creator, Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah. He said in his presidential address on August 11, 1947, "You are free; you are free to go to your temples, you are free to go to your mosques or to any other place of worship in this State of Pakistan." He was a staunch supporter of the idea that minorities should have equal rights to the majority Muslim population. He dreamed of a country that was deeply pluralistic, but, unfortunately, somewhere on our journey as a country, we have forgotten that dream. The interfaith movement has challenged and altered the beliefs which I held strongly before coming to the US. They have helped me to connect with my own religious and historical ideals. My hope is to go back to Pakistan and expose my future students to the dream of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, and to share with them the necessity of inter-faith dialogue and cooperation as emphasized by Islam.

Luis Bernabé Pons Lecture: Private Practice

Lamin Manneh, Student Fellow

Luis Bernabé Pons

The fight for expressing one's religious beliefs has been a story told throughout human history. On October 6, 2011, Luis Bernabé Pons, the Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies at the University of Alicante in Spain, told us one of these tales. He took us back to sixteenth-century Spain at the height of the Spanish Inquisition, when nothing but being Catholic was acceptable, and Moriscos struggled to keep their religious identity from being taken away by the Castilian authority. "Moriscos" is the Spanish name given to Muslims who had converted to Christianity after the fall and expulsion of Muslims from the Iberian Peninsula. Even though the Moriscos were forced to convert to Christianity, they continued to practice Islam in secret. This cryptic, secret Islam left Muslims without sources of Islamic knowledge, and many lost the use of Arabic. As a result, the Spanish Moriscos practiced an "eroded Islam" in which strange practices like worshiping the statute of Muhammed were not uncommon. The Inquisition made sure that any public showing of Muslimness was met with an awesome blow of intolerance; everything that could publicly hint at one's Islamic faith was banned, such as fasting, praying, and wearing "Islamic" clothing. Yet these Moriscos fought back in secret with their practice of crypto-Islam. They wrote their Spanish in Arabic letters, what is known as the almajiado writing system, which allowed them to communicate without being understood by the authorities.

The tactics the Moriscos used to navigate through a society that was intolerant of them was impressive. However, what I found most interesting and puzzling was the fact that they adhered so keenly to a religion, the contents of which mostly had been lost to them. They did not really know the rituals, because any public showing of Muslimness was banned, and the lack of intellectuals meant that Islamic knowledge was scarce. Yet something made them refuse to let go of the Islamic part of their identity over many generations. All this new information about Moriscos got me thinking as I sat there, my eyes on Bernabé Pons giving his lecture as I tried to time travel to the sixteenth century. "Identity" was the word that kept creeping up as thoughts flowed in and out of my mind. I wondered how religion becomes part of a person's identity without ideological backing or even religious rituals. For the Moriscos, religious identity was based solely on ancestral adherance. Perhaps most of our religious practice is based on tradition, and there is not really much independent thought behind it.

The issue of public and private space resembles the position of religion in the modern Western world, where secularism insists that religion be kept in the private sphere as much as possible. Perhaps religion in the modern world is similar to religion in sixteenth-century Spain; it is not something you should express in the open. It appears that we, even in our pluralism, still partition space like we are under the watchful eye of the Inquisition. In the privacy of our own homes, we can express our religious beliefs, but in public we must keep our religious beliefs to ourselves. The U.S. government does not support or promote any religion, which is why pluralism has weakened religious expression in public. It makes me wonder: if the government had promoted both Christianity and Judaism equally in the past, would there have been as much discrimination against Jews within the culture? I would like to think not.

I feel the Moriscos story allows us to question what type of pluralism we desire in our secular society. It teaches us that when religion is pushed to a private space, it becomes secretive and can increase suspicion among religious communities as religious understanding lessens. This I feel is the greatest impact the Lubar Undergraduate Forum has had upon me. The forum provides me with information about the other Abrahamic faiths, and, more importantly, different individual perspectives within each Abrahamic faith.

Religion 101: A presentation and discussion with Chadbourne Residential College

Rebecca Schwab, Student Fellow

As a LISAR Fellow, I am entrusted with encouraging religious understanding and educating the campus and greater Madison community. When Chadbourne Residential College approached the LISAR to facilitate interreligious dialogue and understanding, I was excited to be involved. I lived in Chadbourne last year, and interfaith conversations happened at leisure in the lounges and throughout the building. As a Jewish American, I have always been concerned about the way my religion and culture is portrayed by others, and planning an event geared towards educating students already interested in discussing and understanding different religions aligned perfectly with my interests.

Along with Natanya Russek, a Chadbourne programming coordinator, the Lubar Fellows created "Religion 101." The goal was to have 5-10 minute presentations about each Abrahamic religion to inform the audience about what it means to belong to them. While each group of presenters was required to cover the major religious texts, clerical duties, cultural practices, holidays, and sects or denominations, the presenters also had the freedom to express their own religious beliefs in the manner they saw fit.

Although the presentations were aimed at a general audience, they were constructed and delivered in a way that focused on unique and interesting aspects of Jews, Christians and Muslims in America and also on campus life. Specifically, I noticed that the way individuals represented their own belief systems and what they chose to emphasize revealed significant theological and cultural differences between group identies. The Jewish Fellows focused on culture. As a part of our presentation, we chose to play a clip of Adam Sandler singing his "Chanukah Song." Instead of discussing religious texts, the presentation incorporated Jewish identity and how the idea of what it means to be Jewish has evolved over time in American society. Upon reflection, I have realized that this is the way I chose to present my religion because I take great pride in the expansiveness of Jewish culture.

Student Fellow Rebecca Schwab

The Christian Fellows followed the same informational structure but instead focused on the large number of different denominations within Christianity, and on the importance of sin and the centrality of repentance in Christian devotion. As a Jew, I really noticed the repetition of the ideal of "G-d's love," because it is an unfamiliar concept in my upbringing. Catholicism was heavily focused upon (since one of the Fellows is Catholic), and there was an obvious strain between these practices and Protestant ideas in America. This was made apparent in the short presentations that allowed each Fellow to articulate their own religion.

Lastly, the Muslim Fellows educated people about Islam. An informational sheet was distributed regarding myths about Muslims. Clearly a larger concern in the Muslim presentation was correcting preconceptions rather than discussing salvation, as did the Christian Fellow. Interestingly, it did not even occur to me to discuss the myths associated with Judaism at this event because being a Jew in America means being aware of the diverging Jewish traditions. Yet a major concern for Muslim students on campus today is dismantling harmful myths which breed intolerance about Islam as both a religion and cultural influence. The event succeeded in educating students about the basics of each religion but also included personal expressions of what religion means to university students. Whether it's culture, sin and salvation, or correcting misconceptions, each group of Fellows sought to inform the audience about what it really means to be a member of an Abrahamic religion.

Savory Sunday: Interfaith Community Service

Jaimee Goldfish and Sonia Trevino-Dopatka, Student Fellows

The first part of the morning consisted of sorting through refrigerators full of donated food (spinach, apples, turkey, ham, bread, onions, lettuce...) and figuring out how to come up with discrete menu items. We decided on applesauce, a turkey spinach casserole, and sandwiches. Several of us got to work chopping apples and onions and slicing turkey. We had several dozen pounds of apples, and many hands made for light work! Before we knew it, there was a stock full of mashed apples. Interestingly, most of the students volunteering did not know each other. Many had heard about Savory Sunday from *Isthmus* or through a friend. Most of our conversation was getting to know each other, while trying not to cry from the onions.

The second part of the day was spent serving the delicious food made by the volunteers. We gathered in the basement of the Capitol, where dozens of people awaited a warm and filling meal. The volunteers came from all different religious groups and organizations. We served lunch to those unable to afford a generous meal, and they also came from very diverse backgrounds. Once we were done dishing out the food, we were able to sit down and have conversations with some of the members of the Madison community that we would not normally get to interact with. It was a great opportunity for us all to act upon our mutual religious foundation of service and to give back to the people of Madison.

"It's a humbling experience to serve the homeless community in Madison. Oftentimes I don't think about how blessed I am to have shelter and food everyday. It's also encouraging to see their spirit and will to live and enjoy life the way they can."
-Boan Sianipar

"I loved talking to people from all over Madison who shared with me the importance of serving others. Giving back to the community is so meaningful."
-Jaimee Goldish

"Oh, God, not religion..." was the response we got from a man coming in to drop off more donated food. We were talking about religious differences and he challenged us to consider all of the extreme religions as well rather than restrict ourselves to the handful of mainstream religions. The point was noted, and we heard about a few from him. He said he'd grown up in a home where "all we talked about was different religions."
-Sonia Trevino-Dopatka

"I was amazed by the level of care people put into preparing the food. It wasn't simply a task being done for a good cause; there was real, heartfelt concern for others in that kitchen."
-Joseph O'Donnell

Amitab Pal Lecture

Boan Sianipar, Student Fellow

The Lubar Institute hosted a lecture by Amitabh Pal on February 16, 2012. Pal is the author of the book *"Islam Means Peace: Understanding the Muslim Principle of Nonviolence Today"* and is the managing editor of *The Progressive* magazine. He is also a Hindu.

Pal's lecture was informed by his research on the history of Islam in South Asia. He began his presentation with a great quote from Wajib Ali Shah, a Hindi pluralist who wrote, "Hum ishq ke bande hai/Mazhad se nahin vista...," which means, "we are slaves of love, religion means nothing to us." This sentiment refers to chapters from the Qur'an about Islamic teachings of peace, love, and patience.

Pal explained the history of the gradual conversion of South Asia's population to Islam through three main figures: Sai Baba, Nazrul Islam, and Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. In India specifically, the spread of Islam was due to support from Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, who is known as the "Father of India." Gandhi led the non-violence movement that guided India to independence. Although Gandhi was himself a Hindu, he highly respected Muslims and supported religious harmony between the two religions. Gandhi defined Islam as "peace," and because he supported religious equality between the two religions, he was assassinated by a Hindu nationalist. It is interesting to see how many prominent figures drew inspiration from Gandhi, including Martin Luther King, Jr., who was heavily influenced by Gandhi's nonviolent methods. Since Gandhi was influenced by Islam, this means that Martin Luther King, Jr. and the greater Civil Rights movement drew inspiration not only from the Bible, but from the Qur'an as well, at least indirectly.

Before my involvement in LISAR, I would never have imagined a Christian pastor would have drawn inspiration and shared values and principles from the Qur'an, but now I have a heightened awareness and great respect for the fact that people from different religions study and learn from religious texts outside of their own tradition.

Pal's example of Gandhi's being a religious leader who promoted peaceful coexistence between religious traditions in India in the twentieth century is hardly extraordinary in South Asia. In actuality, the region has had more than a thousand-year record of various Hindu, Muslim and other religious groups interacting, trading, and negotiating relatively peaceably. Southern Asia has been connected by economic, religious and intellectual ties, and Pal's lecture helped elucidate how such diverse countries as India and Indonesia, now the most populous Muslim country in the world, could have been influenced not only by the spread of Islam but also by the pluralistic visions of Sai Baba, Nazrul Islam, and Mirza Ghulam Ahmad.

Some Americans think that Muslims are violent, and they are terrified by the prospect of interacting with people who seem foreign or wholly "Other." When you ask the average American what the word "jihad" means, most respond with the uninformed answer, "holy war." They believe that the religion of Islam is pervaded with violence and that "jihad" is a cornerstone or central tenet of the faith. Pal, however, defines jihad as "struggle," and, more specifically, the struggle individuals encounter within themselves. In his

Amitab Pal

book, Pal contends that Muslims in South Asia have protested and organized mass movements under the banner of "Jihad" according to non-violent philosophies and through non-violent means. In fact, Ulamas teach that the Islamic faith is based firmly peace and non-violence among the community of believers, and that same courtesy is to be extended to non-believers. The Qur'an teaches, "A friend to our faith is our brother." Having grown up as a Christian in Indonesia, I have seen both versions of jihad displayed; The first version of jihad as inner personal struggle, which can be translated into religious harmony between different groups, is very beautiful. I have also experienced the second version of jihad, demonstrated through religious intolerance. Although religious intolerance receives more attention in the press, my personal experience is that religious harmony was much more common and desired by the majority. If only the mainstream media would cover more stories about the jihad of religious harmony, I am sure people's views would be different. My family church in Jakarta is right next to a mosque, and they support each other by sharing parking spaces and organizing occasional interreligious events. Additionally, despite current religious conflicts in Indonesia, the government is continuously pushing the effort to build churches and mosques next to each other in order to promote interfaith conversations.

> *"The true definition of 'jihad' was a big thing I learned this year, and I believe the term - defined as 'struggle within the self' - can be applied to anyone, no matter what religion."*

The true definition of "jihad" was a big thing I learned this year, and I believe the term - defined as "struggle within the self" - can be applied to anyone, no matter what religion. Every person struggles in life to define onesself, achieve one's goals, and become a better human being. In my opinion, jihad is a never-ending process, and the struggle within oneself is never over until we finally meet our Creator. I find the words of Salman Ahmad, the lead composer of a famous Sufi band, extremely wise: "Knowing yourself is knowing God. When you love yourself, you have love for humanity."

Race, Representation and Religion Symposium

Sonia Trevino-Dopatka, Student Fellow

LISAR Fellows Joseph O'Donnell, Rebecca Schwab, and Rehman Ur Rauf (sitting in for Meaghan Walker) answer questions during the discussion.

The Multicultural Student Center (MSC) focuses on diversity issues on campus such as race, ethnicity, and gender.

Generally, these topics are approached separately, but this year, the MSC brought together people from disciplines all across campus, the Madison community, and beyond in a melting pot of "diversity thinkers" for the first of hopefully many symposia focused on race, religion, and representation. My impression is that most people arrived at the symposium not knowing what to expect, yet all departed with more knowledge and many more questions to consider.

When it comes to diversity, the average person may be well-informed about some issues, but only moderately, or ill-informed, about other matters. The symposium provided an inclusive platform upon which experts and novices of race, ethnicity, gender, and religion were able to engage in dialogue. In other words, the most successful aspect of R3 is that it encouraged individuals to be both educator and student: while one might be an expert in racial diversity, he or she might be a novice in matters of religion and campus life. Through presentation and active discussion, R3 challenged and broadened each participant's understanding of diversity on campus.

The Lubar Fellows led a workshop to open the discussion about how one should approach interfaith dialogue practically, and what sort of topics should be addressed. Reflective of the composition of the forum itself, we had one Jewish presenter, Rebecca Schwab, one Christian presenter, Joseph O'Donnell, and one Muslim presenter, Meaghan Walker, who led us through particular aspects of religious sensitivity personal to their own lives, and also very relevant to society. Rebecca brought up several examples regarding the way media portrayals affect people's perception of particular faiths. We could not help but laugh at the Family Guy parody (or reaffirmation?) of Jewish stereotypes.

Speaking of stereotypes, Meaghan shattered nearly every stereotype of Muslims both in the content of her presentation and in her person by representing the miniscule population of white Irish converts from Christianity to Islam. Why is it that non-Muslims, and Muslims alike, associate Islam with people having a certain physical appearance? In actuality, religion does not have anything to do with race, yet many believe there is a correlation between the two. No matter how culturally and politically progressive we think college campuses are, we should be mindful to stop making simple equations between religion and race. What would it take to change this often subconscious stubbornness? In his presentation, Joseph stressed the critical importance of educating youth. The younger the mind, the more malleable and open it is. Eboo Patel claims that education and exposure to other faith traditions could very well be the reason why some people grow up to be religious pluralists, while lack of exposure may contribute to fanaticism. In the forum we discussed the fact that terrorists are not insane people. Rather, they are ordinary people like you and me, but they have been taken under the wing of and nurtured by radical thinkers who use violent tactics. Yet, as Eboo Patel testifies to—using himself as an example—getting these very people into the right hands when they were young could have made a world of difference.

> *"The symposium was a huge step forward for the university, since religious diversity is often neglected in the diversity conversations."*

Education is critical and the symposium enacted a pedagogic belief that the discussion and study of race, religion, and representation will help students, teachers and community members to be moved to understand people different from themselves rather than be swayed by fear of the unknown or fooled by common misperceptions. The discussion at the end of the workshop was dynamic and included old and young, black and white, men and women. It was a diverse group interested in a topic that should rightly be included among other diversity issues.

The symposium was a huge step forward for the university, since religious diversity is often neglected in the diversity conversations. The R3 Symposium was the first of its kind on this campus to integrate race, religion, and representation. Since no one was specialized in all areas, it raised many questions for the attendees and begged for an encore next year. However, the Multicultural Student Center's unifying theme next year is "Race and Place." My hope is that religion is not once again neglected in favor of those standard topics.

Interfaith Volunteer Service with Badger Volunteers

Jennifer Meyers, Alumni Fellow 2009-10

This year I had the privilege of leading two interfaith volunteer teams as part of the White House Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge. The Lubar Institute worked diligently with the Morgridge Center for Public Service to create special teams of Badger Volunteers, students who engaged in interfaith dialogue while serving the larger Madison community.

In the fall semester, I led a team of three students who volunteered as tutors at Sherman Middle School. Lea, Jonnie and I began our semester with a Reflection Session hosted by Brad Klingele, the Program Director for the Lubar Institute, and LISAR's Assistant Director, Ulrich Rosenhagen. Our group met with all of the other interfaith teams to discuss our goals for volunteering and to reflect on the meaning of service in our various faith traditions. As part of our research, we read selections on service from the Dalai Lama, the National Jewish Scholars Project, and Eboo Patel, to name a few. As a group, we discussed our interpretations of these texts as well as our own personal views about the place of service in our faith journeys. Our group was very interested in stepping beyond the campus community to serve the greater Madison area.

At Sherman Middle School, Lea, Jonnie and I worked in several different capacities. We often helped with individual reading assignments, assisted with projects and served as classroom aides to give teachers a helping hand. Our team discussed our hopes for students, the complexities of ethnic and socioeconomic diversity, and ways that we could maximize our service time at the service site. Overall, we agreed that it was a great experience, and we were grateful that we could help today's youth in their academic success.

"At the close of our volunteer period, we were thankful that our experiences were humbling and offered the opportunity to give of ourselves."

In the spring semester, my new volunteers—Morgan, Alexandra and Leo—and I spent Wednesday afternoons at Lincoln Elementary School assisting with Homework Club. We got to spend a lot of one-on-one time with our students and assisted our teachers in whatever they needed. One of our volunteers was from a Jewish background, and we frequently discussed the idea of "tikkun olam," or "repairing the world." All of the volunteers in the spring semester team agreed that we felt very blessed for our own educational opportunities and wanted to see those same opportunities made available for our students.

While we did not discuss our faiths with our students at Sherman Middle or Lincoln Elementary schools, both my fall and spring volunteers agreed that we saw our time in Badger Interfaith Volunteers as an introspective process. At the close of our volunteer period, we were thankful that our experiences were humbling and offered the opportunity to give of ourselves. We are all busy UW-Madison students who have the tendency to get wrapped up in our own schedules and problems, but volunteering gave us the chance to focus on the needs of others and better our community. In concert with programs across the nation, the Badger Interfaith Volunteers are proud to have served as part of the White House Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge and look forward to seeing the benefits of this work in years to come.

The Coexistence Dinner

Lamin Manneh, Student Fellow

The Muslim Jewish Volunteer initiative held its fourth Coexistence Dinner on April 26, 2012. The event's theme was acceptance of all aspects of diversity, and I hoped that all the participants would leave with a desire to spread acceptance. At the beginning, I was really tense because it was the first event I had organized and co-hosted. I was afraid that not many people were going to show up, but when we picked up the Malaysian Muslim and Middle-Eastern Jewish food, I knew the event would represent the bonding of two peoples, which is what MJVI is all about.

The event was held at The Crossing, a progressive Christian student community, which made the event fully Abrahamic. It started off with an icebreaker with everyone in a big circle. Eventually each person got in the middle and stated their favorite smell. As I was listening to others state their favorite smells, I noticed that some people named the same one. I felt this would work to make everyone more comfortable with each other and desire to have conversations. Afterwards, everyone had to sit down to an assigned table and go over terms from the Islamic and Jewish cultures and faiths. It was really interesting to hear what people came up with for definitions of the terms. I was a bit disappointed that most people did not know any of the terms, and that only a select few had an in-depth understanding of the concepts. I think this is rather unfortunate.

Then we ate and started conversations about discussion questions relating to acceptance and interfaith dialogue. Some of the questions were personal and particularly illuminating because of the depth of the answers. Particularly stimulating was the question, "which groups do you need to get to know better?" Most people thought about their answers to a great extent and left their comfort zones by admitting they still have a lot to learn about the world. The end of one person's testimonial really touched me: "Before you act, ask 'is it kind?" Sometimes we have to force ourselves out of our spiritual comfort zones and entertain the unfamiliar. This is what the Coexistence Dinner does. Although the dinner challenges one to expand their religious and philosophical horizons, it does so in a casual and relaxing environment with friendly and inquisitive people. Once people are relaxed, they are more willing to open up. It was so encouraging to see all these people from so many different racial, ethnic, and faith backgrounds coming together, breaking bread, and rejoicing in each other's company.

I was really glad that the Lubar Institute helped support the Muslim-Jewish Volunteer Initiative because, for the most part, it is the food that brings the people. I noticed one man who came into the room seeming very uncomfortable and unsure of the surroundings. He was initially very quiet and would give short generic answers to questions that were meant to make people open up. As the dinner progressed, he started to talk more and his body language became warmer. I then realized it is possible within one event for people to open up if enough warmth, acceptance and good spirit pervade the room.

It got me very excited and happy, in fact, the happiest I could remember being at any event for a very long time. I was overflowing with love, and I felt as if I had achieved something. Yet, there was also this dilemma of "tomorrow." Is this kind of opening up something that can happen in one evening but then disappear, or can the momentum continue day in and day out? It got me thinking about our LISAR student forums and how we could possibly get more people to feel more comfortable with each other more quickly. A certain level of familiarity, honesty and trust is needed in order to discuss such personal issues as religion and faith. The undergraduate forum is supposed to be a place of comfort. Since I have been a part of the Institute for two years now, I feel very confident and comfortable sharing my beliefs and listening to others. While this level of confidence and comfort took some time, a future goal is to make this process easier, quicker, and less daunting for others.

Eboo Patel Visits the UW-Madison Campus

Boan Sianipar and Rehman Ur Rauf, Student Fellows

Eboo Patel speaking on the UW-Madison campus this past April.

On April 30, 2012, Eboo Patel visited the University of Wisconsin-Madison. A Rhodes Scholar, Patel founded the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), whose mission is to make interfaith cooperation a social norm. President Obama appointed him to the White House Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. Patel's involvement on the Council produced the White House Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge, in which over 250 universities participated during 2011-12. To celebrate and underline UW's involvement, which LISAR led, Patel came to campus to hold student workshops, talk to the university leadership, and give a public lecture about the importance of interfaith cooperation.

We both attended the afternoon workshop, along with students from other organizations partnering with the Lubar Institute in the White House Challenge. The discussion started with everyone sharing their engagement with and interest in interfaith cooperation. Most students stated that they were driven to do interfaith work based on their experiences and religious issues around the globe. Patel reacted by posing a thesis that the religious challenges faced by United States match the religious challenges anywhere, even the Palestine-Israel conflict. Since America is the most religiously and ethnically diverse country in the world, he continued, it is important to produce interfaith leaders who can raise the voice of American religious pluralism. Such leaders, he stressed, should be knowledgeable about other traditions, the theology of interfaith cooperation, the history of interfaith activities in the United States, and the values that different traditions share. Reflecting on this last point, the two of us agreed that, although religions teach different beliefs, they all share a common core of moral values. If we see each other's religions through that lens, we will see unity.

After urging top university officials to make interfaith activities a campus priority, Patel addressed an audience of some two hundred fifty about interfaith activities worldwide and advised them on how to move interfaith cooperation forward. His listeners included members of campus religious student organizations, community members, and even students and faculty from UW-Eau Claire. He began by reminding them that the resistance Nelson Mandela lead against apartheid in South Africa was an interfaith movement, not a racial one. Mandela has stated that he would still have been in prison if not for the Jews, Christians, Muslims, Jains, and members of other religious communities who worked together. Patel cited three steps that he deems necessary to create harmony among different religions: individuals should voice how much they value interfaith cooperation, engage with others, and act together. He also insisted that engaging with other traditions has the profound effect of making one understand one's own faith more deeply. He told how Martin Luther King, Jr., got his inspiration from Mahatma Gandhi. He saw that Gandhi was inspired by the Bhagavad Gita to adopt a strategy of non-violence, which made King ask if he could devise a similar strategy from the Bible. This insight made him look deeper into Christianity to find apt teachings. Upon visiting India, he found that Gandhi's movement was full not only Hindus but also of Jains, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, and Sikhs. Gandhi's interfaith movement to free India inspired King's non-violent, interfaith movement against inequality and racism in America.

"He noted that we are blessed with the Wisconsin Idea, the principle that the University should improve people's lives beyond the classroom, and with LISAR, a unique resource. The presence of such advantages makes UW-Madison a premiere public university that can lead stimulating conversations among youth.

We were encouraged by Patel's closing comments encouraging interfaith programming on campus and expressing his admiration for UW-Madison. He noted that we are blessed with the Wisconsin Idea, the principle that the University should improve people's lives beyond the classroom, and with LISAR, a unique resource. The presence of such advantages makes UW-Madison a premier public university that can lead stimulating interfaith conversations among youth. Patel's visit also taught that interfaith movements have had a huge impact on societies and even changed the course of history. We do think, however, that, although religious diversity has achieved great things, it is currently causing more harm than good. We believe that it is a personal duty for followers of all religions to respect other faiths and seek out the truth in order to foster better interfaith understanding. We were moved to see what happens when one goes out of one's way to learn about other religions, or to learn more about one's own religion when inspired by others. Religious believers often discourage interfaith dialogue is because they are confused about others' motives or fear being pressed to convert. However, as we have learned, interfaith activity has the opposite result and strengthens one's own belief. Our experience being Lubar Fellows together has initiated this spark in ourselves, and we hope to fan the flame into a big fire that will spread in the future.

The LISAR staff with IFYC's Eboo Patel (fourth from left) and Katie Baxter (third from right).

Student Reflections: The Role of Religious Diversity at UW-Madison

Sonia Trevino-Dopatka, Student Fellow

The University of Wisconsin-Madison aims to create and foster a welcoming atmosphere of diversity within its campus community. Over 30 student organizations focus on promoting diversity, ranging in focus from different nationalities, socioeconomic groups, ethnicities, gender and many other categories. While walking throughout campus, it is not uncommon to see fliers or sidewalk chalk promoting understanding amongst these groups, or to hear these issues discussed in a variety of classroom settings. In fact, my impression is that students and faculty are in great support of diversity on this campus.

However, when it comes to religion or inviting conversation around religion, diversity efforts fall incredibly short. In fact, for most people at UW-Madison, the most vocal presentation of religion they encounter are individuals on Library Mall publicly condemning those who do not accept Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. There are opportunities to learn and talk about religion in relevant history and religious studies classes, but, outside of these, there is an unfortunate tendency to discuss the topic in isolated contexts. And while some classes may highlight parallels between religion and common values, we lack opportunities for open dialogue, engaging in conversation and meaningful learning. For reasons I do not understand, talking about one's personal religious experience is frowned upon and very much taboo.
For me, religion is what results when human beings search for the ultimate Truth and ask meaningful questions such as, "What is my purpose in life? Is there universal morality? Is beauty subjective or objective?" We come to this university to become scholars and citizens of the world, but we often neglect these essential questions in order to avoid inadvertently offending other people. Even if religion is not our collective primary interest , it is impossible to ignore the religious tensions that exist in our society. One can observe our own country to see there is not unanimous acceptance or tolerance of non-Christian religions, whether consciously or not. And yet, many of us insist that we are tolerant and embrace other cultures.

Since the beginning of my junior year, I have participated in the Lubar Institute's Undergraduate Interfaith Forum. The Lubar Institute for the Study of the Abrahamic Religions is an institute established and funded by a generous Milwaukee couple hoping to create more interfaith dialogue on the UW-Madison campus. In a world with rising religious tensions, the Lubar Institute focuses on the Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—and serves to encourage Jews, Christians, and Muslims to engage in deep and honest inquiry into both their common heritages. They pull together and foster dialogue amongst varying perspectives by hosting speakers and events on campus. It is a grassroots effort to promote mutual understanding amongst the religious traditions, and in turn, foster this understanding on a more global level. The interfaith forum consists of students from all three Abrahamic religions. We meet regularly and, very simply, we get to know each other and hear each other's personal perspectives on a variety of religious topics.
There is a stark difference between knowing about a religion and knowing a person of that religion. It is easy to look up in a book what it means that Jews have Shabbat on Friday evenings, but it is entirely different to be surrounded by several dozen people singing the psalms in Hebrew. Just in spending a little time together, common stereotypes are quickly clarified. Before being involved in the forum, I thought jihad was simply war in the name of God. Now I know that the word "jihad" actually means "struggle" in Arabic and, for the vast majority of Muslims, is interpreted to be the daily internal struggle in our lives, not a physical struggle against other nations. In fact, this concept is very similar to how Christians view the Holy Cross of Christ.

2011-2012 LISAR Student Fellows

front row: Sonia Trevino-Dopatka, Rehman Ur Rauf, Lamin Manneh, LISAR Assistant Director Ulrich Rosenhagen
back row: Boan Sianipar, Jaimee Goldish, Joseph O'Donnell, Rebecca Schwab

The 2011-12 class of Fellows surround Philip Ratner's "Children of Abraham," donated to the Lubar Institute and University of Wisconsin-Madison in 2007.

In the forum, we have experienced great engaging discussions about everything from morality to how each of us prays to comparing the Muslim hijab to the veil the Virgin Mary wears. But more importantly, I have developed great friendships with people whom I may not otherwise have met. And now, when I think of Judaism and Islam, I can think of people I know, not just ideas from a book.

For many of us, it is easy and comfortable to immerse ourselves in a group of likeminded people, but we simply can not neglect religious diversity and openness to other religious thought. Even if these discussions come from disparate viewpoints, they are a basis for learning, engaging in interesting dialogue and expanding our worldview. We should not shy away from it.
As a practicing Catholic, my faith is the essence of my being, and yet, I do not take offense when people disagree with me. Disagreement is not supposed to be a debate but a dialogue, and one that promotes mutual understanding. Endeavors such as the Lubar Undergraduate Forum are integral to promoting interfaith understanding and are the essence of a peaceful society. My sincere hope is that efforts like this continue to grow and become a welcomed and important component of diversity.

Lubar Institute

for the Study of the Abrahamic Religions

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