

Mission Statement

The Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Youngstown State University is dedicated to promoting “an understanding, appreciation, and tolerance of diverse philosophical and religious viewpoints and traditions embraced throughout the world.” A publication of the department’s Pluralism Project, *E Pluribus* (literally, “out of many”) aims to highlight interfaith activities in the Mahoning Valley and to report events of general interest in the field of religious pluralism. Advocating no religious doctrine and criticizing no belief system, *E Pluribus* welcomes contributions in the best spirit of a pluralistic outlook.

What Is Religious Pluralism?

Though a standard definition of religious pluralism seems somewhat elusive, probably owing to misuse of the term, a compact description of the concept can be gleaned from the several meanings given to the term. Many people define religious pluralism as religious diversity. Following this definition, any locale with religious institutions devoted to different faiths would be considered pluralistic. The article “From Diversity to Pluralism,” found on the multimedia CD-ROM *On Common Ground: World Religions in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), which was produced by Diana L. Eck and the Pluralism Project at Harvard University, rejects this definition on the grounds that diversity alone does not equal pluralism; instead, “[p]luralism is the engagement that creates a common society from . . . diversity. . . . Pluralism is not a ‘given,’ but an achievement.” On this definition, religious pluralism would require that individuals from various faiths actively interact with one another with the aim of learning not only to tolerate but also to respect one another’s faith. Perhaps a religiously pluralistic society can be defined as one that allows people to share their understanding and knowledge of their faiths without being asked to convert to a particular faith. Such a society provides for an interchange of ideas about beliefs and practices without privileging particular beliefs or practices.

In his book *The Culture of Religious Pluralism* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), Richard E. Wentz writes, “Pluralism denotes the acceptance of diversity; and this acceptance, we have observed, always works within some perception of ultimate order and meaning not confined to traditional religions” (2). This description of religious pluralism hints at the existence of something that adherents of many different religions attempt to reach and over which no religion has exclusive, proprietary rights. This stance is echoed by William L. Rowe in his article “Religious Pluralism,” in which he says:

[E]ach of these religious traditions is a valid encounter with a reality that transcends every religious tradition because it transcends all human efforts to conceptualize it or to experience it directly. On this view the different religious traditions include experiences of one and the same transcendent reality. . . . The profound differences among the religious traditions are due to the different ways in which the transcendent reality is experienced and conceived in human life. It is this last view that we have come to know as *religious pluralism*. (*Religious Studies* 35, no. 2 [June 1999]:141)

The understanding of religious pluralism advanced by Wentz and Rowe implies the existence of a divine being that is not exclusive to any one religion, thus furnishing a denominator that is common to all religions. In a word, religious pluralism is the recognition and acceptance of religious diversity in an atmosphere that encourages individuals to share their common theological bonds and to understand and appreciate their differences.

—James J. Sacco

Fulbright Scholar Provides Historical Snapshot of Hindu-Muslim Relations in India

On the evening of 12 April 2004, Visiting Fulbright scholar Dr. Naimur Rahman Farooqi gave a talk on “Hindu-Muslim Relations in India” in 121-122 DeBartolo Hall of Youngstown State University. Professor and head of the Department of Medieval and Modern History at the University of Allahabad, India, Farooqi specializes in medieval Indian history. His talk was sponsored by the Center for Islamic Studies and cosponsored by the Pluralism Project of the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies and the Consortium for Educational Resources on Islamic Studies (CERIS), based at the University of Pittsburgh. About sixty college students and community members were in attendance.

Farooqi said that the initial contacts of India with Islam were cultural and commercial rather than political or military and that “the relations between Hindus and Muslims [in the early period] were very cordial.” He said that the period of the Great Mughal Dynasty (1206–1857) is usually considered the golden age of India. Even though a minority in the country, Muslims then made up the majority of India’s ruling class. Farooqi stressed that the Muslim rulers of India followed no sustained policy of converting the Indian populace; that, during the Muslim rule, many Sufis from the Muslim world immigrated to India, upholding the doctrine of religious toleration; and that India remained “free of communal tensions” owing to the work of these Sufis, who identified religion with service to humanity. This religious harmony was, however, severely undermined by the British colonial rulers. Farooqi noted that, from the thirteenth century to the nineteenth, only one incident of Hindu-Muslim communal violence occurred, whereas hundreds of such incidents took place under the British rule. “Most of the tensions in India today,” said Farooqi, exist because of “an imagined past,” which is heavily influenced by British historians and by the British colonial policy (1857–1947) of “Divide and Rule.” In this connection, Farooqi talked about the British historian James Stuart Mill (1773–1836), whose three-volume *History of British India* divided Indian history into three distinct periods of Hindu, Muslim, and British civilization. Mill’s schematization “sowed the seeds of a religious divide,” which ultimately led to the Indian subcontinent’s partition into a Hindu-majority India and a Muslim-majority Pakistan. In his eight-volume work, *The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians*, Sir Henry Elliot (1808–1853) compiled passages taken from Persian sources, with the explicitly stated objective of contrasting the “mildness and equity” of the British rulers with the “oppressiveness” of the Muslim rulers of India. In his preface to the work, “Elliot has nothing but condemnation for Muslim historians,” said Farooqi. Thus, following a political agenda of their own, the British made the people of India believe that they were Muslims and Hindus first and Indians second, thus giving rise to the religious and communal tensions that have haunted India’s Hindu and Muslim communities to this day.

—James J. Sacco

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