How Important Is Religion in Interreligious Relationships? Interreligious Space-Sharing as a Case Study

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This article identifies both religious and nonreligious factors in interreligious space-sharing as a case study of interreligious relationships generally. Analytical insights from social exchange theory are applied to two longstanding space-sharing arrangements, Genesis of Ann Arbor (Michigan) and the interfaith centers in Columbia, Maryland. Recognizing that all interreligious relationships contain a mix of religious and nonreligious factors helps to avoid disillusionment or frustration when the nonreligious factors come to light and offers both participants and scholars a deeper and more nuanced understanding of interreligious dynamics.

Keywords: interreligious, interfaith, religion, space-sharing, Genesis of Ann Arbor, Columbia, Maryland, new towns, planned communities, social exchange theory

Introduction

A segment called "Something, Nothing, or Everything?" on my favorite TV talk show debates the degree of importance of a current topic. When it comes to interreligious relationships, participants and scholars may feel that religion is everything, that religious beliefs and ideals are the only relevant factors in establishing and maintaining such relationships.

I will not make the reductionist argument that religion has nothing to do with interreligious relationships, that they do not stem from religious beliefs and ideals but rather can be explained (away) by psychological, sociological, political, or other nonreligious factors. By definition alone, religion plays some role in interreligious relationships, and thus it is something rather than nothing. But exactly how important is religion when compared to nonreligious factors in interreligious relationships? We shall see that it is not always as important as participants and scholars may think.

Drawing upon my field research, I will present a case study of interreligious space-sharing that carries implications about religion's role in interreligious relationships generally. After establishing an analytical framework in the next section, I will describe two longstanding space-sharing arrangements in which both religious and nonreligious factors have played significant roles. In the concluding section I will generalize from the space-sharing case study.

Religious and Nonreligious Factors in Space-Sharing Arrangements

Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook concludes a chapter on "Sharing Sacred Spaces" in *God Beyond Borders* with this statement: "Sharing sacred spaces, by using them to further interreligious learning, is critical to deepening encounters across religious differences, and to widening our limited

experience, to a more diverse perspective on what is holy, and of the shape of our religious landscape."[1]

As Kujawa-Holbrook suggests, generically religious factors, such as a desire to learn about religious others in order to enhance one's own understanding of the "holy," may be central to a space-sharing arrangement. Tradition-specific religious factors like fulfilling scriptural or theological mandates may also be central.

As expected, I have learned a great deal about such religious factors in my research on space-sharing by religious groups. But this is far from the full story. What has surprised me are the many nonreligious factors that have surfaced.

Social exchange theory (SET) provides analytical leverage for understanding both religious and nonreligious factors underlying space-sharing by religious groups. SET's basic premise is that relationships involve exchanging various kinds of resources, both material commodities like property or finances and symbolic valuables like love, trust, or status. Applying SET insights, we can identify both religious and nonreligious resources that are exchanged in space-sharing arrangements by asking what each group gives to, and how each group benefits from, the relationship.[2]

Genesis of Ann Arbor

Genesis of Ann Arbor (Michigan) was created in 1974 by St. Clare of Assisi Episcopal Church and Temple Beth Emeth (a Reform synagogue) as a nonprofit corporation to own, maintain, and improve a shared facility. The initial agreement begins by noting that the synagogue had leased space from the church for several years and now the two congregations wished to embark on "an even happier and more mature relationship" through joint proprietorship.[3]

The agreement clearly articulates the primary benefit to Temple Beth Emeth as establishing a "permanent religious home." A possible economic benefit of sharing an existing facility rather than constructing a new one is not mentioned; rather, the stated reason is "to be responsive to the ecology of the larger community by conserving the natural resources not so needed."

The agreement indicates that "It is the goal of St. Clare to affirm the aspirations of the Temple to finally have a home of its own," but the practical benefits to the church are only implied in the following statement: "It is a corporate goal of both congregations to provide the current and expanded facilities for future use by their community." This suggests that the church felt the partnership would enhance its ability to maintain and develop its property.

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[1] Sheryl A. Kujawa-Holbrook, *God Beyond Borders: Interreligious Learning Among Faith Communities* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 101.

[2] SET has informed several academic disciplines, including organizational studies, social psychology, and sociology. For overviews, see Karen S. Cook, Coye Cheshire, Eric R. W. Rice, and Sandra Nakagawa, "Social Exchange Theory," in *Handbook of Social Psychology*, 2nd ed., ed. John DeLamater and Amanda Ward (New York: Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht, 2013), 61–88; Russell Cropanzano and Marie S. Mitchell, "Social Exchange Theory: An Interdisciplinary Review," *Journal of Management* 31, no. 6 (December 2005): 874–900.

[3] "Agreement," December 17, 1974.

Interestingly, the agreement says nothing specifically about interreligious exchanges between the two congregations, such as through dialogues, educational programs, or worship experiences. It states only that "by jointly owning and sharing the same facilities for their various worship and non-worship activities, they are demonstrating that out of their act of faith and trust can be found a significant mutuality of understanding." In fact, the religious autonomy of each congregation is explicitly guaranteed: both congregations would "continue to worship and be fruitful in the ways which are unique to both understandings of the nature of God" and "both congregations pledged to respect the theological integrity of both the Jewish and Christian view." This concern for theological integrity is markedly displayed in the sanctuary's architecture, which has three modes at the front—a neutral mode that with a quick rearrangement converts into either a Christian chancel and altar or a Jewish *bimah* and Torah ark.[4]

The agreement touts the witness that Genesis will give to a desperate and strife-torn world, whose "citizens are today becoming more aware of the absolute need to trust, conserve, believe, give and love if we and our heirs are to survive as the children of God." The partnership will also provide a positive model of Jewish-Christian relations: "[Each congregation] believes that their actions herein will stand as a symbol of the power of reason and love to overcome distrust and the prejudices of our separate histories."

A twenty-fifth anniversary commemorative booklet matter-of-factly notes the practical benefits of the space-sharing arrangement between the two congregations going back to the lease period: "The growing temple required more space; the young church needed more income." The booklet also recognizes the day-to-day space-sharing issues that had arisen over the years, such as property maintenance and access, as well as religiously based disagreements about symbols and ritual accoutrements. That said, the booklet proudly reports that a committee designated from the beginning "to negotiate potential conflicts or early signs of stress" had never convened.[5]

This was true even in the midst of a "time of trial" in the late 1980s when both congregations had outgrown the original facility and began exploring the possibility of expansion. The synagogue was "passionate" about having a social hall for meals and other activities, which the church deemed "an extravagance." "In time," the commemorative booklet explains, the church "came to understand the Jewish view of a synagogue as a house of prayer, a house of study and a meeting place," and so the two congregations agreed that the expansion would include a new sanctuary while the old one would become a social hall.

The booklet details interreligious exchanges that had developed over the first twenty-five years. (Recall that the original agreement said nothing specific about such things.) These included "celebrating their friendship" through joint education classes and a shared Passover meal. The *haggadah* (liturgy) for this *seder* meal reads in part, "And so tonight, we worship and feast together, in this, our common home. There are two faiths, but one trust, two ideas of the truth of things, but one faith in each other." Their joint witness to the world is affirmed, as is the mutual enrichment

[4] A demonstration of this convertibility can be seen at "Jewish/Christian Worship Space in Ann Arbor," accessed August 20, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ehvHditTGkA.
[5] "The Story of Genesis of Ann Arbor," 1999–2000.

that had come through this space-sharing arrangement: "We give thanks for the vision of God which has led us to a greater vision of ourselves."

When I visited Genesis in the fall of 2017, it had recently resolved the most challenging crisis of its history. Growth was again key, but this time the synagogue had grown while the church had not. Though equal co-owners, the congregations had become unequal users of the facility, engendering feelings of unfairness in bearing the financial load. The congregations worked out an "Equitable Cost and Space Sharing Agreement" in the summer of 2016, which was thoroughly assessed in a task force report in September of 2017.

As we would expect, these documents are dominated by practicalities, such as scheduling procedures, cost-sharing formulas, and principles and rules for various uses of the facility. The task force report identifies lingering concerns that must be addressed in order to avoid or minimize conflicts over the shared space, including eliminating "back channel" requests and resolving the "persistent uncertainty" about whether or not to charge rent to certain Jewish groups.

Specifically religious sentiments are minimal in both documents when compared to the emphasis on practical matters. The cost/space agreement recognizes the importance of the "sacred and core" uses or functions of each congregation, "without which we could not claim the religious identities and affiliations that we hold." The congregations pledge to respect each other's "weekly Sabbath times" and to negotiate use of the facility when religious holidays overlap. The task force report ends with this: "We note with gratitude that we are still in this amazing interfaith situation—sharing not just relationships but also a building—that may not be extant anywhere else."

There may be a simple explanation for the imbalance of practical and religious content in these documents. After all, there is no need to belabor the fact that the Genesis partners are congregations. Yet I was struck that three-fourths of my interviewees (15 of 20) listed practical considerations first, such as finances and facility usage, when asked about the reasons for the Genesis partnership.

Even more striking was the number who downplayed religious reasons or discounted them altogether. Several synagogue leaders could cite no biblical or theological underpinnings to the relationship. Rabbi Josh Whinston found it ironic that Judaism's eschatological ideal of all peoples someday worshiping together is being anticipated in the Genesis relationship yet synagogue members have largely refrained from using such rhetoric. A couple of synagogue leaders cited moral reasons, one seeing the partnership as more of a humanitarian enterprise than a religious one. When pressed for biblical or theological reasons, this leader could point only to the emphasis on welcoming the stranger found in the Hebrew Bible, noting ironically that the church, not the synagogue, is the welcoming host. No doubt the synagogue's liberal leanings as a Reform congregation help to explain the minimal appeal to religious idioms.

A few interviewees on the church side likewise downplayed or discounted religious reasons for the Genesis partnership. Two of them speculated on how Genesis might differ from space-sharing arrangements that do not involve religious groups. Simon "Pete" Ross, a past president of the Genesis board, suggested that Genesis nurtures close friendships in ways that simply do not happen in an apartment complex, for instance. Christine Modey, the Genesis board president when I interviewed her and previously the senior warden (principal elected lay leader) of St. Clare,

at first admitted that there may be no significant difference between Genesis and space-sharing arrangements in the for-profit business sector, but then pointed to the "interfaith vision" of supporting each other's religious mission while learning from each other, all of which involves making sacrifices for the other, something not found in a strictly business calculus.

Judith Erb was the clerk of St. Clare's vestry (governing board) at the inception of Genesis and thus a signatory of the 1974 agreement between the two congregations. At the time of our interview she was the senior warden of the church. She explained that the religious reasons underlying the partnership are so "embedded" and "completely in your bones" that they do not need explicit articulation. Some of my interviewees felt this taken-for-grantedness had contributed to the recent conflict in that a new generation had arisen in both congregations for whom these reasons for the partnership meant little or nothing at all.

Those interviewees who articulated the religious reasons underlying Genesis agreed that practical considerations like finances and facility usage may have predominated at the start but were "insufficient" to keep the partnership going, to quote James Rhodenhisen, St. Clare's senior pastor. In fact, he argued (though others disagreed) that the partnership no longer carries significant economic advantages for each congregation, and thus the primary tie that binds Genesis together today is "theological/spiritual." James Downward, who has served in several leadership roles at both St. Clare and Genesis and was the Genesis board secretary when I interviewed him, spoke similarly of the "spiritual rationale" for Genesis. He agreed that the partnership began with financial discussions but then sought a "deeper understanding" of what it might mean for two faith communities to live together in this way.

One synagogue leader likened the Genesis partnership to a single family home (the church) that became a condominium when the synagogue bought into it. After outlining the practical benefits of the partnership, this leader explained how Genesis not only models a positive Jewish-Christian relationship but has enabled each congregation to thrive as a faith community. "There's got to be a desire and a value beyond finances that brings the two partners together."

The annual Genesis Erev [Hebrew, "Evening"] Thanksgiving Service I attended displayed the religious (and interreligious) underpinnings of the Genesis partnership. The liturgy featured both Jewish and Christian elements, including readings from the Torah and the "Christian Testament" (what Christians call the New Testament). Striking a civil religion chord, as often occurs in such Thanksgiving services, "America the Beautiful" served as the closing hymn.

At one point in the service, a "Covenant Renewal" statement that had been worked out during the recent conflict was read responsively. The specifically religious elements came first:

> Our vision for the Genesis partnership inspires us to be our best:
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> *By daily embracing mutual trust and respect, we partner with God and one another to heal a broken world.*
>
> Our mission as partners here challenges us:
>
> *To exemplify interfaith understanding, cooperation, and friendship, and to share space in ways that strengthen St. Clare's Episcopal Church and Temple Beth Emeth and the broader community.*

To summarize in light of social exchange theory, the specifically religious exchanges and benefits of the space-sharing partnership are certainly integral to the existence of Genesis of Ann Arbor, including the interreligious learning that Kujawa-Holbrook identifies as a key goal of sharing sacred spaces, though this aspect of the Genesis partnership seems to have evolved over time. What stands out to me are the nonreligious exchanges and benefits of Genesis, particularly around finances and facility usage. These have carried as much if not more weight during its decades-long history.

Interfaith Centers, Columbia, Maryland

Columbia, Maryland, located between Baltimore and Washington, DC, was founded in 1967, part of the new towns or planned communities movement of the 1950s through the 1970s.[6] Columbia was the brainchild of James Rouse (1914–1996), "an ambitious businessman, a crusading activist, an early proponent of urban renewal, and a developer who is often credited with inventing the shopping mall."[7]

Rouse criticized the usual approach to urban and suburban development in which "the bits and pieces of cities are splattered across the landscape. . . What reckless, irresponsible dissipation of nature's endowment and of man's hope for dignity, beauty and growth. By this totally irrational process, non-communities are born. . . We have come to label this suburban sprawl. . . [S]prawl is inhuman. It is anti-human."[8]

Instead, Rouse envisioned Columbia as a "garden for the growing of people," in his own words. As one writer summarizes, he "imagined a beautiful, self-sustaining American City—a new America, really—that fostered economic, racial, and cultural harmony."[9] This new kind of city would be (1) self-sufficient, offering employment and social amenities in addition to housing, (2) environmentally sensitive, (3) conducive to human flourishing, and (4) profitable. Many have noted that, for Rouse, profitability was not an afterthought or an addendum to the other goals. This venture "was not meant to be merely one of Rouse's civic activities," explains Ann Forsyth. "Rather, Columbia was supposed to be profitable enough that less visionary developers would want to copy the concept, changing the character of suburban development more generally."[10] As Rouse himself said, "The surest way to make the American city what it ought to be is to demonstrate that it is enormously profitable to do it a better way."[11]

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[6] See the New Towns Initiative at Harvard University, accessed August 8, 2018, https://research.gsd.harvard.edu/new-towns/.

[7] Jimmy Stamp, "James W. Rouse's Legacy of Better Living through Design," April 23, 2014, http://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/james-w-rouses-legacy-better-living-through-design-180951187/.

[8] Cited in Carolyn Arena and Elizabeth Martin, eds., *Creative Tension: Memories of Early Interfaith Experiences in Columbia, Maryland* (Baltimore: Etchings Publishing, 2017), 27–28.

[9] Stamp, "James W. Rouse's Legacy."

[10] Ann Forsyth, *Reforming Suburbia: The Planned Communities of Irvine, Columbia, and The Woodlands* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 107.

[11] Cited in Gurney Breckenfeld, *Columbia and the New Cities* (New York: Washburn, 1971), 172. The four characteristics of the proposed new city of Columbia were articulated in a variety of ways; see Forsyth, *Reforming Suburbia*, 114.

Rouse recognized religion's potential in making cities what they ought to be, as we see in his 1961 talk at a Baltimore Episcopal church, titled "Christianity and the American City." "[N]owhere is the gap between . . . Christianity and contemporary civilization more vivid than in the American city," Rouse proclaimed. American cities have failed the biblical litmus test of loving God and neighbor, so the churches must step into the breach: "There is no other area where members of a congregation, thinking and working as Christians, can exert so positive a force with such direct and tangible results."[12]

Faith played a role in Rouse's personal life. During the planning stages of Columbia, he and his wife Libby regularly attended the ecumenical and socially engaged Church of the Savior in Washington, DC, which James considered "the most authentic church of the contemporary world that I know of."[13] After Columbia opened, but before its interfaith center model was implemented (see below), the Rouses helped to establish Kittamaqundi Community Church, a local congregation modeled after the Church of the Savior.[14] According to Forsyth, this congregation "was such a strong part of Rouse's life that a number of [his] employees went along to services to understand what made Rouse tick."[15]

As his secret land purchase strategy proceeded without a hitch, Rouse wrote, "We have been so blessed by good luck in this venture that one has to feel the hand of the Lord is in it."[16] Yet the initial planning group assembled for the new town included no religious representatives.[17] Longtime local journalist Len Lazarick suggests that Rouse may have seen himself as "his own expert on religion."[18] In any case, the planning group soon became aware of the importance of planning Columbia's institutional religious life so as to avoid a situation in which practical matters like "concern with parking lots should be a primary problem for those providing spiritual nourishment for their congregations and communities."[19]

A series of meetings with local and national religious leaders was organized. Rouse's February 1964 invitation letter spoke of religion in these terms: "We want to take as fresh a look as possible at the role of religion in the community. . . How, then, can religion formally in the work of the church and its institutions, and informally throughout the life of the community, be made most effective?"[20] These meetings emphasized what was commonly called ecumenicity at the time, what we call interfaith cooperation today, and thus included Protestants, Catholics, and Jews.

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[12] Cited in Joshua Olsen, *Better Places, Better Lives: A Biography of James Rouse* (Washington, DC: Urban Land Institute, 2004), 114–15.
[13] Cited in Joseph Rocco Mitchell and David L. Stebenne, *New City Upon a Hill: A History of Columbia, Maryland* (Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2007), 70.
[14] Ibid., 71.
[15] Forsyth, *Reforming Suburbia*, 112.
[16] Olsen, *Better Places, Better Lives*, 139.
[17] For a detailed description of the composition and work of the planning group, see ibid., 114–19.
[18] Len Lazarick, "Columbia at 50 Part 8: Religion: Interfaith Centers Sought to Bring Congregations Together," February 13, 2017, http://marylandreporter.com/2017/02/13/columbia-at-50-part-8-religion-interfaith-centers-sought-to-bring-congregations-together/.
[19] July 20, 1964 memo from the Director of Institutional Development of the corporation overseeing the planning of Columbia, cited in Arena and Martin, *Creative Tension*, 34.
[20] Cited in ibid., 35–36.

In a crucial step that led eventually to the interfaith center model in Columbia, Stanley Hallett of the Church Federation of Chicago was appointed by the National Council of Churches to prepare a report on the "best new forms of ecumenical ministry" that might be developed in the new town.[21] One of Hallett's many innovative suggestions was "for the churches . . . to build a common religious facility in each village [area of the town] with the possible investment in sanctuaries at a later time." Hallett pointed out that stand-alone congregational buildings "would require a proliferation of parking facilities and an irresponsible waste of land."[22]

The efficiency of a shared building appealed to Rouse's developers, who had previously envisioned a campus of separate religious facilities for each village.[23] After extended deliberations about the particulars of such an approach, a Religious Facilities Corporation was created in 1966 to oversee the apportionment of the shared buildings. Congregations who wished to locate in Columbia would have to buy into this interfaith center arrangement, the incentive being that the cost was considerably less than market price for land on which to erect a stand-alone building.[24]

This extended review of James Rouse's personal faith and the evolution of the interfaith center model in Rouse's new town helps to place the role of religion in proper perspective. There is no doubt that religious beliefs and ideals entered into the decisions made by Rouse and his developers, but an argument can be made that the governing factors were nonreligious. Rouse's moral vision was about human flourishing, creating a city that would be a "garden for the growing of people." This moral vision undergirded every aspect of "the Next America" that Columbia was meant to embody, whether it was interfaith centers or the socioeconomic and racial integration for which the new town is best known.[25]

In this regard, Rouse's biographer makes an astute assessment of his "Christianity and the American City" talk: "Although the sentiment was expressed in religious terms, the real meaning behind it was the same as that behind his work to fix slums or promote 'humanness' in architecture."[26] As Arena and Martin observe, the interfaith centers were "a natural progression of James Rouse's vision for Columbia as a livable city that would promote the well being of its citizens."[27] Rouse himself did not have a particular model in mind for these centers from the start.[28] He was simply interested in finding the most effective way for religion to exert a positive influence on the community.

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[21] Ibid., 39.

[22] Cited in ibid., 50, 51. Hallett's report, titled "Working Papers in Church Planning, Columbia, Maryland," was published in October 1964.

[23] This according to Arena and Martin, *Creative Tension*, 54–55.

[24] Ibid., 54. My discussion here relies heavily on pp. 49–55 of Arena and Martin's book.

[25] See Forsyth, *Reforming Suburbia*, 119–20, 142. In describing one of the interfaith centers, Catherine Osborne argues that theological worldview and building construction "evolved together through a lengthy dialogical process" (Catherine Osborne, "Transforming Space, Transforming Faith: Columbia, MD's Interfaith Center and the Building of Religion," paper presented at the American Studies Association Annual Meeting, Baltimore, MD, October 20, 2011). I am arguing that nonreligious factors like building construction took precedence over religious or theological factors.

[26] Olsen, *Better Places, Better Lives*, 115.

[27] Arena and Martin, *Creative Tension*, 26.

[28] This from Carolyn Arena, personal conversation, August 12, 2017.

The financial and facilities efficiencies of the interfaith center model were attractive on this score. The Hallett report judged the carrying charges on properties that often went unused throughout the week to be "the extravagance of church life."[29] A brochure prepared for the opening of Columbia described the new possibilities for congregational ministries and cooperation, noting the financial drain of the usual approach: "Sometimes up to 4/5 of total income [of a congregation] are spent on the building and maintaining of a physical plant."[30]

Forsyth summarizes Rouse's pragmatic interfaith sensibilities:

> [P]art of Rouse's interest in interfaith cooperation was also practical. Congregations had special building needs. They required a lot of space for meetings and classrooms and parking, but only for a few hours a week, and the rest of the time the space lay unused. These needs were expensive for the religious groups, costly for developers, who could generally find more lucrative and efficient uses of land, and awkward for planning purposes, as separate facilities surrounded by separate parking lots tend to spread out development.[31]

Today, Columbia has six interfaith centers. Religious groups have one of two statuses vis-à-vis a center. Some are partner congregations, having a legal stake in the proprietorship of the center. Other religious groups have renter or user status through agreements with the proprietors. During my field research in 2017, I visited all six interfaith centers but concentrated my attention on those in the villages of Oakland Mills and Owen Brown.[32]

Columbia's first interfaith center opened in 1970 in the town's first village, Wilde Lake. It initially had four Christian partner congregations, two of which remain: St. John the Evangelist Roman Catholic Church and St. John United Church (United Methodist and Presbyterian Church USA).[33] The building has no exterior religious symbols. When I visited, one sanctuary contained no religious symbols, the other was outfitted with removable Catholic symbols (crucifix, Stations of the Cross, and portraits of the Madonna and Child).

Columbia's second interfaith center, The Meeting House, opened in the Oakland Mills village in 1975. Currently it has five partner congregations: Bet Aviv (a Reform synagogue), Columbia Baptist Fellowship, Columbia Jewish Congregation (Reconstructionist), Columbia United Christian Church (Church of the Brethren, Disciples of Christ, and United Church of Christ), and St. John the Evangelist Roman Catholic Church (making St. John a dual-site parish in Columbia).[34] The only exterior religious symbol is a small representation of the tablets of the Ten Commandments over the front entrance. Worship services are held in several symbolically "neutral" rooms into and out of which groups cart their religious accoutrements. There is one dedicated worship space, a small chapel containing permanent Catholic symbols.

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[29] Cited in Mitchell and Stebenne, *New City Upon a Hill*, 97.
[30] Cited in Lazarick, "Columbia at 50 Part 8."
[31] Forsyth, *Reforming Suburbia*, 156.
[32] See Arena and Martin, *Creative Tension*, Part III for detailed discussions of the six interfaith centers.
[33] See The Wilde Lake Interfaith Center, accessed August 8, 2018, http://www.thewildelakeinterfaithcenter.com/default.html.
[34] See The Meeting House, accessed August 8, 2018, http://themeetinghouse.org.

The third interfaith center, in the Owen Brown village, opened in 1984 and today has two partner congregations, Christ United Methodist Church and Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Columbia.[35] The building's exterior has no identifiably religious symbols though colored window panes may be intended to evoke a stained-glass ambiance. This center has three sanctuaries. The one used by the United Methodists contained no religious symbols when I visited, whereas the one used by the Unitarian Universalists has several fixed religious images on the front wall, including symbols of six world religions. These images were not covered for the Muslim Jumah (Friday) prayer service that I observed.

A proposed two-partner interfaith center in the Long Reach village was approved by the Religious Facilities Corporation in the early 1980s but one congregation withdrew before the building was completed. The remaining congregation, Long Reach Church of God (Anderson, Indiana), now called Celebration Church,[36] was allowed to continue the development while seeking a new partner, which never materialized. The facility opened in 1985.[37]

Local Jewish leaders voiced their opposition when it became known in 1997 that Emmanuel Messianic Jewish Congregation had expressed interest in partnering with another Christian congregation in the interfaith center planned for the River Hill village. The Religious Facilities Corporation permitted Emmanuel to pursue the partnership after receiving assurances that it would not proselytize Jews from local synagogues. Emmanuel eventually partnered with Oak Ridge Community Church (an independent evangelical congregation) in opening The Gathering Place interfaith center in 2005.[38] The building has no exterior religious symbols. When I visited, the main sanctuary also had no religious symbols. Emmanuel was worshiping in another room outfitted with a Star of David, a menorah, and the national flag of Israel.

Negotiations for an interfaith center in the Kings Contrivance village began in the mid-1980s. Beth Shalom, a Conservative synagogue, was unable to secure congregational partners and eventually located just outside of Columbia. The Religious Facilities Corporation approved a proposal from The Orthodox Church of St. Matthew (Orthodox Church in America) to build St. Matthew House, a facility for disabled adults, which was dedicated in 1999. A subsequent proposal by St. Matthew Church and Cornerstone Church (Church of God, Anderson, Indiana) to erect separate buildings on an "interfaith campus" adjacent to St. Matthew House was also approved, and the facilities opened in 2007.[39] This, of course, deviated from the interfaith center model of a single shared building, but the partner congregations gave assurances that they would pursue interfaith ideals.[40]

Forsyth considers Columbia's interfaith center model "a fairly bold experiment in both the cooperation and the activities of congregations, with a wide range of trial procedures occurring in their organization and in their practice of worship."[41] But we should keep this in perspective. As

[35] See The Owen Brown Interfaith Center, accessed August 8, 2018, http://www.obicolumbia.org/index.html.
[36] See Celebration Church, accessed August 8, 2018, http://wininlife.com/.
[37] See Arena and Martin, *Creative Tension*, 216–18.
[38] See ibid., 233–39.
[39] See "Interfaith Campus," Kings Contrivance Community Association, accessed August 8, 2018, http://www.kingscontrivancecommunityassociation.org/node/82.
[40] Arena and Martin, *Creative Tension*, 232.
[41] Forsyth, *Reforming Suburbia*, 156.

Lazarick points out, "Within Columbia itself, there are likely more worshipers in business parks, schools and community centers than there are in the interfaith buildings."[42] Moreover, a number of congregations have built their own facilities outside the city limits.[43]

As in the Genesis of Ann Arbor case, primary sources from Columbia's interfaith centers feature a mix of religious and practical aspects. "The planning of Columbia in the 1960's embraced a balanced blend of idealism and pragmatism," begins a piece posted by Bet Aviv, a partner congregation at Oakland Mills. "One of the best examples is Columbia's interfaith concept."[44] The "About" feature on the Oakland Mills center's website calls the interfaith centers "a hallmark of Columbia's new town planning" that were intended to "build a stronger sense of community by fostering understanding of and respect for religious diversity. The centers also offer opportunities for mutual cooperation in community outreach efforts and mission."[45] A handout produced by one of the partner congregations of the Owen Brown center also presents the interfaith center model as an extension of James Rouse's larger vision of Columbia as a nurturing, diverse, and efficient new town.[46]

The practical aspects of operating one of these interfaith centers are thoroughly covered in internal documents from the Oakland Mills center. Early on, the partner congregations created a comprehensive cost/use agreement. I was told that a mathematician from one of the congregations applied analytical methods in devising the agreement.[47] Multiple spreadsheets detailed the usage of office, storage, and common spaces (including shared worship areas) by each partner congregation during various time slots over a seven-day period.[48] The cost/use agreement was revised in the early 2000s after questions were raised about equitability. New formulas and accounting practices were implemented that have stood the test of time, according to one lay leader, largely because they provide accurate and auditable records—everyone can see what has been used and how much has been charged. The center's booking policy covers the minutiae of sharing a facility, including reservation procedures, priority usages by partner congregations, and fees for outside groups. In the midst of all the practical details is a reminder of the religious purpose: "The building is first and foremost an interfaith center, a place of worship."[49]

According to its bylaws, "The mission of the Owen Brown Interfaith Center is to be a premier model of interfaith partnership that supports the mission and vision of its owner [partner] congregations, while celebrating and engendering interfaith community within and beyond the center." As with any set of bylaws, most of the document covers legal and procedural matters. The two partner congregations hold "unequal interest" in the center, which shifted dramatically in 2004 to an approximately three-fourths/one-fourth split due to a large capital investment by one of the congregations.[50]

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[42] Lazarick, "Columbia at 50 Part 8."
[43] Forsyth, *Reforming Suburbia*, 156.
[44] "The Interfaith Idea: Alive and Well at The Meeting House," Bet Aviv, accessed July 15, 2017, http://www.betaviv.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=375&Itemid=1288.
[45] "About The Meeting House," accessed May 30, 2018, http://themeetinghouse.org/the-meeting-house-1/#/omii/.
[46] "OBIC Board of Directors," 2017.
[47] The undated document titled "Exhibit 1" contains much that is incomprehensible to a non-mathematician like me, such as Saaty's judgment scale and Eigenvector weights.
[48] Undated Excel document showing data from the years 1978–1979 and 1979–1980.
[49] "Booking Policy for Oakland Mills Interfaith Center," November 16, 2010.
[50] "Bylaws of the Owen Brown Interfaith Center, Inc.," revised January 2012.

As I found at Genesis, a significant majority of my Columbia interviewees (12 of 17 or 71%) listed practical considerations first when asked about the reasons for joining or using the interfaith centers. For the religious renter groups, practicality may be the only reason since they tend to come and go, interacting minimally if at all with either the partner congregations or other user groups. For instance, the women's Bible study that met at the Wilde Lake interfaith center for a few years saw it as a simple business proposition, according to Cameron Sexton, one of the group's leaders. Affiliated with the Calvary Chapel Association,[51] it took some time for these evangelicals to "adjust" (Sexton's term) to the idea of Christians sharing a facility with adherents of other faiths. Having relocated from a more conservative area in the American South, Sexton came to understand it as "such a Columbia thing." The group saw Wilde Lake as essentially no different than a community center, and chose it because of its location and physical attractiveness, not its interfaith ideals.

A Buddhist group affiliated with Kadampa Meditation Center Maryland, a local branch of the New Kadampa Tradition–International Kadampa Buddhist Union,[52] has held monthly meditation classes in the Oakland Mills center for at least ten years. Senior lay teacher Richard Ratigan likes the interfaith vision of diverse religious groups sharing a facility but that was not the motivating factor in choosing this site. The location between Baltimore and DC is convenient for the group's constituents, Columbia's diverse population is attractive, and the facility accommodates the group's needs. Ratigan also told me that they feel welcome at Oakland Mills, which is important since it is difficult to find places that welcome Buddhists.

Similarly, a leader of a non-Christian group that rents space at the Owen Brown interfaith center told me that the group is treated with great hospitality. The center was attractive primarily for practical reasons—suitable facilities, ample parking, and a convenient location for the group's constituents. The nondiscriminatory aspect of the center's mandate was also key to their decision to locate here. Occasions of interfaith engagement with other groups have been minimal. This leader lauded the role Columbia's interfaith centers play in providing temporary lodging while small religious groups accumulate the means to build their own facilities.

The clergy and lay leaders I interviewed from the partner congregations of Columbia's interfaith centers typically emphasized the practical benefits while also touting the specifically religious aspects of the arrangements. One clergyperson lauded the fact that there is "no edifice complex" for the partner congregations: what a congregation gets out of the arrangement is "a cheap building," what a congregation's clergy, officers, and administrative staff get out of it is that, "If the ceiling is leaking, it ain't our problem. We all reap the benefit of that." Among the religious benefits for this person are the programmatic interactions among the congregations, the daily "living together" that includes talking with each other, which does not occur to the same extent even in situations where congregations have adjacent properties. Especially important for this person are the opportunities for clergy interfacing: "The ministry is a lonely frontier. The fact that we're all not doing that alone in silos means it's less lonely, it's more interactive, it's more engaging because we're doing this together." In effect, the interfaith center features its own in-house clergy association.

[51] See Calvary Chapel Association, accessed August 8, 2018, http://calvarycca.org/.
[52] See KMC Maryland, accessed August 8, 2018, https://meditationinmaryland.org/.

Gerry Hanberry, the pastor of Columbia United Christian Church, considers the practical benefits of being a partner congregation at the Oakland Mills center to be primary. Sharing the financial and liability risks with four other congregations is especially attractive. In Hanberry's opinion, after such practical reasons come philosophical reasons (steeped in Rouse's vision for a diverse Columbia) and then a specifically religious reason—that his congregation can fulfill core aspects of its mission of social witness through the partnership provided by the interfaith center. Hanberry also values the clergy interfacing at Oakland Mills, recalling how lonely he felt in a previous pastorate. A recent year-long sharing of personal faith stories during the regular meetings of the Oakland Mills clergy especially moved him.

When asked why Columbia Baptist Fellowship became a partner congregation of Oakland Mills, senior pastor David Stancil first cited the interfaith component of James Rouse's vision. He recalls saying to the search committee who interviewed him, "What you're describing to me is so weird, I'd like to come see it!" A retired Navy chaplain, Stancil fully agrees with his predecessor pastor who likened the Oakland Mills center to a military base chapel in terms of its constituent groups, facilities, and scheduling.

Stancil acknowledged practical drawbacks of the arrangement, such as the "occupational hazard" of acoustical annoyances—of which his congregation is "probably the largest offenders on a routine basis because we are a noisy bunch"—and the weekly "Chinese fire drill" of setting up and breaking down the worship space.[53] But the benefits clearly outweigh the drawbacks. The arrangement is "a lot cheaper than running your own building," Stancil told me, and he is happy to be relieved of worries about property maintenance. When I asked him to identify the most commendable aspect of the arrangement, he replied, "If I had to pick just one thing, economically it is a good deal." A close second is the enriching interfaith engagement, especially among the clergy. Stancil described the twice-monthly clergy meetings as "once for business stuff and once just for friendship and heart stuff." He emphasized how much richer these meetings have been for him than those with a local Christian clergy association. He frequently asks himself how his rabbi colleagues at Oakland Mills would understand a biblical text he is pondering.

A longtime lay leader of one of the partner congregations of Oakland Mills felt that the initial impetus for signing on to the interfaith center idea was Rouse's egalitarian vision but now the primary benefits are financial. With less maintenance costs, a congregation can afford an extra staff person, for instance. Moreover, the clergy are freed up to do ministry and the congregations can focus their attention and resources on their respective missions.

Peter Barbernitz, Director of Adult Faith Formation and Evangelization for St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church at the Oakland Mills center, explained that Cardinal Lawrence Shehan, the Archbishop of Baltimore, decided to buy into the interfaith center experiment in establishing a Catholic parish in Columbia. Hard on the heels of Vatican II, the ecumenical aspect of these centers was attractive but the interfaith aspect was more risky, according to Barbernitz.

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[53] One reporter calls this "the interfaith shuffle" and a "ritual dance," quoting one clergy person: "That's the agony and the ecstasy of interfaith, that switching around." Arthur Hirsch, "Door of Faith Is Open, Yet Revolving, at Columbia Interfaith Centers," *Baltimore Sun*, December 23, 2013, http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/howard/columbia/bs-md-ho-interfaith-20131218-story.html.

He is not sure whether the centers actually save money when compared to stand-alone congregations, but he is sure that they relieve the clergy of many practical headaches. He also noted that St. John has stayed in the arrangement primarily because of the nonfinancial benefits of the ecumenical and interfaith interactions. "I enjoy rubbing up against rabbis and Baptists," he testified. "That informs a lot of what I do here and elsewhere."

Monsignor Richard Tillman, who pastored St. John for more than 30 years, agreed that Cardinal Shehan's decision to join the interfaith center experiment was influenced by Vatican II, and also by his own friendships with Jewish rabbis. But practical considerations were present from the beginning, Tillman told me. The congregations "made the decision to share a building more from a financial point of view than from a theological, philosophical, or social point of view." When I asked Tillman to describe the benefits to St. John today, he spoke of combining resources and dollars, by which St. John can "gain from the contributions of others." For him personally, the benefits included "sharing ideas and thoughts with other clergy," such as comparing sermon/homily notes on a weekly basis. These relationships had practical benefits as well, for instance in negotiating scheduled uses of the facilities.

Two interviewees from the Oakland Mills center told me separately that finances are not a sufficient reason for a partner congregation to remain in an interfaith center. Money just isn't enough to withstand "the bumps in the road," as one person (clergy) put it. The other, an officer of the board, explained that a congregation must have a "kernel" or "spark" of wanting to engage with interreligious partners even if cost savings are the primary consideration.

Again to summarize in light of social exchange theory, specifically religious exchanges and benefits are certainly integral to the space-sharing arrangements of Columbia's interfaith centers, but as with Genesis of Ann Arbor, the nonreligious exchanges and benefits have carried as much if not more weight at times over their decades-long histories, especially in the early years of planning the institutional religious life of the new town.

How Important Is Religion in Interreligious Relationships?

Genesis of Ann Arbor and the interfaith centers of Columbia, Maryland amply illustrate the mix of religious and nonreligious factors in interreligious space-sharing arrangements. In answering the question posed earlier—What does each group give to, and how does each group benefit from, these relationships?—we find that tangible commodities like property and finances are important, sometimes even more important than religious or interreligious valuables like enhancing mutual understanding and fulfilling scriptural or theological mandates.

We can generalize from the space-sharing case to argue that a mix of religious and nonreligious factors can be found in all interreligious relationships, from interfaith organizations and cooperative activities to interpersonal dialogues. Using terms from the field of logic, religion is a necessary but not sufficient condition for interreligious relationships. Nonreligious conditions are also necessary for such relationships and may take priority over religious conditions in certain contexts or situations.

The kind of religious idealism—or perhaps naiveté—that does not recognize the nonreligious factors underlying an interreligious relationship can produce disillusionment or

frustration in some participants when those factors come to light. Or such idealism/naiveté may impede both participants and scholars from gaining a deeper and more nuanced understanding of interreligious dynamics, including the experiences and concerns of certain participant groups.

Sociopolitical factors immediately come to mind. Forming alliances with established religious groups can enhance a minority religious group's status and networking capacity, as well as provide a safety net of solidarity in the face of threats. As Imam Mohamad Jamal Daoudi explained to me, joining with Christians and Jews in the Tri-Faith Initiative of Omaha, Nebraska[54] provides local Muslims a "social ground to stand on," a "venue" for Muslim participation in the larger society. He spoke of the "dark cloud" hovering over American Muslims today as the latest "targeted minority" in the country's history. It is important to show that Muslims are not secluded or isolated, he emphasized, that they are not different from other American citizens. I contend that Christians and Jews in interreligious relationships like Tri-Faith cannot fully understand their Muslim partners without understanding the latter's sociopolitical location and multiple motivations for joining such initiatives.

Perhaps the clearest example of the importance of recognizing both religious and nonreligious factors underlying relationships among Christians, Jews, and Muslims is the Holy Land, revered by all three faiths but also a political impasse for many of their adherents. Whether or not to acknowledge the nonreligious elephants in the interreligious room—and how to proceed if they are acknowledged—poses a serious dilemma in Abrahamic encounters.[55]

To admit that interreligious relationships include nonreligious factors does not diminish the importance of interreligious relationships, it merely presents a more realistic picture of them. I am on record (with colleagues) that religion scholars should not make too much of religion.[56] Participants in interreligious relationships and scholars who study those relationships should also heed that advice. While it is important to pay attention to interfaith dialogue, spiritual engagement, ritual sharing, and the like,[57] it is equally important to recognize when and how nonreligious factors play a role in interreligious relationships. Rather than meaning everything (or nearly everything) in such relationships, religion can actually mean only something.

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[54] See The Tri-Faith Initiative, accessed August 8, 2018, https://trifaith.org.

[55] See Paul D. Numrich, "The Central Ohio Abrahamic Encounter," in *The Abrahamic Encounter: Local Initiatives, Large Implications*, ed. Mazhar Jalil, Norman Hosansky, and Paul D. Numrich (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 25–30.

[56] Paul D. Numrich and Elfriede Wedam, *Religion and Community in the New Urban America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 277; Fred Kniss and Paul D. Numrich, *Sacred Assemblies and Civic Engagement: How Religion Matters for America's Newest Immigrants* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 230.

[57] Marianne Moyaert advocates interreligious ritual participation or "inter-riting" as a means of deepening dialogue. She writes, "Indeed, there is a sense that interreligious encounters that do not include the ritual dimension of religious life may have a limited scope" ("Introduction: Exploring the Phenomenon of Interreligious Ritual Participation," in *Ritual Participation and Interreligious Dialogue: Boundaries, Transgressions and Innovations*, ed. Marianne Moyaert and Joris Geldhof [London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015], 4–5).

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