John L. Esposito, Georgetown University

Presidential Address — Public Understanding of Religion and Issues of Religious Pluralism

John L. Esposito is the founding director of the Center for Muslim—Christian Understanding and the Center for the Understanding of Islam. He is co-director of the Pluralist Project. The author of more than thirty books, including most recently The Future of Religion: How Globalization is Reshaping Faith (Columbia University Press, 2009), he has been described as a “leading light of Islamic scholarship,” and “one of America’s preeminent Islamic scholars.” He has been interviewed or quoted in The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN, ABC Nightline, CBS, NBC, and the BBC, and in newspapers, magazines, and the media in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East. A native of Brooklyn, New York, Esposito currently resides in Washington, D.C., with his wife, Dr. Jeanette P. Esposito.

Diana L. Eck, Harvard University

A Lifetime of Learning

Diana L. Eck is professor of the history of religion in Islamic and Indian studies at Harvard University and director of the Pluralism Project. She is the author of Banaras: City of Light (Knopf, 1982), Darsan: Seeing the Divine Image in India (Columbia University Press, 1988), and most recently India: A Sacred Geography (Harmony, 2012). As founder and director of the Pluralism Project, Eck has also turned her attention to the United States, producing the award-winning CD-ROM On Common Ground: World Religions in America (Pluralism Project, 2008) and publishing A New Religious America: How A 'Christian' Country Has Become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation (HarperOne, 2001). Her book, Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras (Beacon Press, 1993), won the 1995 Grawemeyer Book Award. Eck received the National Humanities Medal from President Clinton in 2001. She is the author of two memoirs, Through the Narrow Gate: A Memoir of Spiritual Discovery (Saint Martin, 2005) and The Spiral Staircase: My Climb Out of Darkness (Knopf, 2004). Her work has been translated into forty-five languages. She has addressed members of the U.S. Congress on three occasions and has been awarded the TED Prize. She is currently working with TED on a major international project to propagate the Charter for Compassion, which was crafted by leading thinkers in six of the world’s religions and is now being implemented practically, realistically, and creatively in the United States, Netherlands, and the Middle East, especially Pakistan.

Karen Armstrong, Charter for Compassion

The Science of Compassion

Karen Armstrong is the author of numerous books on religious affairs, including A History of God: The 4,000-Year Quest of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Knopf, 1993), The Battle for God (Knopf, 2000), Holy War: The Crusades and Their Impact on Today's World (Doubleday, 1991), Islam: A Short History (Modern Library, 2002), The Great Transformation: The Beginning of Our Religious Traditions (Knopf, 2006), The Bible: The Biography (Atlantic Monthly Press, 2007), The Case for God (Knopf, 2009), and most recently Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life (Knopf, 2010). Armstrong has also written two memoirs, Through the Narrow Gate: A Memoir of Spiritual Discovery (Saint Martin, 2005) and The Spiral Staircase: My Climb Out of Darkness (Knopf, 2004). Her work has been translated into forty-five languages. She has addressed members of the U.S. Congress on three occasions and has been awarded the TED Prize. She is currently working with TED on a major international project to propagate the Charter for Compassion (www.charterforcompassion.org).

Plenary Abstract:
Plenary Panel: Public Understanding of Religion and Issues of Religious Pluralism

Shaun Casey, Wesley Theological Seminary

Shaun Casey is professor of Christian ethics and director of the National Capital Semester for Seminarians (NCSS) at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington, DC. He served as senior advisor for religious affairs for the Obama campaign and was a member of the Faith Outreach staff for the 2008 presidential campaign. His research interests include ethics and international affairs, the public implications of religious belief, and the intersection of religion and politics. Casey has written on the ethics of the war in Iraq as well the role of religion in American presidential politics. His book, The Making of a Catholic President: Kennedy vs. Nixon 1960, was published by Oxford University Press in 2009. He is currently working on two writing projects. He is coediting the Oxford Handbook of Political Theology with Michael Kessler of Georgetown University and writing a book on ethics and international politics tentatively titled Niebuhr’s Children. Casey is a graduate of Harvard Divinity School with a Master of Divinity degree and a Doctor of Theology in religion and society. He also earned a Master of Public Administration from the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University with a concentration in international security. He earned a Bachelor of Arts degree from Abilene Christian University. Casey is a member of the American Academy of Religion and serves as chair of its Public Understanding of Religion Committee. He was a visiting scholar at the Center for American Progress and a subject matter expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Ingrid Mattson, University of Western Ontario
Ingrid Mattson is the London and Windsor Community Chair of Islamic Studies at Huron University College at the University of Western Ontario in Canada. She earned her PhD in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations from the University of Chicago in 1999 and a BA in philosophy and fine arts from the University of Waterloo, Ontario, in 1987. Before coming to Huron University, she founded the Islamic Chaplaincy program and was Director of the Macdonald Center for Islamic Studies and Christian–Muslim Relations at Hartford Seminary in Connecticut. She is the author of *The Story of the Qur'an: Its History and Place in Muslim Life* (Wiley Blackwell, 2007) as well as numerous articles exploring Islamic ethics in contemporary Muslim communities. Mattson is an internationally recognized Islamic scholar. From 2006–2010, she served as president of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) and had previously served two terms as Vice President. She is frequently consulted by media, government, and civic organizations and has served as an expert witness.

Josef Sorett, Columbia University

Josef Sorett is an assistant professor of Religion and African-American Studies at Columbia University. As an interdisciplinary scholar of religion and race in the Americas, Sorett employs primarily historical and literary approaches to the study of black communities and cultures in the United States. He has a special interest in how ideas about religion inform broader conversations about culture and society and how such ideas emerge and take shape in (discursive and physical) spaces typically assumed to be outside the provenance of "religion." His current research addresses two central questions: 1) How has religion been imagined in literature, the arts, and popular culture?; and 2) What is the relationship between the cultures of religious institutions (especially churches) and American public life? He has published essays and reviews in *Culture and Religion, Callaloo, the Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion,* and *PNEUMA: Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*; and his writing and commentary have appeared in such popular media outlets *ABC News,* the *New York Times,* and the *Washington Post,* as well as on the BBC and NPR. He is currently working on two book projects: a monograph, *Spirit in the Dark: A Religious History of Racial Aesthetics*
Plenary Speakers in Baltimore

(Oxford University Press, forthcoming); and an anthology, which is tentatively titled *The Sexual Politics of Black Churches*. Sorett received his PhD from Harvard University and he holds a BS from Oral Roberts University and an MDiv from Boston University. Alongside his academic pursuits, Sorett maintains a commitment to public service and has over a decade of experience serving in research and advisory capacities with nonprofit and policy organizations. He is currently a member of AAR’s Public Understanding of Religion Committee.