Challenges to Religious Identity in the 21st Century

Opening Presentation for “Religious Identity and Renewal:

Jewish, Christian and Muslim Explorations”

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Three Repeating False Starts

1) We can emphasize the ideal rather than the lived.

2) We can be too autobiographical, not hearing others, in our quest for identity.

3) We can give too much attention to ourselves—privileging our own religious identity and tradition. We need to listen to ourselves as we speak out of our faith perspectives.

First Challenge: to convince our co-religionists, our fellow Jews, Muslims and Christians, to join us in this enterprise because we grow from healthy challenges to our self-identity arise in multi-religious contexts; in such contexts we construct our religious identity in dialogue with others.

Second Challenge: to realize that models and modes for interreligious activity change; like the models of communal religious life, interreligious models change.

Third Challenge: to address the increasing agnosticism in our societies; degrees of non-belief are increasing and interact with degrees of religious identity.

Fourth Challenge: to bear in mind what Pope Francis calls a twofold transcendence: toward God and toward neighbor; in the company of communal and interreligious companions, we journey.

Fifth Challenge: for all of us, Muslims, Jews, and Christians, we need to face squarely how we each claim an Abrahamic character.

Sixth Challenge: to overcome the fragility of our relationships due to political and social events and strife and the prejudice that remains from our shared histories; we must persist in trust.

Seventh Challenge: to encourage scholarship of one another’s scriptures and traditions; learning languages and other tools of understanding, for us the texture of our dialogues will change.

Eight Challenge: to emphasize our spiritual companionship over our institutional identities; our interreligious partners become community for us.

Ninth Challenge: to address the growing phenomenon of double-belonging in our midst; the past is as relevant as the present.

Tenth Challenge: to keep trajectories alive in the transition to a new generation; we need to take steps for spiritual formation of those who will replace us to live and think interreligiously.