

December 2006

God in All Faces

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Recommended Citation

Mumford, Anne (2006) "God in All Faces," *Verbum*: Vol. 4 : Iss. 1 , Article 7.
Available at: <https://fisherpub.sjfc.edu/verbum/vol4/iss1/7>

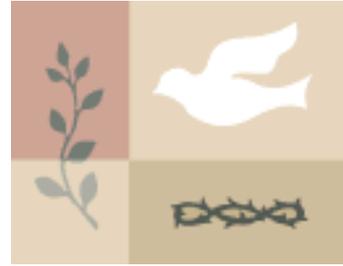
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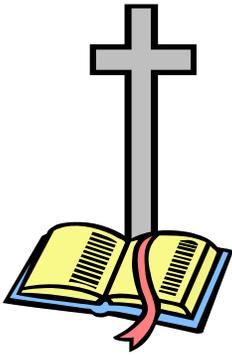
Abstract

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

"In the world there are many people who practice several different religions. Meeting people from different religions helps me realize each has distinct beliefs and interests. I was raised an Italian American Catholic and am still learning about my family's religions."



Living with Other Gods



2006

Winners



God in All Faces
By: Anne Mumford



In the world there are many people who practice several different religions. Meeting people from different religions helps me realize each has distinct beliefs and interests. I was raised an Italian American Catholic and am still learning about my family's religions.

My mother is Catholic. My father is a Baptist and my grandparents were Presbyterians so I got a taste of their religions, services and beliefs. Some of my friends and family's religions include Jewish, Muslim, Baptist, Presbyterian and Methodist.

My friends and I often have conversations about how religion affects our lives and what we do at our churches, including weekly celebrations, youth groups, and classes in preparation for special rites like Confirmation or Bar Mitzvah. We discuss the foods we eat and the traditions we have around our religion. They explain and show me the similarities and differences between their religions and mine. Sometimes their religion is also part of their culture.

My friend, Shkurte, is Muslim and has a very different lifestyle from that of a Catholic. Her religion has a great affect on her life. Shkurte escaped from Kosovo with her family when she was younger. She escaped from Kosovo for religious and political freedom. I remember Shkurte telling me the story of their voyage and the customs she practices even in the United States where she attended Catholic school. One example is when she was fasting because of her religious holiday called Ramadan or Night of Power. Muslims fast or abstain from food from dawn to sunset on this holiday. Shkurte woke up at 5:00 am, ate breakfast, and then went back to bed until it was time to get ready for school. Then she never ate until dinner time even though her classmates in America were eating lunch. At school she was always devoted about her religion and the fast. I was very

impressed by Shkurte's strong religious determination to be a good Muslim. Shkurte never took things for granted. She was a good student; very family oriented and respected other religions. As a result, Shkurte was a respected member of our class.

My grandparents were Presbyterians and I went to their church with my father when we went to visit them. We attended when my grandmother used to play the piano and organ for their church in Batavia. I remember going with my father at Christmas time and seeing how differently they celebrated. The service included much more music, candle lighting, the nativity reading and enactment and we did not kneel. My grandparents were faithful churchgoers but my grandmother found a special devotion through her music. My grandmother's connection with God was through her piano playing. She was amazing to watch when she played. When you heard her music it felt like nothing else in the world mattered except for that moment.

A couple of my other friends, Eric, Jason, and Joey, are all Jewish. They always tell me about their religion and their culture because they are especially close to their families who are very religious Jews. They go to temple once a week for classes to learn Hebrew and study the Torah, which is the first five books of the Hebrew bible. They also studied to make their Bar Mitzvah, a rite of passage for boys in the Jewish religion. I found the Jewish religion and culture very interesting since it influences many things about their daily life such as the food they eat, the holidays they celebrate and the things they wear such as yarmulke, which is a covering for the head, which they wear out of respect for God. We have discussed how it is sometimes difficult not to be influenced by the Christian holidays of Christmas and Easter, which are so commercialized. They, however, celebrate some holidays at the same time such as Hanukah and Passover.

Another friend, Christopher, is Methodist, which is the most similar to Catholics and Catholic teaching. He spends time each evening reading the Bible and discussing the reading with his mother. They have a very different perspective in some cases, about the interpretation of the Bible. Chris also serves in a youth ministry as a volunteer at a boy's correctional school.

My friend's religions and cultures help me in my life in many ways. Our discussions have led me to better understand others. I have learned new and fascinating historical points about other religions and peoples. Knowing the history, practices and beliefs of others helps me appreciate my own beliefs and the power of God and wanting to know him. Most of all I have learned from my friends that no matter what, you are a person and should be treated fairly and should not get judged by their religion or any other personal characteristics. Getting to know the person is what is really important because God is really in all Faces.