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Member Report Crossroads: Art and Religion in American Life

Media reports give the impression that religion is constantly at odds with the arts in American life. But recent case studies and interviews with arts and religious leaders have indicated that there is more cooperation and less antagonism between the two sectors than is commonly reported. This session is based on a seven-year project of the Luce Foundation involving commissioned research, convening, community initiatives, and the recent book *Crossroads: Art and Religion in American Life*, co-published with the Center for Arts and Culture. This project addresses two fundamental questions: what binds the arts and religion to each other, and what drives them apart. Discussants focus on research findings that include an analysis of attitudes towards the arts and suggest strategies and opportunities for coalition building between arts and religious organizations.

Session Designer: Ellen Holtzman
The Henry Luce Foundation

Moderator: Alberta Arthurs
MEM Associates

Panelists: Rabbi Shirley Idelson
Macalester College
Ward Mintz
The Newark Museum
Peter Marsden
Harvard University

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Holtzman: I am pleased to present our panel on Art and Religion in American Life. Our moderator, Alberta Arthurs, will tell you more in detail, but this is the culmination of a seven-year research project that the Luce Foundation undertook, beginning in 1994.

We have today three panelists who are joining Alberta. Alberta was a consultant to the project, and has contributed to the book, *Crossroads*, which is one of the products of this project.

Let me point out first that there has been a change. According to your printed brochures, Susana Leval from El Museo del Barrio was supposed to participate in the panel, and unexpectedly was not able to join us. I want to thank Ward Mintz, from The Newark Museum, for stepping in and adding his own insights for us.

We have this morning, as I said, Ward Mintz, who is the deputy director at The Newark Museum. The Newark Museum is one of the country's most distinguished regional museums, and a leader in combining excellence in collections and programming with broad public access. The Newark Museum is a leader in the area of museum interpretation, and during his seven years at Newark, Ward has seen the museum's exhibitions become models for museums nationwide. Prior to his position in Newark, Ward served in a similar capacity at the Jewish Museum, and from 1979 to 1987 he was a grantmaker, directing the museum program at the New York State Council on the Arts. Ward was also the founding director of the Jamaica Arts Center and the Nassau County Museum of Fine Arts, and he began his long career in the arts at the Brooklyn Museum.

At our next table, we have Rabbi Shirley Idelson. Rabbi Idelson is the project manager of Arts and Religion in the Twin Cities, which is a two-year project funded by the Luce Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation aimed at fostering dialog and collaboration between the arts and religion communities of the Minneapolis-St. Paul area. Rabbi Idelson also works in college chaplaincy at Macalester and Carleton Colleges, and she is an announcer-producer at Minnesota Public Radio. She was ordained in 1991 through the Reform movement at Hebrew Union College in New York, and in 1998 received an MS in journalism from Columbia University. She also writes on Jewish themes for a variety of publications.

Next to Shirley we have Peter V. Marsden, who is a professor in the Department of Sociology at Harvard University. He teaches and does research on social organization, social networks, and social science methodology. With James A. Davis and Tom W. Smith, he is a principal investigator of the General Social Survey, which has tracked trends and attitudes and behaviors of U.S. adults since 1972. He has periodically written about social differences and cultural participation, drawing on survey data. His publications include *Religious Americans in the Arts in the 1990s*.

Finally, although most everybody knows Alberta, is our moderator, Alberta Arthurs. Alberta currently is affiliated with MEM Associates in New York City, which provides programming, planning, and research services for not-for-profit institutions. Until 1997, she was Director for Arts and Humanities at the Rockefeller Foundation, initiating and monitoring programs both in the United States and abroad. During 1996 to 1997, she directed a program on cultural projects and studies for several national organizations, including the Pew Trusts, the Irvine Foundation, the Luce Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and the Chase Manhattan Bank. She is a frequent speaker and commentator on cultural subjects, and an advisor to a number of national and international cultural initiatives. She also serves on several boards including, at the present time, the Salzburg Seminar, the American Place Theater, Aid to Artisans, the Center for Arts and Culture, and National Video Resources. Now I'll turn it over to Alberta.

Arthurs: Thank you, Ellen. I want to talk a little bit about the Luce project, because it has seemed to me that it's an exemplary project for a foundation, with a clear sense of its mission and what it wants to do, but represents a departure out of a central mission.

As early as 1994, Luce convened leaders in the arts and religion from many viewpoints in Washington, D.C. to talk about the arts controversies. Those of us who can think back that far remember that they were particularly heated at that point in time. Specifically, Luce was concerned about the attacks on public funding of the arts and the extent to which the arguments against public funding were ascribed to religious or moral motives or causes on behalf of the public.

It was natural that Luce should take this up, because Luce has in place an arts program and a religion program. But as is the case in much of American life, those two domains within Luce didn't talk to each other very much. It was as though Luce itself were emblemizing the problem in the society at large. The officers at Luce determined, under the guidance of their president, John Cook, to try and figure out what the basic nature of the relationship was, what it could be, and what was standing in the way of better conversations between arts and religion in our society.

The 1994 conversation led to an intense exploration after the 1997 American Assembly on Arts in the Public Purpose, in which the relationship between arts and religion was identified as one of the many, many themes or topics that merit investigation. Luce then put together a three-part project: research and scholarship in the area of arts and religion and their relationship; a set of convenings that brought people together in various sectors to talk about this, meetings of journalists, meetings of humanists, meetings of artists; and a third part of this was a project in community action, which Rabbi Shirley Idelson will talk to us about.

One result of the whole project, as Ellen has suggested, is this book called *Crossroads: Art and Religion in American Life*, in which we are able to report out to the interested arts and culture community the results of the research that was funded through Luce. As one of the writers in this book, Sally Promey, an art historian writes, "There are many points of conflict and conciliation between arts and religion." She talks about conciliation, cooperation, and complementarity on one side of this debate, as well as conflict, tension, and efforts at regulation on the other side of this debate.

Yet, as art historian Neil Harris tells us in his essay in the book, "Contemporary artists in America are likely to possess many values that should make them attractive to the religious-minded: a contempt, hostility, or indifference to materialism; a skepticism about politics as a defining life experience; a concern for spiritual fulfillment; an absorption with the liminal and the experimental." These are values that many churches preach as well. Knowing that, and that sentiment is expressed in other ways in these essays as well, the question becomes why has the dialog between these two great domains in American life

been so difficult, or why has it been perceived to be so difficult?

The three speakers we have here today were chosen to demonstrate two things. One is, modes of working on this issue, from scholarship to cultural institutional commitment to community action on Shirley's part. And also to demonstrate to us the ways in which arts and religion can communicate. I hope that they will lead us together to a set of questions that will take up the rest of our time.

The format: We're going to ask first Peter Marsden, and then Rabbi Shirley Idelson, and then Ward to speak to us. Ward will end with slides, which I think is quite wonderful. I hope time will permit me to ask them to engage with each other briefly before we throw it open to all of you. I hope at the end of our hour and a half together, we will be able to reach some sense of consensus about what we can take away from this room.

Let me start with Peter. And Peter, you're going to tell us what you're going to do and then do it! Right?

Marsden: I hope so. I'm glad I get to go first, because my slides are not nearly as elegant as Ward's.

I am speaking about work that two of the three components of the Luce-funded research projects did. I worked on this project with two of my colleagues at Princeton, Paul DiMaggio and Bob Wuthnow. Our mission was to provide some background on the current state of play between arts and religious sectors in American life, with particular attention to the question of whether the gulf between them is as wide as portrayed in certain portrayals, particularly those that we see in the media.

Most of this material comes out of the *Crossroads* book that Alberta mentioned. I'll summarize briefly first Wuthnow's findings from his interviews with leaders of religious and arts organizations; then a few of my findings about religion and art in the lives of ordinary Americans; and then a little bit from something that we're still writing about what congregations do and the extent to which arts activities are already incorporated in religious organization.

The broad conclusion is that, while these sectors aren't entirely harmonious in all respects – I think the quote from Sally Promey is very apt – there's less in the way of a gulf or a fault between them. There's a good deal of open terrain for collaboration, and a fair

amount of existing collaboration between these two major cultural sectors.

Let me first speak about the work that Bob Wuthnow did in interviewing religious and arts leaders. He undertook long, in-depth interviews with seventy leaders of religious and arts organizations in five American cities: Dallas, Cleveland, New York, Philadelphia, and San Francisco. The focus was on the desirability of collaboration; the prospects for collaboration; barriers to collaboration; and the methods or frameworks in which collaboration would best be pursued.

The main conclusions from these interviews are that, first, there are opportunities for closer work between these sectors, and in broad terms, both sets of leaders believe that it's a desirable sort of thing. Both can see that there are commonalities to the missions that their sectors take on. Perhaps more often cited than anything else was something that I'm sure everybody here is familiar with, just the pressure of other things to do. The routine activities and obligations that are central to the mission, and some feeling that each sector, religion and art, would have to be given a little more in the way of a rationale for why we should go about collaborating more, but there is not an intrinsic disinclination to do so.

Many of the themes of the interviews had to do with bases of conflict, like competition for funds. Do these two sets of organizations feel that more for them is less for somebody else, or the other way around? They didn't. These leaders did not indicate that they were feeling strongly competitive. He also pursued the theme of elitism. Were religious organizations disinclined to work with arts organizations because arts organizations were perceived as elitist? And there were some elements of this in the findings that came back, but a great deal seems to have been done to soften this.

One problem that he did discover was that each set of leaders thought that dialog would be useful for pursuing the other set of leaders to change. This would be something that would be a difficult thing to surmount. Issues of public morality, often differing interpretations of the same kinds of works, seem to be the most difficult turf for these kinds of collaborations to surmount.

In terms of the venues or tactics for collaboration, concrete projects rather than abstract conferences about, "This is a desirable thing to do," seem to be the

most promising venue. Specific projects, community arts councils, delivery of arts-related programs in a congregational setting to lower-income children was something that was mentioned repeatedly as a useful form for collaboration. As we'll see, congregations do already incorporate some arts activities, and several of the leaders suggested that one way in which collaboration could be heightened would be highlighting and heightening the appreciation of the artistic activities that already take place within religious settings.

Let me now jump to the work that I did on how religion and the arts intersect in the lives of everyday Americans. As Ellen mentioned, I work on a national survey that's been going on for some time now about different elements of behavior and attitudes in American life. The Luce-related project focused on how participation in and attitudes toward the arts are linked to elements of religious belief, religious participation, and religious affiliation.

One broad pattern came out as we looked for differences in divisions here. Participation in the arts, less traditional attitudes toward what the arts should be, and support for the arts, both in terms of financial support and giving of time in the form of volunteering, tend to be highest among non-Christian groups, moderate among mainline Protestant and Catholic groups, and lowest in conservative Protestant groups. They tend to be lowest among those persons with the most traditional and orthodox acceptance of Christianity.

Importantly, and echoing the non-competition conclusion from Wuthnow, however, we found that those who attend religious services more are consistently more likely to attend arts activities across quite a wide spectrum of arts activities. So that focuses on the division piece, which we social scientists are often prone to look for.

But in terms of commonalities, we stress that these divisions are distinctions of degree, not of kind. In all religious backgrounds and in all religious beliefs, there was an appreciable amount of arts participation. Notably, the groups that are least involved in the arts and take the most traditional views of the arts nonetheless do value them when they are linked to religious life. There is a widespread acknowledgment that involvement in the arts is compatible with religious devotion. There is much recognition on the part of people that they do experience arts-related

activities in congregational settings. These provide quite a broad base, a broad potential that can be exploited by collaborative efforts.

Nonetheless, and again echoing the conclusion from Wuthnow's interviews with leaders, we found that there are very strong reservations about art that is perceived to be demeaning to religious beliefs, or challenging to sacred symbols. This is the second component of what we found out.

The last thing I'm going to review is some work that was done in a survey of what religious organizations do, and it covered quite a lot of ground. What I'll focus on here is its findings about the way in which religion and the arts intersect in congregational settings.

First, a number of activities were probed in worship. Quite widespread is congregational singing, use of musical instruments, and choral singing. These are done by large majorities of religious congregations. You'll see there that the perspective of individuals and the perspective of congregations are a little different because if large and small congregations differ, they affect different numbers of people. So for example, we see that choral singing happens to seventy percent of people who go to services, but only about half of congregations. There are soloists in half the congregations, and even some less traditional musical forms – skits and plays, dance – are quite common in congregational settings.

Perhaps more of importance to efforts to encourage collaboration between the worlds of religion and art are activities that occur within congregations, but outside of the worship setting. Large fractions of congregations have non-worship groups that deal with the arts. Half of people who go to churches and synagogues have the opportunity to join groups that put on musical or theatrical performances. There are widespread groups that discuss books other than the Bible, and about half of religious groups have auxiliary groups within them that attend arts events.

A second form of activity that's of particular importance is the use of congregational facilities for arts performances or arts exhibits. This is not as widespread as the non-worship groups; nonetheless, about fifteen percent of congregations allow the use of their buildings for musical performances and rehearsals, and these are the larger ones, because about thirty percent of religious attendees are in congregations that do this. Smaller but still appreciable numbers

of congregations allow their facilities to be used for exhibits of works of art. We also find that – this surprises at least some folks in United States settings – a third of congregations attract people who come to view their worship space as an object of art in and of itself.

These findings about what congregations do are consistent with the proposition that there exists a basis for collaboration. The others on the program will be better than I at understanding how one could take advantage of this. Thank you.

Arthurs: Thank you. We're going to move through the presentations and then talk about them together. The next speaker is Rabbi Idelson. Shirley?

Idelson: Thank you. I thought I would talk a little bit about the origins of our project, and then tell you what's happened so far.

We are technically a two-year project, and we are right now at the beginning of Year Two. It is a project that is funded by Luce and Rockefeller Foundations, and it really began in 1999 when Luce convened, with the help of the Bush Foundation, a meeting in the Twin Cities, bringing together leaders from the arts communities and leaders from the religious communities. The idea of the meeting was to explore the relationships that existed at the time, and perhaps to explore some of the tensions and rifts and problems that were present.

What was found, and was not so much a surprise to the leaders who were at the meeting, was that really, their relationships were characterized by collaboration and alliance. Many of the people there were already working together, and I mean working together on arts- and religion-related projects. There was a tremendous spirit of cooperation among the group. So the group was asked to put together a proposal for a project, which they did, and Luce and Rockefeller funded.

The project was divided into two parts. The first part would be a year of public dialogs, and a public survey; and the second year would be a granting program. We've just come out of the public dialogs piece of it.

What I wanted to tell you before jumping into the dialogs was a little bit about the Twin Cities community. We are the land of Garrison Keillor, and while it is a heavily Lutheran community with a strong

Lutheran presence, it's also incredibly diverse, particularly religiously, and one reason for that is that the Twin Cities have become known as a particularly hospitable place for refugees. We have a very large Hmong community, a very large Somali community, and a very large Mexican community, as well as substantial African-American and Jewish communities. It's a pretty diverse place. Of course there's a ton of stuff going on in the arts, particularly in the visual arts, with the Walker, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and the Weisman, as well as lots of community-based arts organizations, some of which are rooted in the cultural communities. A place called CreArte, which is a Mexican-American based gallery and school, and a place called the Hmong Center for Arts and Talent, were also very involved in our project, and we are richer because of it.

The first year we put together a series of dialogs. We decided to work large-scale and small-scale at the same time. Because we had to put it together fairly quickly – and I think in retrospect, for other reasons, this ended up being a good decision – for the large-scale dialogs we decided to collaborate with organizations and communities that were already putting programs together. We were particularly benefited by the fact that last year the University of Minnesota Art Department had put together a program called *Divine Perversities*, which was a series of lectures and discussions about contemporary art and religion.

Using our resource base of leaders and also many, many volunteers, the first thing we did was to find out what was going on and to start organizing what we considered and hoped would be large-scale dialogs. I'll give you a couple of examples of those, and we can come back to some of them if people are interested in the question period.

The first one was at an experimental theater in Minneapolis, and a local playwright had written a play called *Thrown by Angels*, and it was a play that was a contemporary take on the story of Lot and Lot's family. What we decided to do was to add a dialog after one of the performances, called "Raiding the Sacred Texts." We brought together the head of the theater, the playwright, and a local minister who conducted this conversation about raiding the sacred texts. Are there any limitations that should be placed on artists when they draw upon sacred texts as the source for their contemporary artwork? That was the very first one.

I'm not going to tell you all of them, just a few others. We had Elaine Pagels from the Department of Religion at Princeton, and she had a conversation with Tim Rollins from Kids of Survival, and it was fabulous! As many of you probably know, Tim Rollins, the artist, is also now a minister, and Elaine Pagels is the scholar who has written so much about the Gnostic Gospels. They spoke about how that which is heretical initially, becomes canonized sometimes. It was fascinating.

We also had Eleanor Hartney. I don't know if people are familiar with her work, but when it comes to art and religion, her work is just fabulous. I don't remember whom she spoke with, but she jumped right into the controversial works and controversial episodes of the last decade, talking about Mapplethorpe and Serrano and O'Feely.

Her position is that those controversies, like the one in Cincinnati, or the one at the Brooklyn Museum of Art, are not so much about the art world against the religious world, but if you look closely at what's going on, they represent a religious conflict of two very different religious views. What's really going on is that you have fundamentalist Protestants who are in this case really at war with lapsed, or not-lapsed, Catholics. Because most of the artists who have been targeted are Catholic or lapsed Catholics.

She spoke at length about how much of their work is about the body. What she got into was how we have two really divergent views of the body. One that shows the body as a means to the sacred, and the other that sees the body as profane and as something that needs to be transcended in order to get to the sacred. These artists who put the body right out there in all of its physicality really offend those who see the body as something that needs to be transcended. And it's actually more complicated than that.

It was really interesting to have someone dive right into the most controversial art works in front of an audience, many of whom came from very religious positions. So that was another example.

We had Archie Rand come out. Archie Rand is a Jewish painter whose work began as abstraction and moved into very explicitly Jewish work. He told stories about when he made that transition from abstraction to what you could call Jewish art; his friends in the art world and his friends in the Jewish world were appalled and thought he was crazy. The people in the art world thought first of all – and he

actually agreed – that he would have no more sales, but also that his work in some way was diminished because it went to that kind of explicitly religious place. His friends in the Jewish world were suspicious. Many of his friends are Orthodox Jews, and they had issues, including people who commissioned him to do work in, for example, a *yeshiva*, with the fact that his work was figurative. He was under threat of excommunication by Rabbi Moshe Feinstein for the figurative work that he was doing. It was very interesting to hear how an artist who decided to move to the explicitly religious became immediately an object of suspicion, both in the art world and in the religious world.

I'll give two more examples. One was the individual artist voice in the Hmong community. We did two different dialogs at the Hmong Center for Arts and Talent in St. Paul, and the first one focused on visual arts. We had a number of young Hmong painters speaking.

One of the things that was very interesting about their talk and the dialog that ensued was how they were coming from a traditional perspective. Their work was very much about Hmong experience, and much of their work tells the story of this people. In that way, they are very much rooted in their community. But the mere fact that their work is 2-D painting, painting on canvas, is a departure from Hmong tradition and made them objects of suspicion in their own communities. Even though they were telling their community's story, they were doing it in a new form within that tradition, and in that way were struggling within their own community.

This last one that I'll describe was organized by a performance artist who put together a piece of work around a character called Joha, who is a folkloric character. He's a trickster, and he's shared by Arab and Sephardic Jewish traditions. David Harris, the artist, discovered that the Sephardic Jewish community – not just in the United States, but he went to Spain and Morocco – had no idea that their Arab neighbors shared the same character. And vice versa. The Arab Christians and Muslims whom David spoke with had no idea that Joha was this character in Jewish tradition.

So he put together a performance piece, and then we worked with him on creating a dialog, again, that would take place after one of the performances. We put together a panel that included representatives

from the Jewish community and from the Arab-American community in the Twin Cities, and we talked about this shared character.

This was last February, I think, and although it was before the most recent horrific events, it was still a fairly horrific time politically, particularly in Israel, Palestine, and the whole region that continues to be at war. This event brought together Jews and Muslims in the Twin Cities into one room to share an artistic experience and then to talk about it together. In a way I think that the most important part was that they stayed and talked with each other about it. It was incredibly powerful, and it was about art, and it was about religion, and it was about these people who do not talk with each other, meeting each other and finding common ground.

In a way, and I could be wrong about this – but I came away feeling like art was one of the few places where we could get these people into a room together. If we had said we're going to talk about politics, or we're going to talk about religion, I don't think they would have shown up. But they were willing to come see this performance piece, and it was pretty amazing.

We also had a whole series of small-scale dialogs, and I'll just run through some of the topics, because they were entirely volunteer-driven. Some topics recurred, and indicated strong interest, I think. Some of the topics included: developing sacred space; exploring points of distrust and discord between arts and religion; sacred and profane in art and religion; the power of religious symbol; what makes a piece of art religious; ritual in art and religion – again, sacred space kept coming up – art, religion, and right vocation; the artist's role in evoking the sacred; art, religion, and the unforgiving critic; and exploring the responsibility of the artist to religion.

We identified three themes that recurred through the dialogs, and they were tension between contemporary art and religion, overlapping roles of art and religion, and art and religion as forms of cultural resistance. What we're doing now is this granting program. We're encouraging people, as they apply for a grant from Arts and Religion in the Twin Cities, to address one of these themes, although we're not requiring it. We are requiring that every granted project include public dialog. That's because we came away believing that public dialog is what will enable us to build the relationships between these two

worlds which are clearly, at least in the Twin Cities, not at war with each other; to the contrary. But they are two worlds where, while the leaders are very much working together, the people on the next tier are not, necessarily, and just may not know each other. Dialog is the way to bring them together.

The final thing I'll say is that one of the most gratifying things that's happened from the project is the building of a new community. It's a community of people who are strongly interested in arts and religion. The Twin Cities has had at least one major controversial kind of episode. Should that happen again, we have a whole base of people who are strongly identified as caring about art and religion, who are there to respond, and who know each other already, who have relationships that now exist and are strong.

Arthurs: Thank you, Shirley. Ward?

Mintz: Thank you. First, I want to apologize for having prepared remarks, but I tend to get a kind of amnesia when I'm talking in front of unfamiliar folks.

As part of my preparation for the remarks I was going to make today about presenting religion at The Newark Museum, I began thinking about our current exhibition, *Art & Home: Dutch Interiors in the Age of Rembrandt*, and what a pleasure it is to be presenting extraordinary works of art from one of the great art-producing eras and societies of the past millennium. It's a mainstream show that all visitors can delight in, an exhibition filled with splendid paintings and prints by the likes of Rembrandt, Metsu, Terborch, de Hooch, and Maes, complemented by luxury objects of silver, glass, and marquetry.

But working at The Newark Museum for seven years can alter that reality subtly. Newark has become a national leader in presenting art in the context of culture and history, and *Art & Home*, the current exhibition, doesn't disappoint, weaving a hypnotic tale of the rise of Protestant bourgeois culture in the Netherlands as epitomized by the home. While in *Art & Home*, the rise of Protestant values is one of many themes, the familiarity of the theme of religion probably speaks to how much we've been involved in presenting exhibitions that combine religion and culture.

Tibetan Buddhism, Japanese Buddhism, Bengali Hinduism, Eastern Orthodoxy. Portuguese Cathol-

icism. And Puerto Rican popular Catholicism. Judaism. Yoruba Shanga worship. They've all had a home at The Newark Museum in the past few years. Why?

In some instances, it's because the museum has extensive collections of material related to these religious cultures, and an exhibition was an excellent end product of a period of study, documentation, and conservation. In other cases, it was a deliberate goal of engaging a specific community in a state that is one of the most ethnically diverse in the country. But even that doesn't tell the whole story.

Newark's mission is to "Combine objects and ideas, and to do so respecting the needs and wishes of its communities." So when Newark creates an exhibition of art from Bengal, it engages members of the large Bengali community in central New Jersey. The result, *Cooking for the Gods*, explored the role of women in the performance of domestic religious culture. The galleries were not only the home of rare and meaningful objects, but also at times the site for the performance of those domestic rituals. And we thank the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, by the way, for their support of that project.

Newark also is the home of the greatest collection of Tibetan materials in the West. When the Michael Graves renovation occurred in 1989, the Tibetan altar, first installed as a WPA project in the thirties, needed to be rethought. Our curator, Valrae Reynolds, consulted with the Tibetan community in the New Jersey-New York metropolitan area about what it should look like and contain. We also commissioned a Tibetan artist in exile, Phuntsok Dorje, to create the painted decoration.

The resulting altar, which you saw as my first slide – we wanted you to become very serene – was consecrated by His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, who happened to meet then-Bishop Tutu on the day he was in Newark. Archbishop McCarrick, now Cardinal McCarrick, came over to greet them, as did Newark's mayor, Sharpe James, who you see on the left.

The Newark Museum has a decades old history of close communication and collaboration with its large African-American population in the city and surrounding county. The museum boasts the oldest continuing Black Film Festival in the United States, an American art collection with major works by African-American artists starting in the early nine-

teenth century, and at least one temporary exhibition on aspects of African and African-American culture each year.

However, the museum does not have the same history of regularly addressing the cultures of the second- and third-largest populations in the city, Latinos and Portuguese. The Portuguese community has limited its residency in the city to one area east of Newark Penn Station, known currently as the Ironbound, and has since spread into surrounding towns. It has, in the wonderful Cold War allusion of a Portuguese board member, “erected the codfish curtain” between the Ironbound and the rest of Newark. The museum received few Portuguese drop-in visitors.

Prior to Mary Sue Price’s having assumed the directorship of the museum, the administration waited for the right Portuguese exhibition to be offered. No such offer ever materialized, and it was time to organize one in-house. What resulted was one of the most successful outreach projects the museum has ever attempted. Knowing that the Portuguese community is primarily working and middle-class, with strong representation in such fields as construction and food services, and knowing that museum and gallery-going was not an important pastime, the museum decided to create an exhibition of loan materials that would be appealing to a large segment of the community, and at the same time, be a major contribution to scholarship and museum interpretation.

We approached a brilliant Iberianist, Jerrilynn Dodds. Professor Dodds suggested an exhibition that would explore the ways in which the Virgin Mary has helped construct Portuguese identity over six hundred years. It was called *Crowning Glory: Images of the Virgin in the Arts of Portugal*. And we’re grateful to Tomás Ybarra Frausto and the Rockefeller Foundation for their support, as well as the Portuguese Ministry of Culture. Jerri Dodds insisted that the exhibition be unorthodox. It would combine high art with folk and popular art, and would also contain objects from the lands colonized by the Portuguese.

Crowning Glory was organized not chronologically or stylistically, but according to the life of the Virgin, including her life as related by both the canonical and non-canonical books of the Bible. With the help of New Jersey Network, the museum taped the biannual procession of Our Lady of Fatima through the streets of the Ironbound, and that tape, along with

banners from churches in Newark and Elizabeth, was included in the exhibition.

As Han Kotter wrote in *The New York Times*, “Such items would rarely have found a place in a show like this a few years ago. But times and views of art have changed, treating the image of the Virgin as part of a continuing tradition rather than as a relic of the past.”

An active advisory committee led by a Portuguese-American trustee, Dr. Linda Rodriguez, met frequently. The museum recruited Portuguese-speaking docents, or gallery guides, and had Portuguese-speaking students greeting visitors at the door every weekend.

Probably the high point of the exhibition came during a Portuguese family day one Sunday afternoon. Museum educator Linda Nettleton had created a strong relationship with a priest of one of the Ironbound churches, and with his help, and the help of priests at another church, the museum ferried thousands of people by bus from the Ironbound across the downtown to the museum, back and forth, back and forth. Forty-eight hundred people ended up seeing the exhibition on that one day.

At the same time that *Crowning Glory* was in the main galleries, we mounted the second in an ongoing series of smaller exhibitions called *Cultural Crossings*. This one was called *Images of the Sacred Feminine in The Newark Museum Collection* and included such images as the Buddhist Green Tara, the Egyptian goddess Osiris, the Hindu goddess Shiva, as well as the Virgin Mary. We approached the archdiocese of Newark about the possibility of bringing the pilgrim statue of Our Lady of Fatima from Portugal for temporary residence in the cathedral in Newark – we felt she was a little too powerful for a museum residence. Not only did they bring it, but the statue also toured parishes throughout the archdiocese.

We’re following up on that exhibition mounted four years ago with another major Portuguese show. This time, it will not be about religion, but rather about the great tradition of Portuguese decorative arts. We know that the museum will not have to overcome any suspicions, having shown the degree to which it will go in inviting its community into its doors.

Last February, we mounted an exhibition about African religion called *Faces of Worship: An African God in Two Worlds*, about the deity Shango. Shango is the thunder god of the Yoruba people of Nigeria,

and he was presented in both indigenous African and New World aspects. We installed a Yoruba shrine as it would look in West Africa, and altar equivalents made by adherents representing devotion in Brazil, Trinidad, and New Jersey.

Here we see a devotee of Shango dancing while carrying the carved wooden wand that signifies both her mediating role, and that facilitates her trance. Next we see a ram, one of the great pieces in our collection, who is sacred to Shango, the strength of its horns often considered a metaphor for the power of lightning and thunder.

Museums used to show African art with the assumption that the people whose culture and whose religion it was representing were far away. Now they live around us.

The principal advisor for *Faces of Worship* was John Mason, the scholar of African art and priest of the Yoruba religion. The blessing of the exhibition at a lecture by the scholar Robert Farris Thompson brought hundreds of people to the museum on a Sunday afternoon. Interestingly for The Newark Museum, *Faces of Worship* was somewhat controversial among our large, Protestant, middle-class African-American following.

I was going to talk about the Santos exhibition that we did with El Museo del Barrio, but I think in the interests of time, I'll go on. You want to hear? Okay, fine.

This past summer, the museum presented *Puerto Rican Santos de Palo: Objects Between Heaven and Earth*. This marked the first time that New York's El Museo del Barrio traveled their celebrated collection of carved wooden saints. Santos are not only objects of devotion, but also have become potent symbols of Puerto Rican identity. Here you see the great piece from El Museo's collection called *The All-Powerful Hand of God*.

While this was not the first exhibition related to Latino culture that we mounted – in fact, the last, Pepón Osorio's *Badge of Honor* installation, traveled to the Johannesburg Biennial – it was the first in a few years. What the Santos exhibition helped clarify was the relative difficulty of working with the Roman Catholic archdiocese. Representatives of the archdiocese were included on our advisory committee for the Santos show. A conversation I had with one of the Roman Catholic representatives was revealing.

I asked her whether the bishop in charge of the Office of Hispanic Affairs should be approached about becoming more actively involved. She gave me a skeptical look, explaining that *santos* were a form of popular Catholicism, which was not necessarily sanctioned by the Church hierarchy.

As with the *Crowning Glory* exhibition, I was completely unable to communicate with anyone in the parochial school system about developing class visits to the exhibition. And like *Crowning Glory*, our most fruitful relationships, other than those with our advisory committee and the organizations that they represented, were with parish priests.

Our current project, and the last I'm going to talk to you about involving religions, is perhaps the most unusual and in many ways the most challenging, given our times.

The Museum has decided to commemorate the disaster at the World Trade Center through a variety of actions. One of the most immediate has been to borrow from our former senator, Frank Lautenberg, a large, wonderful, and quite ambiguous painting of an American flag by the California artist Ed Rusche.

Far more ambitious is a product scheduled to appear in March, and which will run through this summer. Tentatively titled, *The Garden of Dreams and Remembrance*, it will transform the museum's central interior courtyard space into a three-dimensional metaphor: a Spanish medieval garden, reminding visitors of a time starting in the eighth century until approximately the thirteenth, when Christians, Muslims, and Jews lived together under an enlightened Muslim rule. Not perfectly, mind you, but lived together and shared a vibrant culture. The court will have orange trees, a central fountain, scented plants, and live birds. It will have explanatory texts and blowups of its inspiration: places like the Alhambra; the mosque at Cordova; the synagogue in Cordova; and the garden of the Alcazar in Seville. The garden will be the site of humanities and science programs ranging from readings of Hebrew medieval love poetry to musical performances of the *Cantigas de Amigo*, Songs of Friendship of Alfonso the Wise, from lectures on Islamic architecture to workshops on early astronomy and tile-making.

There are many on the staff who are quite ambivalent about this project, many who believe that the museum should do nothing to show Muslims in anything approaching a positive light. Others of us

believe deeply in the metaphor, and that includes, at least through an informal notification, the staff and trustees of one local foundation – this is, by the way, a very expensive project. Stay tuned, or call, or e-mail for more information about *The Garden*. Thank you very much.

Arthurs: Wonderful. I think we should throw it open to all of you to let you pick up on any questions that you may have about these findings, research and scholarship, or community-based, or cultural institutional activities. Please say who you are.

Audience: I'm with the Flintridge Foundation in the Los Angeles area. This is a really interesting panel, and the topic of the session brings up many, many issues in a macrocosmic kind of way – the role of art in the public sphere, the power of art to work on a spiritual level. I have all these questions floating in my mind, and I'm not going to have one articulate question.

The perception that I have is, art has relevancy when you look on a microcosm, that on a smaller level, in a community, on an individual basis we know that art has power. For instance, the popular ones that I can think of, where the intersection happens in a popular way with modern art, which oftentimes is regarded as being less spiritual and about the public. You know you think of Rothko and his work in the chapel in Texas; or the fact that we use significant conceptually-based architects like Philip Johnson to create the Crystal Cathedral.

But there are also many examples of how contemporary art is really separated on a spiritual level with the public. There are so many roots of why that is. Conceptual art is just that, it's about the individual thought. In many ways, it's considered that if you even get government funding, it compromises the meaning and integrity of this highly individual work of art.

One of the things that was really interesting in articles in *The New York Times* and significant national publications is, after September 11th, what will art do? Where is the relevancy? That doesn't talk on a microcosm level between neighborhoods or one-on-one, but on a really huge macrocosm level. I'm a great lover of conceptual art. I love Serrano and Mapplethorpe, and I doubt that that kind of conceptually-based contemporary art even has the ability to speak to so many different kinds of issues and peoples,

in essence, in a postmodern world. So I was just wondering what your perceptions are of that.

Arthurs: Let me see if Ward can take a quick response to that, given what he's just told us about this upcoming show. And then I wonder, Peter, if you can think of any ways in which the research that you're aware of might speak to the particular problem or opportunity of conceptual art. But you can think about that while Ward is speaking.

Mintz: First, I want to say I was so scrupulous about thanking all of the funders for the various projects I mentioned. I want to add the National Endowment for the Arts, for the *Art & Home* Dutch exhibition. So thank them as well.

I think that the issue really goes way back. It's fifty years ago when abstract expressionist artists and artists working at that time consciously separated themselves from what they saw as the vulgarity of mainstream culture. Since then, contemporary art has in many cases continued that conscious separation.

I thought about the cover of this book, the *Crossroads* book. It's the most beautiful cover, of a piece by Petah Coyne, that I think would really be totally puzzling to many people who saw it.

I think the difference is that we only know the three or four or ten names. There are really many artists who are working to try to communicate in a more direct way, and do, and can, and the ones who don't, who communicate to a smaller group, should communicate to a smaller group. We shouldn't try to use them to do something their work can't do otherwise. That's just the nature of things.

I think that oftentimes, and rightfully so again, curators are most influenced by what is within the art world, not what is within communities. They choose work that, especially contemporary art curators, their colleagues will most value, not necessarily works that the communities in which they live will value.

Audience: A prime example of that is, you were talking about this kind of avant garde approach in your exhibition on high and low art. Low art indirectly is tentatively equated with popularity. If you are in the fine arts institution, you preclude spirituality. You preclude a community-based emotional relevancy.

Mintz: I struggle with the canon, the museum canon, all the time. That's the most important thing. Most museum people are relatively unconscious about the canon of presentation in museums. We interviewed a scholar who we were thinking of having work with us on the Portuguese show, and she said, "You're not going to put folk art and high art together, are you?" And Jerri Dodds said, "You bet!" But that whole thing is very important.

Arthurs: Do you have anything to contribute on this perplexing question, Peter?

Marsden: Well, not a great deal, and so I'll try to contribute it briefly.

We did ask some questions about the reception of modern art, and I guess what I would say we found is that it is the form that is more readily misunderstood, therefore more risky, and therefore the kind of thing that is more apt to be conflict-prone than other forms. I guess I would be skeptical that any form of art is going to be macro enough to deal with what we've been through in the last seven or eight weeks. In thinking about your lead, I thought about most politics being local in the end, and having the strong sense that the kinds of things that Shirley and Ward are describing, that are local but try to create a basis for resilience, being the most optimistic way one can hope to move, because sometimes the wind blows awfully hard.

Idelson: This is what Barnett Newman said: "The present painter [that's himself] is concerned not with his own feelings, or with the mystery of his own personality, but with the penetration into the world mystery. His imagination is therefore attempting to dig into metaphysical secrets. To that extent, his art is concerned with the sublime. It is a religious art which, through symbols, will catch the basic truth of life."

Arthurs: I want to add something we learned from one of our convenings amongst the group of artists. Those were artists who dealt explicitly and implicitly with spiritual and/or religious subject matter. Several of the artists, including Robert Gober in particular, said – whether you choose to believe him or not – that his work is a personal expression, in that case of his Catholicism, and in other cases of other expressions, and that he was not giving that much thought to how it was going to be perceived and received. That it was

purely personal, and however people received it was up to them.

Now, that's a little bit different than what Newman was saying, but it's another take on what the artist's intention is.

Other questions?

Audience: I'm with the local arts agency in Sacramento, California. And we're going to be developing a Museum of Tolerance in Sacramento. It was the site of numerous bombings against synagogues, and also the defamation of the Japanese-American Society and the NAACP several years ago. Besides the religious community, the art community is involved in developing that.

I wonder where this study is going to go, now that we know this, and I also am curious about what we know. It seems like I heard that what we found out was that the conflict is not really so much between art and religion as that religion is being reflected. The conflicts within the religious community are being reflected by the artist, as of course art does, for society as a whole. So is the Luce Foundation pursuing something, or is there more going to be happening?

Arthurs: That's an important question. Let me point to some other findings if I can.

One of the studies looked at conflicts around works of art in one community. It happens to be Philadelphia, and this was work done by Paul DiMaggio and his students. What they found – another angle on this question of who's in conflict with whom – was that neither artists, nor the artists' communities, nor religious actors were very much involved in those controversies at all. There weren't very many. A few of them got a great deal of attention. Neither the people we would identify with the religious communities in that city nor the artists' communities were very much engaged. The heat that was generated came largely from a handful of people who had motivations of their own, and the media that made much of the conflict.

Another angle on this, though – and maybe we should put all these findings together in one place and look at them together – Neil Harris points out that probably controversies involving art and religion are always going to exist in the United States simply because we're so diverse a country. Any time an artist expresses his religious beliefs, or a lack of them,

someone is bound to object in the everlasting interplay and tensions that exist in the kind of polity we have. Which is another extremely interesting point.

But I think we should address your question about where this work is going.

Heller: Sure. As a follow-up to that, I would like to suggest that it's really interesting to examine why there was a controversy around the Yoruba exhibit at The Newark Museum. That seems to me a continuation of the dialog, and a continuation of why these exhibits are controversial, because they bring up religious issues for different constituencies.

Mintz: In that instance there was nothing overt, by the way. I just heard people speaking about it and being concerned about it, which I think is fine. As we're now saying, working on this garden, "A little buzz isn't so bad."

Arthurs: Shirley would have turned it into a dialog. Maybe Ellen can speak to the "Where do we go from here?" point.

Holtzman: Just not to leave your question hanging: as I said, this is the culmination of seven years of activity at the Luce Foundation, and the first time that the arts program and the theology program worked together. We generally don't run our own program. I will also say that we spent a number of years trying to get other funders to join us, and until the Rockefeller Foundation helped fund the final piece, the *Grassroots Community* piece, we really were unsuccessful. There was interest, but everybody kind of wanted it to be their own way.

It's my long way of saying, we have two products, and I'm not selling them. They're just to inform you. One is the book. The other is that Americans for the Arts did what I call the Cliff Notes version to the book, which is this monograph.

The Luce Foundation is finished with its concerted effort to conduct new research; however, what we hope we have accomplished is that by getting to the *Grassroots* piece, that the projects in the Twin Cities will create a model, which is why we want to get the information out to as many people as we can. The Twin Cities piece will become a model that other cities can use to replicate or use in their own way for their own communities. Our theology program, which is an ongoing program since 1936, in addition

to its interest in seminary education, has been in the past ten years making many grants in the arts and religion areas, not always targeted to this community development piece, but often in the past few years, it is targeted in this area, and it will continue to do grantmaking there.

Arthurs: I can say that Michael Gilligan, who runs that program, is extremely interested in these results, and specifically in projects that seem to reflect some of these learnings.

Our basic thought was that this research contains the beginnings of the kind of material that's needed by communities as they move ahead. There's experience, there are findings, there are arguments in favor of action, and there are efforts to explain why it is so hard to achieve that action. So we hope it will be a resource for moving ahead in addition to a report on what it's been that we've learned.

Idelson: Let me just add one thing that we're doing this year, and in the interest of getting out the word that these kinds of projects are replicable. We're taking an issue of *Arts* magazine, which is put out by United Theological Seminary, and the entire issue is going to focus on arts and religion in the Twin Cities, and about eight to ten arts-religion collaborations that are already happening. The articles will give background on the projects, but in a way, they're also going to focus on how you can do this too, in your community. Because so many of them are replicable. I could tell you from the grassroots standpoint that there's a tremendous amount of interest in this. People just want more.

Arthurs: One of the other things that we learned when we gathered humanists at the Luce Foundation to talk about this work is that it's a subspecialty of scholarship that's underdeveloped. Some art historians look at this, a few, but people had not been looking at it in a concentrated or concerted way as a subspecialty within the humanities or within the social sciences.

Working with people like Peter, and Bob Wuthnow at Princeton, Paul DiMaggio at Princeton, Neil Harris at the University of Chicago, has given us the sense that there's much more that could be done in the academy that would address these issues for us. Do you have any comment on that, Peter?

Marsden: I would just endorse the general proposition. This was something that most of us walked into and we didn't have to review the literature, because there wasn't much. We've now created what we think is the basis of something for others to go forward with.

Arthurs: I remember having lunch with Peter one day in Cambridge. One of the many things he was excited about, because he's one of those scholars who gets excited about what he's doing, is that he had a very bright graduate student who seemed to be moving in the direction of studying some of these phenomena. I know that's happened to Paul DiMaggio at Princeton as well.

Marsden: Actually, it was even better. It was a very bright undergraduate, and at Harvard, that's really exciting.

Audience: I'm with the Art Council, and I had a question for Professor Marsden. You said that arts participation was greater among those who frequently attend religious services, and the examples that you cited were either within the worship setting or within the physical setting of the church or synagogue or temple. What I'm wondering was, did you find or look for any link between those who attend religious services and participate in the arts completely separately?

Marsden: Yes. In fact, we've sort of elided two things here. I spoke about a lot of things rather quickly.

The findings with respect to involvement in religious services and participation in the arts were not specific to the religious context. So this covered going to symphony, going to art museums, going to dance performances, and it even covered things like going to popular music concerts and ordinary movies.

Clearly, within the religious setting, we would expect people, just on grounds of opportunity, to have more opportunity and more experience within their setting. But we found that this crossed the boundaries, and people who were active in one setting tended to be active in another, so that certainly there are variations, but generally we found that it was something a friend of mine named John Robinson calls a "more-more" phenomenon, rather than a "more-less" kind of phenomenon.

McIntosh: Do you look at division between those who participated as audience members versus those who actually created? Participated as artists?

Marsden: Within the limited precision limits of surveys, we did. There was more evidence of a "more-more" phenomenon, if you will, in terms of participating as audience members. There was not a competition, but there was simply a no-difference kind of finding for things like participating in performances or doing arts and crafts, active reading, things like this.

Arthurs: Can I add one more question for you, Peter? As I recall, one of the findings that was a little more surprising, perhaps even disturbing, was that in your measure of Americans' tolerance of ideas or events or issues, that they seem to be less tolerant of conflicts involving what could be construed as sacrilegious or unorthodox art than they were in other very disturbing areas. Like, for instance, accepting gays in their communities. I can't remember quite what the comparisons were, but I remember that we were quite startled by that, and it seemed as though there was a kind of educational effort that had been made in certain other areas of American life, that hasn't been engaged with in this area of American life.

Marsden: Yes, you do recall correctly that art that is perceived to mock or demean religious figures is extremely controversial stuff. We have asked a series of questions in our national survey for thirty years, and they actually date back further than that, about, "Would you permit a speaking by a controversial figure, be it a Communist, an atheist, and so forth, in your community? Would you permit books by such people to be in your public library, or would you try to take them out?" And what we found was that the tolerance, if you will, for controversial art exhibits is extremely low. It's competitive with teaching in universities by racists as a controversial issue.

The way I would buffer that, however, is to remind you what you said a moment ago about the DiMaggio findings, that the actual frequency of these kinds of controversial things is extraordinarily low, and that while there is certainly an ongoing basis for conflict there, there is a much larger zone in which these two communities can find a way to get along.

Arthurs: Given the fact that Americans fundamentally are tolerant and seem to learn tolerance in

certain areas, it suggests that the kind of activity that Shirley and Ward are engaged in is extremely important to moving that frontier forward.

Audience: I am a person without portfolio at the moment. A museum consultant.

I thought it might be interesting for you all to know that Harvard Divinity School has initiated a major international conversation on arts and religion under the auspices of the Center for the Study of World Religion. There are a number of activities and has been going on now for two and a half years. There is a Web site that you could look at on this, if you look up Harvard University and then the Divinity School, and then the Center for the Study of World Religion, you can see the results of the initial activities, which involved six cities in the United States, bringing together museum people, art historians, anthropologists, sociologists, and practitioners in the field of religion as well as historians of religion.

In any case, it moved from that to a series of panel discussions and an interdisciplinary graduate course on religion and the arts that was held last spring. Right now, this is continuing.

We had an international conference bringing together museum directors from all over the world to think about how the exhibition and interpretation of religious art could be made very accessible for all kinds of visitors. There was a great deal of anxiety at the beginning of this discussion that was dissipated by the end of it. People were worried.

The Newark Museum is an outstanding example of a place that has done seminal work in this area. But there were people from other museums who were very anxious about touching this topic for all the reasons you mentioned.

I think a lot of those anxieties were dissipated in the days of the discussions, and all of that is going to be published at some point. Right now, I am involved as a fellow there in bringing together three small conferences around issues of religion and the arts. I have to say that they don't deal with churches. We're not dealing with churches here. We're really looking at how issues of religion that are embedded in the arts can be made visible in ways that people understand them and understand their own experience with them in deeper ways.

The first one was a wonderful meeting that just happened, starring the architect of the Chicago Holocaust Museum, Stanley Tigerman, and the former Dean of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York, Jim Morton, both of whom were deeply involved in building structures of religious memory. That's the kind of issue that the Divinity School and the Center are very interested in taking up. I hope you will all take a look at that Web site and make sure to get some materials on that as they are produced.

Audience: I'm currently a consultant to the New York Foundation for the Arts. Now that Ronnie's talked, I'm totally confused, because she's so smart. I've forgotten what I wanted to say. But I think I kind of remember. Two things.

One is that having been in a small group that talked about this with Ellen and John and others at the beginning, and what struck me then – seven years ago was it – was the counterintuitive nature of this endeavor. It continues in the things that Rabbi Idelson has said, and Peter in the research. And Ward. What we all thought was the dialog, the discussion, the controversy about religion, in some ways, is not what it was anyway, but also it's much more complicated and much richer.

To the point that perhaps both Peter and Alberta raised about the research that showed that the number of incidents that were large controversies were relatively few: it makes me think again and again of the media's role in this. Some of us in New York were recently at a conference that the National Arts Journalism program had. I hope that as this project continues in whatever communities, the media will be part of the education and outreach process. I just wanted to end by asking Rabbi Idelson how the media in the Twin Cities treated this, and did they treat you well or poorly?

Idelson: They have actually treated our project very well. What I was thinking about when you were speaking was that there's one controversy in our past that went very public, and it involved Ron Athey, a gay performance artist who did a piece that involved blood. It was covered by a local reporter who was not at the performance, and it was misconstrued. It went national, and it went to Jesse Helms, who used this as one of his ways to make his case about why funding should be denied, because the Walker Arts Center had given a nickel to this program.

But the point was, there was no one locally fighting that battle. It was a reporter who mis-told the story. It went national. It just missed us! There was no one locally from the religious community fighting the battle.

But I have to say, our project has been very well received locally. So maybe things are changing, but it's also safe. Our project is safe to cover, whereas Ron Athey wasn't safe.

Arthurs: I think we're about to run out of time. A postscript on the journalism issue is that one of the convenings we had at the Luce Foundation did include journalists. All of the other convenings had some productive, constructive outcome and follow-up except that one. How to break through on the editorial level, because that's really where it is. It's not the guy or girl on the beat. It's the editors. And given the Luce Foundation's media background, if we could not get to the editors and publishers and make headway, I'm not sure how to. Any of the foundations that want to take that one on, in addition to the grassroots community replication, I think that would be an enormously important contribution and really the next step.

I want to thank you all for coming.

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