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Stephanie Kaza: Discussion Suffering Caused by Personal and Structural Violence

Ven. Ajahn Amaro, Professor Ewert Cousins, Sangeetha Ekambaram, Jim Funk, Paul Gailey, Joseph Goldstein, Fr. Donald Grabner, OSB, Stephanie Kaza, Fr. Leo Lefebure, John Daido Loori, Archbishop Felix Machado, Sr. Barbara McCracken, OSB, Judith Simmer-Brown, Rev. Heng Sure, Ph.D., Fr. James Wiseman, OSB, Danielle Witt, SSND, Fr. Joseph Wong, OSB Cam from [Gethsemani Encounter II, April 2002](#)

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Dialogue after Stephanie Kaza's Presentation

Barbara McCracken: Regarding the topic of militarism: I think with the current war on terrorism that our country is engaged in, there perhaps could be a monastic response. Our own bishops have not given us real strong guidance on this particular war. I see another aspect of this perhaps is continuing something we did in our communities during the Vietnam War, which was educating our own members about nonviolence—the history of it, the principles, and the actions it entails. Speaking from my own experience, I'm not sure our communities are that involved in nonviolence right now. It's never a popular topic. It's always least popular when there is a war going on.

John Daido Loori: Stephanie, could you elaborate just a little bit more about what you mean by media literacy?

Stephanie Kaza: The media literacy movement is in some ways a parallel to the environmental literacy movement. "Literacy" is synonymous with "awareness." The kinds of methods that are taught are how to watch television, how to watch advertising and not be hooked by it, how to understand the techniques that are used and the propagandistic forms. There are a number of videos and a number of

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Ven. Ajahn Amaro is a bhikku in the forest-tradition of Buddhism. He lives Abhayagiri Monastery in England. He took part in Gethsemani Encounter II. He is the author of *Silent Rain*.

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Ewert Cousins, Professor Emeritus of Fordham University, died on May 30, 2009, in Bethlehem CT.

actual curriculums—K-8 and high school—exposing the kind of cultural conditioning that is promoted. Some of the leading motivations for teaching media literacy have been breaking gender stereotypes in particular, but even more the kind of enslavement of the consumer to these models. It's relatively new, but it is making its way into the lower grade levels. I will say that one of the things I did with my unlearning consumerism class was to ask each student to do a three-day technology fast. Each person had to give up something—a telephone, a computer, a car—and then reflect how it changed their life, just to break that addiction to it. If they took on a media form of that—a screen-based computer or television—then they could check the impact of that technology.

Heng Sure: Vis-a-vis data Sabbaths: Part of my ministry extends down to San Jose to the Chinese Buddhist community and Silicon Valley. I meet with a publicist in Silicon Valley who's also a Catholic, named Tom Meehan. I've done workshops now for the last three years, where we go into Silicon Valley and invite engineers to come and meet religious folks. The engineers educate the religious about the new vocabulary, bringing it from agrarian lambs and fishes into bits and bytes, and at the same time we let engineers talk about their grief at having an extraordinary height of education being used to design things that are either trivial or deadly, videogames or weapons. Such a dialogue is allowing them to have the opportunity to explore problems that we are accelerating past on a level that we've never had to cope with before and there is no sign of stopping.

Last weekend, the Episcopal church of St. Stephen's in Tiburon, California invited us for a weekend to do what was called data sabbathing. The religious again talked about sabbaths and about the idea of taking a total break and coming back to family. The response was huge, because people feel that technology is running down the freeway at seventy miles an hour, but there is no one behind the wheel of the car. The engineers themselves say, "I'm involved in work where I'm unable to ask questions of meaning. There is no infrastructure to ask questions of significance. It's: 'If we can build it, we must.'" There is that momentum going. They are saying, "No, no. Let's stop and talk about this." Thus, they are asking, "Where in religions do we find the resources that enable us to ask questions of whether, if we could build it, should we."

Dr. Cousins served for many years as an advisor to Monastic Interreligious Dialogue. He was the chief editorial consultant for the 100 volume Paulist Press series, The Classics of Western Spirituality and was also General Editor of the 25-volume series, World Spiritualit... [\[Read full biography\]](#)

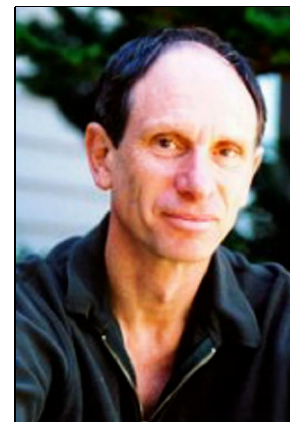
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Sangeetha Ekambaram was a religious studies major at Emory University in Atlanta at the time of the 2002 Gethsemani Abbey.

All articles by or about Sangeetha Ekambaram

Paul Gailey is a physicist who works for the Fetzer Institute in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

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Joseph Goldstein is the

This was a wonderful place for monastics to come forward and say, “We do have these resources, but we’ve never assumed that we had any voice in the technological arena.” What we are trying to ask is the same questions that a religious asks, i.e., “What is it? What is this life? What is my relationship with a higher being, a higher identity?” That same question is the same question that stimulates someone down the path of science: “What is it?” So we measure it, or we use a Dharma, a method, or we use a prayer to try to answer that question. This is a perfect place to begin. And if anybody is leading the charge, it’s the engineers. But who is leading the engineers? The marketing. Who is leading the marketing? Well, whatever sells. What is leading what sells? Greed and desire and the sense of unsettling and insufficiency. Here is a perfect place for this forum to start to speak.

Joseph Wong: I remember this morning, Danielle Witt made a comment on the present situation of military violence. Since there was the major issue of sexual abuse and the structural violence of the Church or monasteries pressing that aspect was somehow left aside. I’m glad that Barbara McCracken has proposed a similar topic about violence coming from militarism. I personally would like also to pursue this topic. It is a very major problem, very alive in this country and in the Middle East and around the world.

This morning Geshe Lobsang Tenzin gave the teaching of His Holiness the Dalai Lama about to tackle violence. He proposed the idea of causal dependence. I think when we see violence and terrorism, we should give it the thorough analysis of causal dependence. For example, after September 11, we immediately condemned the action, of course. Everybody should condemn that violence. Then we gave the cause: hatred. But we need to go further: What causes the hatred? Is the military response the best way? I don’t know whether a military response to terrorism is the best way, but I’m sure it’s not enough. We must examine the causes. Clearly, there is hatred. Life is so precious. If one is ready to just throw away or sacrifice life to commit a terrorist act, it means there is a very deep-seated hatred. We see this hatred in the Middle East against the West in general, and perhaps against the U.S. in particular. I can say this because I’m also a citizen of the U.S., even though I was born outside the U.S.

co-founder of Insight Meditation Society and The Barre Center for Buddhist Studies in Barre, Massachusetts. He was involved in both Gethsemani Encounters.

All articles by or about Joseph Goldstein



Fr. Donald Grabner, OSB, is professor of theology at Conception Seminary College and a member of Conception Abbey, Conception, Missouri. He contributed to both Gethsemani Encounters.

All articles by or about Fr. Donald Grabner, OSB

Stephanie Kaza is an associate professor, concentrating on environmental ethics, religion and ecology, and ecofeminism at the University of Vermont.

All articles by or about Stephanie Kaza

Perhaps we need to examine why is there such a deep-seated hatred for the West and for the U.S. in particular. We say that the violence comes from hatred. Hatred often is based on greed and so on. If we tackle the reasons for their hatred, perhaps we can find out that many of the reasons are irrational and inexplicable. However, perhaps there are also some reasons that can make us reflect more. Perhaps we might see a need for an improvement in relationships among the states in the Middle East or more equal distribution of material goods among different nations in the world. I think a military response is not enough, and should be avoided even. We should look for a deeper reason for the unrest and hatred, and find out a solution to cope with that deeply seated hatred.

Jim Funk: Forgive me for going back to media content, after you made such important remarks about a slightly different subject. Several weeks ago I attended a Rotary luncheon where the superintendent of education in the state of Indiana gave a talk. She remarked that in the early 1900s, in our largely rural society, the average typical family spent about five hours a day dialoguing with one another, where the parents would tell their children about their aunts and uncles and forbears and so forth. After a few other comments, she moved to today. Anybody want to guess what the average time of heart to heart dialogue is with any member of the family? Eight minutes per day. The sabbath would really change those statistics, wouldn't it?

Donald Grabner: Stephanie has talked about five arenas where we notice the presence of violence. I'm wondering if we need to consider it as a kind of a five-headed monster—that there is something that lies behind all of this, which manifests itself in these different forms. I'm still not sure that hate as such is the ultimate root. I think many of these suicide bombers, for instance, are not motivated primarily out of hate. They are doing this with a kind of idealism that they see their religion, Islam, their oneness with God, being threatened. They are acting out of a great deal of idealism. It's a great pity that they are, in a sense, victims of a world that has somehow gone that far astray. Militarism and the media go together. The media in some sense has been the primary instrument of promoting war among the people of the United States, as proposed by the government. I'm not sure where to put the root cause.



Fr. Leo Lefebure is the Matteo Ricci, SJ, Professor of Theology at Georgetown University. He is a member of the Board of Directors of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies and also of the new Center for Religious Understanding, Acceptance, and Tolerance. He serves as an advisor to the Board of Directors of MID and participated in the first two Gethsemani Encounters.

[All articles by or about Fr. Leo Lefebure](#)

John Daido Looi is the founder and abbot of Zen Mountain Monastery in Mount Tremper, New York.

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Ajahn Amaro: I see the root cause as very crucial, but I was reminded of something that His Holiness said in a series of teachings in Los Angeles a few years ago. He was talking about nonviolence. He said, "If you've got a bomb, you can go into a village, and you can blow up fifty people or a hundred people at one go very easily. If all you've got is a stick, it's really hard work. You just hit a few people, you get really tired, you have to have a rest." He got quite graphic in describing how tired you get in trying to kill fifty people with a stick! There were about 6,000 people listening to this talk, and here is the Dalai Lama talking about how difficult it is to beat people to death.

What he was suggesting was that, even though we look at a lot of the causes, we need to take care of the means whereby people exercise those violent impulses. It led to a strong encouragement about the laws regarding weapons, particularly in this country, and the availability of firearms. He felt very strongly that one thing that the religious community could do is to make efforts to lobby for the diminution of arms. Everyone who has ever looked at a newspaper or heard any news reports in the last few years about the violence of teenagers in their high schools, will notice that a huge proportion of the death and injury caused is because of the availability of weaponry. Despite all of the other arguments, if the guns weren't there and all you had was a stick, it would be very different. I felt that this was something that His Holiness would have liked to have shared in this discussion.

John Daido Loori: When we look at the history of the human race, it's very difficult to ignore the fact that it's been a history of violence. The only thing that's changed with time is a greater efficiency in creating instruments of destruction. We've become very good at it. There is no parallel in the rest of the world among animals. I was watching this morning a couple of robins compete for their territory. One was singing its song. Another one, an interloper, came in, and they jumped around and pecked at each other and then one went away. There was no dead robin left behind. Even the most supposedly violent of members of the animal kingdom, like a lion that's had its food, is known to be safe by the other animals who graze close by.

This throws me back to what Joseph Goldstein said earlier—that this is the fact of life; there is no final solution. It's like a leaky rowboat; you just keep bailing it as you make your way across the ocean. I also want



Archbishop Felix

Machado served as under-secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue prior to his appointment as bishop of Nashik (India) on January 16, 2008.

**All articles by or about
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Machado**



Sr. Barbara McCracken, OSB, is a member of the community of Mount St. Scholastica in Atchison, Kansas. She is a member of the MID board and participated in Nuns in the West I and II.

to say that somehow, in my own stupidity, I hold something in my heart where I feel that there is goodness in people. I can't justify it always, but I see it all the time. It's that that keeps me alive. I couldn't be doing what I'm doing if I didn't believe that there was some hope, and yet I'm faced with all of these facts. My scientific background says, "Just look at the statistics." My religious training has me look at these just magnificent people, who stand out and reach out. It's a long haul. I don't know if there is any final solution to wiping out human aggression and killing.

Sangeetha Ekambaram: When I think about the war on terrorism, I think of the whole issue about how violence can't stop violence. If you look at the history of terrorist movements in the world, violence has never cured the terrorist wave. Especially now, since we don't have a definite enemy and the terrorism is not organized in a central location, bombing one country is not going to solve the problem. Many people who do commit these acts are rational. The only thing is that they have worldviews that we might consider distorted. Their worldviews are very rigid, but they happen to lead to violence. I'm interested in the line between having a rigid worldview and what makes it end in violence in some cases but not in others. Other worldviews are rigid and there are separations between you and another person where you maintain separation, but they don't lead to violence. I see both as being equally harmful. The monastic life exemplifies that there are no immediate solutions to anything, so violence cannot cure violence. After a while your rigid perceptions of the world start to break down. I think monastic life achieves both.

Judith Simmer-Brown: There are so many threads being weaved in a parallel direction. The thought I had was of stepping back and looking at the various approaches that we've discussed today. Some of the papers have emphasized more personal, individual work, and others, as Stephanie's, took a very bold overview and summarized things. I think it's very important to understand as contemplatives that we really have to work on an inner level and an outer level at the same time. When we are dealing with issues of power and patriarchy, we have to look at the patriarchy inside ourselves, and the culture of domination in our own personalities and in our own lifestyles. When we look at militarism, we have to look at the culture of aggression in ourselves. When we look at environmental degradation, we have to look at the culture of greed in

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Reverend Heng Sure has been an ordained Buddhist monk in the Chan lineage of China since 1976. He is the director of the Berkeley Buddhist Monastery.

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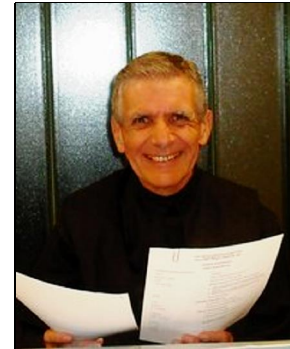
ourselves. I think that's very important, because otherwise we develop a very naive and simplistic and easily discouraged activism.

There is another point that needs to be said. When we are talking about structural violence, individual efforts aren't enough. This is where alternative institutions like the monastery are extremely important, because this place is an attempt to create an enlightened society. There are other such attempts. As individuals, we have very limited power in an environment of structural violence. As alternative institutions, however, we have a tremendous ability to achieve a culture of a very different view. It's very important that as contemplatives, talking about this, we have a sense of the inner work and the vast outer, cosmic view. The missing piece in between is looking within our own organizations and institutions, which have power not just individually but also in a larger way.

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Rev. Heng Sure, Ph.D.



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**All articles by or about
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Danile Witt is the director of Bethany Spring, a spiritual retreat in central Kentucky.

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Fr. Joseph Wong, OSB Cam, was elected a member of the Council of the Camaldolese Benedictines in 2005 and lives at the Mother House at Camaldoli, Italy. He was involved in the second Gethsemani Encounter in April 2002.

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