

You Don't Have to be Wrong for Me to be Right – Finding Faith Without Fanaticism

By Brad Hirschfield

New York: Three Rivers Press, 2009

“...a guide to our common humanity, a source of strength and stamina and hope” writes Rabbi Hirschfield, referring in his introduction to the purpose of *You Don't Have to Be Wrong for Me to Be Right*. This helpful book by a former West Bank activist and current president of the National Jewish Center for Learning and Leadership is especially appropriate for chaplains and chaplain assistants. While shying away from “interfaith pablum,” and “happy hands-across-the-water” inclusive schemes focusing on lowest common denominator thinking, the author seeks to “nurture our ability to make deep commitments while remaining open to new ideas and new experiences.” (p. 11)

Unit Ministry Teams and Religious Educators would benefit from a thorough study of this highly readable text. Whether issues of world religions, interdenominational practice, or implications of pressing issues of the day (religious leader liaison, “don't ask, don't tell” policies...) this popularly written book is beneficial in the following ways:

Civility and Thoughtfulness - Wrestling with the ideas and wonderful personal illustrations presented in the book invites us to respond to others with receptivity, curiosity and openness. Like the Apostle Paul, who “voluntarily became a servant to any and all in order to reach a wide range of people: religious, nonreligious, meticulous moralist, loose-living immoralist, the defeated, the demoralized —whoever” (I Corinthians 9:19 *The*

Message) our servant-leadership can express itself through tempered, thoughtful encounters. The author describes “mean-spirited” and “small-minded” confrontational designs that too often fuel intolerance and “fierce faith.” He recognizes the need we have to assert ourselves and be true to our respective faith traditions (or lack of tradition). Yet, demonstrating thoughtful civility, finding our points of connection with others, and living out our obligations to engage beyond our own church or tribe, go a long way toward building a more secure, stable world.

Connectedness with Others - We routinely build harmony and understanding with Soldiers and Family Members within our units and installations. To further connect with those both within and outside the Army community with whom we may disagree, or with whom we may have little in common, it is helpful to see the “image of God” in all His children. This reverential focus sees every human life as having value, uniqueness, and equality. It is a perspective demonstrating compassion, seeking first to understand the person before us, rather than initially mining the ideology that individual may hold dear. The underlying camaraderie we experience, a demonstration of unity without demanding uniformity, goes far to promote opportunities for mutual growth, understanding and empathetic involvement.

Self-awareness - This book raises many questions that may deepen our faith and build our interactions with others. Do we have a tendency to treat “all who challenge us as dangerous enemies?” (p. 8) How comfortable are we in living with mystery? Can we confront the evil within ourselves and our world, yet possess a gentle confidence when ideas and interpretations may cause conflict? Is it possible to serve with conviction and commitment, maintaining our personal integrity, while fostering an accepting climate of openness for dialogue and understanding?

You Don't Have to Be Wrong for Me to Be Right is a stimulating, practical book aimed at increasing understanding, dialogue and community. When paired with Gustav Niebuhr's *Beyond Tolerance—Searching for Interfaith Understanding in America*

(New York: Penguin, 2008), it can help UMTs mulling over difficulties discussed in these “world-class” resources to bolster competency and care in these increasingly complex yet exceptionally fulfilling days.

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