

# Boston Research Center for the 21st Century



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## Dialogue and Subversion

*SUBVERTING HATRED, SUBVERTING GREED,  
AND THE GLOBAL ETHICS CLASSROOM*

By Mitch Bogen, BRC

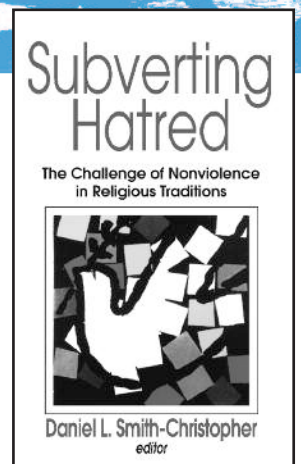
Like most visitors to the BRC booth at the American Academy of Religion conference, the man with the regulation overstuffed tote bag picked up our featured book and flipped right to the Table of Contents. What came next was a surprise, though. "How can Islam be in a book on nonviolence?" he demanded. "Isn't Islam a violent religion?"

The book in question was the tenth anniversary edition of *Subverting Hatred: the Challenge of Nonviolence in Religious Traditions*, and we were more used to positive responses, given the pluralistic atmosphere of the conference. Taking a breath, we said, well, the book shows that each religion contains positive and negative aspects—but that each has a core tradition of nonviolence that we as humans can build on if we choose.

The exchange was a bit jarring, but it validated the book's pedagogical value and potential to initiate dialogue. Upon our return from the conference, we decided to investigate the contribution of *Subverting Hatred* and its companion volume, *Subverting Greed: Religious Perspectives on the Global Economy*, to teaching and learning, especially in the religion and global ethics classroom.

Both BRC-developed books are part of the Orbis Books Faith Meets Faith series on interreligious dialogue. The series, says general editor

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## BRC Public Dialogue: "Understanding Death, Appreciating Life"

"A central and fundamental challenge for the coming century," BRC founder Daisaku Ikeda said at Harvard University in 1993, "will be that of establishing a culture...that does not disown death, but directly confronts and correctly positions death within a larger living context." Inspired by these thoughts, the BRC will host programs in 2008 to foster dialogue on establishing such a culture. (See "From the Director," p. 2, for more.) "Understanding Death, Appreciating Life" will be the theme of a public dialogue to be held at the Center on February 27. Scholars Mary Catherine Bateson, Harvey Cox, Nur Yalman, and Tu Weiming will share how their view of death affects the way they live. Please check the BRC website, [brc21.org](http://brc21.org), for more information on this event and stay tuned for updates on future seminars.



*In September 1993, peace activist, poet, and Buddhist philosopher Daisaku Ikeda came to Boston to deliver a lecture at Harvard University. After highlighting in his talk the contributions that Mahayana Buddhism can make to the peaceful evolution of humanity, his next step was to establish the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century as a tangible commitment to the animating spirit behind his talk—open-minded and open-hearted dialogue.*

*Having studied the lecture again, we at the BRC decided to take up one of its main points as the theme of our activities this year, our fifteenth anniversary. Ironically, though the point was made right at the beginning of his lecture—that our society needs to look at death in a new way—we’ve waited fifteen years to grapple with it.*

*In his talk, Mr. Ikeda emphasized that “humankind seems finally to be on the verge of realizing the fundamental error of our view of life and death, to understand that death is more than the absence of life, that death, together with active life, is necessary to the formation of a larger, more essential, whole.”*

*Perhaps we were wise to move slowly into such a weighty topic. During the Center’s first fifteen years, our activities responded to other themes in the lecture and to the motto the founder gave us: “Be the heart of a network of global citizens. Be a bridge for dialogue between civilizations. Be a beacon lighting the way to a century of life.” Many of the pieces in this issue exemplify how BRC resources, including the books we have developed to date, continue to contribute to dialogue and humanism.*

*By our tenth anniversary, we had arrived at a point where we were ready to delve into life philosophy and profound notions of universal interconnectedness. Our first Ikeda Forums, public dialogue-based events, turned for inspiration to American Transcendentalists Thoreau, Whitman, and Emerson, and culminated last year with an examination of the social reform movements of nineteenth-century American women.*

*Now we take another step—a big step—in our journey. Today, perhaps more so than fifteen years ago, death is refusing to stay in the shadows. Baby boomers, for instance, are moving into the stage of life when the dying of parents brings with it vivid reminders of one’s own mortality. Young and old alike, even if only subliminally aware of world events, cannot but help but sense the dying happening everywhere—from war, hunger, and disease. We are even witnessing the death of whole species and their environments.*

*This year’s Fifth Annual Ikeda Forum for International Dialogue, to be held in two parts this fall, will invite death out of the shadows and explore its influence on us personally and collectively. How does our understanding of death affect the way we live? Could it be that enlarging our understanding of life and death is the most significant step we can take toward building peace in the world? We want to think together about these questions, share experiences and insights, and expand our awareness.*

*Where do we turn to enlarge our view? In planning this year’s Ikeda Forum, we’ve decided to see what we can learn by listening to people who have been close to the actual experience of death—hospice workers, biologists, psychologists, religious philosophers, and near-death experiencers—all who seek to penetrate its existential mysteries.*

*As part of our research, we attended a workshop last October organized by the International Association for Near-Death Studies. We discovered that many people who have had close encounters with death approach life with an attitude of joy and appreciation.*

*Please join us, courageous friends, for this fall’s joyful Ikeda Forum. Let’s find out why understanding death leads to appreciating life—and what this can mean for changing the culture we live in.*

Virginia Benson, Executive Director

## Dialogue and Subversion

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Paul Knitter, is predicated on the idea that the “challenge of bringing about a world of justice, compassion, and flourishing is simply too big for any one religion.” This insight resonates with the BRC’s mission, says Executive Director Virginia Benson. “This was one of the key messages of Daisaku Ikeda’s founding lecture—that we need to find a core of common values that can lead to what he called ‘a grand concert of symbiosis.’”

But many scholars question whether it is even possible to find this core, says Knitter—who is also co-editor of *Subverting Greed* with Malaysian scholar Chandra Muzaffar—since each religion springs from a “particular cultural context.” Knitter’s answer, and the driving force behind the books, is the belief that “if the religions don’t share any common cultural ground, they still can identify common ethical problems.” The collected essays in the books, which are written by scholar-practitioners from the major religious traditions, create, says Knitter, a kind of “polyphonic harmonizing” on the ways that we can “subvert hatred with love and greed with compassion.” (See our full interview with Dr. Knitter, pp. 4–5.)

For many of us, this may sound like a pretty positive contribution. However, for some students, says Tom Parker, lecturer in Religious Studies at California State University, Chico, where numerous faculty regularly use *Subverting Hatred* and/or *Subverting Greed* in the course “World Religions and Global Issues,” it can actually be disconcerting to learn about commonalities among religions. “At this historical moment,” observes Parker, some students are “very attached to certain misperceptions”—for example, Islam being exceptionally violent—“because it clarifies a complex world into an ‘us versus them’ picture.”

Compassionate teaching means meeting students where they are, Parker and his colleagues believe. Jim Anderson, also in the Department of Religious Studies at Chico State, frames it this way: “The limits of American experience and imagination are costly in their effects on the rest of the world.” He sees a course like “World Religions and Global Issues” as part of a bigger “effort to awaken students to a clearer and more responsible relationship to the larger community.”

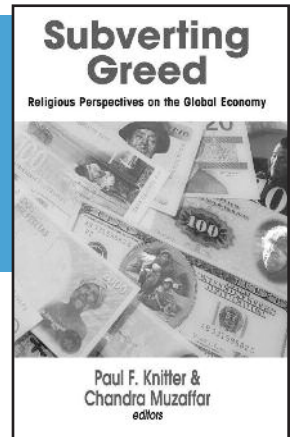
*Subverting Hatred* and *Subverting Greed* assist by providing a historical and theoretical grounding for students as they engage with ideas that can indeed be seen—and felt—as subversive of conventional wisdom regarding war, peace, and global economics. Nancy Martin, professor of Religious Studies and Ethics at Chapman University, finds the essays in *Subverting Hatred* informative, readable, and accessible for students in her course “Global Ethics and Religion.” Echoing Knitter’s “polyphony,” she notes that they illuminate “subtleties of difference” in the context of common ethical concern. For example, she says,

*These books illuminate “subtleties of difference.”*

“Christians, when thinking about how to act in relationship to the environment could benefit from an understanding of the Buddhist notion of interrelatedness.”

She also appreciates how each essay reveals that every religion has struggled with violence and nonviolence. This keeps students from idealizing a tradition or feeling unduly guilty or resistant when encountering the roots of violence in their own traditions, as is often the case with her Judeo-Christian students. The real question, she tells them, is whether the “voices of fundamentalist passion and violence will dominate” or those “of love and compassion and care for all creatures.”

*For more information on Subverting Hatred and Subverting Greed, please visit the BRC website, [brc21.org](http://brc21.org).*

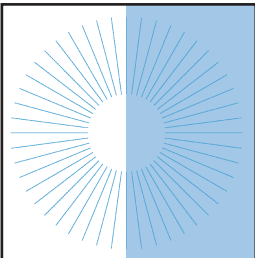


*The BRC’s Founding Lecture*

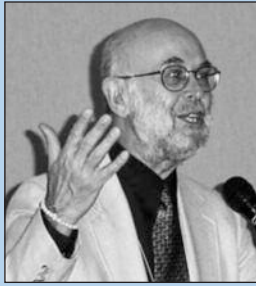
On September 24, 1993, BRC founder Daisaku Ikeda delivered a lecture at Harvard University titled “Mahayana Buddhism and Twenty-first Century Civilization.” Speaking at the invitation of Harvard professors Harvey Cox and Nur Yalman, Mr. Ikeda laid out a vision for the “dawn of a century of peace and humanity.” Central to Ikeda’s vision was the power of dialogue to transform opposing perspectives from “that which divides and sunders people into that which forges deeper union between them.”

Desiring to further the goals of this lecture, President Ikeda quickly founded the Boston Research Center. During this fifteenth anniversary year of the Center, the BRC will be sponsoring a series of events to draw attention to some of the lecture’s most important and provocative ideas.

You can find the entire lecture at the new site [daisakuikedas.org](http://daisakuikedas.org).



## It *is* Possible: Subverting Hatred and Greed



### A Conversation with PAUL KNITTER

Paul Knitter is the Paul Tillich Professor of Theology, World Religions, and Culture at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. The Seminary's vision for the Tillich Chair—to “promote a dialogue of religious communities that will both enrich the religions and promote the well-being of the people and planet”—has guided every phase of his long and distinguished career, from his role as Professor of Theology at Xavier University, Cincinnati, to the authorship of his groundbreaking 1985 book *No Other Name?*, to his participation in numerous international, interreligious peace organizations.

Knitter is also co-general editor with William R. Burroughs of the Orbis Books Faith Meets Faith series on interreligious dialogue, which includes the BRC titles *Subverting Hatred: the Challenge of Nonviolence in Religious Traditions* and *Subverting Greed: Religious Perspectives on the Global Economy* (see p. 1). He co-edited the latter with Chandra Muzaffar. The BRC's Mitch Bogen spoke with Professor Knitter early this year about his hopes for these books as educational tools in the quest for global peace and justice.

**MB:** *How do the books Subverting Hatred and Subverting Greed exemplify the goals and ideals of the Orbis Books Faith Meets Faith series, of which you have served as co-general editor?*

**PK:** Both of these books not only exemplify, but also carry forward, the goals and ideals of the series. The series, established more than 25 years ago, was intended to affirm and expand what was the animating energy in the Orbis Books editorial philosophy from its own beginnings: a commitment to what Christians call liberation theology. This meant a commitment to this theology's driving concern to show, and to live, the vital link between “being religious” and “acting for peace with justice.”

The Faith Meets Faith series developed out of the realization that in today's world, one must be religious *inter-religiously* and one must act for justice and peace *inter-religiously*. The challenge of bringing about a world of greater justice, compassion, and flourishing is simply too big for any one religion. Men and women from all religions must work together and enrich one another's efforts in transforming a world of hatred and greed into one of compassion and sharing.

And here, precisely here, is the contribution of our two collections that seek to “subvert hatred and greed” by assembling the unique contributions of multiple religions. But the advantage these two books have over many of the other titles in the Faith Meets

Faith series—and the reason, perhaps, why they have sold so well—is that they bring the voices of differing religions together in an extraordinarily accessible and practical way.

They stand as two of the towering pillars in our series. And I'm so proud to have them in the series.

**MB:** *In his Foreword to Subverting Hatred, BRC founder Daisaku Ikeda speaks of interreligious dialogue as pointing toward “creative symbiosis,” and you spoke, in your Introduction to Subverting Greed, of the “polyphonic harmonizing” created by the essays in that book. Can you reflect on these ideas of symbiosis and polyphony in the context of our global challenges?*

**PK:** Both of these images—the working together of symbiosis and the blending of polyphonic voices—describe accurately the kind of dialogue that the world today stands in need of. It’s a coming together of religions, in which each offers its unique contribution to the solving of a common problem. So there is *unity* in the problem that confronts all the religions—namely, the suffering caused to humans and to the planet because of violence and greed. But there is *diversity* in the responses from the various religions. And yet, because the diverse contributions are aimed at one goal—the promotion of peace and social justice—we find that the religious differences integrate symbiotically and complement one another polyphonically in their commitment to a common goal.

**MB:** *Why are these books important? Has their importance changed in the years since their creation?*

**PK:** The academic importance of these books for me, and I know for many, lies in the way they offer a practical response to a tangled and controversial scholarly question: Can we find a common ground for interreligious dialogue? Many scholars of philosophy, anthropology, and religion believe that we cannot. They argue that each religion has grown up and sees the rest of the world from a particular cultural context. There is no one cultural context for all the religions; therefore, no common ground.

Well, these two books, *Subverting Hatred* and *Subverting Greed*, make clear, I believe, that if the religions do not share any common cultural

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.....

ground, they still can identify common ethical problems. All of them, in often very different ways, want to “subvert” hatred with love and greed with compassion. And they can work together in trying to achieve this shared goal.

Besides this academic importance, these two books also share a practical importance that is more relevant and urgent than ever. It seems that in our world today, especially since the events of 9/11 and the events after 9/11, there is an ever more frightening amount of hatred and violence, as well as more greed and exploitation, among nations and within nations. Even more frightening, and perplexing, is the way religion is often used to justify violence and animosity or to sanctify greed and consumerism. For this reason, the goals of these two books are more urgent than ever.

Religious people must work together to diminish violence and exploitation, and to counteract the abuses of their religions. They must show the world that religions offer much greater resources for peace than for war and that they hold up the ideal of service rather than selfishness. Precisely such understandings of the role of religion in our contemporary world are offered by these two books.

**MB:** *What are the unique attributes of these books as resources for teaching and learning?*

**PK:** Having used both books in courses I have taught, I can vouch for their unique pedagogical qualities: They have helped me make religion interesting and engaging for students—even for undergraduates who have been “turned off” by religion! These books can help standard courses on comparative religions to come alive. Instead of studying from the academic question of “What do these religions teach or practice?,” we study the religions from the pragmatic question of “How can these religions help us solve the problems of war and violence or poverty and injustice?” With this approach, students come to the study of religions with their own questions. And as Paulo Freire has reminded us, students learn only when they feel their own questions.

**MB:** *What else should people know about these books?*

**PK:** That the authors of the essays that make up these books are scholars who, we can say, are trying to practice what they preach. They are scholars who are also practitioners, and some of them are activists. They believe, and are trying to show in their own lives, that religious faith can not only transform one’s heart, it can also transform the world; it not only can bring peace to one’s spirit, it can bring peace to the world.

It is possible to subvert hatred and greed, in our hearts and in our world. The authors of these books believe this, and they try to communicate it in what they have written. 🐦

## Learning As an Intellectual Event:

### Reflections on Ethical Visions of Education

By Dale T. Snauwaert  
University of Toledo



My years of teaching have confirmed for me the wisdom of editor David Hansen's choice to identify "generative ideas" as the basic philosophical theme of the BRC-developed book *Ethical Visions of Education: Philosophies in Practice*. In his introduction, Hansen argues that "ideas," being distinct from facts and information, are creative acts of meaning; they are acts of making sense of individual experience.

Human beings are meaning-makers. In order to renew and thereby preserve ourselves, we must make sense of our experience of the world. Ideas therefore cannot be transmitted; they emerge from each individual's reflection on their unique experience. In addition, ideas have generative power; they move and transform us. Through the act of meaning-making, through the generation of ideas, we create value.

This understanding of philosophy and the creation of meaning illuminates the task of the educator and informs the vision I hold for my own classroom. From this perspective, there exists a plurality of educational ideas, a notion at odds with the monomaniacal focus of many education policy-makers today on hyper-standardization and testing. I want my students, most of whom will become educators themselves, to enter into conversation with a variety of educational philosophies as a stimulus for the generation of their own educational ideas; the dynamism of their own pedagogical practice is contingent upon the generation of these ideas.

I have found *Ethical Visions* to be an excellent support for this educational purpose. With its cross-cultural perspectives—from Dewey to Freire, Makiguchi to Montessori—it contains numerous opportunities for students to encounter ideas that do not always fit neatly into our public education landscape.

When teaching the various philosophies of education, I urge students to

see them as possibilities for their own thought and practice and not as fixed doctrines to be adopted. One of my core teaching objectives is for students to open their minds and hearts to the possibility of the construction of their own point of view, which brings great energy and relevance to their exploration of philosophy of education. For example, when students encounter the idea in the thought of Dewey, Addams, Freire, Dubois, and many others that social injustice can be addressed through transformative pedagogical practices, they begin to recognize the importance and power of their position as educators.

That's when the course becomes alive as an intellectual event. And that's when students begin to feel empowered as educators. If I've done my job, students leave the course empowered to enact their educational beliefs. *Ethical Visions* is a source for igniting this experience. It is an inspiring reminder from past great educators and educational philosophers to answer the call of one's own generative ideas, ideas that breathe life into education. ☺

## Education Fellows Program Begins

To support scholarly analysis of Soka education, the BRC has launched a new Education Fellows Program. "It would be wonderful to see this program grow into a widely known source of support and encouragement for young scholars whose research serves to enlarge our understanding of the vast potential of Soka educational practices," says Dr. Larry Hickman of Southern Illinois University, chair of the program's Advisory Council. "I hope that the research supported by this program will be of such high quality that it will find its way into the day-to-day practices of educators everywhere."

An increasing number of scholars have been deepening their interest in Soka education, the humanistic educational philosophy initiated in 1930s Japan by Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944) and Josei Toda (1900–58). *Soka education* now refers to a growing international system of schools, under the leadership of BRC founder Daisaku Ikeda, and a grassroots network of educators throughout the world who self-identify as Soka educators, having found inspiration in the philosophy.

For 2008–10, the BRC will fund two young scholars, each focusing on the

social and pedagogical implications of this movement in their doctoral dissertations: Juliana Finucane of Syracuse University and Gonzalo Obelleiro of Teachers College, Columbia University. The fellows were selected from a pool of applicants by the Advisory Council, which in addition to Hickman includes these leading scholars of educational philosophy: Ann Diller, University of New Hampshire; Jim Garrison, Virginia Polytechnic University; David Hansen, Teachers College, Columbia University; and Nel Noddings, Stanford University emerita.



## Dialogue on “Women and the Power of Friendship”

The BRC’s Fourth Annual Ikeda Forum for Intercultural Dialogue focused on women collaborating for change. Full coverage of this Ikeda Forum is now available on the BRC website, [brc21.org](http://brc21.org).

Held on September 29, 2007, “Women and the Power of Friendship” explored the dynamics of friendship and social change as experienced by women past and present. The morning session examined the role that women’s alliances played in the reform efforts of nineteenth-century America, especially the anti-slavery and settlement house movements. Participants delved into questions like “How did friendship and collaboration among women contribute to the work of reform?” “To what extent did these relationships break through barriers of race, class, and culture?”

The afternoon was devoted to exploring the power of women’s friendship today, when women enjoy greater freedom in the public sphere than ever before. A series of activists shared their experiences of working with others for personal and social change. The dialogue that ensued showed that a vision for collaborative action is now emerging, one in which local and global change can occur simultaneously.

## Mission Statement

The Boston Research Center for the 21st Century (BRC) is an international peace institute. The Center was founded in 1993 by Daisaku Ikeda, a peace activist and president of Soka Gakkai International (SGI), one of the most dynamic and diverse Buddhist organizations in the world. Inspired by the SGI’s philosophy of value creation (Soka), the BRC works to build cultures of peace through dialogue and education. Our dialogue programs include public forums, scholarly seminars, and conversation circles that are diverse and intergenerational. Through these programs, scholars and activists are able to forge unexpected connections, refresh their sense of purpose, and learn from one another in a spirit of camaraderie. The overarching goal of these gatherings is to contribute to a shift in U.S. culture from isolation, violence, and war to interconnectedness, nonviolence, and peace. The BRC also works to encourage the peaceful aspirations of young people through multi-author books published by academic presses. Our titles, such as *Subverting Hatred*, *Subverting Greed*, *Educating Citizens for Global Awareness*, *Ethical Visions of Education*, and *Buddhist Peacework*, introduce humanistic values and ideas that are not often included in the typical curriculum. So far, they have been used as core and supplemental texts in more than 500 college and university courses in the United States, Canada, and overseas.

## How to Reach Us

We welcome your advice, ideas, and comments, as well as requests for complimentary examination copies of our books. Individual staff members can be reached by calling 617-491-1090 or via fax at 617-491-1169. Email addresses are listed below:

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## Newsletter

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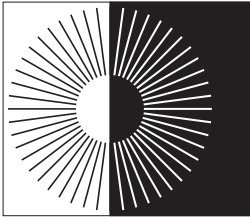
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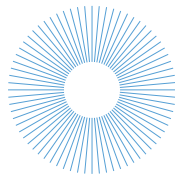
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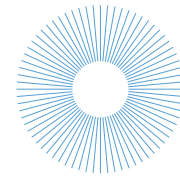
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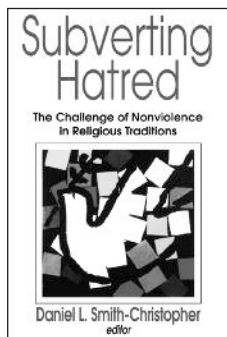
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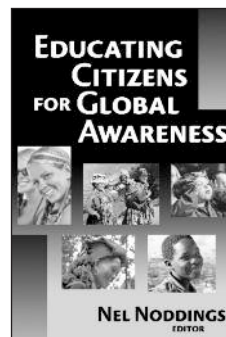
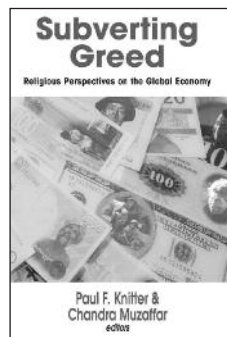
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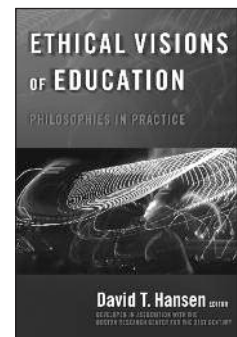
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