

There, but for the grace of God, go I. The statement is a familiar one to many, dealing with the sense of our connection to those less fortunate than ourselves. The saying is often attributed to the English evangelical preacher and martyr, John Bradford (circa 1510–1555). He is said to have uttered a slightly altered version of the expression, "There but for the grace of God, goes John Bradford," when seeing criminals being led to the scaffold. I don't like the statement for the cosmology that it presents. Basically, I'm okay because of some divine intervention--grace. Meanwhile, those with whom I recognize a profound connection are in such a conundrum because, we must assume, the divine has not intervened--god forsakenness as it were.

Yet, what the statement can raise--if one does not push it to its logical conclusion--is the seeming randomness of events, and my (our?) obligation to recognize that my good fortune is not really my construction. At some level, the good that I receive is not necessarily the result of my being a good person, a shrewd operator, a wise individual. *There, but for the grace of God, go I* raises the fact that I must wrestle with the lottery of birth. I could just as easily have been born in the Sudan as northern Minnesota. I could just as easily have been raised in a home that left me wanting in innumerable ways that ultimately manifest itself in self-destructive or plain old destructive ways later in life. I could just as easily have been involved in a life that looks quite different from the one I live.

While this may not be the sort of thing we want to consider very often. It is the type of awareness that builds, if nothing else, a sense of compassion and understanding for others. We can't help but realize that there are so many things that impact our lives and so many of them are so far from our control. I thought of this numerous times this past week. I hope that the experiences I encountered might make me a bit more compassionate and kind.

To begin with, an evangelical church group with ties to Nigeria was looking at possibly renting space at St. Francis. As we discussed their needs and looked at the various buildings that might provide them the space for their program, we had a very interesting exchange in Assisi Hall. I noted that the hall was not being used very much at the present time, save for the Muslim community that prays and holds classes on Sunday afternoons. "No Muslims!" was the response I received. To which I quickly shot back, "Oh yes, Muslims. We like our Muslim neighbors." The man who had spoken derisively about the Muslims gave me a puzzled and surprised look. "Really?" he said. "Really," was the reply.

As I reflected on this exchange, I realized that their response made all the sense in the world, given the animosity in Nigeria between Muslims and Christians. While I know that the relationship that we have with the American Institute for Islamic and Arabic Studies is not necessarily the norm in the world, I also know that it is the future, if there, literally, is to be a future for the world. Yet, I also realized how hard and calcified those animosities are in other

areas of the world. My ability to recognize inter-religious peaceful coexistence and collaboration arose not, necessarily, because of some evolved way of thinking. Literally, it stemmed from where I have been fortunate enough to be born and to work. There but for the grace of God go I.

The other profound experience of the randomness of birth and its implications was at the pro-DACA rally this past Tuesday in Stamford. Dreamers who have had their rights under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy stripped away spoke movingly about what they have dealt with living in the shadows, the opportunities that DACA provided them for education and employment, and the reality that this country is really the only country they have known. You can have differing views on what we should do regarding immigration in our country. You cannot hear these stories and think that these people need to leave our--their--country. Indeed, when I consider the randomness of birth and events that brought the Dreamers to the United States, I was overwhelmed by the awareness of all the rights and quality of life that I take for granted because I was simply born where I was.

I realize that this awareness does not always make for easy law-making and adjudicating the competing claims of groups and individuals in a country much less the world. It should, however, sensitize us to the serendipity that we enjoy precisely because of *nothing* that we have done, as well as soften our perception of and our action toward the other. As Harvey devastated areas in Texas and Irma decimates islands in the Caribbean as it careens toward Florida, I am mindful, again, of the randomness of location. There but for the grace of God go I. And I hope that I (we?) become a bit more compassionate and kind.