

**Boston College**  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY  
**Continuing Education Encore Events**

**Transcript of**  
**"Islam for Catholics 101"**

presented on March 5, 2015 by  
**Dr. Natana DeLong-Bas**

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**Melinda Brown Donovan:**

Good evening and welcome. My name is Melinda Brown Donovan, and I serve the School of Theology and Ministry as associate director for continuing education. It's great to see so many of you here this evening.

In July 2013, just a few months after he was elected, Pope Francis wrote a message to Muslims throughout the world marking the end of Ramadan. In it he wrote, and I quote, "That especially between Christians and Muslims, we are called to respect the religion of the other: its teachings, its symbols, its values." And he continued, "I reiterate my hope that all Christians and Muslims may be true promoters of mutual respect and friendship, in particular, through education." End quote.

It is in this spirit of promoting mutual respect and friendship through education, that we gather here this evening for the presentation "Islam for Catholics 101" by Natana DeLong-Bas. Here to introduce our speaker is dean of the School of Theology and Ministry and professor of Church history, Father Mark Massa, S.J.

**Dean Mark Massa:** Thank you, Melinda.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you for coming. As I spoke to some of you as you were coming in, I'm going to rewrite the Irving Berlin song to read, "I'm dreaming of a white Easter." So we'll see [INAUDIBLE].

[LAUGHTER]

We're delighted to have our speaker with us tonight. Natana DeLong-Bas holds a Master of Arts in Arab Studies and a Ph.D. in History from Georgetown University, a sister Jesuit institution to the south. She has taught here at Boston College since 2004, and she now serves as a visiting assistant professor in the Department of Theology. And she also serves on our interdisciplinary program entitled Islamic Civilizations and Societies.

Natana's scholarship is valued at a number of places and at very high levels. She is an ongoing consultant to the media, to the U.S., and various international governments, as

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well as to the United Nations. She has worked as a consultant for the Rand Corporation, and she serves on the academic council for the Prince Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim Christian Understanding at Georgetown. She was also on the board of directors for the American Council for the Study of Islamic Societies, as well as on the advisory board for the *Journal of Islam and the Contemporary World* at the King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies in Saudi Arabia. She is a peer reviewer for the Qatar National Research Fund.

Natana has written many articles, as well as three books. In addition, she is editor-in-chief of the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Islam and Women*, a two-volume work, published in 2013. I am honored and delighted, and please join me in welcoming our speaker for tonight, Natana DeLong-Bas.

### **Dr. Natana DeLong-Bas:**

Thank you very much, Dean Massa and Melinda, for your very kind introductions. And many thanks to all of you for braving the cold this evening and coming out on yet another evening when snow might have kept us at home.

What I'd like to do tonight is to provide you with some very broad overviews of the Islamic tradition and what Muslims believe. Hopefully we'll shatter some stereotypes that might have been caused by something called the media, [laughter] and hopefully you'll leave here with a deeper understanding of what it is that Muslims believe and why their faith tradition is so dear to them.

I thought we might begin with a little bit of math. Just to make the point that Muslims and Christians combined, as of 2012 we're about 54.7% of the global population. Today it's closer to 61% of the total population, and I would suggest that that means that the well-being and future of the world really do depend on the ability of Muslims and Christians to find ways of working together to address global concerns and challenges.

Often times we hear Muslims say, in the news, "Well, you know, Islam is a religion of peace." And then we hear other people say, "Well, no, Islam is really a religion of war." And so when Muslims express that they feel that Islam is a religion of peace, they're trying to tell you something about the Arabic language.

Not to get into too many linguistics here, but Arabic words are formed on the basis of three root letters. And you'll note up here, in the bold print, that the words for Islam—the religion, meaning submission; a Muslim—who would be a person who adheres to the faith of Islam; and the word for peace, *Salaam*—all share those same three root letters of S, L, M. And so what Muslims are trying to convey is that submission to God is intended to lead to relationships of peace between God and oneself, between God and other people, and ultimately, hopefully, with the whole world. So this idea of submission is supposed to guide your relationships with others.

Muslims believe that a book called the Qur'an is the final, perfect, and complete revelation that God gave to one individual, the prophet Muhammad, directly over a period of 22 years

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in the Arabic language. [It] may interest you to know that the purpose of the Qur'an was actually to confirm and reaffirm prior revelations, and the Qur'an often talks about the Torah, the Psalms, and the Gospels as genuine revelations that were received from God and given to humanity. The concern was that there seemed to have been perhaps some errors and omissions or perhaps misinterpretations that were introduced over time, and this is why God revealed the Qur'an to sort of correct those problems once and for all.

Muslims often say that the Qur'an is inherently pluralist, meaning that it recognizes more than one faith tradition as being true, because there are verses that talk specifically about Jews, Christians, and Sabians, as people who will go to paradise in the afterlife if they live out the teachings of their faith tradition. So it's not a call for them all to convert to Islam, but to be faithful to the faith traditions that they do adhere to.

It also talks about how God could have made everybody exactly the same, but that God likes diversity and that God created diversity with a purpose. And the purpose was so that different tribes and nations and groups of people could come to know one another. In other words, human beings were created with the intent of living in community and building relationships with each other, rather than maintaining separateness.

When Muhammad received the revelation, it was spoken to him through the Angel Gabriel. And yes, this is the same Gabriel who appears in the New Testament to make the announcement to the Virgin Mary of the pending conception and birth of Jesus. Muhammad said sometimes it was very easy for him to hear what the angel was saying, and sometimes he had to listen really, really hard because there would be other noises, like bells were clanging in the background, and he really had to work hard to listen to what was being revealed to him.

Muslims believe that the Qur'an is literally the word of God spoken to Muhammad. And that is part of the reason why there has been some reluctance among Muslims to subject the Qur'an to the kind of historical and literary criticism that oftentimes occurs with respect to the Bible.

Anybody here read the Bible in its entirety? I'm Lutheran, so that's just part of what we have to do growing up. I was very shocked to learn from a Muslim friend of mine, early on, that the coming of Muhammad was actually foretold in the Bible. I said, "Really? Because I don't remember reading that part. Could you tell me where it was?"

So no, no, it's in the Gospel, the Gospel of John. It's Chapter 16, verses 5 through 13, if you're interested. And this takes place on the night of Jesus's betrayal, just shortly before his arrest. He speaks to his disciples and he says:

Now I am going to him who sent me, yet none of you asks me, 'where are you going?' But because I have said these things, you are filled with grief. But I tell you the truth. It is for your good that I'm going away. Unless I go away, the Counselor will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you and when he comes he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment. In regard to sin, because men do not believe in me. In regard to righteousness, because I'm going to the Father, where you can see me no longer.

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And in regard to judgment, because the prince of this world now stands condemned. I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of Truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own, he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come.

Christians understand that to be a reference to the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete. But Muslims, when they hear that passage, think about how the Qur'an was spoken to Prophet Muhammad, and that he spoke only what he heard. He was known as a counselor during his own lifetime. And he was someone whose message very clearly focused on warning of the judgment that was to come and condemnation of the ills of this world, not simply in terms of worshipping false idols, but also in terms of the widespread social injustice that existed at his time.

Like Christians, Muslims historically have debated what the best method of interpreting the Qur'an is. And there seems to be a tendency, when we interpret our own Scripture, that we do this in a polysemic way, that we recognize that there may be multiple meanings to any text, there are different ways in which you can read it. But when we read somebody else's revelation, oftentimes we tend to read it very literally and assume that what it says, literally, is what it means. And that can lead to, sometimes, some unfortunate interpretations.

And so I do want to assure you that there are many Muslim scholars who engage in polysemic interpretations of the text. It's not always literally, but they look to see how a particular theme might fit with respect to the entire Qur'an. They will look to see how particular terms are used throughout the entire text, so that you're not allowing one verse alone to offer you the final word on what the text actually says. There is attention to looking at themes—which themes are the most important, which ones are talked about the most, and what might that indicate to us—as to what we should think about it.

One thing that Muslims take very seriously is the memorization and recitation of the Qur'an. And they always do this in Arabic, regardless of whether or not they speak the language. That is done out of respect for the Arabic text as God's literal, revealed word to human beings.

If you've ever studied a foreign language, you know sometimes it's hard to fully translate certain words. They may have multiple meanings in the original language that you can't quite capture in English. And so there is this desire to preserve the Arabic language of the text.

Memorization and recitation are not just individual endeavors, but there are competitions held at local, national, and even international levels for recitation. In Indonesia they're very popular. Indonesia, by the way, has the largest Muslim population in the world. They don't all live in the Middle East. There are more Muslims in Indonesia than there are in the entire Middle East combined.

Indonesia's practice of Qur'an recitation—these events are so popular, that they hold them in football stadiums. And they pack the stadiums, people will pack the streets with parades

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to celebrate recitation, and both men and women participate in these competitions. So some of the most famous Qur'an reciters in the world are in fact women. Hajjah Maria Ulfah, from Indonesia, is considered one of the top ten in the world.

Who is Prophet Muhammad? Before anybody worries that anybody's going to be offended by the picture that's there, this is from a Persian miniature. And this is one of the ways in which the prophet has been depicted in artwork, historically. You'll notice that his face is not shown. He's shown wearing a veil so that we don't have to worry about anybody potentially worshipping Muhammad rather than God.

Muslims will always tell you that Muhammad was strictly a human being. He was not a divine figure. Nevertheless, they believe that he is the most perfect human being who has ever lived, because he best represents what it means to live out the teachings of the Qur'an. As one of my Muslim friends has said, Muslim reference is to Muhammad, Muslim reverence is to God.

Muslims spend a lot of time studying the prophet's example called the *sunna*, which are recorded in literature called the *hadith*. And these are records of sayings and doings of the prophet. Sometimes, you only have one hadith that will talk about in issue, but oftentimes, you'll have hundreds, if not thousands, about the same incident. And the reason for that is that Muhammad didn't spend a lot of time by himself. He always had an entourage of people with him. He had friends and companions, kind of like Jesus and his disciples, who would follow him around. You get all of those different people who are present to hear him speak or respond to a particular issue. Everybody has their own version of the story.

Oftentimes, those versions may vary in the details, because each one of us when we hear something may have different interests or different things that jump out at us or grab our attention in a way that they don't. Some of us are focused on the words, some of us might be focused on who else was present, whether the prophet was speaking to an individual, whether this was something that was supposed to be a broader matter. And so my point is that having a multiplicity of records does not necessarily indicate falsehood per se, but rather that you had many people in the audience and everybody is remembering according to their own experiences.

Muhammad is believed to be the last in a very long line of prophets and messengers that began with Adam and continued up through Jesus and John the Baptist. If you're wondering what the difference between a prophet and a messenger is, prophets were generally not very popular people. Prophets were given a message from God, but oftentimes, people did not respond very positively to those messages. They chased them out of town or throw rocks at them or what have you. Only messengers were guaranteed the success of that message.

And there have only been five messengers according to Islamic teachings. First one was Noah. In Christianity, Noah isn't a prophet because he never really says anything, he just does whatever God tells him. But he does speak in the Qur'an. The other four are Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and, of course, Muhammad himself. Some of the other prophets who are shared in common between the Bible and the Qur'an include Aaron, Adam, David, Elijah,

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Elisha, Ezekiel, Job, John the Baptist, Jonah, Joseph, Lot, and Solomon. So many characters from the Old Testament and a few from the New Testament.

Muhammad was born in the year 570, according to tradition, and he lived until the year 632. He only began receiving prophecies in the year 610, when he was 40 years old. Now we know in American culture that forty's a bad number, right? We don't want to turn 40. Some of us turned 40 a long time ago. Forty's not something we really look forward to. So I'd like to share with you, that in the Islamic tradition, 40 is the number of perfection. It is the age when you receive wisdom, so 40 is something to look forward to, and so there's a symbolic importance to his having received that message at the age of 40.

During the early years of his ministry, Muhammad was in a city called Mecca. There are some scholars who have noted that the more universal message was revealed during that time. There's a lot of talk about the coming Day of Judgment. The idea of there being an afterlife; the idea that the actions that you undertake in this lifetime matter in a very eternal way.

It's also very interesting that during that time period, violence was absolutely forbidden to the Muslim community, even in cases of self-defense. And that was an important prohibition because this early Muslim community was under physical attack very frequently, including the prophet himself. Sometimes, it was the lady next door who liked to come and throw rotten tomatoes at him on a daily basis. There was another not terribly nice neighbor, who would come and dump garbage over his head on a daily basis. There were some early Muslims who were persecuted, and even killed, because of this new faith tradition. So the idea that for these first 12 years of his ministry, violence was forbidden and nonviolence was the norm. People were encouraged to engage in conversation and dialogue, is a very important part of the tradition that needs to be recaptured today when it seems like Muslims are always associated with violence, terrorism, and extremism on the TV set.

In the year 622, Muhammad was invited to come to another town called Medina. And he was invited there because this town had been caught up in tribal warfare of the worst variety. This was a culture in which a harm that was caused to one tribe had to be avenged by the tribe that had experienced the harm. And so you had these cycles of violence and retribution that would begin, and more and more people would become involved. And by that point, Medina was in a situation where the tribal warfare was so bad, nobody knew how to stop it.

But they had heard about this guy, Muhammad, in Mecca, and his abilities as an arbitrator, that he was somebody who could find solutions that would help to stop the killing and stop the warfare. And so he was invited to Medina to come and arbitrate this situation and ultimately, to take over as head of state.

And so it's during these last 10 years of his ministry, that his job description changed. He wasn't just a prophet anymore, but now he had taken on some of the roles of a head of state. That meant that he had to issue legal rulings. That meant that he was responsible for the security of all of the people who lived in Medina. And it was during this time period that God permitted the Muslim community to engage in the use of violence, but only for the

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purposes of self-defense. The Qur'an is very clear that violence is never to be used offensively. It can only be used when the community is under attack or under the threat of imminent attack.

It's also very important to note that during this time, not everybody who lived in Medina decided to convert to Islam. The pagan tribes remained pagan; there were certain Jewish tribes that lived there who remained Jewish, but what they did was they all signed a pact together. And this was a security agreement, that if any one of those tribes was attacked by the outside, everybody who had signed onto that pact agreed to act in defense of that community. Muslims refer to this as the Pact of Medina, or the Constitution of Medina, and will often say that this is really the world's first written constitution. So it's a point of pride for many of them.

Some of the controversies we hear, with respect to Muhammad, have to do with his use of violence. Yes, he was a military leader. Yes, he did fight in battles. As I said, part of that was because of his position as a head of state. Once an alliance had been, a treaty relationship had been established with the tribes in Mecca that had been persecuting the early Muslims, though he was willing to engage in a treaty relationship with them and lay down arms. So the purpose of his fighting was not to annihilate the enemy and wipe him off the face of the earth, but rather to bring the enemy to a point where they could start to negotiate what kind of relationship they could have so that peaceful relations and certainly commercial relations could be restored.

Second point, with respect to Muhammad, is that most of the time we think about Muslims, we probably think about the Middle East. And we think about some governments that maybe aren't the nicest; authoritarian dictatorships might come to mind. And so it's very interesting that the prophet himself was known for ruling through *shura*, or consultation, and working to achieve *ijma*, or consensus.

He didn't just issue decisions on his own. This entourage of people he was always surrounded by—he was always looking for advice from his friends. He took a lot of advice from his wives. Sometimes it was very good advice and sometimes perhaps the advice wasn't as good.

But he was somebody who really talked to people and listened to different ideas, and believed in the importance of building a sense of consensus within the community. And so some Muslims would say that's evidence of early democracy. Others, who are of the more extremist variety, might argue that he, at some level, gave up part of his authority.

But Muhammad always said he did not always speak as a prophet. There were times when he simply spoke as a human being. So he tried to be clear about when he was receiving a revelation versus when he was offering his own opinion. And his companions learned to ask him, "Are you speaking as a prophet or are you speaking as a person? If you're speaking as a person, I think I have a better idea. Why don't we try something else?" And he was willing to listen to that kind of advice.

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One final point that often comes up as a criticism of Muhammad is that he had multiple wives, and was clearly a sensual person. And that's often placed in contrast to Jesus who did not marry, did not have children, and was understood to be of a higher calling. Muslims point to Muhammad's role as a family man, somebody who was married and had children, as one of the things that helps to make him very relatable to them; that he was somebody who experienced the joys and the challenges of marriage and children. I have two teenagers; they can be very challenging at times. And so he understood this at a very practical level.

One thing that's often not mentioned is that his first wife, Khadijah—he was married only to her during her lifetime. And he only began to marry other women after she died. The first wife he married after her death, he married because the community had decided that he needed a new wife to keep house for him and to keep him company so that he wouldn't get lonely.

He only had one wife, Aisha, whom he married as a virgin. The other wives were either widows or divorcees. And many of those marriages were undertaken to engage in alliances, tribal relationships, to build stronger relationships with tribes. If you need a parallel, think about European monarchies of the past where you'd have the French monarch marrying the Austro-Hungarian princess or that sort of thing. So Muslims explain it as building political relationships.

And his wives were really kind of a mixed bag. Sometimes, they got along well and sometimes, they bickered a lot with each other about who was the favorite and who got to spend more time with him. And at one point he got so fed up with all of them, that he told them, everybody was going to take a 30-day break, and they needed to make up their minds: either they could stay married or they could choose to get divorced, but the bickering within the household needed to stop.

We hear a lot in the news about Sunnis and Shiis and occasionally, about Sufis. I'll give you a very broad definition of what the differences are. Muhammad was a human being. Human beings die, and when he died, that left the community in a real quandary: who was going to lead the community after his death and in what capacity? He was supposed to be the last of the prophets.

And so the majority, the Sunnis, decided that the appropriate model would be to choose a successor called a caliphate. And this person's job was to serve as a political leader. This person was not necessarily a hereditary descendant of Muhammad—one of them was, the fourth caliph, but the first three were not. The job of the caliph was to serve as this political leader. He was expected to continue to engage in consultation with the community and to lead the community forward.

Sunnis refer to the first four caliphs as the Rightly Guided Caliphs. These were people who had been Muhammad's close companions, and therefore it was felt that they were the people who could best answer WWMD, *What would Muhammad do?*, because they knew him and they had spent time with him. So they had a certain level of knowledge and interaction with him that was unique to that time period.



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After that last caliph, unfortunately you moved to a different generation that heard other people's memories but didn't have those memories personally. And I should mention that being a caliph was kind of a dangerous job because three of them got assassinated. So there were issues and concerns about the appropriate leadership in the aftermath.

Shiis, on the other hand—and they constitute the minority. Sorry, this map is a little bit fuzzy, but I wanted to give you an idea of what the percentages of Sunnis and Shiis look like. Shiis believe that the appropriate leader for the community had to be a male descendant of the prophet. And the reason for that was belief that Muhammad passed on special knowledge and ability for interpreting the Qur'an to his male descendants.

It got a little cagey in the early days, because Muhammad did not have any sons who survived infancy; he had a couple who died as babies. And so the imamate passed to his cousin, his male cousin, who was his closest male relative who also happened to be his son-in-law because he was married to his daughter, Fatima. Happily, they had two sons, Hasan and Husayn. And so you had direct male descendants after that point.

May sound odd to us to think about first cousin marriage, that does remain the norm in some places in the Middle East, and the Gulf countries in particular, which are also working to address the reality that they also have the highest level of genetic disorders in the world because of that marriage pattern.

Shiis ran into a bit of a problem with the imams because the branches divided depending on how many they recognized. Some recognized five, some recognized seven, some recognized 12. Regardless of the number, at some point there was no longer an imam on Earth.

The Twelvers are the largest group. They believe that the twelfth imam did not die, but went into this sort of mystical occultation and that he will come back at the end of time to defeat the antichrist, the *dajjal*, it's called in Arabic, and to co-rule with, guess who? Jesus, for 1,000 years of peace and justice.

And so Shiis historically have tended to be politically rather fatalistic, waiting for this return of the imam as the moment when they might finally expect some kind of social justice. That changed in the 1970s in Lebanon with Imam Musa al-Sadr, who encouraged them to take a more activist approach. So just as often times as we have in Christianity folks who seem to believe that God is not going to send Jesus back for the second time unless we hurry up and do something to create the conditions to make that happen, there are some Muslims who also believe that they have some kind of responsibility to create certain conditions that would make it possible for God to take that kind of action.

Sufis, very briefly, represent the mystical tradition in Islam. So these tend to be people who are more focused on spirituality, generally speaking, than they are on doctrine, per se. They have been responsible for much of the creative production in Islam because one uses creative and artistic methods to try to connect spiritually with the divine. So the use of music, dance, poetry, chanting of particular prayers or phrases, the idea is to open this connection with the divine. Not just for yourself, but also then so that you can pass this along to other human beings, to kind of be this connection between heaven and Earth.

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I often hear in the news, that there are two kinds of Muslims: there are the bad Muslims we don't like, and those are the terrorist, jihadi, Wahhabi, Salafi, nasty, ISIS type people that nobody likes because they're very politicized and have very rigid understanding of doctrine. And then we have the Sufis on the other hand, who are always portrayed as being tolerant and peaceful and loving and compassionate and wonderful. And I simply have to shatter that stereotype by telling you that that's not always been the case.

If you look at the 19th century anti-colonial movements throughout North Africa and Southeast Asia, they were largely led by leaders of Sufi orders because they had the popular connections, they had the network of lodges to go to, and they were financially independent from the state. So they had resources that were available to them that allowed them to very effectively fight against colonial regimes.

Probably the most famous case being in Algeria. It took the French 32 very bloody years to conquer Algeria because of Emir Abdelkader. If you ever read through some of the diplomatic cables, Wikileaks from the 19th century, you will find these examples of frustration with these Sufi leaders. So they're not always peaceful, happy, loving folks. We have to be very careful about these binary presentations.

So what is it that Muslims all believe in? Muslims have these things called the Five Pillars and all five of these pillars, the point that unites them, is that they are very community focused. Pillar number one is the *shahadah*, or the declaration that there is no god, but the one God. And that's followed by a statement that Muhammad is God's messenger. So this is recognition of the Qur'an as God's revelation to the prophet. It's a statement of absolute monotheism and a statement of belief in revelation.

When you proclaim the shahada, this marks your entry into membership in the Muslim community. So if you need a Christian parallel, that would be baptism, when you become a member of the Church. You are supposed to make your shahadah in front of two witnesses because this is a public statement, a public act, that you are joining into this community. And if you're worried that you may not be able to find two Muslims near you, you can go to IslamicCity.com which will set you up with a teleconference with two Muslims in some other city so that you can proclaim your shahadah. And they have a little runner on the left side of the page that indicates brother or sister so and so proclaim the shahadah at such and such a time on such and such a day, so that you can statistically keep track of this.

Second pillar, or the five daily prayers. The music you heard at the beginning was actually the Sunni call to prayer. If you ever visit the Muslim world, five times a day you will hear that call coming from the minarets. And the idea is that it's an invitation. It's not supposed to be something you force people to, but it's an invitation. Something that calls to you.

Sometimes, we hear, "Oh my goodness, you know, they have to pray five times a day. That seems so burdensome. That's a lot of praying." Well, life is all supposed to be prayer at some level. But what's the deeper purpose behind five daily prayers? You pray first thing in the morning, noon, mid-afternoon, at sunset, and in the evening. All throughout the day, you are remembering God. This is about keeping God as a very active presence in your life.

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And it's not intended to be a burden. Prophet Muhammad said that "Islam was not sent to be a burden to people," so there are exceptions to the rule. If you happen to be away on travel, for example, you're allowed to collapse the prayer times into three times of the day. You still want to say your five prayers, but you do it in three time slots. Shiis tend to do that on a regular basis to kind of distinguish themselves.

What happens if you happen to be in outer space? This is a picture of Prince Sultan bin al Salman. He's the son of the new King of Saudi Arabia. He was the first Muslim and first Arab to go to outer space. He flew with the Challenger in 1985. He was a payload specialist, and I had the opportunity to interview him about that experience, and well, how did you do it? How do you pray in zero gravity? How do you know what direction to turn? And you're supposed to pray facing Mecca. What time frame do you use because you're orbiting the Earth?

He said, well, he had to talk to some of the religious scholars about these things. And it was determined that because he had taken off from Cape Canaveral, that he would follow whatever the timing was in Cape Canaveral. He said when it came to finding the direction of Mecca, he ended up having to look out the window to see where it was on the Earth from where he was.

But he said the hardest part was the prostration, because as you can see from the positions there, Muslim prayer is actually, physically, very involved. Try prostrating in zero gravity. They had to build special shoes for him that were attached to the floor and then have two of his fellow astronauts hold him one by each arm to help him be able to get down to where he needed to be able to perform the prostrations correctly.

And then I also asked him about—I had heard—it said that he had recited the entire Qur'an in space because that was reported in all of the Saudi press and all. And at that point he got this rather pained expression on his face. He said, "Yes, well, I was there for a scientific mission, you understand. My religion is my own personal business, but the reason why everybody heard about this is because my mother kept calling Mission Control to ask them to remind me to say my prayers, because she wanted to be sure I got home safely."

So now you'll remember the prince. If you have difficulty figuring out what time the prayers are supposed to be or what direction Mecca is, this is actually an app that you can get for your iPhone or what have you. It's called Pocket Salat, and you can just carry it with you. The idea is you're supposed to have a clean space, typically on a carpet. And if you're worried—if you don't have an iPhone, the Japanese have made a prayer carpet that has a compass that always points to Mecca, that's in the front of the carpet. So there are ways of making prayer easier for people.

One point I should make with respect to prayer though, is if you look at the third position of prostration, it really reflects what Islam talks about. This idea of submission. Being face down, with the back of your neck exposed, is the most vulnerable position that a human being can take. It's the one place you never want anybody to hit you because you can sever your spine. And that's a reflection of a very old tradition of prostrating before the emperor. If you went before the emperor or the king to make a request, you did so in a position of

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prostration. And if you were fortunate enough to have your request answered, the king or emperor would lift his face and you would be asked to stand up. If you were in a lot of trouble and they just wanted to get rid of you, you already set up to lose your head.

Christians refer back to this practice as well. If you've ever heard the Old Testament benediction about "The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face shine upon you," that's lifting his head. "The Lord lift his countenance upon you and give you peace. May he grant your request." So a very nice symbolic connection.

Pillar number three is *zakat*, or almsgiving. Once every year, Muslims are expected to give two and a half percent of their entire wealth—that's not income after taxes, Social Security, Medicare, and what have you. This is two-and-a-half percent of your entire wealth, so stocks, bonds, bank accounts, car, house, all of those things together. And it's to be given to redistribute to the less fortunate members of the community. So again, there's this community focus on always looking out for those who are less fortunate. If you're not sure how to calculate what your *zakat* is, there is *zakat* calculators available online. You just plug-in all your assets and they'll add it up for you.

*Zakat* has proven to be a real challenge for Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11, because there's been so much concern about this money that is being channeled to terrorists. And concern that people are going to the mosque and paying their *zakat* there or paying it to a particular sheikh or organization and not really knowing exactly where that money is going. And so there have been mechanisms put into place to try to make sure that the money is being used for legitimate purposes. I think most people understand that, but it does take away a little bit of the personalized aspect of being able to decide who you want your money to go to.

You may have heard of the month of Ramadan when Muslims are supposed to fast. The fast traditionally begins at the moment when you can distinguish a black thread from a white thread, and then the fast ends for the day when the sun goes down. Muslims follow a lunar calendar, rather than our solar calendar, which means that the year is shorter. And that means that the month of Ramadan circulates through all of the seasons.

So this coming summer [2015], Ramadan will fall in the month of June. The fast of Ramadan—no food, no water, no smoking, no sex from sunrise until sunset—is a little bit easier to do when it falls in December and you live in Boston where it's not very warm. The days are short in winter, and so being without food and water may not be as difficult. But just imagine the level of discipline it takes to engage in that fast if you live in Baghdad, or Riyadh, or Kabul, and Ramadan is in August, and the days are very long and very hot, and you cannot have any food or water.

Why would God ask people to do this? Again, because there is this sense of focusing on the community. It's the possibility of experiencing for yourself what it's like to be hungry and thirsty on a daily basis. The difference for you is, you know it's going to end in 28 days. There's a set time limit. But for people who live without access to food on a regular basis, or the 40% of the world that lives without regular access to a clean and safe water supply, that's not by choice; that's by circumstance. And so the idea behind this fast is that it's

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intended to help you feel more empathy for those who are less fortunate, and hopefully be motivated to do something to help change that.

And as with prayer, there are exceptions that can be made. Young children learn to fast over time. You don't just get up and tell your five-year-old they can't have anything to eat for 12 hours. They'll start with a two-hour fast and grow into it. They usually only start fasting when they're around seven years old. People who are elderly, diabetics who have to maintain a certain blood sugar level—you don't want to have your ups and downs and crash. If you're pregnant or a nursing mother, exceptions are made. You have the choice, if it's a condition that's not permanent, you can make up the fast later, or you can simply feed two hungry people every day, so that you're still keeping with that idea of caring for the less fortunate.

Ramadan ends with the Eid al-Fitr which is one of the important Muslim holidays. [It] tends to be a three-day celebration that might be comparable to Christmas for us, because people visit each other and exchange gifts.

Pillar number five is the Hajj, this pilgrimage to Mecca that Muslims are expected to make once in a lifetime as long as they are physically and financially able to do so. Prayer is always made in the direction of Mecca, so visiting this location that you've been praying toward your entire lifetime is—it's a very powerful experience for Muslims who are able to attend.

The Saudis describe the logistics behind planning for Hajj, as being comparable to hosting 30 Superbowls in which everybody attending is actually playing the game, because you've got two million people who come every year. Everybody does the same set of rituals over a 10-day period. So it's being in congregation. It's probably the largest religious gathering in the world on an annual basis. You don't go on Hajj alone; you always go with a group of people.

I've included a couple of pictures here, because the way you dress is expected to show humility and equality of all persons before God. Men wear two very simple towels that are not sewn together. And the idea is that when you are on Hajj, you're really practicing for Judgment Day. You're in the presence of God, and when we're in the presence of God, all of the earthly trappings that we normally have are stripped away from us. Our wealth, our status, our titles, all of those things—you're really stripped down to the bare basics. And God sees you for who you are and looks within your heart, because that's really what matters to God.

And so, on this pilgrimage the idea is that everyone is supposed to be equal. The clothing is referred to as *ihram*, but *ihram* is also a state of mind. You're not allowed to lose your temper when you're on Hajj. If you do, it invalidates the entire experience. You're not supposed to engage in grooming or sexual activity on Hajj either, so that you can really focus on God.

There's also a celebration at the end called the Eid al-Adha, and this is the Feast of the Sacrifice. Most of the Hajj rituals actually reenact events from the life of Abraham. So you

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have this running back and forth between the hills of Marwah and Safa that are in imitation of Hagar's running, looking for water to give to her son so that he wouldn't die in the desert.

All five of these pillars are required of all Muslims, both male and female. There's this idea that everyone has the same responsibilities toward God, and everyone will be held equally accountable, and can expect the same level of reward. So we got those Five Pillars, and we seem to be missing something: namely that [*jihad*]; that's not one of the five pillars. That's not something that all Muslims are required to do.

There are some Muslim scholars, activists, militants, who are trying to make jihad some sort of unofficial sixth pillar. But jihad itself does not mean holy war. It's really about striving and struggle and effort and Muslims will talk about this inner/greater jihad versus the outer/lesser jihad. And the most important jihad is the one within yourself to live a righteous life, to be a pious person, to live by the teachings of the Qur'an.

The outer or lesser jihad is one that is only supposed to be engaged in defense of the Muslim community, but it doesn't have to be through the use of violence. Feeling bad about something in your heart and being concerned about social issues is also a method of engaging jihad. Writing—articles, op-ed pieces, bringing attention—writing a blog would be another method of this outer jihad. Jihad of the tongue, speaking out, providing education for people about what the faith tradition actually teaches.

And then you have jihad of the hand, it can be of the sword, but there's also this idea that you personally get involved and get your hands dirty in fixing whatever it is that is wrong with injustice. Perhaps one of the most important things that certain parties need to be reminded of with respect to jihad, is that the whole purpose—if you are fighting this as a violent, militant activity—is that your goal is to end the conflict. Your goal is to end the fighting. It's not to annihilate the enemy from the face of the Earth. Your goal is to establish a treaty relationship.

That's what Prophet Muhammad did, and that's really what the goal is supposed to be. Treaties can be established for any period of time. Typically, they're for ten years. They're always renewable. Just because ten years is up, doesn't mean that it has to be over. It's still possible to have a relationship.

There are some Muslims who are really trying to reclaim jihad and its true meaning from the militants. So they're engaged in what some of them call jihad [ARABIC], civilian jihad. This is actually a Twitter campaign with the hashtag #MyJihad, where people are invited to explain what they understand their personal striving or effort to be, and what they're trying to do to make the world a better place.

So you can see there are many points of commonality in beliefs between Muslims and Christians. We all believe in God as the creator of all life. We all believe in God as a source of justice, certainly as the one who is going to judge us on Judgment Day and hold us accountable and decide where we are going to spend the afterlife.

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All of us believe in the importance of belief in one God. Sometimes it's hard for Muslims to understand the concept of the Trinity, and I get into this debate with them all the time: "you people believe in three gods. You're polytheists." "No, we believe in one God, in three persons, three capacities, three functions, but it's one God, [ARABIC], not [ARABIC]." And so that can be a little confusing, at times.

Perhaps one of the most important beliefs that we share has to do with the creation of the first two human beings, Adam and Eve. Both faith traditions believe that God created them, placed them in the garden as caretakers, and that there was an incident with a serpent who tempted them into doing something that they should not do. And here's where the stories diverge a little bit.

In Christian tradition, God asks Adam what happened. Adam blames Eve. Eve blames the serpent. God punishes everybody. And there's this sense of collective accountability. This Original Sin that is passed down from one generation to the next, to the next, that we're all accountable for.

Muslims do not believe in the doctrine of Original Sin. Muslims believe in individual accountability. Adam and Eve were responsible for their own actions and had to take accountability for that; and each one of us is responsible for our own actions and decisions, and we will be held accountable for those. I will not be held accountable for the actions of my husband, my grandfather, great great great aunt Tillie, or whomever. My children are not responsible for what I do. I'm responsible for my own actions.

In the Qur'an, both also immediately accept responsibility for what they have done. Instead of trying to pass the buck and blame it on somebody else, they recognize immediately that they are at fault, and they ask God for forgiveness. And God offers that forgiveness to them. There's still punishment and accountability, they get kicked out of the garden, but God offers them forgiveness and tells them that he will provide them with guidance for the rest of their lives.

One other interesting point I would make with respect to Creation. [The] Book of Genesis, in chapters two and three, talks about the order of Creation. And we all know that Adam was made first and then God made some animals and did some other things. And Eve, God created second, and that has led to certain theological interpretations of women as lesser, inferior, subordinate, over time.

In the Qur'an, first, man and woman are created at the same time, from a single soul, and one is not created before the other. And this reality of being created from a single soul means that they are also—neither one is ever complete without the other. So if you ever heard people talk about that beautiful idea of the soul mate—there's this idea that in order to be whole again, you need to find that *zawj*, that spouse, that completes you.

Mary and Jesus are certainly very present in the Qur'an. It's interesting to note that they are always talked about with reference to each other. Mary is always described as the Mother of Jesus, and Jesus is always described as the Son of Mary. So they go together as a pair.

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The Qur'an confirms the virgin conception and birth of Jesus. There's this scene where Mary has left her family, and she's taken shelter out in a far location, and an angel appears to her. And she's worried about this angel who looks like a man, and she warns him that she's a chaste woman. She's not interested in fooling around. He needs to leave her alone.

And he tells her that he's bringing her a message from God, that she is going to have a child. And her response is very similar to that in the Bible. "Really? How's this going to happen? Because I've never known a man." "Don't worry; with God, everything is easy." God simply says, "Be," and it is. It's the same way that the God of the Old Testament creates in the first chapter of the Book of Genesis.

The terminology that is used to describe Jesus is also reminiscent of biblical language. Jesus is referred to as a Word from God and a Spirit from God, and those phrases are only used in the Qur'an to describe Jesus. It's reminiscent of the language opening the Gospel of John. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. So we have this Word from God and Spirit of God confirming that this Jesus has a very special status and no earthly father.

And the Qur'anic telling of the story, which we'll take from chapter 19 of the Qur'an—Mary is actually the only woman who is named in the Qur'an. We have more information about the Virgin Mary in the Qur'an than we do in the entire New Testament. Some of this information comes from books that didn't make it into the canonical Bible, specifically the Gospel of Mary, which is used by Coptic Christians until today.

So we have, in chapter 19, this description of—Mary has accepted receiving Jesus into her, and comes to the moment of childbirth, which is an extremely vulnerable moment and an extremely painful moment. And we see this depiction of her, standing here, holding onto the trunk of a palm tree, crying out, "I put to God that I had not experienced this." She's alone. She's having this baby. It's very painful and God responds to her, "Don't worry, I'll take care of you. Look, shake the tree, there are ripe dates there, [to] provide you with food. Look there's a stream here to provide you with water."

The only thing that God asked of her that day was that she simply not speak to anyone. And so she has her baby, is cared for in this very tender relationship with God, and once the baby is born, then she goes back to her family. [Her] family, not surprisingly, is not very happy. "Where'd this baby come from? What have you been doing? Mary, daughter of Aaron, your father was not an evil man. Your mother was not unchaste. What has happened here?"

So she's not allowed to talk to anybody that day. So who speaks up to defend her? The Infant Jesus. One of his miracles in the Qur'an, is to speak as an infant, and he speaks up to defend his mother, to defend a woman who has been falsely accused of unchastity.

What do Muslims believe about Jesus? They believe that Jesus was a Word from God and a Spirit from God, but not the Son of God. This is probably one of the biggest differences between Islam and Christianity. For Muslims, the understanding of God is that God is completely separate from human beings. And so the idea of God having a son, which



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always seems to be interpreted literally, that's not something that God would do, because God is not human like us.

Muslims also do not believe in the Crucifixion, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus, which was certainly pivotal to Christianity. And the reason for that goes back to that discussion of individual accountability. If we are not collectively responsible for the sins of other people, then it would not be possible for one individual to engage in one all-atoning sacrifice to save all of humanity. Each one of us ends up being responsible for our own actions. Islamic tradition teaches that when God goes to judge you in the afterlife, your good deeds will be weighed against your bad deeds. If your good deeds are heavier, you'll go to Paradise. If your bad deeds are heavier, then it's unfortunate for you, you will end up in Hell.

So what exactly do they do with the whole Crucifixion, Death, Resurrection thing, with respect to Jesus? The exegetes, those who interpret Scripture, have two different interpretations of one verse. This verse says that God raised Jesus up. Some understand that to be a reference to the Ascension: that God literally raised Jesus up into heaven, so that he did not die. Others said, well, this raising up is really more symbolic, more metaphorical.

Crucifixion was a horrible way to die. It was a painful and humiliating way to die. And it would be unthinkable for God to allow one of his precious messengers to die in such a gruesome, unacceptable way. And so the idea of God raising him up would be raising him above that kind of death. And so the explanation is typically that it wasn't Jesus who died. It was somebody else who looked like him. But that Jesus himself was not crucified.

Where might this leave us with respect to interfaith dialogue and relations? Because I realize I'm running out of time. I have so much to say, and never enough time to say it all. I think that one of the things Muslims and Christians really need to think seriously about is, what kind of dialogue or relationship are we looking for? Are we looking for one in which we can cooperate? Or are we looking for one in which we simply argue about whose religion is better than whose, and the kinds of conflict that that can lead to?

I'd like to suggest that there are two major avenues that dialogue is taking today. One of them is what I would call a dialogue of information and perspectives. Certainly, with respect to Islam, there is a lot of misinformation out there in the media. I was shocked on one of my first trips to Saudi Arabia to discover that there's just as much misinformation out there about Christianity.

One of my first meetings with three very, very conservative religious scholars—I was fully veiled, my husband was with me, so I'd done everything protocol-wise that I was supposed to do—but they were sitting back against the wall, in absolute terrors. What have I done or what am I not doing that I need to do to help these folks relax?

And they said, "Well, it's just we've never met a cannibal before." I said, "Excuse me? Did I use the wrong word?" I thought I said Christian. "No, no, no. We understand, but don't you people eat your God every Sunday?" Well, okay, we don't really quite think of it in those terms, but there was a real fear factor for them, that I just had never thought about it

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that way before. So hearing these differences of perspectives and making sure that there's accurate information and understandings out there can be helpful.

Dialogue can also help us to avoid the kind of reductionism into 30-second sound bites that the media likes. And it's one thing to read a book or hear somebody on TV talking about a faith tradition. It's entirely different when you have the opportunity to meet a person yourself, and hear them talk directly about their own experiences of the divine and what their faith tradition means to them.

And so I'm very proud that Boston College is part of this kind of dialogue. Many thanks to the chair of our Theology Department, Catherine Cornille, for working very hard to ensure that this kind of dialogue continues. Now, we have the School of Theology and Ministry also working, hopefully, to help us with this kind of information.

Some people feel that dialogue in and of itself doesn't go quite far enough. They would like for dialogue to have a more practical focus. It's nice for us to get together and talk about doctrine and talk about what we believe, but what are we going to do with it? And so this kind of dialogue is really much more directed toward, how do we engage together in dealing with social injustice? In dealing with community level issues? How do we take this first stage of dialogue and build on it so that we're actually building relationships with each other that fulfill needs for all of us.

Will you all bear with me for one song at the end? It kind of wraps it all up, with respect to what Muslims believe. This is a young man named Sami Yusuf. A piece that he wrote to express some of the names of God and what they mean to Muslims around the world.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[MUSIC - SAMI YUSUF, "ASMA ALLAH"]

[NON-ENGLISH SPEECH]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

**Ms. Donovan:** Thank you very much, Professor. She has agreed to take some questions in our remaining time.

**Participant:** Can you just say something briefly about the Sunna? You mentioned the Sunna as part of a company's revelation as an important factor, along with the Hadith.

**Dr. DeLong-Bas:** Okay, so the Sunna is actually recorded in the Hadith, and the Sunna refers to the prophet's example. And that can refer to any number of things. It can refer to how he interacted with his family members. We know how he brushed his teeth. We know how he issued legal rulings. We know how he engaged in warfare and some of the kinds of

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rules that went with that. So the prophet's example covers, this sunna covers a wide variety of territory.

Part of the question for contemporary Muslims is how do you best follow that? Do we look for the kinds of values that he embodied? So for example, one big debate with respect to women's rights has to do with domestic violence. And the prophet never hit any of his wives and actively discouraged his companions from doing so. So he's looked at as a very positive example of a husband.

Must one follow literally exactly everything he did in order to go to heaven? If you don't brush your teeth exactly the same way that he did, does that mean that God's going to say, "Sorry, you don't quite meet the mark." It really depends on who is interpreting.

Some of the most tedious, we'll say theological literature I have read has been from Saudi scholars ruling on exactly those kinds of issues, and oftentimes the questions are very minute. Like with respect to prayer, is it permissible to move your index finger in a particular way? And they'll look back to the prophetic example and go through the hadith to find those. I think the broader tendency today is to really try to recapture values and reinterpret those in ways that make sense for the contemporary era.

We have lots of questions. Somebody want to grab a microphone, or pass it around.

**Participant:** Yes Professor, two things briefly strike me. One, if I understood you correctly, you were speaking about in Muslim, the creation of humanity, you focus, mentioned the complementarity of man and woman. It would seem, if I'm not mistaken, it would seem that's not absent in Genesis, either; Genesis 2. As you should know, probably know, two Creation accounts, first two chapters of Genesis and wherever in Genesis 2 speaks of, you know, when the man is made and then all of Creation is paraded before him, and none proved to be a suitable partner for the man. And then coming to woman, this one is bone to my bones and flesh of my flesh. It would seem that particular text of Genesis would point to male-female complementarity.

**Dr. DeLong-Bas:** I would agree with that point. And what I do mention to my students in that particular account is that the idea that God took this rib out of the man to make woman from that, means that the man always has a piece that's missing from him, and that he can't be complete again until he finds that partner and is put back together.

And with respect to the two stories of Creation in the book of Genesis, the discussion in the first chapter of Genesis, I would say, is actually a closer parallel to the Qur'anic telling, because it doesn't talk about God making man first and then other things happening. But it really talks about God creating them both it seems, at the same time: that "male and female, he created them." And there are three different ways in which it is stated that would tend to make that point.

**Participant:** Okay, and then, if I may, Professor, you mentioned, if I understood you correctly, you spoke of the goal of jihad as a reconciliation, communion with others, okay.

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Is that at odds at all with the Muslim focus on individual accountability, rather than collective accountability that you spoke of? Do you see what I'm saying?

**Dr. DeLong-Bas:** Not quite. Reference to jihad, the inner jihad would be an individual struggle to live a righteous life. So at that level, I can see where the individual accountability would come into play. Is that what you were asking me?

**Participant:** No, when you, at least, maybe I understood you incorrectly. Once again, I don't know how to use other words on this point. The goal of jihad is to, it's not so much warfare or annihilation, you spoke of reconciliation, communion. My understanding of what you were trying to say, given that, is that at odds with the Muslim tenant of individual accountability, at all?

**Dr. DeLong-Bas:** I may be coming at the question in a different way. If you are, as a community, engaged in a jihad that's intended to defend the community, then you would have the expectation at the communal level, that what you're trying to do is to reconcile relationships between two communities. You would not necessarily have a jihad as violent or militant action, undertaken by an individual against another individual. It's supposed to be declared by a legitimate leader who is the head of a state, so that takes on a political dimension to it.

Maybe one way of approaching the individual accountability question would be with respect to whether participating in that jihad is understood to be a collective responsibility or an individual responsibility. And that is something that is talked about a lot in the literature, historically. That emphasis has been on jihad as a [ARABIC], which is a community activity only to be undertaken by the community.

What contemporary extremists have done—and this began with Abdullah Azzam in 1984, who was sort of a mentor to Osama bin Laden—was to say that, in fact, this is not a collective responsibility. This is something you have to undertake as an individual. When jihad is undertaken as a collective responsibility, there are certain parameters to that. One of which, for young people, is that they have to have the permission of their parents in order to go, because the individual may have other responsibilities at home. And I have spoken with the Saudi government about this, and they have actually had parents get on TV to tell their kids who've gone off and joined the jihad, that in fact you don't have my permission and you need to come back home.

So this idea of introducing it as sort of this individual responsibility, that the individual has to make a personal decision to go and join the jihad, is something that really does not have a strong basis in the historical literature.

**Participant:** Thank you.

**Dr. DeLong-Bas:** You're welcome.

**Participant:** Hello.

**Dr. DeLong-Bas:** Hi.

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**Participant:** I had a question. In this presentation you have a slight focus on war and peace and jihad. How did the jihad, was the Islamic conquest way, way back when, considered jihad? And how does it influence it that there were Arab Christians within the Muslim forces? And how does that play a part of the fighting for a goal that it might not be a goal between all of the soldiers?

**Dr. DeLong-Bas:** Okay. I think I understood the question. We're going back to the Muslim conquest of the seventh and eighth century, when we saw the Islamic empire spread from this very small area, territory in Arabia, out across North Africa into Europe and throughout the Middle East. One of the things that, contextually it's important to note, is that there were two surrounding empires, both of which had been fighting each other for long periods of time and were on the verge of collapse themselves. You had the Sassanids in what's today Iran, and certainly the Byzantine Empire, which represented Eastern Christianity.

We oftentimes hear that, oh, this was a jihad by the sword and Islam was a religion that was spread very forcibly. And everybody in the territories that they conquered had to convert to Islam. That in fact is not true. There were actually many different groups of Christians who welcomed the Muslim conquerors, because they had been persecuted as Christian minorities by the Byzantines. And so they were welcomed at some level. Many of these conquests really have to be understood at more of a political level than necessarily a religious one.

There were some people who did choose to convert. There were others who chose not to. There were benefits of doing both. If you were non-Muslim, so if you were Jewish or Christian, you could opt to pay a tax, it was called the *jizya*, that would excuse you from participating in military activity. But you were essentially paying for your security in the process.

A lot of those nuances seemed to be lost on certain groups and movements today. I would argue that some of them actually, one, need better grounding in their own doctrine, and two, need better grounding in their own history. I haven't taken on the history as much as I have doctrinal issues, trying to point out this is what the classical tradition says, this is what it said historically, where people are coming from is really outside of anything that's ever been done.

And that carries a certain weight because *bid'ah*, or innovation, is something that people who are more literal in their interpretation would understand to be absolutely forbidden. So if you accuse them of doing something really innovative, it puts them on the defensive. Just dealing with doctrine is not going to be enough to take the teeth out of ISIS, obviously, but there is a sense and a level at which the doctrinal issues do need to be addressed, not just with ISIS, but also for global populations, and trying to understand why this is such an anomaly, rather than an accurate historical trajectory that's been seen before.

**Participant:** Thank you for the wonderful presentation.

**Dr. DeLong-Bas:** Thank you.

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**Participant:** My question is, would you consider it a myth, the oppression of the Muslim woman?

**Dr. DeLong-Bas:** That was, unfortunately, a part I didn't get to but I'm really glad that you asked it, because there are certain images and stereotypes that we have. My greatest level of activity with respect to women's rights has been with respect to family law. Looking at issues related to marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance, and whether rape is actually being treated as the crime that it is; and it's very clearly established as a crime in Islamic law.

Unfortunately, what we have sometimes are a mix of religion and culture and so there are certain cultural attitudes and practices that have been permitted to override Islamic law in certain places. So to give you one example, both men and women are supposed to have the right to initiate divorce. Men don't have to have a reason for it. Women's reasons have tended to be more limited, historically, and because of that, there are some judges who simply won't pay attention to a woman's request for divorce.

And you have these petitions, in Egypt, for example, there was a case of a woman who had been asking for 40 years to be divorced from an abusive husband. And it simply took that long to find a judge who was willing to accept that as grounds for divorce. So there are times when in practice it's not faithful to the way that it's supposed to be set up.

Another example would have to do with marriage that the husband is supposed to pay a dowry, not a dower. This is a dowry that's supposed to go to the woman as her nest egg in the event of divorce or becoming a widow that she's got some kind of financial means to fall back on. And that's important, because there is no concept of joint property in Islamic law. So when you have a couple that's married, the husband has what's his and the wife has what's hers. So even if they're married for 30 years and own a house together, the house would only be under one name, and it's usually the husband's. So the purpose of establishing the dowry was to provide financial justice for the woman in the event that the marriage ended.

It's become popular practice in some places for the woman to offer it as a gift to her father, essentially turning it into a dowry, rather than keeping it for the purpose for which it was intended. So there are definitely instances in which we could say that oppression exists and that certain rights are being violated.

One other question that often comes up has to do with veiling issues. There are some countries that do require women to veil: Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, most of the Gulf countries. If you happen to be from there, you have to veil. If you're visiting, it's kind of optional, but you may be taking a risk in some places if you don't. I don't look very Saudi. I veil when I'm there. And it's really more for my protection, and so that I can meet with conservative scholars who wouldn't be comfortable talking to me otherwise.

But in other contexts, where veiling is not something that's mandated by law, there are a variety of reasons as to why a woman might choose to wear a veil. It's not always because her husband is making her do it or her brother or her father. There are many women who

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choose to veil as an expression of their personal piety, as a means of protecting themselves from sexual harassment, as a symbol of their faith, as a matter of controlling what aspects of their beauty are publicly visible. It's a sign that a woman is not simply some public object to be objectified, but that she has the right to determine to dress modestly and to dress as she pleases.

The Bible tells us a woman's crowning glory is her hair, right? So if we cover our hair, we are controlling the degree to which we might be objectified or sexualized by others who are looking at us. So simply because a woman wears a veil, doesn't mean that she's oppressed. There may be a variety of reasons why she might choose to do that, and hopefully, in Western context we're becoming a little bit more aware of that.

Oftentimes it invites harassment. I would say that Muslim women have disproportionately borne the consequences of 9/11 because it's very easy to pick out the Muslim woman. Although I would note, our sisters over on the side, there's really not that much difference between a habit and a hijab, and it's oftentimes the same principle. So it's a choice to express one's modesty and chastity. And for some reason, we respect it within Christian tradition, but we're a little less comfortable in Islamic tradition.

**Ms. Donovan:** It's now seven o'clock. Time flies.

**Dr. DeLong-Bas:** It does.

**Ms. Donovan:** But Professor, I wonder if you'd say a few words about the books that the bookstore is selling back here.

**Dr. DeLong-Bas:** Oh, right. So I was asked if there might be additional readings that you could read that wouldn't be too long or are too expensive, but that might provide you with a little more information. One of them is a very short introduction to Prophet Muhammad; give you more information about his role in Muslim life.

There's also the results of the largest Gallup poll that was ever done of the Muslim world, *What a Billion Muslims Really Think*. So it's based on statistics and a very strong series of surveys, if you are interested in learning more. I didn't happen to write any of them, so I do not have any personal vested interest. I'm not getting a kickback with any of those sales. It was simply for suggested further reading if there were other things that you might like to look at.

**Ms. Donovan:** Thank you very much. That was a very informative presentation.

[APPLAUSE]

[MUSIC PLAYING]