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# **Islam 101**

**with Natana Delong-Bas**

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**BOSTON COLLEGE**  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY

# Islam 101

## USING THIS RESOURCE

This resource is a guide to using an STM Online: Encore presentation as a conversation starter with members of a faith community. Each part of the presentation may be used separately, in combination with each other, or in a sequence over a period of time. “Islam for Catholics” has broad appeal for a faith community. It could serve as a standalone adult education series, or could supplement the learning of a wide variety of existing parish groups. Segments could be used by for periodic catechist meetings or Catholic school faculty meetings, and it would also be appropriate for high school religion students studying the world religions. Prayer groups, Scripture study, outreach groups, and women’s or men’s groups could find this resource to be a worthwhile enhancement to their work and mission.



## OVERVIEW OF THE PRESENTATION

Natana Delong-Bas offers a broad overview of the Islamic tradition. She invites listeners to shatter stereotypes and to more deeply understand “what it is that Muslims believe and why their faith tradition is so dear to them.”

Natana Delong-Bas, Boston College professor of the practice of theology

**Part 1: Overview, What Muslims Believe about the Qur’an [video 9 min.]**

**Part 2: What Muslims Believe about the Prophet Muhammad [video 12 min.]**

**Part 3: The Five Pillars of Islam [video 13 min.]**

**Part 4: Jihad, The Traditions of Islam: Sunnis, Shiis, and Sufis [video 9 min.]**

**Part 5: Common Beliefs of Muslims and Christians, The Future of Interfaith Dialogue [video 12 min.]**

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# Part 1: Why Study Islam and What Muslims believe about the Qur'an

## OVERVIEW

This segment provides a brief overview regarding the importance of learning more about Islam, and then discusses the book of revelation Muslims call the Qur'an, which also includes references to the Bible as used by Christians. DeLong-Bas discusses interpretation of the Qur'an, which is central in the prayer, world view, and daily life of a Muslim.

### The Names of God from "Asma Allah" by Sami Yusuf

Merciful	Gentle
Generous	All-Aware
Incomparably Great	All-Hearing
All-Knowing	All-Seeing
Forbearing	Majestic
Wise	Watchful
Firm	Responsive
Bestower of blessings	Forgiving
Most Compassionate	Appreciative
Opener	Loving
Forgiver	Self-Existing by Whom all subsist
Accepter of Repentance	Most Kind
Provider	Patient
Witness	Most Glorious

## VOCABULARY

Sabians – a religious group mentioned in the Qur'an as a "people of the book"

Polysemic – having multiple meanings

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. What do you see as similarities with the way Christians understand revelation in the Bible? What differences do you notice?
2. What surprised you or stands out for you in the discussion of the Qur'an?
3. How do you understand the principle of submission and its implications for the practice of Islam?

# Part 2: What Muslims Believe about the Prophet Muhammad

## OVERVIEW

DeLong-Bas discusses Muslim beliefs about Muhammad in this segment of the presentation. In particular, note the prophet's relationship to God, the changing roles for Muhammad in his lifetime, the role of violence in Islam, and Muhammad's dealings in the political realm. This section invites us to question our assumptions and stereotypes, and to consider the points of intersection, similarity, and difference with Christianity.

## VOCABULARY

Sunna - sayings and doings of the Prophet Muhammad, recorded in literature called the hadith.

Shura – consultation

Ijma – consensus

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. Explain your understanding of this statement: “Muslim reference is to Muhammad, Muslim reverence is to God.”
2. Comment on Muslim beliefs of the humanity and divinity of Muhammad. How does this differ from Christian understanding of Jesus?
3. If someone asked you who Muhammad was, how would you respond? What are the main points that define him?
4. What have you learned about Islam and violence in this segment?

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# Part 3: The Five Pillars of Islam

## OVERVIEW

In this segment, DeLong-Bas describes the basic tenets of Islamic belief, known as “The Five Pillars of Islam.” She points to the deeper meaning underlying each practice, and some of the intersections with Christianity. She also describes jihad in this section, which some have attempted to categorize as a pillar.



*The example of the those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah is like a seed of grain which grows seven spikes; in each spike is a hundred grains. And Allah multiplies His reward for whom He wills.*

**The Holy Quran 2:261**

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. Briefly name and describe the Five Pillars of Islam. Did you notice a shift in the way you understand these practices? Please describe.
2. Choose one of the Pillars of Islam, and describe its similarities and differences with Christian tradition and practice. What do you admire about the practice? What do you want to know more about?
3. What principle or theme connects these pillars for you as a basic tenet of Islam?

# Part 4: Jihad, and the Branches of Islam: Sunnis, Shiis, and Sufis

## OVERVIEW

DeLong-Bas explains, in general terms, the differences between three branches of Islam that may be recognized from their use in describing world events.

### SUNNIS VS. SHIIS VS. SUFIS

#### *Sunnis*

- *Caliphate model based on merit*
- *Leader is political figure*
- *First 4 “Rightly-Guided” – Companions of Muhammad*

#### *Shiis*

- *Imamate model based on hereditary descent*
- *Leader is both religious and political figure*
- *5ers (Zaydis), 7ers (Ismailis), and 12ers (Ithna’ Ashari)*

#### *Sufis*

- *Mystics*
- *More concerned with spirituality than doctrine*
- *Equal opportunities for males and females for membership and leadership*

## VOCABULARY

caliph/caliphate – successor to Muhammad who serves as a political leader

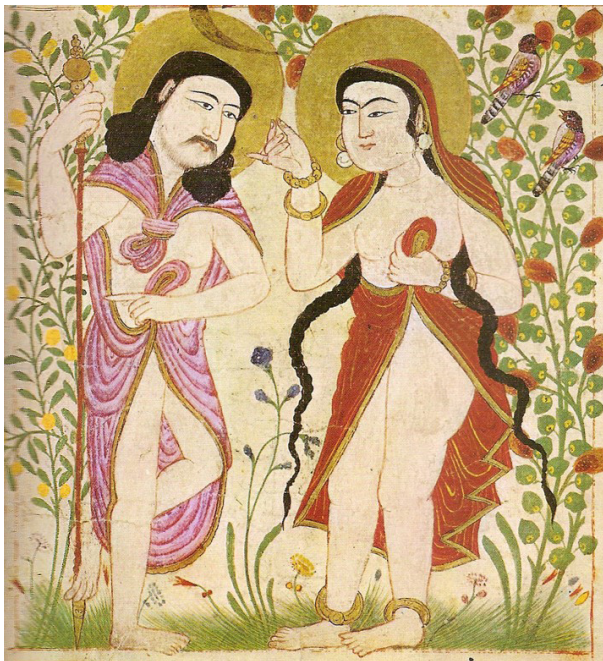
## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. What did you learn about jihad in this segment? What do you want to remember?
2. What do you understand to be the main differences between the Sunnis, Shiis, and Sufis? Please explain.
3. Take one of the branches of Islam and do some additional research on it. Where is this branch most prominent? What additional distinguishing characteristics did you find?

# Part 5: Common Beliefs of Muslims and Christians, The Future of Interfaith Dialogue

## OVERVIEW

DeLong-Bas probes some of the core commonalities among Muslims and Christians in this final segment, including the creation of the first humans, personal accountability, Mary, and Jesus. She completes her discussion with a brief reflection on possible avenues for interreligious dialogue among Muslims and Christians.



## ARE THERE POINTS OF COMMONALITY IN MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN BELIEFS?

- *Belief in Judgment Day*
- *Accountability*
- *God as Creator of all life*
- *Belief in Afterlife*
- *Monotheism*
- *Primacy of revelation*
- *God as source of all justice*
- *Belief in virgin conception and birth of Jesus*

## QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. DeLong-Bas states, “One of the things Muslims and Christians really need to think seriously about is, what kind of dialogue or relationship are we looking for?” How do you respond to her question? What motivates your response?
2. What issues are important to engage with at the local level? What would be realistic next steps for your community to take to enter into dialogue on one or more of these issues?
3. [Use this question if you are using all modules of Islam 101 as a series] Looking back on this brief study of the basics of Islam, what do you want to hold on to? How will you embrace this in your own life? What do you want to learn more about?