

APRIL 11-12, 2008

Interfaith Conference on Religion and Violence

# *The Origins of Sacred Violence*



Sponsored by

The Raven Foundation  
with  
Trinity Wall Street

*Is religion to blame for global violence?*

*Does belief in God eventually lead to the easy justification of violence  
in God's name?*

*Where does the idea that God sanctions violence come from?*

At *The Origins of Sacred Violence*, The Raven Foundation will present an exploration of the provocative ideas of René Girard on the function of sacred violence in human communities. Learn what Judaism, Christianity, and Islam teach about God, violence, and the path to peace.

## SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

FRIDAY, APRIL 11, 2008

SESSION 1 - 7:00PM TO 9:30PM

*Sacred Violence*

James Carroll & Andrew McKenna

SATURDAY, APRIL 12, 2008

SESSION 2 - 9:30AM TO 11:30AM

*Desire*

Tariq Ramadan  
& Esmail Koushanpour

SESSION 3 - 1:00PM TO 3:00PM

*Scapegoating*

Susannah Heschel & Sandor Goodhart

## REGISTRATION

ALL 3 SESSIONS WITH  
ADVANCE REGISTRATION - \$25

SATURDAY LUNCH - \$5

EACH SESSION - \$10 WALK-IN

## LOCATION

THE RAVEN FOUNDATION  
2624 PATRIOT BLVD  
GLENVIEW, IL 60026

## Video Conference

Via video from the Trinity Wall Street Conference held on January 21, 2008, we'll hear from:

**James Carroll**, best-selling author of *Constantine's Sword*, former Catholic priest and lifelong activist for peace

**Tariq Ramadan**, Senior Research Fellow at St. Anthony's College, Oxford and author of *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muhammad*

**Susannah Heschel**, holds the Eli Black Chair on Jewish Studies, Dartmouth and author of *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, which won a National Jewish Book award

## Guest Scholars

Responding in person to the video and to your questions will be:

**Dr. Andrew McKenna**, Professor of French Language and Literature, Loyola University and Editor-in-Chief of *Contagion: Journal of Violence, Mimesis and Culture*, 1996-2006

**Dr. Esmail Koushanpour**, Emeritus Professor, Northwestern University Medical School and Executive Director of the Islamic Cultural Center, Northbrook, IL

**Dr. Sandor Goodhart**, Department of English, Purdue University and past president of the Colloquium on Violence and Religion

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MAURA JUNIUS: So I just wanted to let you know that approximately an hour into the presentation we'll be taking a ten-minute break. The wash rooms are down the hallways on either side. So the ladies, if you go down this hallway, you'll find ladies' wash rooms. The gentlemen, you just have to take a left and a left and you'll find wash rooms on that side.

If you haven't completed your lunch form -- I know it seems early, but we have to get these things handled -- please fill it out now so I can get lunch ordered; get those elves making those sandwiches. All right?

So thank you.

SUZANNE ROSS: Thanks, Maura. For newcomers this morning, that was Maura Junius, our marketing director and event planner, woman extraordinaire who handles all details. So if you do you have any problems related to the conference or personal life, whatever, ask Maura.

[LAUGHTER]

SUZANNE ROSS: We're going to start a new column, "Ask Maura." She really has all the answers.

So welcome again. It's great to have you all here. Welcome, good morning again to our speakers. We have, again, for those of you who are new, I'm Suzanne Ross with my husband Keith, founders of the Raven Foundation.

Our other staff members in the back are Adam Erickson, the director and Emily Martinson, co-director. And our speakers are, starting at the far end here, is Dr. Andrew McKenna, professor of French language and literature at Loyola University here in Chicago.

We have Dr. Sandor Goodhart, professor of English and Jewish studies. It's an odd combination.

SANDOR GOODHART: It's an odd combination.



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SUZANNE ROSS: Okay. Jewish studies and English at Purdue University; and Dr. Esmail Koushanpour who is executive director of the Islamic Cultural Center in Northbrook.

So welcome again, gentlemen. It's a pleasure.

I am going to attempt the three-minute executive summary of last night. Let's see. I'm going to flex my muscles here and see what happens because Andrew led us in a wonderful response to James Carroll's presentation from the Trinity Institute. James Carroll is the author of Constantine's Sword.

And Andrew led us through a fabulous discussion on the origins of sacred violence and then offered us a way out of that. So I'm going to try and do the three-minute thing.

So Andrew began with an observation that anthropologists bring to us that from the beginnings of human culture we find religion. Religion is right there at the origins. And why is that? Because religion solves the biggest problem that faced human beings at the origins of culture, and that was the problem of their own violence against and within their community.

So the archaic solution to that, the ancient solution to that was the practice of sacrifice, scapegoating sacrifice. So he described the original scene in a protohuman community where there is violence of all against all consuming the community. And the solution is focusing that violation against one victim, an arbitrary victim, but that is a unanimous choice by the community. And when that victim is killed, expelled, or otherwise gotten rid of, the community experiences peace where once there was confusion, order where there was disorder. And that center, that violent center of the community becomes the sacred center of the community.

And he went on that describe that the peace that's generated and the calm that descends is sort of interpreted as coming from outside the community. It's a divine solution because -- well, for two reasons. One, the contrast is so shocking from the violence to the peace. And also there



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is a certain discomfort with the murder that's at the heart of that peace. And there's a certain element of concealment of the reality of that violation; that ... that was the viable solution.

And so by attributing it to a divine directive, if you will, or a divine mission of this victim to bring peace to the community, the community solves a number of problems.

So Andrew said what is the alternative to bringing peace through violence. The alternative that's offered by the three great religions represented here and that's also, Andrew pointed out, a quite reasonable, logical, and secular answer -- you don't even need to go to religion for this -- the obvious answer is when we are retaliating and caught in this cycle of violation, the way to break out of it is to offer forgiveness instead of violence, very simply.

And that an act of forgiveness is a creative act because there's nothing to -- it is not imitative. If you're engaged in imitating violence for violence, all you're doing is repeating what other people are doing. There's no originality. There's no creativity. That forgiveness is that moment where creativity and originality enters into the situation and transforms it.

And Sandy and Esmail, from their traditions, said -- affirmed that response; that that response is part of their traditions as well. So I think that's it. Was that three minutes?

[LAUGHTER]

SUZANNE ROSS: But I think that's -- and we had a wonderful discussion about forgiveness last night and what that means and how it begins to manifest.

So this morning, we're going to move to the subject of desire and looking at it, first, through the lens of Islam. And we are going to hear from the Trinity Conference that was held in January in New York. The speaker, Tariq Ramadan, who is a very prominent Islamic scholar who speaks to the western community about Islam very well, an articulate spokesman. And then Dr. Koushanpour is going to respond.

But first he's going to give us some context and introduce a video. Esmail?



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ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR? Thank you. Good morning. I'd like to first thank Ross and Keith -- I'm sorry -- Suzanne and Keith Ross for inviting me to this conference and sharing this platform with two prominent scholars that I met on March the 8<sup>th</sup>. So our relationship really started March the 8<sup>th</sup>. I had known Suzanne longer than that, and we really got very close very quickly. We saw eye to eye, and I've become their student. Mimetic theory proposed by another scholar, René Girard. And I did not know anything about that theory, but I have since found many, many examples of that in my own faith and in my own historical background from Iran.

So if anyone has got questions about how I explain certain things about mimetic theory, you're quite welcome to ask them when we're done. So I have enjoyed this experience and feel that, as a student, since I don't have a middle name, student is my middle name so I can learn from my colleagues. And they are really wonderful people -- and from her. She has written a book, and I'm still reading it and enjoying it.

So that was my very first comment. The second comment I want to thank you for that executive summary. I would not have put it a better way. I enjoyed listening to that. It's a learning experience there.

The subject for this morning is a, as Suzanne mentioned, is that the role desire plays in religion and violence. And our speaker is a prominent Muslim scholar which I will talk about a little bit when we get there. But I'd like to say something about the religion of Islam because that's the focal point of this talk.

Islam is the youngest of the three Abrahamic religions. Today one out of every five individuals on earth is Muslim. And there are approximately 7 million Muslims in the United States. Yet for many people, their only exposure to Islam is what they see on the news and films.

In short, Islam remains a largely misunderstood religion in the West. I thought that, to facilitate our presentation and discussion of the speaker, we need to know something about



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Islam. For those of you who know about Islam, please forgive me and bear with me. For those of you who are not familiar, that is fine because Islam is a new religion, only about 1432 years old.

But Muslims feel that it is the same religion that God gave to all the prophets. So we feel that Adam, starting with the prophet Adam, and all the way through Mohammed, through all of the prophets. The same message was given at different times to different people.

I have prepared a hand-out that you have in your packet about Islam, and I'd like to very briefly go through that. There are verses from the Holy Koran for everything that I say. I'm not planning to recite those for you here. However, I would have references to Holy Koran as we talk about the video. And if they are important enough, I will read them to you. And some of them are similar but there are some new ones that I will point to them, so if you want to write down where I got it from, you can.

So this is what I want to do first. To tell you something about the belief in Islam and the practice that Muslims what practices in the religion. The basic belief in Islam is that Muslims believe in five articles of faith. And they are belief in one God and we call that Allah in Arabic because oftentimes, people use the term God of this, God of that, and we don't want anybody to get confused. Allah is the same god that was worshipped by Abraham, by all the other prophets, Moses and Jesus.

The second is that belief in God's angels and an archangel, of course, Gabriel, who was the angel of revelation. He's the one that brought all the revelations to all the prophets.

Third, belief in all the revealed scriptures. Muslims believe in all the scriptures that was revealed to all the prophets with no exception.

So as a Muslim, if you do not believe in Torah and gospel -- the Arabic term for that is ngo, you are not a Muslim because what is in those it books are part of our religion. So for that



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reason, you find that Muslims do know a good deal about Judaism and Christianity but it's not the other way around. So we are very proud of that that we know that because this is part of our religion.

If you do not believe in Moses, you're not a Muslim. If you do not believe in Jesus, you are not Muslim. If you do not believe in Adam or Isaac as a prophet or Ishmael or all the other Hebrew prophets, Abraham, you're not a Muslim. So this is very important for us to bear in mind.

And belief in all the messengers, that's the number four. And belief in a day of judgment, and that's the time that you have to account for your words and actions.

The revealed book of Islam is the Holy Koran when was compiled during the time of the prophets and has been kept ever since, and it hasn't changed. The content of that, the Arabic text has not changed. It is in Arabic, and as it was written at the time of the prophet, there were no diacritical marks on it. So only Arabs could read it; non Arabs could not read it.

And when Islam came to Iran and was accepted by Muslims, they made two contributions to Islam among others. Iran was instrumental in spreading the religion of Islam because the Iranian scholars became Muslim. They developed a grammar, Arabic grammar, which allowed people to better understand the Koran. Even the Arabs enjoyed that.

Second, they invented diacritical marks so the non-Arab can read the Koran. So I said one out of five people in the world are Muslim. And among the Muslim, less than one out of five are Arab and the rest are non-Arab. And the non-Arab owe their religion to Iranians because of what they did; both the grammar and the diacritical marks because you cannot read Arabic unless you know how to pronounce it.



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And it's strange that if you mispronounce -- if you change the vowel on one of these words, it says something different. So it's very important for a person to pronounce those correctly.

And one other comment I'd like to make about Iran -- we're going to talk more about it and it's part of this video -- is that a lot of people, as I have been involved in interfaith for the last 15 years, I hear from my colleagues, scholar colleagues, that they don't see any evidence that the Muslims are doing any scholarly work to analyze the text -- so-called deconstructing the text -- and see what it says.

Unfortunately, and I've been saying that to them, they're really wrong. This has been done continuously. But it is written in either Arabic or in Persian. Those are the two areas, two countries that have been very strong in doing these things.

And only recently, there are some books written in English by Muslim scholars who are born and raised in the West so they speak the language of the West, either English or any other western languages, as well as knowing Arabic.

And there are -- the two of them that are very preeminent at least they have been quoted a lot in the United States are Iranian. And the one is Reza Aslan. The other one is Vali Nasr. These are two Iranians. The first one has written a book called *No God but God*. The second one has written a book about revival of the Shiites called *The Revival of Shia Islam*.

So this is -- there are a lot of books in other languages but not in English. And I think it's worthwhile for people to read them if they want to know if there's such a thing as scholarly work on the text of Islam.

Now, let me tell you something about the other aspect of faith. When a person believes in these five articles of faith and he accepts Islam, he can only accept Islam by stating one simple



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statement that I believe in one God and I testify that Mohammed (peace be upon him) he's a prophet of God and messenger of God. And Koran says he's the last messenger.

Now, when we say that, it means that Mohammed represents all the other prophets so that, by saying you believe in Mohammed, that does not mean you negate Jesus or Moses or Abraham. On the contrary, it says I acknowledge all of them in the line of prophets.

And in the Koran, there's a beautiful verse that says there is no distinction between them. God makes no distinction between these prophets. And this is in your hand-out.

So this is the first of the five elements of the pillar of Islam, which is a code of Islamic practice.

FEMALE SPEAKER: May I just ask a question for clarification?

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: Sure.

FEMALE SPEAKER: If God makes no distinction between these prophets, is that, in some way, God and the prophets are included sort of like the Christian concept of the trinity where all are one?

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: No. I think -- Muslims do not believe in the word trinity because -- and I have been speaking with myself, with the people who are experts in the field. I talk to both Catholics and other Christian, protestants and Episcopalian and so forth and so on.

For Muslims, there's only one God and there is no partner. We do not say God the father because he's not a father. In fact, there is a beautiful verse -- I believe it's in your hand-out -- that says I'm not father nor I'm the father. God is not -- does not have a child in any form or shape. And it was a miracle that Jesus was born from an immaculate conception by Mary. There are no male partners and God was not the so-called male partner. God does not have a gender.

And the -- his birth is really no different than the birth of Isaac which was born to Sara, who was very old and could not really bear children. But a message came to her that you will be



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-- kind of good news for her -- that she will have a child and that was Isaac. And we -- and Isaac is a prophet. They revere him just the way we revere Ishmael, the first-born, the first son of the prophet Abraham.

So and no difference between them. They're all prophets. And Jacob and Yusuf and all of them are the prophets. We revere them. And there are stories about them rather somewhat different from they are described than it is in the Torah and the Bible. And rather than make an issue with that, the difference is are interesting and they are very much concerned about studying it because you find a different take on these stories in the Koran than you find in Bible or Torah. But that's another topic for another time.

So Muslims do not believe in trinity, and that's -- and they do not believe that Jesus was crucified. Koran says he was taken up and he will come back to finish his ministry. That's the Islamic belief.

But we respect the Christian belief and whatever they say when they say they believe in God. And we take their word at that point and go no further. So we are people of the book. We respect them just the way we respected our Jewish colleagues and, of course, we share the same thing we do with them, very closely. We both share paraphrasing my word that there's no God but one God. And so there is no difference there.

But the difference in Christianity is when we talk about the trinity. So I thought I would clarify that. But that does not diminish our respect for them. There are people of the book, we respect them. No problem whatsoever.

FEMALE SPEAKER: But God is up here and the prophets are sort of all one at the level --

ISHMAEL KUSHANPOUR: Exactly. Because he has chosen the prophet --

FEMALE SPEAKER: Okay.



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ISHMAEL KUSHANPOUR: -- from man among the nations that are living there. And he says I never bring people to task on the Day of Judgment unless I have given them a prophet in their lifetime.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Okay.

ISHMAEL KUSHANPOUR: And all the prophets will be assembled and act as a witness to the people that they've taught. So no exception is there. And whenever I mention Mohammed and I say peace be upon him, if I said Moses, I said peace be upon him. If I say Jesus, peace be upon him. Abraham, peace be upon him. We say that all the time, but when I talk in these venues, people get tired of hearing that. Peace be upon him. Peace be upon him.

So I usually say it without saying that. But when we are among the Muslim group, if I miss saying that, they'll jump on me. You have to be very -- immediately say that's prophet Moses, that's prophet Jesus. Why are you not saying peace be upon him? No exception.

And the message, there is no exception -- the main message that all are brothers because the message of that is mentioned in the Koran. In the Koran, there will only be five places, that Mohammed's name is mentioned. But name of Moses, peace be upon him, mentioned a hundred times. And Jesus, peace be upon him, 80 times. Mary, a lot less her. She has a particular chapter in the Koran named Mary and she's the only woman mentioned in the Koran by name. Mary's name.

And Christian scholars have written a book about Mary. One of them, Yaroslav Pelikan, has a book called Mary in the Koran. And chapter five of that book is a translation of chapter 19 of the Koran that talks about Mary. And he says if you want to learn about Mary and Jesus, read the Koran and not the Bible. And in the Koran, Koran mentions Jesus as a messiah. That's a word that was not used in the Bible. So we revered him enormously. Absolutely enormously. Muslims are upset when somebody says that Jesus drives SUV. People didn't care for that.



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Muslims did not care for that because you're equating him as a very high prophet with ordinary people who drive SUVs. That's not very -- that was not making them very happy.

So I just shared with you a little bit of emotion here to feel how we feel about the prophets and the other books. So let me tell you about these five pillars of Islam that constitute a code of our practice.

One is a declaration of faith. An Arabic term I put there for you to know if you want, it's called Shahada which means to testify a belief that there is no God except God, Allah. And Mohammed is the messenger of God. This declaration affirms Islam's absolute monotheism and uncompromising belief in the oneness or unity of God. It also affirms that Mohammed is a prophet and his prophesy confirms and completes all of the earlier real messages.

So in the Koran, you find messages for all the prophets. There are about 26, 27 prophets are mentioned by name. Most of them are the Jewish prophets with the exception of Jesus. He also was a Jew. And so they're all mentioned here. And peace be upon him. I have to say that.

Now, the second pillar of Islam is prayer. Muslims pray five times a day: at daybreak, at noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and evening. Christians also believe -- they used to believe seven times a day. They're not doing that much. And the Jews also believe, I believe, three times a day. And our prayers are basically similar in what we say.

The third pillar of Islam is a Zakat or charity which means purification of your wealth. Muslims are required to give 2.5 percent of their wealth, not their income, for charity. And it's been estimated if everybody in the world did that, there will be no poverty in the world. If people give 2.5 percent of their wealth, put it in a big fund and a pool of money and then distribute it, and if you study the Islamic rules in different countries who are honest Islamic rulers -- I have make sure we say that -- who actually follow the teaching of the Koran, they had no poor among them.



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And the leaders were the first ones to stop eating if somebody was not eating. And there are many examples of that. And that was also true when Jesus, peace be upon him, was around talking to people, he was a poor man, didn't have much, but he was rich in spirit and that's what he was trying to instill in people's minds. Moses, same way, peace be upon him. And that goes for all the prophets.

And the fourth pillar of Islam is fasting. And Muslims fast in the month of Ramadan, which is the ninth month of the lunar calendar. They fast from dawn to sunset. And they are not eating anything, no food, no drink, and no sexual activity. That's just the physical part. But the main part is that they will have to exercise all kinds of things that they normally do not pay attention to too much, beginning with don't tell lies, don't do any back fighting, don't look at somebody else's wife with a lust, and so on. These are the behavior that Muslims have to have all the time, so they have to kind of intensify that in the month of Ramadan.

And then the next pillar is going to Hajj. You make a pilgrimage to Mecca, which is in Saudi Arabia, to visit and do the ritual activities in the Kaaba, around the Kaaba and Mecca that the prophet Abraham did because Muslims believe that Abraham and his son Ishmael, peace be upon both of them, built the Kaaba. And this is considered to be the only house of worship for God. And there, you find a mass of humanity from all over the world. Literally from every corner of the world coming -- men all dressed in two pieces of cloth, nothing else; ladies can dress the way they are. And they go through a ritual that the prophet Abraham did.

And you really forget -- my wife and I and my daughter went -- and when I arrived in the vicinity of the mosque in Mecca when the Kaaba is seen, somebody asked me where are you from. And for a moment, I forgot. And I looked at him and he said didn't you hear me; where are you from? Because they ask people where are you from. I said I come from Chicago. And I had a momentary lapse because you're going forget where you are because it's basically a



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reenactment of the day of judgment as the Muslims believe. You're all wearing these white two-piece cloth and they're either barefoot or shoes, sandals, walking around, bare head. I was worried about my wife. She can burn very, very quickly. But she had a hat and she did okay. So no problem.

SUZANNE ROSS: I'm sorry to bring up timing issues, but I'm wondering, we have about 15 minutes before the break. Should we watch the video before the break?

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: I can do that. We can do that. Yes.

SUZANNE ROSS: Okay.

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: If you allow me to say something about that before --

SUZANNE ROSS: Absolutely.

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: Okay.

SUZANNE ROSS: Yes.

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: Okay. Before we watch the video -- thank you very much for reminding me of that -- I want to tell you there are like six separate and related statements to kind of help you to understand the video. And then we'll talk about the video.

First, we, as a human being, continue to struggle over two kinds of aspirations; the desire for honesty and transparency, and the temptation for violence. This comes from the director of this institute. A wonderful comment.

The second also comes from her. The starting place for dealing with global violence is our inner self struggle. This is precisely -- this is the part that I added -- this is precisely the meaning of a greater Jihad -- which we didn't have a chance to talk about, but I will do that later -- that is mentioned in your handbook.



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The third is religious people have the responsibility and capacity to contribute to change by helping people to move away from preoccupation with ego-driven consumerism as they examine their inner self in search of the true meaning of life.

Fourth, the notion that the sacred text must be understood in the historical context as well as the need to be humbled before the inevitable mediation, our own mind. The speaker that we see on the video challenges Muslims to seriously consider this way of thinking in order to confront the challenges facing Muslims in today's world.

Five, the paradox of remaining faithful and yet providing for progressive evolution of religion, affirming self-doubt as humility, and requiring at least a moratorium on ancient laws that develop in a context very different from our own age.

And finally, six, as a religion based on peace, Islam opposes the use of force but it also recognizes that force is found in nature as well as in human society. Since Islam embraces a whole of life and does not distinguish between the sacred and the secular, it addresses the use of force and power which characterize this world. There are acts of force and violence happening every day which we take for granted because they are a natural and normal part of our world.

Now, we can watch the video, and after that, we'll talk.

SUZANNE ROSS: Just to give you -- Tariq Ramadan is the senior research fellow at St. Anthony's College in Oxford, England, and he spoke to the conference from London because he's not allowed in the United States anymore. We're not sure why.

TARIQ RAMADAN: It's something that we don't like in our contemporary world is to speak about morality or to speak about ethics, but here, it's very much the case that when we come back to ourselves we understand that we have two different types of aspirations.

And this is not -- it's universal. It's not Jewish or coming from the Jewish tradition or from the Christian tradition or the Islamic tradition. It's everywhere. It's human beings are like



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this. It's that we have this, you know, temptations towards what is very bad, violence, oppression, power struggle, getting more and more money and appearance while on the other side we like truth and we like transparency and we like just to be close to him, to be close to the transparency and honesty. So we are torn apart between two different kinds of aspirations.

And we need to try to find our way. Meaning by this, that all the religious traditions are providing something which is indispensable. Education, self-education. Come back to our hearts and between yourself, you and yourself, between you and your heart, between you and your inner self, you will find something which is already a direction which is mastered by temptations with your aspirations towards the good, towards the truth, towards transparency. It's all about mastering, self-control, spiritual education. This is something which is the starting point.

If we really want to spread peace around us, around us for all the people, if we want peace for the future, the starting point is what about your own personal responsibility towards your own self. Because you can be the first promoter of violence, if you don't check yourself. If you don't come back to your own heart because there is a potential of violence here. There is potential violence in your mind. There is potential violence when you forget the guidance, when you forget the rules, when you forget this self-improvement and ongoing education. We are all students in that field.

Within spirituality, no one gets a degree. It's always, always something that we have to continue and continue. You know, great mystics in our tradition -- and in the Christian tradition, it's exactly the same -- are always saying, you know, when you come close to God, you understand that you still have a long way to go, a long way to go. Because when you feel a new thing that you are close to him and you get it, it means that that you are still far. This is the complete opposite of humility. The spiritual dimensions of the messages that we have in common.



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If only we were able to come back to this. If only we were able to come back to the essence, the substance of the religious and not just speak about, you know, not to be obsessed with the appearances and then sometimes to fall into something which has to do with power struggle and which is the best religion. At the end of the day, what we need to know, it's not what is the best religion. I think that my religion is the truth. The Christians think that their religion is the truth. And everyone of us thinks this. At the end of the day, what we are trying to do is to be the best witnesses to your messages before the people around us, just to be consistent with it.

But education is essential here, as I mentioned. And out of this education is a way for us to send -- to respond to the call of God because all the messages are calls. God is calling us to come close to him. Come, I created you; you are human beings; come close to me; come close to your own self and then try to educate yourself and to reform yourself.

So the second dimension here is to reform. Reform your own self. No one of us was born democrat, generous, open-minded. It's all about education. It's a long process and we need to come to this. So to become a human being means to educate oneself. And to educate oneself means to come back to your own heart. So it's an ongoing process, a two-way process of always trying to be better and to improve ourselves. Education and improvement, this is the meaning of the spiritual education.

Why am I starting with this when we are going to speak about the global issues? Because the starting point of this global issue is that we are trying to deem the world to be act to end violence starting with our own understanding. It's something which is very, very -- you know, it's the global message that there is a global inner struggle in every one of us. So it's something which is what we are sharing together and then we have to come to this. So this is the way to be faithful to the messages.



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So having said that, and this is coming from very deep. And this is not only a religious ritualistic or formalistic message, it is the deep spiritual teachings that we have or lessons that we have in common.

And then from all this, we have to extract two dimensions, two attitudes or two dispositions of understandings that are going to help us in our ways to lead our life and to change the world for the better. The first one which is for me now very much central in our life is really humility. Humility. I need him. I need God who will help me. And I know that I cannot get it all. It's not -- he is the truth, but this truth is not all in my mind and in my understanding.

Intellectual humility, spiritual humility and even social humility and cultural humility that you are who you are and you are trying your best with what you know and what you can achieve in this world. And then at the same time, the other dimension is committed truly to change, committed to change. And this is something which is really important.

We have a central, you know, statement here which is something which is the treasure of the treasure among the treasures of the hereafter. This is a saying of the prophet, peace be upon him, he says there is no power and no -- in Arabic it's [indiscernible] -- no power and no ... nothing greater than him. He can do whatever he wants. And this is something which is really central because at the same time you have the two dispositions here, the two understandings.

The first is that I can't change and he can. And he's helping me to change so I will be able to do it. So it's I have to do it, but then I have to rely on him for this to be achieved. This is humility. But at the same time, it's giving us another message that if he wants, anything could happen, anything could happen. So if the people are saying, no, it's impossible and you're not going to change the world, just forget about it, just try to -- no, no. If we are faithful, if we are serious, if we are trusting him and one point, as the pope said once, John Paul II, he said one time



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he said something that I never forgot. I never forgot it. Then I'm working with this. He said if there's only one person who is suffering less in this world, the world is better.

It's a very simple statement, but he's saying the question is not the result. The question is not the number. The question is to be determined to understand that you may have to change one heart. You may have to just to save one human being, but in the end the world is better.

So this is simple. This is what you have to do. And then as for changing the world, do whatever you can do and rely on him. Rely on him because if he wants, anything could happen. So it's, you know, to open up all the eventualities for us to change the world. So humility and determination -- it's coming from what? It's come from our trust towards him that we are trusting God and that we are trusting the fact that he can help us to change our own self, to change the societies, and to change the world.

It doesn't mean that we may be passive. For example, you know that sometimes people don't understand that we are talking about when we say insha' Allah, God's willing. It's exactly the opposite of a fatalistic statement. It's exactly the opposite. Do whatever you have to do and then rely on him. Do what you have to do and don't try to do less than what you can do. Your responsibility is to reach the highest level of commitment and achievement, and then after this, I did what I can. And then what could happen is coming from God or coming from something which is beyond my own power. So there is something here which has person implication and with this personal implication is a commitment to change your own self and to change the world and then humility and determination. It is something which is coming from these spiritual messages.

But now we have to say something which is really important in our life. In our societies, we should start with this because we want to change the world. We want to make it better. And we understand this: If God is sending messengers and prophets, it's to tell us this is the



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direction, these are the principles, here you are in this world, now you have to be faithful to these principles by changing this world for the better.

So it's not only a spiritual message pushing us to live on the margin of our societies but exactly the opposite. It's to come to be witness to our messages, to inform the people, and to try to do something. But once again, and this is sometimes the problem that we have with our societies. If we are speaking of principles, if we are speaking about collective principles, but we are not starting with something which is a personal commitment towards our own self.

So I come back to this because I really think it's central here. The spiritual message that we have to spread around us is you are responsible to get something which has to do with an inner peace. An inner peace, if you want to remove from your own heart this potential violence, has conditions. And the same conditions that you have in your own heart and your own mind, these conditions are also important in the collective life. You have also to rely on them.

And the first one, as I said, is try to answer the question. You may believe in God or not, but still ask yourself at the end of the day what is the meaning you give to your life. So I think that we have to reconcile our societies if we want to get rid of this obsession of quantity to come back to the quality. And to come back to the quality means answer the philosophical question. Have it in mind. So we also have to come back to this in our schools is don't only speak about how to be the first but the meaning. Come back to the meanings of things.

And I think that we are forgetting this. And if we, coming from a spiritual background of religion, we can help our consumerist societies, to come to something which is better, it would be beyond that. It would be on -- I may have an answer for myself but we still have questions for all of us. And it's the question of quest for meaning. And we do not get peace if you are not trying at least to get the answer for yourself. So come back to this.



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Because what the philosopher, the French philosopher, Pascal, was saying, when you are facing your own death, there is two ways of dealing with it. Try to find an answer, or just try to find ways to divert yourself from the essential answer. So it's entertainment. It's consumerism. It's everything that can help you forget the question. And I think that we have to come to this.

SUZANNE ROSS: Thank you. Thanks, Adam. Very good. So I think what we'll do is take a ten-minute break and then reconvene, and Esmail will give his response to Dr. Ramadan. And then we'll have our panelists start the question and answer period for us.

So ten minutes. Synchronize your watches. Twenty minutes before the hour. We will be back.

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: Okay. You already heard what professor Tariq Ramadan was talking about. The very first thing he said was that you have to come to yourself. Believe in God and come to yourself. He really spoke about a concept that we didn't have a chance to talk about. And that's the concept of Jihad.

Jihad has been misused by a lot of people. You do not push for a holy war. You don't perform a holy war with yourself. The concept of holy war came from a pope, Pope Urban II, on November 27, 1095, at the beginning of the Crusades. He gave a speech at Claremont, France, and exhorted the Christians to go and fight Muslims or the infidels. So that's the way the holy war started.

There is no such thing -- Jihad does not mean holy war. Arabic word for holy war is harb is war. Muhatas is holy. You do not it in the Koran. You don't find it in the saying of the prophet. So it's not there. Muslims never talk about holy wars.

But Jihad is a spoken of in the Koran in about 25 places. And the meaning of that when you look at it, the way it's used doesn't mean armed conflict. There are two parts to Jihad. There is a greater Jihad, and there is a lesser Jihad. The lesser Jihad is a defense of your family,



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your community, and the Muslim against outsiders. If you're attacked, God has given permission that you should reciprocate. But if it's a rule about that. And the rule is very precise. You don't kill children, women, children, men. You don't kill anybody who's not combating with you. Only combatants. Do not destroy anything -- trees, houses of worship. Very strict. And you do not -- if the other side stops, you stop because God does not like aggression.

So that's clear. That's what is the lesser Jihad. But the measure of greater Jihad is the one that you continually struggle, strive to better yourself. And when you stand up everyday five times a day and pray and the kind of words you use which are very wonderful if you learn the words in Arabic or you translate. It's the first chapter of the Holy Koran, seven verses, we use it often.

And Chapter 112, which is another one that we mentioned in the prayer, these are two prayers that we use -- actually two chapters in the Holy Koran, very small. Once seven verses, the other one is four verses. And if you say that as you pray five times a day, and if you start doing that first in the morning and start lying, then it's no good because now you go back and afternoon, you have to say the same thing. How can you really say the same thing? So, you know, I told you that I want your help is a part of a prayer. I want your help. I believe in you. I believe in your power. I am going to follow your teaching. Guide me to the straight path. Muslims say it all the time.

Now, you go ahead and lie and cheat somebody. Somebody's buying food from you and instead of giving him one pound, you give him a half a pound and charge him the price for two pounds. Well, you're cheating. And now you go at noon to pray. What would you say? Would you say the same things? God, forgive me, I did all of that, but I'm not going to do that any more. If you say it with sincerity and don't do it, he forgives you. But if you are lying, you can't lie to him. He knows exactly what is in your heart. So this is a Jihad which is not easy.



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When you pray, and I have found it's very difficult to concentrate to even say these words. You're being distracted. Time is running out. You have to go to work. Traffic and so forth and so on. That's your heart. So how do you -- how far do you go in concentrating to say those things and then follow it through?

Now, I tell you a story which has stayed with me ever since I came -- left Iran and came to the West. When I was 16 years old and I was going to Oxford to study, a young person from a somewhat religious family, but not extremely so, my father gave me advice.

He said -- and I didn't quite understand that until much later. He said, never point your finger at anyone because there are three fingers pointing at you. This was really open my eyes. I didn't understand it at first. And I asked him the question. I said, so I do that and what do I do? He said, well, you have to -- find faults with you. You've got to correct those. When you say to somebody you lied, why turn around to yourself and say did you lie; did you do the right thing. And, obviously, you didn't, so you better correct yourself first.

And I said, well, can I point again? He said no. You have two more fingers pointing at you. So believe it or not, this has become my motto. When I read -- I personally practice that. That stops me. If I'm going to blame something, I immediately realize that, wait a minute, I can't do that. And, you know, this has been my motto.

So this is an exercise in doing greater Jihad. And that's what he was talking about. He says come back to yourself. Keep correcting yourself, improving yourself. And how do you improve yourself? Education. Muslims have to educate themselves. They have to read their books and all their books. Learn from all of them because, as a Muslim, you do. And if you don't understand, ask somebody.

In fact, to share with you the importance of education and reading, the very first verse that was revealed to Prophet Mohammed which was a historic moment when angel Gabriel came



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to let him know God chose him as a prophet and came to him to give the first part of the Koran to you, the sixth verse. He was illiterate. He couldn't read anything. He couldn't write anything. And the angel Gabriel said to him in Arabic, recite in Arabic, apa, to read apa. He said, I can't read. I can't read. And he relates that the angel grabbed him, squeezed him enough that I thought I'm going to die, and after that, he began to recite. And he was shaken, went home to his wife put a blanket over him. There's a story all about that.

But the very first words to read and study. So this is repeated all the time. So Muslims should study, as he was saying, educate themselves, and keep educating. And once you do that, then you begin to overcome or conquer your ego. Most of our problems are ego-driven. We look for this, for that. It's ego-driven. So this is the underlying he is taught, is really to, for the Muslim, he's talking Muslim, and of course, it's for everybody else, that is, of course, same thing as in all religion, every one of the prophets have said the same thing. Muslims are no exception.

That you should strive to better yourself, improve yourself. And if you do that, as the pope said, there is less -- there's one hurt soul less in the world, the world is better. And so you're making the world better and better every time. So the more you improve yourself and become a better person, the less likely you will resort to violence because it's less likely that you want -- because violence comes from rivalry according to the mimetic theory. You have been talking about that so I don't know a lot about it. I don't. The people who know about it are sitting right in front there.

And I learned from it. Such a potent theory that I could not have resisted to learn something. I did a lot of reading on my own with their help.

So if there's no rivalry, it should mean that you are not wanting something that somebody else want, so there is no collision. There's no collision, there is no fight. So it's a collision of all these little people that get together and a big collision that's going to be war.



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And there's many examples of that. Think about it yourselves all the examples that there are. So that's really the important point to keep remembering.

Now, he said something which is very important in his conversation that I trust God and I believe in God and he can do anything he wants. And he used the Arabic term ----- . There is nothing that God cannot do because he created everyone, everything. He knows everything. God has all knowledge. And he's capable of doing everything.

But there is another comment that he did not say specifically. But he said you have to try very hard. And then he used the word insha' Allah, God willing. Well, you cannot say God willing, I will get -- I will throw the seed on the ground and it goes by itself to become a tree. It doesn't happen. When you do that, you have to water it, fertilize it, take care of it. And he says correctly and God says, I help those people who help themselves first.

I said this message and there is a similar one in the Christian Bible and Jewish Bible, Hebrew Bible. They all share the same things.

And he was saying that; that you can not just say that. You have to work. You have to strive. You have to do this striving and hope that you have reached a point that you have elevated enough to the level that God is pleased with you so he will then step in and help you to open your eyes and heart more so you can do better.

It would be like saying, God, if you let me pass this exam -- I didn't study for it -- believe me, I'm going to go take my friend to lunch. That's not going to work.

[LAUGHTER]

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: He's going to say forget it. You go ahead and study first, then -- and that's what we need to do. There is no free lunch.

[LAUGHTER]



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ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: I like -- I learned that and I didn't understand it at first when I came here. But I learned quite quickly.

He mentions a lot -- there's a lot of talk about helping your fellow man, which is, of course, all derived from this first principle, and having humility, which means realizing that God is the sole master of everything we do. But also we have to reach out to him all the time. And he really goes on this program, keeps talking about it.

And the two books that he's written -- and the third book I have not seen yet, it's written but I have not seen it -- he talks about that a lot of he talks about examples of how a prophet did that. There is a story I want to share with you about a prophet which is kind of speaks to all this.

In --

MALE SPEAKER: There's five minutes.

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: In Mecca, when the prophet was preaching, there were Jews and Christians around. And some of the people from his own tribe were beating him up and mocking him and so on. They said, well, we're going to solve this problem once and for all we're going to send some emissary to Medina, the other town where most of the Jewish community were residing, and because they are people of the Book, they have heard that these people are knowledgeable and they're rabbis and those sorts of things. Let's go and ask him what did they say that we can ask him that there is this guy in Mecca, his name is Mohammed, he claims to be a prophet. Is there anything in your book and you want it ask him that you should ask him to see if he knows the answer? And they said, yes, there are three things you can ask him.

One, you can ask him about the people of the cave. You know, there's a story about the people of the cave. There are stories. Very many, two, three, four. There a number of them



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[indiscernible] in there. Ask him what he says about the people of the cave. That was the first question.

The second question was that there was a king someplace, they didn't specify it. It so happens it was in Persia. And he had two horns. And in Arabic, it's called zofarnai to have two horns. And he built a wall to protect the people from the invasion of the barbarians. Ask him does he know about it.

And the third question was ask him about the soul. Where does the soul -- where is the soul and where does it come from?

So they came back to the prophet and they asked him these questions. And prophet said come back in two weeks, I'll give you the answer. So two weeks was up. They came to him. This is a true story. You can read about it in a book called Mohammed based on original sources, by a person called Martin Lings. He was a curator of a British museum and he died recently. But it's a fantastic book that describes a biography of the prophet. Very accurate, very interesting stuff. It's in that book.

And the whole description of what I just said is in the Koran on Chapter 18. It's called Surai means cave. Chapter 18. There are 141 chapters in the Koran, that's Chapter 18. You may want it read that if you want to.

Two weeks is up. They go to him and they said do you have an answer. He says no. I haven't got an answer yet. They knew right away that he doesn't have the answer. He gets the answer from somebody. That was the first evidence that he was really a prophet. He didn't have the answer himself.

Then he started praying. He said, where's the answer. And there was another two weeks go by. He was getting nervous. Finally, Angel Gabriel came with the answer. But the first thing he said to him, he said, never wish something unless you say insha' Allah, God willing. That is



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in that chapter. It begins with that. Do not wish for something unless you say God willing. So he was saying the same thing.

You cannot wish to become a better person. I'd like to be a better person insha' Allah. And then go do anything you do in the same way. You can't do that. So you have to work hard to better yourself. And the idea is that if you better yourself, you can build one step at a time.

Now, before I relinquish this podium, I do like to read a short paragraph from a scholar which I love very much. And I read what I've written here. That's easier to do so I don't take too much time.

I would like to include what I've been talking about why quoting from Professor Hans Kung, K-U-N-G -- most of you know him -- an imminent scholar of Roman Catholic theology. A well-known man, he has previously written two monumental volumes on Judaism and Christianity. And believe me, they are monumental. They are this big, each one. I have both of them. But I became ecstatic when I saw the third book, another monumental book. So recently in, I think, 2005, it was published, he's written another monumental book on Islam past, present, and future. A wonderful, wonderful book. A scholarly book.

And I want to quote something from him. He says the option has become clear; rivalry amongst the religious, a clash of civilization, war between nations, or a dialogue of civilization, and peace between the religions as a harbinger of peace among nations.

You have a choice. Having said that, next he said, faced with a deadly threat of all human mankind, faced with a deadly threat to all humankind, shouldn't we demolish the walls of prejudice stone by stone and build bridges of dialogue including bridges to Islam rather than erect new barriers of hatred, vengeance, and hostility?

Finally, he says, it is abundantly clear that we will not have peace on earth until we have peace between religions. Thank you.



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[APPLAUSE]

SUZANNE ROSS: Thank you. Thank you for those comments. And I'm going invite our panelists to take their places. And each of them will have a chance to make few comments and pose a question to Esmail.

Sandy will go first. And then we will open it up for your questions.

SANDY GOODHEART: Well, I have a Jihad. My Jihad is that I can't find significant differences between Judaism and Islam. And so we're going to try. We have kind of a running game here. Each time, we try to find out and discover that there are no differences. So I'm going to try again.

I notice the word belief came up today. And in Judaism, thinking of Martin Buber, we talk about the deeds, the importance of the deed. And there is a notion, certainly, in Judaism, of faith which is the "emuna." And it means trust as we talked about today.

I've always had the -- I've always had the feeling that there's an equal emphasis in Christianity on declaration on of faith, you know, the saying of something as, you know, I believe in Jesus, I believe in so forth, so forth.

And in Judaism -- let me back up a little bit. When I teach Bible as literature, students will often come up to me and say, Professor Goodhart, do you believe in God? And I will say to them I don't believe in God; I believe God.

And I think that gets at the question that I would like to address to you. In other words, does belief mean the same thing for you as God becomes your interlocutor?

ISHMAEL KUSHANPOUR: Absolutely. I feel exactly the same. When he said I believe in God, I think that phrase comes from the translation that is very common of the first part of the Koran is [indiscernible]. And they translate that in the name of God, compassionate and merciful.



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And some scholars, newer scholars, don't like that because they feel that you're just kind of sending God somewhere else, but he's part of you. So that's part of the new reform they want to -- I believe God. And I can give you many example of what happened to me that I wouldn't be here if I did not believe God.

SANDY GOODHEART: We failed again.

[LAUGHTER]

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: I think you said it right. I think it's -- Sandy -- he's a very smart man. I like him very much. And he's promised to send me something, and I hope -- he said we're both coming from a prophetic tradition, and it's hard to, both of us, hard to find differences but let's at least try for fun. And I think -- he's a wonderful man. And every time he does that, I learn something from him. I'm too old to be your student.

[LAUGHTER]

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: They really wonderful people these people. And they've taught me a whole lot. And the lady right over there especially.

SUZANNE ROSS: I just listen. It's fantastic. Thank you.

So, Andrew? A question? A comment?

ANDREW MCKENNA: Yes. A question actually, and it's somewhat dovetails on what Sandy was asking.

You know, do you believe God? Well, some of us remember that line from Deuteronomy. I give you a choice -- life or death -- choose life. Now, according to the scriptural tradition, that's God talking. So who are you going to believe? Who are you going to believe?



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Codin goes on to say that, you know, we know, you know, it's really a question today, but we have this option today. But the option now, life or death is so clear. It wasn't so clear when we couldn't really destroy everything.

A preface to that, that's a preface to my question, really. Honestly, I'm very taken with this -- as delivered particularly by Tariq Ramadan, this connection or nexus or complimentary between education, prayer, humility, and determination because you can't get one without the other. There's very few people who say the Christian word for that [indiscernible] commitment, determination, it said. And education is spiritual education.

There really has never really been anything simply, clearly, and, oh, yes, as secular education. If you think in history, even in the cultures, it's resolutely secular, let's say, Soviet, Russia; Laos, China, you know. You were learning and you were sacrificing and you were suffering, but at the center of, you know, this was for the five-year plan. You know? All the little Red Book.

Spiritual and education are really inseparable. And Islam, as Tariq Ramadan reminds us, of that. We really don't have a choice between spiritual and nonspiritual education if we have the choice to acknowledge that we're spiritual beings.

And so my question is, building up to this, that the idea of a spiritual education which is - - so you're telling me you cannot separate from learning -- learning more about oneself and from prayer, which is to say developing and increasing your relationship with God. So far so good. I think I'm just trying to paraphrase this.

Is it a possible connection with mimetic theory in this sense that the spiritual education is something that, for instance, in prayer, at five times a day. You just can't do that and go out and lie. And so the prayer is supposed to be something to construct a self won't do that. And to be a defense against the temptation to do that.



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So it is an exercise in self-control. So you can't separate struggle, Jihad, and prayer, in that regard. But it also is, to put it crudely, a device, if you will, a mechanism to control your relations with others so that you will not be a cheater and a liar, but you will be merciful and compassionate.

What does that mean for someone like me as a, at least, card-carrying Christian, if you will, and as a disciple of the mimetic theory? Why does a mediator -- that's my interest -- even in Christianity, Jesus is the mediator. He says and we are supposed to believe that if you want to get to God, you've got to go through me. But what that means is that -- and who am I? I am your brother. You see?

The idea that Jesus is -- if you want to know God, you have to know what Jesus is reminding us of in the Jewish tradition about who your God is. He's merciful. He want mercy and not sacrifice, et cetera. All this is paraphrasing.

And so what I detect in your remarks and Tariq's as well is this notion of mediation. That God remains the mediator among human beings. And that we're never, you see, simply dealing on this horizontal plane which is simply one to another. Or that when we do, we're in the worst possible scenario because then we're going to get it at loggerheads sooner or later even if it's about religion; my God is better than your God.

But that the God of Islam is the primary and ultimate mediator of all human relations. Would you -- is that an accurate description?

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: Sure. I think we are basically continually thinking of him. Yeah. Because just to give you a kind of simple way for you to understand. When we get up in the morning, the very first word I said -- I'm talking about myself -- in the name of God, be compassionate and merciful. Thanks for allowing me to start a new day. I'm talking to him. And I'll start it getting through the prayer, same thing.



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Now, I'm ready to put my clothes on. Every step of the way, again, I repeat that same thing, praise. This is simply to remind me that I am doing my part, and he's looking over me so I can always be in contact with him. We have a one-to-one communication, no party line.

And we do not believe in an intercessor. We don't go to heaven through Mohammed. Mohammed was a man. He was like anybody else. He was a pious man, a [noble] chosen person for his job. But can he cannot go through him because he said look at your deeds. That comes first. Like ensha' Allah for free. You got to cook the food and put it together and -- I gave you -- make the thing that makes the food so you've got God in there, but you have to do your part.

So he's the mediator. There is no mediator. And he says in the Koran no one can mediate for you; for your good deed or bad deed. I look at that. But I am merciful. He's not going to put everybody in the world in quote unquote hell. There's no room in there. So what is he going to do? He's going to -- he wants you to do well. He does not want you to go bad. He's really not interested in punishing you. He wants to have mercy for you. But you have to gain that. You have to gain the trust.

ANDREW MCKENNA: Yeah. I'm beginning to see a kind of triangle in that our relationships among ourselves are still successful to the extent that they are mediated by God, by God's will for us and by our trust in God. The line that comes to interlock means God willing, which in the Christian prayer means your will be done.

And when you religion-ize violence, you're really saying my will be done. You're using God as an excuse to hang that sword.

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: But then you can say I saw God in my dream.

SANDY GOODHART: You know, it's always occurred to me that when Jesus says "only through me" what he's saying is "only through Torah." In other words, that one way of



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formulating Jesus' project, so to speak, is that he's saying I'm going to be the word incarnate.

I'm going to be the word made flesh. Of course, I'm thinking of John there.

And if we say that only through me is only through Torah and that the word is God, then the whole thing --

SUZANNE ROSS: Makes sense. Doesn't it?

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: And for us to follow the Koran which is the teaching of the word of God which came through the mouth of Mohammed, his prophet.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Uh-huh.

ANDREW MCKENNA: Which is exactly the same thing the prophets did.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Uh-huh.

SANDY GOODHART: No one prays to Jeremiah or to Isaiah, but it's Isaiah who says always and always "there is no God -- I am God; there is no other." That's the phrase over and over and over again. I am God; there is no other.

SUZANNE ROSS: Alright.

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: We mentioned that before. Muslims say there is no God but God.

SANDY GOODHART: Yeah. It's the same thing.

ISHMAEL KUSHANPOUR: And we are close to Christianity. I don't think -- we should not walk out of here with the notion that there are differences between us. There are no differences between us. I think we're all doing the same thing.

SUZANNE ROSS: The differences lead us all to the same --

ISHMAEL KUSHANPOUR: Exactly.

SUZANNE ROSS: It's very fascinating.

SANDY GOODHART: Freud spoke of narcissism of minor differences.



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[OVERLAPPING CONVERSATIONS]

SANDY GOODHART: Sometimes that is what we go after, but we can't hold on to any big ones.

SUZANNE ROSS: Yes.

Adam, would you like to start the questions?

ADAM ERICKSON: Sure.

SUZANNE ROSS: And as Adam is doing that, if you have a question, please come and speak into the mike so we can record you.

ADAM ERICKSON: I guess it's more of a comment about what you were just talking about. Sandy's -- well, first, I want to thank you, Esmail, for the wonderful introduction to Islam and your comments on Tariq's talk.

Sandy has said a few times that there are no differences between you. And every time you talk, it's -- you just have this synergy, and it's a beautiful thing. I've seen it.

And I think that part of how it comes about is that you are both so steeped within the beauty of your own tradition that you're able to somewhat mimetically, I guess, discuss the beauty of each other's tradition.

So you're able to not focus on yourself so much as you are able to see the beauty within the other. Which is, I think, what's at the heart of positive mimesis so that you're able to discuss with one other each other's beauty.

And while I was watching you guys do this, I was feeling a bit of mimetic envy, maybe.

[LAUGHTER]

ADAM ERICKSON: Holy envy, if you will, because I was thinking I want to participate with this, too. I appreciate the last --

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: We're competing giving you our secret.



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[LAUGHTER]

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: All three of us.

ADAM ERICKSON: So, Ishmael, I guess the comment that I want to make -- when I've studied Mohammed and his project, it seems like what he was trying to do was to bring this unified concept of God among these polytheistic religions. And when they had these polytheistic religions, it kind of -- it separated the people from one another.

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: Yes.

ADAM ERICKSON: So at the same time Mohammed was trying to unify God, he was unifying the community.

ISHMAEL KUSHANPOUR: Exactly.

ADAM ERICKSON: So what we say about God -- if God is one has important implications for us.

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: Yes.

ADAM ERICKSON: We are also one.

ISHMAEL KUSHANPOUR: Absolutely.

ADAM ERICKSON: It reminds me of the Jesus prayer where he says, "May they be one as you and I are one."

So I was wondering if maybe you could comment about what it means to be -- for God to be one, for the people to be one. And, also, Tariq mentioned something about forgetting.

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: Yes.

ADAM ERICKSON: Like one of the greatest sins in Islam was to forget about the oneness of God and the implications of what forgetting that means.

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: Yes. I think -- I agree with you wholeheartedly because the prophet has said many times that oma of the world, of all mankind, is like one family. We are all



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one. And if one part of the family -- if a finger begins to hurt, the whole body hurts. And in medicine, we know that. If your finger hurts, you don't feel good everywhere even though it's still set in here.

And he said that. He said if a limb or part of you doesn't hurt -- it hurts, then the whole body hurts. You have to find out. You cannot neglect it. So he was very much strong in bringing these different tribes from Saudi Arabia together.

They would fight over a camel going over the territory of the person to eat grass from the other side. They would actually go to war, killing one another. And he did work very hard to bring them all together. And they -- what happened when he died -- this is kind of hard. There was a momentary time that it was going all come apart because he died. And some people felt that, well, he died, they're not going to be Muslims. They're going to leave.

And the person that brought them back together was his close friend, Abu Bakr, who said to him, to the people, he said, if you were worshipping Mohammed, he's dead. But if you're worshipping God, he's alive and will be alive forever. Now, people didn't rally around it because they had to decide.

And this brings me to an important question because I was at a meeting someplace and they were asking me what is the meaning of an apostate, somebody who leaves Islam. And I said this is not an Islamic word. We don't have this English word. There is no such a thing. I said, at that time, when this happened, mean people left Islam. Nobody wanted to kill anybody; they just left. Some of these were big-shots, heads of tribes, because they didn't know that -- they were not strong enough to understand that they were not really worshipping Mohammed. He's a human being. He left, that's what happened to him. People have said lots of things, but that's not the issue.



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But God is still there. So that was an element that kept the community. But, unfortunately, whenever Muslims were together, good things came out. And whenever they start fighting over things that were not religious, hell breaks loose. And I don't have to remind anybody about what's going on in Iraq between the Sunni-Shiite-Kurds and between Shiites. They're not fighting about religion because there are people that I know in there who have been married within these groups and between all three of them.

It is the pot of gold sitting there called oil that the Sunnis don't have much of it. It is the Kurd and Shiite have it. And now we can't deprive the other people. And start sitting around and thinking if all of Iraq would work together to be nice to themselves and their neighbors, that's the most important thing. I think this is the element of being a good Muslim, but they're not practicing that. They're just as far away from that. And the saddest part is that they're in the areas that this religion started. You know, you expect them to be more in tune with this, but they're not.

So I stop here.

SUZANNE ROSS: Yes. [Indiscernible] come up. And then --

FEMALE SPEAKER: This is really intimidating. Well, you just brought it up. And my question was, as I was watching Tariq, it seemed to me like he was speaking to the choir. I mean, we've got the nuns and we have all of religious people. And up here, we have the scholars and the very wonderful professors. And I don't know that much about Islam, and you've really helped me to understand it in the last couple of days.

But we have this man and we have you speaking about learning how to become peaceful and in your own body and pray to God. But I worry, and I think a lot of people in the West worry about what the imams are saying on Fridays and what's going on education wise in the



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madrasas. And it's confusing to us to know you and listen to Tariq and then to see what's going on in Iraq and in other places in the world.

And I kind of need that explained to me.

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: Absolutely. That's an excellent question.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Thank you.

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: It really depends on what -- where you go to listen to an imam. I start from there. So that's the first of your answer.

If you come to Islamic Cultural Center, where we are, you find a very different preaching. We are very moderate. Sixty-five percent of our community are Bosnian. They're European. The others are either born here or immigrants from the other countries and they spend a lot of time here, a long time.

I have been in this country over 50 years, and I've listened to all kinds of preaching. And you hear -- and some of them, I walk out. Some, I stay and listen.

When they, in my judgment, are out of line, and you don't have to be a scholar to know that when somebody says anything hateful towards somebody else, I walk out because hate is not in my religion as I understand it.

After all, I have to -- education wise, I have to educate myself, do the so-called quote on quote Jihad within me. So I have to be happy. If I read something and I want to explain it to someone, I have to understand it well enough. And more importantly, I should be able to practice that so I can say it with a certain amount of certainty and feeling so that the other person that can accept it.

Well, this is not there when you see somebody who is talking about what is not Islam. When I see somebody does something wrong in the name of religion, I think he's not a Muslim.



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I don't care what he says. He could pray five times a day, he could fast all year long, he could go year to year... That's a beautiful beard..

[LAUGHTER]

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: I wish -- I tried to grow one once in Germany when I was Fulbright Scholar because the professor I was working with had a nice beard, just like this. But mine didn't look good, so he said to me, you shave that.

[LAUGHTER]

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: So, you know, these are criterias that I don't even bother with that. Absolutely right.

Now, the problem with that is -- and I get to the meat of the subject -- we have a good amount of educated, he has a doctorate degree in Islamic studies from the graduate theological foundation in Indiana, which teaches not only imams but teaches priests and rabbis -- all kinds of people. This is very open, very important place affiliated Notre Dame and the Oxford. So it's a very important place.

You don't find too many imams that have that -- or know imams that are available that have that kind of education. Most of the people who go to for Friday prayer just simply have someone, a leader, to follow the prayer with because anybody can stand in the front. As long as they can recite the Holy Koran, they can be the leader of the prayer.

But an imam has to have certain qualifications so he can get up there and talk. But he should talk, and the way they should talk -- and this is a rule that prophet followed -- take a verse from the Holy Koran and explain to them it the meaning of that.

Now, our imam does that and he actually writes down, unlike some people who talk and they don't know what they said, and you can get a copy of that from him. And because I'm Executive Director of the center, he normally sends a copy of that to me before. Not necessarily



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that I'm going to tell him not to talk about it, but I take a look at it. And if I see something in there that is not appropriate for a mosque simply because we are a tax-exempt institution and we can't talk about politics, I remind him of that. But that never happens.

But, you know, in other places, that is not the case. So that's number one.

Number two, what we need to do in this country, we need to have an American-born imam, somebody who's from this country who understands this country but born here, knows this country like I do even though I was not born here so he would not speak about issues that are not appropriate. We can talk about injustice but in terms that is meaningful but not hateful.

So you have to educate people. And there are movements afoot to do that because this is necessary. We have to do that. So I don't know that I answered the main theme of your question.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Well, I guess I'm more worried about what's going on in the Middle East countries with imams that seem to be -- and, you know, maybe that's because of what we hear, rabble-rousing, more than talking about peace and talking about how to find your inner soul.

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: Right. I think the media is not fair. They're not fair to any religion. They're not really fair to Muslims. They're not fair to Catholics. They're not fair to Christians. They're not fair to Jews. They are not fair. I mean, I know that from all my colleagues.

In fact, we are doing something. At a different level, we're getting together for the last three years to figure out how we do that. They don't understand the religion. So they're actually preparing for each religion, this group, something to be given about every religion to the media so they don't go after the janitor who happens to be sweeping and a Muslim asking the question. They go and look if there's something written by scholars.



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And for the Middle East, well, you know, our hope is and has been, if we set an example for them, if we clean our act in here, we're not really too much involved. Thank God, we don't really do the kind of thing that goes on over there; we don't have that. But if we do clarify things for ourselves, educate ours and educate the community of Muslims in a good way, then we can set an example for the people in the Middle East. And that's all we can do.

There's one thing that's happening, a group of 36 scholars have written a long letter, about 26 pages, that put forth Islamic position and has sent out the copies of that to every religious leader around the world.

And if you interested in reading that, send me an e-mail. I will send it to you. It's absolutely a fascinating letter. People at the Common Ground in your field are planning to have a special series of lectures to talk about that letter and to see if -- to respond to that letter because they feel that that's it the best thing that could have happened that the Muslims are now reaching out collectively to all the religions.

And what's written in that letter is really marvelous. So if you interested, give me your e-mail and I will send it to you.

ANDREW MCKENNA: We're worried about what we hear about what is said that we don't get to hear ourselves because that's what the media feeds us. It makes us feel good because we think the violence over there is their violence and it's not ours. We need to be very worried about what gets preached from the pulpits of Christian America, you know, and from the National Cathedral of all places.

We don't have to think about that as long as we think it over there.

SANDY GOODHART: Can I?

SUZANNE ROSS: Yes.



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SANDY GOODHART: Yeah. I mean, I'm reminded of the connection between the holocaust and Vatican II here that there's a way in which the worst kind of tragedy lead to a kind of opening that's unexpected. And I think it's pretty clear that Vatican II was, in large part, a handling on the part of the Christian church of its relationship to the holocaust.

I think that in the wake of 911, we're in the process of education about Islam. I mean, I'm learning just all the time. And these kinds of meetings are examples and you're putting your question, which I want was very good, are precisely the sort of opening for us to be able to discover these things and to not, as you say, be trapped by the small-mindedness, which is not their fault but they don't, you know, they've got five minutes, you know, to have a five-minute fight, you know, a sound bite that the media gets locked into. And we need to go on with forums of this kind where education is the key.

SUZANNE ROSS: Uh-huh. And Zhyrgal was waiting and then Janet, I think. And I'm aware we're kind of at lunch time but I think we'll go over about ten minutes and we'll be fine. Yeah.

SUZANNE ROSS: This is food, too. Right? This is food.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Yeah. Exactly.

ZHYRGAL: You know, I want to mention that my English is not good, but I will go anyway I will try my to give my question. For example, I was tradition of Muslim and I became Christian. And what the Koran says about this situation?

Also, the second question is what says Koran about Christianity?

SUZANNE ROSS: Could you hear?

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: No. Not quite.



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SUZANNE ROSS: She asked that -- Zhyrgal said that she was a Muslim and she has converted to Christianity. And what does the Koran say about that? About converting to Christianity?

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: That's a good question. First of all --

SUZANNE ROSS: And what does it say about Christianity in general?

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: Yes. I'll answer the last question first.

We respect Christianity. The people, the Christians are people of the book, so we respect them. It's in the Koran. We respect them because they had their revelations in the Bible ngos. So that's the meaning of gospels of the Bible, number one. So no problem.

We respect Jesus. We love him. We follow his teaching. We love his mother and so on. We've been talking about that quite a bit.

With respect to you becoming a Christian after being Muslim, I think there is nothing -- Islam never calls you anything but you just -- when people become Muslim from another faith, you say they reverted to Islam, not converted because by doing so they're not rejecting their previous faith. So a person from another faith becomes Muslim, they do not -- particularly from people of the book, they do not convert because there's nothing to convert to.

We all believe in the same God. That's the main thing. And we all have our own paths. The Koran says it's not up to us to push somebody to go to a different path. There's no compulsion. If there is no compulsion in religion, a direct quote from the Koran, so we have no business saying anything. And that's your choice. You're free. You have a freedom. For everyone -- as a Muslim, I have self-doubt oftentimes. Does that mean I'm leaving the religion? No, I'm thinking about it. I need explanation about something that I read. I want to know more about it. That's perfectly okay.



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And just to emphasize how important that is, learning and finding out what is kicking with you, what makes you happy, is so important that prophet was walking to the mosque with a group of companions when he was alive. There was one group sitting in there praying. The other group was arguing about some point. And the people with him asked him who is doing the worship. Worship is not just praying. If you help someone, that's worship. If you make a dinner for someone who can not make dinner for himself, that's worship.

All of these are worship. All the goods things are worship. And he said the people who are arguing because they are opening their mind. Not the people who are praying.

So you decided based on your knowledge and learning you want to follow a different path. That's fine.

I have another example that's very important. I have told these two young people who are in the confirmation classes either from Jewish community or Christian community when they come to our center, they ask me the question why there are too much different religions. My answer to them is that these are different paths. And I ask them do you go to the mall, you know, a shopping center. They all say yes.

And I say, where do you live. They say Evanston, Wilmette, North Brook, Glenview, Lincoln Heights, Highland Park. And I say, do you take the same road to go to the mall. No. They take different road to the same place.

So we have different paths to God, whatever we want to call it. The ultimate. I don't think there is any more to say. You can do whatever you want. And we respect you. Of course, I respect her enormously because she was part of the group from the Kyrgyzstan that came to see the mosque. And we enjoyed having you here. And if she's now a guest of Maura--

FEMALE SPEAKER: That's right.

ISHMAEL KUSHANPOUR: Wonderful. Wonderful.



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FEMALE SPEAKER: And Janet was waiting and then [indiscernible].

JANET: Okay. Two questions. And I hope the first is relatively short and the second is going to be controversial.

The first -- and I'll say them both at once.

The first is that we all speak of God as he, but many people think of God as being he and she. And certainly, Genesis says in his image but he created them both, man and woman.

And so could you speak to that?

And then the second controversial question which I ask as a religious and not a political question, to be very clear, is about abortion and about my personal belief that there are many forms of life and that there are also many forms of violence.

And the question, the most contested question would be when a woman who is not raped and the child is not in risk of hurting her through childbirth or pregnancy but that woman, for whatever reason, because she's feels she can't handle it, because she already has eight children, because she is a drug addict or whatever, chooses to have an abortion, perhaps, because it will allow her more life and her ability to be more productive in the world.

How do -- you know, we know what the dogmatic versions of religions say about this. But -- I certainly don't know at all what Islam says about it. I certainly know what Catholicism says about it.

But could people speak to that in terms of violence and life and different ways of interpreting life and so forth?

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: I apologize. I was intently listening to your second part of your question and forgot the first one. Sorry.

[LAUGHTER]

JANET: Just about God being man and woman.



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ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: Okay. That's fair enough.

I don't think -- I mean, in the writing, whenever you write, I remember this from when I was in English class way back and I kept -- I was supposed to be talking about the family and the plight of the family. It was just something given to us to write. And I fell into the habit of writing everything in terms of he. And then in the middle of the story, I changed it to she not realizing that. But the teacher was very smart. And this was a tutor of mine in Oxford. She was a lady, a very wonderful lady.

She said that -- do you know what she did in this story? I said, no, I thought I wrote a good story.

[LAUGHTER]

ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: Yeah, is your story is good, but who's the main actor in the story? Well, I said, the man. She said, okay. Let's go down a paragraph. Who's the actor in this one? I said, oh, I forgot; I said, it should be a man.

And so I was having problems because I was having trouble distinguishing between he or she because maybe this is carryover for a lot of people.

In the Koran, whenever it talks about the man and woman, it doesn't say just one. It does not say believe in man covering everybody. No. It says believe in man, believe in woman. Fasting man, fasting woman.

Next distinction, now, I have to take from that that God is not -- doesn't have a particular gender as we think about it because our mind is limited to what we think. We cannot conceive -- first of all, we don't know how -- what he is. We just know that he's there. We have no image of him.

And in the Koran, it says there is nothing like unto him. There's nothing like it. So we don't know really -- and then there is nothing unto him nothing unto her. I think these are used -



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- what they all -- the scholars say these are the royal designations. Like the we is a royal. It's not really I or male or female. So this is really -- there are no gender implied in here.

Although, he addresses both genders, he created both of them. That's number one.

Regarding abortion, if you go to the strict -- without any kind of qualification -- you can have abortion in Islam if it is going -- if the pregnancy is a threat to a woman's life. And, of course, in there's incest, rape -- those are very rare, but those can happen. It's a part of a human situation. Those are all exceptions to the rule.

Now, in some Muslim countries -- and I would bring right away the country that I know a lot about, Iran -- they do have birth control. In fact, all these clerics that people are -- which I'm not happy with some of the things they do -- they did a very good job because they could not feed so many people. The population of Iran has gone way up. There's 75 million there.

They have to feed these people. They have to educate them. They have to have housing for them. So what did they do? They actually said you can use birth control. And they actually provided people with that. So this was unheard of.

Now, this is one way, I guess, they were answering the idea of abortion in the area you were talking about -- the person cannot handle any more; they've got too many children; and there was an accident, and all of that. So I think there ought to be a qualification. And I think people are coming to the conclusion that this is something that they need to consider.

There are stories -- these are from the past history -- that people are encouraged to have kids because if they were worried about taking care of them, they were told that don't worry, God will take care of them. But that goes counter to what we were saying.

You can't just say, well, I'm going to have a kid and tra-la goes to college. I don't think so. Unless you have a bundle of money put away for him to go to college. I think now none of these things worked.



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So they were misinterpreting these. I mean, we want to kind of fit things to our desire, and that doesn't work, really. And the only way you can correct that is have education. Are you satisfied with that?

FEMALE SPEAKER: Yes.

FEMALE SPEAKER: Sandy and Andrew, if you want to make comments? Sandy?

SANDY GOODHEART: Yeah. In Hebrew, you know, in both 127 and 51, the law is male and female created God them -- in the image of God, male and female were created. And the rabbis understand that phrase male and female to mean hermaphroditic, that is to say, as one.

And in fact, they say that when -- later on when God takes a side, it's not a rib, it's a side, from, you know, the hermaphroditic creature, male and female -- so we distinguish, really, between -- we say, you know -- and students are always saying Adam or Adam, but we -- the Adam is the name, it's like a nickname for Ha'adam, then Ishah, the woman, and then Iysh, the man then Adam. Adam is created last.

If you like, there's a sequence to creation. The first is Ha'adam. It's this male and female creation. And then -- and God passes the animals before Ha'adam, and God -- and Ha'adam can't find anything in the animals that's going to work. I sometimes like to think about what would have happened had Ha-adam said well, this, you know, this donkey is kind of nice.

[LAUGHTER]

SANDY GOODHEART: But, you know, he didn't do that. And so he took a side. And the pinnacle of creation is woman, it's not man. It's Ishah because woman is the first independent gender. The gender is born with Ishah, the woman.

And then suddenly, man jumps in and says she shall be called Ishah because she was taken from me, which is actually a lie. I mean, because he wasn't there. It was Ha'adam who



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was there. Iysh wasn't created until after the birth of Ishah. So it's kind of interesting that the man gets it wrong right away.

[LAUGHTER]

SANDY GOODHART: Thus, therefore, a man clings to his wife. So not only does he get it wrong, but he's a clinger. Or, I like to say, a Klingon.

[LAUGHTER]

SUZANNE ROSS: I enjoyed that very much. Very good.

Andrew, did you want to say anything about anything that's been happening?

ANDREW MCKENNA: I can't follow that act.

[LAUGHTER]

ANDREW MCKENNA: One thing that is at issue in both of them is that are we going to get into a semi-veiled battle of theology when really what we're talking about is violence. And with abortion, which is a very touchy issue, there are some theologians in the Catholic tradition who are tying it back to the natural law because foundation of nature and science and et cetera we know nothing about natural law, but it's making a comeback and what we know it is wrong is to make the abortion issue some sort of a sword and scabbard thing where you can religionize politics and politicize religion.

And you know the symptoms of that. And when you hear that going on, it's time to get up and leave because that's really about violence and control, it's not about violence to the unborn.

SUZANNE ROSS: All right. I'm looking at my clock and I'm realizing Dorothy had a question.

DOROTHY: I am willing to let go of all of my comments and questions other than can you recommend a translation of the Koran?



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ESMAIL KUSHANPOUR: Yes. The one that I recommend is in that little handout. It is Egyptian scholar and was educated in Cambridge, England. He's very -- he's studied English and my criteria is ...I've seen many translations I have looked at many of them and am not happy with them, but this one has several differences. My criteria is that if somebody's going to do that, he has to know the Arabic language but he also has to have a command of English.

So I want to be able to say to English speaking people who don't know the Arabic nor have the time to learn Arabic what it says. I mean, the language that I can understand and they can understand. I found that it is very good. And Ron Miller he used that with his students at Lake Forest college and he teaches that and with the people who come to the Common Ground. Usually, you have about 12 hours of coursework on Islam. That's all. They like this Koran and he said to me thanks for telling me about that translation.

SUZANNE ROSS: I want to thank Esmail, Dr. Kushanpour, for your comments. This has been incredibly helpful. And you've all earned your lunch. So Maura is going to explain how lunch is going to operate.

MAURA JUNIUS: Okay. So your sandwiches are here. They're actually, if you go out to the right and another right, you'll see that they're laid out in alphabetical order by last names with your ticket on top. So there shouldn't be any question about who's -- you shouldn't have a lost sandwich here. I know how this -- there's also -- there's plates, there's napkins, there's veggies.

And our panel has been very gracious and they're actually hosting a table. So you can join one of the speakers at one of the tables. So there's a table out front in the foyer. There's a table right behind us here in this small conference room, and then there's another table in the back corner there. So have a great lunch.

[END]



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