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

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

Dr. Natana DeLong-Bas:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It's also very interesting that during that time period, violence was absolutely forbidden to the Muslim community, even in cases of self-defense. And that was an important prohibition because this early Muslim community was under physical attack very frequently, including the prophet himself. Sometimes, it was the lady next door who liked to come and throw rotten tomatoes at him on a daily basis. There was another not terribly nice neighbor, who would come and dump garbage over his head on a daily basis. There were some early Muslims who were persecuted, and even killed, because of this new faith tradition. So the idea that for these first 12 years of h

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

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

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

Second point, with respect to Muhammad, is that most of the time we think about Muslims, we probably think about the Middle East. And we think about some governments that maybe aren't the nicest; authoritarian dictatorships might come to mind. And so it's very interesting that the prophet himself was known for rule of law.

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

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

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

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

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

The Twelvers are the largest group. They believe that the twelfth imam did not die, but went into this sort of mystical occultation and that he will come back at the end of time to defeat the antichrist, the dajjal, it's called in Arabic, and to come -

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Perhaps one of the most important beliefs that we share has to do with the creation of the

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

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

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

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

So we have, in chapter 19, this description of —Mary has accepted receiving Jesus into her, and comes to the moment of childbirth, which is an extremely vulnerable moment and an extremely painful moment. And we see this depiction of her, standing here, holding onto the trunk of a palm tree, crying, and the 19.5(a)-(20.7(i))-4.56(r)D.5w/19.3(S-1425(t)-456(i)-14.487-125th

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

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

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

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

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

[MUSIC PLAYING]

[MUSIC - SAMI YUSUF, "ASMA ALLAH"]

[NON - ENGLISH SPEECH]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

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

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

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

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

Part of the question for contemporary Muslims is how do you best follow that? Do we look

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

Dr. DeLong- Bas: Okay. I think I understood the question. We're going back to the Muslim conquest of the seventh and eighth century, when we saw the Islamic empire spread from this very small area, territory in Arabia, out across North Africa into Europe and throughout the Middle East. One of the things that, contextually it's important to note, is

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

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

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

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

Another example would have to do with marriage that the husband is supposed to pay a dowry, not a dowry. This is a dowry that's supposed to go to the woman as her nest egg in the event of divorce or becoming a widow that she's got some kind of financial means to fall

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

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

Oftentimes it invites harassment. I would say that Muslim women have disproportionately borne the consequences of 9/11 because it's very easy to pick out the Muslim woman. Although I would note, our sisters over on the side, there's really not that much difference between a habit and a hijab, and it's oftentimes the same principle. So it's a choice to express.5(n)-8.5()0.2.0.6(w -13.()0.2.0te11.125(r)9.3n30.6(t)-mBon)e 11.5(co)1d.6(')0.9(t)-c.6()0.11Bon i . ico'tcoe ewsepr