



BOSTON COLLEGE

BOISI CENTER
FOR RELIGION AND AMERICAN PUBLIC LIFE

Symposium on Religious Diversity and the Common Good **Panel 2: Contemporary Issues and Approaches**

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Owens: Well, thank you all again for staying over the lunch. I hope you've enjoyed your meal. We're looking forward to a lot of extra food for thought during this next session here. And of course, there will be a big keynote address following this session, and then a public reception afterward where we can continue the conversation. It is a pleasure to see such a large crowd.

My name, again, is Erik Owens. I'm associate director of the Boisi Center for Religion in American Public Life, and with Professor Alan Wolfe, my colleague at the Boisi Center, we are delighted to have you all here at this sesquicentennial conference on religious diversity and the common good.

Our first panel this morning was an excellent exploration of historical trajectories of problems and communities and ideas along the axis of this theme. And in the second panel today, we are looking at contemporary issues and approaches. Of course, the conversations about the past bring us to the present and ask what we can do or should do today, and those in turn look back to the resources we have in different communities for what we should and should not do.

I remind everyone that we are recording the events on audio and video. They'll be posted as soon as possible, and we are also planning to publish transcripts of the conversations today which you can all reach for at your convenience at bc.edu/150 or bc.edu/boisi, B-O-I-S-I. I also remind you that we are tweeting the event, and I hope that you do, too, using the hashtag #bc150. So join us on that online conversation as we move along. I did not want to force our moderator, Catherine Cornille, to read her

tweets while the panel was going, so we can't tweet questions to her, but hopefully you'll have questions and insights as well from the panel while you're tweeting.

At this point, I'd like to turn it over to our moderator, Catherine Cornille. She is professor of Comparative Theology and the Newton College Alumnae Chair of Western Culture here at Boston College. She's also the chair of the Theology Department and an expert in inter-religious dialogue. Just simply the perfect person to have as our moderator. And I'd ask you to welcome her as she welcomes and introduces our panelists today.

Cornille: Thank you very much, Erik, and thanks for organizing this fabulous meeting. I'm really honored and happy to introduce our panelists this afternoon. Just before I do so, we will roughly follow the same format as we did this morning. So we will first engage in conversation about some of these topics among ourselves, and I hope to give ample time for discussion and questions with all of you in the second hour. So we really have a fabulous panel here this afternoon with a lot of diversity and different voices that will come into the discussion.

Nancy Ammermann is a professor of Sociology of Religion at Boston University School of Theology and the Department of Sociology in the College of Arts and Sciences. Her work focuses mostly on the study of American congregations and on religious conservatism. She has published numerous books, and particularly relevant to our discussion today are her books, *Bible Believers: Fundamentalists in the Modern World*, *Baptist Battles: Social Change and Religious Conflict in the Southern Baptist Convention*, *Congregation and Community*, *Pillars of Faith: American Congregations and Their Partners*, and very recently, just this year, *Sacred Stories: Spiritual Tribes Finding Religion in Everyday Life*, and this book is a collection of narratives of people who talk about how religion plays a role in their work and their life today. So welcome, Nancy. We're delighted to have you.

Reza Aslan is an Iranian-American writer and scholar of religion who obtained his doctorate from the University of California Santa Barbara. He has also published widely on questions of religious fundamentalism and radicalism. He's the author of *No God but God*, which was named by Blackwell Publishers as one of the 100 most important books of the last decade, *How to Win a Cosmic War*, and then very recently, of course, *Zealot: The Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth*. And I understand that

there's a reading group here who has just read your book, so I'm sure they'll be very happy to engage you in conversation. So welcome also.

Next is Randy Kennedy, who is the Michael Klein Professor at Harvard Law School, where he teaches courses on contracts, criminal law, and the regulation of race relations. He's a member of the Bar of the District of Columbia and the Supreme Court of the United States. In 1998, he was awarded the Robert Kennedy Book Award for race, crime, and law. His publications include *Sellout: The Politics of Racial Betrayal*, *Interracial Intimacies: Sex, Marriage, Identity, and Adoption*, and *Nigger: The Strange Career of a Troublesome Word*. A member of the American Law Institute, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and the American Philosophical Association. We welcome Randy.

And then last but not least is Laurie Patton, who's currently dean at Duke University. Prior to this, she had a long and very fruitful career at Emory University. She is also a widely published author who is also very much engaged in all kinds of discussions on religion in the public sphere. Among her many publications are the books *Grandmother's Language: Women and the Study of Sanskrit*, which is about to appear. Her background is mostly in the study of South Asian religions, and she has done extensive research on myth and ritual in South Asian religions. She also published a translation of the *Bhagavad Gita*. Among other publications in the area of South Asia is *Bringing the Gods to Mind: Religion and Sacrifice in Ancient India*, published in 2006. Then finally, her most recent book that is just about to appear with the University of Chicago Press is called *The Wild Sphere: 21st Century Study of Religion and Its Publics*. So these works are certainly very relevant to our discussion this afternoon on the common good and religious diversity today.

So by way of opening our conversation this afternoon, one area that this morning hasn't really been brought to the fore is the role of Asian religions in the religious plurality of the United States. And because Laurie is an expert in this area, I would like to invite her to address this topic maybe first. And Jonathan Sarna was mentioning the importance of broadening the idea of the common good by bringing Jews into the conversation, and I wondered if Laurie could speak about what it means for the common good when we also bring religion such as Hinduism and Buddhism and certainly Islam into the conversation. So I wondered if you could do that.

Patton: Sure. Well, I was very struck by what Jonathan said. I think that you could say that every newcomer on the religious scene, and particularly through the courts – and I know we’ll hear a little bit more about that – there’s always a kind of landmark case or a landmark controversy that signals the insistence of inclusion by a new religious group. And I think since 1965, when the immigration law shifted in 1965, and when so many of our South Asian brothers and sisters who are now here arrived in America, we’ve had a series of very interesting engagements. I think the first wave of immigration were very much professionally focused.

And then we had much more pluralism within South Asian religions more broadly. Much of South Asian religion was not understood if it wasn’t the Vivekananda lineage. So even though I think David Cave was right in pointing Vivekananda’s role in bringing South Asian religions to our attention, South Asian religion that was taught by a South Asian, the first one that came on the national sphere certainly was ISKCON, otherwise known as a Hare Krishna tradition, now known as ISKCON. And ISKCON was not well understood for many, many years.

Over time, certainly in the ’90s and early 2000s, you see the establishment of a number of different temples and sponsorship by South Asians of temples that look a lot like temples in India – South Indian temples, North Indian temples in Pittsburgh and Atlanta and New York and L.A. and so on. So I think that you have a much more expanded imagination of what South Asian religions or Asian religions look like.

The story of Buddhism is a very different one in a way, partly because of great teachers like Trungpa Rinpoche and D.T. Suzuki. All of those kinds of teachers created a kind of American lineage which did not have quite the same problem with acceptance. Still very much a challenge, but I think because there were so many Western teachers earlier on, they didn’t have quite as much of the ethnic challenges as some Hindu groups did. That would be a broad outline, certainly.

But in terms of pushing the common good, I think the one thing I would say is that the question of ethnicity that Jonathan raised about Judaism is very much the same for Hindus. There are folks who are still struggling with whether they can think about themselves as being a secular Hindu, but in general, many folks will argue that Hinduism is just as much a way of life as it is a religion, which is something that many Jews will also argue. And so I think that the Hindu presence in the United States is really pushing the boundary of definitions of religion.

I had a wonderful experience once when I was asked to testify at a court case in Tennessee about a person's validity of visa because he wanted to come and be a Hindu priest. And so they said, well, what is the Hindu seminary that he was trained at in India. And then you were in this very interesting moment where you had to say, well, there are about 200 of them, and they're all very illustrious. And what is a Hindu seminary curriculum? And then you have to explain what the sort of radical diversity of a Hindu seminary curriculum, otherwise known as a pachawa curriculum would be in India.

And it was pretty much incomprehensible to the court that there would be such radical pluralism in a quote-unquote world religion. And I think that has been the very interesting tension even for certainly Hindus in representing themselves, which has been are we polytheist, which is a colonial term, or are we what the new term of our – at least with many of my friends in Southern American Hinduism, is polymorphic monotheists, which is a very different kind of term.

So these are the kind of debates that I think we're having now. But absolutely, I think it changes our understanding of what pluralism is partly because of the radical nature of the pluralism.

Cornille: Are there other changes that any of you would want to point to in comparison to what we talked about this morning in terms of religious diversity? (multiple conversations; inaudible)

Ammerman: I think Laurie has just made some really interesting points about both the similarity and the differences that have arisen with South Asians moving into the American religious diverse landscape. On the one hand, they move into a set of religious traditions and legal structures and cultural expectations about what religion is that are already there, and to a certain extent are able to adapt in order to survive in that system, but in other ways really challenge and stretch that system.

And I was struck by your pointing to the temples being constructed, because I think there's a sense in which the Hindu temples, unlike almost any of the other new traditions coming into the American religious landscape – quite literally landscape – have challenged Americans to recognize the diversity of our religious traditions. Yes, mosques look a little different from churches, but they're still kind of – and they often occupy buildings that are either former religious buildings or secular buildings. And these grand Hindu temples are really a very visible kind of

statement of the fact that, yes, on the one hand, it is a local religious place that sort of operates like other local religious organizations, but in other ways, it stretches the limits.

Aslan: I was just going to comment on something that Laurie said which I found so fascinating about this notion that it's usually court cases that introduce us to this new absorption of religious traditions. And certainly, when it comes to Islam, which clearly has this South Asian element to it – in fact, I've seen figures that say something – about 1% of Americans are Muslim, so a little more than 3.5 million, and I've seen figures that say 60% of that 3.5 million are descended from South Asia. So it's a very large Muslim community from this part of the world.

But the reason that I was stuck by that comment, and I would love to hear what Randy has to say about this, is that, as I'm sure many people are aware, there are now 23 states in the United States that have either passed legislation or are debating legislation to prohibit the use of Sharia. And indeed, just in the previous presidential elections, most of the GOP candidates made similar pledges. I believe that Newt Gingrich said that among his first actions upon being elected president would be a Constitutional amendment banning the use of Sharia. I myself am not a Constitutional scholar, but I'm fairly sure we have a Constitutional amendment banning Sharia. It's called the Constitution. But nevertheless.

The first of these laws, and Oklahoma has already been challenged in I think one of the state courts – but I'm curious whether you would see this, Randy, as – I don't know if there's a possibility of this moving on to the Supreme Court, that there needs to be some sort of federal decision about the use of Sharia courts in the United States the way so many other religious communities can have access to family courts when it comes to their religious preferences. But would that be something? I would love to see this example of the absorption of Muslim-Americans in the religious fabric of the United States have something to do with this kind of legal decision making. But is that in the cards?

Kennedy: It seemed to me that you put it very well when you said that we already have a provision that addresses the fear that these laws are purported to address. The interesting thing is that these laws, it seems to me, are themselves illicit under our Constitutional regime. It's an odd development that you would have a concern of this sort that would be illicit because we already have a First Amendment that would protect against the installation of any sort of state religion.

Cornille: So in light of this, I'm wondering if this is part of what we understand by the common good, is maybe creating a sphere broad enough to allow the different religious communities to flourish as authentically as possible. Is this one way of framing the idea of the common good in our pluralistic context? Or what are other models of possibly doing this?

Patton: Well, I'm sort of fascinated by a combination of Nancy's work and Randy's work, which is that – I am so with you on the power of everyday life. I had a very interesting conversation with a scholar who writes Christian commentaries on Buddhist texts and lives in rural Vermont. And my model of pluralism and the common good, which has to do with not only that strangers are inevitable, but there will be more and different strangers in our lives than ever before in our everyday life. That's part of what we need to build up, is a kind of pragmatism of everyday life, a pragmatic pluralism on these questions, which I know you've written about.

And he said something very interesting. He said, yeah, I live in the woods in Vermont. I'm not quite sure that I run into as many strangers as you do. And he was right. So one of the things that I was interested in talking to Dean Quigley earlier this morning – the role of the city, I think, cannot be underestimated. And particularly, if we think about a common good from a religious perspective, something different is happening, of course, all over the United States. We know this. There are ashrams and really interesting Buddhist centers in North Georgia where I frequently travel. It's there.

But I do think that the legal questions of everyday life and of common life and the pragmatic questions of everyday life do take shape differently in the city now. And I think the next step for us in thinking about the common good inter-religiously has to do with really looking at the differences in inter-religious engagement in the city and in rural America.

Ammerman: Those pragmatic places of connection really are so important, and there are two primary kinds I think that we've seen over our history. One is the kind of overlapping ties, so that we don't live in completely enclosed communities. So even if we do have our particular religious communities, which I would argue are in fact very important parts of the overall pictures of the common good, those particular communities are not so utterly enclosed that all of our relationships are contained within those communities.

Putnam and Campbell have this really interesting way of talking about my pal Al, who happens to be, and you fill in the blank. And the fact that we run into strangers, to people who are outside our immediate communities, is one of those important pieces that I think we have to pay attention to. How do we create habits of everyday life that make it possible for us not to be afraid of the people we encounter who are not like us?

But the other place where that kind of pragmatic interaction has taken place is in any kind of organization that brings people together around a common cause. And typically, in our inner cities but also beyond cities, religious communities have been places that are sort of nodes of organizing. So a few people from this religious community and a few people from this one and a few people from this one and a few people from that one all get together because they have a common concern in the larger community that brings them together. And it is those partnerships in our larger communities that have often been the places where we've been able to do the bridging work across our very particular religious traditions.

Aslan: If I may, let me give an interesting example of what Nancy just mentioned, and it goes back to what I was saying before about these anti-Sharia legislations. The original form of the legislation and what was so immediately problematic about it was that it targeted Sharia specifically. It actually used the word Sharia. And so it was very easily overturned because the argument could be made that it was denying First Amendment rights to a particular religious community that other religious communities could have.

So the author of this legislation, a man by the name of David Yerushalmi, who happens to be an Orthodox Jew, changed the legislation to make it more general. Remove the word Sharia and talked about foreign law, foreign religious law. And what happened is that the Orthodox Jewish community in the United States rebelled against the law and actually joined forces with Muslim communities in these various states to fight the law because this law, which was written by their fellow Orthodox Jew for very clearly anti-Muslim purposes, was affecting them. And so you have this very interesting unity being formed based on these common interests that I think in most cases probably would not have formed, as a result of an attempt at obvious bigotry and bias.

Cornille: So if we talk about pragmatic pluralism, though, and these kinds of situations of self-defense almost, these are almost negative examples of coming together out of necessity or to solve a certain problem. And I'm

wondering if there are ways in which we can think of an idea of the common good where religions contribute in a more positive way to the good of society as a whole, rather than solving problems or trying to deal with a particular context. I wonder if you have examples.

Ammerman: Well, I think one of the most interesting examples is the movement of faith based community organizing. And here in Boston, the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization, which brings together people across religious traditions in pursuit of the common good. And people in GBIO would certainly want to claim that they're a prime force that helped to move the Commonwealth of Massachusetts toward universal health coverage. So here is a group of people organized in a particular way that allows this kind of interfaith cooperation in pursuit of something that has nothing at all to do with religious diversity as such, but rather has to do with our common life together.

Kennedy: I thought that one of the most interesting points that was made by the first panel was that the term the common good is a term that can be put to bad ideological use. People like the common good. It sounds wonderful. But of course, every position is going to be to some degree partial. And so when I hear the term common good, there's a part of me that I suppose resonates with it, but there's also a part of me that's immediately suspicious, because who's ever pushing the common good, what do they want? The common good is never completely embracing of everyone. There have to be boundaries around the common good, because not everything can be good. And it might very well be the case that something that is considered bad might be something that I like. And so I guess I'd like to hear more about the ideological uses of this term that is a privileged term in our discourse here.

Patton: And I think building on that, and responding to something you said earlier, I think that we build forms of the common good in a very basic way when we suddenly understand our own interdependence. And what's interesting about that is I think there are these fabulous stories from mostly urban America, but not necessarily, where we are interdependent between religious traditions in ways that we never thought we would be.

So one of the ways that I define pragmatic pluralism is when one religion needs another religion to be itself, to exist as itself. The most dramatic example is of course after 9/11 when a young Jewish woman from Stern College needed to sit next to the refrigerator truck of the remains of folks who were killed in 9/11 because there could be one Jewish fingernail in there, to sing the psalms that accompany the body before the body is

buried. And she did it for entirely Jewish reasons, but everybody who wanted her to do that came to sit with her. So Muslims came, Buddhists came, secular folk came, whoever. And they needed her to be Jewish in that moment and do that mourning ritual with them.

And there are many, many other really inspiring stories like this. I think we haven't reflected enough on those tiny moments where we need another religion to be itself. There are three really wonderful stories in the last six months in the newspaper. We have Mohan's Suits. Mohan grew up in Ahmedabad, was trained in Hong Kong, and he is one of the few people who know how to do kosher suits in a really wonderful way in New York.

And we have a more dramatic example of the Chinese community, that is elderly Chinese are feeling oppressed by folk who pretend to be seers within the community and solve problems but cost a lot of money, and the elderly Chinese don't know that this is the case. And so a group of shomrim, Jewish protectors, are now protecting the elderly Chinese community against that within their own community.

These are very specific things, and there's three more in the last three months, where people are getting together in these really interesting ways because they need the other religion simply to be itself. And I think that that pushes against the idea that there is a common good that someone wants from above, and I'm not even sure that those forms of interdependence upon which I think we really need to reflect more on would even – the people involved in those kinds of interdependencies would call it a common good. They'd call it probably something else, and I would agree with you that we need another term for those spontaneous forms of interdependency.

And I think there's something else about this that is very, very important, which is what do you lose in a common good? Every religious tradition who then becomes part of a common good or a public – there is a tragedy of the commons, and I don't think that we've reflected enough on what every religious tradition does have to give up in order to become part of an American public. And I think that could be our next stage, in a way, of reflection.

Cornille: Maybe we can come back to that question in a minute, but you brought up the example of the common good as something that appears ad hoc a particular situation where we need one another. Usually you think of the

common good as a big system almost that is in place and that somebody has created, which I don't think is the case either. I think it's a very open term at this stage, certainly.

So besides these ad hoc situations, what would be ideal situations where the definition or the understanding of the common good can take shape, can get some more contents? How would those come about? We've talked about several negative situations. We can also talk about how do we fill it in, but what would be the context in which we can fill in that term or that category of the common good?

Aslan: Well, I think about a friend and colleague of mine, Eboo Patel. Some of you may be familiar with him. He started an organization in Chicago called Interfaith Youth Core, the purpose of which is to bring young people of different religious backgrounds together not to dialogue, which I find very interesting. They don't sit around and have interfaith dialogue. In fact, there's very little of that that takes place at all. Instead, they form these missions where they go out and they do good, whether that means cleaning the streets or helping build a home or feeding people in need. The emphasis is on action.

And what is remarkable about this is that the bonds that are created by these shared participatory experiences in the common good in the way that it's defined there creates bonds that are far, I think, stronger than any amount of interfaith dialogue could ever do. He calls it interfaith action. So that, I think, is a very interesting example, a concrete example of what you're referring to.

Ammerman: I think sometimes part of what we need to be willing to just trust is the kind of public that is created within a particular religious community. Omar referred to some of this this morning, that many religious communities – most religious communities are diverse within themselves. And whenever a group of people is coming together in these kinds of voluntary religious communities all around us, they're having to figure out how to organize themselves and how to solve their differences, how to govern themselves. And those experiences in and of themselves, within those somewhat sheltered publics, can also contribute the skills that are necessary, the habits that are necessary for participation in the larger community beyond those enclaves.

I think we need to trust both that process and the fact that, as Laurie said, we need Jews to be Jews. And in these projects together, these are people

coming together, not trying to tell the people next to them, well, we're really all the same. We're telling each other our stories that are our very particular stories, and finding ways that both the work we do inside our communities and the very particular stories that we learn and tell and perpetuate in those communities – how can they come together then in these other settings in order to pursue work together?

Patton: I very much appreciate your pushing us to describe if not an ideal, a preferred way of building, because we don't do too well at that project. I think that in general, we're analyzing and we're making ethnographies and things, but pushing the normative around us is a huge issue.

I would give two words, and they build on what everyone has contributed up to this point. One is alliance, and the second is irony. What do I mean by alliance? I mean that if you think of what happened after the Sikh tragedy in Wisconsin last year, if you looked at all of the websites from the Sikh temples around America, you saw – if there was buried in the fifth level of the website, what is Sikhism, here is what the government says about Sikhism, et cetera, suddenly it all went to the top. They were flashing. And it was a very poignant thing to see how much every Sikh community or every gurdwara in the United States felt as if they had to reeducate yet again on every single level.

And I'm thinking, OK, that's great, but shouldn't there be an alliance? Shouldn't there be an alliance of educators? In the study of religion, certainly, we have been debating the insider-outsider dilemma for 25, 30 years now. Who has more authority to say what about a religious tradition? What if we instead moved into an explicit ideology of alliance of teaching about Sikhism between insiders and outsiders, so that every Sikh gurdwara didn't feel as if yet again, with yet another shooting, there would have to be more reeducation, and it was all on them. The cultural tacks and the religious tacks for representing oneself is all on the community, rather than, OK, help us not just celebrate Sikhism, which is I think a somewhat superficial response, but rather how can I as an educator educate with you in the multiple publics that we participate in.

So that would be one alliance, and I don't think we've done very well about that, because we're too caught up in the insider-outsider dilemma still, when it's obvious in our lived reality that it's gray, and that insider and outsider identity is continuously gray and very rarely black and white.

And the second I would say is irony, and what I mean by irony is exactly the wonderful way that you put it, Nancy, around these smaller publics. That internal divisions and controversies within minority religious traditions particularly in the United States are very, very fraught, because as soon as one of those controversies is exposed into that bigger public, whether it's the state or the city newspaper or CNN or whichever you're talking about, it can be very, very threatening to the sense of representation more broadly. Certainly in the Jewish tradition, you'd say, well, is this good for the Jews? Everything that happens, good or bad, is it good for the Jews?

And I think that a version of that happens whenever there's an inner controversy that gets blown up into a threat to identity. And so I think one desideratum would be in public debates around religion, even within minority traditions, that the sense of irony about one's own tradition, the possibility to allow for that inner controversy to be played out in public without the vulnerability that one inevitably feels – obviously, you're going to need the protections of the state to do that. You're going to need legal protections, and you're going to need a cultural environment where irony about oneself, even as a member of a minority tradition, is possible. You asked us to describe the ideal, and that would be what I would describe as an ideal.

Ammerman: Can I respond a moment, Laurie? Because I think this is a really interesting and important point about the integrity of the communities themselves, minority religious communities. And what historically in American religion has existed is that religious communities have been uniquely safe spaces because they are protected by the First Amendment. And one of the things that I've been thinking a lot about recently is the way in which our recent fear of particular religious communities in our midst has engendered a kind of surveillance state that means that those spaces may not be as safe as they used to be.

Patton: I think that's right, yeah.

Cornille: So the element of education that was raised here I think is a very important one. Mutual understanding and knowledge of both majority and minority communities. Actually, right today, there's also a panel at our competing institution across the river that talks about the importance of education in civil life, and in particular, education about other religious traditions. So that's certainly a very important element that goes in it.

But back to the idea of the common good – I think we can define it in common terms or in distinctive terms. Are we talking about a common good where we meet each other on the basis of our common ethical principles, like [Interfaith] Youth Core, where all these young people can commit themselves to social change because each of their religions is already committed to social change, and they meet each other and it does go forward.

So is that what we understand by the common good, where we find each other on basic common ethical principles? Or can it be bigger than that, where the common good becomes really something that is defined by the distinctiveness of the different religious traditions? Can the Islamic finance, for example, come into our understanding of the common good in the United States and challenge the scandals of the past 10 years? Can we understand the common good more on the basis of what does each religious community contribute to it distinctively, or should we just go back to what are the common ethical principles?

You're probably all familiar with Hans Kung's Global Ethic, that all religious traditions do and should find each other on the basis of their shared four ethical principles of no killing, no stealing, no lying, and no sexual misconduct. And they formulate it in more positive terms, a commitment to a culture of life, commitment to the truth, commitment to justice, and commitment to treating different sexes properly and equitably.

So how do we see the common good? Is it a place where we find each other on the basis of what we already share? Does that exist? Or can we envision a common good where different religions actually contribute something distinctive and new?

Kennedy: I'm going to have to confess my ignorance of Hans Kung, but having said that, it seems to me that your short description of his view of religion seems to my ear all too happy, all too sunny. We are in a world in which every day, we read about fundamentalists of various sorts blowing themselves and other people up. In the United States, we have people who for – at least purportedly on the basis of a religious imperative, going to people's funerals and chanting and saying all sorts of terrible things. What does one do about people who talk in a religious idiom who do things which are frankly intolerable?

I'm all for cosmopolitanism. I'm all for openness. I'm all for empathy. I'm all for trying to understand people. But at some point, there is a

boundary, and at that point, I guess I become intolerant, and I don't feel embarrassed to say that. It seems to me intolerance is a very dangerous thing. One needs to be very careful about where one draws boundaries. But don't boundaries at some point have to be drawn, including even with respect to people who are talking religious talk on the other side?

Ammerman: I have to admit my first response to listening to your list of Kung's supposedly things we all agree on was, what? We agree on those things? Really?

Cornille: Well, I think what he means is – actually, those were formulated at one of the more recent meetings of the World Parliament of Religions that was a commemoration of the centenary, actually, of the World Parliament of Religions. And he brought leaders from different communities together to formulate this kind of global ethic. But I think we really do agree fundamentally on those principles. What we disagree on is what they mean.

Ammerman: Exactly. (laughter)

Cornille: So the principles themselves are in some ways vacuous until we look at what actually no killing means for a Buddhist and what it means for a Christian or for people from – but then it becomes interesting. Again, then the second question that I raised is then is the common good really constituted by the different things that we can contribute to a kind of discourse on some kind of ideal society where different religions contribute distinctively and positively to a greater good? Can we think of it in those terms? Or is that too dreamy?

Patton: I mean, I would say with Randy that we very much live in what Wendy Steiner and others have called the paradox of liberalism, which is that we are deeply tolerant of tolerance and deeply intolerant of intolerance, and that is the paradox of liberalism right there.

Where I draw the line, and I think it's a very interesting one, because we're all going to draw it in different ways – and I'd love to hear your thoughts about this, Randy – I think in the cultural sphere, we are going to be far more tolerant of intolerance than we are in the legal sphere. And I don't want to draw an absolute boundary, obviously, between those two, but there is a boundary. It's fuzzy. But I would love to hear from you a little bit about where you see legal discourse around intolerance moving

because of the kinds of things that Reza was talking about around Sharia law, and whether the discourse around Sharia law is and is not the same as the discourse around race and race relations that you've done so much work on.

Kennedy: Again, going back to the wonderful morning panel, there was a historian who talked about cycles. The American legal system had a heck of an encounter with, for instance, Mormonism. It's not as if the United States has not been willing to suppress various religious groups. They might not say so. There's various religious language that's all full of ways to do things and not do things directly. But the United States has been willing to suppress that which the culture was not willing to tolerate. And my sense is we're going to see various rounds of that proceed.

It's not as if the law is some special category apart from what we're doing. The law is just the crystallization of what we're doing. And so it's through forums like this, in fact, that legal norms are in fact created, because people participate in things like this. They get a notion, they get a sense of what's good and bad, and then a person who has been reinforced with that sense becomes empowered to declare the law by being nominated by a president of the United States and getting a number of senators to put them on the bench. And then these various discussions then get made into the law simply with some legal hocus pocus – the idiom of the law. But the thinking that we're engaged in is not all that different, frankly, than the thinking that actually determines the boundaries under which we live.

But again, what I want to say is there are going to be boundaries. So the common good and religious diversity today – well, the common good – there is a boundary around the common good. Diversity – well, not everybody is going to accept everything. And while I think it's important for us to nourish those aspects of the discussion that are all about empathy and embracing, life is tough, and life has its ugly sides, too, and frankly, religion has its ugly sides, too. And it seems to me that that also needs to be part of the discussion. And what do we do when we bump up against that which we really think is fundamentally ugly, or to use a religious term, evil?

Ammerman: And I think you're right to remind us that we continually have these points in our history where various religious groups test the limits of where the boundaries are. Is it OK for parents to say we're not going to medically intervene for our children? Is it OK for Santería folks to sacrifice chickens in their garages? Is it OK for Mormons to be polygamists?

We've had these instances over and over again. Sometimes we've handled them reasonably well, through a variety of debate and finally coming to some conclusion, but other times, there have been instances of violence along the way against these groups that we find unacceptable. And I think that debate about where the limits of our religious tolerance and diversity can be is one of the most critical debates in our society today.

Patton: What I'm interested in is precisely where the cultural norms actually bump up against the legal, because you would be able to articulate far better than I the fact that there is that continuum. And I think that's a very helpful way to look at it. When you have a procession, let's say in Atlanta or in Durham, which ends the Hindu festival of Ganesh in August, and the idol – the image – that's the Indian-English term – the image is taken into a river to be purified, and there's a wonderful procession that goes there, that is not incitement.

When members of the Aryan Church who are also members of the Nazi Party say that their march in Skokie, right down the Jewish neighborhoods of Skokie, was an expression of their religious freedom in the same way that the Ganesh festival was, you have this really interesting space where the expression of religious freedom goes right up against the language of incitement. Because there was a group that sued that group in Skokie in Illinois because it was understood not as an expression of religious freedom, but as incitement. So there, you have this very interesting clash between the legal and the cultural realm – the cultural realm, where expression of religious freedom is precisely where we flourish in exactly the more idealistic way that Catherine was talking about.

Or if you go certainly international, not necessarily in the United States, but there is a provision in the Indian constitution against hurting the religious sentiments of other folk. And that has created more public controversy as well as legal controversy in India in the last two decades as it struggles with its own pluralism in really interesting ways than almost anything else. We will work it out culturally in a very tolerant nation, as India both claims and doesn't live up to that claim, but the question of hurting religious sentiments in the constitution is a huge legal issue. So those would be the ways in which I see them as very interestingly conflicting spheres.

Ammerman: I also think it's really interesting that we've been talking about both really big society-wide legal kinds of principles and precedents that are important, but also the very small places where the conflict and sometimes

the cooperation gets worked out. And when you first asked your question about the common good, my immediate response was to say I'm willing to just be content with some common goods, some smaller places in which people across religious diversities manage to work together in ways that seem to foster the health of the community in which they're living.

Cornille: But there's another issue, I think, that has to come up in this context, and that's even the possibility to think about a common good. I don't think that religions are by nature oriented to look beyond the goods that they are focused on. So living in a religiously diverse context also puts a lot of pressure on religious self understanding to rethink their own teachings and doctrines in ways that opens them up to the possibility of working together and committing to the common causes. And I think the young people who are part of Youth Core, they're not going to necessarily reflect on this, but I think that this is also a major challenge for even the possibility of creating spaces for thinking about these norms that then we will eventually apply to the legal system.

Kennedy: One thing I liked about your point and your point earlier about whatever group that was where the kids get together and actually do things – there was a certain nice humility about them. So it wasn't as if you were taking on this huge thing – let's try to chart out abstractly the common good. It wasn't top-down. It wasn't huge. It was rather bite-sized, let's try to take on something that we can get our arms around, that we can see. And maybe that's something for people to think about, just because these things are obviously so complicated, especially in a society this large.

And one of the questions that was given out to the panelists was do we have a – it had to do with geography. Under what size units can you do good things? The United States is so huge. I mean, 300 million people on this huge continent. It might be too much, frankly, to think about. And one thing that I kind of liked about your comments was, again, bite-sized. Let's knock the issue down a little bit. Let's make it maybe a little bit more manageable.

And maybe if you can multiply a lot of manageable things, maybe we can get experience from those manageable things and derive lessons from experience, to get back to your point about what is it that makes people really trust one another. Is it talking? Or is it actually having experienced things so that you feel that you can trust somebody because actually you've been in a relationship with them?

Aslan: I think that came up earlier in the panel, the importance of relationships in breaking down these kinds of barriers. There's no question that education is important. Learning more about each other's religious and communal traditions gives us an opportunity to understand it better. I think that's an undeniable fact. But I think it's also equally undeniable that data very infrequently changes minds, that in reality, bigotry tends to be impervious to data and information, and that, as I think social scientists would argue, that really what does reframe perceptions in truly radical ways is connections, individual connections, relations with individuals.

And so that's why this model of the Interfaith Youth Core is so good. Rather than talking about the things we have in common and the things that we have that are different, instead we go out there. We actually put our shared values into practice at a micro level.

But if I can go back to what Catherine was saying, because anybody who's studied intergenerational religious communities in the United States has noticed that you have far greater identification with religions in the children than you have in the parents. I've seen this in the Sikh communities. I've seen this certainly in Muslim communities, where the parents tend to be far less stridently identifying with their religious tradition than their children do, despite the fact that their children have grown up mostly in the United States. And I think it's partly because of the enormous diversity of religions in the U.S. that it actually fosters a sense of identification with one's religious traditions.

And at the same time – this is not new, or unique, this has been said many, many times – but one thing that's remarkable about the United States is the way that it transforms religious communities. The kind of Buddhism or Hinduism or Islam or even Judaism that exists in the United States is quite unique. It's deeply American. For instance, in the United States, partly because of the small numbers of Muslims, we don't see the same kind of deliberate sectarian division between Shi'a and Sunni that one sees in other parts of the world. If there's only one mosque in your city, it really doesn't matter if you're a Shi'a or a Sunni. You just show up to it.

And this is certainly true in other religious traditions, too. I went to a Buddhist temple in San Jose when I was an undergrad as part of this field research in the Americanization of religions. And it was a beautiful, very architecturally-speaking traditional Buddhist temple. You could see it anywhere in the Far East. And then when you walk into the temple, there were pews and hymnals. I just thought, this is perfect. This is perfect American religiosity right here.

I think that's what's so remarkable about us. Our religious diversity does those two things. Paradoxically, it encourages you to adopt your religion as an identity in a much more fervent way than you would if you lived in a majority religious community, and then at the same time, it encourages you to syncretize and acclimate your religion to the American cultural identity that is so pervasive.

Patton: I would absolutely agree with that. I think there are two things that we can say further based on your really insightful points. The first is, if Omar is right that we are – or we were talking about the work that came out that said we're actually 11 countries. One of the things that I would suggest is going to emerge in the next few decades as we get used to pluralism all across even rural areas as well as urban areas is a tone of religiosity that actually mirrors the broader tone that affects those regions, whether they're 11 or 20 or whatever they are.

I've already noticed it – if you take the American South, for instance, there are ways in which Hindu engagements or Buddhist engagements with Pentecostal groups in an interfaith community in Spartanburg, South Carolina, is going to have a very interesting common language that would look different than the groups, say, in New England, et cetera, et cetera. So as a friend of mine said, I'm becoming a Baptist Hindu in the South.

And I just thought, well, this is the next thing that we're going to be seeing, is ways in which all of the religious traditions – the usual way that we talk about this is that every American religion has to become a Protestant version of X. You have Protestant Jews, you have Protestant Hindus, et cetera. But I think that that regionality will also spring up as we get used to the interfaith conversation that occurs in every single region of the United States.

But the other thing that I think is non-trivial, and it goes back to something Nancy said earlier – Ashutosh Varshney, who's an Indian political scientist, wrote a wonderful book about where – in 1992, when there were riots all over India, Hindu-Muslim riots because of the dismantling of a mosque by a group of Hindu extremists who wanted to find the original Hindu temple underneath the mosque – because of this dismantling, there was eruption of Hindu-Muslim violence in many, many cities in India. And what he did is he studied the cities that did not erupt in violence. He said, what's the difference between the different cities?

And one of the differences that he found was that there was not just engagement, but significant long term inter-religious engagement in secular institutions. So the water board, the education board, the electricity board, the Indian equivalents of those. Over time, it meant two things. You had a set of associational patterns that meant that there was no Other, really, to be rioted against. Even though there were neighborhood, the neighborhoods had gray areas and boundaries where people talked to each other differently as a result of that civic engagement, long term.

And the second was rumor mongering stopped, which is of course the one thing that creates riots more than anything else. And because there were business leaders and civic leaders from all religious traditions who were able to talk to each other and then talk to their own neighborhoods. So one of the major mechanisms of the incitement of violence stopped as a result. So I think your points are not only non-trivial but have very real political implications.

Cornille: Thank you. I'm wondering if we can now open the discussion to the floor and see if we can also return to the topic of the common good in the more broad sense of the term.

Kennedy: If any of you know what it is, please let us know.

F: I'm interested in asking about what your thoughts are on the level of intentionality and how we foster that as a broader culture, in terms of creating these opportunities for substantive relationships. I'm a huge fan of Eboo Patel and the Interfaith Youth Core. And in my own life as a practicing Jew, I've got children who are in a Jewish day school in Watertown, Jewish Community Day School, which fosters pluralism within the Jewish community. We are a family that lives in Brighton that hosts ESL students as well as grad students from B.C., and this year we have a Saudi young man living with us for the academic year. And I am here today with a few other members from my Daughters of Abraham group, a women's group that came after 9/11, which is a book group of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim women who meet monthly to read texts from each other's traditions.

So clearly, I have a personal sense of the need and the intentionality to break boundaries, because as someone who grew up in an affluent suburb, went to particularly elite colleges, lives in synagogue and in a Jewish school, my life could be very limited in who my intercourse is with, unless

I very intentionally set it up otherwise. And I think that people very different than me in this culture have a similar experience of if you just go with the flow, your life can be very limited in terms of who you encounter and the relationships you have an opportunity to build.

So my question to the panel is what are your thoughts about the requirement to foster a sense of desire and intentionality in people to try to figure out how to build relationships with people that they don't normally encounter?

Ammerman: I'm going to begin by responding with a reinforcement of the point you made about how easy it would be not to do this. One of the things that Putnam and Campbell point to in their book and that I've been observing over the last couple of decades is the increasing echo chamber effect, and the increasing degree to which we are able to surround ourselves only with people who think like us, and that that is certainly being found increasingly even in religious communities, that the religious and political alignments are now much more tightly bound than they were a couple of decades ago.

So the need to be intentional, I think, is even greater than it might have been in some earlier times when there may have been a variety of places, including our religious communities, where we met people across political and social class lines in ways that we are less likely to.

Patton: I would deeply underscore your statement of the importance of intentionality. And I think one way to talk about what IFYC does is to create or sow the seeds of that kind of intentionality more broadly. I think one thing we're seeing in the early 2000s is that, for all forms of progressive agendas, whether it's on women or inter-religious conversations, et cetera, et cetera, that we can't think – and I think Jonathan was talking about this before – that there is this progression that we continue to foster. I think another way to put it is it's a narrative – we have to think about action against retrenchment as much as we think about infinite progression or common progression. So I would say the intentionality is as much about action against retrenchment as it is about moving forward with even a pluralistic or ad hoc or ground-up sense of the common good.

I would also say that we are living in an age where intentions and the relationship between intentions and effects is unlike any other age in history. And that's a big statement, but let me explain what I mean.

Faisal Devji has a wonderful book about Al-Qaeda in which he writes that the way that Al-Qaeda actually works is not like the Boston Tea Party, where we had a sense of what we're going to do to disrupt, we threw the tea in the harbor, and then our intent had more or less the effect that we wanted as a form of political disruption.

Now, I think there – Al-Qaeda did not know, for instance, that the Twin Towers would fall in quite the way that they did. But as people who followed their discourse after this happened, they reorganized themselves on the basis of the effect of the latest disruption. And so there's a bigger break between the intent and the effect than there ever has been before, and that's because of the one thing that we should talk about more, I think, in interfaith engagements, and that's social media and the role of the Internet more broadly.

It's one of the critiques that I have of Eboo's last book is precisely this question, which is if you have a preacher in Florida who simply threatens to burn a Koran, creating riots in Afghanistan, you have an entirely different relationship between an intent and effect than has ever occurred. And if we don't take that seriously, particularly as we build intentionality, we're going to be in big trouble.

M: I think it is important to know that the common good comes from teaching civility and engagement. If we don't understand that – I have my religion, you have your religion, then we work together, regardless of what our religion calls for. It calls for goodness around the world. This is how one understands his religion. So in a way, we have to understand that it is diversity which leads to unity.

And I'm going to give an example how the engagement of the small community could make a change. In the Islamic Center of Boston in Wayland, there was protest coming in from a certain church, and they targeted three different organization. One of them was the Islamic Center. People stayed out on the advice of the police. But there was a bigger protest against those people who were marching against the mosque from the high school students of Wayland.

Now, this kind of reflected through the whole town. Those students knew about the center, because in the center, when one of their fellow students was murdered, they found the shelter in the mosque, because the mosque hosted the memorial for that child who was murdered. And the center did not stop there. They went and put a scholarship in the name of the mosque

in the high school, so the high school has a scholarship sponsored by the mosque.

So in a way, the whole town – the town has a church, a synagogue, and a mosque next to each other. And those students know each other, and they know how they work in the mosque. So I believe that those little – as Professor Kennedy said – that these small engagements are very important in raising the awareness in the young children and the young adults.

M: Thank you for that optimistic picture, which is very gratifying to hear. But I'm more with Randy Kennedy. I want to hear more about the dark side of things. And so since one of you had quite a public encounter with interfaith conflict – I mean you, Reza. (laughter) Would you object to saying anything about that experience you had on Fox and what you learned from it?

Aslan: Well, I guess I would say two things. One is that obviously there is an enormous, perhaps even unprecedented level of anti-Muslim sentiment that permeates this country, in certain groups within this country especially. And the polls speak for themselves. Half of Americans believe that Islamic and American values are irreconcilable. Two-thirds of Americans believe that Muslims shouldn't have the same First Amendment rights as other religious communities. One-third of Americans believe that Muslims should be forced to carry special IDs identifying them as Muslims. And there's a historical analogy there somewhere, but I just can't put my finger on it.

So the numbers speak for themselves. And it's certainly true that Fox News, as anyone who has spent even a minute watching it, has been the main purveyor of this kind of sentiment. In fact, they have turned anti-Muslim sentiment into ratings gold for the last decade. So I think that part of that has to do with this sort of general feeling that exists in certain sectors of American society that anything that a Muslim does is just, by definition, not trustworthy.

But I think there's a more important point that gets lost, I think, in some of the discussion about what happened, and it has to do with the inability of many in the general public to even conceive of religion as an academic enterprise. The very notion that you could write about religion from a fairly, as much as possible, objective perspective, that that in and of itself is difficult to conceive.

And to be perfectly frank, that's our fault. We in academia spend far too much time talking to each other, and not enough time talking to everyone else. We don't do a very good job, I don't think, in translating our research and our work to a general audience, to a popular audience. On the contrary, not only do we discourage such things, we tend to actually punish such things.

And I think that it then should not come as a surprise – and by the way, this is true of almost every academic discipline, not just the study of religion. But I then think it shouldn't come as a surprise that the response that we get, particularly from the media and from the public, is one of confusion or distrust. I think anyone in this room who is either a student of religion or a teacher of religion has had that experience of being on a plane and having someone ask you what you do, and you say, I'm a scholar of religion, and they think, oh, did I swear? Oh, my God. They start confessing their sins to you because they don't understand that you are a social scientist studying a historical phenomenon.

But again, I just have to emphasize this once again – I think the blame for that resides primarily amongst us. We ourselves need to be engaged in the public marketplace of ideas. We have some very interesting things to say. I always tell my students that I'm assuming that you are studying this topic because you find it interesting. Well, guess what? Other people do, too, and you should feel empowered to share your ideas with the public as much as possible. So I think that's the takeaway for me, to be honest with you.

Cornille: I wonder if there's also something about how we talk about each other's religion, what the role is of that in this whole controversy – the kind of things we say about each other's religion, whether we speak as an insider or as an outsider, and how those who receive it then feel about what we say, and what the limits are of that kind of discourse. I think that's also probably an issue that –

Patton: If, in fact, social media tend to reinforce affinity groups, which is what Nancy was talking about earlier, you combine that with the anti-Muslim sentiment, which seems to be at an all-time high that Reza was talking about, and there is no way – it's not only that outsiders can't say anything about another religion, Christianity being the case here, but for a Muslim outsider to say something about Christianity is – the stacks were already up against you, but doubly so now, given the age we're now living in.

Sullivan: I feel like I'm at town meeting, so I always feel compelled to say my name when I start speaking, because that's what we do. Dan Sullivan. I want to commend Mr. Kennedy, first of all, in line with what Mr. Aslan just said, that sometimes you have to come down to the level of the people to really understand what's going on down there. And he was brave enough in this academic environment where it's supposed to be free-flowing ideas to say that there are supposed to be boundaries, too. So I commend you for bringing that perspective to the discussion, Mr. Kennedy.

What I wanted to address as far as diversity goes is the huge problem we have as citizens, especially in light of the Islamic world, where I hear on National Public Radio that 33 medical people have been assassinated by the Taliban in Afghanistan for giving measles and other vaccines to children. And we roll our eyes and shake our heads and say how incredibly foolish and murderous this is, until the second half of the story, when you find out they believed that these medical technicians from the West are withdrawing DNA samples so that they can establish genetic links to Taliban and Al-Qaeda leaders. And then you say, oh my goodness, this is another way that we've offended their culture and we've gone looking for culprits to murder.

So I'm saying that our quest for diversity and understanding has to pursue justice, yes, but we also have to recognize where the other party is coming from. And I like your idea about the Chicago groups just tackling projects together. I don't think there's anything that does that as well as tackling a project, a really specific, as Mr. Kennedy said, bite-sized project. And that's all. I don't really have a question, but I wanted to endorse that. Thank you.

Adler: My name's Gary Adler, and I had a question kind of on this theme – not quite the dark side. And I'll give a quick vignette of what I'm talking about. But I had a question about the difference between achieving religious diversity and understanding as a byproduct versus an intentional product. So Eboo Patel's work is terrific in the sense of intentionality. But I thought one of the great contributions of civic life in its various forms is that we get these things as a byproduct. So I'm wondering what the possibilities are for that today.

And I'll give the quick vignette. In Cambridge, I'm a part of a daycare cooperative. And a couple weeks ago, I found out we were having costume day. Not Halloween, but costume day. And I was kind of shocked at this. I can understand various religious reasons to oppose Halloween, but I don't think in this day care in Cambridge, we had those

sorts of people that were opposing it for those reasons. But it was kind of the achieved religious diversity of exclusion – not talk about the difference – versus achieving religious diversity by inclusion, which was my preference. And of course, now we're coming up upon the grand holiday season, so I'm kind of waiting, as a sociologist, to see what's going to happen.

But I'm wondering if you could help us reflect on this a little in our organizational life, how we can achieve these things as byproducts, and what some of the hurdles are or some of the possibilities.

Ammerman: I've been thinking about our talk about the bite-sized projects and that kind of cooperation, and reflecting back on Catherine's insistence on wanting us to talk about the common good. And I wonder if there is a kind of intentionality about byproduct, if you will, a next step. That, once having engaged each other in these common bite-sized projects, is there a next step that needs to be a part of this that includes a reflecting on what we have experienced together, asking both where have we found genuine common principles – don't kill, don't like, whatever have we found – but more to the point, have we discovered, out of our experience together, something about the particular ways that our traditions and stories understand what those principles are? Some of which we may now agree we've got some common language for, and in other cases, we may discover we've got different stories coming from different places that nevertheless led us to this place, working on this project together.

So that intentionality about reflection on the experience, I guess, strikes me as one of the things that may be a way in which we need to articulate our learnings from what is going on on the ground.

Patton: I really love the question, and I would say, as I collect the stories of pragmatic pluralism that are very much those micro cases and bite-sized projects, one of the things I've noticed is when you have a situation where you are in need of another religion simply being itself, you also – as I've followed up on each of these stories, there also is a very interesting byproduct of a memory of that relationship, even if it doesn't last. Because if you're going to do bite-sized projects, how long are they going to last?

And one of the big movements that we see as interfaith takes off in a new way in the 21st century is that we don't want to be episodic anymore. We don't want to have a dialogue and then go our merry way. We really want

to have something that is lifelong, a relationship, whatever its basis might be. So there's some very interesting stories that have to do with memory that I think a direct answer to your question would be the number one byproduct I see from these small engagements is memory.

For example, the person who holds the keys to the Holy Sepulcher is a Muslim. And that happened because of the Crusades, but eventually all the Christian groups – you know what would happen if one Christian group had the keys to the Holy Sepulcher, right? So what you see is that that is a hereditary position now amongst Muslims, and Christians need him to be a Muslim.

And he has memory of liturgical changes around the different denominations, changes in liturgy that happened over the course of the centuries, and his family does, too, in a way that no single Christian group does. So if you read interviews with him, he will tell you that, well, the Baptists did that one time, or the Greeks Orthodox did that, and now they switched, and so on. So he has a form of Christian memory that no single individual Christian group could have.

Another wonderful example is the Ner Tamid, the Eternal Light in the Jewish tradition. There was a synagogue that needed a place to worship in Atlanta, so they were hosted by a church, and that's very frequent all across America. I think the stories that emerge out of hospitality because of an itinerant religious group are extraordinary, and someone needs to write a book about them. This is a very small, bite-sized example, but that synagogue grew enough to have its own building, but that church still has that room where the Ner Tamid, the Eternal Light, was. That's the Ner Tamid room. That's where the Jews were. That's where we were hospitable to the Jews in this very interesting way.

And so that is the kind of thing that I think is really important, because as soon as religions begin to tell stories about themselves that have to do with hospitality to other religious traditions, you're going to have a shift in civic life, as well.

Burgard: Thank you. My name's Steve Burgard. I'm director of the School of Journalism at Northeastern. I'd like to go back to the question of media and public perception for a second, because I was on the editorial board of *The Los Angeles Times* around the time of the 2001 attacks. And as we looked at the Islamic community, we were trying to figure out why there

was such a sense of silence on the part of this group of new Americans in the face of what violent Islam had done in the name of their faith.

So part one of my question is – we’ve now had a passage of time – is the Islamic community more confident today in speaking publicly about differentiating itself from the terror? And how are we doing in terms of public reporting and commentary in the media on Islam? Maybe that’s for you, Reza.

Aslan: Well, I think first of all, I would question this general impression that there was a lack of a Muslim response to the attacks of 9/11. That wasn’t my experience of it. On the contrary –

Burgard: (inaudible) That was the case in Southern California.

Aslan: I wasn’t in Southern California, so I couldn’t tell you. But from my experience, nationwide, not just in – I happened to be in the Midwest at the time – but in the communities that I had any connection with and certainly the organizations that I’m familiar with, what I saw was an overwhelming response against those attacks. I would say that that is far more true today, that there is a far greater sense of confidence that has been instilled in the American Muslim community in the decade or so since 9/11.

But I don’t think that the reportage of it has changed much. I still, to this day, get questions from people about why are Muslims silent in the wake of attacks. And I honestly don’t know how to respond to that question, because I could just rattle off the thousands and thousands of fatwas and commentaries and statements that have been released from the Muslim Public Affairs Council or from the Council for American Islamic Relations or for the Institute of Social Policy Analysis or from ICNA or ISNA or from the American Society of Muslim Advancement or the Cordoba Institute. It just keeps going and going and going.

But I guess the only answer that I would have for that question is that it’s not news. It’s not news. It’s not news that the Islamic Society of North America issued a fatwa condemning the attacks on Copts in Egypt. That’s not news. The attacks on the Copts in Egypt – that’s news.

Burgard: (inaudible) Do you think the mainstream press has gotten more sophisticated in its coverage of Islam?

Aslan: I don't think so. Not necessarily.

Burgard: Do you read *The New York Times*? Do you read *The Los Angeles Times*? Do you read other print media (inaudible)?

Aslan: Well, I don't read *The Los Angeles Times*, but nobody does. I do read *The New York Times*. But I think what we're seeing is that you more often tend to see, at the very least, requests for quotations from the heads of these organizations that have become significant enough that they cannot be ignored. Whether you are seeing on mainstream media, whether it's TV or print – whether you are privy to the robust conversations that are taking place within these communities and these organizations about the proper way to respond to radicalism and extremism, et cetera, et cetera – I don't think that that is being covered.

But I don't blame the press for not covering that, because frankly, it doesn't sell papers. When I say it's not news, what I mean to say is that it doesn't actually draw eyeballs to the TV screen. But I think you're absolutely right in the sense that we are in the very least hearing the voices on the other side, that they are being invited to the table. If CNN is covering a story about some act of violence in the name of Islam, they will tend to invite at least a Muslim from one of these organizations to comment on it.

But the general impression, I think, of the populace remains that there is this kind of lack of response, a lack of condemnation in the Muslim world – not just in the United States, but in the Muslim world – to these acts. And despite the fact that that is patently false, I'm not sure how to make that any more obvious than we can, because of the limitations of the media.

Cornille: Brian O'Brien has question for you – David O'Brien, sorry.

M: (inaudible) Can I follow up on that last question?

Cornille: Yeah. Afterwards, we'll come back to it, yeah. David?

O'Brien: I was waiting for someone over there. Thank you. My name's Dave O'Brien. I admire bite-size projects, and I love people that do them, but I would want to come back to the huge undigestible (sic) question posed by Professor Cornille around the Global Ethic.

The Global Ethic of Hans Kung came out of those Parliament of Religions. The Parliament of Religions worked on developing the Global Ethic, some of the people there, because they felt this tremendous sense of urgency about something we might call the universal common good or the global common good. Some of that is environmental urgency, but there are many other urgencies around the global economy, around the need to develop a capacity for humanitarian intervention, the responsibility to protect. All those kinds of questions draw you to this sense of a universal common good.

And they said it seems like we can come up with principles, as we did with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights a long time ago and we occasionally do on environmental questions, but nothing happens. And that would seem to me to be a religious challenge, that in this title of your project today, the common good and religious diversity, the religious weight is perhaps on the side of the common good and not on the side of the religions.

That's a religious challenge, if we're talking about human survival. Some of us used to feel that very strongly during the nuclear arms race. It's faded away a little bit, but it's very real. So how do you turn religious diversity, religious differences, into an asset, not a liability – into resources that can lead us somehow to get over this hump and really begin to have practices and policies that address the universal common good? That's what Kung and the World Parliament of Religions were doing, and it was a noble effort, I think, and one that has to be held in at least as much respect as the many bite-sized projects that we all love.

Patton: And I would just respond that I think you're seeing somewhat of an intellectual trend in that direction, too. Jonathan Sacks writes about the Noahide Laws as a gesture in that direction from within the particularity of Judaism. The Dalai Lama's project really is to secularize much of Buddhist principles as a way of translating what he thinks is absolutely critical for Buddhism as a form of leadership.

And so I think where I would want to push us is to have each religious tradition from within its own idioms articulate those questions of the common good in a particular way as part of the clarion call to move forward. And then I think you do need to think about what those larger global ethics would look like in international court tribunals, in the Kyoto Accords, et cetera, et cetera. Applying those to very specific international fora would be the way that I would move.

Ammerman: I think it's really important to recognize that sometimes the so-called bite-sized projects are actually quite global in scope.

Cornille: Someone way, way back.

Reda: My name is Mohammad Reda. I'm from the Islamic Center of Boston. And I want to ask, how many people were here in Boston on September 11? OK, there are enough people. Anybody seen me or seen anybody from the Islamic Center on the media in Boston? And actually, it was in the media, but people don't pay attention to that.

On the day of September 11, the religious leaders of all congregations, we met together to have joint prayers for the victims. And we did that all together. I was here. In Boston College, we had in the archdiocese – actually outside the – when the archdiocese with all religious leaders, there were five, six Muslim leaders, and we met with in the archdiocese, and everyone condemned the attack of September 11.

And then I was with the governor of Massachusetts, and this was on Channel 5. And nobody cared to remember that the Muslim leaders of this city were there condemning September 11 from day one. However, everybody remembers the false news. The false news was one of the girls who grew up in our mosque and was married and pregnant, and she was on the plane to California, and she died on September 11. And Channel 5 reported her as one of the perpetrators of September 11, and she was a victim. She died with her husband and her unborn baby. And everybody thought, because Channel 5 reported that. But then when they apologize about it, nobody remembered that. They say there is a girl from Newton, part of September 11 attackers.

So please don't tell me that there is no bias in the media. There is bias in the media, and there is bias in the listeners, as well. Thank you.

Aslan: Let me just add – from a more sociological perspective on this question, which I think is interesting. It goes back to that generational issue that I was saying earlier. The fact of the matter is that when it comes to the immigrant Muslim population here, most of the Muslim immigrants come from societies, countries in which political participation is – well, let's just say discouraged, and so are not used to the kind of integration into the public marketplace of ideas that is necessary in order for a community in this country, a minority community, to be taken seriously by the media.

I'll tell you just from my own personal perspective – my family immigrated here from Iran after the Iranian Revolution. And after 9/11, I was one of the voices who was going around trying to reframe some of these perceptions and answer some of these challenges. And when I went back to my parents' house for Thanksgiving or something – first of all, there was a gigantic American flag on the front lawn, which I thought was odd. But my parents sat me down and had this very serious conversation with me in which they said, we need you to stop talking about this stuff. You need to get off the television. You need to stop talking about this.

And it's because they were afraid that there would be some repercussion from the government, not from outsiders. Not that some radical Islamophobe would do something, but that the government would do something. And of course, that conception, for a person who was raised in the United States, never entered my mind. But for them, it was the first thing that they thought about. Do not talk about this stuff, or the government will come and get you, which is what happens in Iran, whether you were living under the days of the Shah or the days of the ayatollahs.

That, I think, is an experience that I think many, many Muslim immigrants to this country would share. Their children do not. And what we saw after 9/11 amongst the younger generation was, far from silence, this intense, robust desire to self-identify as Muslim in a way that they never had before. And again, I think it's that very interesting dynamic that's taking place among this immigrant community between the parents' generation and the children's generation, and the paradox of identity and diversity.

But I think that had something to do with it. You didn't hear from a lot of average, non-organizational Muslims not in leadership positions because of that sentiment, that it's better not to say anything because this is the society that many of them grew up in.

- Ammerman: And isn't that an interesting echo of earlier times in our history when many, many immigrant groups that have come here from societies in which democratic participation was not normal? And interestingly, often through organizing in their religious communities, that's been one of the bridge spaces in which they've learned the ways of participating in American civic life.
- Cornille: Erik?
- Owens: Hi, thank you all. One of the working assumptions of scholars and maybe many other people, as well, is that if we learn to talk about our deepest differences, we'll be better off, whether that's theological differences or racial or cultural or whatever. I wonder if you panelists agree with that premise, and if so, how you would judge our society's progress on that mark? And who's responsible for making that happen? If that is indeed the case, that talking about our deepest differences will help us somehow to live with those differences, not paper them over with the idea that we're all the same in some way – Abrahamic traditions or Americans or whatever – but talk about differences – how well are we doing on that and who's responsibility is it? Is it NPR? Is it the parents? Is it churches or what?
- Ammerman: I would say that I think talking about differences is important, but that's not the first place you start. Much of what we've been talking about for the last however long we've been up here is the way in which relationships and joint shared work are the places out of which enough trust is built to be able to then talk about the kind of deep religious differences that we may have. My gut feeling about things is that if you start with let's have a conversation about how much we disagree about X, Y, or Z, that may not get you very far.
- Kennedy: I'm all for talking about differences, but it's not based on some notion that if we talk about especially radical differences, we're going to be able to get along better, that there's going to be some sort of upshot in terms of better day to day life. We're speaking in the bosom of a great university. I'm interested in talking about things which are important and talking about things which are interesting, and that's what intellectuals do. And it might sometimes be that there's a collateral effect. Some people, in fact, may be able to live better in the aftermath of such a talk. And if that's true, good.

But frankly, if it's not true – and my belief is probably that very often, it's not true – that's not going to dampen my insistence upon doing it, because my insistence upon doing it is not actually predicated on there being a day to day life payoff.

Patton: I would say that there are some very interesting studies that suggest in sociolinguistics that if you begin with the assumption of difference and the purpose of the talk between people is to discover similarities, that relationship is going to last longer than if the assumption is similarity and the talk is about difference. So I would be more in favor of making sure that we begin with an assumption of difference, which is obvious at a certain level, and then move to an exploration of the similarities that are surprising, which is very different than a kind of triumphalism around similarity, which happens so often in interfaith discourse.

There was a wonderful example of that in the World Parliament of Religions, the 100th anniversary, where there was a big debate between two or three religious groups about who was more tolerant than the other. It's a very tough conversation to have, right?

The other thing I would say that is very important from my perspective in terms of how we're doing is I think for every generation in American history, there is one religion that bears the brunt of the conversation about difference. We just saw it. It's Islam right now. Before that, it was Catholicism. Before that, it was Native American. You can define your periods how you want. But I do think that part of the reason for that is because we do want one institution or one group to take care of that conversation for us, almost.

And I think we need to move beyond that to that question of the shared cultural burden, so that every institution that we have is going to be talking about religious difference. It's not just NPR, but it's the family and it's the schools and all those kinds of things. And that gets back to the intentionality that we were talking about earlier.

I also think that we would do really well if we talked better about the great unmentionable in American society still which is class. Talk about an assumed difference. And I think if we integrated into religious conversations, which tend to be very middle-class, with questions about class difference in society, we would have an entirely different kind of conversation, and I would hope that we move in that direction.

Ammerman: I want to say one more word on this subject. One of the things that has been striking me in our conversation all day long is that there have been times in American history where we have been able and willing to expand our sense of diversity and other times when we have wanted to contract our sense of who we are religiously and otherwise, and that those times have probably coincided with times of relative more and less sense of a threat versus hope, and that maybe the way in which we tend to our ability to encompass more diversity is not by focusing on the diversity, but by focusing on the conditions in our larger society that allow us to feel secure, that allow us to feel a sense of hope, that diminish our sense of overall threat to our well-being.

Cornille: There's someone in the back.

Cavanaugh: Can you hear me? My name is Sheila Cavanaugh, and I spent many years in the business sector before coming to Boston College's School of Theology and Ministry. And I spent years working in other parts of the world where I worked side by side with Muslims, Jews, fellow Catholics, Buddhists, people from all works of life and every race. And so the business sector is one portion of the global sector where people are forced to work on episodic projects together and long term projects together.

And what I noticed in all of my work – and I did take a couple of sabbaticals working for the United Nations at a Vietnamese refugee camp, and then working in Bosnia trying to resettle Muslim refugees coming into the United States after the war – is that we'd have so much in common. What I have really fundamentally come to the point of realizing is that we are all searching for the same things in life – health, happiness, joy, and a sense of purpose in what we do. And this is happening every day in the workplace.

And the reason why I left business to come to the School of Theology is that I realized we're all searching for the same things, and yet we see people for our differences, and not for what we have in common. And I saw a great lack of faith practice in the workplace. And I know we have separation of church and state, but people were coming to me all day long, I think by virtue of who I am and my disposition, for help in managing the problems of life. And because I was counseling people without training, I said, I have to go get the training, so I left.

But I wanted to affirm what you've said, Mr. Aslan, is that I feel isolated in the School of Theology that we're talking among ourselves. We should

be involving the School of Law and the School of Business, because it's those people who go into public policy making roles in our society. And it's public policy that uplifts the poor and that brings immigrants into our society to acclimate them. So I just wanted to float the idea of broadening the conversation to include those agents and actors on college campuses who are weighing in very heavily in public policy that does bring people together. Thank you.

Cornille: So that brings us back to the importance of religious literacy and religious education. I think at Boston College, at least, we try to indeed educate people from all the different professional schools also in the foundations of faith and give them the option, also, of learning about other religious traditions, which I fully agree is absolutely essential. Thank you.

Ammerman: And that workplace environment is a really interesting thing for us to think about, and how those relationships are built and take place, how we learn from each other in the workplace environment. One of the things that I am struck by when I think about Putnam's notion about my pal Al who happens to be, is that you have to be able to fill in the blank there, which means I have to know that my pal Al happens to be Episcopalian, Muslim, Buddhist, whatever, which means that we need a way of talking about who we are that allows those religious identities to be visible in non-religious spaces in ways that facilitate the relationships.

Aslan: If I may just plug an organization that I serve on the board of, it's a New York based organization called the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding. And one of the biggest things that we do – in fact, most of our activities are focused on precisely providing a framework for corporations, businesses, small or large, to have these kinds of discussions, even if that means – we have workbooks that we send out that just are simply the most basic elements of what does it mean that your coworker is a Muslim or your coworker is a Jew? What days do they need off? How do you discuss these things? And I think the success that we have had is by framing it not as a responsibility that a company has to its employees, but as a means of fostering greater community, greater loyalty, brand loyalty, loyalty to the corporation, and it's been remarkable successful.

So you're absolutely right. I think that the workplace environment is a perfect experiential melting pot for this kind of theorizing that we're discussing.

Cornille: I think, though, in all of this, the focus is really on mutual understanding and respect for one another and so forth. But one thing that hasn't really come to the fore is the need for religions themselves internally to rethink their relation to one another and to the common good of the society in which they live. So there's, I think, something beyond just mutual understanding, and something a little bit more proactive that is called for in terms of religious self-understanding and religious change in a society like ours.

Patton: And there, the work of a historian I think is very important, because every religious tradition has narratives in its sacred corpus about encountering strangers, which is going to tell you a lot about its theory of the outsider. And secondly, every religious tradition has an affect, and it may differ, of hospitality. And those two things together I think could be the grounding for the kind of reflection you're talking about.

Cornille: So with this, I'm afraid we will have to close. It's a nice point to close this afternoon session. I thank you all for your participation, and especially the panelists for your contributions.

(applause)

END OF TAPE

