

Transcript IFD 2006

Joyce Davis

I would like to welcome you to this session of the Forum 2000, the theme of which is "The Dilemmas of Global Coexistence".

We have the privilege of delving into one of the most challenging issues facing the world, the relationships among the world's faiths. We have assembled a panel here of quite distinguished experts to talk about the risk of globalization as involves religion. The specific theme we will be looking at is: Do religions offer a solution or are they part of the problem? I will introduce our panel and then we will ask each of them to speak for about five to ten minutes, so that we can allow some give and take amongst the panel and have a dialogue.

I will not go into biographies, because people at this table are so distinguished that it would take quite a long time to even give the most prominent parts of their biographies, so I will ask you to look at those in your programs. Our first speaker will be His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, Head of State and spiritual leader, and we are happy to have him here with us today. We will also have Soho Machida, who is a professor at the Graduate School of Integrated Arts and Sciences, Hiroshima University, Japan, and Tomáš Halík, a professor at Charles University and member of the Program Committee of the Forum 2000 Foundation, the Czech Republic. We also have Kanan Makiya, who is a writer and professor, a specialist on Iraq who now lives in the USA; Vartan Gregorian, President of the Carnegie Corporation of New York, USA; Michael Melchior, the former Chief Rabbi of Norway and member of the Knesset in Israel; Michel Dubost, Bishop of Corbeil-Essonnes, France; James Zogby, President of the Arab American Institute, USA, and Zaid Ibrahim, Chairman of ZICO, Chair of the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Myanmar Caucus, Malaysia.

So without any further ado, we would ask that His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, open our session.

Dalai Lama

Indeed it is a big honor to come and speak and exchange views regarding this issue because my one commitment is the promotion of religious harmony. To this I am committed till my death. So I am really happy to be here and discuss with other respected representatives and practitioners of different traditions.

Do religions offer a solution or are they part of the problem? I think both. Religion offers solutions but at the same time religion also creates more problems. So I think both. But if we think deeply and carefully, then I feel that various different religious traditions actually deal with our emotions, our minds. So we human beings should realize that in our lives and also in various fields of human activities, human intelligence and human emotions have, I think, a very important role. Take the September 11th event. Such an unbelievable sort of disaster could happen only because of modern technology and human intelligence guided by destructive emotion. Then such unthinkable or unbelievable things can happen. Today we are in the 21st century but in this century, like in many past centuries, there are human emotions, particularly destructive emotions, so I think that all these troubles actually started on an emotional level. Thus I think that in the 21st century various and different religious traditions have a very important role: to compensate and counterbalance these negative emotions. How? All religious traditions seem to be talking the same message inspired by different philosophies. Philosophically there are big differences, fundamental differences, but in spite of that, all carry the same message: A message of love, compassion, forgiveness, tolerance, self-discipline, containment. All the same, I personally see that amongst the followers of different religious traditions -- among the Catholics, among the Jews, among the Muslims, among the Hindus and so on -- there are really some wonderful people. That indicates that all different traditions have the same potential to produce such wonderful compassionate people.

In order to reduce these destructive emotions, it is very important that we develop and cultivate compassion and forgiveness. For compassion, we cannot buy it in the supermarket. We cannot develop compassion through surgery. Maybe, in the long-term future, it will be possible, and then it will be very easy. So you see that we have to develop compassion through one's own effort.

On the other hand, now in the 21st century, there is an immense material development. Of course, in some parts of the world there are still many difficulties, difficult situations and starvation. But generally speaking, material development is highly enhanced. But in the meantime there are other problems and many of these problems are actually man-made problems from our negative emotions. Therefore, I feel that various religious traditions have a very, very important role to create better human beings, more compassionate human beings. In order to do that, I think that once we religious people accept religion, then we should be very sincere and very serious. I think that is one important thing, not to see religion just as a name. So,

religion still has an important role on this planet.

Another factor in the past and also today is that in the name of religion there are divisions, and in the worst cases even bloodshed. Now we must take serious care about that. I feel that in many cases the main reason is political or economic or it is some other reason but it simply manipulates the name of religion. In some cases the person may be very religious-minded, very faithful but creates some troubles. These are called fundamentalists. Now we have to think about that. Here I think about the concept of one religion, one truth, and the concept of several religions, several truths. Now this is not connected. Each practitioner of the concept of one religion, one truth, is very essential in order to develop genuine faith, a single pointed faith towards one's own religion. That sometimes, you see, creates some problems. You just believe one religion, one truth, and therefore other religions are not there. Now here you see it is very important that we should have the concept of several truths, several religions. I think that these two things are contradictory. But how do I come to that? I feel that in terms of community the concept of several truths, several religions, is relevant and, in terms of the individual, the concept of one truth, one religion is relevant. So on that level we can overcome these two contradictory things. For that reason I think we need more communication with followers of other traditions, and then we can develop mutual respect, mutual admiration, mutual appreciation. I think that brings genuine harmony on the basis of mutual understanding.

Joyce Davis

Thank you very much.

I think that the essential message His Holiness was giving us was that religion is meant to better the human being and to better the person, but sometimes we see that this does not exactly happen. And how do we bring together this need to be a serious committed faithful person whatever his or her religion is, with respect for other people's beliefs? I think that this is actually at the core of what we will be discussing today.

I want to apologize to my audience and to His Holiness because I did not tell you who I am. My name is Joyce Davis and I am the moderator of this discussion and an Associate Director for Broadcasting for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty here in Prague. We owe a great debt to the Czech Republic for hosting this organization that brings news and information to closed societies around the world. With that we will continue our discussion on how we make compatible this need to have a strong faith and respect for other religions, and does religion in any way better the human being sometimes and other times make it worse?

We will now turn to Mr. Tomáš Halík and ask for his comments.

Tomáš Halík

My answer to the question whether these two opposite tendencies - fundamentalism and fanaticism on the one hand and hedonism and cynical pragmatism on the other hand - exist is: yes, they really do exist; they provoke each other and are equally dangerous. They have always existed in a certain form because both emanate from two of man's deep needs: the desire for fixed order and the desire for freedom (in the sense of self-realisation, free fulfilment of one's needs and potential). Combining these two values - order and freedom - harmonising them is possibly the most important thing in the life of a person and a society. But it is very difficult and so, throughout history, there have been conflicts between those people who are fascinated by one of these values so much that they underestimate the other one.

If advocates of a fixed order of moral values do not take human freedom (in particular a person's right to seek the truth according to his or her own conscience) sufficiently seriously, then this leads, and not only in religion, to sectarianism, to a black and white view of the world, to an attempt to give too simple answers to complicated questions, which we call fundamentalism, to a tendency to demonise "others" and under certain circumstances to fanaticism and even to violence. On the other hand, to advocate freedom without respect for moral order, without responsibility, will lead to libertinism and cynicism.

Another alternative to these two tendencies are two dangers which John Paul II often talked about, as does his current successor Pope Benedict: religion without critical thought is dangerous but also relying only on reason separate from spiritual and moral values, the traditional source of which is religion, is one-sided and therefore can be equally dangerous. I would, however, like to emphasise that this is a "tendency". Rarely do we encounter it in its pure, extreme form. It is, of course, clear that in today's world -- in the context of globalisation -- both viewpoints often come to a head and become more radical.

I am convinced that the mass media has a large share in this. Today the media is slowly taking over some of the important roles which formerly were carried out by religion -- it interprets reality, it offers a certain picture of the world, big stories, common symbols - and so it fundamentally influences people's lifestyle and

thoughts. Its picture of the world is far from being just a mechanical reflection; the media seeks out and accentuates controversial and scandalous subjects. A perfect example is the recent uproar over Pope Benedict's speech in Germany. The media has taken one controversial sentence out of context and then, with great delight, has chosen the most extreme reactions from the Muslim world. Both dangers need to be constantly pointed out. If religion in the world does not distinguish between the divine and the human side of religion, if believers are not also aware of this human side of religion - and all the limits associated with it - there is a growing risk that faith will become an ideology and may be misused. Pathological forms of religion exist, but we must not generalise. Pathological forms of secularism also exist. Secularism, which would like to remove everything that is religious from the public sphere, is itself becoming an intolerant and dangerous religion. Such a stance logically provokes and strengthens religious fundamentalism, fanaticism and extremism. We must protect ourselves against crime, whatever form it takes, including religion.

But for the future it is absolutely necessary that sensible-thinking people from all groups know about each other, that they be in contact with each other and especially that they have the courage to stand up to extremists in their own ranks.

Nowadays we are worried about the tension between part of the Arab world and the West. A number of people in the West are incapable of differentiating between Islam and terrorists shielding themselves behind Islam, and on the other hand many Muslims, because of certain pathological and decadent phenomena in our civilisation, have a completely distorted view of the West. I am convinced that we Christians now have a special responsibility - there are many things that connect us to Islam (and from our own past we know what temptations Islam is exposed to today) and on the other hand we can also understand western secular civilisation, which was born out of a cultural environment that was fundamentally influenced by Christianity. I think we could try to build bridges between these two worlds or at least defuse some of the preconceptions - which does not mean being naïve and uncritical.

Joyce Davis

Thank you. It is interesting that you brought out the role of the media and religion. And it is very clear that as religious people, and especially leaders, you have to be aware that what you are saying could immediately be sent and broadcast around the world. It's not any longer as if you are only speaking to your own small group of followers. The media has the ability to carry that to various parts of the world and have repercussions. Like here So now we will hear from Mr. Soho Machida who is a professor at the Graduate School of Integrated Arts and Sciences, Hiroshima University

Soho Machida

We must first properly understand the meaning of all of us being here in this room. We didn't have to die because of wars, because of famine, because of illness. In a sense, it is a miracle that we are here. On the other hand, at this very moment, people in Sudan are going through genocide. People in North Korea are agonized by oppression. If we have time to discuss noble ideologies we must have the courage to go out and act for those people. However there is one condition. That is - do we trust ourselves? Do we love ourselves? Before we advocate coexistence with other religions, coexistence with other civilizations, we must ask: Are we coexisting with ourselves? Regardless of lots of shortcomings that we have, when we cannot trust, love and coexist with ourselves, how can we trust others? How can we love others? Before we say love thy neighbour, we must learn to love ourselves in the real sense, not the egoistic sense. Only then can we feel both the joy and the sorrow of other people as ours.

I am a scholar of comparative religion. Personally I am a Buddhist coming from Hiroshima, and at one time I was a Buddhist monk in a monastery for twenty years. Later I became a scholar. But coming from Hiroshima I want to say one thing. Hiroshima is Jesus Christ. This is because 250,000 people died in the atomic bomb for us and brought the peace that exists today. In the same manner six million Jewish people died for us in a Holocaust and brought peace today to our hands. We must give up the absurdity to blame Roman soldiers who spiked the body of Jesus Christ. Instead we should seriously think about the meaning, the holy meaning of a torment by Jesus Christ in Golgotha or Hiroshima. Then we realize the big responsibility that we are challenged to maintain this very fragile world peace today. I hope that we all here feel this big responsibility through this conference.

Joyce Davis

And now we will turn to Mr. Kanan Makiya, a professor and writer originally from Iraq and now living in the US.

Kanan Makiya

Thank you. The Arab Middle East is my part of the world both as a writer and as an activist. And since that is the case, I will address my remarks with that region in mind. So from the point of view of the first part of

the question facing this panel: Do religions offer a solution to the risks of globalization? From my point of view, from the point of view of the history of that part of the world as I see it, that question does not make any sense. Because in a real and important sense, this part of the world, that is the Arab countries of the Middle East, have not yet really met or experienced globalization as other parts of the world have. And so it cannot really be the source of our problems in the same sense.

As for the second part of the question: Are religions part of the problem? That too is either insulting to the people involved or it has an unimportant sense beside the point.

Now I would like to address the question why. Of course on everyone's mind, and previous speakers have already alluded to it, is that we are looking at a very important phenomenon; the origins and rise of radical Islam in my part of the world. Now the story of its origins and rise has, it seems to me, no, or only the most tenuous connection to globalization, as I have said. More usefully, the phenomenon should be understood as a response, a massive and popular response, to the systemic political and institutional failure of the regimes and states in that part of the world. This is, after all, the only part or significant area of the world that really has not yet produced a sustainable democracy, not even one, and it is a region that long before the emergence of radical Islam as a potent political force was home to some of the worst dictatorships seen in the developing world of the post World War II era. Now those observations are not accidents of history and are not connected in any way that is fundamental to the nature of Islam as one of the great religious traditions of this globe. It is far more useful and relevant to look at the distortions, for instance, produced by oil producing economies on society, on culture, as a possible one of many causes, important causes, for the kind of institutional and political breakdown that I have alluded to and the breakdown that is on the scale that I have referred to.

Now here in Europe, where we are seated today, it is common to look to the absence of any breakthrough in the Arab-Israeli question as a fundamental cause for the systemic political and institutional failure in the region that I am concerned with. That, it seems to me, is a fool's errand, because it puts an important part of the cart before the horse. Failure always begins at home, long before it looks to the outside for excuses by which to perpetuate it. None of this is to underestimate the importance of a real settlement, a well-suited and long-term one, of the Arab-Israeli conflict. But I am, or rather we are, addressing the subject of sources and origins here, not justifications and excuses.

Nonetheless it can be said that the Arab-Israeli conflict helped to accelerate perceptions in ways that ultimately led to large political consequences. Consider, for example, the great test of the Six-Day War in 1967, the Arab-Israeli war. To my eyes as a young Arab Muslim boy growing up in Baghdad, Iraq, at that time and to that of my whole generation -- for in that sense I am simply a representative of the whole generation of young Arabs -- the abysmal performance of the Arab armies was positive proof of how rotten the Arab state system, symbolized by the person and regime of Gamal Abdel Nasser, had become. So in frustration people like myself, I in particular -- but I think here I speak for the generation -- turned to the Palestinian movement, latched our hopes and our energies as young activists seeking a better world for its then-rising star. But that too very quickly turned out to be an illusion. These organizations were tried and tested and failed during the fifteen-year-long Lebanese civil war. The PLO or the organizations that made up the PLO, long before they became a national authority in Gaza, it is important to remember, ruled parts of Lebanon the way Hezbollah rules parts of Lebanon today. It exercised power and it did so very badly, operating like thugs and running protection rackets just like all the other ordinary militias. So with that great disappointment, my generation, a secular generation, a nationalist generation that had very little to do with religion and were never driven by religious forces, never came to politics because of religion or Islam or any of that, most of us, or many of us, turned cynical and more or less retired from active politics.

Where did we go? Into the universities of course, into newspapers and other media and that's where we are until today. We are occupying the prime editorial positions and speaking the same language we spoke in the late sixties and early seventies. Politics was left to others. It was left to younger Arabs than ourselves, a different generation, to pay the price for our failure and the thinking of all the young men who died in the Lebanese civil war and of all the Iraqis and Iranians who died in the Iraq-Iran war and all the other wars, and uprisings, and turmoil of the nineteen seventies and eighties in my part of the world.

It is this generation that, because of our failure, turned to Islam. Almost invariably in naive and extremely, let us call it, immature ways, many of them hardly knew the classic text from which they derived the authority for all their activity. Anyway, they turned to Islam driven by our failure to give answers and our failure to generate. Not only have we failed to have answers but also we did not produce the Vaclav Havels of this world. We did not but we should have. By reasons of history, by reasons of all sorts of circumstances, especially you in the Czech Republic would understand, there should have been Vaclav Havels who would rise in the Arab world in the late nineteen seventies and nineteen eighties but for

whatever reason -- that's a far too complicated question to discuss in six minutes -- they did not appear. Instead they turned to Islam, and in Iran of course, they started a revolution under the banner of Islam. It was, unfortunately for all of us until today, a very successful, a very real, and a very genuine revolution, a revolution that has perhaps not yet run its course. So from this perspective, returning to the question of the panel and wrapping up very quickly, I agree with His Holiness, the Dalai Lama, that religions are not a solution nor are they really the source of the problem.

Joyce Davis

Well so far we have heard, led by His Holiness, that religion is supposed to be a way of bettering the individual. We have heard Professor Halík tell us that religion is also perhaps designed to bring order, an order to a person and to the world in some regards. We have heard Professor Machida tell us that we must love ourselves, that religion is the way to unify us to bring some peaceful coexistence amongst peoples, and now we have heard from Mr. Makiya that the religion of Islam was long looked at as the solution to the problems of the Middle East. This was where the people of the Middle East turned to bring order to their societies. And yet even in that case things did not quite turn out as anticipated. So we will move on in our discussion of whether religion is a positive or a negative force and its impact on globalization or globalization's impact on religion. We will now turn to Vartan Gregorian of the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

Vartan Gregorian

Good morning. When I went to Stanford University in California as a freshman in 1956, I heard a sermon by an Episcopal bishop. At that time, the significance of the sermon did not register with me. He said that categorization is a sin. When human beings are divided and subdivided into categories and separate entities, each categorization can lead to abstraction, and hence, anesthetization. Categories become "problems," problems become political, political problems require solutions, and thus politics anesthetizes and requires "ideal" solutions to problems. A case in point: I witnessed the consequences of such "ideal" solutions when I recently visited Auschwitz.

Nowadays, religions and ideologies are prone to categorization; they are, after all, in the business of categorization. Religions and ideologies deal with absolutes, universal absolutes at the expense of any nuances and ambiguities, because they are inconvenient nuances and ambiguities. Instead of religions transcending politics they often become the tools of politics. Instead of transcending nations they become nationalized as political tools. Instead of serving as bridges of understanding they often become walls separating nations, peoples and individuals. Religions become collectivized, and the individual has to disappear within the confines of the collective.

I hear that today, even "dialogues" tend to become monologues. Everyone delivers up their understanding until the next dialogue, which is graced by the same speech. As a matter of fact, I recently summed up one such interfaith dialogue in the following way: "Brother," said the Anglican bishop to the Catholic bishop, "we both serve the Lord. You in your way and I in His." Today, we tolerate each other as long as there are no obstacles in the way we perceive absolute truth, but as long as such "absolute truths" exist, I am afraid we are always going to confront the question of whose religion is better, whose is the best, because, in the minds of many religious leaders, "all roads do not lead to Rome." Some of them lead to Tibet, some of them to Beijing, some of them to Mecca, some of them to Jerusalem, some of them to Arizona—wherever that may be. Having said this, I still believe that dialogues are important. They deal with powers and religions. Hence, one of the things that I would like to discuss in the short time allotted to me is the use and abuse of numbers in order to project power and instill fear of "enemies" whose ranks are made up of large numbers of people.

Let me illustrate. Everybody says that there are 1.2 billion Muslims. Hence, the "Muslim world." In my opinion, there is no Muslim world, the same way there is no Christian world. There is no Buddhist world. There are, however, Muslims in 57 countries. There are Buddhists in many countries and Christians as well. But political scientists such as Huntington describe modern political and social conflicts in terms of the clash of civilizations, in which the West is not even called Christian. It's "the West," even though it contains Catholics and Protestants as part of the West. But Slavs and the Greek Orthodox are not part of Western civilization. Even Greece, where Western civilization began, should be excluded because the people are Greek Orthodox...

By considering Islam as a single entity, people avoid the fact that Islam has the same divisions as Christianity. We have Shi'a Muslims, we have Sunni Muslims, we have Yasidis, all kinds of other religious sects or orders. By insisting on the unity of the "Islamic world," we are able to portray it as "the Green Menace," the same as we used to have "the Red Menace." We do this because we don't like to have any ambiguity and any differences that would show Islam has the same varieties as Christianity. But the facts

don't conform to such sweeping theory because throughout Islamic history, in the history of Muslim nations and societies, there has not been a single act of unity since the 7th century. Three of the Prophet Mohammed's successors were assassinated. The seat of Islam divided into many regions, from Baghdad to Damascus to Cordoba to Fez, to Delhi, to Isfahan, to Istanbul, to Central Asia, Samarqand. We never acknowledge these differences because the differences are inconvenient, because they don't conveniently fit into various ideologies. The theory of anesthetization requires some sort of organic unity so that we can say, "Look who's against us." This kind of logic allows a Bin Laden to say, "We are 1.2 billion Muslims, we will work to have a Caliphate," without saying that the last Caliphate died an ignominious death in 1923 when Atatürk, with a stroke of his pen, eliminated it.

There has never been a single instance of successful jihad on the part of all Muslims, in all of Islam's history. During World War I, when the Caliph of the Ottoman Empire called for a jihad of all the Sunni Muslims, ordering them to rise against Russia, France and England, nothing of the sort happened. You know what happened instead? Arabs revolted against the Ottoman Empire. Not only have we not had even a single act of unity by all Muslims, we have not had an act of unity by all Arabs, even though the "Arab world" is also considered to represent a major unity. The United Arab Republic did not work, nor did the North African Alliance work. The United Arab Emirates is the only act of unity that, so far, has held. Yet there is persistent talk about an organic Arab world. Let me remind you that on this 60th anniversary of the Arab League with its more than twenty member countries, the Arab League stands as an embodiment of disunity rather than of unity. Let me also remind you that the "Arab world" constitutes ten percent of the entire "Muslim world," if we accept that such a world exists.

Let me also mention the fact that during the Renaissance and Reformation, secular powers in Europe used religion—both Protestantism and Catholicism—to advance secular goals. Nowadays, it seems all over the world, organized religions are using secular power to advance religious goals, combining theology and politics through an alliance of both. Instead of theologians disputing each other's theories, today they outsource their divisions to politicians, and politicians now pick up these divisions and start fighting wars. Perhaps the best way to prevent wars, historically, would have been for the sons of religious leaders to have been obligated to lead battles rather than the religious leaders standing in the back and saying we are 1000 percent behind you, you go and die for this or that noble or absolute cause. So in many ways, religions have often divided people more than united them. In my opinion, religion is a personal matter with ethical and spiritual dimensions. As Einstein said, "Scientists ask why, but they don't ask, to what end." Religions always ask the question, "To what end?" And that's the most important quest: our place in the infinite, and knowing where we are at this time, how we relate to the universe—are we an insignificant nothing or are we a significant something because we know our own insignificance? Religions, instead of dealing with ethical, moral, and spiritual issues, most often deal with mundane political issues. We should try to prevent the use and abuse of religion and not confuse religiosity and religion.

Joyce Davis

Professor Gregorian hit on some very important topics. He focused a lot on Islam, but I am sure that all of the religions that we have been discussing here can look at their histories and see divisions, see violence, see times when they were used or misused by politics or other forces not necessarily to the benefit of mankind.

We will move on and we will now ask Rabbi Michael Melchior, the former Chief Rabbi of Norway and a member of the Israeli Knesset, to speak to us.

Michael Melchior

I was inspired by the last speaker to begin with a short story of a man who came to his rabbi after Yom Kippur with a big smile on his face. Yom Kippur, as you know, is a very serious day of repentance marked by twenty-five hours of fasting, prayer, repentance and reconciliation between ourselves and God. "What are you so pleased about?" the rabbi asked. "I am sure God has forgiven me", he replied. "How can you be so sure?" the rabbi asked him. The man thought for a moment and said, "While I was praying I reflected on all the sins which I have committed during the past year. I remembered that I had not dealt fairly with all of my customers, and I did not always treat my wife with sufficient respect. These are certainly serious offences, but then I thought about what God had done during the past year. I thought about the natural disasters, how women had become widows and children orphans. Then, I made a deal with the Almighty. I said that if you will forgive me for my few sins I will not recall yours anymore". The rabbi took the man by his collar and said, "You fool, is that all you asked for? You had the opportunity to bring hope and salvation to the whole world and you just thought about yourself."

I think that this is maybe some of the problem of religion today. As the Dalai Lama also indicated, we are emotionally confused. We think only of ourselves and our own group. We don't understand that religion can

soothe suffering and help human beings. It can bring salvation to humankind but it cannot be done when we only think about ourselves and are prejudiced towards others. We have to recognize that hatred is the root of all evil. Hatred wears many masks. I know of no more ugly mask than the hatred of religious totalitarianism. In our world religion has become synonymous with hatred and terror. If this is all that religion is bringing to humankind, then who needs it? We can and we must disarm the haters who attract the morally weak. I think that we should define hatred as a sign of heresy because it nullifies the humanity of others and leads to humiliation, persecution and death. By doing this it distorts the image of God.

I would like to turn to practical things. Four and a half years ago, in Alexandria, we held a major summit with all the religious leaders of the Holy Land present. Each one of them signed the Alexandria Declaration, in which they committed themselves to work towards peace amongst religions. The Declaration is now being introduced in Baghdad in an attempt to find compromise. It has been used to stop bloodshed in Nigeria and been inserted into the Nigerian constitution. We have followed up on the declaration with a series of initiatives which are beginning to make a difference to the way dialogue is conducted and the way we perceive each other.

Until now, most attempts at dialogue have brought together the left wing of one side with the left wing of the other side. Not surprisingly, they were able to agree on a lot, but these are not the people who urgently need to participate in dialogue. As part of the follow-up to the Alexandria Declaration, we brought together the headmasters, teachers and students from the most religious Islamic and Jewish schools, those who have never been part of any peace process. The groups examine the texts which we are being taught at each other's schools and try to understand them in ways that do not cause de-legitimization and demonization of the other. We now have groups of young rabbis and Imams who are working on traditional interpretations of Holy texts to see how we can highlight goodness and compassion as the bases of religions in the Holy Land.

When I fight Anti-Semitism, I make it a Jewish interest. It is not. Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are threatening our entire civilization. So the leaders of the religious communities decided in the aftermath of the Alexandria Declaration to combine forces to defeat Islamophobia, Christianophobia and Anti-Semitism. Jewish leaders will fight Islamophobia and the Muslim leaders will fight Anti-Semitism. In that way, we demonstrate that fighting discrimination is not a sectarian thing. By doing it together, we create a credibility that does not exist today.

We are also working on practical problems. In the past, I received a lot of complaints from Arabs who felt humiliated by the way that they were treated by security officials at Ben Gurion airport. In response, we established, together with the airport authorities, a joint commission to examine all the airport's procedures to make them more respectful to every person who flies in and out of Israel.

I will just conclude by saying that we must build the kind of social contract where religious leaders are not seen as a source of conflict, nor do they try to replace political leaders; instead they support efforts to build a better, more just society, for a more just peace. We have already built personal relationships. At every such gathering, I can feel the walls of hatred come tumbling down. It is not easy to build up trust but when it is there, there is no limit to what you can do.

Ten years ago, I was invited for the first time to the Iftar meal that marks the end of Ramadan. The newspapers got hold of the story and it was a big sensation. This year, I was invited to twenty Iftar meals but nobody writes about it anymore because it is so natural. Still, an interesting thing happened this year. I usually come to the meal and speak together with some of the Muslim leaders. This year, the head of the Islamic movement in Israel could not make it to the celebrations. He telephoned me and said, "You know, you always speak from your tradition, from the Torah, and I speak from the Koran. This year, I can't make it. You have heard my talk from the Koran so many times, can you please speak on my behalf at the dinner?" I did it and it actually was not bad.

What I am saying is: We have to start somewhere. There is nowhere better I think than Israel, Jerusalem, the Holy Land, and monotheistic religions. I hope that, with this work, we can do something that will change the relations in the Middle East because religion is not the reason of the conflict, but it is there, and it has been misused and it is very sensitive in relations. If we can do that I think we can do something that can be an inspiration also for people in many other places of the world. I thank you so much for being here and listening.

Joyce Davis

Thank you very much Rabbi. If this conference achieves nothing more than breaking down the walls of hatred a little bit more it will be a great success. Thank you. We will now turn to Bishop Dubost.

Michel Dubost

The risks of globalization. Do religions offer a solution or are they part of the problem?

The question is odd, inasmuch as it lets a suspicion fall on male and female believers, whereas no such kindred question is put to Marxists, nationalists, liberals or supporters of laicism...nor obviously to dictators and to beneficiaries of corruption.

Every week, in order to bolster this suspicion, Europeans are served with a reminder of the Crusades, of the Inquisition, of the war in Northern Ireland, whilst the newspapers report on the terrorist deeds of Al Qaeda and of the war in the Middle East, without any fear of either anachronism or of mixing up facts with ideological interpretations.

Odd also is the constantly renewed tendency to look for a scapegoat for violence in the world, as if the Nazi or Marxist experiences ought not to have cured us of this laziness of the mind which unceasingly looks for a culprit, whether he is an owner of something, a Jew or a religious person. Odd is the complete oversight of Christian, Jewish and Muslim martyrs of the 20th century. Odd is this way of asking the question of the possible guilt of a portion of mankind, as if the person who asks the question – apparently in a neutral way – was placing him or herself in an “advanced” position beyond ignorance and barbarism, thus pointing to an abstract word – religion – at actual people who exist, who think, who love, looking at them as if they were a race apart. Odd is this way of encompassing within a single concept – the concept of religion – polytheisms of all kinds and monotheisms which have not at all the same understanding of God, of the relationship of Man with God, of universality, of freedom, of conscience. Odd is this absence of a close look at reality. Violence takes many forms. It is true that it can be hidden in the heart of every man or woman, as well as in the most orderly institutions, including the most religious ones. But looking back at the history of the 20th century and of the early years of our own, I come upon many believers who have been martyred because of their faith even though they were striving to build peace.

In my country, in my “département”, violence is not religious. During the youth riots of November 2005, neither young Muslims nor young Christians were the violent ones, but much rather young people bred on television and without cultural roots. Furthermore, adult believers were the ones who played a great part in restoring peace and order. During my life I have wandered through many battlefields; I have met religious leaders who were scared or who had lost all patience. But from Sarajevo in Bosnia to Dili in East Timor I have so often heard them appeal for peace, tolerance, mutual understanding – often in vain I admit.

On the other hand I have met political leaders who used religion as a tool towards war to such an extent that I am today convinced that every war is “religious”. Nobody will ask people to risk their lives for a piece of land, a bundle of money, or some power: issues must be made “sacred” through religion. Witness how, after having been, with his Baath party, a strict supporter of secularism, Saddam Hussein, on the verge of war, took off his shoes to show off as a believer. Should we then incriminate Islam or simply the religious men and women who were deceived by this criminal pretence? Should suspicion be cast on religion or on those who use religion for nationalist purposes?

The question we are being asked is probably much deeper than meets the eye at first: it is the question of what is “the truth” in a pluralistic democracy. For some people the question of what is the truth does not arise at all. Everybody has the right to have his or her own idea of what is the truth, and democracy consists of inventing procedures in order to find solutions to common problems, while letting everyone take part in the debate. But in defiance to them, Antigone stands up, together with all those who held out against the Nazis, even if they were put in power by a regular election. For other people it is enough to abide by the golden rule: “Don’t do unto others what you wouldn’t want them to do unto you” - and to add the Rights of Man - in order to make it possible to live together in peace. Experience shows that for many people in the world this way of thinking is rejected as being “purely Western,” and that some people think that this respect for the other man’s opinion, even if it is necessary, is not sufficient to create a social link. Non-violence, respect for life, a fair economic order, tolerance, equal rights cannot by themselves alone be the foundation of a “will to live together”.

What then should be the basis of such a will to live together, of such a necessary brotherhood? I think that no brotherhood is possible without the acceptance of a certain transcendence, whatever the name one gives to it. Only transcendence induces me to think about mankind beyond my personal feelings, even beyond my will not to assault my fellow human being. Belief in the oneness of God is for believers the basis of the unity of mankind and of the acceptance of the “fellow man”, whatever makes him different and whatever enmity one may feel towards him. Indeed, belief in the one and only Creator makes me believe that my fellow man has been created like myself and also wanted like myself.

I maintain that the Gospel of Jesus Christ enables me to discover the importance of any true encounter with a different person: my neighbor, even if he is a foreigner (and perhaps, especially if he is a foreigner) enables me to discover someone who is not me and can produce in me a kind of opening to things I did not know, to a presence which comes close to me and which gives me joy.

For any believer the very existence of God questions and criticizes "reason" which globalizes, classifies and forgets the reality of people. Indeed, for a believer, truth, even if it is reasonable, is not primarily a fruit of his reason but above all of a relationship, an encounter. For any believer the existence of God makes him conscious of an essential poverty; he is not God, he does not know everything, he is limited! Within this poverty the modern world forces him to meet his fellow man in the full awareness of the distance that separates the two of them. This hesitancy about the truth -- this poverty -- is without doubt, in this global world, the basis of the best service the believer can deliver to it.

Joyce Davis

We will have a chance to go into more detail with some of the questions that have been raised by all of the panelists in the second part. But we have two more speakers that we'd like to hear from so that we can lay out all of the issues or most of the issues that we want to discuss today. So now we will turn to Mr. James Zogby.

James Zogby

We have a little story that a speaker in my position tells back in the United States. You begin your talk by saying: "I feel like Elizabeth Taylor's seventh husband. I know what to do; the problem is how to make it interesting."

It is important to be clear about what we mean by religion. Religion manifests itself in so many forms; we have heard many of them described today. But by that I don't mean that just many religious traditions exist in the world today. Rather I am concerned with the varieties of religious expression and practice that exist in each of these traditions. Currently, there are fundamentalists in every tradition who deny the validity of these varieties, but they are real. They exist and are a powerful force to those who adhere to them. What I am saying in other words is heretical to some, but there is no one Christianity, there is no one Islam, there is no one Judaism. What there are instead are Christians and Muslims and Jews in different parts of the world, in different social circumstances who because of their unique cultures, experiences, and histories, need to speak about those needs and those cultures and those histories and those traditions in different ways.

Now, in addition to the varieties of these religious practices and experiences, and believe me on this, in my country alone we have Christians who are snake handlers in the Ozarks. We have Pat Robertson on television. We have rather ecstatic African-American Christians in inner city churches and we have rather austere Episcopalians in suburban parts of our country. All are Christian, all have experiences, and all have a legitimate view of their lives and talk about it. There is another way to look at it. That is not just as a variety of experiences but as a variety of functions that religion can perform. And these are so dramatically different that it might be better if we actually had different words to describe all of them.

When the Greeks have different words for the word love, we ought to have different words and not use religion because they are all so different. In fact they are not only different, but they are also contradictory. I remember during the Vietnam War, watching Cardinal Spellman, the catholic cardinal, blessing the troops in Vietnam and sending them off to battle while Daniel Barrigan, a judge who was a priest, was pouring blood on draft files protesting the war, saving lives he said, in the name of Jesus Christ. Who's Christ was real? Whose religion was right? You can look and talk about religion theologically, but I am suggesting it is best to look at it sociologically because at the end of the day the meaning of religion, just like the meaning of the words Jesus Christ have more than one meaning. Are you really talking about the savior or are you talking about the fact that you are really angry and you have chosen a shortcut to express your anger by using a word that is highly evocative? So the meaning of the word is derived by how it is used in the sentence, the meaning of religion is how it is used and played out in daily life. And so for example, the other night there is Joan Baez singing "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot". The song is the cry of the oppressed or it's the acceptance of suffering in the sense of passivity in the face of overwhelming power, and the resignation to that, handing one's life over to the divine, or it can be a cry of revolution. Fighting against oppression can also be used and has often been a tool to regulate not only personal behavior but also social behavior, and it therefore can be used by state power very effectively to regulate. It can also be the expression of wonder in the face of the divine; a sense of humility when one comes up against one's own finitude. All of these functions are so diverse and I say often contradictory that they present our conversation with this problem: they are called religion. But why? What they have in common is the

language they use.

As I said we fought wars and we opposed wars in the name of God and Jesus Christ. All are believers. All use religious language. It's how it's used, and that's what we have to understand, not what they are saying. And we don't judge one over the other, we understand them. And so what I am suggesting is, to be more conceptually clear, that we not talk about religion as a solution but we talk about the kind of religious functions that would be a solution. Because if you strip away the language and look at what we are talking about, then we are able to find common ground. For example, oppressors can all find religion, despite religious traditions, very useful as a tool of oppression. It works. They understand each other. And those who are oppressed and use religion as the cry of their oppression also can find common ground. Clearly, for example, religion as dogma, hardened truth, born of insecurity and the need to create order and maintain order, that is not a solution: that's a problem. In this functional form religion looks more like a political ideology sacralized with sprinkling water using the name of Jesus or the name of Mohammad, or the name of Allah or the Torah to oppress.

The form that would be most useful is the form of religion that is born of wonder. Religion in the form that can be helpful is the religion that is born of humility. The religion that doubts. The religion that is based on faith, not certainty, and in another way, that makes the leap: "I don't know for sure but I believe." It is the religion that is open to the other. It recognizes our limits as humans with all of our imperfection. It claims not to be perfect truth but rather recognizes that in the face of God, whom we never really know, that we are all to use the religious language in need of salvation. And that pride and certainty are the most dangerous sins of all.

However, even in saying this there is a danger because one can be prideful of one's humility as in: "I am humble, you are not," which is not humility. In fact, what we need to do, instead of condemning those whom we call fundamentalists, is to understand the sociology of why they are. What has brought us to this point of people who need certainty in that way? The solution is not to argue them out of it but to change the conditions of their lives so that they can be freed of their own need for certainty. And so I suggest that if we understand the function and we deal with this problem sociologically we will find a better path to see religion as a source and a solution rather than a problem that divides us.

Joyce Davis

And now, Zaid Ibrahim.

Zaid Ibrahim

Well, the question is, do religions offer a solution or are they a problem to these aspirations of a globalized world? And I suspect this question is posed in this way because of Islam. I would imagine that if we had not had these kinds of problems the last couple of years, nobody would ask this question because I can't imagine that it is conceivable that you would ask the value of religion in the lives of people on this Earth. I think we have seen countries under regimes that despise or ignore religion, whether it was Stalin's Russia or Mao Zedong's China. It is just suffering; there is no meaning to their struggle. There is so much cruelty. So I don't think there is a replacement for religion. There is no replacement for faith. As Muslims, we believe that our purpose in this world is just to do good things as agents of God. That is the ultimate purpose. But I understand the problems there, the problems with which people associate Islam. Violence, rejections of modernity, the degradation of women, suicide bombers, everything that is negative. And when the pope posed the question of the 12th century Byzantine emperor asking: "Does Islam bring any good to humanity?" the reaction was of course anger on the part of the Muslims, but I wish we could just respond by showing the world what Islam has done, what we stand for. There is no need to feel betrayed or hurt, but the Muslims today do after so many years of isolation. I am putting this in perspective because I think the future of this global coexistence requires the smarter amongst you, the richer amongst you, and the more compassionate amongst you to reach out to this group of people, to Muslims, so that they can, together with you, bring about a better world. And I see that Muslims have been ostracized, have been emasculated for many, many years. Yes and that's proven. And I don't want to blame anybody but that's history. You look at any Muslim country-- Egypt, the so-called Seas of Learning. It's always been under the French, the British and now the Americans. Next you look at the Middle East. The Saud family. It's actually a very close ally of America. And you look at Iran. When the Iranians stood up and said we want this guy to be our prime minister -- Mossadegh in 1951 -- what happened? He was overthrown. You look at all these places and in my part of the world you look at the Muslims in it, in the subcontinent. They only had a country of their own called Pakistan about fifty years ago. So much poverty, so many tribal problems. Indonesia, 200 million people, very poor and they had colonial rule for 250 years. So one has to have some sympathy for these people. Do not show the negative side of this. There are possibilities that we should elaborate on, that we should talk about.

I remember Christianity in the Middle Ages. A lot of dark issues, dark values, dark history. We all know that. But then you brought in people of learning, your universities opened up, you produced people like Thomas Aquinas, you produced scholars, you brought a human face to Christianity. But we never had that chance. After Spain there was nothing. After Baghdad was ransacked by the Mongols there was nothing. Baghdad used to have the biggest public library in the world. Of course today you have it in New York.

What I am trying to say is that the glory of Islam is real but it never had a chance to carry through the schisms in Islam and the fight between the Shi'a and Sunni which started many, many years ago as soon as the Prophet died. A sense of history is important and it is important that we understand that this religion of, I don't know, 1.6, 2 billion people is the answer to world peace, to coexistence, to enrichment of humanity, and you have to believe that. Islam liberated women long before the British came up with the concept of female property in 1820. But you must distinguish between tribal laws and customs. You must distinguish between what's ancient that is part of that religion.

The culture of the Wahabis and the Saudis, that's not Islam. The eye-for-an-eye killings are purely tribal laws but we make no effort to understand them, we make no effort to study them. And of course Muslims are to blame too; they like to isolate themselves. They think it is all Jewish conspiracy. They think it is all a Western conspiracy. But you must understand. If you have been isolated for so long, this is what you go through. So I will end here. I hope I made some sense to you. I came all this way to plead to Europe, if not to America, to lend us a helping hand to understand one another.

Joyce Davis

This is not the end of the discussion, but rather the beginning of it. We have heard the comments from our panelists and in the next session we will actually discuss the ideas given. The last speaker raised the provocative question that I think would be good for us to start with. He asked, "Would we all be talking here if it were not for the threat that militant Islam poses in the world today?" And so the opening question that I would like the panelists to consider is: is it really just about Islam and its connection, or not, to terrorism or are there issues, real issues, about the role of religion in today's world and the impact, or lack thereof, that the religious people have when addressing the issues of the modern world? So I would, out of deference, allow the last speaker to continue his thought about how, perhaps, Islam has been emerging from a period of difficulty, a period when perhaps its culture, its religion did not have a chance to breathe, and how of the plea that I heard that religions of the world should reach out their hand to help it through this period. And then I would ask the other panelists to really talk about it: Is Islam really the only problem with religion in our world? So, Zaid, please continue.

Zaid Ibrahim

I will just take the first part. The question that I would like you to consider is "What else can we do to help to reach out, to facilitate an understanding of the problems?" A few minutes ago someone approached me and asked me: Are you Muslims doing enough? Where are the so-called moderate Muslims? I think it is a very good question, and I believe that of course a lot more Muslims should speak out against violence, against suicide bombers, against senseless killings belied with rules that are totally unrelated to Islam but nevertheless carry that name. Of course a lot more Muslims should speak out, but this is where I have come back to my original premise that you can only speak about things if you have some confidence and understanding of the issues. And I think the development of Islamic thought has not grown in the way that it should. The Islamic universities have not expanded in the way that they should have. The intellectualism has been somewhat stagnant because of all these factors that I mentioned to you. I think it is changing, perhaps slowly. You have more scholars now, more writers from Iran, from the United States, from the developing world, from Indonesia. We see efforts being made now in Indonesia for a dialogue, the society interfaith dialogue, which is a good thing. We tried to do that in Malaysia. It was shut down. But I think it will come in time and they will accept these things.

So, very briefly, a lot more needs to be done. Our education system and cultural aspects should be looked at as well. If you have no culture, if you have no history, no intellectual dynamism in your society, then of course you will have all those negative things and negative thoughts and negative actions and I feel that it is our responsibility to move along this line.

Madame Moderator, I think that is all that I can say. I believe that I am not saying that this is your fault or that this is my fault. I think that we all just have this responsibility and I am just trying to make you understand that some of the problems with Islam are deep-seated, historical, and political and it's something that requires empathy and not hatred.

Joyce Davis

Thank you. I'd like the rest of the panel, perhaps beginning with His Holiness, to talk about the issues in

their own religions, the battles that they are facing in perhaps maintaining the purity of the thought, the closeness to God and to goodness that the religions are supposed to be about and how do you deal with those elements that exist, I think, in Christianity, Judaism, and even Buddhism? How can you control the negative?

Dalai Lama

Not easily. I have always believed that whether we accept religion or not is up to the individual. If we force faith then the individual may not be a very sincere believer or is just following one's religious faith as a tradition. And then there is the other one who voluntarily accepts one's own religion but with attachment.

One time in South America I think there was one meeting with religious people and some scientists and one great physicist. He said at that meeting that he was a scientist and I think that's very wonderful. I am Buddhist, I have Buddhist faith but I should not attach to Buddhism because attachment is some kind of emotion. Once the attachment is involved then you can't see the reality because your view becomes biased. So I think when religions are in contact with other traditions you should see very objectively and then you can see the values as I mentioned this morning.

In spite of different philosophies, friendly speaking, I am a non-believer. I am Buddhist, no idea of a creator. In many Buddhist literatures there is a lot of argument. If you accept a creator, then there are lots of contradictions. So therefore, please, I am a non-believer. But I fully admire the concept of a creator. That brings new hope to many people, and new value and that concept, I think, is a very powerful concept: to bring love, to bring enthusiasm to the practice of love and compassion because the essence of the teaching is love to God and our very love created by God. Not talking about previous lives and these things. So in this very life, since it is created by God, we have a very close intimacy with God, which helps to develop some kind of trust, some kind of feeling of closeness, so I think there is more willingness to listen to the message of love and the message of love for God and at the same time love for your fellow beings. As one Muslim friend told me, according to the Koran, if you interpret it properly, there is not only love for your fellow human beings but also love for all creatures. So the environment issue is, you see, now very connected. And also love for other traditions.

I just mentioned if you truly believe God is absolute and the ultimate creator then Buddhism is also God's creation. From the Christian point of view. Then Judaism is also God's creation. Islam is also God's creation. And also the Hindus and everything. Therefore, you must have that sort of understanding. Oh, and why did God create all these different traditions? There must be some purpose. Since I am a non-believer, a non-religious person from my viewpoint, from a Buddhist viewpoint, even within the Buddhist community or even within the followers of Buddha, Buddha taught different philosophies and these philosophies itself were contradictory. I often tell people that Buddha did not teach these contradictory philosophies because of his own confusion. Certainly not. No, Buddha taught these contradictory philosophies to create more confusion among his followers. So the answer is that Buddha taught these contradictory philosophies or contradictory views because, you see, Buddha taught according to his own followers' mental dispositions. To some people one kind of philosophy, one kind of view is more suitable, but some people may have a certain different view that may be contradictory to the other view. So Buddha taught different philosophies to his own followers. I think this is a very clear example. There are different traditions of religions because they suit different people according to their mental dispositions. Hope that was helpful.

Joyce Davis

Thank you. That was very helpful. I think you have expressed perhaps the feeling that we may have faith and sometimes see the contradictions but it is perhaps our own failing rather than the failing of the messenger, the person who was trying to bring the information. But I want to get to the issue of: Is religion really worth it? And so we were looking at whether it is useful to the individual, and clearly it brings something to each of us. When I read my Bible I feel like a better person. When you meditate you feel strengthened. But what about the role of religion in the world? Are we, who are people of faith, simply indulging our own passion, so to speak, or do we have a role to play? Are we playing a role? Christianity. I will go to Bishop Dubost. Christians have often been accused of being too idle. They are confident in the power of their church, perhaps, but do they really do anything with that power to right the world's wrongs? Would you care to address that?

Michael Dubost

Thank you. You know, I think, I believe in God. And I believe in looking at Christ and for me the major message of Christ was given when he died on the cross. That means that he did not want to force religion on anybody, because when you are dying, you don't force anyone. You have no force at all. His message is to give the idea that God was humble and the idea of the faithful to be humble himself or herself.

Christians have not always been like this in history, that's true. And we have been like everyone, part of the sin of the world. That's true. But when I am reading the Bible it reminds me everyday that he gave his body for the world, not for me only. And I have to cope with the idea or with the grace of God to do something, to improve brotherhood in humanity. And I think that in our country, at least nowadays, that many Christians are involved in day-to-day working for others. In a lot of regions of France, there are a lot of Christians. And in my diocese, if the Christians were not acting, there would be emptiness in many, many organizations trying to cope with the social link.

What more can we do? I think that we have to, in the face of God, we have to love people. For me, it is not only a creator. It's a God that loves every one of us. Even if you yourself think that you are lost, you are a sinner, you are not able to do anything. And I think that you cannot confront yourself with the world if you don't have a good idea of yourself. And the idea is not coming from our own capacities, but God is sending the idea. The almighty loves me. He loves also the men and the women in front of me even if I call them my enemies. The gospel says, "Love your enemy."

Joyce Davis

Professor Machida, you mentioned something about "how can we love others if we do not love ourselves?" Were you speaking to the world's religious when you made that statement?

Soho Machida

Yes. I think we have two groups of people. The first group is the extremist group in our own tradition. The audience and the panelists here are quite open-minded and tolerant and respect other traditions. But narrow-minded fundamentalists who are extremely evangelical and impose their values upon others cause the problems we face right now around the world. How do we reach those extreme people within our own tradition? This happens even in Buddhism, even though it is often said that it is a religion of peace. When we look at the past, at the history of Buddhism, there was a lot of fighting among temples and among some priests. So we have to take this issue very seriously. How do we reach extremists who are not here? Otherwise we cannot maintain the fragile world peace.

Another group we have to reach is ordinary people. In modern times fewer and fewer people go to churches or temples. Throughout the European countries you have great churches, but every Sunday not so many people are attending mass. The same thing can be observed in the Asian religions. Fewer and fewer people. Especially very few young people go to the temples or churches. The ordinary mind is quite secularized, sometimes very materialistic. How do we convey the values we believe in to those people who are totally alienated or separated from religious values? We have to think very seriously about those things. That's why I say that what we have to focus on is not religion. Media inflates an image. Most of the wars are not caused by ideological differences among religions. No. The main problem is the human mind, which is infested with greed. That's why I said we have to learn how to love our souls. Unless we have pure love, not egocentrism, we cannot love others. We are paying too much attention to religion, but what really is causing problems is human greed and how we deal with this human greed. This is the issue we have to think about.

Joyce Davis

Rabbi, we heard you give a very moving account of how you were trying to work with Muslims in your area -- building things, trying to right lives -- and yet is there no real discussion at all of the things that are actually dividing you, the claim to the same spot of land that both religions have. How do you deal with the very concrete issue of: "My God said it was for me and your God said it was for you?" So, who is right?

Michael Melchior

That's a very good question. First of all, we don't avoid it. We put it on the table and deal with it. It's not easy, and here is an example of how challenging it can be. The Temple Mount presents a very difficult problem, no doubt it is the issue on which all the previous peace negotiations have failed. A couple of years ago, a proposal was made to create a concept of a divine sovereignty over the Temple Mount. We worked on the details with some Muslim colleagues and the Israeli negotiators brought the proposal to President Mubarak. The President listened to them and said, "It sounds like a good idea. My only question is -- whose God will be sovereign, yours or ours?"

In every religion and every society there exists the potential for hatred. The rabbis said that even the Torah, Judaism's holiest book, which is supposed to be a tree of life, can also be twisted into a deadly poison. According to Christian tradition, Jesus was crucified for the love of people, but how many people have been killed and persecuted in his name? We could find similar examples with regard to Islam.

Israeli participation in the peace negotiations was greatly hindered by religious delegitimation of the Oslo

talks, which resulted in the demonisation of those who led the process and eventually to the assassination of our prime minister. That was no doubt a major setback, if not a decisive setback in the peace process. So we have a lot to do inside of our civilizations, but my claim is that we can't succeed if we don't cooperate, if we don't make coalitions, if we are convinced that Islam will never, never be able to live with any kind of Jewish state, no matter how small it is, in the Middle East, or if Muslims are convinced that we are there to spearhead some kind of world battle against Islam. If we live with these stereotypes, we are not going to get anywhere; therefore we have to break them down. This is what our activities are about.

You asked me how religions which preach so much goodness can lead to so much evil. We have already referred to the problem of exclusiveness. I want to talk about one other problem.

There is a story of Abraham, the founder of monotheism who was famous for his hospitality. He would feed his guests lavishly and then asked them to thank God for their food. One day, he was visited by an old man who refused to thank God. Abraham was very angry and said, "Are you are not grateful for all the good the Lord has bestowed upon us?" "I have never said grace before and I am not going to do it now," the old man replied. So Abraham threw him out of the tent. At that moment, Abraham heard a heavenly voice. It said "Abraham, I hear you had guests today." "Yes, I had an ungrateful old man," Abraham replied. And the voice from heaven declared, "Abraham, if I could tolerate this old man for seventy years, couldn't you have managed another couple of hours?"

The problem is that often we focus on ourselves instead of on God. We insist on the truth of our own positions and attribute them to God. For example, during the political process of disengagement last year there were buses driving around with signs saying, "God is against the disengagement." I was very surprised that people claimed they could read His mind.

The final and most important thing that I should like to say is this. All Jewish prayers end with a request for peace. The prayer goes: "God who makes peace in the heavens, please make peace upon us". And when we say that, we take three paces backwards and we bow down. The question is, why do we do this? The answer is that if we want God to help us make peace on earth, we have to do a little ourselves by giving up something of our own to make space and show respect for the other. We symbolically take three paces backwards in order to make room for the other. If we do that, then we will also see fulfillment of the prayer that God will help us with making peace.

Joyce Davis

I like the term making space for the other. That is something I would also ask regarding the same issue: Is there space for the other in this issue in the Middle East? I would like to ask Dr. Zogby as well as Mr. Makiya to comment on that. But before I do I would like to ask Mr. Tomáš Halík. This issue of tolerance. I have a strong faith. I am a Baptist. Does it really mean I have to give up the strength of my conviction to make space for someone else's beliefs?

Tomáš Halík

I think there is something like "a cheap tolerance" in the sense "everything goes, everybody has his own truth" etc., and there is also "demanding tolerance". If somebody has no firm conviction, it is not difficult to be tolerant. But if you have a conviction - not sectarian, but deep respect for truth - it is not so easy to be tolerant, and I think we should be now more than tolerant, we must deeply share our spiritual, intellectual and moral experiences.

To answer the nice provocation of His Holiness, that he is a non-believer, I would like to remember a sentence of one Cambridge theologian, Professor Niklas Lash: Christians, Jews, Muslims and atheists have in common that they don't believe in gods. We Christians, Jews and Muslims believe in God, and he is not one of many gods. Our faiths give us liberty not to serve "gods" of our time... There is a very deep tradition in Christian theology-- but also in Jewish and Islamic mysticism -- of so-called negative theology: we can say about God what he is not, but what he is, it is a great mystery. So our belief in one God is a struggle against idolatry, against the temptation to absolutize the relative things and values-- like political leaders, parties, ideologies, nations and so on.

Rabbi Melchior started his speech with a nice joke. I would like to add another joke: "Jesus was once in a football match between Catholics and Protestants and when the Catholics scored a goal, Jesus was jubilant. But when the Protestants scored, Jesus was also jubilant. And when he was asked whom he supports, he said, "I don't support anybody, I just enjoy the game." And I hope the one God that we believe in -- and I think that His Holiness understands this very well -- also enjoys the game between Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and atheists, if we are playing fair.

Joyce Davis

If we are playing fair.

Michael Melchior

Excuse me, I just have to comment on the football. In England, the Chief Rabbi and Archbishop of Canterbury are good friends and Arsenal fans. They went together to watch a match between Arsenal and Manchester United. The newspaper predicted that Manchester would have no chance. But Manchester won 3:0. The headlines said there is no God. And the chief Rabbi wrote a letter to the editor saying that God did not lose, he just was not an Arsenal fan.

Joyce Davis

Ok. Now to get back to the other issue we were discussing, you described clearly how difficult it is from the Jewish standpoint, the issue of the space, the territory, the land. I'd love to hear Mr. Makiya and Mr. Zogby talk about it from the viewpoint of Muslims who look at the same patch of Earth.

Kanan Makiya

I just want to comment on this discussion of tolerance that the previous speaker and you raised. It is useful to remember that the essential meaning of the modern idea of toleration is 'when one puts up with something that one positively dislikes.' It makes no sense for me to tolerate the company of red-haired men if I don't care one way or the other about the color of their hair. But if I positively have an aversion to their red hair, then I have an obligation to learn how to deal with it and integrate myself into the company of men with red hair. So to tolerate is exactly to deal with something that means a lot to you. To illustrate this, I would like to use an example a little bit outside of my sphere.

Protestants and Catholics at some point were intensely intolerant of one another in the 16th and 17th centuries. They killed each other in rows. The meaning of toleration was invented as a response. The modern idea, and not the old Islamic idea, are totally different and I am not going to make that mistake. The modern idea of toleration is that I actually agree that I still think that he is going to burn in hell because he believes in virgin birth or whatever, but I have chosen to live in society, in public life together with that person even if I hold that belief very firmly. It does not mean what it has come to mean in late 20th and early 21st century as the previous speaker said, that "everything goes" and therefore you are very surprised if somebody has a problem when everything does not go.

There is a very, very different idea: "Let's take care." And we in the Middle East are still in that earlier stage trying to invent that early version of the concept where we have to act as we have strong feelings on the questions of faith, on the questions of space, territory, politics, ideology and so on. We are prepared to kill each other over them but we still have the idea, that old modern idea invented by thinkers like Voltaire and so on back in the 16th and 17th centuries, which has not yet begun, or I think it is only just beginning, to find speakers who will articulate the way it will work in Muslim cultures and at this point in time.

The remarks of His Holiness really set a train of thought in me. I always thought that I was quite profound on the matter of principle. I am a non-believer. I am a profoundly secular person. I come from a tradition where, although I struggled with faith as a young man, I left it very early. But after his words I am now totally confused. I don't know what I am and I think that confusion is a nice angle from which to look at our complicated world and from which to look at some of these questions that we are struggling with here on this panel. Instead of talking about religion, as we have all done, there is something very, very akin to it. I am stating the same point but looking at it from a slightly different position. To what extent, let me ask all of us here, do societies or individuals learn from the mistakes of their own past? Well, there is some wisdom we know that travels down the ages. I mean, for instance, the ability to kill one another. It expands exponentially over the centuries. We are technically, technologically, scientifically more and more capable to do so. The ability to kill fewer and fewer of one another seems to grow far less rapidly. So there is some wisdom -- call it tradition, call it religious faith -- at the core of all great religions that is somehow preserved.

But there are other lessons like love and freedom, other very, very basic, powerful forces that as a species every generation is doomed to keep on learning and relearning all over again. Otherwise the moment they go, as the history of fascism shows, they are gone and they are very fragile. Precious little things. And if you don't start all over again each time, and toleration is one of them, you lose it. Religion is like that. It is a part of it. It is like an external part of it. That core. Perhaps faith is not what we are talking about. When we talk about the Arab Middle East we are not talking about something that is rooted in the centuries. We are talking about a newly invented extremely political response to concrete political problems that arose in the present whose excuse, whose justification, happens to be Islam. And that becomes, therefore, its ideology. So often these modern radical Islamists or fundamentalists, or whatever you call them, don't know their religious tradition in a very profound sense, just like Nazis did not really know their Goethe or Schiller; they did not really know German culture in some important sense or at least a huge component of the German

culture. And these ideologies -- very important, very powerful -- more or less grow up and flow with the ages and with the times, and they legitimize themselves in certain ways and all of that is very important and all of that needs to be understood.

Joyce Davis

Many people say it really is not Islam. That it is absolutely not religion at all. It is the extremists.

Kanan Makiya

Exactly. Take the Wahabis for instance. They positively think that the beginning and end of Islam was in a twenty or thirty year period in the 7th century. And the fourteen centuries of Islamic civilization that have passed since are nothing to them. In their minds they think of themselves as companions of the Prophet. This is a very strange mindset.

Joyce Davis

And yet, to be honest, because I have spoken to many Islamic scholars including Wahabis, there is something very activist about saying that if you are a good Muslim or a good person of any faith, you have a duty to right wrongs; you have a duty to have a positive impact on the world. And yet this is at the very core of the Muslim extremist argument: "There are things wrong and we are going to set them right." And talking about tolerance, I'd like Mr. Zogby and Mr. Gregorian to come in on this. We talk about tolerance but the fact is, as people of faith, is there not a line we draw beyond which we will not go? If something in society is so offensive to me, do I really have to tolerate it?

James Zogby

You had actually asked me a different question, and I'll see if I can get to it if there is a space. My wife, who's here with me, is Irish and we go to Ireland a lot. And I will never forget, years ago, one of the first times we were there. I was sort of amazed by everything and I was asking questions and I looked at the wall and I said to the guy who was taking us around, "Who built the wall?" He said, "Bloody Brits." It was about four years ago but it was as real and as vile today as it was then. Go to Ireland today and it is a different world. The promise of justice and the radical transformation of daily life that has come about through economic prosperity have changed the focus of people in that country. Incidentally, I am a Catholic with a PhD in Islamic studies, very strange, I know. Anyway, Martin Luther King used to say, "Jesus said, love your enemies. Why love your enemy? Because if you love your enemy, you might come to know your enemy. Your enemy might come to know you and if you know your enemy and understand your enemy, you might understand why your enemy is your enemy, you might also understand what you might have done to make your enemy your enemy and then you can change that."

The idea of understanding for the purpose of change is so central for this. I was listening to Zaid and what I said before and I will say it again, is that to hate fundamentalism is pointless. To defend it is pointless. It is real. The question is, why is it? Why does Pat Robinson with that funny look on his face say, "The end is coming, I can feel it. And it's a good thing that we are going to blow ourselves to death." And he loves it, because it brings back Jesus. Why is it that this young boy straps a bomb to his body and kills himself and others at the same time? If we don't understand the origin, the motivation of that cult of death and change it, we get nowhere in this discussion. To say it is not religion is pointless. It is. It is a deeply held belief. We have to change it to make a difference. I was asked a question during the break by a couple of reporters: "Why fundamentalism? Where does it come from?" And the point is, each circumstance is different. Look at Gaza for one moment because that's where the space issue comes from since the peace process began. Since the peace process began, youth unemployment in Gaza has risen to 80% which means that a young man in Gaza today, 35 years old, has never had a job. He has never had a prospect of a job. Therefore, he cannot marry. Therefore, he cannot have children. Therefore, in a traditional society, the source of honour, which is continuing the line, is ended. And so out of this despair comes this perversion of life. Not just religion. Perversion of life. This cult of death, which sees honor in death. Yes, they are killing Jews, innocent Jews, but they are also murdering themselves. Suicide, which every religion is opposed to, has become a source of life and honor. That is sick. But we must deal with the reality. Now how do you end it? You radically transform the conditions of daily life. You create hope in the future, you bring justice. They will not be saying "Bloody Brits." They will find the space for others, but only if you transform the conditions that have bred this despair and this anger. It's one thing to curse the dark; it's another thing to find the way to change the dark. And transforming reality gives hope, which will then change the other and make space for the other. Tragically, I don't see us moving in this direction. And actually I think you are so right, I mean, what you said about those who are able to integrate and have a discussion and about others who are not. We need to finally get an understanding of the other. As for those who are not here, we should see what could be done to transform the conditions of their lives so that they feel more open and less threatened and more available to us to have this conversation.

Joyce Davis

So are you saying we should begin a dialogue with extremists?

James Zogby

It's not a question of starting a dialogue with extremists. It's a question of understanding their extremism. And I am not one who approaches this with a sense of despair. I myself have hope and I think that one of the things that is fascinating is that we are having this conversation to begin with. I believe and I learned that we live in a world of increasing complexity which itself is producing increasing consciousness, so evolution did not end with material, it continues on the level of consciousness, a very Buddhist concept I might suggest.

The point here is that we are talking respectfully with other faiths, something unheard of two centuries ago. We have human rights organizations, we have people in America defending people in Africa to whom we paid no attention a couple of decades ago. They did not exist for us. I don't believe there is more suffering today. I believe that there is more awareness of suffering today. And therefore the urgency of doing something about it has come to us in a way that did not exist in previous generations. Societies cared for their own, and the definitions of one's own a hundred years ago was maybe even limited to one's own family or one's tribe or one's village and did not extend beyond that. But we have moved in a very different direction, where we are concerned about others. All of us sitting here today fought wars with each other within the last century and saw each other as less than human and even as the devil itself, and now we engage in conversation. We are getting better and I think we are aware of how bad it is, and that makes us better.

Joyce Davis

Dr. Gregorian, are we getting better? What about the categorization that you talked about, the willingness to label people, to stereotype? Is there room for the other?

Vartan Gregorian

I hope so. Let me just mention two elements that breed intolerance. I remember reading that more damage was done by one passage in the Bible, highlighted by St. Augustine, than any other. It was, "Compel them to come in." Just one line.

We should be reminded that one is not born a Christian, one is not born a Jew. One becomes a Christian or a Jew or a Buddhist. Birthright is not an entitlement. Unfortunately, nowadays, just the fact that you were born in a certain community is sufficient for you to be designated as a Christian or a Muslim or a Buddhist or a Jew. There should be some ethical journey or process by which one becomes what one is not, because life is a constant state of becoming. Unfortunately, the centrality of ethics has often been sidelined in religion. Ritual has taken over rather than spiritual stages of being and becoming.

Then there is the issue of humility. I am so happy that His Holiness mentioned humility. Not many religions are humble. They consider what they espouse to be the absolute truth. And when you have absolutes you are not tolerating the others who, in your opinion, don't have identical absolutes. Let me give one example. There was a famous conservative columnist in New York, a good friend of mine. One night he was going on and on and on with utmost certainty and authority, espousing doctrine. So I said to him, "Excuse me, are you a Catholic?" He said, "Yes." Then I asked, "Do you believe in original sin?" Again, he said, "Yes." So I said, "You can't be right all the time, can you?" Because, after all, it is a fact that original sin is appropriately brought up sometimes, but not always, to show one's limitations and to serve as a source of humility. If you are a Christian and believe in original sin—and I am not a theologian but I dare mention this—then it is necessary to recognize that God has given humanity both reason and faith in order to cope with our problems. This was given to us as an act of grace. Original sin, by definition, provides grounds for humility. It shows that we are defective. We don't possess the total of all knowledge. But when it comes to religion nowadays, everybody forgets humility. They believe, with such certainty, that their way is the only way, the perfect, uncontested way.

Let me also point out that religious tolerance should not be based on law alone. The law says that regardless of what different faiths we follow, we have to live together. The law requires that. Tolerance should be based on understanding, not compelled by law alone. Actually, "tolerating" is a bad term when it is used in the sense that you are "tolerating" somebody. Tolerance can be a good word when you are trying to understand somebody. Throughout history, especially in modern times, there has always been intolerance: we tolerate people with faith but we don't tolerate people who have no faith. That's not true tolerance. True tolerance is that you know the limitations and aspirations of individuals and communities for what and who they are rather than what they ought to be. Tolerance has to be based on knowledge. Who is a Jew? Who is a Muslim? Who is a Christian? Who is a Buddhist? Otherwise, knee-jerk tolerance means

nothing.

Then, of course, there's also the question of indiscriminate "love" of every good cause. If you love everything with the same vehemence, you love nothing, because there's no room left for action. People who believe in all good causes in many ways believe in nothing because they have not prioritized their time or their social commitments and engagements in order to help solve problems. The same thing is true of tolerance. If you "tolerate" somebody, you have no engagement with that person, as James Zogby mentioned. You have to engage with that person in order to make tolerance valid.

Another point I'd like to discuss pertains to the literal translation and literal meaning of religious texts. I was traveling a couple of years ago, reading about the Marquis de Sade—an attack on de Sade, not praise, but the person next to me was agitated. He said, "May I ask you what your profession is?" I answered, "I am a teacher." I knew where he was going. He said, "Have you read the Bible?" I responded, "Of course, who has not?" Then he asked, "What do you think of the Bible?" I said, "It is a Great Book." So that ended our discussion, but then I said, "I am going to go further. You know, something bothers me about the Bible." My companion asked, "What?" and I replied, "I am surprised that the Bible does not mention the English language. It does not mention French. It does not mention Latin. It does not mention Greek. Only Aramaic and Hebrew. So how do we know that God understands us?" To which my traveling companion responded, "Oh my God, I never thought of that." Well, that's how literal-minded people are. In the 1920s, the first woman governor of Texas, Miriam A. Ferguson, banned foreign-language instruction saying, "If the King's English was good enough for Jesus Christ, it's good enough for the children of Texas." You know, it is that kind of limitation that breeds intolerance.

And the last point I'd like to mention is that my definition of an intolerant person, or a fanatic, is one who says—and this is true, by the way, I've heard it said, I'm not making it up—"God would be on my side if only He knew all the facts." When I was at Notre Dame two years ago, I dealt with a tough issue. I said that I pity those who invoke the name of Jesus in order to buy or sell cars by discussing hypothetical questions like, if Jesus came back, would he drive an SUV? Would he buy a Volvo? I am outraged by the idea that not only Jesus but God has been commoditized, vulgarized, homogenized and commercialized, even demeaned. We should always remember, whether we are Muslims, Jews or Christians, that the third Commandment states, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." Unfortunately, that idea was long ago abandoned, perhaps not even consciously. Nowadays, God is a companion, traveling along with you, gambling with you in casinos, playing games like football. Sadly, we have transformed everything into a commodity in the name of religion. And organized religion, hence, is suffering. The issue of loneliness, the quest for spirituality, the meaning of the agony of suffering, the quest for eternity, the struggle with our conscience—all private endeavors have receded in this age when even religion itself has become a commodity.

Joyce Davis

Thank you very much. You are right. Consumerising religion, we know that well in the US, yes. This has been a magnificent and, I think, engaging discussion, but I am going to do something a little more provocative now. So bear with me. We really have some of the world's greatest religious thinkers amongst us. So before we let them leave, I would ask each of them to spend about a minute, if you can, telling us where you get your own personal strength; your personal connection to whatever it is that sustains you. If it is not religion in your case, Mr. Makiya, then what is it? Where do you derive your strength? Because you clearly are people who are having an impact on the world. How do you do it? Can we start with the Bishop?

Michel Dubost

You know, my neighbor is a Muslim, so I like chatting with him, but I do it after reading my Bible and praying to my God. That is my life. I hope it gives me a sense of justice. There is so much violence and hatred that I just have to do something.

Michael Melchior

This is a very difficult, very personal question. We work on these issues because we have no alternative. At least, I don't know of any alternative. If we stop or give up that would certainly be heresy. I am not just saying heresy in the religious sense. One of my secular friends in Israel tells me, "We disagree about the existence of God, but we agree that God has created man in his image, which means that we must respect our fellow human being." We have no choice, the paradigm shift, which we need in the world today, has to push us to make those extra efforts for the future of the world.

Dalai Lama

I think it is difficult to give one answer, because I think that there are so many sources from which you get

your strength. Broadly speaking, our strength comes from a combination of intelligence and warm heartedness. I think everyone, not only believers, any successful human being, can benefit if intelligence and warm heartedness are combined.

Tomáš Halík

I believe in God and it gives me the liberty to be human and not to be God, not to play the role of God. My faith is also a source of humor and self-irony. I remember a book of letters written by children to God. One little boy wrote only one sentence: "My God, I do my best, your Franz." - I am trying to do the same.

Soho Machida

My strength comes from a prayer, which I want to share with you right now. I don't know how appropriate it is in this kind of conference, but it doesn't take time. Wishing you all good health and happiness. Thank you. . [Chanting followed.]

Vartan Gregorian

I owe everything I have to my peasant grandmother, who was illiterate, who raised me. I grew up as an Armenian in Tabriz, Iran, which had a predominantly Muslim Turkish community. My first language was Armenian, my second was Turkish, the third was Persian. And then the Soviets came and I had to learn Russian. When the Soviets left I had to go back to Persian. Subsequently, I went to Lebanon where I learned French and Arabic, and last, I learned English when I came to the United States. These many languages provided me with the perspective of both an observer and a participant. They helped me to see possibilities. As a boy I admired the beauty of Christianity but at the same time I read humanistic literature. At Stanford, my teachers introduced me to the Koran, to the Bible, to the Torah and other holy texts, plus the entire humanistic texts of the East and the West. Having read all of this, I could not possibly not be tolerant or develop sensitivity towards my fellow men and fellow women and their yearnings in this life and their hopes for the other. However, my grandmother, who did not know the poet Saadi, always told me, "Before you say anything, you should always think whether what you want to say is more important than silence." In other words, listening is important. It gives you time to think about what you believe and how you cope with your righteousness while dealing with the righteousness of others. Thus, my peasant grandmother taught me the first rules of tolerance and I'm very grateful to her. She would have been very surprised to see me sitting here next to the Dalai Lama. She would have thought it absolutely impossible. But about that one thing she would have been wrong. This is indeed a world of possibilities.

James Zogby

Three sources. One is the strength and the steadfastness of my wife, mother of five and grandmother of four, who has faced hardship and pain and remained strong throughout. The image of the crucified Christ cannot help but inspire me as it always does, and then finally, it's the faces of those in prayer, especially those most oppressed crying for release. When I heard Joan Baez singing and thought of the origin of that music in the fields as I often do, the souls of black folk as W. E. B. DuBois said, "teaches us faith and the yearning for something more." I think it is in the souls of those most oppressed that we ultimately come to believe.

Joyce Davis

Well, on behalf of my fellow panelists I would like to thank you for your patience and your tolerance. We hope you have benefited by this discussion, and we hope that you will have some sense of strength as a result of it. I have one more thing to tell you, so stay tuned. There is going to be, from 16:00 to 17:00, an interfaith meditation at the church of St. Salvatore. His Holiness the Dalai Lama will be there along with Tomáš Halík. They will be leading this interfaith meditation to which you are invited.