

# OpenTheo

## Overcoming Echo Chambers | Robert George & Hamza Yusuf

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### The Veritas Forum

Can Christians and Muslims get along in America? That's the question we asked Christian intellectual and Princeton law professor Robert George and Islamic scholar and Zaytuna College president Shaykh Hamza Yusuf at the San Francisco Jazz Center this Spring. George and Yusef, who are good friends, believe that unity across religious backgrounds is not only possible but also necessary, and their friendship serves as an embodiment of that belief. Over the course of their conversation, moderated by Trae Stephens, principal at Founders Fund, they discuss unresolved tensions, the role of religion in civic life, and a potential path forward.

### Transcript

It's important to acknowledge the good in other people's faiths and the good that people do motivated by their faith. Can Christians and Muslims get along in America? That's the question we asked Princeton law professor Robert George and Zaytuna College president Hamza Yusuf at the San Francisco Jazz Center this Spring. George and Yusef, who are good friends, believe that unity across religious backgrounds is not only possible but also necessary, and their friendship serves as an embodiment of that belief.

Over the course of their conversation, moderated by Trae Stephen's principal at Founders Fund, they discuss unresolved tensions, the role of religion and civic life, and a potential path forward. Hello, thank you to all of you for coming and thanks to Toby for the gracious introduction. The goal here for setting is just to introduce our panelists, our speakers, and then we'll dive into a set of questions and as Toby said we'll open up to audience Q&A after that.

So first I'd like to introduce Hamza Yusuf, he's one of the world's leading proponents for classical learning in Islam, and is the co-founder and president of Zaytuna College, which is just across the bridge here in Berkeley. He's also the advisor to the Center for Islamic Studies at Berkeley's graduate theological union. He serves as vice president for the

Global Center for Guidance and Renewal, which was founded and is currently presided over by Sheikh Abdullah bin Baya, one of the top jurists and masters of Islamic sciences in the world.

For almost a decade, Hamza has been consecutively ranked as the world's most influential Islamic scholar by the 500 most influential Muslims, which is edited by a university professor of mine, Janis Bizito and Ibrahim Khaleen. Robert George is an American legal scholar, political philosopher and public intellectual, who serves as a McCormick professor of jurisprudence at Princeton University. He lectures on constitutional interpretation, civil liberties, philosophy of law and political philosophy.

He is considered to be one of the country's leading conservative intellectuals. Aside from his professorship at Princeton, he also serves as director of the James Madison program in American ideals and institutions, is a Herbert W. Vaughn senior fellow of the Witherspoon Institute and a visiting professor at Harvard Law School. He has served as the chairman of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom and also as a member of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

He also has a list of medals attached to his name that would make George General Patton blush, but I won't get into all of those. Importantly also for this conversation, he's a Roman Catholic and also dear friends with Hamza. Some of you may have seen, they have had a number of conversations that you can find on YouTube in the past, which are incredibly interesting and worth checking out afterwards if you want to learn more about the things that they have been talking about.

So given the title of the forum tonight is overcoming echo chambers, perhaps the best way to kind of kick off as a question for both of you is why is it so important for our society to overcome echo chambers and have meaningful conversations about important topics such as the Islamic Christian dialogue. Go ahead. Well, I'll be happy to begin.

And first I want to thank you Trey and thank Toby and Jennifer and the Veritas Forum and the Templeton Foundation and everyone who made this evening possible. And thanks to all of you for coming out to share this evening with us. I want to say what a special joy it is.

It always is to be together with my beloved friend, Hamza Yusuf. Hamz and I have not only engaged each other in wonderful conversations. We've worked together on some very important topics.

We've made common cause with each other in the fight against pornography, for example, or the defense of human life. It's just been an honor for me to be working arm in arm with my dear brother Hamza. If people think that it's not possible for Christians and Muslims or Christians and Jews or Muslims and Jews or Christians and Muslims and Jews and people of other faiths to actually work together and to love each other, well all I

have to say to you is you're wrong.

In my experience, it's the easiest thing in the world to do. If you just have goodwill toward each other and you're willing to learn from each other and be supportive of each other, then you can work together more than easily. We have so much in common, so much more in common than what divides us and there's joy in the work that we're able to do together.

Now to answer your question specifically, there are a number of reasons today. Why it's important for people to work together, especially believers to work together across the historic lines of religious division. But let me begin with one that is not just for today, one that is timeless, one that is fundamental.

And that is if we work together, we will get nearer and nearer and nearer the truth. If we engage each other, we will learn from each other. And that I think is something that is intrinsically worthwhile, inherent to our fulfillment as human beings, fulfilling of our nature as human persons at all times and in all places.

So even if we didn't have other good reasons, which we do have today for working together and reaching out the hand of friendship to each other, there's that eternal reason, perennial reason to do it. And I've learned so much from Hamza and from other friends, Jewish friends, for example, my Protestant friends. I've learned so much in these dialogues that I'm just grateful for the opportunity to engage with them.

And there's no one from whom I've learned more than from Hamza. And then of course there are reasons that are quite urgent today. There are no newsflash that religious divisions are causing bloodshed around the world.

They're causing us to live in fear, in fear of each other. They are tempting people, even good people, to stoke fear of people of other faiths. And I've said time and time and time again to anybody who will listen.

This is wrong. It's stupid, but it's also wrong. I as a Christian say to my fellow Christians, I as a conservative plead with my fellow conservatives, saying it is wrong to fear our Muslim fellow citizens, and it is wrong to make them fear us.

I have so much in common, so much to learn from each other, so much to accomplish common values of justice and decency and goodness, so much to achieve by working together, that being afraid of each other, making the other people of the other faith fear us, is a dreadful, horrible, ungodly thing. God does not want this. I can think of no honorable faith that would worship a God that would want that kind of division leading to hatred and to bloodshed.

So we have a special reason today to come together as Hamza and I have done to extend the hand of friendship to each other, and to encourage everybody in our own

communities to do the same across these lines of historic religious difference. If we're going to live in peace with each other, then we need to understand each other, and we can only understand each other if we're willing to meet and respect and talk with each other and work together for common values. Hamza.

All right, well, thank you. First of all, I want to second your gratitude to the very toss and for the people coming out. I think in terms of an echo chamber, if I understand it correctly, we tend to listen to only those things that agree with us and increasing our society.

It seems it's becoming more and more difficult to have dialogue. Our culture was founded upon this idea of freedom of speech, and yet it's, I think, harder and harder for people to speak freely because there's a lot of animosity towards views that are different from mine or yours. And so I think it's absolutely necessary for us to share dialogue so that we can know one another.

The Quran has a verse in the 49th chapter that says that we created you the royal. We created you from a male and a female and made you tribes and communities, and the commentators say tribes share a father and community share a tongue or a culture that binds them. So people are either bound these familial, patrilineal or matrilineal bonds, or they're bound by a culture and a language.

And then it says the reason, in order for you to know one another, to come to know one another, and the understanding is not to hate one another. And then it says surely the noblest of you in God's sight are the most conscientious, the most virtuous, the most pious. And so we know, for instance, in the United States that people that know Muslims tend to have a more favorable opinion of them than people that don't, we've got a lot of statistics.

We have a, there's a character in the Islamic tradition called Jo'a'a or Moola Na'asul-Din. He's a comical character, but he's also, he's a sagely character, and there's a story that he was on the side of a riverbank, was a wide river. And a man came to the other side of the bank and shouted over to him, "How do I get across to the other side?" And Moola Na'asul-Din said, "You're already across the other side." And I think there's a lot of truth in that, that we tend to just see things from our own perspective, and we fail to see things from the other side, listen to their pain very often, because a lot of it is just acknowledging the pain of the other.

Which we tend not to do very often, and I'll just give you one really brief story about that for me personally. My great-grandfather was involved in the mining of the Wasabi Range in Minnesota, which is from Lakota, where Minashota. And I was with this man, Chief Arval-looking horse, who's the pipe carrier for the Lakota people, and we were in the interfaith thing.

But I stayed with him in the house. We were in the same place. And at breakfast, I told him what my grandfather was involved in.

I said, "Could you find it in your heart, just to forgive my family for being part of what you consider desecration?" And he's very honorable and noble person, but he just didn't say anything, and I thought that was really stupid. And later on, the next day, we were at an interfaith, and he was sitting next to me. And he said, "We were asked to say something good about somebody else's religion, which is one of these interfaith things that they sometimes do." And when it came to his turn, he said, "I don't really have anything good to say about the only other religion I know, but I will say that I forgive my brother's family, and he gave me a big hug." And it was very interesting what happened in the room, because a lot of people came up to me afterward and said, "That was so powerful, like what happened." And I think for me, a lot of restoration will come by just acknowledging the pain of the other, and what's been done to them.

Even if it's a perceived grievance very often, it's a type of humility. In our tradition, the Prophet said, "He taught people to always look to themselves and not try to blame." In the Quran, the character that blames is the devil, whereas Adam and Eve took responsibility in the Quranic narrative, whereas the devil blamed God. And they didn't blame the devil in the Quranic narrative, so very often we tend to blame others and forget the importance of taking personal responsibility.

Hamz, I agree with you that it is important to acknowledge grievance, even if we don't necessarily agree that the grounds of the grievance is just. But I also think there's a positive side. It's important to acknowledge the good in other people's faith, and the good that people do motivated by their faith.

It was a very important moment in my tradition. In 1965, when the Catholic bishops of the entire world gathered for what was called the Second Vatican Council, a great council of the church, it rarely happens in the history of the church. But in 1965, there was a council in Rome, and the council produced a small number of very important documents.

And one of them was called *Nostra Etate*. And that document has become widely and rightly known as a document that's important for Jewish-Christian relations. It creates anti-Semitism, the church's historic involvement, alas, in anti-Semitic acts, the unjust charge of diicide against the Jewish people, and so forth.

But although that's primarily why the document is known to the interested general public, there's something more in it, and it extends to other faiths, including very notably Islam. And that is a whole section devoted to acknowledging, and I quote, "all that is true and holy in the other faiths." It's teaching Catholics to not simply tolerate other people and their beliefs as misguided and wrong as they are, but to understand that much in their traditions, especially the monotheistic traditions the church fathers teach,

especially the monotheistic traditions, to acknowledge that there's much that is good and holy. That's a very important thing, because when you recognize that there is much, not just a little bit, much that is true and holy in another faith, you're not just tolerating people anymore, so long as they stay out of your way.

Now you have a ground for engagement.

[MUSIC] Yeah, let's dive into that a little bit. Part of knowing someone is understanding what the core messages, what the fundamentals are that they believe.

So let's go back and forth with, for both of you to answer this, what is the core message of your faith? And what is the message of hope for the world that comes out of that today? Well, the Quran basically states that all peoples have been given messages, and so there's this idea that actually there has been divine communication since the beginning, and that every peoples have had a messenger. Some, the Quran says we've told you about it and others we haven't. We tend to look at revelation as being within the Abrahamic, the Semitic people, whereas in the Islamic tradition it actually says there's no people that has not had prophets come to them and teach them some basic truths.

And those basic truths are that there's only one God, and that God has absolutely no likeness to any created thing. And that God created us purposefully and intentionally to know, to enter into a communion, a personal relationship with that God, and that God has given us basic guidelines. That in the Islamic tradition are, the 10 commandments are in the Quran, that those are the most foundational that are in the 10 commandments.

And those basic moral guidelines are meant to be acted upon, and that we will be resurrected. We believe in a bodily resurrection that we will be resurrected, recreated in what's called the, adjusted the bakki, the eternal, or an eternal body. And we will be judged, and that people will be taken to account for their time that they carried on the earth.

And the essential message is to align yourself vertically with God through belief in that God, and to align yourself horizontally with that God through virtuous behavior, through knowledge and through will. And so, to sum it up, Faro D'Norazi, one of our great theologians, said, "I could sum up the entire message of Islam in two statements, adoration of the Creator and service of His creation." Robert? Christian faith is faith in a person. It's faith in Jesus Christ, understood to be the son of the living God, the second person of the blessed Trinity.

Christianity believes that there is one and only one God who is eternal and transcendent, but that God is triune, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That man fell, and sunk in sin, man was helpless to save or redeem himself. And yet God, in His infinite love and goodness, knowing that man was incapable of saving himself, took on the responsibility.

God became man. That's the doctrine of the incarnation. Jesus, the eternal second person of the blessed Trinity, is a man.

He's truly God and truly man who suffers to pay the price of sinfulness, making sure then that it is possible for us to be redeemed, us to be saved. So Jesus, the message of Christianity is that Jesus is our Savior. Jesus is our Redeemer.

Our faith is in Him as a person. And that we are called to enter into a truly personal relationship with Him. One that will begin what culminates eternally in a participation in God's own life, in the divine life of the Trinity.

St. Athanasius once summed it up in a way that would be very provocative to many ears by saying that God became man so that man can become like God, or more like God, that man can be brought into the eternal life, the divine life of God himself. That is what redemption and salvation consists in. So, like our Muslim brothers and our Jewish brothers in the developed Jewish tradition, we believe in a bodily resurrection.

And we believe in that because we believe the body is no mere extrinsic instrument of itself, that the person is not a ghost residing in a machine, is not a psyche or a spirit that just has a material shell or that inhabits a material vehicle. But the body is part of the personal reality of the human being so that to exist fully and rightly as a person as God has created us is to exist in a bodily condition and not simply as a separated soul. So that in eternity we exist as we exist today bodily, but our bodies will be glorified bodies.

Their bodies raised from the dead to eternal life in the same way that Jesus was resurrected, having died on the cross for our sins to redeem us. He was raised on the third day by his father. To bodily life, he wasn't just a ghost.

When Thomas, so we now know him as doubting Thomas, happened not to be present when Christ appeared the first time to his disciples after his resurrection. When Thomas hearing the story said, "I refuse to believe unless I can explore the wounds in his hands with my fingers or the wound in his side where a Roman centurion had thrust a spear." Jesus then came back, appeared to him and said, "Thomas, I want you to believe, please explore the wounds in my hands, explore the wound in my side." And we are calling it clear that Jesus now in his glorified state was not just a spirit, but a body. Jesus, the God-man, Son of Man, Son of God.

And we are called to live a Christ-like life. That's the life of virtue. That's a life that is consistent with friendship with God.

We believe in free will. We believe that God's offer of friendship can be accepted by us or alas freely rejected. Sin is what separates us from God.

By our own desire, not by God's desire, we are taught as Christians that God wills all to be saved. We believe in the universal salvific will of God, but we don't believe in

universalism. Because we do believe human beings have free will.

They can reject God's offer of friendship, thus juming themselves to hell. That heaven is not a lock, that we, through our own actions, can reject God's hand of friendship. And instead of taking, being taken up into the eternal divine life of the Trinity, we can be excluded from that.

Can I just, just, just because I wanted to add just that, because we believe in the prophets, the Muslims acknowledge the Abrahamic prophets. That's Al-Kitab. Can you explain that concept? Al-Kitab literally means the Bible, right? The biblios, the book.

And so the people of the book are generally the Jews and the Christians, but it can also specifically in the Quran refer to the Bible. For instance, in Nisa, it says that the Jews will believe in Jesus before the end of time. So it asserts the Jewish acceptance of Jesus.

But Jesus is one of the exalted prophets. He's one of the five exalted prophets in the Quran. And so Muslims have to believe in Jesus.

They also believe in the enunciation. They believe in something akin to the Immaculate Conception, because there is a sound hadith in a Bohari and Muslim. The prophets said that the devil prods every human being, before they come, when they come into the world, except for two.

Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Jesus are the only two that were not prodded by the devil. And the Muslims also believe that Mary, who has an entire chapter named after her in the Quran, is one of the most exalted. She's the only woman mentioned by name in the Quran.

And there's a very interesting reason for that. But she's mentioned 34 times in the Quran, but 11 of those times she's only mentioned for her intrinsic virtue, not as the mother of Jesus. So a third of that is literally because she's Mary.

And another very interesting thing, and you're a genealogist in Arabic genealogy, so you'll appreciate this. In the Quran, in Arabic, when you say the son of so-and-so, you drop, if you have the first name and then the son and then the father's name, you drop the alif. With Jesus, the son of Mary, the alif is not dropped in the Quran.

And what it's saying is that Jesus is the son of Mary. So it's exalting her stature. It's not just saying that he's the son of Mary, but he's Mary's son.

So it's focusing on Mary's extraordinary role as one of the kumad, the perfected women in human history. She's one of them. So there's a very, very strong relationship that the Quran has with the Christian tradition.

There's an entire chapter named after the Eucharist, Al-Mā'idā, and many other aspects.



But the Muslims do not believe in the sacrificial lamb. The Muslims believe that human beings have direct access to God for forgiveness, and it does not go through some type of vicarious atonement.

Many times, those of us who are Christians fail to understand our own faith, because we forget its rootedness in the Jewish scripture and in the Jewish witness. We forget about the importance of the Jewish prophets, including on the Christian interpretation, the foretelling of the coming of Messiah. Sometimes we even forget that Jesus is not just the second person of the blessed Trinity, the son of the Virgin Mary.

He's also the Messiah's long-promised to the Jewish people, and there's a particular Christian interpretation, which of course is different from the modern Jewish interpretation of what that means to be the Messiah, and different from the Muslim interpretation of Jesus' Messiahship. But Christians do, when they understand their faith properly, understand that this is Jesus the Messiah. Christianity fought an important battle very early on in the life of the church over whether the church would remain faithful, would understand itself as rooted in that Jewish witness.

There was an important figure who was declared a heretic named Marcian, who wished to cut off Christianity from its Jewish roots. He wanted to treat the God of the Old Testament as a different God from the God of Jesus and the New Testament to repudiate the God of the Old Testament. In fact, to reject the Hebrew Bible, but he lost.

What was established as orthodoxy within Christianity is that the whole of the Hebrew Bible, the whole of the Jewish Scripture is canonical, is authoritative for Christians. And then Christians add the New Testament. So there's nothing in the Christian case, there's nothing different in what Christians called the Old Testament or what Jews would simply call the Bible or the Scripture.

There's nothing different from what is in the Jewish Bible. Not only are some stories taken from the Hebrew Scripture, the entire Scripture intact is taken as part of the Bible, and then the New Testament is added to have the complete Christian Bible. Although Protestants and Catholics have some division about some books that... Protestants call it the Apocrypha and Catholics call it the Deuterocanonical works.

I sort of favor Deuterocanonical. Let's shift gears slightly. Each of you devotes a significant amount of time to promoting religious freedom.

Why do you think a thriving society requires religious freedom and pluralism? Well, we have one of the foremost constitutional experts in America. Well, let me not address it. You're too kind to say that, but let me not address it as a constitutional question, although if you want me to get into that boring stuff, I will.

I'm easily provoked. But I want to, as a moral matter, why I think even someone who is

not a person of faith, just relying on reason itself should affirm a robust, not just a narrow, crab, stingy conception of religious freedom, but a robust conception of religious freedom. And here it is.

Fundamental rights protect human goods. We have certain rights because there are certain aspects of human well-being and fulfillment that are important, intrinsically worthwhile, and worth protecting. And there is a particular human good that is protected by the right to religious freedom.

And that human good, which, controversially, we could label religion, but it doesn't matter what the label is. Let me describe it and hope that you'll agree that it is something worth protecting. This human good has really three dimensions.

And they're essential to our humanity. The first is the importance for all of us, for every human person, to ask the basic fundamental existential questions, the questions of transcendence and meaning. Where did we come from? Are we merely material creatures, or do we transcend our materiality? Is all there is a world of material and efficient causes, or is there something more than that? Are we truly rational? Are we truly free? Are we not merely material, but spiritual as well? What gives life meaning? Is there a law higher than the merely human law that states impose, under which the law of states can be held in judgment, as Martin Luther King said, in speaking of the natural law and the law of God, as the law to which the merely human laws can be subjected to scrutiny, in light of which we can subject human laws to scrutiny and judge them to be just or unjust? So that's the first part of this good, the raising of the fundamental existential questions of transcendence and meaning.

And then secondly, for every human being, it's important that we not only raise those questions, but that we do our best really honestly to answer the questions. To not just go along with whatever is trendy, or what might get us ahead, or make a good impression on other people, but to really try honestly to answer those questions truthfully. Nobody, even an atheist, even Richard Dawkins or Christopher Hitchens would want to go through life, not asking those questions, or answering them in a hypocritical way.

No one would want his children. Richard Dawkins wouldn't want his children to go through life, never asking existential questions of meaning and value and transcendence. No matter how they would come out in the end, whether they would share his atheistic convictions or not, he would want his children to ask those questions and to answer them honestly.

And then the third part of this human good is to actually live your life with authenticity and integrity in light of your own best answers. Don't pretend to be what you're not. Don't pretend to be a believer if, like Camus, your honest investigations have brought you to non-believing conclusions.

Or don't pretend to be a non-believer when in fact your honest conclusions have brought you to belief because, I don't know, maybe because you teach in a university, you're afraid other people might think you're a dumb person. Don't hide. Live your life with authenticity and integrity.

And religious freedom protects the right of all of us to fulfill that aspect of our nature that consists in the asking of those questions, the honest effort to answer them, and to live with authenticity and integrity in light of one's best judgment. That's why we need to protect religious freedom. Over to you, Thomas.

Well, I mean, I think that for me the number one reason is it's the best way to prevent hypocrisy becoming very common amongst religious people because I think when people are forced to do something, they do it because of the social pressure on them. It's very interesting to me that Islam was born in the crucible of religious persecution. The prophet was persecuted for 13 years and really almost for the entire 23 years because they were still trying to eliminate his community well into the tradition.

And the prophet's all I said, one of the things, one of the hallmarks of his religion was religious tolerance. Instead of being xenophobic, they were actually xenophilic. And if you look at a book that Michael Phillips Penn recently published called "When Christians First Met Muslims." One of the interesting things is that we tend to hear from the Byzantine tradition, like St. John of Damascus, and a lot of polemics against the Muslims.

But when you actually look at the Syriac sources from the heterodox churches, especially like the Coptic Church, which was considered by the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church to be monophysite. I mean, they like DF Site. They like to use another term for it, but they were seen as a heretical.

The idea that Christ had just one nature, not a divine and human nature. Orthodox Christianity teaches that Jesus is both human and divine, that son of the Virgin Mary, son of God. So when the Muslims came into Egypt, the Coptic Church actually welcomed them.

And there's ample evidence for this historically. The Muslims, as they got more and more power, became more and more intolerant. But overall, these communities flourished in the Middle East.

And you have the Chaldean Church. And your own family comes out of one of the Eastern Catholic churches. But people forget that there's several million Coptic Christians in Egypt, that the Muslims did not annihilate these people or forced them to convert.

The Quran very clearly in the second chapter in 256 says, "Let there be no compulsion in the religion." And even though some people argue that that was abrogated, and there are Muslims that argue that that was abrogated, that's not the

dominant position of the Muslim tradition. And the Muslims actually practice that. There's evidence in Fred Donner's book, "Mohammed and the Believers," who's a very well respected historian of early Islam.

Fred Donner shows how the Muslims and Christians were actually sharing churches because there was not mosque space. And so they were allowing the Muslims to pray in the churches in that early period. So I think there was a lot of religious liberty.

And that's why it's very tragic for me, the current climate now, where you're seeing these ancient churches that were there long before the Muslims, 600 years before the Muslims, that are literally being persecuted in places. This is one of the great blemishes on the Muslim Uma that will, I think, go down in history as a great black spot in Muslim history. But I personally agree with Thomas Jefferson that whether my neighbor believes in one God or 20 gods neither robs my pocket nor breaks my bones, but I think it's very important for us to acknowledge that people do have their own conscience.

And that conscience sometimes will lead them to disbelief. And I actually tell the students at Zetuna that in the end, this is not a dogmatic tradition. There's a dogma in the tradition that you can learn, but in the end you have to believe it yourself.

You don't inherit faith. You can inherit it from your parents. But real faith is not inherited.

It's something that you have to believe yourself. You can make your own personal commitment. And that can only come out of free will because we also share the belief that the human being is a moral agent, has moral agency.

And if they're compelled or forced to believe something, then therefore going their moral agency. And it just contradicts the whole idea of moral agency and the open invitation of God. And that invitation in order to be truly open has to be open for rejection.

So one of the historical reasons for atheists and agnostics to kind of reject all forms of faith is deeply rooted in the history of religion. And these are kind of intrinsically connected in many ways. What do you think are the challenges that exist within both the Islamic and Christian community today that are creating those potential stumbling blocks? Well, all faiths, all the large world historical traditions of faith have their black spots.

But certainly Christianity does, and I'll speak here just for Christians. The Hamza has spoken in the Muslim case. Those black spots represent cases where Christians have behaved in unchristian ways.

It's when they betrayed their faith. Even when supposing they were acting in the name of their faith, sometimes acting in bad faith in the name of their faith. We're at our best, we're at our most tolerant, we're at our most respectful to people of other faiths when we act in a way that's consistent with, say, the teachings of Jesus.

Consistent with the understanding that faith in principle cannot be compelled. This goes to a point that Hamza just made. Coercive force, whether the coercive force of a state or the coercive force of a parent, can cause someone to perform the outward indicia of faith.

But coercion can't reach the internal acts of intellect and will that are the substance of faith. All it can do, the coercion, the compulsion, is breed hypocrisy in authenticity. So it's not just that trying to compel faith is bad.

It's quite literally impossible. You will compel external behavior, but not internal belief, the internal acts of intellect and will that are the stuff of faith. Now, part of the reason I think that many people today reject religion is the black spots.

But I have to ask them, why do you regard those black spots as black spots? Why do we think it's good not to oppress people, not to exercise coercion in the case of belief, not to conquer people, not to dominate people? We can't say, well, it's just obvious that those things are bad. Alexander the Great didn't think they were bad. The people who labeled him the Great didn't think they were bad.

Julius Caesar didn't think they were bad. There are great traditions of thought and action that think that glory, that a well-lived human life, reads some nichas, is a life dedicated to exercising power over others to conquest and domination. Who taught us to be against those things? Who taught us that there is a better way that those things are bad? Our great traditions of faith.

So often our friends who reject religion, who embrace unbelief because of the black marks, don't realize that they themselves consider these to be black marks as part of the legacy of the best in these traditions of faith that through our culture they have appropriated. So I would invite everyone to try to think of what the faith teaches in its purity and integrity and to test whether we think we ought to embrace a faith based on those teachings, not on the black marks that will always be there as long as human beings exist because human beings are weak and vulnerable and fallible. Christians believe fallen.

Human beings are going to make mistakes including moral mistakes and sometimes monstrous moral mistakes. That's going to be the reality. And they'll make the mistakes in the name of religion or they'll make the mistakes in the name of non-religious ideologies.

If we look at the record of unbelief of secularism, of atheism, do you think that stacks up especially well against religion? I could name you some names, but I don't have to because you all know those names. So the common counter that you would likely hear to that is that yes, maybe we have learned something about universal moral codes through great religion, but do we need the superstition? Do we need the religion? Can we not just

hold the universal moral? There's an idea that religion is the scaffolding that we've built our civilizations with and now that they're built, we can just remove them. I think a stronger argument is that it's the foundation.

And one of the interesting things to me about secularism is that secularism came out of religious tradition. It didn't birth itself. The original secularists, all of them had religious training.

They were informed by religious belief. So when you remove these things, you fall into real utilitarianism and your ethical foundations become very difficult to ground in a tradition. This is an argument.

But the other argument just about the black spots, I mean there's probably in some ways, human history is one big black spot. But I think one of my favorite people, Helen Keller, said that the world is filled with suffering, but we have to remember it's also filled with the overcoming of suffering. That there's another side to history that's very, it's not in the books.

It's not all the mothers that suckled their children. It's not all the selflessness and the sacrifice that people have done for others. Those things are not written in the history books.

The Muslim sages have always looked at our planet as an insane asylum. And religion is the forazine that really keeps the demons at bay. And when you look at healthy religious societies, and unfortunately it's getting more and more difficult to see that.

And there are reasons for that because in many ways things are breaking down and not because of religion, but in fact in the absence of religion, there's a great deal that's breaking down because religion is about community. It's about fraternity, not just the fraternity of the ecclesia or the jama'a, or that community, but Benny Adam, that we are the children of we're one family. And all families have the uncle that they don't want over for Thanksgiving, but he comes anyway.

This is just part of the human family, that there's people in the human family that are difficult. But I think that the loss of religion, I think when it's finally gone, because our tradition actually says that atheism does win in the end in this world, when it's finally gone, I think it's going to be a very horrible world. Well this much I'll give you, when religion recedes, it's not as if there's nothing.

A vacuum is created and something will fill that vacuum, something will play the role of religion. It will function as a pseudo-religion. Some secular or secularist ideology will come to replace it, it might be utilitarianism, it might be Marxism.

Or as I like to call it in San Francisco, SoulCycle Ecumenicalism. There you are. And Byron Mentalism, it will be something, it will be whatever the latest trendy ideology is.

And believe me, people will believe it with ferocity and passion. And just as has happened with great traditions of faith, there will be people who will be willing to do very bad things to other people in the name of this religion, their pseudo-religion, thinking that they are doing good, thinking that they are doing in a sense the Lord's own work. So I think we really don't have an option of no religion, which is why we should take the question of what religion we ought to subscribe to very seriously.

And we should honor, if I can quote from my own Catholic tradition again, all that is true and holy, all that is good and holy in the great traditions of faith. Now that doesn't mean embracing religious relativism. That doesn't mean you think that all traditions of faith are correct.

If Christians believe Jesus is the Son of God, the second person of the Triune God, Muslims cannot in conscience believe that. Jews cannot in conscience believe that. Paul actually said it was a stumbling ball.

A stumbling ball. That's right. And foolishness and the Gentiles.

That's right. So it can't be true that Jesus is the second person of the Blessed Trinity, the Eternal Son of God, and that he's not. One of those is right and the other is wrong.

But that doesn't mean that someone who thinks the Christians are wrong about this, or the Muslims or the Jews are wrong about this, must believe that there's nothing right about the other Christians. Or that we worship a different God. Or that we worship a different God.

Because I think this is one of the important, if you look at Shalosa, Shalosa, Asar, Akhadeem, which is the third king of the Creed of Momoyanities. A Muslim reading that creed can believe in I think every single point, except for perhaps the one that says that Moses is the greatest of the prophets. And the Torah will never be replaced.

But all the other points about God, no Muslim would have any problem with that creed. The Athination Creed is a lot more difficult. Because I think there's 31 points in that creed.

And Muslims would have a difficult time. But so would the Jews for most of those points. But in Nostra, Akhadeem, it's very clear that we worship the same God.

And that's the Catholic belief. The conceptions of that God are different. But we're talking about the Creator of the heavens, the Earth, the Resurrector of the dead.

The one that brings us before the throne on the day of judgment. Not in any temporal or spatial sense. And who will judge humanity.

That's the same God we're talking about. It's certainly the Abrahamic traditions. And so

this idea somehow that Muslims worship Allah.

Or say Allah is another way that that's said very often. As if it's a different God. Even though Ilo is the only Aramaic word that Christ, Ilo, Ilo, Ilo, Ilama, Ilama, Sabartani, which most Arabs could understand that because it's so close to Arabic.

But Ilo, Ilo, him is the Hebrew. And the Christian Arabs say Allah forgot. They call Jesus even Allah, the son of Allah.

And so this idea somehow that Allah is this alien God, it's the Semitic word. It's one of the Semitic words for God. And so I think that's important just to acknowledge that.

I often make this point to my fellow Christians who wonder or sometimes even claim that Allah is not God, that the Muslims worship a false God or worship a demon. As Hamza hinted earlier, I'm ethnically Syrian. My father's people are from Syria.

Christian Syrians, Eastern Orthodox Syrians. So I grew up with my grandparents blessing us in the name of Allah. That was just, I knew that was God.

That wasn't an issue to me. So I was a bit taken aback the first time I heard a Christian say when I was an adult, "Well Muslims don't worship God, they worship Allah." And I said, "Well, huh?" So the Christian critique of Islamic fundamentalism or extremism has tended over the last 20 years to have been something along the lines of, "Well, Islam needs to go through the Reformation." Because we had this kind of bloody history and the enlightenment came around and we had a Reformation not to mention how bloody our own Reformation was. But yeah, I'm going to step aside on this Reformation.

But you've said before that you believe that Islam doesn't need to go through a Reformation. They are going through a Reformation. This is a Reformation.

And they need a council of chance. Without very good theologians. So yeah, why is Reformation actually pretty decent? I mean, I prefer the Catholic iteration.

I always knew Hamza was a Catholic Muslim. You just didn't have the tone of a Protestant Muslim to me. So what is preventing Islam from experiencing a council of Trent moment? Well, I think part of it is that the Muslim world is in great disarray right now.

I mean, Donald Islam, I just wrote a little piece about the abode. I said the abode of Islam is derelict. The plumbing is not working.

The water is not working. I believe the foundation is solid. That we can renovate the house.

But the house is derelict. And I think there's a lot of problems. There are a lot of reasons for it.



Overall, just the curvilinear nature of civilizations. Islamic civilization has been on the downside for quite some time. It was noted in the 14th century by Ibn Khadun that things were looking bad.

Right? And so we also, I think the traditional, and I'm going to do a little pitch for liberal arts right now, but the traditional model of Islamic education was similar to the Christian model of Christian education, which is that you needed a well-rounded person. Most religious scholarship now is entirely focused on religious training only. Whereas in classical Islam, the Muslim scholars were great mathematicians.

Many of them were at the cutting edge of science. Much of Islamic theology is actually deals with Euclidean geometry, oddly enough. A lot of the great theologians took a lot of insight from Euclidean geometry, which the book of Euclid was something that was mastered by all traditional Muslim theologians.

So I think a lot of it is just a loss of a kind of holistic view. And right now you have, in the Muslim world, you have governments that have been entirely in control of the religious tradition, which for me, it just deracinates religion of its life when governments take over religion. And that thriving traditional antagonism between the religious leadership and government, which was there.

There was a very interesting tension between the two. They were loyal citizens, but there was always a tension between them. That tension has largely been lost, and that has led because of this stagnation.

It has led to reactions from within the Muslim community who now see traditional scholarship as scholars for dollars. That these are people that are just in the employment of tyrannical governments. And so demagogues have arisen out of that vacuum.

And now you have, unfortunately, the worst thing that you can do is hand religion over to uneducated people, especially religion is dangerous as Islam, because Islam does have, in the Quran, there are verses that are very difficult to understand without serious training. I'll just give you one example. There's a verse in the Quran that says, "La chujaduru alaikrab illa-bility hiyya asan illa-lil-baramou minou." Do not enter into dialogue with the people of the book, except in the best way.

And then it says, "illa-lil-baramou minou." And the word illa there usually means accept, but in that verse it actually means, and also even the people who are 'valamou'. So there's an example where an Arab, if they hadn't been trained in classical scholarship, they would never be able to understand that. And when Graham Wood came to me, he actually interviewed me in my house.

And he was talking about ISIS and how they have their own version of the... And I said, "Where did they get their training?" And I pulled out a book, which is called "Moorley

Labib." It's a book that is the last book that you study in grammar. It's two volumes just on the prepositions and particles in the Quran. And it goes into great detail, and I was just telling Robbie George about the Oxford comma, which I'm a fan of, you know, that there was a case in Boston, where literally, because there was an Oxford comma omitted in a state contract, they were going to end up having to pay, possibly, \$10 million.

People don't realize that grammar matters. You know, let's eat grandma. Is she going to be dinner, or is there a comma after let's eat? Grammar matters.

I mean, I actually want Google to put something on the internet that automatically erases anything poorly written. Because all of these negative comments would disappear. Freedom of speech is not for private companies.

But it would just eliminate all that negativity. Because whenever I see really vile comments on the internet, they're always poorly written. It's just so interesting to me.

So I think this might be a good transition point for a couple of things. The first is, I'm going to ask one more question, but fire away with the text messages. I'm getting a little... In good grammar.

In good grammar only. Yes. If you have multiple points to your question, make sure that Oxford comma is... Can I follow up on something that Hamza said though before you ask your next question? Famously, Father Richard John Newhouse, the late Father Richard John Newhouse said of the New York Times editorial page that according to the New York Times, and the New York Times' view, the only good Catholic is a bad Catholic.

So I unfortunately find a lot of conservatives and Christians who believe the only good Muslim is a bad Muslim. Or a dead one. They think that, yeah, of course there can be good Muslims.

Those are the ones who don't follow Islam. Those are the ones who don't understand Islam. So what is that rooted? Well, it's rooted in the bad example that's set by Islamist terrorists, of course.

But it's also rooted in a profound misunderstanding of the teachings of Islam itself and a distorted picture of the history, which you've done a lot to correct a little tonight in other places. I think if conservatives and Christians understood better the teaching of Islam and if they were willing to look at the interpretative issues in Islam the way we look at the interpretative issues in the Bible, they would realize that the world would be better not if Muslims become bad Muslims, but if Muslims become better Muslims, the better they are as Muslims, the better they will be for everybody as citizens, as friends. You know, and I mean this in all seriousness, I truly believe if you look at what's happened in the Muslim world over the last several decades, and just since 9/11, the physicians for social responsibility estimate about 1.3 million Muslims have been killed, the vast

majority of civilians, men, women and children, on this war on terror.

Since 9/11, there's been about 130 Americans have been killed by Muslims in the United States. During the same period 240,000 Americans have been murdered by other Americans. I think I truly believe that Islam, given what's happened in the Muslim world and the type of difficulties that Muslims are living under, would drive a lot of people crazy and had it not been for religion, I think you'd have a lot more mad people in these environments.

It's religions, the only thing that they're holding on to because Islam is a religion of hope. So as if you said this. And I truly believe that there would be far more terrorists if there wasn't Islam to keep these people in check.

I really believe that. Yeah, you've fallen in love. I think they're in spite of most of these people do not have real religious teachings.

And the few that do, we have always had in the history of Islam a group that has been barbaric. We had a sect called the Hashashin who were literally terrorists during the Seljuk period. They would literally go in and kill it like the Sakurai in the Jewish tradition.

So these are problems of religion. I call them the externalities to use an economic term. When you produce something, you have externalities that are either positive or negative.

And religion also has externalities. It's like nuclear power. You can use it to light houses or you can use it to blow people up.

But nuclear power also has that waste product. And so religion has a type of, it's embedded in the religion. I think it's part of the divine dysfunctionality of this place.

I really think part of the reason that this place has designed the way it is is to drive people to God. If it doesn't drive you to God, it will drive you to drink. Well since you brought that up, our mutual friend Jennifer Bryson was a civilian employee of the military.

And she was for two years, I think two years, it might have been a little more. A quantano. An interrogator at Quantano-mo.

And one of the things that amazed her was that almost none of the people she interrogated themselves had any real knowledge of or deep commitment to the religion in the name of whom they had committed acts of terror. She said some other things were the widespread history of drug use among them. The pornography that was rampant among them.

She said there was, in one case when they took apart a computer, when they looked into

what was in the laptop of one of the terrorists, they were shocked because it wasn't stuffed filled. There was no pornography there. They had become so accustomed to computers.

Now these weren't devout people who were stuffing their computers full of pornography. For whatever reason, they had latched on to Islam, but they were not model Muslims. From a Muslim point of view.

Well this book which is a thinking person's guide to Islam, which was written by Prince Azib and Muhammad from Jordan, he has the last section of his really good book, but in the last section he has a lot of the Jordanian intelligence about ISIS in it. And many of them have criminal backgrounds. So unfortunately this is a reality, but the vast majority of Muslims you're looking at 23% of the planet is Muslim.

And the idea, first of all, waging war on one out of every four people on the planet is insane. And the religion itself, which has been enlisted as religion is often enlisted, in a lot of these wars are about over resources, over land, over disputations, over occupation. And so religion just gets enlisted.

The Palestinian Liberation Army was a completely secular organization. And the Islamists only arose in the late 1970s and 80s. Before that the Palestinian resistance was largely communist.

Yeah, so, and there's nothing unusual about this. Even Stalin, the atheist communist Stalin, when he had to fight the Second World War and lists the Orthodox Church. Right.

Into the blessing of the Russian soldiers and the blood Russian armaments. This is a constant through history. And on the interpretative questions, I think it's important for Christians and Jews to understand that in our scripture there are a problematical, difficult to interpret passages.

What about the passage in which God commands genocide, the slaughter of women and children among the Canaanites? How are we to interpret that? Is the God we worship a God who orders genocide? Well, the great teachers of tradition, such as the medieval Jewish and Christian, the great theologians of the medieval period Jewish and Christian alike, tended to treat those passages in spiritual terms. The Canaanites represent the evil within us. The sin within us.

And the genocide, the destruction of the, of the, of the, even the women and the children represents the complete destruction of the sinfulness and of the sin within us. Now look, if we Christians and Jews are permitted to interpret our scripture that way, then we have better, we have better, permit Muslims to interpret their scripture. And there are many, many of the great scholars, that's how they interpret a lot of these verses.

They tend not to, in the Islamic tradition, isaturicism, which is called botany or occultism,

is when you deny the outward meaning as well. So the inward meaning, the outward meaning, there's a very interesting balance and play between the two, but there are no verses in the Qur'an that call for genocide. There are no verses in the Qur'an that call for, and the few verses that are there, like the ones always quoted from Toba, the ninth chapter, which says, "Ochtunun mushirikin, you know, kill the polytheists wherever you find them," was specific as a permission for people who had attacked the Muslims at that specific time.

And although, and I'm going to be honest about this, I, there are interpretations in Islam that are very problematic. And we do have a history, they're isolated and they tend to be minority opinions, but they are there. And it's very important for people to understand that there's no vigilantism in the Islamic tradition.

All of the verses that deal with these type things are the prerogative of a government. And this is why one of the things that the so-called Caliphate did, which was very clever, was to declare that it was a government. Al-Qaeda never did that.

By the Caliphate, you're talking about ISI al-A'am. I am talking about ISIL, yeah. So, but what they did by doing that, they were in a sense attempting to legitimize their, their, their positions about jihad and these things.

Because al-Qaeda, technically by classical Islam and by, you know, all the scholars of Islam, nobody can declare jihad except somebody who is in authority to do that. And, and, and, and so, and, and then you get into debates about whether it's offensive and defensive. Many, many scholars have said jihad is only defensive jihad because the Quran is very clear that fight those who fight you.

Right? That tattoo, don't aggress on people. These are the interpretive traditions that we're trying to teach, that we're trying to. These, this is the narrative that we subscribe to.

And it's not to deny that there aren't other narratives out there. Unfortunately, there are. And some of them are quite troubling.

But the, the answer for me, Islam is not going to go away. Christianity is not going to go away anytime soon, any of these religions. And so we have to learn to find within our own traditions those things that will be most appropriate for the time that we're living in.

But from the matrix of the religion, because if, if people want just to reinvent or reconfigure the religion in their own image, the vast majority of people aren't going to accept that, that adhere to these religions. And, and that's why it's very important. But I believe that we have in our, in each one of our traditions, we truly have the resources that are, are compatible with the time that we're living in, that concord with, with the basic sensibilities of our time.

To a large degree, there's always going to be tension between believers and between the world. And there's always going to be that tension. It's the nature of, of, of the truth that we adhere to.

The world will, will in many ways hate us as believers because the way of the world is the way of, of appetite. It's the way of the, the lowest aspects of the human beings. And the way of faith is calling people to rise up to a, a much higher standard.

This is a point of convergence between Christianity and Islam. Because that's exactly the teachings of the New Testament. You find it suffused throughout Paul's, Paul's writings.

You don't expect the world to be happy about the demanding message that is preached by the faith. Let's talk about the time that we live in right now. Particularly because we're here in the San Francisco Bay area where, you know, technical, technological progress is kind of the name of the game.

We had an interesting conversation beforehand about one of the other commonalities that are being seen in the millennial cultures of, of both Christianity and Islam. Around this like kind of rise of secularism and identity as being a, a bigger part of religion than the actual fundamentals of the faith. How do you think progress and the actual like progressive movement, the, the kind of technological utopianism, transhumanism.

How do you think all of this is playing into the rise of secularism and how it will affect people of faith in the years to come? Well, let me give it a start. First, I'm very concerned about identitarianism. I see it doing nothing but harm, whether it's on the left or on the right.

And regardless of who started it. And when I see it creeping into my own faith, creeping into Christianity where people treat Christianity as fundamentally an identity and not a faith. And build politics around that identity.

I think that's a, that's a nearly blasphemous thing to do. I think our culture is suffering very badly from the divisions that are provoked and exacerbated by identitarianism. I'm not at all surprised by the rise of this phenomenon called the alt-right.

Although I deplore it. But it is what one would expect when identitarianism is the order of the day in our politics. So it's a matter of very, very grave concern to me.

And I think that all of us within our different traditions, especially our religious traditions, but not exclusively our religious traditions. Also our ethnic communities and so forth. But especially within the religious traditions, I think we have to fight that impulse just as hard as we can.

I think we have to fight it, fight it off. What we need to be loyal and faithful to is the teachings of our faith. Not to some identity that we adopt based on the fact that we

happen to be Christians or happen to be Muslims.

That kind of tribalism will undo this great noble experiment in order to liberty that the founders of our nation for all their faults bequeathed to us. And I think it's too precious a treasure to permit that to happen. Now on the technology front, I'm all for progress.

I'm all for technology, relieving suffering, enhancing the quality of human life. All that's good, but it's got to be within moral boundaries. The integral human good has to be taken into account.

And in the name of progress, we can degrade our very humanity. And that's something I'm concerned about. There are almost no new bad ideas.

Almost all bad ideas are actually old bad ideas that are being revived. There's a very bad idea that's being revived today. And it's an idea that Christianity had to wrestle with early on in the first two or three centuries.

And that idea is called Gnosticism, Genos-T-I-C-I-S-M. Gnosticism among other things proclaimed, taught. And there were various forms of it.

Some were highly ascetical, some were quite the opposite, highly licentious. But one of the things that was a constant within Gnosticism was the idea that human beings are not their bodies, but merely inhabit them. That human beings are psyches, are minds, are spirits, are souls, that merely inhabit and use as extrinsic instruments material bodies.

This is the idea that's captured in the concept of a ghost in a machine. Ghost in the Shell, which is actually a movie that just came out two weeks ago. Not surprised.

I'm not surprised at just what this age would produce. A lot of the films are not... Back to our old... And what that loses sight of is the profoundly important truth that our bodies are not merely extrinsic instruments of ourselves as persons who inhabit them. Our bodies are part of our personal reality as human beings.

They are share our dignity. So our bodies matter. This is why, as I said earlier, in Islam, in the developed Jewish tradition, in Christianity, this stress is put on the resurrection of the body.

To be who we truly are as human persons means to live as a bodily person, not just as a non-personal body. That's inhabited by a non-bodily person. That's not what human beings are.

But I think if we slip into this mistake, there will be a continual descent as our sense of our own... The worth of our bodies, the meaning, the importance of our bodies is lost. You see this in the area of sexual ethics very much. This is why I think you have such a challenge today to Christian and Jewish and Islamic sexual ethics.

You see it in the aspiration, the utopian aspiration to upload human consciousness into a computer. So we do away with the body altogether and we can just have our satisfactions. Our bodies don't exist simply to, as mechanisms, as extrinsic machines or instruments for generating somehow psychic satisfactions in our... In our minds or in our... So it sounds like you would say that you don't think we live in a simulation? No, we're not in the mix.

We live in reality and part of our reality is our embodiedness, our bodily selves. So those are some concerns that I have. And the matrix they were influenced by Gnostic thought.

So what Star Wars, right? The Force. The Force has one of the other features of Gnosticism is its man-icketyism. Yeah, that there's not an all-good, beneficent loving God.

There's a gemiurgic sort of force that has a dark side and a light side. I mean, Christianity in its struggle with Gnosticism prevailed, but it was never able to drive a stake through the vampire's heart to keep it in the coffin. It keeps popping up.

It did in the Middle Ages. It did in some ways in the early modern period. Cartesian, the Cartesian, Descartes conception of the person is fundamentally Gnostic, and now it's back again today.

I mean, I think in some ways it would be some divine irony if the Terminator scenario actually played out because the things that we've created to serve us then turn on us. So in some ways it's almost, it would be divine justice because God created us and to serve him and we've turned on God. Yeah, if the divine power of reason, the gift of God, that the most godlike thing about us were used to degrade our very humanity, that is a profound tragic irony.

So I think we should all be really concerned because things are happening at a very fast rate, and one of the things about this idea of progress is you can't stop progress, but there's ample evidence historically to say that you can at least slow it down. The Ottomans, for instance, prohibited the use of the printing press for 400 years, and people think that they did it because they were against books. It's not true.

They actually did it because the scribe lobby was so powerful. So it's basically just like today. It's basically just like today.

It's a crony capitalist. The scribe lobby could literally, they had master calligraphers that spent a long time to learn how to do this. They had 400 people in a factory.

Each one would do a page, and they do a book in very quick time. So the idea of bringing in these machines to replace all these people, what would the people do? That was basically the idea behind it. The other thing is they didn't like the idea of pounding for the Quran.



They thought, first of all, to write it backwards was sacrilegious because that's something they do in magic, and then the other was the pounding. So that's just an example where they actually thought about it and decided that it's not really a good thing to eliminate all these jobs. Like now all the cab drivers with Uber.

Now Uber, I think, is getting in trouble and there's some other group coming up. But now with the automation, we're going to be driving driverless cars pretty soon. There's pretty good argument because apparently several of them drove across the United States and got into three accidents, all caused by human drivers.

So the actual automated cars didn't get into accidents. And I think these are going to be the arguments that are used. And even surgery and things like this, robots are doing a lot of things.

I don't think people are really quite aware of what's actually happening out there. And I was in at the world I can outperform. They had a meeting here with a lot of CEOs from Silicon Valley.

And one of the things that was said in there was we need to prepare the Americans for all the jobs that are going to be lost in the coming years. And they were talking about white collar jobs. They were talking about labor.

They were talking about white collar jobs. So these are very serious concerns, I think, for us. But also technology is changing us.

One of the things about in the Catholic tradition and also in the Islamic tradition, there's something called acedia, which is one of the seven deadly sins. And acedia was called the Nune Day Devil. Acedia is actually, it's translated as sloth, but it's not really a good translation because people think sloth is laziness.

Acedia is a type of spiritual laziness, but the hallmark of it is distractibility. And it's one of the real deadly sins. It's a mortal sin because if you get into an acetic state, you'll never focus, constantly distracted.

And one of the things with young people now with all this technology is they're losing the ability to concentrate. They're losing the ability just to be present, to focus. They're constantly being distracted.

And so that distractibility of these machines that are calling us. One of the things about compulsion, we talked about no compulsion in religion. Many of us are living lives of compulsion that were compelled by things internally and externally.

And one of the most important aspects of religion is to free people so that they become not slaves to themselves or to their lower impulses, but literally they're freed by becoming servants of God in control of themselves, of their lower appetites, the

concouper soul, the irascible soul. This was at the heart of these religious trainings. That's why discipline was so important.

The idea of just disciplining the soul, spiritual practices to do this. And so I think the idea of what Richard Weaver called this stereopticon, you know, this idea at his time, he was writing about television, radio, and media. Whereas now if we think about, I mean he was worried about it back then.

Now we have all of these things. And we've got so many people. I mean we had some girl the other day was taking a selfie and fell off a bridge.

You know, I just, it's just so strange to see what's happening. When you look now, everybody wants to take pictures. And I always, you know, I remember years ago I was in Morocco and there was a very old Moroccan man.

Somebody wanted to take a picture. And he said, you know, he went with his heart. You know, take the picture here.

You know, keep the memory here. And I think one of the things, we now see more images in a day than a Victorian saw in their entire lifetime. And one of the things about traditional metaphysics is images are very important.

And images, there's a belief that images are embedded permanently. That's why whenever I see these, you know, they have these ads for films, there are scenes in this film you'll never forget. That's a reason not to see it.

You know, because people are watching now like torture, they're watching, the average American child by the age of 18 sees about 18,000 murders by the age of 18, simulated murders. And you just imagine what these things are doing to our psyches. Although there's also like the quote from, I believe it was Douglas Adams who wrote, "Hit Checkers Guide to the Galaxy" where he said, "Anything that exists before you're 30 is not technology.

It's just old. Anything that exists when you're 30 is technology and it's crucial to your daily life. And anything that exists after you're 30 is evil and really, really scary." And so there's like this question of like, do we look back over time? And the things that we're saying today are the same things that people were saying 50 years ago or 100 years ago.

Anyway, totally different discussion. I want to make sure we get to some of the questions because I'm getting these hilarious messages on my iPad from someone that's saying like, "You need to stop. This is ridiculous." So let's just get to a couple of them.

Incidentally, the conversation was ridiculous. No, like we're going over time. So the conversation is great.

Incidentally, we've covered like eight of the ten questions already, which is really cool. It's all the way up to you. So here's a unique one.

What is the responsibility of us as Christians and Muslims when it comes to participation in social movements of people who might have different perspectives? So, participation is of the religious and social movements. Well, in the United States, almost all the great reform movements of our history, abolition of slavery, civil rights movement, the movement to protect women and prevent child labor, the movements against alcohol, against now the trafficking, especially trafficking of women into the sex trade. All of these have been religiously motivated and inspired.

I mean, think of the civil rights movement as a good example. Martin Luther King was the Reverend Martin Luther King. His chief lieutenant was the Reverend Ralph Abernathy.

The Reverend, Josea Williams and others, they not only spoke religious language, they were clearly motivated by the fundamental Christian principles that they held as a matter of faith. So it would be very odd to suppose that you could or should detach religious witness from movements for justice or to overcome social ills. We now have the opioid crisis where I grew up in Appalachia.

I grew up in West Virginia. And in lots of other places in the country, rural as well as in some cases, urban, Rust Belt cities and so forth, you have a terrible crisis with opioids. Well, that in a fundamental sense is a spiritual crisis.

If it's going to be addressed, it will have to be addressed in spiritual terms. And churches and other religious organizations are going to have to play a very important role. And people motivated by faith to make the kinds of sacrifices that pretty much in human history, faith alone by and large motivates.

Well, those sacrifices are going to have to be made. And people of faith are going to have to be the ones who are making those sacrifices. We need today, people like Martin Luther King, people like Dorothy Day, people of courage rooted in faith, who are willing to address spiritual problems in spiritual terms.

That's how I see it. Well, I totally agree, if very the change about the ending of certainly the transatlantic slavery, those were evangelicals in England, people like William Wilberforce, Hannah Moore, one of the great women of England, and a freed slave there, Aquino, the Clapham 12, that they were motivated by religion. Even the Catholic Church was supporting labor unions 120 years ago when it was not popular to support them because they believed in just wage.

You have Ambrose in the Catholic Church and one of the Church Fathers has incredible stuff about poverty and how the rich Christians, he said, you're thinking about what

stones you're going to use to pave the front of your house. And when there are people starving, they need your attention. So it's not like these things go away.

We're dealing with perennial problems. And so I think religion has to be at that. And there are different capacities.

I don't think everybody, we need contemplatives. Oh, yeah, absolutely. We need scholars.

It's a very good point. Yeah, we need people. And this one of the problems, I think, in the activist community is if you're not an activist, you're kind of dismissed as being part of the problem.

Whereas you might be doing things that are really important in your own area. And so all of us are pressed for time. So I think it's very important that people understand that we should support good causes in prayer, certainly.

And if we're able to, to support them in other ways. But there's a lot out there going on. I think one of the big challenges that we have right now is the mental illness.

I think we're in very unstable times. And I think the opioid crisis is really part of that. I actually had fentanyl, not illegal fentanyl, but legal fentanyl.

And I had it in the 1990s. And I broke them on a very bad break. And they gave me fentanyl.

And I really understood. I had a spiritual experience on fentanyl. So I really... Not to be tried at home.

I really can understand how people would want to get to that place that fentanyl got me there very quickly. Because the world is very painful. And one of the things I mentioned before in conversation was Robbie, but Karl Marx, the quote that they use about opium, what he actually said was that religion is the sigh of the oppressed.

It's the heart of a heartless world. It's the opiate of the masses. And what he was saying is that religion, that what we need to do is create this perfect world where people won't need religion to numb their pain.

That was his argument. But he was acknowledging that religion actually act as an opioid. And because now people no longer have religion to go to, opium becomes the drug of choice because substitutes for God.

So people are substituting opium for the ability to turn to God. And I think of just the blues tradition in the United States. Blues came out of spirituals.

The African American people in this country, they sang blues songs. Martin Luther King

used to quote... He quoted a blues song. I've been down so long.

Down don't mean nothing to me no more. It's like the blues help people get through, singing help people get through great trials and tribulations. And so I think religion has that incredible capacity, true religion, to do that.

And that's why for me, religion has been an incredible source of solace. For me, that I know that that door is always open. And that's a door that should be knocked on constantly.

The door of prayer. Prayer is efficacious. Prayer works.

We're not talking to ourselves as some would imagine. We're talking to a living eternal God that listens. And we'll give people what they need to get through the trials and tribulations that he's allowed to exist in this world.

And we're going to lay some emphasis on a point that Hamza made. And it's about what we as individuals are called to. One of the great things about traditions of faith is that they have given us the truth that we are not all called to the same thing.

Some of us are called to married life. Others to single life. Some of us are called to religious vocations.

Others of us will, even if we're devoutly religious, have our calling in the secular sphere as lawyers or doctors or salespeople or auto repair people or what have you. We're not all called to be activists. Some of us are.

But we're all called to be active. Even if our activity is the activity of contemplation, the activity of prayer, religious sisters in a convent are active in leading their contemplative life, and praying for the reconciliation. A really good example of this is if you look at Edith Stein, incredibly active life, and when she entered into the Carmelite nunnery, 1933.

After her conversion. She converted in the 20s. But she was sent to Belgium in 1938 and really remarkable experience.

When she was arrested by the Nazis and taken one of the eyewitness accounts was that there were women there who were literally insane and they had completely neglected their children and the children were screaming and crying. He said that Edith Stein came into this environment. You can imagine being in a Nazi.

She was in Auschwitz. He said that she had a calm that was so palpable and she began taking care of the children in the midst of this. That's the power of the contemplative life.

If you lose those people, what you end up is we have a lot of angry people out there. Anger is not a rung on the spiritual ladder. Indignation is.

Anger is actually a very harmful force in the world. There is a very big difference between indignation and anger. One last question from the audience which I think is a great note to end on.

You might want to wrap that back. I think it's going the wrong way now. In 60 seconds each we have two minutes total.

What is the message from Islam and Christianity for cultural renewal at this point in history? I'm sorry. What does cultural renewal look like in the Islamic tradition and in the Christian tradition for the modern world? For me, the hallmark of a cultural renewal would be a restoration of beauty as a central cultural goal. All of our religions share this triad of virtues of truth, goodness and beauty.

I think one of the hallmarks that I see in the modern world is a lot of ugliness. It's become very ugly and I think for a lot of people, this is an Indian carpet and the Indians would never do a carpet like we do carpets today. These ugly, horrible carpets that you find in hotels and things like that.

It's just a beautiful carpet. Beauty is not in the eye of the beholder. There are actually aesthetic, there are ways of determining something's intrinsic beauty.

It's not simply just what I see as beautiful. There really is the human being who's in a healthy condition will actually see beauty wherever it is. That's why we're struck by mountains, that's why we're struck by waterfalls, that's why we're struck by forests.

A lot of people are in just nature deficit disorder. They're just not going out and just experiencing primeval nature, just being with God's creation. If you go to malls, I was just in Singapore and we're walking through and it was horrible.

I get constricted in these places. These poor people walk in through these places where these bovine stairs, as if consumers and consumption is the purpose of life. We have hearts.

All of us have these incredible human hearts. When that heart is open to beauty, to real beauty, then you will see a cultural renewal. When that heart has been literally just life has been removed from that heart, people don't love anymore.

Real love, just loving another human being for a lifetime is an amazing thing to grow old with a person. People don't have the patience anymore just to be with a person, to go through the trials and tribulations of marriage. Even children, so many people aren't having children anymore.

They don't want the hassle of children. I think cultural renewal for me would be based in a renewal of the family. A renewal of just loving, just having a loving center in your being that you transmit that to other people.

But I really think beauty is something. When language is part of it, just the beauty of language poetry, we've lost. Every civilization has honored poets.

Not ours. In our civilization, it's just amazing what passes for poetry. I understand the Nobel Prize Committee's judgment.

I'm a Bob Dylan fan, so I'm going to say that was one. I'll make an exception for that. I am a Bob Dylan fan.

He had some interesting lines. With time-rusted compass blades, a laden and his lamp, sit with utopian hermit monks, side saddle on the golden calf. Of all their promises of paradise, you will not hear a laugh, except inside the gates of Eden.

It's a very beautiful statement because time-rusted compass blades, that's like religion. They're compass, but they're also harmful. They've been around for a long time, and they're not polished or honed anymore.

A laden and his lamp Islam sits with utopian hermit monks, Christianity, side saddle on the golden calf, Judaism. And of all their promises of paradise, each one's claiming, paradise is ours, you will not hear a laugh. People are taking these things very seriously, all except inside the gates of Eden.

Well, I want to say, amen, hallelujah. That's what my brother said there. 52 seconds.

Restoration of the integrity of education. Restoration of the integrity of the family. Restoration of the integrity of language and of decency and of decorum, of entertainment and of journalism and news media.

All of those, I think, are essential aspects of cultural renewal. Historians are fond of breaking up the epochs, the ages into the age of this, the age of that. And we frequently say that the medieval period was the age of faith, where faith was the standard by which everything was judged.

And the enlightenment was the age of reason, or the age of science, where everything had to be tested by science, or reason for its validity, or goodness. Well, if the medieval period is the age of faith and of the modern, the enlightenment period was the age of reason, what is our period? What age do we live in? And I'm afraid, regrettably from my point of view, we live in the age of feeling, where we think that a well-lived life is a life about feeling good, achieving satisfactions, getting what you want, getting more of what you want. It's me generation ideology that has now become the dominant understanding.

And that reduces fundamental concepts, great fundamental, essential fundamental concepts, like love to trivial things, where love becomes a feeling and emotion. Rather than what previous generations knew love to be, which is the active willing of the good

of the other for the sake of the other. Love in that sense is self-sacrificial.

Those of us who are Christians understand Jesus as the ultimate model of self-sacrificial love. It's not me, me, me getting, wanting satisfactions. It's giving, it's being self-giving, it's being self-emptying, it's willing the good of the other for the sake of the other.

And if we can only create an ethos or move in the direction of creating an ethos, where that is what our understanding of love is, of respect and the other notions that are cognate to it. If we can just get that in place, that will become the driver of a renewal of our culture. Well, join me in thanking.

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