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# IWDM Study Library

# Society’s Problems Panel Houston TX

### By Imam W. Deen Mohammed

Male Speaker: Now your host, Imam Ibrahim Kamalud-Din

Imam Ibrahim Kamalud-Din: Assalamu Alaikum, may the peace of the Almighty G-d be upon you. Dear beloved viewers, we welcome you again to 30 minutes of information, good wholesome information on American Muslim mission and focus. As you can see, we have with us today an interfaith panel and this interfaith panel consists of brothers from other religious faith of Al-Islam, of Christianity and Judaism. I'd like to begin by introducing our guests. The first person we have here is Imam W. Deen Mohammed, he is a Muslim and he is of the religion of Al-Islam, he believes in the Holy Quran and the sunnah of Prophet Mohammed and this is what he teaches. He is also the resident imam of the Masjid Honorable Elijah Mohammed in Chicago, Illinois. Brother Imam, we'd like to welcome you.

Imam W. Deen Mohammed: Thank you.

Imam Ibrahim: Our next guest is Father Bill Young, he is of the Marion Christian High School, he's a teacher there and from what I understand he is a very excellent teacher.

Father Bill Young: Thank you.

Imam Ibrahim: We'd like to welcome you to our program. Next, we have Minister William Roberts. He is of St. Stevens United Methodist Church and he is the associate pastor. Next, we have brother Rabbi Shaul Osadchey, get that name right brother Rabbi. Also, he is of the Congregation Beth Shalom and I'd like to welcome all of you gentlemen to our program. Dear beloved viewers, I wish I had more time to really tell you a little more history on these brothers because it's really fascinating and very interesting their careers and the works that they've been doing. Maybe one day soon I can get them to agree to come on my program a one-on-one, each one of them and we can interview them.

At this time, I'd like to also let you know that all of us are members of an interfaith organization called Interfaith Media Network. The purpose of this Interfaith Media Network is to bring people of different faiths together so that we can begin to work together to try and solve these terrible problems that we have in our society. This is something that's been needed all the time for us to work together. This is what we're trying to do here is to show you that it can be done. At this time, I would like to get to the questions.

What we're going to discuss is questions concerning some of the problems in our society and we want to hear the views from each one of our guests. Also, I'm thinking that there's a storehouse of information here between the brothers we have sitting here. Let's get on to the first question, the first question is, are men and women equal in every respect? I think it would be interesting for us to know how each one of you view women. Start with you brother Imam.

Imam W. Deen: They unequal in some respects.

Imam Ibrahim: What respects?

Imam W. Deen: I would say the average woman can't compete with the average man in a physical contest.

Imam Ibrahim: I see, you're saying that physically they are usually not equal?

Imam W. Deen: Yes.

Imam Ibrahim: How do you feel about the rights of women?

Imam W. Deen: Should be equal.

Imam Ibrahim: Should be equal. All right, Father Young?

Father Bill: Basically, I think go along with that, it's obviously physical differences but in terms of any kind of rights in dealing in jobs in society the rights are equal. I think women are equally intelligent and as capable of being different professions as men. If you take away that sometimes physical difference and that's not always true, it's getting narrow and narrow as the great athletes are showing us. I bet I would say they're very, very equal.

Imam Ibrahim: Thank you, Minister Roberts?

Minister William Roberts: I believe too that they're equal. In our denomination, United Methodist Church, we are ordaining women as several of the denominations are as ministers. We've got a ways to go as far as how equally they're treated. I think there's a discrepancy between what we write down in our doctrines and what our actions are. Basically, we believe in equality of the sexes.

Imam Ibrahim: Brother Rabbi.

Rabbi Shaul Osadchey: The only thing I can add to that is to simply say that as far as the Jewish community is concerned that we certainly believe in equal rights of men and women in all facets of public life and also in all facets of religious life. Although, there are various ideas about the role of women in Judaism depending on which branch of Judaism one adheres to, essentially the Conservative and Reform movement, and the Orthodox to a different extent do uphold the equal right of women in our religious affairs.

Imam Ibrahim: Now this next question, we know there's a little difference in the teachings in all of our religions. I'm beginning to find out just from that first question that they're a lot alike, but there is a little difference. Now the question I want answered here is, should that difference in our religious teachings keep us from working together for the moral and spiritual development of our society? Brother Imam.

Imam W. Deen: Well, I have to say that that little difference may be a big difference, depends on from where you're standing. Even the big differences that I see between the major faiths doesn't justify us not coming together to fight the common evils that are bothering man's life, makeing trouble for the life of man. We should be able to come together to fight the common enemy and that's ignorance, disease, et cetera.

Father Bill: Absolutely, I don't see any reason why we can't come together to work. There are some differences and I think different faiths will maybe disagree on some particular issues but there are some monumental moral issues that we can come together and we can work on. I think we've got more in common in many ways than we have apart and, we just got to do it, we're never going to conquer some of the problems if we don't come together [crosstalk] so absolutely.

Minister William: I believe in one G-d, it seems to me gives us a place to stand so far as faith is concerned. Therefore we have the capacity to be able to do some things together because of the values that are different religions present us with, the certain claims on us. We believe in one G-d and that G-d has claims on us, claims on our society, we ought to in as many ways as we can try to measure up to those claims whether it's along moral lines or ethical lines or just the way that we treat each other and respond to each other. There are lots of things, very positive things that we can do and we ought to address ourselves to those things.

Imam Ibrahim: Rabbi.

Rabbi Shaul: I'll just say Amen.

[laughter]

Rabbi Shaul: I just add that I think one of the basic criteria for any meaningful dialogue begins with a mutual recognition of the legitimacy and the authenticity of our respective religious beliefs. I think when we're able to acknowledge that then were able to have productive and fruitful communication and perhaps really make some headway in terms of solving mutual problems.

Imam Ibrahim: Really, good. Now, the next question is a question concerning an issue that I think has been on the burner for maybe- well quite a few years now and that one is the question of creation and evolution. It seems that the scientists, they hold on to evolution and religious people say that creation, that G-d created everything at once other, especially man. Now, what I would like to know is you, you brothers view on that creation and evolution. How do you view that?

Imam W. Deen: Do you have to start here?

[laughter]

Imam Ibrahim: Rabbi, we'll start with Rabbi.

Rabbi Shaul: I'll be happy to. From my perspective, I don't see any conflict between the teaching of evolution and the belief in the Bible, I don't think they're incompatible and therefore I see no particular conflict. The only conflict I see is when the teaching of the Bible's account of creation which is essentially a religious teaching is injected into our public schools, I see a problem there. I believe that the explanation of the why of creation and not the how of creation but the why of creation belongs in our churches and in our homes and amongst our religious institutions. I don't believe it belongs in the domain of the school but other than that, I see no problem and in reconciling the two.

Minister William: I agree with the Rabbi, I do have a problem when we're presented with the concept of evolution as not being a way that G-d could have created us. If G-d chose to create us over or create the earth and the heavens over long periods of time. Basically, the book of Genesis still even though we may look at it that way we can still accept what I believe that the book of Genesis is telling us about creation. G-d did do it all and how he did it is maybe not that important and perhaps we've made too much of an issue of this.

The basic thing seems to me is that a loving G-d did create us and how he did it, to me, if he did it through evolution which I see no reason for us to personally for us to dispute, if he did it that way, then that's to me a very beautiful thing. I know that there are people that disagree with me and I respect their right to do so.

Father Bill: I think we'd be about the same position, the Bible, even the Bible itself gives two different accounts of creation in Genesis and it's a matter of you're trying to synthesize all of these things together. I guess from a Catholic perspective, it would basically if G-d allowed our physical bodies to somehow evolve and we know that our bodies develop and all that, we can probably say that at some point in time he gave us what we call the soul which makes us essentially different from animals. If G-d wants to do that over 10 million years, I'm not going to tell G-d he can't do that.

It's a middle ground but I think we make a bigger issue of it than it needs to be, I think we've taken the whole thing of creation and creationism and made that a vehicle for other things that are going on. I think it's that's one of the things we have to do the Bible doesn't prove one way or the other and evolution doesn't prove one way or the other. Somehow we have to put all those things together and we've got to be careful of making issues of the wrong things.

Imam Ibrahim: True. That the Bible is not scientific textbook is it sometimes.

Father Bill: It's a religious book.

Imam Ibrahim: Sometimes I think somebody is trying to get us off track.

Imam W. Deen: I would agree with everything that has been said.

[laughter]

Imam Ibrahim: Okay. Now, the next question is dealing with some of the problems in our society, that's really threatening all of us today and our families. You know that we are plagued now by immorality in our society and it's really getting out of proportion and crimes like drug abuse, sex abuse, child abuse, alcoholism and drunken drivers are killing and maiming hundreds of thousands of people every year. Now, what do you think is the cause of this and what do you think the solution is? How should we go about solving this problem?

[laughter]

Imam Ibrahim: Minister Roberts, you really go ahead. Anybody?

Imam W. Deen: I think we should understand that just like society is much very much like human being in its health. We have our healthy days and our bad days, good days and our bad days and we're seeing some of the bad days of the body in society. You see? I think we just have to use the best of medicine and create the best environment and just work against it very rationally and with love for even the worse off.

Imam Ibrahim: It's like the doctor who works on us over a period of time sometimes to get as well.

Father Bill: I think I would probably say that all of those things are somehow a result of sin. We live in a world that is not perfect, we know our human experience tells us that our world is not perfect and underlying cause of all those evil is sin and that's a nice theological way to say it. In particular circumstances such as alcoholism which is a disease, it's a real human weakness and a human frailty and it comes from a lot of things. Our society perhaps contributes a lot because we are becoming a very fast fix society, take a pill for this, everything has to be solved right away. Americans have a terrible problem with patience, we are not a patient people.

If a problem takes more than a week to solve then it's far too long. We have to learn from our brothers and sisters human community and other parts of the world that it takes longer and you have to get out of that pleasurable, that hedonistic type thing where we can solve everything right away. There's just, I guess I could go on for hours on that, that's a huge problem but basically, I think it's a result of sin that we have as the Bible teaches, we have created within ourselves a distance between us and G-d because of our sin.

Imam Ibrahim: I noticed that in all of our scripture, G-d tells us about patience. He always puts that out front you must know that, you're right about that. Minister?

Minister William: I certainly agree with what Imam and what Father Bill have said, the home and family today are bombarded to the values of our society or accepted on a large scale as being always there and always presenting families and homes with this option or that one, buy this buy that, use that plastic money and they're just all kinds of pressures. There's the general anxiety that comes about because of the fact that the world is on edge right now, the situation with Russia and the United States and generally, the whole worldwide situation is [crosstalk].

Father Bill: Anxiety has a lot to do with it?

Minister William: There's a great deal of anxiety, all these things it seems to me are converged with this general problem of that Father Bill was talking about, this problem of sin. I think there's some confusion and I--

Imam Ibrahim: I'm sure there is, I'm confused about some of this.

Minister William: I think a lot of us are and maybe though the secret is going to at least be manifested by the [crosstalk].

Imam Ibrahim: Let Rabbi deal with it.

Rabbi Shaul: I'm not sure, I can offer any better advice that was given but I think to talk about it in this context is overwhelmingly intimidating. There's so many political, social economic facets of all this that it just boggles the mind but it just perhaps one general observation. I think one of the things that all of those complex factors have done is has caused us to focus more on the individual and less on the community, less upon the cooperative interdependent nature of people and moved us from a position of viewing us as in need of each oth er's help and guidance to a position where we think that each one of us can solve the problems ourselves for ourselves.

I think that's a dangerous trend that's been developing in our society.

Imam Ibrahim: What we need is more cooperation, that's beautiful. Anybody else wants to make a comment on that particular [crosstalk]?

Father Bill: I listening to a friend of mine give a talk on that and he was talking about television, this television bad. He said, "You know what television sets are?" Then he goes to some families where I come from and everybody has their own set, there's four and five sets in a house and everybody go in their own room and watch whatever program they want and they never have to make a cooperate decision. They never have to decide something for the common good from the time they're six or seven, they grew up just going off in their own little rooms and we encourage that individualism.

It's a small thing like that, it's a very small example maybe which we're talking about of how it fits even into our families and it sounds so good, doesn't it? Where everybody has their own set, and we don't fight. And maybe we ought to fight it, it's really good to fight so that we can come up with the idea of common good.

Imam Ibrahim: Sometimes I think maybe once a month at least once a month they should just not watch television. I believe the family will come close together, they begin to get to know each other, the family had just gotten divided and that's really creates problem. Children don't know the parents, parents don't know the children. Now, here's a question on unemployment. Most of the time, you think of unemployment you don't think about religion or religious people but now we have a severe problem of unemployment in our society today.

Is there anything that religious leaders or religious people can do to help solve this problem? What suggestions could you give?

Imam W. Deen: I know I can speak for our religion and also for Christianity as it used to be lived in the poor Black community. We used to consider idleness a sin and the Muslims for Muslims, idleness is still a big sin and I don't think any Muslim person should accept to be idle even though the jobs are not available. We should find something constructive to do and find some way of earning a decent living by decent means while we at the same time try to influence the powers that be to give more attention to the need to create jobs or to make jobs available to people.

I don't think we can wait for the sky to rain down a new situation. We have to take what we've got and make it work for ourselves and not give in to this temptation just to be idle and wait on a welfare check or waiting on somebody to give you something.

Imam Ibrahim: Just anyone make comments on this because our time is getting short. Anybody who wants to.

Minister William: The churches are somewhat limited in what they can do about the unemployment situation. I do think that Christian people speaking as a Christian, we should inform ourselves as much as we can on the political issues and on the candidates and try to go toward things with our nation, our politics to produce the best economy that we can and stimulate the possibilities for employment.

Father Bill: Basically, that's again for those big, big problems, it's hard to say.

Imam Ibrahim: Okay, We have time to talk about one more question. This is something that's really been an issue and this is more of a religious question I suppose. Abortion, there's been quite a controversy about that as to whether it should be made legal or under what circumstances should it be permitted. This all comes under family planning also is included in that. They say that the family planning and the idea of abortion is in some cases because of poverty or just to make it easy for parents because of their careers or they just don't want all their time taken up to raise children. I'd like to know what are your views on the abortion and family planning? Is there any time that it should be permitted?

Imam W. Deen: Right away, (unclear) sources of authority for us in our life is the Word of G-d. I think right away of a verse in the Quran that says, "Do not kill your children for fear of want". Out of the fear of want. If I'm making my family small because I fear that I won't have enough food for them or if I'm trying to improve the material situation for myself and my wife and perhaps the one or two children we have and I say, "Well, another child would threaten this level of comfort that we want," then I would be un-Islamic.

I'll be going against my religion to do that but certain situations where life is threatened, the life of the mother's threatened then that would be an altogether different situation.

Father Bill: Basically, I would say and the Catholic Church would say that human beings are human beings whether they're inside the womb or outside the womb, humanity is humanity and it's not up to us to make the choice. G-d is the author of life, he's also the caller to death. We all have to die. None of us is going to escape death and perhaps if the mother's life is threatened perhaps it is the mother's time to die. Who are we to say when it's somebody's and especially when we're dealing with a conflict of two human beings. We're not talking like in an accident. Human beings are human beings and we just have to say the right to life is the right to life.

Imam Ibrahim: Who do you think should make that decision, if the mother's life is threatened?

Father Bill: It has to be G-d. It's a rarity, it doesn't happen all that often and we have to use all our terms of medical science and all complicated thing but basically we think that we would be G-d.

Imam Ibrahim: Minister Roberts.

Minister William: I can't really speak for my church. I can't say that in every case abortion should be turned down if there's a request for an abortion but it's something that we ought to tread very carefully with or if there's incestuous rape or some such situation is there.

Imam Ibrahim: I don't mean to, our time is just about up...

Rabbi Shaul: The Jewish community takes a somewhat different position on this issue by and large while we hold the sanctity of life we also hold the sanctity of the body. Under certain circumstances, abortion has always been permitted in Jewish tradition. We never really considered an embryo or a fetus to be a full life in the sense of what perhaps father Bill is talking about. While we accorded it the status of life, its rights versus the rights of the mother in terms of a life-threatening situation were considered secondary and there would be an issue of self-defense perhaps what we may call the aggressive pursuer principle. The Judaism has permitted that kind of situation.

Imam Ibrahim: Gentlemen, I'm sorry and this is really interesting. It's getting better all the time but we've got to wrap it up. I want to thank you very much for being on my program and I want to have you back again with your permission. Dear beloved people, I want to leave and greet you with the greetings of Assalamu Alaikum, which means may the peace of Almighty G-d be upon you. Sorry to rush off but my time is up. See you next time.

[music]

Male Speaker: The American Muslim Mission in Focus. This program has dealt with the misunderstandings that exist in this country about the Muslim religion. We hope this program will bring about a better understanding of the religion of Al-Aslam. We also hope this program will encourage all people to begin to know each other better so that we can work together to assure the survival of our country.

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[00:30:00] [END OF AUDIO]