

## ***Journeying into a Peaceful Islam*** ***A Worldview Framework Approach***

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### 1. Main concepts/issues

In the minds of many in Europe and North America, the words Islam and violence often go hand in hand. Islam is readily associated with 9/11, Afghanistan, Osama Bin Laden, car bombings, the oppression of women, the persecution of Christians, and more. But what if Islam does not really fit this caricature, or that portrayed by people such as Salman Rushdie, Ayaan Hirsi Ali, or Pastor Terry Jones (Rushdie, 1997; Ali, 2008)? Like Christianity, it is all too often simplified, vilified and misunderstood.

The media plays a major role in conveying a particular view of Islam. A constant bombardment of negative images soon takes its toll and a stereotype emerges: Islam is perceived as violent. Counter-violence from non-Muslims sometimes surfaces and individuals or groups of individuals on both sides abuse religion to advance their own nefarious purposes. The reporting of their destructive activities does little to deepen our understanding of the religions themselves.

Educational systems remain the dominant source for educating about religion. But when and where it does so, does it also convey a truncated notion? Students learn facts about religion but do these become disconnected pieces of information lacking systematic connections? Does this kind of learning influence students outside the classroom? For learning to be effective, students require a framework that actively engages them and assists them in creating meaning for themselves (Palmer & Zajonc 2010; Parks 2011). Can such a process applied to religion in general, but to Islam in particular, contribute to peace and not violence?

Religious education is best served when it establishes meaningful connections between content and the lives of students. Rather than present students with prescribed answers or information for memorization, they should be challenged to think, to derive and articulate meanings from their own experiences. Meaningful learning arises when challenging questions are posed: what are your beliefs; where do they come from; do they change over time; do they enliven or limit you, how and why; how do you know when something is true or right; how do you know what you know; what does it mean to participate in community; how do you distinguish between cultural traditions and religious injunctions; what do universal concepts such as justice, fairness, equality and benevolence mean in your context or situation? Engaging students in these questions may lead to understanding religion not as a source of strife and violence but as one to understand our deepest questions and concerns. But how do we go about this – for religion in general and Islam in particular?

A journeying into Islam that avoids narrow and prescribed formulas requires a comprehensive approach that solicits insights from a variety of disciplines. It seeks a framework that goes beyond a focus on cultural expressions, traditional dress, obligatory rituals, and specified behaviours. It entails an approach that acknowledges Islam's rootedness in the Quran yet realizes Islam is expanded by insights gained from other sources. It requires an approach that seeks wisdom in understanding how to implement Quranic principles of fairness, equality,

justice, peace and benevolence in the context in which one finds oneself. It seeks an approach that invites Muslims to freely discover for themselves how to live by the Quran's two most central tenets: submission to God and being a good person.

## 2. Methodology for addressing the topic

This colloquium will present a pedagogical model that engages Muslims (and non-Muslims) in discovering a comprehensive Islam for themselves as a journey into its two most central tenets and how to live those out peacefully in the context in which they find themselves. This model is grounded in a worldview framework that is transdisciplinary and comprehensive and seeks to present an Islam that is open, dynamic and peace-loving – not prescriptive, static or violent.

The worldview framework consists of five sub-frameworks, with each comprised of six further components. The framework is grounded in theory from a number of disciplines (Valk, 2012, 2010; Sire, 2004; Naugle, 2002; McKenzie, 1991; Olthuis, 1985; Smart, 1983; Tillich, 1957). Each sub-framework raises questions such as those stated above and highlights responses from various worldviews – secular and religious. Students are then asked for their responses in the form of a non-confrontational Socratic (“and what do you think”) query.

## 3. The status of the research at the time of the proposal.

Presented here is a worldview framework that has been used in a dozen years of teaching. It is also being used to write a book entitled “An Islamic Worldview: Religion in a Modern, Democratic and Secular State”, part of a writing project currently underway at Ankara University. The project involves a group of younger and older faculty members and PhD students who wrestled in a series of five workshops with a variety of sociological, theological, philosophical, cultural, and existential questions and issues regarding Islam. From the perspective of a comprehensive worldview framework a wide-ranging view of Islam took shape for them as they thought anew how to be Muslim in a modern, democratic and secular society.

## 4. Sources grounding the presentation

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