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ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES

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Introduction and Moderator:

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Discussant:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. McCANTS: All right. Good afternoon, everyone. We'll go ahead and get started.

Welcome. Sorry for the commotion earlier but it's going to make for a more peaceful, productive session.

We're here today to talk about the launch of our new report, Publicly Funded Islamic Education in Europe and the United States by Jenny Berglund, who is to my left. It's a great report and it is pretty hefty, too. I think it's one of the more comprehensive studies I've seen, comparative studies I've seen of teaching about Islam as a religion in publicly-funded schools at the pre-university level, so we're really excited that you've joined us here today.

Jenny, on my immediate left, is associate professor of the Study of Religions at Södertörn University in Sweden and a visiting associate professor at Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit at the University of Warwick in the United Kingdom. She's collaborated on the editing of several Swedish books, which regrettably I cannot read, and has also published widely in English on Islam in Europe Islamic education and religious education. She also works on various projects with Sweden's young Muslim community.

Susan Douglass, to Jenny's left, is a senior research associate at the Ali Vural Ak Center for Global Islamic Studies at George Mason University and an educational consultant for the Prince Al Waleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim Christian Understanding at Georgetown. She previously served as an affiliated scholar with the Council on Islamic Education for a decade, reviewing more than a dozen commercial textbooks in development, reviewing state curriculum standards, and developing instructional resources. So I think we've got a really solid panel to walk us through

Jenny's findings.

Jenny, first off, I'd like you to give the audience a sense of what we're talking about when we say Islamic religious education, because I think for many Americans when we hear that phrase we immediately think of it as being taught as a confessional subject, that members of the religious community are learning about their faith. But can you give us a sense for the term before we launch into your findings?

MS. BERGLUND: Okay. In this paper I use Islamic education for quite different things. First of all, I touch upon Islamic religious education, which is an emerging school subject in many European countries in publicly-funded schools, and so it's a school subject that is taught parallel to Catholic religious education or Protestant religious education, but is an elective school subject in some countries.

I also in this paper write about Muslim schools. Publicly-funded Muslim schools. There are, of course, many Muslim schools in Europe and the U.S. specifically that are not publicly funded so I also talk about the religious education, Islamic education in Muslim -- publicly-funded Muslim schools. And then apart from that, I also touch upon teaching about Islam as a nonconfessional school subject that is taught to both Muslims and non-Muslims in world history classes in some countries, but also in some countries in nonconfessional religious education. So I'm using the term for quite different things, but what is common to all of them is that this is public funds used for this kind of education.

MR. McCANTS: Right. And that sort of goes to the big distinctions that you bring up in the paper. I mean, I was surprised, largely because of my ignorance, but was really surprised that a number of European countries, very secular European countries teach Islam in public school as a confessional subject. I mean, it's just not the kind of thing you would ever dream of happening in the United States for any religion but in some countries in Europe that is the case. And then for some other countries you

have it about right in the middle of the spectrum where Islam is taught as an academic subject to all students which doesn't really happen in the United States either. I mean, I remember my education about Islam prior to university was pretty thin and it usually came up as part of other subjects, history or what have you. And then, of course, you get to this country or France where it's not really taught much at all as a standalone subject. So can you give us a sense of the spectrum for all the countries?

MS. BERGLUND: I think it's possible to divide the countries where I've done that into four different groups. I mean, you have like Germany, Austria, and Spain, where religious organizations can go into cooperation with a state, and like Catholic organizations, Protestant organizations, Jewish, Islamic, they cooperate with the state, and that means that they can also provide Islamic religious education as a confessional school subject within the public schools.

So, for example, in Germany, in many public schools, Muslim parents have the possibility to elect Islamic religious education for their kids. All parents, they are asked what kind of religious education they want, and in Germany, this is part of the basic law. It's in the basic law that it is the right of every parent to choose religious education for their children, and this is also in relation to the European Convention on Human Rights

MR. McCANTS: And it's offered in the public school.

MS. BERGLUND: It's offered in the public school. It's paid by the public school. So it's in the public school. It's the same in Austria. It's similar in Spain, actually. It's an old law in Spain. You have the right to choose this but it's not available in all Spanish, but certainly in Madrid and some others, that you have this possibility for religious organizations to get into cooperations. Then you have those countries, for example, like the Netherlands or Finland, who historically have not one majority church

but at least two. In Finland, the Orthodox and the Protestant church, and in the Netherlands, you have the Catholic and the Protestant church who have kind of parallel paths all the time. So now when there are more religions in the Netherlands and Islam, there is a big Muslim minority, they also have created like a parallel path, which means that they have the right to start religious schools with public funding and also to offer Islamic religious education as an elective. So it's very similar to Germany and Austria and so on, but it's based on another system.

Then we have Sweden and the United Kingdom, where you have an old majority church that has had a strong relation to the state but where now other religious organizations are offered the same possibility in terms of state funding. So there are state-funded Muslim schools in both the UK and in Sweden, but there is no possibility to get Islamic religious education in like state schools. Instead, there is a World Religions class. So religious education in Sweden and the United Kingdom, that is a school subject that you have from grade one, and for 12 years through school where you are taught from an academic perspective about different religions -- world religions, concept religion, and so on.

And then there is France, which is quite similar but also different to the U.S., where there is no possibility to get Islamic religious education as a confessional subject in any state-funded schools. There is no state funding for the Muslim schools, but there are still some differences that we can come back to that I find interesting.

MR. McCANTS: Okay.

And Susan, how does that compare with the United States? I suspect it's closer to the French model but tell me if I'm wrong.

MS. DOUGLASS: Well, in the United States, teaching about religion is the framework, the academic study of religion, in other words, and the idea is that it is

allowed to be done within First Amendment guidelines. I actually, before coming here, came from the First Amendment Center, which has since the 1950s, theologians actually set up a set of guidelines for selecting materials for use in American public schools that would conform with the First Amendment guidelines, and then over time elaborated and then disseminated these guidelines to the point where we are today. So the trajectory that has taken place, I mean, I went to high school in the '60s, not giving away my age or anything, and there was almost nothing there. Multi-culturalization was just beginning to raise its head at that time, and so from about the 1970s, 1980s, as other cultures and civilizations began to be added to what was a western civ core, other religions came to be covered under that, often within sort of a context of each civilization which, of course, most world religions never stayed within the boundaries of any one empire or civilization.

So by the 1980s, you had a situation where perhaps the textbooks would contain a few paragraphs, a subsection or something like that would mention it, whereas earlier perhaps Islam would never have come up except as an ending of a paragraph about the Crusades. So that was the status of it.

Across the late 1980s, this is when Charles Haynes of the First Amendment Center really became engaged with this work of disseminating the guidelines. Some Supreme Court cases came up about teaching about religion, religious literacy, and so on. And also history came to be part of kind of a lead discipline in social studies curriculum across the states. By the time you had the standards coming up, the standards movement in the early 1990s, religion had really taken a place, had expanded with and in a way California's framework of 1990 in the lead so that you had entire chapters and then later on across the course of the 1990s, entire teaching units that incorporated world religions and taught specifically about it. And then again, within these academic guidelines.

So the situation didn't emerge after 9/11, nor in response to 9/11. Actually, what happened with 9/11 is there had to be much more robust defense of what was already becoming institutionalized. And by the way, most importantly, all of the 50 states that had standards in the early to mid-1990s and finishing up their work shortly before 2000, required teaching about the major world religions under a sort of cookie cutter type of standard.

MR. McCANTS: Thank you.

And that's a good segue to my next question. Jenny, can you give us a sense for how Islamic religious education in Europe, and also the United States, if you want to touch on it, how it became complicated after 9/11. I imagine as Susan says, some of those complications were already there because it's tied to questions of national identity and constitutional frameworks, but after 9/11 and after, you know, various attacks carried out say in Europe or attempted in the United States, how have the politics surrounding discussions of immigration and terrorism influenced how Islam is taught in public schools?

MS. BERGLUND: I think what is quite clear is that before 9/11, in most European countries and the European countries that I touch upon in the paper, there was not really -- even if there was the right to have Islamic religious education as a confessional school subject in Germany, Austria, in Spain, and so on, in Finland, even if the right was there from far before, since the '50s, actually, for example, in Germany, it was not until the last 10-15 years that the interest on Islamic religious education has risen quite a lot. And also, the focus on Muslim schools in another way have been in the U.K., for example. So there has been quite a big shift in this. But depending a bit on then country where we are and so on, I mean, both U.K. and Sweden for example, has had nonconfessional academic study of religions, religious education since 1969, so it's an

old school subject. This has nothing to do with that. So in terms of that school subjects, there is not really any difference, but of course, the discussion around Islam has differed.

I think that, for example, in the U.K. and Sweden, the case is that the reason why religious education is taught from a comparative perspective in a nonconfessional way is because there is an idea that it's good for social cohesion for children, teenagers, and so on, to learn about different religions from an academic perspective, so you wouldn't know something about people you meet in society in the street, and also because to read the newspapers where you have religion coming all the time. But it's very clear, for example, in Germany, that even if the right to choose Islamic religious education for Muslim parents was there, the 10-15 last years, the state has actually taken initiative to start teacher education as they have in Germany, to establish chairs in Islamic theology. This is quite a recent phenomenon.

And, of course, in, for example, Germany, there is a big discussion on the ambivalence of this. Is this only state control of religion or is it the right to have the same education as all others? So it's a two-sided coin. There's a lot of discussion on what is this school subject really about. And I think in Spain, for example, there is also -- because there was an attack on the Atocha station in Spain, and after that there was more increased attention on Islamic education institutions and so on.

But clearly in all these countries where you have Islamic religious education as an elective in public and state schools, there is a lack of educated teachers, and this was also before but also the state has taken more interest in the teacher training.

MR. McCANTS: Susan, how about in the United States?

MS. DOUGLASS: Well, I could speak very briefly to Germany because I actually, as a woman from Ohio, I actually accepted Islam in West Berlin, Germany. And I do know -- this was from the early '70s to the early '80s. And I know that part of the

reason for this right not being affected for students was because of the growing community, of course, the infrastructure that was there. But the structural reason is that Islam does not have an established religious authority, and so -- and you also had a great diversity. While there were mostly Turkish people living there, there were quite a number of others. So to what address do you address the need to do this? And of course, that was very much complicated by Turkey's very secular state itself. So these are some interesting issues.

And as far as the United States go, as I sort of tried to lay out, the system was there and was in place, and teachers, if they have not received formal training -- for example, we have the very strange situation that teachers, although they have to seek recertification by taking courses every five years or so, they cannot take these courses in schools of religious studies. They would take them in history or geography or economics or whatever of the four core disciplines. So if you can imagine, teachers coming for one reason or another to teach a world history course, either at the middle school level, six and seven, or at the high school level, grades nine and ten, it isn't enough that you're asked to come in and teach about the whole world and everything in it from the Stone Age to the Space Age, but you also now may have in a big urban school, students representing every one of the faiths you're going to teach about with your little knowledge. And so many of them are very fast studies, and then there's also the virtue of being the guide on the side rather than the sage on the stage. So, but many teachers have also become very dedicated, and it's an interesting fact that many teachers, or most of the teachers I would say in the U.S. who are teaching world religions electives, which have become quite popular with students, have come to it through teaching Advanced Placement World History or teaching Advanced Placement Human Geography or teaching advanced, you know, courses in world history itself, and then have come upon

this idea that there's a lot of interest. And again, those courses are electives and they are still the academic study of religion, but it shows you the degree to which teachers have immersed themselves in a subject like this.

MR. McCANTS: So, state involvement in religious education, whether it's the German model or the U.S. model, at some point there's some decision about what should be taught to the students. And even in the United States where you don't get a lot of instruction about religion, there's still, Susan, as you know, much better than I do, there's still a lot of deliberation and thought that goes into the curriculum. Who gets to make these choices? I mean, are people invited from the religious communities to have input into these kinds of decisions, or is it just some faceless bureaucrat who gets to decide it? Who makes the decision about what gets taught in the schools and what sort of textbooks are selected?

MS. BERGLUND: Yeah. I think this is very different from all of the countries that I put into this paper.

For example, in Sweden, it would be researchers, scholars who study religions, together with some teachers who would make the curriculum. In the U.K., it is people from different religious communities in the area because in the U.K. religious education is not a national -- there's no national curriculum; it's a locally agreed curriculum. So they would invite people from different religious organizations. In Germany, for example, it is these associations that can get into cooperation with the state that make the curriculum together with the state. And this would be the case also in Austria, for example, like that. In Finland, you have also religious education together with the state writing the curriculum because, of course, schools are socialized agencies for the states. This is where the future citizens are kind of molded to become democratic citizens in society. So the state wants to see what is in these curriculums. And that is

the same, in Finland, for example, you have 13 different religious educations to teach about. If you're a parent, you elect what you belong to, but it's the organization together with the state that decides, but that turns out quite differently in the different countries.

MR. McCANTS: Susan, how about in the United States?

MS. DOUGLASS: Here we do it like you make sausage. So before the state standards movement, which was the first really cross-curricular movement since World War I that reformed the curriculum, it had some wonderful impulses behind it such as what should a student know by the time they graduate from high school in order to live in the 21st century, a very participatory process between scholars and teachers, sort of trying to improve the level and close those curriculum gaps between what is known among researchers and what is actually taught in the schools.

So you have that impulse. But before that you already had a sort of default standard that had grown up around the world history textbook. I could go back to the 19th century for how that evolved, and I won't spend that time here today, but suffice it to say that as the content on religions -- all world religions -- and I really want to emphasize that Islam is never taught in the United States public schools in isolation. It will be taught together with Christianity and its history, with Judaism and its history, with Hinduism, Buddhism, and even the methodologies of the Greeks and Romans and many other things as well. So it's a strand within these courses.

When the state standards came along, this default textbook standard was somewhat put aside, but on the other hand, many of the state standards molded themselves around textbooks. Others molded themselves around the new national standards and then state standards. So the textbook publishers really couldn't drive the situation. They need to reflect what the states required because textbooks are produced commercially in the U.S. and under very competitive circumstances, but they are adopted

by state boards of education.

This has become a pressure point since 9/11, where for good and not so good reasons, some groups have come to try to put pressure -- Texas is always a bellwether, but other states as well, to try to mold what gets in, what does not, and indirectly that way to put pressure on the textbook companies to change or downgrade or whatever. And there's a whole sort of academic or semi-academic or activist cottage industry that has grown up around that since 9/11.

MR. McCANTS: I wanted to ask, do you find the same kind of pressuring that happens in Europe?

MS. DOUGLASS: The textbooks?

MR. McCANTS: Yeah.

MS. DOUGLASS: Yeah. I think that it's quite interesting to see that in some countries it's an open market, it's a competition. There's no state agency that checks textbooks, for example. Some countries used to have that but it didn't really work because the person who was checking was always an expert in, for example, one religion and not the other, and so you would find it. So it's an open market in many countries. But, for example, in Finland, as I mentioned, that teaches -- that offers all these different religions educations, the state also funds textbooks. So there is a new textbook that was just printed five years ago which is called Salam. It's in Finnish, and it's about teaching confessional Islamic religious education. So there the state sponsors them, and they would also sponsor this book. I mean, the Muslim minority in Finland is very small. It's only 40,000 Muslims living in Finland, but they not only sponsor it in Finnish; they also sponsor it in Swedish, because Swedish is a minority language in Finland. And the number of Muslims that have Swedish as a language is very, very little. But this is the state policy. There is a lot of discussion to change this because, as you can imagine, this

is very costly, and having all these different ones. I think also what I have seen is that in many Muslim schools, in countries where there is no -- in Sweden, for example, in the Muslim schools, and they teach Islam from a confessional point, a couple hours a week, there are no textbooks because there is no market. There are so few Muslim schools. There are like 15. So there would be no publisher wanting to spend their money to do that. So they import books instead, and that is sometimes I would say quite problematic and the teachers say that this is a problem because, of course, if you import textbooks about Islam from Saudi Arabia, from Jordan, from U.K., actually, there is quite a possibility. You get very different forms of Islam, and I think this is important to remember when we talk about Muslim schools in any country I would say because they are so different, one from the other, depending on what theological strand is dominant, what kind of ethnic background that the people on the school board would have, and so on. So you couldn't talk about these books. But you can see on the textbooks. When you discuss and you meet and you ask about textbooks, that's something that they choose very, very differently, of course.

MR. McCANTS: So I have a slightly annoying question. I'm going to ask the question.

MS. DOUGLASS: I should have added something. I'm sorry.

MR. McCANTS: Sure.

MS. DOUGLASS: One way in which -- I know you mentioned the presence of academics and the process of writing books. There is certainly an emphasis here because of who the textbook publishers choose to have as authors, sometimes after the fact of a text being written when it's revised and so on, but there is a very large couple of columns on the front matter of textbooks that show academic reviewers who are usually professors, often across the various subjects of world history and geography,

and then there are also teacher reviewers who come in. And then there are often civic organizations. The First Amendment Center has been very prominent in being a reviewer to check the textbook manuscripts for adherence to the guidelines. And I, myself, have participated in this process for quite a long time.

MR. McCANTS: Thank you.

So the annoying question I have, I'm going to ask it, and then just give you a second to think about it and I'll move on to a second question and then come back to the annoying one. But the annoying question is what surprised you about the research? Jenny, I know you work on this subject a lot. You probably anticipated a lot of what you found, but I wondered if anything you came across just struck you as unusual or something you hadn't thought would be there. And Susan, same thing to you. Reading through the research, if you noticed anything.

I'll let you think about it, but my second question is -- my second question has to do with good practices. Reading the report it really struck me that these countries are so different from each other. They have such different political cultures. They have very different Muslim populations. They seem so sui generis that it would be hard to, at least on first blush, identify any good practices that could be applied across the board. But you do make some recommendations in the report. You talk specifically about teacher training, and you also talk about textbooks.

You can take either of those question sin any order that you want them, but I thought the audience might like to hear what surprised you, and also why you think these recommendations would make sense across the board. And Susan, feel free to weigh in.

MS. BERGLUND: Yeah. I would say that something that surprised me -- now, coming from Sweden, you should take that into account -- it surprised me how in

teacher training, for the U.S. and for France, that even if teachers in the U.S. and France are supposed to teach a bit about different religions, it's not included as obligatory in their teacher training. And that surprised me. Coming from a country where if you're going to teach anything about religion, of course, you have to have academic training. So that surprised me, even if I had heard about it, but then looking into it. Of course, there are further education courses and so on, but that is up to the teacher. But you can talk more about that -- know more about that than I do.

I think that what I also find important, what I make recommendations about in the paper, is that no matter what kind of education we are talking about here -- if we are talking about the German, Austrian, and Spanish Finnish case where you can get confessional Islamic religious education, or if we're talking about the Swedish or U.K. or U.S. frame system where you teach about religion, Islam or other religions from an academic perspective, good teacher training is important. We can say that for everyone. And of course, we have this debate in some countries, that this is a state control of religion, that the state is putting out teacher education only to control Islam. We have that. But on the other hand, we also have the right to have education from the parents' perspective.

And then I also think that even if we could have this critique of domesticizing religion and so on, I think that most parents want good teachers for their children. That is quite general. Then we can have a discussion on what good teachers are, and that they want educated teachers. And then we could have, of course, a critical discussion on what kind of education. But I think that in terms of also the confessional subject, that there is some kind of teacher education for Islamic religious education teachers, is a good thing. But then we could discuss how it should be done and so on. So that is one of the things that, you know, thinking about how are the teachers taught

actually or trained, and what is in the teacher education.

And then in terms of textbooks -- and this goes also, as you said, both the nonconfessional textbooks and the confessional for Islamic religious education. I mean, we know from research, in many European countries, and you know, from here in America, that there's quite a lot of prejudice getting into textbooks, and this doesn't only concern Islam, but it concerns other religions. In some textbooks, we get very stereotypical images of religions and people (inaudible) religion. I sometimes, to my students at the university, I talk about what I call the "robot tendency"; that religious people are pictured like robots; that you behave in a certain manner just because you are Catholic, or you behave in a certain manner just because you are Islamic, as if that was the only guiding principle in your life. Of course, it's not for anyone.

So discussing how religions and religious people are pictured in textbooks is very important because that is something that would stay with the students or the pupils. And also, for example, like pictures in textbooks, I mean, I've been looking at some of the Swedish textbooks. We've had nonconfessional religious education from an academic point of view since 1969. You could still, in some textbooks, find that in the chapter about Islam, that all pictures are from the Arab world, whereas we know that the majority of Muslims don't live in the Arab world. So, I mean, having diverse pictures in different -- you know, what do you picture how the people look? That's also important, I think. And, of course, textbooks for the Islamic religious education from a confessional point of view. Why do people get them? In some countries it's absolutely impossible that the state would help out with that, but in some -- in the U.K. for example, you would have Muslim organizations being engaged in producing textbooks, but then, of course, English is a big language. So also, there's a market for this. In many of the other European countries it's small languages, but still, that could be engagement in getting -- helping

each other.

And something else. I find it surprising also that both France and the U.S., for example, they teach about religion in like world history and so on. There is actually not that much -- there is on the academic level, conferences and so on going on with scholars meeting, but there's not much discussion, teachers to teachers, and so on across the borders. So it's a very national -- education is a very national thing, where I do think that people could learn from each other, even if they have different systems.

MR. McCANTS: Susan, what did you find surprising, or what did you make of the recommendations?

MS. DOUGLASS: Well, I first want to say that Jenny Berglund's paper puts down a real marker because we've had a lot of nonsense published or put out, not academic papers -- there hasn't been a real dearth of them -- but a lot of sort of things taken at face value that people say or that, you know, papers that really don't have a solid economic foundation or, excuse me, an academic foundation. And so many times, journalists have just published these things at face value without going into any -- even things about the standards that anyone can really know who could research them. It's all up there on the Internet. So this, as I said, puts down a marker that will prevent some of these farther afield ideas from getting a lot of traction, and I'm very grateful for that. It's very interesting on the other side.

As far as the sort of issues, one thing, you mentioned that maybe there isn't so much in common from Europe to here, but one thing that there is in common is a long tradition in the west, that includes both the United States and Europe, for treating nonwestern -- as they call it, nonwestern religions, even though Islam is very much in the same vein as Christianity and Judaism. And so the Orientalizing side of things has complicated very much so that textbooks have often been ridiculously inaccurate in

covering this.

One of the wonderful strengths of the guidelines published by the First Amendment Center and disseminated through teacher training, a program particularly called "Rights, Respect, Responsibility" that's been going on now for 20-some years, is the idea that we can really only get a benefit from this as a civic enterprise if we can be authentic about it. If we can cover beliefs and practices as their adherence to understand them rather than putting a sort of editorial vein over, or veil over it, if you want to use that term, that would insert this sort of academic secularism, and many Christian parents are very upset that this idea should come in. The guidelines provide a fence for that because some of the books that can be used in colleges, whether they should or not in comparative religion, really do take an editorial tone that is very much secular humanist, and many Christian parents are absolutely allergic to that in the schools. It makes them very suspicious of the whole enterprise of teaching about religion. So the guidelines have been very helpful in trying to bring that authenticity, but while the separation there is not to make truth claims. You can read scripture but you use it as a primary source, historical source. You can talk about beliefs, but you can't make truth claims as to -- you can't also make, you know, comparative, qualitative comparisons and things of that nature.

So this is a very useful civic enterprise. It's very good training, and I would also say that, again, what I think is so important is not to think of teaching about Islam or teaching Islam, because it always occurs together with other classes. And you mentioned when students in these nonconfessional classes are learning about other faiths. Well, as a teacher, I can tell you that one of the most important things, no matter who is in the classroom, if they are confessional, if they adhere to this faith or not, they may not know very much about its history or even its deeper beliefs. So what you have

in these classrooms where the civic enterprise or teaching about religion in an academic way is students from all faiths, learning about their own and other faiths in a mediated forum of the classroom. And where skillful teachers are involved, this is really amazing. And it's one reason why these world religion electives have really become so popular. Students at that age are trying to figure out where they are, themselves and so on.

So I think that even, for example, when I go and speak in Muslim schools that teach about religion in the course of history and geography courses -- and I will also say that one of the enterprises that'[s going on in the United States and has been for a long time, is creating textbooks for Muslim schools that are confessional in that sense, but ones that suit the American experience of being Muslim rather than some oversees version which the kids, quite honestly, don't buy anyway, including my own, so they want something fresher.

But when I'm speaking to schools, Muslim schools, I also recommend that they use these guidelines because it's not going to give you any real sense of knowledge of other faiths if you're teaching them in a confessional school as, oh, those are the guys that are wrong; right? You know, we're the right guys and everybody else is wrong. You're not going to create much knowledge that way. So I think the guidelines are one thing that -- I read in your paper, you know, it's there in common. Of course, it requires teacher training. Here in the U.S., that mostly takes places in various in-service environments, so teachers are already in the classroom and often, you know, screaming "uncle," you know, what to come in and take part. And NEH seminars sometimes do at schools, outreach programs at various universities. The Pluralism Project at Harvard. There's a whole bunch of different programs. The American Association of Religion has stepped forward and put K-12 guidelines and are offering much more support than had been the case earlier.

MR. McCANTS: Thank you very much.

I want to open it up for questions. I'm mindful of the time. We've got 11 minutes. So let me take -- just raise some hands. I'll take three or four questions. We'll come and then I'll go back to you folks if we've got any more time. So just go down the line, if you would.

MR. JACO: Larry Jaco.

This is very interesting. Thank you very much.

Jenny mentioned three distinct systems -- the German, Austrian and Spanish; the French and U.S.; and Finnish and Swedish, I think it was. Do you care to rate those as to what's the best system? And what are the best outcomes? What are you looking for outcomes from this? Is it religious tolerance? Is it just education? Are we siloing all this or are we supposed to be integrating it?

Thank you.

MR. McCANTS: Thank you very much.

All right. Just work your way back. We're going to gather a couple.

MR. MANDO: My name is Janrus Mando.

I was interested in your following up about, you know, the whole thing of saying we're right, we're not wrong. But some of the textbooks that come from Saudi Arabia sometimes take, I guess, a triumphalistic approach to other religions and non-Muslims. And now that we're dealing with problems of radicalization and opening to those ideas, I was just interested in how we can vet textbooks to ensure that they are inclusive and integrate the Muslim population into the western experience.

MR. McCANTS: Thank you.

There's someone all the way in the back.

MR. BURN: My name is Jim Burn. I'm a long-time journalist here in

town and have made quite a study of what Islam actually teaches, although I don't have Arabic so I'm weak in that. But something that made a huge impression on me, and you're probably all three very familiar with is the current cover story in Atlantic. And the key authority in that is a person I'm sure Dr. McCants is well aware of, is Bernard Haykel of Princeton. And he is described in the article as the leading secular authority on the teaching of Islam, and his basic position is that what people like the ISIS folk are, they are teaching what is accurate in the Quran. The words they use are absolutely in the Quran, but it's a medieval interpretation of those words. And I'm wondering if you have any reaction to that.

MR. McCANTS: All right. Thank you very much.

So just to recap real quick. Number one, what are the best systems, which is a question I wanted to ask but I knew you wouldn't answer, but we'll ask it anyway.

Number two, about the Saudi textbooks. And if I could frame that just a little bit larger. Again, you know, how do schools make decisions on what textbooks represent normative Islam? What is normative Islam? That sort of thing.

Number three, the question about the Atlantic article. Again, if I could broaden it out just a little bit. Who gets to serve as an academic authority on Islam and what represents Islam? Because, you know, academics themselves don't really agree.

So Jenny, I'll start with you. You can take a stab at any of those, and then Susan, choose any of them you like.

MS. BERGLUND: Yeah. I'll try to touch upon all of them.

Best practice, that is a very good question but a very difficult question because I don't think that you can take the practice from one country to put it into the other because it's so tied to the history, the politics of each country. But what I think,

there is a lack of research actually in terms of what is the achievement of the children, and there is actually very, very little on this, because I think it would be very interesting to see. So how are the kids doing who go to Muslim schools in the Netherlands or Sweden? Are they doing better in Muslim schools than in public schools? Maybe they are; maybe they're not. There are those who argue that this having segregated schools is the way to integration to get into that, but there are others who argue the other way. So I find it very difficult. But, of course, in a country where you are entitled to choose your religious education as a parent, then I think, of course, that you should, you know, either if you are Christian or Jewish or Muslim, you should have that right. So that is, I think, for those countries, a good practice that is coming, and that, of course, is needed to be discussed how it's done.

And you can see that those countries who teach Islamic religious education as an elective school subject in public schools, like Germany, Austria, Finland, there are not so many Muslim schools. There are very few. England and Germany, there are a couple, but not many. So having that opportunity to have your religion recognized in school, apparently seems to make the case that there are not so many Muslim schools established. I cannot say that this -- there are many other reasons, of course, but you can see that there is a difference in that.

I think in terms of choosing the textbooks, I have discussed this a lot, especially in Swedish-Muslim schools. And in those countries that you have publicly funding, publicly funding means that you only get publicly funding if you follow the national curriculum. So you cannot choose any textbooks, so if you are publicly funded, you have to choose the textbooks that are written according to the values that are stated in the national curriculum. And different countries have a bit of different values, but for the Swedish case, for example, it's solidarity, democracy, gender equality, tolerance, are

the values that you have to have in any school subject that you teach, be it home economics, math, or Islamic religious education, that is in Sweden only taught at Muslim schools.

Then, if you are a teacher, you have to think about, okay, so what kind of textbooks do I take? And the teachers I met, for example, in Sweden, they had chosen textbooks -- confessional textbooks then from France. They did not take textbooks from Saudi Arabia, for example. And many of them, they would cut them to pieces to make their own textbooks to get something that you could work with in the national curriculum. In schools, in the U.K., for example, that are not publicly funded, then, of course, the state cannot tell you what kind of textbook to choose, but most schools would take a textbook that -- I mean, you want the kids to continue into higher education. That is the prestige of the school. So maybe there are probably exceptions, but you would think about that in that way.

And that's interesting also in terms of how you teach religion, because if you teach religion, be it any religion -- Christianity, Judaism, or Islam -- from a confessional point of view, if you have to do that in relation to a national curriculum that states that these are the values that you have to get into education, the teachers, they have to balance this. They have to balance between religious authorities, what religious authorities, and this is not -- Islam is not the sole case. That is the same if you have confessional Catholic religious education or Protestant. What kind of Protestantism is it that you choose? And so this is a balancing act very much.

And that kind of answers the last question as well because, of course, then you have to teach a version of Islam that is compatible to these values that are stated in the national curriculum, and there is plenty of religious authorities to lean to in that. But it's the same kind of process within other confessional religious subjects. So

when the state -- well, when the state pays, the state also has a say. You can say that. If the state doesn't pay, that's another question.

MR. McCANTS: Susan, do you want to weigh in on this?

MS. DOUGLASS: We have three or four minutes to cover all of those broad questions. I should start by saying that there are in the United States fewer than 200 Muslim schools, confessional schools. They are based in communities. They are funded by their communities, and many of them are, of course, church mice, if you'll mix metaphors here. And they overwhelmingly teach using local public school curriculum for all of the subjects; of course, except Islamic religion because that's not a public school subject. But they do teach world history, they do teach geography, and as you said, they want their children to go on to college. Many of them submit to the very same state testing, regimes that happen to be there when they're available even to be used. And if not, then they use other standardized testing formats because they're answerable to the parents.

The Saudi textbooks is a special case. They are not a factor in Muslim schools for many, many reasons. Number one, they're in Arabic, and most children in Muslim schools do not read Arabic at that level. Let's just put it that way. Arabic is a subject. It's a foreign language taught in those schools or it's a native language for heritage speakers. The Saudi textbook issue came up very early after 9/11 and it has been vetted. There's a lot of academic discussion about it. There have been surveys of them and there's been a whole process within the one Saudi school here in the United States, which is a diplomat school. It's not a community school, and it is, as I said, the only one. So I['m not going to be able to address the subject in all of its depth, but Saudi textbooks are not used in Muslim schools in the United States, and they are certainly not used to either write mainstream commercial textbooks. They have absolutely no factor in

that, and so I think that that's a worry that we really don't need to have.

As I said, the biggest effort that's been going on now for 20-some years and more is how do you write materials that will be attractive to and useful to students growing up and living in the United States and beyond? I mean, we're a global community, not just a United States community. Of course, those schools have the say because they're not funded publicly. Even there aren't really Muslim charter schools or any of those kinds of things either. And also, I mean, it's not only again what, if anything, annoys me to go back to that sort of question, it is again putting Islam as an exceptional religion when, in fact, the way parochial schools teach about their own religions, no matter which one it is, there are issues. And even some of those issues seep into the public schools, such as this huge debate we have going on about biology and creationism, and so on and so forth. So those are not without.

We certainly cannot in 30 seconds, you know, address the issue of ISIS, but what struck me about that comment that that particular article in the Atlantic has generated enormous response. You can just google it and you'll find hundreds of articles and blog posts and one thing or another now, whether there's anyone who can claim to be the foremost academic on Islam. I doubt that. And I was also struck by the way the question was framed as that ISIS uses the medieval interpretation of Islam because there is not one such medieval interpretation of Islam. So that's a subject I'm sure we can't touch upon but it has very little to do with the schools which are trying very hard to make religion that their students will continue to build upon in their lives and find useful values from and also to meet the needs of academic study. And as I said, I've always recommended that those students in parochial schools -- whether they're Christian or Muslim or whatever else they are -- should be having an education about other world religions as well. And, in fact, there are interfaith partnerships between schools and

activities like Eboo Patel mentioned in Acts of Faith, where students of different religions are put to work on or voluntarily put themselves to work on public service projects so that they actually get to know each other, you know, elbow to elbow. So those are the kind of things that are there -- that are out there.

MR. McCANTS: So Jenny, quickly?

MS. BERGLUND: Yeah, very quickly.

I just wanted to mention that it's been very interesting for me to go around to both Muslim schools but also the Islamic religious education classrooms in different European countries. And one thing that strikes me is that when you go into the classroom of a German Islamic religious education classroom, how very German it is. When you come to Muslim schools in the U.K., it's very British. And when you come to a Swedish -- and now I mean also in terms of how you view education. For example, in the Swedish-Muslim school, you don't have gender segregation. They are co-education, all of them, because in Sweden, you don't gender segregate; whereas, in Britain, for example, you have a long tradition of boys and girls schools. These are the top schools, so many of the schools are segregated in that way. Then, of course, between them, there are huge differences. You go into one school and it's completely different from the other Muslim schools or the other classroom. So there's really no way of saying that this is how these schools are. They are very different. They take the national educational issues with them, but then they are also distinguished in terms of interpretive tradition within Islam, and that makes a huge difference in how they teach, how they select material. If it's state sponsored, of course the states have a way, but even if you go into the ones who are not state sponsored, it's very, very different, and the choices that the schools make, the teachers make, would be very different from one to another. So I think that one thing we need to remember is that we can't really draw -- the variation is so great

so we cannot talk about them within countries and between countries.

MS. DOUGLASS: I would build on that just by saying that much of the discussion about teaching about religion, it occurs in a very top-down manner. We're talking about what decisions are made and what textbooks are written, and we've sort of forgotten the kids here. Because in some of those different situations you've seen, even in Muslim schools, just say, those kids who are learning a regular curriculum and who have gotten used to sort of the American way of teaching student-centered, constructivist, you name it, whatever it is, they're not going to go into a class and swallow it whole when it's just rote learning. Nor do educators think that this is a good idea because ideally, what you have to have is a student who is able to discriminate, who is able to understand why these things are, and not just because I said so.

Just as a quick anecdote, my daughter who is now 23 years old, has come out after having, you know, religious instruction courses, whether in weekend schools or in the mosque, in young adult groups or whatever it happens to be, and she says religion is not a scorecard, you know, where you fill, like your dance card, you know, I did this and I got that many points. That's not how you're going to be able to use religion to live. And so these education systems are in themselves in the process of developing an education that's acceptable to students, that's useful for life in this globalizing world, where everybody is on their own. And that's another thing. We live in itemized societies where students -- a person can get away with just about anything. People aren't looking. So there has to be an internalization of those values, and I think that's what we're sort of aiming at as a common denominator here.

MR. McCANTS: Thank you very much.

Well, join me in thanking Jenny and Susan for a great discussion.

(Applause)

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