

TRANSCRIPT

Richard Shumack:

One of the things I've noticed is that John was trying to give an objective outline of a particular other religion, Hinduism, Buddhism, and then talk about how that interacts with Christianity. I'm a little less optimistic about how much I can do that with Islam. I'm speaking to you as a Christian and so, clearly, I think that Christianity is true and I don't think that Islam is true. If I thought Islam was brilliant and fantastic and true, then I would become a Muslim. But I'm a Christian because I think that Christianity is brilliant and true. Having said that, I think I can say some fairly accurate and fair things about Islam, but honestly, if you want to really understand Islam, or Hinduism or Buddhism for that matter, it's not just about knowing truths about it, understanding Muslim or Hindu doctrine or their core beliefs. You really need to understand why a Muslim loves Islam, why they feel that Islam addresses their hopes and their dreams and their fears.

Richard Shumack:

If you don't understand why something really attracts someone, then you're not going to really be able to get it particularly and you're not going to engage deeply with them when you're speaking with them. There is an outline presumably that you got when you walked in. If you notice the outline, if you look at the tiny print on the right, there's a book list and there're some websites. If you look closely, you'll notice that one of the links there is to my book and that's only there because John wanted it there. Apart from that, every single one of the other links are to Muslim books and Muslim websites and that is the best place for you to go to, to get a view from the inside. As you will see, there's a range of different styles, if that's the right word, of Islam and I've tried to cover as much of the landscape of Islam in those books. Start with the websites. They're free and they're probably going to give you a quicker in.

Richard Shumack:

But really, what I want to try and do is give you a sense of a landscape, and I think hopefully fairly, and then really focus on how Christians and Muslims can discuss the truth about God in a way that is helpful and particularly, in a way that's relational and compassionate. I want to start with a story. A few years back, I was invited to a Muslim outreach night. It was a bit like what might happen in a church. It was in Melbourne, in a suburb called Broadmeadows. I don't know if you know where or much about Melbourne, but it's an outer suburb. It's a dodgy suburb. You don't go there unless you have a reason to go there. Heavy Muslim population. At Broadmeadows Town Hall, they were having an outreach night. They'd wheeled in a speaker from overseas and this speaker was going to explain Islam to people. Muslims would invite their friends and at the end of the night, there'd be an opportunity to become a Muslim. And so, I went along with my friend, Abdi, Somali guy, just out of interest, see what the guy had to say.

Richard Shumack:

We drove to Broadmeadows, pulled in to the car park with all the V8s, went into the town hall, and there were something like 500 men on the floor of the town hall. There were women there too, but they were up on the balcony. I had no idea how many there were. And so, I was sitting there when my friend Abdi and the guy started talking. He talked for about two hours, but most of the first hour, all he was really trying to do was try and show us why it was fair to think that God was real and that if God was real, that you should take God seriously. After about an hour of doing this, he said... Well, he paused and he said, "I would like you to put up your hand if you are not a Muslim." And so, I was sitting there thinking, "Wow, this is not really why. I just want to fly under the radar. Just want to hear as an observer." But I'm here with Abdi and Abdi knew I wasn't a Muslim. So, I put up my hand.

Richard Shumack:

I'm looking around and there were 10 hands went up. So there were 10 non-Muslims, 490 Muslim men. And then the speaker said, "Right. Can you put your hand down if you don't believe in God? Keep your hand up if you believe in God, but you're not a Muslim." And so, five hands went down and there were now five of us with our hand up. And then the speaker said, "Right. Can you five please come down the front?" Again, this isn't entirely what I was planning, but up on the stage, they put five chairs and I was in the last chair. And so, the five of us were sitting here. Now remember, up until now, he'd just been talking about God, hadn't really mentioned much about Islam. But nevertheless, he said to the first guy, "Do you believe that Muhammad is a prophet?" And the first guy said, "Yes." And then he said to the second guy, "Do you believe that Muhammad's a prophet?" And the second guy said, "Yes." The third guy said yes and the fourth guy said yes.

Richard Shumack:

Now, I'm about to be the only guy in the room in Broadmeadows, long way from home, who's about to deny that Muhammad's a prophet. Now, here's the thing about the story. Why are people chuckling at that story? Right, but why is it uncomfortable? It's uncomfortable because, and I'm not having a peck at you, I was thinking the same thing. I was sitting there thinking, "How's this going to go down? I've got the gauntlet there. 500 people, and then I'm in Broadmeadows. How am I going to get out of here in one piece?" They're these things I'm starting to think. I'm thinking it and perhaps, people here are thinking it too because deep down, or maybe not so deep down, there's this perception that Muslims are touchy, irrational, sensitive about Muhammad particularly, and if you say something about Muhammad, then they can get inflamed really quickly. It could get violent, could get nasty.

Richard Shumack:

But I want to say that, that isn't even slightly how Muslims think about themselves. They don't think of themselves as the irrational, touchy, crazy people. They think of themselves as the sensible, rational believers in God and they think that the Christians are the crazy people, the irrational people, the people

that believe nonsense things. I want to give you at least a bit of a sense of it. As Christians, we believe in the Trinity. I don't think there's anyone in this room who can explain the Trinity to me. Now, that's not a problem particularly. You don't have to explain something for it to be true. We don't know how light works. Is it waves? Is it particles? We don't really know how it works. It's still obviously a real thing. It's a true thing. No chance of explaining that to you, but I can tell you about that it works and it has these effects and it's pretty reliable.

Richard Shumack:

You don't need to explain something fully to know that it's true, to testify to your experience of it. But still, the Trinity is a paradox, God being three and one, and it's the sort of paradox that a Muslim says, "How can you possibly believe something that's that irrational? It's that nonsensical?" It's not just the Trinity. All our core beliefs are inexplicable. All of them. The incarnation. How can Jesus be God and man? We can't explain it. What's happening on the cross? Can't explain it. Even what it is to be a Christian, to be sanctified, to being changed into the image of God. You can't explain it. If I ask you, "Who is at work in your life?" Presumably, you want to say, in fact, we were just saying it before, "It's all Jesus Christ." "So, you don't do anything? Jesus just carries you around?" "Well, no, I try. It's on me as well. I have effort." "So, it's all you and it's all Jesus? How does that work?"

Richard Shumack:

"No idea how it works. I can tell you what it feels like. I can tell you how it plays out in my life. I can testify to the reality of God's holy spirit in my life, but I can't explain it." Muslims will look at us and say, "You're the crazy ones, because you can't explain any of your core beliefs." Islam on the other hand is extraordinarily simple in comparison. The core doctrines of Islam and particularly, the Quran. The Quran only really has three major themes. First theme is God: God is real. God is one. God is absolutely one. Second theme is that Muhammad is God's prophet. The third theme is Judgment Day is coming. And so, you better live an obedient life. Obedient just means doing the things that Muhammad said. It's pretty simple. It's pretty clear. They say, "You can have this simple, clear religion that makes sense. There's one God and he drops his will upon us."

Richard Shumack:

Thing worth noting too in Islam is that in Islam, God does not reveal himself. Even Muhammad didn't meet God. In Islam, all that happens is God reveals his will. God reveals the laws through an angel to Muhammad. He reveals the laws. And so in Islam, there's no real theology. In fact, Al-Ghazali who is probably the greatest Muslim thinker said in Islam, "God is unknowable." There's no theology. There're just lots of jurisprudence, if you know what that means. It's working out the laws, working out how laws apply in every little part of your life. It's exceptionally practical. Islam is not really about orthodoxy, believing all these correct doctrines. It's about living faithfully to keep the law and that's what you see. In fact, Muslims don't really base much of what they do on the Quran. It's mainly on the Hadith, which is the example of Muhammad.

Richard Shumack:

And so, how that plays out is that you have a whole range. This is part of the explanation for the landscape of Islam is that there's not a whole lot of theology. There's just a whole lot of people working out how to do life. Some of them are more strict in their legal judgements and some are less strict, and they're all trying to work out what would Muhammad do type thing in everyday life. Sometimes, that's ambiguous, but what it means is Islam looks like different things and it's hard to know what true Islam really is. We can be really quick to think, "Well, this is true Islam. It's people trying to impose and enforce Islam wherever they go." Some Muslims do want to do that, but it's not always like that. A lot of Muslims are more like this: they're pretty relaxed about their Islam and they don't even... It's superficial really. They're Eid and Ramadan Muslims like Christmas and Easter Christians. They'll identify as Muslim, but they don't take it super seriously.

Richard Shumack:

Lots of Muslims are like that. These are Somali girls, just to give you a bit of an indication how it plays out, because it's hard to tell sometimes. We worked with Somalis for 12 years and one time, we took some teenage girls on a camp. When I say teenage, 16, 17, 18. We went in a mini bus and our women's worker met them and they all got on the bus. Somalis are pretty conservative. So, they're in their gowns and their hijabs and they got on the bus. By the time we got out of our suburb, the hijabs were off. By the time we got to the edge of Melbourne, their gowns were off. They were down to jeans and boob tubes. By the time we were halfway to Geelong on the freeway, their daks were off and they were mooning people up and down the freeway. Now, I'm not saying this is appropriate Islamic behavior. I'm not saying that's Islamic. But my point is, here are some people, if you'd met them in [inaudible 00:13:24], you would say these are hardcore.

Richard Shumack:

But actually, in their community, they look very Muslim, but outside, not so much. Lots of Muslims are not hardcore. Other Muslims will say, "Well, this is true Islam." True Islam is not about violence. True Islam is about serving and caring for people. This is the red crescent. It's the equivalent of the red cross. This is in the Middle East. There are people caring for victims in war, for refugees, and they would say, "Muhammad said, 'Look after the sick. Look after the poor.' This is true Islam. This is true religion." Probably, I'm guessing that the first image, if I'd asked you before tonight what true Islam looks like, this is not the image. At least, not the first image that would jump into your head. Maybe, something like this would jump into your head and Islam can be like this too. This is ISIS. This is ISIS beheading Christians. I know relatives of these guys. Brave Christians who died singing hymns.

Richard Shumack:

ISIS will say, "We are true Islam. We're the ones trying to enforce Islam." Other Muslims will say, "This is true Islam. Islam is about beauty. The Quran is beautiful. Muhammad's example was beautiful. Islam is

about creating beauty." This is the Museum of Islamic Art in Doha. Tim's been there. This is the image that Muslims have of what they're trying to do. They're trying to create a utopian society that looks a little bit like this. They think that Islam brings beauty. Possibly, the strongest image that traditional Muslims will have of Islam is like this. This is a Ramadan meal. It's an Eid feast. Fast during Ramadan and then they have a big meal every night. But on the last night, they have a really big meal and they will say, "This is the truest form of Islam because it's about spiritual discipline." Fasting is all about this discipline of God awareness and God faithfulness and then celebration and community and family and food and hospitality.

Richard Shumack:

They will say, "That's true religion. That's true Islam." I promise you, if you went to an Eid feast, you'd get a sense of that overflowing hospitality. Earlier this year, I took a bunch of my students. We were in Canberra. Unannounced, seven of us turned up at a very small mosque, maybe 20, 30 people there. Seven of us turned up and they threw food at us until we couldn't eat anymore. I guarantee you that if 100 of us had turned up unannounced, they would've gone out and bought enough food to throw food at us. Muslim communities have astonishing hospitality, put to shame anything I've experienced in Christian communities. They would say, "That's true Islam. That's the heart of true Islam." But Islam will also say this, "Islam will dominate the world." Islam is a faith that is imperialistic. It wants to become the world faith. It wants to take over.

Richard Shumack:

Particularly, if you're a Christian here tonight, don't get too head up about that or uptight about that because probably, you would like the same thing for Christianity. Fair is fair. If you're a Christian, certainly it's true for me, I think that Jesus is fantastic and I'd love everyone to follow him. I reckon a true life of following Jesus in self-sacrifice and service and humility and forgiveness and restoration, if everyone did that, I think the world would be fantastic and brilliant. And so, wouldn't it be great if Christianity dominated the world? Muslims just think the same thing about Islam. They would say, "Islam is fantastic. We've got all these great rules and if everyone followed them, the world would be a great place. And so, we would love that to happen." The key difference I think with Islam is that in Islam, all you really have is the rules. And so, they see that it's appropriate to enforce its laws.

Richard Shumack:

"All these laws are from God and we're going to enforce them if possible, because that's good for everyone. People might not like it, but for their sake, we're going to enforce them." Let me give you one illustration that might give you a sense of why that might be a good thing in the Muslim imagination. Presumably, everyone here is happy that there's a law in Australia that says, "Do not murder people." If someone comes into your house, wants to murder you or your mom or your dad or your brother or your sister, you would be happy for the police to come in and use whatever force necessary to stop that happening, including lethal force, if that's what it took. For your sake and for the murderer's sake

actually, but for society's sake, it's okay to enforce laws. In the Muslim theological imagination, that's what Islam is. "It's these rules and it's good for everyone. And so, we want to enforce it for your sake." That's their mindset.

Richard Shumack:

The other thing too is hopefully, I'm guessing most people here are Christian. I have no idea, but most people probably are. Can I just say, you guys, of anyone in Australia, you are in a unique position of being able to get Islam because if all you got was the media or particular brands of Christian literature, you've really only got these two ends of the spectrum: got these crazies, literally crazy violent people and these nice, friendly, peaceful people. No one can get that ISIS, maybe they're not crazy people. But I guarantee you, I know Muslims who are jail because they were planning terrorist attacks and these are guys I played soccer with and they're not crazies. They're people who have a utopian vision of creating this beautiful society and they think that violence is one of their tools, one of the legitimate tools to do it. They're not crazy people.

Richard Shumack:

If you're a Christian, you should get that you can be reasonable and radical at the same time. In fact, that's what Jesus calls us to. Jesus says, "You want to follow me? Well, it's not a half-hearted thing. It's total. You have to take up your cross and get involved absolutely and totally." In book of revelation, he says, "If you're half-hearted, forget it. I'd rather vomit you out of my mouth. It's all or nothing. I want you to be a radical Christian." There're good reasons. It's reasoned faith, but it's a radical faith. It's the same in Islam. This is the Turkish prime minister who, before the last year, you might have thought he was a more reasonable Muslim, but he says this. "The term moderate Islam is ugly and offensive. There's no moderate Islam. Islam is Islam." That's his point. It's not this thing with crazies and nice people. True Muslims take Islam really seriously. They want other people to be Muslims and they will use all the legitimate tools at the disposal of Islam.

Richard Shumack:

What is true Islam? Well, it's all those things, all those images that I've just showed you because all those things were in the life of Muhammad and they're all in the Quran. Peaceful, hospitable, caring, violent, imperialist, warring. They're all in the Quran. They're all in Muhammad's life. Muhammad was involved in beheading people and he was caring for widows. And so, all those different types of Islam, you can argue that they're legitimate. But here's the thing. Particularly, if you're a Christian here tonight, I would suggest don't get too concerned about working at which is the true Islam, partly because I don't think there is a true Islam. I don't think Islam is true. I want to do a little bit of apologetics on why that is, and then I want to suggest perhaps a better way of engaging with Muslims on truth.

Richard Shumack:

One of the really interesting things about Islam is that, and I hope I can explain this in a way that you get, all the ways, all the belief processes that Muslims have for becoming a Muslim and for evaluating the truth of Islam are exactly the same as the processes of becoming a Christian and evaluating the truth of Christianity. Islam is theistic. Islam believes that God sends prophets. Those prophets speak his message and that message is written down in scriptures, and then those scriptures are authoritatively passed on. And so, we have this testimony to God interacting with the world and then that can give us the evidence for God's interaction, and so on and so on. Muslims will testify to the experience of being Muslim and the transformed lives. Again, that's great, because it means that Christians are in a unique position to be able to speak to Muslims about faith and also to evaluate the truth claims because we're making very similar truth... Well, the doctrines are really different, but when we're pointing to the evidence for the truth of them, we're talking about really similar things. We have similar tools.

Richard Shumack:

I want to just mention five things really quickly and promise you, these are just... I'm not going to be able to give the details, but here are at least five reasons why I personally think that Islam is not true in comparison to Christianity. First, history. This church is well steeped in historical apologetics. I get that. I think we have good reasons to think that and this is just one little part of history, the transmission of scripture. I don't need to tell you guys about reliability of scripture stuff. You get that all the time. But let me tell you about the Quran. Muslims will tell you that the Quran is necessarily miraculous because it came down perfectly and it's been transmitted perfectly and it's never been changed. The problem is, that's just not true. It's not true historically. Muslims won't know that because Muslims never did the work. Christians have been looking at our texts closely for hundreds of years. Muslims never have.

Richard Shumack:

The early texts of the Quran are all riddled with intentional changes. I don't just mean dialectical. There are different dialectical versions of a Quran. I'm not talking about that. I'm talking the text itself. Whole words, whole sentences, intentionally changed. This is an example. A friend of mine, Dan, he did a PhD where he went around to all the earliest PhDs. This is brand new. Only a year or two ago. Took photos of every single page, went through every single line and every single word looking for changes. Every single copy of the earliest Qurans that we have are riddled with changes. Here's an example. The darker word on the right and over on the left. Words were rubbed out. Things were written over the top. Intentional changes in all of the early copies. In fact, one of the leading Muslim academics, so not a religious scholar, but a secular academic, at a Quran conference last year that I was at, he said, "You know what? The early stories, the early traditions about Islam, they cannot be true because the history's just not backing them up." But Muslims have never really looked into it.

Richard Shumack:

Christianity is on much stronger ground historically. There's one example. Philosophically, Muslims will say things like, "You believe in Trinity? That's nonsense. We've got a nice, simple faith philosophically."

But it's just not true. Muslims have serious philosophical problems that they've never really wrestled with. For example, if you ask most Muslims, they will say that the Quran is eternal, that it was in heaven, sent down upon Muhammad. But if the Quran's eternal and if God's eternal and if the Quran is not God, then you've got two eternal things. How's that work if God is absolutely one where there's no complexity? That's a problem and the early Muslim philosophers recognized it was a problem, but they got shut down. The religious authority said, "No. Stop talking about that." There were other problems too. But philosophy in the Muslim world died about eight or 900 years ago when the religious teacher said, "Stop it. Don't ask those questions."

Richard Shumack:

Christianity has kept on asking questions. We can talk ethically and I could give you lots of tricky arguments, but really, I just want to say one thing. I really like Jesus a lot more than I like Muhammad. I find Jesus far more impressive morally than I find Muhammad. Jesus's life was one, like I was saying before, entirely self-sacrificial and serving and humility and gentleness. Muhammad was impressive in his own sort of way, very impressive leader, but he was a warrior and I'm not impressed by his home life, the way he treated the people he perceived as his enemies. Jesus loved his enemies. Muhammad wiped them out. I find Jesus more impressive. I don't think Islam keeps its promise of creating utopian societies. It never has. Muslims look back at the early time, straight after Muhammad, and they say, "This was beautiful time." It wasn't like that. It was a society racked with civil war and infighting, where leaders were regularly assassinated, where there was a major division early on that's kept fighting even till now.

Richard Shumack:

There's never been this beautiful utopian society. This is a picture of human rights. It's a diagram about human rights. The dark ones are the places where there's the least human rights and there's this massive correlation between Muslim countries and abuse of human rights. It's complex issue, but all I'm really saying with this is if you look around the world today, there's nowhere where Muslims can point to and say... No Muslim country where there's strict Muslim laws, where they can say, "That's a beautiful country. That's a peaceful country. That's a just country." It hasn't happened in history. Islam doesn't keep its promises. Theologically, I said before, Islam doesn't really have much theology. There's not much flesh around who God is, because God just gives you some rules. But the beautiful thing about Christianity is God, he visits us in person and he shows us himself and shows us that he's full of grace and love and we get to know his character.

Richard Shumack:

Here's one little glimpse. Muslims say that they love Jesus, one of their prophets. One of my friends in Melbourne, Abdi, he had a T-shirt on once outside the gym and it said, "I love Jesus," and on the back it said, "because I'm a Muslim and so was he." And so I said to Abdi, "Hey Abdi, what do you love about Jesus? What do you love about what Jesus said or what Jesus did?" Abdi said, "It's just a free T-shirt from the mosque." But here's the thing. It's not just a free T-shirt from the mosque. Muslims know very little

about Jesus. Yeah, there's a few things about Jesus in the Quran, but here's the thing. Ask a Muslim, what is a Messiah? In the Quran, it says that Jesus is the Messiah. [foreign language 00:30:33]. It's his title, if you like, that he's the Messiah. But if you ask any Muslim what a Messiah is or what the role of a Messiah is, what qualifies you to be a Messiah, and then what do you do as a Messiah, there's no substance there.

Richard Shumack:

They don't get the depths of who Jesus was and why he came, because God never turns up in Islam. I'm a Christian because of who Jesus was and precisely because of what he did and what he said and particularly because he rose again. Islam has no account for that and it just denies it. Okay, I'll just spend a couple of minutes talking about speaking with Muslims. A Bible reading, Romans, Chapter 10, it's Paul. He's here talking about Jews, but he could just as easily be talking about Muslims. In fact, in many ways, if you want to understand the Muslim mindset, read the sermon on the Mount and listen to Jesus talking to the Pharisees because Pharisees and Muslims have a very similar... At least, traditional Muslims and Pharisees, very similar theological framework.

Richard Shumack:

But here's Paul talking about the Jews and I'm going to say it's about Muslims. "Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them," for Muslims, "is that they may be saved because I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge, for being ignorant of the righteousness of God and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness." Whatever you say about the landscape of Islam, what is true virtually of all Muslims is that they believe in God and that they might not be pursuing it with great passion, but at least theoretically, they want to be right with God and they want to live a right life. They want God's righteousness, want a right connection, and to be righteous people. But like it says here, because they don't know that God does that for them, they try and establish their own righteousness through being a good person or they think they're just going to fail and they can't pull it off because they're not very good.

Richard Shumack:

But what that means is it's really easier to talk with Muslims about God. They'll be easiest people to start a conversation with. The conversation might get tricky, willing pretty soon. But as we heard, you go to [inaudible 00:33:08], it's super easy to talk to Muslims about the truth, about God. They are interested in truth. I got out of Broadmeadows alive. And so the guy said, "Did you believe that Muhammad's a prophet?" I said, "No, I don't believe Muhammad's a prophet." There was a murmur in the crowd, but the guy said, "That's okay. This guy's on a journey to truth. He needs to find out himself." They gave me a showbag. It had a Quran, some books, some DVDs, life of Muhammad course type stuff. They're just people who want to discuss truth with me and I had 12 guys afterwards talking truth with me about God. It's really easy.

Richard Shumack:

As Christians, we're the only people who're really equipped to do it. Of anyone, we should get Islam because we have the same, similar theological framework to be able to pull it off. Couple of quick stories, and then we can have a chat. One of my students in Melbourne, he lived with this guy who was selling a van like that. He was at home once and these two guys knocked on the door. Opens the door and these two hardcore Pakistani Muslim guys. Hardcore like little Muhammads, the whole Salafis, if people know what I mean. People who absolutely want to model their life on Muhammad. Very conservative, very traditional, beards, caps, gowns, the whole thing. These guys knock on the door and say, "We're here about the van." Now, my friend confessed that the first thing that popped into his head was, "What do you want with a van?" Because there's that thing, "You guys are up to mischief clearly."

Richard Shumack:

But he repented that, got over that, and said, "Well, it's not my van. It's my flat mate's. He's coming back in a little while. You can come in and wait." And so, he made them a cup of tea and they sat down. They started chatting. They worked out he was at Bible college. And so, they started talking about the Bible and Jesus and Muhammad and the Quran and God. After about an hour of chatting, the other guy came back. But they said to him, "You know what? You must be the first Christian that we have met. We've been in Australia," they were students, "We've been here five or six years. You're the only Christian we've met because you're the only person who takes God seriously and who reads your Bible and particularly, you're the only Christian who's offered us a cup of tea. You're the only person who's offered us a cup of tea in five years." Now remember, in Islam, hospitality, that's true religion. Totally easy for him. It's really easy to speak about God with Muslim people.

Richard Shumack:

It's also really easy to witness faith, to walk as a believer around Muslims. I believe in God. It's really easy to pray with and for Muslims. In fact, it's crucial. Can I encourage you to take opportunities to pray? Muslims believe in God. They believe that God's powerful. They believe that God answers prayer. In 12 years of working with Somalis, apart from some women who I think became secret believers, no man took a Bible from me except one guy. He was going to court and he was totally guilty and he asked me for a reference and I said, "I'll give you one. It's no use. You're gone, but can I pray for you?" And so, I prayed for him and not just for him, with him in Jesus's name. He went to court and he was totally convicted, but the judge let him off with a caution. And so he raced back to me and said, "Your prayer got me off. God answered your prayer." And then, "Show me a Bible."

Richard Shumack:

Because here's the thing about Muslims. Again, in Islam, God is so transcendent. But if you're a Christian here tonight, your claim is that you have God living inside of you. You have this intimacy with God. If you pray with and for a Muslim, then they're getting a sense of that, sense of what that connection with God looks like. It's foreign to Islam. Last quick story. In that Romans passage, the first verse I think is a crucial one. Particularly if you're a Christian, I'm speaking to you now. Romans, Chapter 10, verse one, Paul says,

"My heart is [inaudible 00:37:51]." It's about his heart. And so, the challenge for us I think as Christians, it's not a theological challenge particularly. It's not even a skills challenge. It's how big is our heart. Friend of mine lives in Brisbane. By the way, this is a Rohingya refugee. Rohingyans are some of the most persecuted people in the world. They are a Muslim minority in Burma. There's a Rohingya refugee community in Australia.

Richard Shumack:

I'm not particularly talking about refugee policy, all that stuff tonight. I get there're complexities around that and we don't need to be naive. We want to be shrewd. But there are real Rohingya refugees in Australia who've been persecuted really heavily. One day, this friend up in Brisbane was walking past a park. Again, parks are great. Saw these guys playing soccer, just joined in. After they played soccer, he discovered they were Rohingyans. But he said, "Come back to my place. We'll get some pizzas." They went back and again, similar to the previous story, they said, "We've been here five or six years," they were permanent residents by now, "and this is the first Australian house that we've been in." Now, my friend is Irish and his wife is Japanese and so he said, "Well, sorry to have to tell you, you've still not been in an Australian house." But they had been in a Christian House.

Richard Shumack:

Remember, what's true religion? The challenge for us is whether we have space in our hearts to engage Muslims deeply and profoundly. Again, we're in a unique position to be able to engage Muslims on truth, but also with compassion and with love and hospitality. The challenge is whether we have that space in our hearts to do that. I've got all the time in the world for questions, but we'll see how we go.

Speaker 2:

Put up your hand if you've got a comment or a question and we'll go from there. Yep, right at the back.

Speaker 3:

Hi. How are you, Richard?

Richard Shumack:

Hi. Good, thanks.

Speaker 3:

The question I think you're missing is about, is there any discrimination and sexism in Islam which is dominant or not, or it should be neglected or not?

Richard Shumack:

Say that again?

Speaker 3:

Well, I'm saying, is there some discrimination and sexism-

Richard Shumack:

In Islam?

Speaker 3:

Which is very bold in Islam, or not?

Richard Shumack:

Right. Is there sexism in Islam? Certainly. In traditional Islam, I would say that what traditional Islam is trying to do is it's trying to recreate a seventh century Arab culture: Salafi, again, that modelling ourselves on Muhammad. What the strict schools of Islam is trying to do is they're trying to model themselves on Muhammad, and so what they're trying to do is have the role of women the same as you had in seventh century Arab society where women were second-class citizens in a whole variety of ways. And so yeah, certainly by Western modern standards, traditional Islam is there's no equality for women and particularly not if you're a... Muhammad had wives, but he also had concubines and he had slaves. And so, they were radically not treated with equality.

Richard Shumack:

In a general sense, yes, in traditional Islam, women are treated as second class. Now, there are modernized versions of Islam. There are different societies that will say, "Well, we're going to move on from that." Modernist Islam will try and do something different. Liberal Muslims will try and do something different. But in the traditional Islam, that's true. In the Hadith, I didn't talk much about Hadith, but in the whole example of Muhammad, and it goes back to what I was saying before, the ethics of early Islam are not very impressive to me.

Speaker 3:

Thank you.

Speaker 4:

The role of Jesus in the Quran, being a prophet of Islam [inaudible 00:42:22] and also being called the word of God, you say that most, I guess, grassroots Muslims don't know much about Jesus themselves. But how does Islam view the message and the words of Jesus? What do they accept and what do they reject?

Richard Shumack:

Right. Well, in the Quran and again, the word is another example, there's no substance to that term in the Quran. It doesn't really explain what does that word mean for Jesus to be the word, or [inaudible 00:42:50] the spirit as well. What does that even mean as well? In Islam itself, there's very little content around any of that. And so, what a Muslim will understand is that Jesus taught Islam because all the prophets taught Islam. You reverse engineer it, what happens is... And the interesting thing too, I don't want to go too much into this, is it's pretty clear that Muhammad had never seen a Bible. There were some Bible stories, but they were oral traditions.

Richard Shumack:

So he'd heard oral traditions, but he'd never read a Bible. And so for the first 100, maybe even 200 years, most Muslims didn't have any idea what was in the Bible, and so they just assumed that Jesus had taught Islam. It was only when they started to really interact with the Bible properly, they realized that what was in the Bible is very different to what Muhammad taught. And so as a general rule, the issue isn't so much what is in the Bible, but it's if what's in the Bible corresponds to what's in the Quran, then it's true and if it doesn't, then it's not.

Speaker 2:

Can I ask a question, Richard?

Richard Shumack:

Yeah, sure.

Speaker 2:

In my conversations with Muslims and perhaps, I didn't appreciate the power of simplicity of Islam, I found myself falling into rookie traps trying to unpack the incarnation or the Trinity, these doctrines that just look foolish to them. What are some of the easy engagement points that avoid some of those traps? What should I have been aiming to talk about where there was commonality and where Christianity didn't look as foolish or was more intelligible?

Richard Shumack:

Yeah. I think as a general rule and you won't always be able to... You need to respond to real questions. You can't always drive conversations, but as a general rule, I'd say don't try and debate theology with Muslims. Even the things I say about Trinity and about Jesus, they've never really looked into it themselves. It's the stuff they've been told. Most Muslims' theological education ends when they're about 11. They go to Friday school till about that. And then after that, they don't really know a whole lot about Islam. They don't know much about Muslim theology or Christian theology. And so yeah, you spin around about incarnation and the Bible's being changed.

Richard Shumack:

But my suggestion is don't discuss that. Discuss things like, "Do you know that God loves you? He's going to answer your prayers." Discuss existential questions, if people know what I mean by that, not theological questions as much as possible. Use your testimony and speak authoritatively too. Again, big generalization, but for the most part in traditional societies, people don't ask many questions and still most Muslims you speak to are from a traditional society, at least in their theological framework. And so, a good answer to the question the Bible's been changed is no, it hasn't. Don't even bother getting too much in the apologetics. Just say, "No, it hasn't." I've based my whole life on this thing and I've been studying... Well, I can say things like I've seen Sinaiticus, which is the earliest...

Richard Shumack:

That's my phone. Sorry about that. I've seen Sinaiticus in the British Library, and so I've seen the earliest Bible and it hasn't been changed. I've been to theological college and I promise you, it hasn't been changed. Just take it from me. If it was so obvious that it had been changed, I wouldn't have based my life on it. There's a way you short circuit that, but just give your testimony. We're not called to be apologists or called to be testifiers, to be witnesses to the reality of God. You should just talk about why you love being Christian and the difference God makes in your life. I think that's the way you need to go and you might need to yell a bit to get to that point. You might need to deflect a bit to get to that point.

Speaker 2:

I got time for one more question I think.

Speaker 5:

Thank you. Hi. Given the problems of hatred and everything in the world, could it be argued that this talk of, "Is Christianity true?" "Is Islam true?" Is part of the problem more than part of the solution?

Richard Shumack:

My background is in philosophy. So I'm touchy about that, but I think truth matters. Ideas have consequences and false ideas lead to evil and destruction and truth leads to reality. I don't think that by avoiding truth, you avoid conflict, particularly when if truth, and this is what I would argue and I guess, this is part of why I'm a Christian, about God fundamentally is that God is love and that relationship is at the heart of the universe and that the mechanism that we're called to live by is forgiveness and restoration and reconciliation. If that is the truth, then that's got to be the solution. That can't make the problem worse. You just can't avoid truth in the end. Truth wins. If truth is also beautiful and loving, then I can't see how that stops it being a solution. We can discuss truth well and we can discuss it badly and if we discuss it badly, then we can end up in arguments. But truth matters and ideas have consequences. Particularly, when truth is beautiful, I think it's the solution, not the problem.