



## ***BUILDING BRIDGES: ABRAHAMIC PERSPECTIVES ON THE WORLD TODAY***

**What is the relationship between religion and violence?  
Must your faith tradition be wrong in order for mine to be right?  
What is the role of God in a democratic society?**

**Season I, *Building Bridges: Abrahamic Perspectives on the World Today*.** This popular series which premiered in November 2006 on Bridges Television (American Muslim TV Network), looks at these and other vital questions about the role of religion in America today. Conceived by **CLAL President Rabbi Brad Hirschfield**, this landmark program brought religious leaders together from the three major faiths to answer the tough questions dividing our country and world. From religion and violence, to abortion, to the place of women, the series asked leaders to probe their own traditions for insights on the big issues to create a new listening, understanding, and foundation for bridge building.

### **God in the American Public Square (1 1-3)**

What are the implications of today's ongoing debates about prayer in public schools, the Ten Commandments displayed in courthouses? What is the appropriate place for religion in our nation's public institutions? How much influence should our respective religious communities wield? Together we explore how to honor both the freedom of religion that is a hallmark of American culture, and the place of our particular religion in creating a better world.

### **Creation and Evolution (2 1-3)**

Are science and religion antagonists or allies? Eighty years after the Scopes "Monkey" trial, America is still struggling with the proper understanding of creation/evolution and what should be taught, especially in public schools. Together we will explore what our faiths teach us about creation and evolution. How do we understand the competing claims made by science and religion? What are the implications, given that each actually asks us to confront the fundamental questions of how we got here, and where we are going?

### **Religion, Violence, and Peace (3 1-2)**

Whether called crusades, commanded wars, or jihad, all three of our religions have invoked the name and will of God in the pursuit of violence. It is too simplistic to claim that such moves are only made by those who have "hijacked" their respective faiths. How do we understand the place of violence and war in each of our traditions? Is anything worth fighting for? If so, what? Under what circumstances? How do we understand each of our tradition's mandates to pursue peace? How do we know when to follow one path, and when to follow the other?

### **Abortion and the Sacredness of Life (4 1-3)**

Religion fans the flames of this hotly debated topic. Could it do more? The usual framing of pro-life vs. pro-choice simply does not work for most Americans, who routinely show themselves to be both uncomfortable with abortion, and with undermining a woman's right to make choices for herself. What do our three faiths teach us about the beginning of life and when, if ever, we can choose to end it? How might these teachings contribute to a healthier conversation about this terribly divisive issue?

### **When Life Ends (5 1-3)**

Terri Schiavo was just the beginning. With each great advance in our ability to prolong life comes a great responsibility for us to better understand when it is really over. That is what the marriage of blessing and obligation, which lies at the heart of each of our faiths, is all about. When, according to each of the Abrahamic traditions, does life end? What do those definitions teach us about the value of life, and maintaining the complex balance between its quality and its quantity?

### **Forgiveness and Repentance (6 1-3)**

Each of our traditions teaches the ideal of forgiveness and challenges the faithful to repent when they have transgressed. But are there any acts that are truly unforgivable? Are there sins so great for which repentance is not possible? What do we mean when we use terms like "justice," "punishment," and "retribution"? Where is the line between keeping ourselves on the right track and satisfying the very dangerous and all too human yearnings for revenge?

### **Fitting In: Creating Cultural Continuity (7 1-3)**

What does it mean to be a minority in America? Is assimilation a blessing or a curse? Perhaps the term is itself problematic. Instead, we might ask, how do we find the right balance between maintaining religious/ethnic integrity, and locating a larger American identity? As a nation of immigrants, these issues have been addressed by each of our communities. What can we learn from each other's experience, and how in particular does religion

hinder and/or promote such learning?

### **The Laws of God and People (8 1-3)**

Each of us would claim that being a faithful member of our communities and being good Americans are never a problem, but is that really so? What happens when the demands of our faith conflict with the law of the land? Where does each of our communities feel that pressure right now and what are we to do? Is compromise possible and if so, under what circumstances?

### **Does One Side Have To Win? (9 1-3)**

How do we understand concepts like "the chosen people" and "divine election"? Does the fact that I deeply believe that my tradition is True demand that I see yours as False? If not, why not? In a time of heightened debates between absolutists on all sides, we will examine how each of our three faiths can help us past these unhelpful arguments. We will consider how each of our traditions understands Truth, and the place it allows for difference and diversity.

### **Secularism and Other Fundamentalisms (10 1-3)**

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### **Jerusalem (11 1-3)**

The struggle over Israel and Palestine remains one of the most crucial of our day. It looms larger than either the size of the territory or the populations that are affected. What is it about our connection to something physical, like land, which is actually spiritual? Are such attachments even appropriate? How can our spiritual traditions be used to generate fresh thinking and new vision that will help heal this wound and bring justice for all? Beyond using our respective pasts to prove who is right, we will use them to forge a vision for the future.

### **Sacred Doubt and Holy Questions (12 1-3)**

What are the roles of questioning and doubt in the creation of healthy religious identities and strong spiritual communities? We all know how good our traditions can be at providing answers to so many of life's big questions, but how are they doing at training individuals to ask those big questions that help all of us advance to higher levels of thought and practice? If our various faiths cannot do this, are they really living up to their highest ideals?

### **Papal Statement (13 1-3)**

Pope Benedict XVI found himself embroiled in controversy after quoting a medieval king who criticized the religion of Islam as being "inhuman and violent." While he has since apologized, the resulting tension has forced many to ask the question: Where is the line between rebuke and respect when it comes to other peoples' religions? How can we share our sharpest questions about the religion of others, and what obligations do we have to take those questions seriously, even when they are asked in hurtful ways?

### **Self-Defense and Self-Critique (14 1-3)**

We are privileged to live in a country where both the government and the self-defense organizations of our respective faith communities will raise the public cry when we experience prejudice or bias. But has that created a culture of chronic complaint in which we are always searching for the hurt done to us by other communities instead of looking at those places where our own communities should be doing better? Has victimization replaced honest self-critique?

### **Why Religion Matters (15 1-3)**

What is the role of religion in a world that is currently witnessing more religious violence than at any time since the crusades? Is it time to simply give up not on any one tradition in particular, but on religion in general? If the answer is to have any real meaning, then we must take a hard look at each of our traditions and ask what they really offer the world. What is it about them that contributes not only to the creation of group identity, itself a crucial element of human identity, but to the good of all mankind?

### **A Woman's Place (16 1-3)**

Our understanding of the place of women in society has changed more in the last one hundred years than in the previous thousand. Is that a change for the better or not? What are implications of those changes for communities of faith? How are women understood in the three Abrahamic traditions? What is their role and is it a fair one? Although often referred to as "women's issues," why are these questions important for men and women alike?

### **Religion and Pop Culture (17 1-3)**

Religion plays a powerful role in contemporary popular culture. From Mel Gibson's *Passion of the Christ* to the explosion of Christian rock bands to Madonna as a devotee of Kabala, Jewish mysticism. Is this a good thing? Is it proper for religion to build its successes on pop culture's institutions rather than to critique the culture's excesses? Do our faiths risk being trivialized when they are so much a part of the American marketplace? Does cultural success lead to spiritual failure?

### **Hopes and Dreams (18 1-3)**

Each of the three Abrahamic traditions has a picture of the "good ending," a picture of a perfected or redeemed world. In this episode we share those images of the end-time, as a vision of the world to which we aspire, and a map that can lead us there. Together we will consider how our hopes for the future can shape our behaviors in the present, and challenge ourselves to create that world for which we all hope, by living it as much as possible right now?