

The Real Religulous: Elon explores stereotypes, spirituality

Natalie Alison
Senior Reporter

Gun-owning, anti-government Bible thumpers. Terrorists who crash planes in the name of Allah. Amoral cynics who judge religious people. The portrayal of religious groups and atheists in media, prompted a discussion at Elon University about the myths of many of these claims.

Religious studies lecturer L.D. Russell, a self-described "recovering Baptist," assistant professor of Arabic Shereen Elgamal, a lifelong Muslim, and sociology professor and atheist Tom Arcaro participated in The Real Religulous, a panel discussion moderated by associate professor of communications Anthony Hatcher Monday.

The panel, hosted by Elon's interfaith student group Better Together, was organized to facilitate one of the group's priorities: bringing mutual understanding between people of different religious backgrounds.

"People finding motivation in religion to do ungodly things is certainly a huge problem and has been throughout history," Russell said. "But I want to be careful not to lose sight of the tremendous good that has been done and motivated by religion. For every Osama bin Laden, there might be a Mother Theresa. And you shouldn't deny that."

Elgamal, who said she has experienced instances of discrimination for being a Muslim, shared her thoughts that most problems that stem from religion don't come

from the faith systems themselves, but rather from misguided followers.

"I would say religion is not the problem," she said. "I think people misrepresenting or forcing religion on other people is the problem."

The 10 years after Sept. 11, Elgamal said, have been characterized by Western public opinion of Muslims as evildoers. But when asked what Muslims can do to combat the terrorist label, she told the audience that little could be done besides having lifestyles consistent with the message of peace.

"I agree it is a perpetual stereotype," Elgamal said. "We do the best we can and we get our points for trying. It starts with me and then I spread the word of knowledge and peace and understanding and each of us becomes an agent."

Christians, whose stereotype in the media is commonly that of right-winged fundamentalists, Russell said, also encompass a wide range of people, beliefs and cultural tendencies.

Left-leaning Christians, Roman Catholics and Mormons, he said, which are less commonly portrayed in media than mainstream Protestants, are but a few examples of other groups who identify with Christianity.

"Certainly a healthy portion would fit the description of gun-owning and right-winged," Russell said. "However, there is a broad spectrum. There are conservative, traditional evangelicals who by and large fit

that description, but you also have centrists and modernist evangelicals who might believe some of the same things but might be much less political about those beliefs."

Arcaro, who conducted research and initiated a national survey on atheism in 2008, said religion-scoffing, modern and historical leaders in the atheist stream are not representative of all nonbelievers.

"The perception of atheists by a lot of folks is that this is a monolithic group of people who all look like Christopher Hitchens or Richard Dawkins," he said. "Those more vocal voices tend to paint the image of atheism for everyone, and that's a small group of folks. There are a lot of everyday atheists out there — you wouldn't know it, but you might be sitting next to one."

Many atheists are grouped together with anti-theists, Arcaro said, who see religion in general as a problem. He said that was the type of stereotype he wanted to dispel.

Whether widespread understanding among religions will be established is unsure, according to Elgamal. Although some people are misguided about the reality of her faith, Elgamal said she doesn't make it a priority to correct them, but rather to simply live out her convictions and do good to others.

"To combat evil with good, it's a lot of work and takes a lot of time," she said. "But I believe that positive energy multiples in certain ways, so hopefully good will prevail in the end. But when is the most difficult part of that question."

NEWS BRIEFS

String of smashed windows hits Elon

Several cars parked on Lebanon and East College Avenues had shattered windows last weekend.

Affected sophomores Ashley Fowler and Kimberly Lilienthal learned no cameras overlook the area. Neither student found anything to be missing, but Fowler's side mirror was broken and Lilienthal said she thinks more should be done to improve the safety of students and their property.

Elon police are continuing to investigate.

Student feedback prompts West End to change name of party

A party at West End Station called CEOs and Corporate Hoes, planned for Wednesday night, has had a name change after offended Elon University students voiced their disapproval.

Now called CEO Night, West End posted an apology on its Facebook page.

"It has been brought to our attention that the naming choice of our event next Wednesday offended many," the apology reads. "We are extremely sorry to anyone who has been offended as a result of this."

Students host conference to explore reasons behind unemployment

Students at Elon University will host a conference to explore unemployment and the social implications of work Nov. 17 in McCoy Commons, Oaks 212.

The all-day conference, titled "Human Fulfillment & the Meaning of Work," will incorporate discussion about how the perception of work has changed over the years.

Nov. 16 - Nov. 22

<p>Nov. 16</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Education Week: India • National Hunger and Homelessness Week: 10-11:30 a.m., Loaves and Fishes • Elon Innovation Challenge Award Distribution: 4:15 p.m., LaRose Digital Theater 	<p>Nov. 17</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conference on Human Fulfillment and the Meaning of Work: 10:30 a.m.-3:45 p.m., Oaks 212 • International Education Week Yoga and Meditation seminar: 4:15 p.m., Belk Pavilion 208 	<p>Nov. 18</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indoor rockclimbing trip to Tumblebee's Gym in Greensboro with Campus Rec • Turkey Trot with Campus Rec: 3:30 p.m. 	<p>Nov. 19</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SUB Cinema showing "One Day": 8 p.m., Irazu
<p>Nov. 20</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International Transgender Day of Remembrance Vigil: 6 p.m., 	<p>Nov. 21</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pendulum Executive Staff Applications due by 5 p.m. to the Elon Town Center, third floor. • SJE Art exhibition: 5:30 p.m., Isabella Cannon Room • Elon University Jazz Ensemble Fall Concert: 7:30 p.m., McCrary Theatre 	<p>Nov. 22</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanksgiving Break 	<p>For more dates and information about campus events, visit the calendar on the Elon website.</p>

Corrections

In the Nov. 9 issue of The Pendulum, Peter Felten was incorrectly identified. He is the assistant provost.

Also in the Nov. 9 issue of The Pendulum, Scott Hendershot was incorrectly identified. He was not present during the removal of posters from senior Taylor Ferguson's room. Evan Heiser, assistant director of residence life, was present.

the Swing

Watch The Swing at <http://bit.ly/theswing4>

Men's Soccer wins SoCon

Sports editor Justin Veldhuis talks about Elon men's soccer winning the SoCon championship and previews what will happen at the NCAA tournament this week.

Wake County School Board

Former Wake County students give their thoughts on the recent school board election and what it means for their alma maters.

Thanksgiving Holiday

Swing Executive Producer Christopher Bosak explains why Thanksgiving trumps all other holidays.

Pottermore

We've got all the details on the web's latest interactive attraction for Potterheads.

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The Pendulum goes social



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