

The Da`wah-Evangelism Peace Project

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[We were given only six minutes to speak at this conference! The goal was to outline the issues in our presentation and then during Q&A time we could address issues in greater detail]¹

Christian-Muslim relations comprise one of the momentous challenges of the 21st century. The relationship between Christians and Muslims is characterized by a history of conflict, supercharged by the “war on terror,” and exacerbated by the fact that western countries are perceived as “Christian” by many Muslims. The importance of making peace between these two faith communities is significant when we consider that Muslims and Christians make up well over half of the world’s population.²

One of the areas of tension, suspicion and conflict between Muslims and Christians is the issue of mission – da`wah (the technical term for Islamic outreach, which literally means “invitation”) and evangelism. Both Christianity and Islam are missionary faiths. Large numbers of Christians convert to Islam on a regular basis and large numbers of Muslims become followers of Jesus on a regular basis. How can both Muslims and Christians respectfully bear witness to their faith and yet live in peace?

I see three major challenges facing Evangelicals on this issue. First, evangelism is a pillar of evangelical faith.³ Jesus commands us to bear witness to our faith (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 1:8).

¹ I have added footnotes for those who read the presentation after it is posted on my website.

² “Muslims and Christians together make up well over half of the world’s population. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world...’ Peaceful relations between Muslims and Christians stand as one of the central challenges of this century, and perhaps of the whole present epoch...If we can achieve religious peace between these two religious communities, peace in the world will clearly be easier to attain” (Volf, Muhammad and Yarrington 2011:53).

³ I helped facilitate a three-hour closed-door session on the topic of da`wah and evangelism during the Common Word Dialogue at Yale University in July 2008. Almost thirty Christian and Muslim leaders participated. You can imagine how lively that discussion was! During this session Dr. Joseph Lombard (an American Christian convert to

This is non-negotiable. So *how* we witness is vital. I am painfully aware that evangelical practice sometimes fails in this respect. There are evangelicals who use relief and development as a *cover* and do “aid evangelism” (i.e., aid as a means to evangelism). Bearing witness respectfully isn’t always the norm among Evangelicals. May God forgive us and may you my Muslim friends forgive us.

Happily there are a large number of evangelicals who seek to share their faith in a manner worthy of Jesus the Messiah.⁴ In a joint statement entitled “*Why Do We Share the Good News about Jesus with All Peoples, Including Muslims?*”⁵ leaders of fifty-five Christian organizations from nineteen countries affirm the importance of respectful witness and specifically reject what has historically been referred to as “aid evangelism”: “We, who come from many cultures, countries and backgrounds, offer this message of peace to all people in love, with respect and cultural sensitivity, without coercion or material inducement (Affirmation 5).”⁶

The following texts from the New Testament emphasize the same thing:

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15).

Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone (Col 4:45-6).

Second, how evangelicals share their faith and simultaneously work for peace is a conundrum for many evangelicals. But it needn’t be. The “great commission” (i.e., Jesus’ command to make disciples of all nations: Matt 28:18-20) is to be lived out in ways consistent with the great commandments (i.e., Love of God and Love of Neighbor: Matt 22:35-40). In other words, love for God and love for neighbor shape the expression of our witness to the nations. Without love,

Islam) exclaimed, “I didn’t realize that evangelism was one of the pillars of the Christian faith!” A few other Muslim leaders made the same comment to me during the Common Word Dialogue.

⁴ I rejoice whenever the good news about Christ is shared (cf. Phil 1:15-18). However, I believe that Christ receives more glory when our motives and manner are more in line with his, and I believe his witnesses are more effective when they imitate his motives and manner.

⁵ You can find this statement at <http://www.ricklove.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/Why-we-share-the-good-news-with-Muslims.pdf>

⁶ J. Dudley Woodberry and Joseph Cumming have each written profoundly biblical articles about respectful witness (Woodberry 2009:171-177; Cumming 2008:311-324).

evangelical witness is like a “noisy gong or a clanging cymbal” (1 Cor 13:1ff.).⁷ I could easily have said this 10 or 20 years ago but how I live this out in practice now is very different.⁸

In addition, many Evangelicals have ignored or minimized the clear teaching about peacemaking in the Bible.⁹ This is reflected in the preamble of World Evangelical Alliance Peace and Reconciliation Initiative:¹⁰

God has created the world to be recipients of His love. Because of sin, we live in a world rife with conflict. God’s mission is the reconciliation of all things through Christ, and He invites us to participate with Him in the pursuit of right relationships. We honor the faithful examples of peacebuilding and reconciliation in our history. We confess and repent of our failure, whether through our action or inaction, to bear witness to the Gospel by faithfully living out the peaceable ways of Jesus Christ. In particular, we acknowledge that in our zeal for evangelism, we have often overlooked the biblical mandate to pursue peace. We commit ourselves anew to this mandate within our homes, churches, communities, and among the nations.¹¹

Evangelicals would do well to go back to the Bible to draw out its profound and comprehensive teaching on peacemaking ... and live it out!

⁷ See Graham Cole’s excellent summary of these issues (2009:218-219).

⁸ The chart below presents a good overview of evangelical thought and practice in numbers 1-4. The point I am trying to make is best summarized in number 4, “Integral Mission,” or what I call “Biblical Holism.” (Davies p .4)

1 Proclamation Only	2 Traditional Evangelical	3 Pragmatic Evangelical	4 Integral Mission	5 Pragmatic Ecumenical	6 Traditional Ecumenical	7 Liberation Theology
Doing good is a distraction (therefore, a sin) from our call to preach the gospel.	Social programmes are acceptable as long as they don't take evangelism resources.	Social programmes are a good strategy for evangelism (a means to an end).	We do good because we are Christians – no distinction made between compassion & proclamation	It is ok to preach the gospel but only if you have a chance (no intentionality)	Doing good is our preaching. Don't use ministry resources to "proclaim".	Preaching the gospel is via transforming the unjust structures of society.

⁹ See my article *The Missing Peace of Evangelical Missiology: Peacemaking and Respectful Witness* <http://www.ricklove.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/Peacemaking-and-Evangelism.pdf>

¹⁰ The World Evangelical Alliance represents 420 million Evangelicals around the world. <http://www.weapri.org/about-2/>

¹¹ The Peace Catalyst Manifesto is similar: In a world rife with conflict, we resolve to follow the peaceable ways of Jesus the Messiah. God’s true children work for peace. We confess we have often overlooked the biblical mandate to pursue peace. Sometimes, we have shared the tenets of our faith without exhibiting the character of its founder. Thus, by the grace of God, we commit ourselves to peacemaking – to resolve conflict and restore harmony as God commands. We commit ourselves anew to this mandate within our homes, across our religious communities, throughout our spheres of influence, and among the nations of the world.

Third, it appears to me that a significant point of tension between Muslims and Evangelicals is the issue of freedom of religion.¹² An Evangelical viewpoint has been ably articulated in another important consensus document which is part of the “Grace and Truth Project” (affirmation 7 in the exposition).

We affirm the right of religious freedom for every person and community. We defend the right of Muslims to express their faith respectfully among Christians and of Christians to express their faith respectfully among Muslims. Moreover we affirm the right of Muslims and Christians alike to change religious beliefs, practices and/or affiliations according to their conscience. Thus we stand against all forms of religious persecution toward Muslims, Christians, or anyone else. God desires all people to make faith choices based on conscience and conviction rather than any form of coercion or violence (2 Cor 4:2).¹³

It is my understanding that most Muslims could not affirm this. I rejoice that the Qur’an teaches “There is no compulsion in religion” (Q 2:256), but Islamic tradition also affirms the “law of apostasy” (which states that if someone converts to another religion from Islam they must be killed).¹⁴

In light of these three challenges I would like to propose a “Da‘wah and Evangelism Peace Project.” We would begin by gathering select leaders from both faith communities together to develop an agreed upon “Ethics of Da‘wah and Evangelism with three components/consultations

- Studying together the sacred texts of our respective faith communities about the ethics of witness and religious freedom.
- Engaging in critical evaluation: Where have we been faithful? Where have we failed? (We would need an experienced conflict resolution facilitator for this).
- Appointing a taskforce to help determine mechanisms of redress when 1) Christians in a majority-Muslim country are undergoing persecution; 2) Muslims in a Christian-

¹² Evangelicals are non-negotiably committed to Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”

¹³ <http://www.ricklove.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/grace-and-truth-exposition-for-website.pdf>

¹⁴ Happily there are a number of Muslim scholars who are re-examining and refuting the traditional interpretation of the law of apostasy. I was deeply encouraged by Mohammad Hashim Kamali during the Common Word Dialogue when he refuted the traditional interpretation of the law of apostasy (see his *Freedom of Expression in Islam* [1998]). Asma Afsaruddin (a member of the Advisory Board of *Peace Catalyst International*) and Jamal Badawi also refute this traditional viewpoint. See Afsaruddin 2009: 200-202. Jamal Badawi gave me his paper on the subject which I hope to put on my website in the near future. See also *Apostasy and Religious Freedom* by Louay Safi Apr 08, 2006. <http://louaysafi.com/content/view/54/18/> and article about Dr. Abdul Hamid Al-Ansari in “Academic cautions against ‘irrational way of thinking’” by Anwar ElKhatib in the Gulf Times http://www.gulf-times.com/site/topics/article.asp?cu_no=2&item_no=262587&version=1&template_id=36&parent_id=16 However, as Abdul Rashied Omar notes, “The right to be convinced and to convert from Islam to another religion is held by only a minority of Muslim scholars. This view of religious freedom is, however, not shared by the vast majority of Muslim scholars both past as well as present. Most classical and modern Muslim jurists regard apostasy (riddah), defined by them as an act of rejection of faith committed by a Muslim whose Islam had been affirmed without coercion, as a crime deserving the death penalty” (Omar 2009:186).

majority country are being persecuted or cast in an inaccurate and negative light; 3) Muslim leaders have concerns about the ethics of a particular Christian witness in their society; or 4) Christian leaders have concerns about the ethical practices of a particular Muslim witness in their society.

I could envision at least four practical outcomes:

- A published resource manual which educates Muslim, Christian and other readers about the ethical commitments and concerns on both sides of this sensitive issue and which suggests a way forward in terms of a code of ethics for witness and religious freedom.
- A global, relational network of Christian and Muslim leaders with a strong working (and personal) relationship who can together defuse problems of persecution and unethical witness before they escalate into major crises.
- A tangible display of “love of neighbor” and interreligious peacemaking as Christian and Muslim leaders together solve some of the toughest issues facing Muslim-Christian relations.
- An ongoing working group created to evaluate on an annual basis the relevance of the manual in light of real sources of tension between Muslims & Christians.

I realize the massive complexity of working toward “freedom of religion” and implementing the “Da‘wah-Evangelism Peace Project.” But my commitment to love of God and neighbor, along with the massive biblical teaching on peacemaking, compels me to push forward with this initiative. I believe there are wise, noble and forward-thinking Muslim leaders and wise, noble and forward-thinking Christian leaders who will join me.

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