

***Human Rights in a Post 9-11 World:
How Followers of Christ Relate to Muslims***

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This panel focuses on human rights in a Post 9-11 world. So, my remarks will focus primarily on human rights as it relates to Christian-Muslim relations. Certainly the age of “terrorism” negatively impacts the Jewish community, but my expertise in Christian-Muslim relations, the unique focus of this panel, and time limitations forces me to narrow my focus. The title of my response is *Human Rights in a Post 9-11 World: How Followers of Christ Relate to Muslims*.

Since 9-11, too many people who call themselves “Christians,” as well as genuine followers of Christ respond to Muslims out of fear, suspicion or anger rather than love.¹ The threat of terrorism, negative stereotypes of Muslims, and ignorance has caused the church to shrink back from Jesus’ commands to love and to make disciples. Instead of actively loving Muslims, too many Christians merely reflect the prejudices circulating through the media, which only increases polarization.

I see two reasons for this. First, there is ***a lack of biblical clarity and conviction about human rights*** among Evangelicals. While the most famous human rights document -- the Universal Declaration of Human Rights -- is written in purely secular terms, the ethical issue of

¹ A Washington Post/ABC News poll in 2006 found that nearly half of Americans have a negative view of Islam, seven percentage points higher than observed a few months after Sept. 11, 2001 (Esposito and Mogahed 2007:45).

human rights is not secular.² In fact, there is a rich and robust theological basis of human rights.

Even a quick review of “For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic

Responsibility” (from the National Association of Evangelicals

http://www.nae.net/images/civic_responsibility2.pdf) and “An Evangelical Declaration against

Torture: Protecting Human Rights in an Age of Terror” (from the EHR

<http://www.evangelicalsforhumanrights.org/storage/mhead/fullstatement.pdf>)

makes this clear.³

A second reason Evangelicals have been slow to engage human rights issues is *an overemphasis on a gospel of personal reconciliation at the expense of social transformation.*

Justice, mercy and peacemaking are also an essential part of the good news of Christ. The World

Evangelical Alliance Peace and Reconciliation Initiative (WEAPRI) described it as follows in

the Preamble to their commitment statement.

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 honour 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

² “For the church to apply the principles of human rights in its mission is not to follow a ‘secular religion’, but to make basic commitments emerging directly from core Christian beliefs. It follows that evangelism which ignores human rights abuses in the context of its activity lacks both authority and credibility” (Wieland 2007:174).

³ Walter Riggans summarizes this well: “In a real sense, Christian mission is the parent of the human rights movement. There are several biblical principles that have profoundly influenced Western societies in this context: The Bible teaches that all humanity is made in God’s image; the incarnation and passion of Jesus demonstrate the value of each person to God. God challenges us to work for a society characterized by righteousness, justice and peace; he commands us to care for the weak and disadvantaged in society; Jesus call us to love even those whom we might consider enemies” (Riggans 2000:462). See also Christopher Marshall’s *Crowned with Glory and Honor: Human Rights in the Biblical Tradition* (2001).

mandate to pursue peace. We commit ourselves anew to this mandate within our homes, churches, communities, and among the nations.⁴

Biblical Foundations for Human Rights

What is a Christian perspective on human rights vis a vis Christian-Muslim relations in a Post 9-11 world? Let's begin with a Scriptural overview.

The Torah mentions numerous commands about how God's people should relate to immigrants or "the other".

Do not mistreat an alien or oppress him (Exodus 22:21)

And I charged your judges ... Hear the disputes between your brothers and judge fairly, whether the case is between brother Israelites or between one of them and an alien (Deuteronomy 1:16)

Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice (Deuteronomy 24:17)

When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow (Deuteronomy 24:19)

God's people must insure that aliens are not mistreated or oppressed. The people of God should act justly (which includes a concern for the legal rights of the alien) and show compassion (see also Exodus 23:9; Deuteronomy 14:29; 24:14; 27:19). But even justice and compassion for the alien fall short of God's high standards. God calls us to racial equality and practical love.

When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself (Leviticus 19:34)⁵

⁴ I serve on the Executive Team of WEAPRI (World Evangelical Alliance Peace and Reconciliation Initiative). See <http://www.weapri.org/about-2/>

⁵ Christopher J.H. Wright makes two noteworthy comments on these texts: "The most comprehensive single text that articulates the ethical dimension of holiness in Israel is Leviticus 19" (2006:373). "If we are inclined to think of holiness as a matter of private piety (in Christian terms) or as a matter of binding religious rituals (in Old Testament terms), then we might expect either a list of devotional exhortations for our deeper personal sanctity or a manual of

He [God] defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens (Deuteronomy 10:18-19)

Thus, “God loves the stranger, the widow, and the orphan; and therefore his people, if they truly love God, must also be concerned for justice and righteousness in relation to their neighbors. In short, God’s people are to be known for their concern for those whose social and economic position exposed them to exploitation and oppression.”⁶ In fact, because of the vulnerability of aliens, positive discrimination is required towards them, to mitigate against the impact of their vulnerability.⁷

Jesus teaches about love of “the other” in his profound and prophetic parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37). Jesus makes the despised Samaritan (cf. John 4:9) – the “immigrant” or the “alien” – the hero of the story. The Samaritan felt compassion and showed mercy, not the Jewish religious leaders (the Priest and the Levite). How does Jesus define love of neighbor? An act of compassion done to anyone in need – even if they are of a different – or even despised – religion, nationality, or race. Compassion towards an outsider becomes the exemplar of what it means to love one’s neighbor.

obsolete ritual obligations ... Actually it contains none of the former and only a few of the later. The bulk of the Leviticus 19 shows us that the kind of holiness that reflects God’s own holiness is thoroughly practical, social and very down-to-earth.” (2006:373, 374).

⁶Christensen, Duane L.: *Word Biblical Commentary: Deuteronomy 1-21:9*. Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002 (Word Biblical Commentary 6A), S. 206

⁷ In the Prophets, God’s just purposes for the alien continue to be emphasized but little is said about love. “This is what the LORD says: Do what is just and right...Do no wrong or violence to the alien, the fatherless or the widow” (Jeremiah 22:3). “Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor” (Zechariah 7:10). “So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those ... who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me,” says the LORD Almighty” (Malachi 3:5).

But Jesus doesn't just echo the teaching of the Torah regarding love. He also commands his follower to "love their enemies" – which is at once the most radical, and the most ignored command in the Bible. (I mention this command not because Muslims are our enemies, but because for many they are "perceived" to be our enemies.) This command is anchored in the robust biblical teaching about peacemaking.⁸ There is a striking parallel between being a peacemaker (Matt 5:9) and loving your enemies. Both peacemakers and those who love their enemies are described as "children of God" (Matt 5:9, 44; Luke 6:35). They are called children of God because they are acting like their Father: the God of Peace (Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 5:23) who sent the Prince of Peace (Isa 9:6) to bring about a world of peace (Luke 2:14). In other words, peacemakers and those who love their enemies demonstrate their authenticity as children of God by their words and acts of peace.

The command to "love your enemy" is not just a peacemaking principle though. It comes from the one who modeled enemy love. Scripture teaches that Jesus loved humanity and laid down his life for us, "while we were enemies" (Rom 5:10; cf Col 1:21). After his enemies nailed him to the cross, Jesus prayed, "Father forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). In other words, Jesus responds to enemies with self-giving, sacrificial love. This is the good news and this is our example!⁹

The pervasive call for justice and the strong emphasis on love in the Scriptures should push Evangelicals toward their Muslim neighbor in positive attempts at bridge building. It

⁸ The theme of peacemaking– if not the term -- pervades the Sermon on the Mount. Teaching on the following subjects directly relate to the tasks of peacemaking: anger and reconciliation (5:21-26), not resisting an evil person (5:38-42), loving ones enemies (5:43-48), forgiving (6:12,14,15), not judging others (7:1-5).It is also a pervasive theme in the New Testament (See Love 2000; Love 2008a).

⁹ "From Matthew to Revelation we find a consistent witness against violence and a calling to the community to follow the example of Jesus in *accepting* suffering rather than *inflicting* it (Hays 1996:332).

should motivate Evangelicals to speak out against human rights violations and to seek to uphold civil liberties for their Muslim neighbors.

Practical Implications of Human Rights

At a conference like this it is important for each faith community to clearly articulate what their sacred texts teach about human rights. But I think it is just as important to acknowledge where their faith community has failed to live up to its own standards. So I must include a word of repentance. Personally, I am grieved over how Christians have responded to Muslims in America since 9-11. There has been a huge gap between what the Scriptures teach and how followers of Christ actually live.¹⁰ May God and our Muslim neighbors forgive us. The good news is, however, that there are many efforts taking place to address Muslim civil liberties and challenge Christians to love and respect their Muslim neighbors. Let me point out five such initiatives.

- *Evangelicals for Human Rights*¹¹ EHR has been a prophetic voice calling for the abolition of torture since 2006 (<http://www.evangelicalsforhumanrights.org/>).¹² I am privileged to be serving on their Steering Team.
- *The Yale Center for Faith and Culture's Reconciliation Program*. The goal of the Reconciliation Program is to promote reconciliation between Muslims and Christians, and between Muslim nations and the West, drawing on the resources of the Abrahamic faiths and the teachings and person of Jesus (<http://www.yale.edu/faith/rp/rp.htm>). I had

¹⁰ Recently I found a verse in the Qur'an that describes how Christians are supposed to live: "We sent after them Jesus the son of Mary and bestowed on him the Gospel; and We ordained in the hearts of those who followed him compassion and mercy" (57:27). This verse comports well with Jesus teaching about the compassion of the Good Samaritan.

¹¹ One of the ways I was led to work toward justice on behalf of Muslims was by participating in a *Global Leaders Forum* in Arlington, Virginia October 2007 (sponsored by the National Association of Evangelicals and the Micah Challenge, U.S.). Ten working groups were structured around some of the most globally significant ethical issues facing the church today. I was asked to facilitate a working group addressing torture. This resulted in my serving on the Steering Team for *Evangelicals for Human Rights*.

¹² We rejoice that our labor has born fruit. President Obama signed an executive order banning torture on January 22, 2009 – just two days after taking the Oath of Office. While there is still much work to do, this is an encouraging first step.

the opportunity to do post-doctoral studies there during my sabbatical.

- The *World Evangelical Alliance*, a network representing over 420 million Evangelicals around the world, has recently started a new peacemaking initiative. It is a privilege for me to serve on their Executive Steering Team (<http://www.weapri.org/>).
- A Global Network of Christians recently wrote an affirmation called “*Grace and Truth: Toward Christlike Relationships with Muslims*.” The purpose of this affirmation is to challenge followers of Christ to love and respect Muslims. It is part of a larger project that aims to end the polarization between Christians and Muslims and help the church live out the gospel of sacrificial love. (This will be published soon and then posted on my website (<http://ricklove.net/>)).
- Along with a few friends, I am in the process of starting a new organization called, *Peace Catalyst International*, which will focus on bridge-building between Christians and Muslims.

I have to admit I don't know what it would be like to live as a Muslim in the U.S. But I have lived in Indonesia, so I know what it is like to live as a Christian minority in a Muslim majority country. I know Christians who suffer the same discrimination from Muslims there that Muslims experience with the majority of Americans here. In fact, there are many places in the world where both Muslims and Christians suffer various forms of discrimination and worse, even persecution. I remember talking to a good friend, Mahan Mirza (Instructor at Notre Dame and Ph.D. candidate, Yale University) about the veil controversy in France.¹³ He said, “Rick, if a Christian is not allowed to wear a cross around their neck – they are not being denied the right to practice their faith. On the other hand, if a woman who wears a veil as a sign of modesty and devotion to Allah is forbidden to do so, this law explicitly forbids her from practicing her faith.”

¹³ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_scarf_controversy_in_France

Lord willing, I will be going to the Netherlands this year to address the issues of human rights for Muslims and do peacemaking between Muslims and Christians – an “International Journey of Reconciliation” as Clergy Beyond Borders¹⁴ calls it.

I would like to join hands with my Muslim brothers and sisters to fight against all forms of discrimination and persecution of both of our faith communities in the world today. These human rights issues demand our attention and could be addressed more effectively if we could partner together. One practical suggestion as a starting point: we should work together for “freedom of religion.”¹⁵ I am particularly burdened to see Muslims and Christians enjoy deep mutual respect, where both freely live out their faith, including graciously bearing witness.¹⁶

Related to this is a topic that continues to emerge in Christian-Muslim dialogue: da ‘wa¹⁷ and evangelism. I’ve had lively discussions about this topic in five dialogues: at Yale University with Egyptians Sheikhs, at the Doha Inter-Faith Dialogue in Qatar, at a dialogue sponsored by the National Association of Evangelicals at the World Bank in Washington DC, at the Common

¹⁴ <http://clergybeyondborders.com>

¹⁵ This focus on working together for “freedom of religion” does not mean we would dissolve our distinctive, historic beliefs into an imaginary “One World Religion.” Rather, it would mean that each faith community would seek to be authentically faithful to their historic beliefs and find *within* those beliefs the resources to reach out to one another in love.

¹⁶ It has been said that human rights describe the institutionalization of justice! While we affirm the importance of all human rights, perhaps the most controversial and yet important human right is the right to religious freedom. We affirm the right of religious freedom for every person and community. We defend the right of all faiths to respectfully express and share their faith among Christians. Likewise, we defend the right of Christians to respectfully express and share their faith among people of other faiths. Moreover, we defend the right of all people to change their religious beliefs or affiliation if their conscience so directs. Thus, we stand against all forms of religious persecution. We concur with John Piper’s incisive rationale for this perspective: “Christians are tolerant of other faiths not because there is no absolute truth or that all faiths are equally valuable, but because the one who is Absolute Truth, Jesus Christ, forbids the spread of his truth by the sword. Christian tolerance is the commitment that keeps lovers of competing faiths from killing each other. Christian tolerance is the principle that puts freedom above forced conversion, because it’s rooted in the conviction that forced conversion is no conversion at all. Freedom to preach, to teach, to publish, to assemble for worship—these convictions flow from the essence of the Christian faith. Therefore we protect it for all” (2005).

¹⁷ Da ‘wa refers to Islamic mission: the act of inviting people to embrace Islam.

Word dialogue at Yale University, and at the Common Word Dialogue at Fuller Theological Seminary.

This issue will not go away. Large numbers of Christians convert to Islam on a regular basis¹⁸ and large numbers of Muslims become followers of Christ on a regular basis. It is important to acknowledge that both Christianity and Islam are missionary faiths.¹⁹ The challenge is this: how can we both be faithful to our respective faiths and yet live in peace?²⁰

I propose a “Da ‘wa and Evangelism Peace Project.” We would begin by gathering leaders from both faith communities together to develop an agreed upon “Ethics of Da‘wa and Evangelism.” Something similar to this has already been done in Britain by the Christian Muslim Forum (http://www.christianmuslimforum.org/downloads/Ethical_Guidelines_for_Witness.pdf). Perhaps a second phase could include practical demonstrations of mercy where there have been human rights violations. My friend Dr. Sayyid Syeed (National Director of ISNA – the Islamic Society of North America) told me this story: A church building in Pakistan was burned down recently by Muslims. So some U.S. Muslims helped raise money in partnership with a church in the US. They went to Pakistan to give the leaders of the church there a large financial gift so they could rebuild their church!²¹

¹⁸ During the Doha Inter-Faith Conference Prof. Dr. Ahmed Tayyeb, President of Al-Azhar University acknowledged that there are a 1000 Christians a month who convert to Islam and attend Al Azhar University.

¹⁹ Christianity and Islam both command their followers to spread the good news of the true path to God. Each claims a universal message for all people (Qur’an 25:1; 38:87; 3:20; Jn 3:16). Both faiths claim the final messenger (Qur’an 33:45; Heb. 1:1-2). Both Christians and Muslims are called to be witnesses (Qur’an 2:143; Mt 28:19-20). The scriptures of each make exclusive claims for their message (Qur’an 3:85; Jn 14:6; Acts 4:12). Yet both are called to witness in a gracious manner (Qur’an 16:125; 29:46; 1 Pet 3:15).

²⁰ For an important summary of these issues see “*The Ethics of Da‘wa and Evangelism: Respecting the Other and Freedom of Religion*” (Love 2008c).

²¹ There are hundreds of examples like this of Muslims demonstrating acts of kindness and seeking peace, yet we rarely hear about them.

I realize the massive complexity of working toward “freedom of religion” and implementing the “Da ‘wa-Evangelism Peace Project.”²² But my commitment to human rights (which flows from my obedience to my Scriptures) compels me to push forward with this initiative. And I believe there are wise, noble and forward-thinking Muslim leaders and wise, noble and forward-thinking Christian leaders who will join me. In fact this may be a good project for “Clergy Beyond Borders!”

²² I remember talking to two Syrian Muslim leaders about this issue. They reminded me that religious leaders in Syria serve under the authority of the government there.

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