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How Christians and Muslims Can Embrace Religious Diversity and Each Other

An Evangelical Perspective

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Abstract

Can Evangelical Christians and Muslims embrace religious diversity and each other? This essay argues a qualified “yes” marshaling historic, classical, and contemporary resources by and relevant to Evangelical Christians and Muslims, sustaining mutual empathy, humanity, tolerance, religious liberty, integrity in wrestling with seemingly irreconcilable differences, cooperation, theological sharpening, a dynamic open marketplace of ideas, and love. These priorities often extend beyond Muslim and Evangelical relations with each other to invigorate constructive interaction generally among Muslims, Christians, and religiously diverse people in a multi-faith world.

“All the World’s a Stage”

Christians and Muslims comprise more than half the people currently alive.¹ Islam and Christianity are historically the most successful “missionary religions.” Each tradition is growing rapidly through childbirth and conversion, and not only in regions formerly associated with them. By the early twenty-first century, Muslim presence proliferated in Europe and North America, especially in France, Germany, Russia, and the Netherlands. In

¹ The Central Intelligence Agency by August 2013 listed a 7,095,217,980 world population that is 33.39% Christian and 22.74% Muslim. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2009, 2011 estimated 1.57 billion Muslims (23% of the global population) and 2.18 billion Christians (31.7%). World Christian Database purports 2,262,379,391 Christians (32.81%) and 1,552,460,570 Muslims (22.51%) by 2010.

June 2009, U.S. President Barack Obama estimated five million Muslims in the United States, a number greater than the individual populations of Arab speaking Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon, Mauritania, Oman, and Qatar.²

David W. Bebbington and others likewise signal Christianity's evangelical character in Africa, Asia, and growing European, Latin and North American churches emphasizing the Bible, the gospel, the cross, social activism, and eagerness for converts (Noll 47; cf. Adeney 2009; Jenkins 2011; Sanneh). Rodney Stark predicts from early Christian, Muslim, and Mormon expansion: "A century from now, the religious map of the world will show a Muslim Europe and a Christian China" (Stark 2007: 335; cf. Jenkins 2007).

Such demographic shifts could be good for the world if Christians and Muslims promote flourishing, but they are presently the most populous religious factions in worldwide political and social unrest. Christians and Jews decry deadly oppression from Muslims in the Middle East, Africa, and South and Southeast Asia. Christians, Muslims, and Tibetan Buddhists protest persecution by communist China. Muslims accuse Europeans and Americans of intolerance for isolated but highly publicized Qur'an burnings, offensive films and cartoons, headscarf and burqa bans, and the Swiss prohibiting new minarets. Muslims and Evangelicals both bemoan hostile scholarship and media stereotyping. Zionists and anti-Zionists buttress grievances with theology. Muslims clash with Pilipino Catholics, secular Australians, African animists, Thai and Myanmar Buddhists, Baha'is in Iran, Russians in Chechnya, Jews in Israel/Palestine, Hindus and Sikhs in Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, and Nepal. Meanwhile, the majority Christian United States concentrates its interventionist military foreign policy on predominantly Muslim lands while facing charges of torturing Muslim prisoners in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay (cf. Ezzat).

Christians and Muslims also inherit a notoriously troubled history. Muslim political hegemony imposed social, economic, and religious inequities on non-Muslims, ratcheting Jewish and Christian decline in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia (cf. Jenkins 2008; Karsh; Griffith; Moffett). Europeans in turn launched bloody Crusades. Muslims conquered and Christendom re-conquered Spain. Muslim Turks and Mongolians fought Christians for centuries culminating in Turks killing over a million Christian Armenians. Europeans after World War I participated in dividing the Muslim-ruled Ottoman Empire, and European Colonialism foisted foreign rule over majority Muslim areas where Europeans, Americans, and Muslims perpetrated North African, transatlantic, and Middle Eastern chattel slavery. Atlantic and Mediterranean Muslim corsairs had concurrently enslaved thousands or millions of Europeans and Americans (cf. Clarence-Smith; Davis; Kidd: xiv-6, 19-36, 171-75; Lewis; Milton; Segal).

Narrowing the Trajectory: Three Distinct, Yet Mutually Influencing Arcs?

Given past and present collisions, can Evangelical Christians and Muslims embrace religious diversity and each other, and in what ways? At least three intersecting issue arcs emerge when approaching religious diversity. The first involves optimal ways for adherents

² This is higher than American Muslim numbers reported by *The World Fact Book* (0.6% or 1.9 million) and Pew Forum (2.5 million), and slightly higher than World Christian Database (1.32% or 4,106,065). Obama estimated seven million American Muslims but revised to five million two weeks later (Iqbal).

of varying religions to interact. The second are truth questions: Are all religions and theologies equally valid, true, false, or do some more accurately or faithfully mediate ultimate reality? A third focus is salvation, *telos*, enlightenment, eternal joy. If Utopia, the Qur'anic Paradise, the Biblical New Heavens and Earth, the Hindu Nirvana, or the Amida Buddhist Pure Land exists or will exist (cf. John 14:1-3; Qur'an 9:72-73), shall many, all, or proportionally few people participate; and what role if any do religions and religious identity play enabling participation?

Much literature about religion in the early twenty-first century collapses these arcs into a static binary fostering the impression that religious people and convictions fall into two non-overlapping categories: 1) The broad-minded, humble, sophisticated, liberal, peaceful, inclusive promoters of all religions as equivalently beautiful, valid, or benign at their best; and 2) the narrow-minded, arrogant, ignorant, literalist, conservative, militant, exclusive haters incapable of countenancing legitimacy to opinions, cultures, or experiences other than their own (cf. Collins; Fisher: 11, 503-29; Kimball: 49-80, 218-21; Lattely: 218-19).

This bifurcation conflates favorable opinions about religions or religious teachings with positive dispositions toward their followers (cf. Marshall: 382). One may arrogantly assert all religions are equally true, beautiful, or good; or humbly uphold Muhammad and not Joseph Smith, Mary Baker Eddy, or Guru Nanak as God's final prophet. Allegorical Qur'an readers such as Muwahhids or Almohads have waged aggressive war against "literalist" Murabits or Almoravids in medieval Morocco and Spain (Furnish: 31-38, 64-65; cf. Murphree: 115). Belief that any given proposition or methodology is true or sound is a distinct issue from the capacity to live peaceably with dissenters; "exclusive" beliefs fail to consistently correlate with violent or repressive words, expressed attitudes, or behaviors (cf. DeVan 2012b; Jabbour: 83; Richardson: 204-209; Volf 2011: 219-38, 260-62).

Arguably more vital to interreligious thriving than advocating only one or several or all religions as true or as leading to salvation are convictions governing interactions among religiously diverse people. If someone believes God or their ideology demands killing dissenters, while someone else advocates active goodwill toward everyone, ensuing fruits will bloom disparately to the degree these beliefs translate to action.

Neither do positions on truth and salvation automatically correlate. One may identify particular religions as such as fatally flawed, but hope or expect everyone will enjoy eternal happiness through God's love or mercy (cf. Karkkainen: 174-80; Khalil). One can proclaim Islam the truest or only authentic *din* (religion) yet expect some Jews and Christians will attain paradise (see Qur'an 2:62, 2:111-12, 2:177, 2:253, 2:281, 3:113-14, 6:34, 10:94, 19:51, 22:42, 29:46, 42:15). Or, one might appreciate non-Christian insights into truth but lament that non-Christians are without salvific hope until they believe Jesus is Lord (cf. Corduan; Tennent). This article, cognizant of these distinctions, synthesizes Evangelical Christian, Muslim, and synergetic voices setting forth priorities or "ways" for fruitful interreligious interaction grounded in Evangelical Christian and Muslim resources.

Priority 1: Empathy and Recognizing Each Other's Humanity

Amy Maddox (age 16) does not divulge her religious affiliation. But her meditation easily applies to Evangelicals and Muslims. "He prayed – it wasn't my religion. He ate – it

wasn't what I ate. He spoke – it wasn't my language. He dressed – it wasn't what I wore. He took my hand – it wasn't the color of mine. But when he laughed – it was how I laughed. And when he cried – it was how I cried.” Amy illustrates the biblical precept that every person has dignity in God's image and the Jewish-Christian-Muslim confidence that every person is in some sense God's steward or vice-regent within their spheres of influence (see Genesis 1:26-28, 2:15-25, 9:6; James 3:9-10; cf. Qur'an 2:30, 17:70, 38:26, 95:4-6).

Genesis 1 accords God pronouncing animals and plants “good.” But after creating humanity *Imago Dei*, God pronounces creation good “exceedingly” (Christiansen: 21, 55, 78). Early Christian Irenaeus (second century) avowed: “The glory of God is humanity fully alive, and the life of humanity is the vision of God” (quoted in Berardino and Studer: 136). Methodist Bishop Scott J. Jones contends God's kingdom always involves loving and restoring people to full humanity (47, cf. 57). For Amos Yong, this means approaching “people of other faiths less as representatives of religious labels than as people made in the image of God” (11).

Mark A. Gabriel fosters empathy even toward those classified as terrorists: “They can be cruel, bloodthirsty killers, and I hate what they do . . . [but for all those] on the news, there are many more broken human beings who realize that they have taken the wrong path and don't know how to find their way back” (2006: 16; cf. Taylor).

What about historic and contemporary Muslims on human dignity? Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) hailed people as God's vice-regents created in God's form with God's attributes (4:3). Al-Ghazali (1058-1111) analogized that distortions arising within human hearts were like grime on a mirror (1909: 23-26, cf. 1990: 3:13). Riffat Hassan references Qur'an 95:4-6 that God creates humanity “in the best of moulds,” even if humans intermittently act as “lowest of the low” (95).

Jerusha Lamptey cites Qur'an 5:18 that every person's *fitra*, or human nature, insures their co-status as God-guided creatures (246, 252). University of Tehran Professor Emeritus Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari elaborates that humanity is perfected and self-realized (*al-isan al-kami*) by serving as a theomorphic vice-regent (*khalifat Allah fi al-ard*; 114). Imam W. Deen Mohammed exhorted African-Americans at New York City's First Corinthian Baptist Church: “Don't you know that no matter what you convert to, before you converted to that you were belonging to the life of your people?” (2004). He elsewhere lauded “pride of all colors,” since God created all people to strive for excellence (1988: 41; Haney: 123).

Humanizing one another is one impetus for *New York Times* bestselling Evangelical Ted Dekker and Carl Medearis's *Tea with Hezbollah: Sitting at the Enemies' Table: Our Journey through the Middle East* (cf. Camp: 130; DeVan 2011). Dekker and Medearis trekked through Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinian territories to eat, drink, and converse in Jesus' name with Muslim ideologues, Hamas leaders, Hezbollah fighters, Saudi Arabia's Oil Minister, two brothers of Osama bin Laden, Lebanese Sheikh Ayatollah Fadlallah (deceased July 4, 2010), and workaday Muslim taxi drivers, teachers, river ferriers, entrepreneurs, and military officers. Dekker and Medearis braved border patrols, bodyguards, the IDF, and Saudi religious police to humanize elite and everyday Middle Eastern Muslims to Americans, and Americans – especially American Evangelicals – to

Middle Eastern Muslims. One way they do this is by peppering interviewees with lighthearted and audacious questions:

What is something your children or grandchildren do that makes you laugh? What are your favorite hobbies, television shows, or sports? What would you say are Americans' greatest misconceptions of your people? What are the worst Muslim, Arab, and Saudi misconceptions about Americans? If you had one thing to say to all Jews and Christians, what would it be? Jesus' greatest teaching was that we love our neighbors as we love ourselves, even love our enemies. How do you recommend we love each other as Jesus taught? If you fire a rocket at your neighbor, is that loving them? (*passim*).

Medearis congruently humanizes Americans who fear Muslims. "In a time of color-coded terror alerts . . . [They] can't even take a domestic flight without wondering if it will be their last" (115; cf. Reisacher: 158). Skeptics and cynics may sneer at risking death and deportation to humanize squabbling religious, cultural, or national factions to each other, but dismissing Dekker and Medearis as foolish fortune-hunters overlooks the results of their adventuring which expose heartfelt, presciently akin human concerns.

Priority 2: Tolerant Coexistence and Religious Liberty

Empathy and esteeming each other's common humanity motivate further ways for fruitful interaction. Numerous countries with historic Christian and Muslim populations in the United Nations General Assembly ratified "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights" in 1948, drafted partly by Lebanese philosopher-diplomat Charles Malik and yoking human dignity with freedom of thought, conscience, religion, worship, practice, observance, opinion, and expression "without distinction of any kind." This transnational accord, where Articles 2, 16, and 18 address religion, supplies a momentous precedent for overlapping interreligious consensus on tolerance and human rights.

While some champion moving "beyond tolerance" to mutual acceptance or celebration, many Muslims and Evangelicals balk at indiscriminate approbation of ideas or worship they believe are false or improper (cf. Beneke; Johnson 2006; McDowell and Hostetler; Niebuhr; Safi 2003: 23-24). When affirmation is impossible, tolerating religious differences is indispensable. Even ambivalent coexistence for communities recovering from centuries or millennia of discord is a step toward healing, a welcome inn on the reconciliation road.

Muslim resources for tolerance include some Qur'anic verses referring to Jews and Christians as "People of the Book" and related pronouncements (quotes from Abdel Haleem translation; brackets in original). "Argue only in the best way with the People of the Book, except with those of them who act unjustly. Say, 'We believe in what was revealed to us and in what was revealed to you; our God and your God are one [and the same]; we are devoted to Him'" (29:46). "There is no compulsion in religion: true guidance has become distinct from error, so whoever rejects false gods and believes in God has grasped the firmest hand-hold, one that will never break" (2:256).³ "Another of His signs is the creation

³ Cf. Ibn Abbas on 2:256: "No one from among the people of the Book and the Magians should be coerced to believe in the divine Oneness of Allah after the Arabs' embrace of Islam"; Ibn Kathir on 2:256: "Do not force anyone to become Muslim, for Islam is plain and clear . . . whoever Allah directs to Islam, opens his heart for it

of the heavens and earth, and the diversity of your languages and colours. There truly are signs in this for those who know” (30:22). “People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognize one another. In God’s eyes, the most honoured of you are the ones most mindful of Him” (49:13, cf. 6:42).⁴ “Had your Lord willed, all the people on earth would have believed. So can you [Prophet] compel people to believe?” (10:99). “If your Lord had pleased, He would have made all people a single community, but they continue to have their differences” (11:118). “Say [Prophet], ‘Disbelievers: I do not worship what you worship, you do not worship what I worship, I will never worship what you worship, you will never worship what I worship: you have your religion and I have mine’” (109:1-6). “Follow what has been revealed to you from your Lord, there is no God but him. Turn away from those who join other gods with Him. If it had been God’s will they would not have done so, but We have not made you their guardian, nor are you their keeper” (6:107).⁵ “Do not revile those they call on beside God in case they, in their hostility and ignorance, revile God. To each community We make their own actions seem alluring, but in the end they return to their lord and He will inform them of all they did” (6:108). “Closest in affection to the believers are those who say, ‘We are Christians,’ for there are among them people devoted to learning and ascetics. These people are not given to arrogance” (5:82).⁶

Maulana Wahiduddin Khan envisions import of Qur’an 2:256 and 6:108 “best described not as religious harmony, but as harmony among religious people” (92). Muslims can call non-Muslims to Islam but leave judgment to God. “Say, ‘Now the truth has come from your Lord: let those who wish to believe in it do so.’” (18:29, cf. 2:217). “If any one of the idolaters should seek your protection [Prophet], grant it to him so that he may hear the word of God, then take him to a safe place for him, for they are people with no knowledge [of it]” (9:6; cf. Hassan: 99). “Call . . . to the way of your Lord with wisdom and good teaching. Argue with them in the most courteous way” (16:125).⁷ And:

Call people to that faith and follow the straight path as you have been commanded. Do not go by what they desire, but say, ‘I believe in whatever Scripture God has sent down. I am commanded to bring justice between

and enlightens his mind, will embrace Islam with certainty. Whoever Allah blinds his heart and seals his hearing and sight, then he will not benefit from being forced to embrace Islam.”

⁴ Cf. al-Jalalayn on 49:13: “pride lies only in . . . fear of God. Truly the noblest of you in the sight of God is the most God-fearing among you.” Ibn Kathir on 49:13 writes that this common heritage alerts all people that they are equal in their humanity. However: “The only difference between them is in the religion that revolves around their obedience to Allah the Exalted and their following of His Messenger.”

⁵ Cf. al-Jalalayn on 6:107: “We have not set you as a keeper over them, a watcher . . . that you might require them for their deeds; nor are you a guardian . . . that you might . . . coerce them to faith.”

⁶ Qur’an 5:82 is admittedly less helpful in prefacing: “Most hostile to the believers are the Jews and those who associate other deities with God.” Ibn Kathir extrapolates from 5:82 that Christians “are generally more tolerant of Islam and its people, because of the mercy and kindness that their hearts acquired through part of the Messiah’s religion . . . with knowledge, worship and humbleness . . . following the truth and fairness.”

⁷ Cf. Qur’an 16:126; Hassan: 99; Ibn Kathir on 16:125: “If any of them want to debate and argue, then let that be in the best manner, with kindness, gentleness and good speech . . . It is not up to you to guide them.”

you. God is our Lord and your Lord – and to us our deeds and to you yours, so let there be no argument between us and you – God will gather us together, and to Him we shall return’ (Qur’an 42:15).

A surah titled “the Table” adjures Muslims and Evangelicals to literally sit at the table together. “Today all good things have been made lawful for you. The food of the People of the Book is lawful for you as your food is lawful for them” (5:5). The New Testament correspondingly typifies meal solidarity in John 13, 21; Acts 2:42-46, 27:35; and Christ’s marriage feast inaugurating the New Creation in Revelation 19:9.

Do Evangelicals concur? Ergun and Emir Caner are Turkish former Muslims, Baptist pastors with earned doctorates in Christian history (Emir) and Theology (Ergun). Ergun is president at Brewton-Parker College and former Dean of Liberty Baptist Seminary at Liberty University. Emir is President of Truett-McConnell College. Ergun was accused of verbally exaggerating or embellishing his personal history in 2010 (Kennedy), but the Caners’ conversions from Islam to Christianity are undisputed and their books remain popular in print. The Caners are especially noteworthy since detractors might expect little from them in the way of tolerance, yet in two books they devote sections or chapters to religious liberty, touting it as conceptually superior to tolerance (2003: 210-24; 2004: 175-97).

In “Let the Heathen Worship!” the Caners quote Martin Luther: “I am really distressed that these poor people should be so pitifully murdered, burned, and horribly put to death. Everyone should be allowed to believe what he likes. If he is wrong, he will be punished enough in hell fire” (2004: 175, 195). Some will blanch at prescribing hellfire for wrong beliefs, but Luther’s corollary is not persecuting anyone for alleged aberrations *before they die*.

The Caners approvingly quote Anabaptist Balthasar Hubmaier (1480-1528): “To punish those of a different religion was antithetical to winning them to the Christian faith” (2004: 177); and Baptist John Leland (1754-1841): “Let every man speak freely without fear, maintain the principles he believes, worship according to his own faith, either one God, three Gods, no God, or twenty Gods; and let government protect him in so doing” (2004: 195, 197). They liken Pope Urban II’s crusade rhetoric to Osama bin Laden’s:

Any who are offended by this comparison of bin Ladin to Pope Urban can stand with us, for we are offended as well. We are offended that the institutional representation of Christianity stooped to such a level of evil enterprise . . . it is one thing to have Christians in the army, serving under a secular power. Because we live in a fallen world where injustice must be stopped and life must be defended, Christians can serve in the military and remain a godly influence and moral agent . . . *Just War* is built on this . . . It is another thing, altogether . . . to field a Christian army to kill the enemy in the name of Jesus (2004: 107, italics in original).

The Caners and Hubmaier apply Jesus’ “Parable of the Wheat and Tares” to religious liberty (2004: 176, 195; Hubmaier in Pipkin and Yoder: 66): “The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field,” but an enemy secretly sowed weeds or tares. The servants asked if they should uproot the weeds. “No,” the owner answered. “Because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat . . . Let both grow together until the

harvest. At that time I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn” (Matthew 13:24-30; NIV).

Since the weeds (unrighteous hypocrites) entwine with wheat (the righteous) and can resemble wheat until harvest, God appoints the Final Judgment for harvesting and disentangling weeds with minimal harm to wheat. According to the Caners, medieval inquisitors violated Jesus’ teaching and example by uprooting wheat and weeds before the Final Judgment by burning heretics and by knowingly or unknowingly falsely accusing true believers:

Only Jesus Christ has the right to judge the soul of a person. We might deduce . . . civil government has no right to “bear the sword” in theological matters (Romans 13:4), and even church authorities had better be careful in judging others. Whatever their places of authority, Christians who attempt to persecute others . . . leave damaged brothers and sisters in their wake . . . [History is] littered with massacres of Christians by Christians who intended to purify the church of error . . . Jesus reminded his disciples that the wheat and the tares will grow together since Satan works in all societies. It isn’t the Christian’s responsibility to deal violence against unbelief (2003: 214).

The Caners additionally cite Ephesians 6:17 and 2 Peter 3:9 that Christians have only “one sword,” the “sword of the Spirit,” and that God desires for no one to perish, but all to repent. Hastening judgment leads people away from the loving arms of the Savior (2003: 215). Instead, they are guided by 1 Peter 3:15: “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” (2009: 205, 229; cf. Qur’an 16:82, 16:125, 42:48).

The Caners finally go beyond Qur’an 5:5 by applying 1 Corinthians 10 on whether eating meat sacrificed to pagan gods involved Christians in idol worship. “Paul’s answer is to be gracious, especially to the unbeliever who extends an invitation to dinner (verses 25, 27). The believer who eats is not participating in the rituals and is not embarrassing the host by turning down their meal. This is extending grace in the midst of witness for Christ (verse 33)” (2003: 168; cf. Truesdale and Mitchell: 34).

Priority 3: Cooperation in Social Justice and other areas of Common Concern

Evangelicals and Muslims can cooperate without denying dissonance in other areas as Jordan Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad, Sufi Muslim Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Evangelicals Miroslav Volf, Melissa Yarrington, and others epitomized in *A Common Word: Muslims and Christians on Loving God and Neighbor*; Mohammed Abu-Nimer and David Augsburger facilitate in *Peace-Building By, Between, and Beyond Muslims and Evangelical Christians*; and Catholic Evangelical Peter Kreeft christens *Ecumenical Jihad* (cf. Adeney 2002; Ippave; Volf: 239-54, 262). People of opposing political persuasions will find certain Muslim-Evangelical pairings disconcerting, but causes on both the “left” and “right” provide cooperative opportunities in politics, economics, environmental stewardship, peacemaking, alleviating poverty, and challenging the powerful (Cragg 1984: 156; cf. Johnston: 223-32; Kreeft 2013; Volf: 213-18, 260, 304). For the Caners, both Islam and Christianity condemn therapeutic abortion (Qur’an 22:5), homosexuality (Qur’an 29:29), suicide, and euthanasia (2003: 195-96; cf.

Qur'an 4:29). Baptist George Braswell adds, "Islam does not condone frivolous pleasures, lying, slander, arrogance, boasting, scheming, obscenity, insult, spite, envy and inconstancy" (137; cf. Qur'an 2:177, 30:21, 90:12-20; Kreeft 2010: 12; Volf: 9). Southern Baptist mega-church pastor Rick Warren urges the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA): "I'm not interested in interfaith dialogue, but interfaith projects . . . talk is cheap, but love is something we do together" (quoted in Duin; cf. Dueck et al: 239; Johnston and Aasi: 272-73).

One church in Alexandria, Egypt partners with Muslims in writing, visual arts, and fine arts classes (Casper 2012a). At the NGO level, Syrian Christian Chawkat Moucarray discloses that the Evangelical ministry World Vision operates in twenty Muslim-majority countries where Muslims comprise most World Vision staff. "Without ignoring the distinctive beliefs of each tradition, knowing our common ground enhances our work for the common good of the communities we serve" (2010, cf. 2001). On a national scale, Nobel laureate Leymah Gbowee immortalizes Christian and Muslim women praying together and staging non-violent protests against ruling warlords and civil war in Liberia.

Former ISNA president and Canadian convert to Islam Ingrid Mattson pictures an "Axis of Good: Muslims Building Alliances with Other Communities of Faith" (244, 277). In light of this and Qur'an 21:107's presentation of Muhammad as "a mercy . . . to all people," Muslims can fulfill charity (Zakat), Islam's fourth pillar, by pooling resources with non-Muslims sympathetic to social justice and pursuing friendly competition in "good works" with Jews and Christians who the Qur'an construes, "hasten to do good deeds as if competing with one another . . . Whatever good they do, they will never be denied the reward of it" (3:114-15). Will present and future generations herald Muslims and Evangelicals as Roman Emperor Julian "the Apostate" inadvertently praised early Christians for supporting "not only their poor, but ours as well" (Stark 2007: 319)? As the Muslim prophet Muhammad, reminiscent of Jesus's teaching in Matthew 25, foresaw:

Allah will say on the Day of Judgment, "O son of Adam, I was sick and you did not visit Me." He will say, "O my Lord, how could I visit You, when you are the Lord of the Worlds?" Allah will say, "Did you not know that My servant so-and-so was sick and you did not visit him? Did you not know that if you had visited him, you would have found Me there?" Allah will say, "O son of Adam, I asked you for food and you fed Me not." He shall say, "O my Lord, how could I feed you . . . ? And Allah will say, "Did you not know that My servant so-and-so was in need of food and you did not feed him . . . ? "O son of Adam, I asked you for water and you did not give Me to drink." The man shall say, "O my Lord, how could I give You water . . . ? Allah will say, "My servant so-and-so asked you for water and you did not give him to drink water. Did you not know that if you had given him to drink, you would have found that to have been for Me?" (*Sahih Muslim* 32:6232).

Priority 4: Principled Antagonism and Mutual Theological Sharpening

Documenting tolerance and cooperation does not mean these are limitless. Non-negotiable flashpoints are a reality. History's "great cloud of witnesses" (Hebrews 12:1) reveals carefully discerned opposition to what they perceived as evil words and deeds.

Ayatollah Mohammad Fadlallah's assistant rhetorically inquired: "Did Jesus allow the thieves to control the temple?" (quoted in Dekker and Medearis: 78). This query references the only gospel story where Jesus used physical force (Matthew 21:12-13; Mark 11:15-19; Luke 19:45-46; John 2:13-16), but there is no indication Jesus injured, killed, or degraded the thieves' essential humanity, nor hurt any of the animals (see DeVan and Smythe; Gabriel 2004: 130-136). Deciding what methods and causes one ought to practice, prioritize, or alternately to oppose is debatable. But empathy, tolerance, religious liberty, and recognizing each other's human dignity moderates zeal and enables prophetic voices to resist reacting uncharitably (cf. Johnston: 224; Volf: 218, 261).

Imam W. Deen Mohammed and Baptist minister Martin Luther King, Jr. emerge as African-American practitioners of principled antagonism in the twentieth century. The former initiated dialogue, denounced charges that Jews and Christians were Muslims' enemies, and blessed his daughter's marriage to a Christian (cf. Haney: 88; Mohammed 1988: 9-10; 2004; Gartenstein-Ross: 45-47, 73-75, 87, 91, 113, 116-117, 216; Peterson). W. D. Mohammed worked for racial unity, met with Pope John Paul II, and recited the Qur'an at the Baptist American President Bill Clinton's interfaith prayer services (cf. Haney; Peterson).

Martin Luther King Jr. similarly demonstrated: "When evil men burn and bomb, good men must build and bind. When evil men shout ugly words of hatred, good men must commit themselves to the glories of love. Where evil men would seek to perpetuate unjust status quo, good men must seek to bring into being a real order of justice" (1987: 51). For King, principled antagonism does not endeavor to humiliate opponents, but to win their friendship, understanding, and acknowledgement of what is right (1986: 7, 10, 12, 18, 87, 482, 487; see DeVan 2003). As Pope Pius II wrote to Ottoman Sultan Mehmet II amid interreligious conflict in 1461: "We are hostile to your actions. Not to you. As God commands, we love our enemies and pray for our persecutors" (2; see Volf: 44, 177).

Disagreement also has a place in discerning truth. Al-Ghazali appealed to the Qur'an for instigating debate "in the best manner" (1990: 1:88-90; cf. Khalil: 35; Qur'an 16:125).

To adapt Proverbs 27:17, as iron sharpens iron, so Muslims and Evangelicals may sharpen each other. Reciprocally probing merits and flaws facilitates filtering gold from theological dross and takes seriously perceptive critiques or attacks that may be *partly right* (Campolo; cf. Moffett: 206; Selmanovic; Volf: 47-48, 259, 262). Muslims and Evangelicals uncovering weaknesses in their own or others' positions can clarify, minimize misunderstanding, discover deeper relationships with God through testing their faith (James 1:2-5), appreciate each other as interlocutors, and concede that error illumines truth by contrast just as "geocentrists taught heliocentrists certain things" even when wrong in their overall interpretation of the data (McDermott 2000: 167).

John Wesley believed one of God's purposes for Islam was to "reform the Christians" (1991: 489).⁸ If the best way to counter critics is not to deserve their criticisms, then God allowing or willing the existence of multiple religions may be to provoke growth (see Ahmed: 65-73; Jabbour: 96; Robert: 97; Zebiri: 167).

Asma Afsaruddin (198), Hasan Askari (1968: 485; 1985: 191, 193, 196), and Evangelical mega-church pastor Joel Hunter ("A Common Word Panel One") suggest Christians and Muslims assist or complete each other through "creative conflict" and "dialogical necessity" in knowing and understanding God. Forbidding or neglecting this inflicts a critical apartheid where Evangelicals and Muslims are less able to benefit from each other (cf. Cragg 1984: 13; Manji; Mattson: 232). Muslims may unearth Biblical insights that Christians miss and Christians' understandings of the Qur'an heretofore eluding Muslims (see Zebiri: 212-13).

Askari chides Muslims for compromising their faith if they reject the Bible's wisdom on love, forgiveness, and the spirit over the letter of the law, even if these virtues are not totally absent from the Qur'an (Bennett: 207, 218-19). Evangelical Gerald R. McDermott consonantly communicates:

God uses the religions to teach the church deeper insight into the meaning of Christ . . . We saw this even in the Bible . . . It may be that some of today's religions portray aspects of the Divine mystery that the Bible does not equally emphasize . . . the Qur'an's sense of the divine majesty and transcendence . . . Hindu traditions . . . remind Christians of God's immanence when deistic tendencies have obscured it. Theravadin Buddhists may be able to show . . . dimensions of the fallen ego that will shed greater light on what Paul meant by "the old man." Philosophical Daoists may have insights into nonaction that can help Christians better understand "waiting on God." Confucius's portrayal of virtue may open new understandings of radical discipleship . . . I am not saying these . . . [are not taught] in the Bible . . . But many of us . . . see them less clearly than we could . . . God used Aristotle to shed light for Thomas Aquinas on certain aspects of Christ and life with him . . . Peter learned from Cornelius's religious experience and heard God's word through him (2007: 162-67).

If fear or awe or reverence of the Lord begins wisdom, then collaborating and comparing with past and present God-fearers from every nation, tribe, and tongue reaps the spiritual "wealth of nations" (Isaiah 66:12). St. Augustine (354-430) said: "Every good and true Christian should understand that wherever he finds truth, it is his Lord's" (54). Muslim philosopher al-Kindi (ca. 801-873) assured that truth wherever found "never cheapens or abases," but rather ennobles and honors whoever searches for it (Walzer: 131). The Muslim prophet Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law Ali concordantly cautioned that prudent believers focus less on who is speaking and more on what is being said (Chittick: 75, 85).

⁸ Puritan Cotton Mather (1663-1728) accordingly thundered: "*Christian*, beware lest a *Mahometan* be called in for thy condemnation" (6)!

Walking the Four Ways Together

Social scientists Grim and Finke document that societies emboldening religious freedom curtail religion-based persecution and conflict. Christian Rodney Stark and Muslim Abdulkarim Soroush aver analogously that contrary to top-down impositions of one faith or no faith, societies grow more religious as they grow freer (Soroush: 145; Stark 2007: 282-338). Optimum environments for pursuing the paths above are genuinely open societies that not only tolerate but cherish freedom of religion, expression, conscience, equality before the law, and a dynamic open marketplace of ideas.

In contrast, apathy, indifference, censorship, colonial exploitation, inquisitions, religious wars, discriminating against Jews and Christians as “dhimmis,” and extreme cultural relativism forbidding people of disparate religions from critiquing each other are “ways that lead to death” (Proverbs 16:25), belonging to, in one erstwhile American President’s phrase, “history’s unmarked grave of discarded lies” (Bush). Better is St. Patrick’s reorienting the Irish who left “conquering sword[s] to be eaten by rust, while they went far and wide again over sea and land, bearing now to the nations – both neighbouring and far off – the healing balm of Christ’s gentle words” (MacManus: 126).

Evangelicals and Muslims can view at least some attempts to persuade or convert as love, goodwill, or best interest, as one Harvard Muslim perceived Evangelical efforts to convert him (M. Abbas Jaffer, personal communication). For Christians *not* to share the Bible with Muslims, or Muslims the Qur’an with Christians, might violate Qur’an 2:140: “who does greater evil than he who conceals a testimony received from God?” (Arberry), and 10:94: “If you [Prophet] are in doubt about what We have revealed to you, ask those who have been reading the scriptures before you.”

For Khurram Murad, the purpose of dialogue is *da’wah*: all parties inviting all other parties to their faith (Siddiqui: 76, 209). Abdullah Yusuf Ali hopes *da’wah* hearers will perceive their interlocutors not as dealing in “dialectics,” nor as trying “to get a rise,” but sincerely expounding their faith motivated by love for God and love for humanity (669). Druze convert to Christianity Louis Bahjat Hamada complains that refusing to share the Gospel is laziness or bigotry toward those deemed unfit for it (Kidd: 141). Moreover for the Caners: “The most unloving act is to refuse sinners a chance to accept the Savior” (2003: 202).

Kate Zebiri infers that inviting others to one’s faith is a high complement to their freedom to change, convince, and be convinced (38). Volf invokes the “golden rule” (Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31) that one should witness about one’s faith in ways that one would want to be witnessed to by others (15, 159, 211, 306).

Will Evangelicals or Muslims instead be *silenced* (Marshall and Shea) or pressured to profess that others ought *not* to hear the gospel or Muhammad’s message? One heckler scolded Patricia St. John, a missionary to Muslims: “People have their own religion, and by trying to impose your views . . . you’re forcing them into a different culture, dividing them, and introducing unnecessary problems. Why can’t you just leave them alone?” St. John replied: Is Christ “so eternally precious that he is worth infinitely more . . . than all that they

may lose, even life itself?" If so, "Let us press on; if not, by all means, let us leave them alone" (137).

Freedom to speak is balanced with freedom to remain silent, to decline to listen, or to listen and disagree without reprisal. But criminalizing or curtailing witnessing or *da'wah* forces many Evangelicals and Muslims to choose between conforming to human political or social structures and what they perceive as obedience to God. Failing to witness to the gospel or embracing tolerant forms of Islam also surrenders available realms of persuasion to frenzied radicals who are less shy about recruiting (Colson 2002: 19-21; 2006).

Christianity and Islam were born and grew rapidly in religiously diverse societies despite vigorous antagonism (Ayoub: 43; Stark 2007: 113; 2011). Will present and future Muslims and Evangelicals freely practice and propagate their beliefs while also allowing other religious and "nonreligious" people to do so?

Muslims Asma Afsaruddin, Abdul Rashied Omar, Abdullah Saeed, Evangelical Miroslav Volf, and Anglican Bishop Kenneth Cragg insist that people must be free to espouse or forsake any religion or religious belief: "No self-respecting faith should be a prison for those within it" (Cragg, quoted in Omar: 186); and "forcing Muslims who do not want to remain Muslim to adhere to Islam would categorize them as hypocrites" (Saeed: 302). Patriarch Mar Aba I comparably confessed to his political overlord Shah Chosroes I of Persia: "I am a Christian. I preach my faith, and I want every man to join it. But I want every man to join it of his own free will and not of compulsion, I use force on no man" (quoted in Moffett: 216, 223).

In the same spirit, Axumite Ethiopian Negus As'hama sheltered the first Muslim refugees from persecution, and his successors permitted Islam alongside official state Christianity. In gratitude, "Muhammad decreed that Axum should be spared conquest – unless they attacked first" (Burton: 162). Centuries later, the Egyptian Muslim Fatimid Caliph al-'Aziz (955-996) financed church buildings and supplied guards to protect workers, and Caliph al-Zahir (1021-1036) signed a treaty stipulating that Christians forcibly converted to Islam could publicly return to Christianity without retribution (Moffett: 382-83). The Ottoman 1856 "Tanzimat" and "Hatt-i-Humayaun" reforms declared in principle, if not always practice, that Muslim and non-Muslim Ottoman subjects were "equals, with equal rights and responsibilities vis-à-vis the Ottoman State and freedom in building places of worship" (Dogan and Sharkey: xviii).

Evangelicals, Muslims, and others can also look to political and cultural currents in three of the world's four most populous nation states with sizeable Muslim or Evangelical constituencies. Sudipta Kaviraj praises post-colonial India for inspiring religious and cultural multiplicity (Lawrence: 291-92, 307). Twentieth century Indonesian Pancasila constitutionalized humanitarianism, democratic consensus, and social justice (An-Na'im: 223-63). John Wesley distinguished America in 1787: "The total indifference to the government there whether there be any religion or none leaves room for the propagation of true scriptural religion without the least let of hindrance" (1986: 452). W. D. Mohammed two centuries later reiterated, contrary to his father's separatism: "America is perhaps a place where the idea of freedom is developed to its highest degree" (1988: 35).

The “Most Excellent Way”

Are the four “ways” or priorities suggested here the pinnacles for fruitful interaction? To adapt 1 Corinthians 13, if Evangelicals and Muslims practice empathy, human dignity, liberty, tolerance, cooperation, dialogue, mutual learning, and principled antagonism, yet lack love, they eschew the “most excellent way.”

When a Jewish lawyer asked Jesus what was the most important commandment, Jesus replied: Love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind; and love your neighbor as yourself (Luke 10:27). When the lawyer retorted, “Who is my neighbor?” Jesus illustrated with the “Good Samaritan,” a potent interreligious parable especially for sufferers of mutual contempt as ancient Jews and Samaritans were. Who might Jesus specify as parable players to present-day contemporary Evangelicals? “A Baptist pastor and Senator passed by on the other side, but a Pakistani cleric took pity.” Or for Muslims, “A mufti and a mullah passed by while an American marine rescued the victim.”⁹ Romans 12:14-15 in the New Testament reads: “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.” The Qur’an also instructs: “Repel evil with what is better and your enemy will become as close as an old and valued friend” (41:34); and:

The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day, in the angels, the Scripture, and the prophets; who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travellers and beggars, and to liberate those in bondage; those who keep up the prayer and pay prescribed alms; who keep pledges whenever they make them; who are steadfast in misfortune, adversity, and times of danger. These are the ones who are true, and it is they who are aware of God (2:177).

Is such love feasible for Evangelicals and Muslims? Muslim Samir Kreidie (Dekker and Medearis: 39) and Evangelical Joseph Cumming detail interactions among those who see Jesus’s teachings about love as a source for unity rather than division. Medearis too narrates an exchange where Lebanese parliament members pondered how Muslims, Christians, and Druze could productively pray together and study the life of an exemplar they admired. One Sunni Muslim pounded the table and said, “I’ve got it. It’s Jesus! Muslims like Jesus. Druze like Jesus. Even Christians like Jesus . . . We would all love to meet and discuss Jesus” (139-42). So they read through the Gospel of Luke.

The following are but a few Muslim and Evangelical exemplars in word and action of the “most excellent way.” Evangelist Billy Graham identified boxing champion and convert to Sufi Islam Muhammad Ali as a role model in his struggle with Parkinson’s (Beam; *The Larry King Show*). Ali insisted, together with gospel singer Della Reece, “Strength is not just about muscle. You have to know what you’re fighting for . . . If you’re not fighting out of love, it’s just a fight, and you’ll never win” (*Touched by an Angel*).

⁹ Dekker and Medearis retell the “Parable of the Good Samaritan” in the context of contemporary Lebanon. This parable is interwoven in segments throughout their otherwise nonfiction *Tea with Hezbollah*.

Croatian Evangelical Miroslav Volf resolves that loving God and neighbor must matter more than any other religious or political ambition (260-261). In Albania, Tony Kriz, a missionary to Muslims, relayed his personal experience living with a Muslim family:

There were nine of us in a relatively small space . . . Running water flowed only a few hours a day, electricity was intermittent, and food variety was limited . . . What I found most challenging was this: They loved me . . . not only in a pat-you-on-the-back landlord sort of way. My Muslim family loved me like a son, which included caring for me as their spiritual responsibility. This took particular force in the person of my hunched and humming Albanian grandmother. She was the first face I saw each morning, and at night she would lovingly touch my shoulder and say “sweet sleep.” She also pastored me. She encouraged me when I was low, blessed me as I went about my work (which, by the way, was Christian missionary work) and she told me about God’s love for me.

At the community level in Ghana, pastor Frank Mills employs “living water” imagery (John 4:10-11) for sharing a church well with Muslims and animists: “As God’s grace is free to all, so is [our] access to clean water” (quoted in Gorman: 52).

Joel Rosenberg recounts reconciliation between himself – a Jewish to Evangelical Christian convert who worked for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu – and Tass Saada, a former Fatah fighter for Yasser Arafat. Saada and Rosenberg sought to reorient their lives around Jesus’ teachings and were deeply moved when they met to organize Gaza and West Bank humanitarian initiatives. “Here we were, a former aide to PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat and a former aide to Prime Minister Netanyahu, hugging each other – not trying to kill each other – in the heart of Jerusalem. All because of the work Jesus had done to give us hearts of love rather than hatred” (367; see DeVan 2012a; Saada and Merrill).

Egyptian Christians petitioned in December 2012: “We pray for our brothers, both Christian and Muslim. We pray for our brothers, the Salafis and the Muslim Brothers . . . God will hold them accountable . . . [and us] for how we live with them” (Casper 2012b). When arsonists torched Evangelical and other Egyptian churches in August 2013, Muslim officials pledged to rebuild the churches and some Muslims stepped forward to defend the churches that remained. Christians replied to the second group: “Buildings can be rebuilt again, but you are priceless, so stay safe and don’t worry about the churches” (Ascott).

Is love among Evangelicals and Muslims viable internationally? His Royal Highness (H.R.H.) Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad Talal of Jordan on October 13, 2007 spearheaded “*A Common Word between Us and You*” (cf. Qur’an 3:64), addressed to “Leaders of Christian Churches, everywhere.” Prince Ghazi quoted the Qur’an and Jesus’ greatest commandments, “love of God and neighbor,” to articulate a new global Muslim-Christian relations paradigm endorsed by an exceptional range of Muslim signatories: scholars, professors, politicians, and the Grand Muftis of Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Dubai (United Arab Emirates), Egypt, Istanbul, Jerusalem, Jordan, Kosovo, Oman, Russia, Slovenia, Syria, and Ukraine. Seyyed Hossein Nasr expands the scope of *A Common Word*: “It cannot include for Muslims only Muslim neighbors, for Christians only Christian neighbors, or for Jews only

Jewish neighbors. It must also include followers of other religious communities, even nonreligious” (116-17).

Muhammad and Nayed boldly position *A Common Word* as normative Muslim *Ijma* (consensus) due to its international breadth, scope, and signatories representing the four major schools of Sunni jurisprudence, Shi’i and Ib’ai Muslims, societal leaders, and NGO administrators (173). *A Common Word* has prompted hundreds, if not thousands, of world media responses, instigating interfaith initiatives, workshops, and conferences at Cambridge University, Georgetown University, and Yale University, as well as in Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, India, Oman, Pakistan, the Philippines, Qatar, South Africa, Sudan, and the United Arab Emirates. It has attracted attention from then U.S. Senator John F. Kerry, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and will continue to gain momentum as more and more Muslims sanction and live by it.

Conclusion

During the Cold War, the United States and its allies faced off the Soviet Union and its satellites in a policy of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD). Although relations between Muslims and Evangelicals are not yet so severe, still both sides must embrace empathy, human dignity, tolerance, liberty, integrity wrestling with differences, cooperation, theological sharpening, a dynamic open marketplace of ideas, and love to optimize flourishing. Christine Mallouhi introduces *Waging Peace on Islam*: “I include this plea to any Muslim readers not to use our confessions as artillery to escalate the war – Christians fear what will happen if we call off the war and Islam doesn’t” (9).

Moses’ charge to the Israelites is apropos: “I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days” (Deut 30:19). If Muslims choose life and Evangelicals death, or Evangelicals choose life and Muslims death, the ways that lead to death will persist.

Malcolm X on his Hajj pilgrimage extolled, “The brotherhood! The people of all races, colors, from all over the world coming together as one” (369). Evangelicals synonymously testify to other multi-ethnic, multicultural, multi-national gatherings such as Urbana missionary conferences as previewing “every nation, tribe, people and language” that Revelation 7:9 foresees standing before God’s throne.

Martin Luther King, Jr. in “The American Dream” preached a message as crucial to Evangelicals, Muslims, and a multi-faith world as it was to King’s original 1960s audience: “We must *all* learn to live together as brothers, or we will all perish together as fools” (1986: 209, emphasis added). Fortunately for Muslims, Evangelicals, and those influenced by their beliefs and actions, vibrant Evangelical and Muslim resources reinforce renouncing the ways that lead to death, embracing the ways that lead to life, and living the most excellent way.

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