Responding to Islam in Western nations

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Halal certified Vegemite

وَٱتْلُ عَلَيْهِمْ نَبَأَ إِبْرَٰهِيمَ

Recite unto them the story of Abraham (Sura 26:69)

Islam is gaining influence as it occupies the vacuum left as Christians abandoned their role. Multiculturalism was a mistake .... and we all know what the results are: isolated communities which have given the opportunity for extremists ....

- Bishop Michael Nazir-Ali

Western nations unwisely responding to non-Christian influences

In the years after the Second World War, many Western nations generously accommodated people who sought political and economic freedoms which were denied in their homelands. This involved the grant of citizenship and welfare privileges, but without wisdom for managing the integration of new citizens, or adequate evangelism among them. Ethnic and religious enclaves or ghettos consequently developed, which often fostered great animosity.

A cultural shift soon began via the growing influence of non-Western views. Hence many food outlets in Britain changed their menus to satisfy Islamic requirements, to the disadvantage of others. Incredibly, in 2011 the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists suggested that as the genital mutilation of young girls occasionally happens in Australia, a version should be performed legally and safely by surgeons!

Such cultural changes are prompted by demands for *Sharia* law - the legal application of Islamic theology - though it contradicts the Christian view of human rights and gender equality at the heart of Western societies. Legal concessions eventually occurred, such as Great Britain recognizing Islamic finance and Sharia courts. British Muslims have used anti-vilification law to accuse Christian evangelists, and in 2010 the right to assault police by throwing shoes at them was granted in Britain, as a concession to Islamic expression.

Ironically, the clash between Christianity and Islam is a collision between systems which both claim to be the authentic expression of Abrahamic faith.

Engaging Islamic people through friendship-based evangelism

Professed linkages to Abraham provide opportunities for dialogue between Islam and Christianity, especially about the personal and civic value of faith in Christ. This can be explored as Christians give friendship, caring action, and testimony without quarrelling. Like a majority of Christians, most Muslims do not biologically descend from Abraham, but regard him as a spiritual father. Instead of arguing against Islamic views of Abraham, such as the belief that he was to sacrifice Ishmael (not Isaac), Christians can help Muslims to realise that *if you belong to Christ, you are Abraham's seed and heirs* (Galatians 3:29).

Along with professed reverence for Abraham, Islamic people agree with most of the Old Testament, trace their family history to Adam and Eve, say "Amen", oppose abortion, reject pornography, and regard Jesus as a prophet who shall return. Those beliefs provide common grounds for dialogue and testimony. Instead of trying to evangelise by arguing, Christians can earn the right to lead Muslim friends into the truth by love - guided by a pattern set by Jesus in his ministry to the Samaritans, who revered Abraham in word but not in deed.

Applying lessons from Christ as he ministered in Samaria

Christ's love for the hated Samaritans gives a parallel that may help Christian responses to Islam. In their heresy, the Samaritans rejected Israel along with Jerusalem, its temple, priesthood, prophets, and writings, and built their own holy place. Muslims also reject Israel, and have built a mosque on the temple mount. Yet Christ rebuked the disciples who wanted to burn a town in Samaria (Luke 9:51-55), he spoke the Good Samaritan parable (10:25-37), cured a Samaritan leper (17:16), and told his people to witness in Samaria (Acts 1:8). His work challenges Christians today who may be unloving toward Muslims.

The love of Christ for the Woman of Samaria also sets an example for today. Undeterred by her sin, or by her people's beliefs, Jesus accepted her in word and deed - a righteous Jewish man caring for the unrighteous woman - and set himself in her debt by asking: *"Will you give me a drink?"* (John 4:7). The woman was amazed by the love that undergirded his challenge of her sin, and was foundational to his firm assertion that *salvation is from the Jews* (4:22).

As Jesus loved individual Samaritans before tackling their system of belief, Christians today should love Muslim people before explaining the personal and civic implications of belief in Christ, who grafts sinners into the family of Abraham - *a father of many nations ... and kings* (Genesis 17:5-6).

Consuming Sharia compliant foods

Following the example of Jesus who ate and drank with outsiders, Christians may wish to dine with Islamic friends - but could be concerned about *halal* foods. Certified by a Muslim authority (with or without labelling), halal meat comes from animals that are killed in the name of Allah, as required by the Qur'an: *Eat not of (meats) on which Allah's name hath not been pronounced* (Sura 6:121). Often the animals are killed without being stunned and the meat is frequently eaten by people unknowingly - if the food is not clearly labelled.

Further, many ordinary foods have also gained halal certification and labelling. So in early 2010 it was announced that Australia's iconic Vegemite had gained halal accreditation. Each jar features Arabic script, and names the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils as the certifying authority, though there was never any need for Vegemite to gain halal certification, since under Islamic law all foods are *halal* (permitted) unless they are *haram* (forbidden).

People who have no personal objection to eating foods that should never have received halal certification or labelling may choose not to buy or eat that food, in protest of Sharia influences. Others who are upset as a matter of conscience and are frightened about purchasing and consuming such foods, are effectively in servitude to Islam, which has gained a significant victory.

Christians may be encouraged to have no fear of eating food linked to Islam, while also recognizing the value of abstinence for certain higher purposes. So Paul affirmed that Christians at Corinth were free to *eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience* (1 Corinthians 10:25) while he also commended abstinence for *the other man's conscience* (10:29) so as to *not cause anyone to stumble* (10:32) - since converts to the faith may be frightened about consuming certain foods. Peter similarly urged Christians *... to abstain from food polluted by idols ... from the meat of strangled animals and from blood* (Acts 15:20), in deference to sensitivities among Jewish people: *For Moses has been preached in every city* (15:21).

Christians need not be afraid about buying or consuming halal meat or foods with Islamic certification or labelling, but may be concerned about the suffering of animals, and the spread of Islam. Although Christians are free to consume any food item, they are also free to refrain for a higher purpose such as denying royalty payments linked to halal certification and to avoid helping the finance or promotion of Islam, as it contradicts fundamental values in Western culture.

Safeguarding the Western tradition

Since Christianity is at the core of Western nations and their institutions, the governments of such countries should not erode their civic foundation, nor commend beliefs or policies that contradict the Christian worldview. Instead, the integrity of Western lands should be protected as governments apply wise public policy to reduce the negative influence of anti-Christian philosophies.

The following policies could be worth applying in any Western nation which has only a small number of persons who oppose mainstream values:

- housing stipulations within migration laws that prevent ghetto formation;
- compulsory military service which instils discipline, pride and respect;
- civics education so as to encourage patriotic responsibility;
- governmental resolve to not recognise the findings of Islamic tribunals;
- improved citizenship requirements as a safeguard of social harmony;
- the banning of full-face coverings - in the quest for improved security;
- zero toleration of seditious propaganda, to prevent it from spreading;
- parliamentary determination against endorsing Sharia financial systems;
- compulsory voting in elections, so as to improve civic engagement.

But Western countries with a large minority non-mainstream population may have to apply much stronger additional provisions, such as the following:

- property ownership and rental rules that sensitively dismantle ghettos;
- regular review of recent migrants, so as to ensure their integration; and
- withdrawal of passports and privileges from persons in bad standing.

When such firm policies are motivated and tempered by Christian ideals of loving-kindness, they may help the Western nations respond to non-Christian views. If Western countries prosper by applying God's wisdom, they become more able to reach Muslims and other non-Christians at home or abroad, and to commend Christ as personal saviour, and lord of all the nations. Western countries would thus give better testimony to Jesus Christ as the son of God *who redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come* (Galatians 3:14), and *all peoples on earth will be blessed* (Genesis 12:3).

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