Radford U Panel 02/08/2011

Muslim Christian Relationship (in the US)

Sedki Riad's Statement

- I would like to start by thanking the organizers of this event for their genuine sensitivity to the importance and critical nature of the topic, for organizing the event, and for inviting me to participate in the panel. I would like to also THNAK my BROTHER Reggie Tuck for his sincere words. *He bought me lunch the other day in an effort to bribe me to say good things about him tonight☺. I was too naïve and shared with him my thoughts on the topics. Guess what, he borrowed all my lines in composing his presentation and I have nothing left to add☺. Shall we open the floor for questions now? I guess, you did not buy that, so let me start.*
- Well, before I get carried away with my short statement, I would like to make it clear that I don't have any formal religious training, education, or degrees. I am a professor of Electrical engineering at Virginia Tech and I play the administrative role of the director of the Islamic Center of Blacksburg. I do share in giving the Friday sermons (Khutbahs) occasionally at our Mosque (Masjid) as we do not have a local scholar that can serve this role. Hence, my presentation here tonight is that of a student of Islam and not as a scholar who would be well versed of this vast religion. In other words, I am only conveying my modest understanding of Islam.
- Reggie cited verses from the Christian references of the Bible. As a Muslim, the references of Islam are the Quran and the Sunnah (or hadith) of Prophet Mohammad, pbuh, (Hadith is the documentation of the traditions of the prophet, pbuh, his sayings, and his lifestyle). I encourage those who would like to seek knowledge from their genuine sources to read both the Quran and Hadith books and study them well. These references are in Arabic; however, English translations of the meanings are available. Remember these translations are done by humans and will never comprehensively or accurately convey the words of the creator. So it may help to check several translations to be exposed to differing attempts at capturing the full picture.
- My sole purpose of being here tonight is knowledge sharing and building bridges based on mutual understanding. I do believe that understanding each other's views and beliefs can only enhance the chances for world peace. To the contrary, misunderstanding and stereotyping generates fanatism and hate.
- In my presentation, and out of habits, I may use Islamic terminology that most audience may not be familiar with. I will try to explain them if I use them, and if I forget, please do not hesitate to stop me and ask their meanings and implications. I may also use "Allah" to refer to God, the Creator, and the God of Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammad, pbut all. Muslims believe that "Allah" is the name of our Creator, also, Arab Christian and Jews use "Allah" to refer to God as well. Since we do not translate names, hence our use of "Allah" in all languages.
- Muslims are commanded in the Quran to respect the God-given rights that the Creator Has bestowed on all humans starting with "Let there be no compulsion in religion: لا إكراه في الدين". (Albaqarah, 2:256)
-

لَّا يَنْهَىٰكُمُ ٱللَّهُ عَنِ ٱلَّذِينَ لَمْ يُقَٰتِلُوكُمْ فِى ٱلدِّينِ وَلَمْ
يُخْرِجُوكُم مِّن دِيَٰرِكُمْ أَن تَبَرُّوهُمْ وَتُقْسِطُوٓا۟ إِلَيْهِمْ ۚ إِنَّ ٱللَّهَ يُحِبُّ
ٱلْمُقْسِطِينَ ﴿٨﴾

Also, in Surat Alhujurat the Quranic verse 49:13, the translation of the meanings *says: "O mankind, We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). Verily, the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you (with most piety). And, Allah has full knowledge and is well-acquainted (with all things)*."

- One more citation from surat: Al-Mumtahinah [60:8] "*Allah forbids you not, with regard to those who fight you not for (your) Faith nor drive you out of your homes, from dealing kindly and justly with them: for Allah loves those who are just."*
- History tells us how much Christians and Jews living in Muslim lands enjoyed peace and prosperity… Many contributed heavily to innovations in science, art, and knowledge, which can never be the case for unprivileged people in society.
- To relay that Islam promotes tension with Christian and Jews because of religion is a growth misrepresentation of the Religion of tolerance and compassion. Christians and Jews hold a special place in Islam as the Quran refers to them as the people of Book and promotes them to a special status in our relationships.
- We believe in all the prophets and messengers Allah sent to humanity to provide guidance and teach people how to coexist and live in peace, starting with Adam and ending with Mohamed, pbut. Islam acknowledges that Prophet Mohammad, pbuh, complemented the messages of Moses and Jesus, pbut, and talked about them with deep appreciation and great respect.
- The Islamic faith acknowledges and complements the concepts and values preached and promoted by Allah's previous prophets: Moses commandments and Jesus emphasis on "love". The Islamic faith puts it all within a BALANCED, comprehensive and holistic way of life. The balance in Allah's attributes is emphasized to demonstrate to us humans how it all fits together: the Balance between His Magnificent Powers and Might, on one hand, and His Compassion, Mercy, Love, and Forgiveness on the other. He is Just. He is All-Knowing. He does it all in balance and in wisdom; a balance beyond our understanding and wisdom beyond our comprehension. He is the only one to be praised whether one is in health or in sickness, in richness or in poverty, in times of ease or in times of hardship.
- Back to Brother Reggie's presentation, he said "Much of the current tension in Islamic-Christian relations may be helpfully viewed as family dysfunction. It is not as much a failure of our religious traditions as it is the consequence of human shortcomings." I fully agree with his analogy, but would like to further add that what appears to be a tension in Islamic-Christian relations has no religious foundation. The true driving force behind this "apparent tension" is in fact political that resulted from the foreign policies of the United States towards the Middle East in general and the Israeli issue in particular.
- In today's convolution of world politics and power manipulation, many facts are hidden and unknown. News, images, and perceptions are manipulated to portray

preferred political positions rather than the bare truth and honest facts. While terms such as "liberation movements" and "freedom fighters" are used to describe some actions and groups, "terrorism" and "terrorists" are typically used comparable actions by Muslims and Muslim groups.

- Dissatisfaction with the American foreign policy is typically misrepresented as hate to the American people, the "free world", and resentment to Christianity.
- Fighting the oppression of the state of Israel and the racism of Zionism is typically explained as Islamic "fundamentalism".
- Brothers and Sisters, let me assure you that Islam promotes PEACE. The word Islam is derived from the word peace. Our greeting to others "Assalamu Alaykum, peace be upon you" is wishing them peace. Islam promotes forgiveness and discourages revenge. To appreciate this aspect of Islam, let me explain to you the concept of Jihad in Islam:
  - No one can deny that the word jihad is, today, closely linked with the violence associated with Muslims.
  - "Jihad" is often mistranslated as "holy war," thus suggesting the attempt to spread Islam by force, which is completely false and goes against one of the tenets of Islam, as "the freedom of belief" is a God-Given-Right.
  - The truth is that, among its other Islamic forms, jihad calls for Muslims to "struggle/fight" for regaining the rights of all people, while demanding that violence be a last resort.
  - "It is an Islamic religious duty to defend and protect God-given rights with vigor and commitment, be it the rights of Muslims or non-Muslims.
  - "Peaceful means are to be exhausted before resorting to the use of force."
  - Islamic teachings emphasize the rules Muslims must follow when force is required. These include prohibitions against killing people not involved in the fighting (e.g. women and children) or destroying civilian infrastructure (e.g. farms and factories).
  - "Islam gives the Muslim the highest code of ethics to abide by. But when the pressure and injustice exceed human tolerance and withstanding, human beings (Muslims or non-Muslims) break down and are tempted to revolt and respond violently.
  - You can't demand ideal behavior from human beings living under oppressive regimes and unjust tyrannies and you can't defend their wrong actions, too. However, before judging people's reactions, one needs to put himself/themselves in their shoes.
- Finally, let me close by stating the importance of recognizing that we all are indeed brothers and sisters sharing the same ship which we must sail in harmony.
- The current "guidelines for interreligious relationships" of the United Methodist Church as shared with us tonight by Reggie is greatly appreciated and we should struggle (do Jihad) to subscribe to and implement. Building bridges of mutual understanding is a must and our forum tonight should be one of several to come.