



Holden in the Gap - An Evangelical response to the rise of Islam in America

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...The people of the land have used oppression, and exercised robbery, and have vexed the poor and needy: yea, they have oppressed the stranger wrongfully. And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it: but I found none.  
Ezekial 22:29-30

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In a microcosm of the national debate over the rise of Islam in America and the proposal to build a mosque at Ground Zero, the debate is likewise modeling itself on a smaller scale in the Temecula Valley, Riverside County, California. I received an email from an associate mentioning a lecture that was to take place on 02 September, 2010, in Murrieta. It was to be hosted by Murrieta's Calvary Chapel Bible College (CCBC), in conjunction with the Veritas Evangelical Seminary, which is currently based there.

This lecture was initially a response to the local community's request for Calvary Chapel Bible College and Veritas Evangelical Seminary's position on the mosque that is being proposed by the Islamic Center of Temecula Valley (ICTV) on a piece of land on Nicolas Road near a Baptist church. With the national opposition to the Ground Zero mosque forcefully opposed by a vast majority of Americans, this local issue likewise generated some understandable resistance as well.

Likewise, in the wake of ongoing incidents of domestic terrorism like the attack at Fort Hood (many more stopped short by vigilant Police work), people are justifiably aware, very irritated, and there is a tremendous amount of "push-back" by sensible people against Progressive liberalism's endless blind lecturing on tolerance and religious plurality in the face of reality today.

Yet, some Christians have come to accept that anything less than aggressive and violent confrontation with Muslims is "liberalism," "compromise," and weak. This is plain nonsense and these need to dial it down a few notches. Contemporary progressive liberalism is *not* synonymous with *Biblical* grace and compassion! In this agitated environment it is the loud and surly who are thus far dominating the discourse.

I am familiar with CCBC. I had not heard of Veritas Evangelical Seminary (VES) to this point. Since the writer of the original email inferred this was to be an "inter-faith, diversity lecture of compromise," which was certainly prejudicial before the fact, it piqued my interest. Since I have been involved to some degree with these issues many years, I headed down the road for the forty-five minute drive to South Riverside and CCBC.

CCBC is a beautiful, sprawling property. I drove in line to the gate and followed the trail of cars inside, but was tempted to wander around alone to see the place. The setting sun and impending start of the lecture prevented that and I followed the other stragglers into the lecture hall. There were a couple hundred people in attendance and I immediately recognized a few I knew, so sat in the back to follow the proceedings without distraction.

The lecture was presented by Joseph M. Holden, Ph. D., Co-founder and President of Veritas Evangelical Seminary. Decidedly atypical for a seminary President, his age and appearance to a casual observer would be a CEO of a national financial institution and not a nascent seminary in rural suburbia.

This was not a church service, nor an evangelical event, per se, but a community forum headed by a qualified leader endeavoring to give a Christian, and therefore, a Biblical perspective to a secular community. I honestly wasn't expecting too much. Within the context of venues, books, online forays, and people I company with, I was looking for comprehensive Biblical answers in response to the decidedly un-Biblical direction much of national Christianity—those who "name the name of Christ"—is being drawn away recently dealing with Islam in America. Our model dealing with the lost is New Testament Christianity as lived in Jesus Christ and modeled in the lives of the disciples, the Spirit-filled Church, in the book of Acts, and no other organization or individual. That field is sparse these days.

Ten minutes into the lecture I was disengaged, updating my Twitter account a few times. Then I was quickly engrossed.

Holden started skillfully threading the needle in the midst of a very high-profile, high-pressure environment, not only right there, but locally and nationally. Although there were minor remarks made I would dispute and some historical assertions about Islam that historians disagree over, Holden laid out a well-reasoned, even-handed, balanced commentary with grace and professionalism. It was directed to the wider secular community. It was directed to professing Christians. And it was directed, rather pointedly I might add, towards the local, national, and global Muslim community.

An "equal opportunity offender" as a friend once good-naturedly quipped, and treasures from Heaven for those with "ears to hear." (Luke 14:35)

Some of the high points, which Holden addressed during the lecture in much more depth:

**Concerning the Law of the Land.**

Holden addressed the law, touching on the Declaration of Independence and the “Laws of Nature,” and “Nature’s God.” We hold these truths to be *self-evident*, that all men are created equal, that all are *endowed* by their *Creator*, with certain *unalienable* rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness. The Constitution and First Amendment, that Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion, or *prohibiting* the free exercise thereof.

Romans 13:1-7: Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that **exist** are from God.

Divine law is *not* to rule government, but moral law yes! (which is *consistent* with Christian divine law). It removes moral relativism, and preserves religious pluralism (versus Islamic divine law).

Judeo-Christian principles (Natural Law) form the basis of U.S. law – Jefferson, Locke, Blackstone, R. Hooker, Aquinas, Apostle Paul, and God (Ro. 2:15; Lev. 11:44).

The result is freedom of religion (all religions have a right to *worship* and *believe* what they wish – though not *practice*).

All freedom-loving people hope Islam would afford others the same religious freedoms in their countries (e.g Saudi Arabia, Iran, etc.) – reciprocity – that Islam has come to value and experience in the U.S.

### **Addressing the Muslim Community.**

He addressed the Muslim community locally and by extension nationally by encouraging Islam to allow (and speak out in favor of) religious freedom in Muslim countries - the same freedoms they have come to expect from the U.S. and emphasized communicating social expectations to Muslims, namely, they need to speak out in public (and in the mosque) against violence, and denounce acts of terror (including known terror groups). Islam's inaction on the hard issues implies acceptance.

He encouraged Muslims to lead the campaign against terror/violence. The Western world should not have to lead - it is a Muslim problem!

Requested a pledge to denounce all religious violence and terror as a legitimate means for change.

Requested a pledge to affirm or deny the terror status of each group listed on the U.S. government terror list.

Articulate the mosque's view of civil disobedience, women's rights, Jihad, religious freedom, and Sharia Law, as described by the Qur'an, Sira, and Hadith.

Articulate the role of the Muslim world in dealing with radical Islamic terrorism.

Articulate the mosque's policy towards their relationship with the State of Israel and the rest of the non-Islamic world.

Demanded transparency within American Islam: post Friday sermons on their websites, have fiscal accountability, and be vocal on religious freedom.

Requested a pledge to list all charities in the U.S. and abroad to and from which the mosque gives and receives money.

Requested a pledge to upload Friday sermons on the mosque website for public access. (Thus the FBI and DHS would not have to monitor them covertly.)

These transparency measures should be welcomed by the entire community since they:

1. Provide an opportunity for Muslims to clarify their beliefs and become more transparent to the public,
2. Offer the community and press a record by which local Mosques can be held accountable and,
3. Provide a record by which Christians may offer theological and philosophical responses to Islamic beliefs and practices in an open and dialogical/evangelistic manner. There should be no reason to reject these voluntary measures, unless of course, Islam seeks to remain hidden behind closed doors, in which case the community would have a justified right to believe Islam has something to hide. In this event, Muslims should not find it strange that the surrounding community would continue to oppose any expansion plans.

#### **Addressing the Christian community.**

Holden asserted we reassure Muslims of our concern for their safety and religious freedom while in western countries – any violence against Muslims will not be tolerated.

He asserted we share Christ and his love with Muslims, and emphasized this is a golden opportunity to live and present the Gospel of salvation to the Muslim world.

He challenged our commitment to religious freedom for all at home and abroad, argued in favor of freedom of religion, and emphasized the frightening alternative. John Calvin and his theological battle with Michael Servetus in 1500's Geneva comes to mind, an affront to intellectual freedom.

Holden stood in favor of the people's constitutional **RIGHT** to demonstrate against the Islamic Center of the Temecula Valley, though sharply **DISAGREED** with its ability to work through the real issues involved (rights vs. wisdom). He emphasized again in favor of viewing this as golden Gospel opportunity.

In favor of the Islamic Center of the Temecula Valley's Constitutional **RIGHT** to build, though sharply **DISAGREED** with their doctrine.

In favor of challenging the ICTV to speak out publically against terror, violence, and champion religious freedom.

#### **A Warning.**

On this evening, Joseph Holden and peers endeavored to stand in the gap of a society and culture teetering, agitating towards the brink. Thus far, on this one issue, it was the most definitive I have seen or heard. A few young people from the college made some public comments during the question and answer session I was very impressed with as well! What a notable evening!

Holden stated to me in private in following days, *"It's unfortunate many Christians have left the great commission and Christ's love behind for a more militant approach."*

Yes, many. The times are evil. In the midst of a society crippled by political correctness that has lost its ability to recognize evil at all, many believers are understandably under duress. Still, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." (Romans 12:21) We are in spite of everything still held to a higher standard than the rest of the world.

The Bible teaches specifically all of us as individual Christians will stand before Jesus Christ, the visible representation of the Triune God one day to answer, not for our sins, which were judged at the cross, but for our works in this life. It is no small thing to "name the name of Christ" and know one day God will manifest before all the motives of our hearts in how we lived our lives.

"According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble.... 1 Cor 3:11-12 (KJV)

Paul cautions us to "be careful" how we build upon that holy foundation. Are you building on a New Testament model, strengthening America's heritage, or undermining it further succumbing to a secularist confrontational, combative, "non-sectarian" world-view partnering with the "mixed multitude"? (Exodus 12)

"Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. (1 Cor 3:13-15)

"Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." (2 Cor 5: 9-10)

We are told in the Bible, "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." (1 Cor 11:31) Check your Method of Service. Check your world-view.

Holden mentioned in the question and answer session near the end, with his associate Robert Heckler, an instructor in World religions at the Bible college, the abysmal percentage that, "Only two percent of believers in America regularly share their faith in Christ with others." (quote attributed to Bill Bright of Campus Crusade for Christ, "The Coming Revival," New Life Publications, p. 65)

This comports with Ken Ham, founder and president of Answers in Genesis, with Britt Beemer of America's Research Group, in their book, "Already Gone," who state that two-thirds of the young people who are sitting among us in church have already left in their hearts; soon they will be gone for good. This largely because of a tepid Biblical foundation in their formative years, combined

with being spiritually ill-equipped to operate within a largely secular, spiritually hostile culture through High School and College.

Furthermore, as I presented in "A Rear-guard Action,"...Only 9 percent of professing Christians have a biblical world view. Because of this, today's believers live very similarly to non-believers. A personal sense of significance is rarely experienced, we spend our money and time on things that fail to satisfy and we begin to wonder what life's ultimate purpose really is. We are, in short, losing our bearings as a people and a nation. [From The Truth Project]

And Christians wonder why in this spiritually destitute environment, as we have largely *failed* to be individually obedient to our primary mandate to, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature," (yet strangely find the time and energy to show up at the local protest or rally) mosques are popping up like mushrooms in the middle of the night all across America. Symptoms of a subtle generational disease—moral relativism—that continues to be ignored.

New Testament Christians with only the Gospel turned the first century world "upside down." (Acts 17:6) Today, Christianity is by and large dead in Europe, and we see the resulting moral and spiritual chaos ravaging their cultures as the civilization is being "Islamized."

Wait... what are we seeing happen here in America?

Time to change course!

As Evangelical Christians we don't believe the Koran was inspired or holy, and therefore not the Word of God. Jesus' final words on the cross were "It is finished" (John 19:30), the work of man's redemption completed, and "Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12), thus the individual avoiding an eternity separated from God by only submitting to His singular plan of salvation.

Right now—right now, as we sit here, the eyes of the world are on America through global media, watching to see how issues like the Ground Zero Mosque, the proposed burning of the Korans at the Dove World Outreach Center, or the Islamic Center of the Temecula Valley debate plays out. This is indeed a "golden Gospel opportunity," as Holden stated, on many different levels. May we seize this day!

May we balance justice and judgment, with mercy and compassion that the Lord one day may say to us, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." (Matt 25:21). May American Christianity not recklessly misrepresent the Lord now in this critical time in ours and the world's history, as we stand at this global podium.

May Muslims in America and the world over be challenged by our professionalism and gracious testimony, to reevaluate their religion, that they may come into a genuine and true relationship with a living Jesus and be saved!

I strongly suggest any pastors or teachers looking for credible resources to form your own organization or small group's program to contact either me or Veritas Evangelical Seminary for a CD copy of the talk. This debriefing is just a small account of the full lecture:



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*"The American culture is obsessed with salvation by politics. We as a corporate body cannot comprehend any other way of changing the culture. They do not understand that God changes cultures by the preaching of the Word. Nineveh's culture was not changed by Jonah getting elected king or arguing that Nineveh stop socialism or stealing from her citizens. It was changed when God ordered him to preach." ~ Tom Pardue Sr. LtCol. U.S. Army (retired)*



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My deepest respects and regards to Joe Holden for his help on this invaluable resource.

May the Lord use it in a mighty way towards His long-term purposes.