

Do we pray for Muslims?

Someone put “The Nation of Islam” on the prayer-chain of a Lutheran congregation in Arizona. It actually happened. What were they thinking?

First of all, the Nation of Islam (NOI) is a black Muslim group which stands outside of traditional Islam. Led today by Louis Farrakhan, the NOI believes that Allah became incarnate in the 1930’s in Detroit in the person of Master W. Fard Muhammad, who claimed to have come to Detroit from Mecca.

Although the NOI embraces some Islamic beliefs and practices, such as abstaining from alcohol and pork, it rejects others, such as the five daily prayers and pilgrimages to Mecca. The NOI also preaches the racial supremacy of “black” people in contrast to the colorblind stance of traditional Islam. The NOI foments racial prejudice and is persistently criticized for being anti-Semitic.

In what possible sense could one pray for the Nation of Islam? Or even for traditional Muslims? Does the command to “love your enemies” (Matt 5:44, Luke 6:27, 35) mean that we should pray that God would bless the Nation of Islam? Or Islam proper?

What about moderate Muslims who are our neighbors, co-workers, and friends? Surely they are like the “righteous Gentile” of Acts 10:22. They do good; individually they can be as professional, kind, and upright as any other American citizen. So what’s the difference? In all religions, even in the Nation of Islam, there are people who do good.

Nevertheless, Islam is not to Christianity what Judaism is to Christianity – part of the history of salvation leading to Christ. Moreover, it is not true that Islam and Christianity are really working for the same goals.¹

The illusion of “the common good.” The LWF is caught in this illusion: “God loves all humanity. God desires to give life. Christians and Muslims share the responsibility to preserve life beyond the members of their own faiths,” LWF President Mark Hanson said at a June 2006 conference on Lutheran — Muslim relations in Indonesia (Mpls. Area Synod *InterActs*, 8/06, p.11). Implying that Christianity and Islam mean the same thing when they talk about God desiring “to give” and “preserve life” is deceptive and irresponsible.

The 1990 Cairo Declaration of Human Rights in Islam was signed by representatives of all 57 Muslim countries. This document asserts that *Shari’ah* has primacy over the UN’s Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and claims that Allah has made the *umma* (Islamic community) “the best nation,” whose role is to “guide” humanity.

The Cairo Declaration states principles that are common to many civilizations but then modifies these principles to comply with *Shari’ah*. Thus it affirms “[man’s] freedom and right to a dignified life *in accordance with the Islamic Shari-ah*.” It says the laws of Islam are “binding divine commandments . . . and that no one as a matter of principle has the right to suspend them in whole or in part or violate or ignore [them] . . .” Again, “it is prohibited to take away life *except for a Shari’ah prescribed reason*.”

Freedom of speech is first affirmed, then limited by *Shari'ah*: "Everyone shall have the right to advocate what is right, and propagate what is good, and warn against what is wrong and evil *according to the norms of Islamic Shari'ah*."

Political rights can only be exercised "*in accordance with the provisions of Shari'ah*."

And in its final article the Cairo Declaration reaffirms the self-enclosed, impermeable-to-criticism nature of Islamic law: "*The Islamic Shari'ah is the only source of reference for the explanation or clarification of any of the articles of this Declaration*."

Thus when church leaders make statements that imply Muslims and Christians are all really working for the same "common good," they perpetuate a dangerous illusion that dishonors victims of jihad terror and colludes with terrorism today.

Then how could a Lutheran pray for Muslims? Some suggestions:

We pray for the courage and wisdom to spread the gospel in Muslim countries.
We pray for God to convert Muslims through the preaching of the cross of Christ.
We pray that God would confound Muslim efforts to lead people away from Christ.
We pray for the courage to support Muslims who publicly support human rights as defined by the UN's 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
We pray for the separation of religion and state in Muslim countries.
We pray for Islamic countries to foreswear their goal of exterminating the Jews.
We pray for Islamic countries to refrain from killing those who convert out of Islam.
We pray for Islamic countries to refrain from persecuting religious minorities.
We pray for Islamic countries to refrain from honor killings and persecution of women.
We pray for Islamic countries to allow women equal rights.

We thank God for the separation of religion and state in our own country and ask for the courage to honor and defend this separation for ourselves and others.

We pray to God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: THY kingdom come, THY will be done.