

A Biblical Response to the Clash between Radical Islam and the West: A Middle Eastern Christian Reflection

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How do we address the difficulties our world faces? We have an important and unique contribution to make!

Our response should reflect our beliefs, as we know God's hope is not just for believers, but for all of creation – Christian, Muslim, and Jewish.

We shall all be reconciled with each other and with God.

Should We Be Involved in Political Engagement?

John Stott defines politics as “the art of living together in a community”- it is impossible to avoid politics since in some way we are all part of a community.

We are not called to be separate from the world, but a model for what a redeemed and restored creation will look like.

How should we be involved in politics? How can we, as followers of Christ, engage our communities and bring about positive transformation?

THE CHALLENGE OF FUNDAMENTALISM

- Rise of Fundamentalism in the Region
- Radical Expressions
- Terrorist Attacks
- Media Coverage of Graphic Violence
- Rise of the Islamic State
- Political-Religious Movements and Violence

Islamic Fundamentalism

- Islam as a religious belief
- Political Islam
 - rejects the Western idea of nation-state, challenge the Western world order of secularism and human rights

New Global Phenomenon

- Religious fanaticism and extremism have emerged before the end of the Cold War.
- Islamic fundamentalism became a new enemy of the West after the fall of communism.

New World **DISORDER**:

Islamic fundamentalists are **weak** and **divided** in coming together. They **cannot** create a new order, however, they **can** create a **new world disorder**.

“Islamic fundamentalism is an absolutist universalism, a vision of a worldwide order based on Islam. For this reason – not because of an ‘enmity to Islam’ - the debate on fundamentalism and world politics must be centered around Islam and the West” – Bassam Tibi

Globalization of the Nation-State

- The nation-state system is an European institution that formed in the early 19th Century.
- This system spread over the globe, united national communities.
- Globalization is a ‘structural process’ with a universal outlook, having norms and values that stem from the Western secular worldview.
- Globalization has spread, but its values have not become universal.

Political processes of mobilization and integration + Economic processes of growth → European nation-states → Impose Middle Eastern nation-states

Clash between Political Islam and Western Ideology

- Political Islam begins its revolt against the West by rejecting the nation-state system.
- Islamic Fundamentalism seeks to remake the world, reclaim the sciences, family, education and the understanding of order.
- Political Islam advocates its form of order, but in the process, it leads to disorder.

Islamic fundamentalists reflect a sociopolitical worldview through religious symbols; pronouncing a new order closer to modernism instead of a traditional religious revival.

Fundamentalists gain a support from the failed policies of the secular regimes and continue to question the secular nation-state.

The divine order they imagine as an alternative model in reality leads to disorder.

Islam has become the West’s leading challenger due to the fact that Islam resembles the Western civilization.

*It is **universal** in both its claims and its outlook and it is **not restricted to national or regional boundaries**.*

A Clash Between Two Dominating Powers in the Israel-Palestine Conflict

- **Islam Fundamentalists** seek to confront and challenge the West through countering the narrative of secularization and nation-state
- **The West** dominates through economic and military superiority and international law that is framed according to Western values

THE CHURCH AND CONFLICT

Many Christians in the Middle East have embraced Western moral values without fully understanding its political implications.

Muslims perceive Christians as part of the Western worldview that seeks to dominate it.

It influences theological discourse especially in the Israel-Palestine conflict.

The Israeli – Palestinian Conflict

- A daily reality of checkpoints, guns, and soldiers serves to reinforce entrenched historical opposition and prejudices.
- The encounter between Israeli and Palestinian is preconditioned by both real and perceived threats.
- The relationships between Israeli and Palestinian believers are set on a course dictated to them by social and political norms.
- Those who operate outside these paradigms are treated with hostility and suspicion.

OUR FAILURE: There is a failure within the community of faith to bear witness to the glory of God.

We come with a set of preconceptions influenced by the biblical hermeneutics of our ecclesial traditions and a Western worldview.

Many international Christians take “sides” in the conflict and inhibit their ability to encourage reconciliation.

Tensions are split down ethnic and racial lines.

Conflicting theological ideologies add a religious dimension.

Scripture is manipulated to legitimize established political opposition.

“Though explicitly giving ultimate allegiance to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, many Christians in fact seem to have an overriding commitment to their respective cultures and ethnic groups. Hence in conflict situations they tend to fight on the side of their cultural group and employ faith as a weapon in struggle.”- *Miroslav Volf*

Biblical Concept of the Kingdom of God



Understanding our Role in the Kingdom

Western values that divorce God from society and politics →

← FOLLOW BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES →

← Islamic view of divine order on earth

Examples regarding God's people in the Bible

1. The Role of King
2. The Role of Priest
3. The Role of Prophet

1. The Role of King

Seek to serve people, not to be served, not to take from or oppress them

The king in the Bible is powerful, but he does not wield unbridled power.

The king must be accountable to others as a reminder that there are limitations to power.

The kingdom of God has come to serve others. Jesus came to set what was wrong, right.

2. The Role of Priest

Declare the kingdom of God and the principles of Jesus, draw others to the kingdom

The priest is expected to teach the will of God; to attend to the daily needs of his people, and to mediate between the people and God.

Jesus came to proclaim God's good news and that His kingdom is near.

3. The Role of Prophet

Serve God's purpose and speak out against injustice

The role of the prophet is to proclaim that the kingdom of God has come, Jesus is king, and man does not own politics.

Jesus refused to bow to false authority and power.

God's kingdom requires us to act with justice and truthfulness.

How to Live Our Lives

- It is important for us to liberate us from the fear of speaking prophetically to an oppressive regime, whether it comes in the form of a military regime or a political party.
- The church needs to reemphasize its priestly role by attending to the needs of the Christian people in the Middle East and by reaching out to the Muslims and Jews around us.
- The Arab Christian church can provide a model of government that both the Western and the Islamic paradigm lack - show a third way between the extremes.
- We should work together to carry out our vocation most effectively.

Questions We Need to Address

1. How is the church dealing with the evil and violence around us?
2. How do we deal with the breakdown of nation-states and the increase in chaos?
3. How can the church meet the needs of people in the midst of chaos?
4. What is the role of the church as a prophetic voice to the political or military power to fulfill their duties to protect people and not misuse their power ?
5. How can the church present a moral worldview that reflects the Kingdom of God to both the Western and Muslim world?