



Rev. John C. Rankin, President
Theological Education Institute and Mars Hill Society
P.O. Box 297, West Simsbury, CT 06092
860.408.1599 www.johnrankin.org john@johnrankin.org



A Vision for “First the Gospel, then Politics...” A Passion for “The Love of Hard Questions.”

Islam and the Invitation of Only Genesis

John C. Rankin

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As a biblically rooted Christian, I believe all people are equal in the sight of the one true Creator, and most of us seek truth, beauty and wisdom.

I also believe that human nature yearns for the dignity and honor of religious, political and economic liberty. Such liberty is necessary for a just social order, and as a minister of the Gospel, I desire justice for Muslims just as I do for all people.

Beginning in Tunisia in 2011, the Muslim world has erupted against despotic governments. The heart cry is for political and economic freedom. But does this also include religious freedom? Unless we are first free to choose what we believe, how can we also be free to choose our governments and economic systems? I want to see all Arab and Muslim peoples prosper as fully as possible. Can it happen within Islam? What is a proactive biblical perspective?

Here, for any Muslim friend who might be interested, I will seek to define some positive biblical assumptions that, in sum, point toward honest politics and economic liberty. Such honesty and liberty is intrinsic to the Gospel of Jesus, Messiah. Are they intrinsically attractive to the Muslim soul? I understand that the Qur’an and Sunnah do not hold the same view of the Bible as I do. But deeper yet, I believe that any person or nation in pursuit of truth, beauty and wisdom, can instinctively affirm the ethical and political nature of these assumptions

In Genesis 1-3, the Bible sets forth the storyline defined by the good order of creation, its reversal or brokenness, and then the redemption of the good. The order of creation is entirely good and trustworthy, and defined in Genesis 1-2, in what I call **Only Genesis**. In Genesis 3, the brokenness of this goodness and trust follows by an act of the human will. Also in Genesis 3, the

promise of redemption is given to restore the promises of Genesis 1-2, fulfilled ultimately in Jesus the Messiah. Jesus literally buys us back from the slavery of broken trust.

Thus, only when we understand the heights of the goodness of the order of creation, can we then understand the depths of the injustice and evil that breaks it. And only then can we grasp the height of being rescued from the depths, and receive the good promise of the resurrection.

The original goodness of Only Genesis involves ten positive assumptions:

- 1. Only Genesis has a positive view of the Creator's nature.** The Hebrew language for the one true Creator is *Yahweh Elohim*, and it uniquely defines the One who is greater than space, time and number. His power is unlimited, his nature is good and his purpose is to bless all people fully. In being greater than space and time, this means Yahweh Elohim is also great enough to come into our human world and relate to us. In being greater than number, Yahweh Elohim is not numerically restricted in himself, and this leads to the triune understanding of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. From this point, as manifest in human community, checks and balances on power in tripartite forms of government (co-equal branches of the executive, legislative and judicial) are derived. Thus equals diversity in service to unity, and thus a healthy social order.
- 2. Only Genesis has a positive view of communication.** The first words spoken by the Creator in Genesis are "Let there be light." This is the nature of revelation or communication – where by definition, light reveals what is truly there. Part of Yahweh Elohim's communication in the Bible is that it is a dialogue – he invites us to ask him questions as we learn his ways. Yahweh Elohim communicated this way with Abraham and all the biblical prophets, many others in the Bible, and likewise to the present through the Holy Spirit, in accord with what has been revealed in the Bible. In the Gospel of John, Jesus declared himself to be the "I AM," to be Yahweh Elohim, the one true Creator in human form, to communicate with us as the living Word, as the Light of the world. One of the names for Jesus in the Hebrew, *Immanuel*, means that Yahweh Elohim is "with us."
- 3. Only Genesis has a positive view of human nature.** The whole structure of Only Genesis is designed to highlight the creation of man and woman as the image-bearers of the one true Creator, as Yahweh Elohim breathed the breath of life into Adam and Eve. The creation was made for us, and to bear his image means that in our finite nature we reflect the Creator's infinite qualities of communication and creativity. We were made to

- govern the good creation and take care of it with satisfaction in building families and nations. Or as it declares in Psalm 8, we are “crowned” with “glory and honor” as the highest purpose of the creation. In other words, central to the greatness of Yahweh Elohim is his joy in making man and woman to share his glory.
4. **Only Genesis has a positive view of human freedom.** In fact, it is the only proactive definition of human freedom in history. The first words spoken by Yahweh Elohim to Adam in Genesis 2 are, in English translations, “You are free ...” More dynamic is the Hebrew language itself, a metaphor translated “in feasting you will continually feast” (*akol tokel*). In other words, an unlimited menu of good choices in all of life is presented, so long as the forbidden and poisonous fruit is not eaten. To eat the forbidden fruit means “in dying you will continually die” (*moth tamuth* in the Hebrew). Thus, feast on what is good, or eat poison and die – the sovereign Creator gives man and woman dignity and honor in giving us such a freedom to choose. Unless we are free to say no, we are not free to say yes. There is no coercion in the Gospel. We are free to choose between truth and falsehood, between good and evil, between life and death, between freedom and slavery.
 5. **Only Genesis has a positive view of hard questions.** When Yahweh Elohim gave man and woman stewardship over creation, an endlessly delightful learning process was put in place. We were made to learn in his presence, a central part of which was asking questions. Even after the broken trust of sin, the power to pose hard questions in the presence of Yahweh Elohim and one another is seen dramatically, for example, in the persons of Abraham, Moses, Job, David, Solomon, the Queen of Sheba, Jeremiah, Habakkuk and Paul, and supremely in Jesus as he modeled the rabbinic teaching method. No questions were ever prohibited. Yahweh Elohim allowed himself to be directly challenged, and Jesus also invited the same in the face of his plotting enemies.
 6. **Only Genesis has a positive view of human sexuality.** The structures and trajectories of both Genesis 1 and 2 focus on men and women as full equals and complements, as image-bearers of the Creator. They are joint stewards of the creation, and joint heirs of eternal life. Healthy human sexuality is defined by chastity outside of marriage, and fidelity within the marriage of one man and one woman for one lifetime. It is within this covenant of faithful marriage that trust is first learned, between man and women, then modeled for their children, then to the extended family and local communities, and then to the nations.
 7. **Only Genesis has a positive view of science and the scientific method.** In Genesis 1, the sun, moon and stars are treated as inanimate objects, as opposed to being deities as in

pagan religion. From there on the Bible views creation as it is, setting the table for honest scientific observation of the world in which we live. The Law of Moses also provides the ethical basis for the scientific method, the principle of falsification, where 100 percent accuracy is required of Hebrew prophets. If there is one mistake, then the prophet is not a true prophet. In science, if an experiment to prove a theory produces the same result 1,000 times, then a different result the next time, it has been falsified, and must be reviewed to find the error. This is science's most exacting standard, coming from the Bible's most exacting standard. Thus, the historical, geographical and observational claims of the Bible are relentlessly confirmed by the discipline of archeology and other sciences, from the Garden of Eden, located at the headwaters of the Pishon, Gihon, Tigris and Euphrates rivers in ancient Mesopotamia, through ancient Israel and the capitol of Jerusalem, to the apostle John on the island of Patmos.

8. **Only Genesis has a positive view of verifiable history.** Beginning with Adam and Eve, the biblical revelation is always ratified by multiple eye-witnesses, rooted in the Law of Moses, all the way to Jesus, along with very detailed genealogies; then from Jesus to the end of the New Testament. Indeed, when Jesus appeared, he did so in accordance with millennia worth of recorded history rooted in multiple checks and balances to certify truth. This commitment to verifiable history has informed all Hebrew, Jewish and Christian scholarship across the millennia.
9. **Only Genesis has a positive view of covenantal law.** Here, Yahweh Elohim first holds himself accountable to being just and fair and loving, before he requires man and woman to obey his laws. The original covenant in the Garden of Eden was that of freedom, and all subsequent covenants aimed to restore such freedom, finally fulfilled in the Messiah. Covenantal law on this basis is a bulwark against human despotic governments. Then, central to this biblical witness is the reality that the covenantal people are held to higher standards than are the pagans. The prophets Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Micah, Amos and Habakkuk, among others, first held Israel and Judah accountable for their sins; as did the apostles Paul and Peter for the church.
10. **Only Genesis has a positive view of unalienable rights.** Yahweh Elohim gives the gifts of life, liberty and property (stewardship of the creation) to all people equally in Genesis 1-2. "Unalienable" refers to rights given by the Creator, rights that cannot be alienated, rights that are above the power of human government to define, give or take away. These unalienable rights are simply to be honored. The unalienable right of liberty means religious, political and economic freedom for all people, regardless of religious or

philosophical beliefs. Biblically faithful Jews and Christians celebrate these liberties for all people equally, including Muslims, under the rule of law.

Only Genesis begins with the assumption that all things in creation are made good (*tov*). The “Gospel” of Jesus the Messiah comes from a word meaning “Good News” (*euangelion*). In the face of Muslim rebellion against despotic governments, what will follow? And where is any good news to be found for the establishment of a healthy social order?

Here is a summary of what I call **The Six Pillars of Honest Politics**, which are rooted in the prior **Six Pillars of Biblical Power** (written about elsewhere). But for here, it can be asked: To what extent would Muslim peoples like to see these pillars in their own governments? I would love to see them embraced in the United States. Are they attractive? The first four pillars are drawn from Only Genesis, and the last two are drawn from the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount – he who restores the promises of Only Genesis.

1. **The power to give** affirms that the unalienable rights given by the Creator belong to all people equally, and leaders in human government should serve such a gift.
2. **The power to live in the light** means leaders in human government at every level should be as fully transparent as possible.
3. **The power of informed choice** is rooted in an honest definition of terms in political debate, providing a level playing field for all ideas to be heard equally, apart from which political freedom is not possible.
4. **The power to love hard questions** is in place when political leaders honor and answer those who pose them the toughest questions.
5. **The power to love enemies** recognizes that even the harshest of political opponents share a common humanity and are to be treated with respect.
6. **The power to forgive** recognizes the need to address our individual and societal transgressions against one another, and to work toward justice and reconciliation.

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