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The Power of Only Genesis to Leverage the Nations
A Vision for “First the Gospel, then Politics...” A Passion for “The Love of Hard Questions”

Seven Questions for the Imam at Ground Zero

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In the September 9, 2011 op-ed piece in the Wall Street Journal, Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf calls for “religious moderates” to “join hands” with him to build a future with “the basic peaceful principles of our religions to overwhelm the extremists.” Imam Rauf heads the Cordoba Initiative, which envisions a mosque near ground zero as part of an advertised “independent, multifaith and multinational project that works to improve Muslim-West relations.”

When this issue was in the midst of public controversy a year ago, I penned an article at FoxNews Opinion online: *Seven Questions for the Imam at Ground Zero*. My questions remain. In the goal of honest multifaith dialogue, would Imam Rauf be willing to have a public conversation with me about these questions? I am likewise delighted to receive any of his questions, especially if in any way I am inaccurate in my stated concerns. Unless we define our terms honestly, up front and in the presence of those who would challenge us, how can real dialogue happen and “Muslim-West” relations improve?

Here, again, my seven questions:

1. Does the choice of the name Cordoba House indicate an ideal for Imam Rauf, and a desire to emulate the Islamic state of al-Andalus?

Imam Rauf states in his September 7, 2010 op-ed piece in the New York Times: “Our name, Cordoba, was inspired by the city in Spain where Muslims, Christians and Jews co-existed in the Middle Ages during a period of great cultural enrichment created by Muslims.”

The Iberian peninsula – modern Spain – was conquered by Berber Muslims in A.D. 711. Later, under Abd al-Rahman, the newly named al-Andalus had its capitol city in Cordoba. Islam maintained religious, political and economic hegemony.

In Cordoba, Jews and Christians were tolerated by Islamic rule as dhimmis, or “protected peoples.” Their ideas were welcomed in learning and culture only to the extent that Islam had the final say. But dhimmis did not have equal status with Muslims in terms of rights or liberties. Infidels (atheists or polytheists) had to convert or be put to the sword.

2. Does the Cordoba House hold to the classic view of Islam as a one-way religion?

A related concern is the historical reality that Islam is a “one-way religion” where people who are born Muslim, or convert to Islam, are not allowed to leave Islam. Many apostates have been put to death, and a range of pressures have always been employed to prohibit Muslims from leaving Islam.

In a reflection of this one-way reality, Imam Rauf addressed the multifaith nature of the Cordoba House in an interview with CNN on September 8, 2010. He said he wanted Jews and Christians to be “perfect” in their religions. But Islam believes the Qur’an fulfills and supersedes the Hebrew Bible and Christian New Testament, and thus, such perfection is only found in becoming Muslim.

3. Can the unalienable rights of the Declaration of Independence, and the First Amendment liberties in the U.S. Constitution, be rooted in the “tolerance” of Cordoba?

Imam Rauf also defines “the very American values under debate” as a “recognition of the rights of others, tolerance and freedom of worship.” This language, if consistent with the historical nature of Cordoba, refers to the rights of Muslims to tolerate and control the terms of “freedom of worship” for Jews and Christians as second class people. This is wholly at odds with unalienable rights given by the Creator to all people equally – life, liberty and property – and thus, at odds with the core of “American values.”

4. Will the Cordoba House likewise place restrictions on these and other questions, or can it embrace rigorous liberal arts inquiry?

The Cordoba House’s stated purpose is to “cultivate understanding among all religions and cultures.” In Islam, *ijtihad*, or legal reasoning, is employed by many Muslims in the 21st century for freedom of thought within Islam, and in its multifaith communications. However, historically in *shari’a* law, *ijtihad* is not allowed to be used to question a) Allah’s existence; b) Muhammad as the final and true Prophet of Allah; and c) the perfection of the Qur’an. If such foundational questions are prohibited, how does that affect all other questions?

5. Does the Cordoba House understand that true “peace” can only be attained through submission to Islam?

Imam Rauf says: “The very word ‘islam’ comes from a cognate to shalom, which means peace in Hebrew.”

However, at the primary and contextual level in biblical Hebrew, *shalom* means “integrity” and “wholeness,” with “peace” as a derivative term. In Arabic, the primary meaning of *islam* means “submission” to Allah. Thus, two cognate terms have been compared here by Imam Rauf, instead of two primary terms. Thus, this play on words only obscures the reality that in Islam, true peace is only attainable when people and nations submit to Islam.

6. As the United States continues to be swallowed by a top-down government that regulates the smallest details of our lives, is this not a more accurate analogy for shari’a?

Elsewhere, Imam Rauf has called the United States a “shari’a compliant state,” in seeking to link it with unalienable rights in the Declaration of Independence. Shari’a, or Islamic law, is obligatory for all Muslims. It is based on a detailed imitation of the Sunnah, the life of Muhammad, consistent with the Qur’an. Accordingly, minute details in every Muslim’s life are prescribed. Shari’a does not speak of unalienable rights for all people equally, as does the Declaration in its biblical roots.

7. Does Cordoba House “multifaith” freedom allow for Muslims to convert to Jesus, Son of God, if they are thus persuaded?

There is asymmetry here. Namely, the United States was founded on the biblical ethics of unalienable rights, extending to Muslims the same rights as it does to all peoples. Nations and cultures governed by shari’a law do not treat non-Muslims likewise.

In my asymmetrical freedom, I am free to convert to Islam if persuaded, and thus, I welcome unrestricted and tough questions as Islam would pose of my Christian faith.

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