

I'd Rather There be Muslims in My Foxhole

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It was more than a year ago that I found myself in the back seat of a car driving through rural Venezuela with Dr. Ghazi Kahn-Kahn, a teacher of Islam from Long Island, someone who is known to many in this room. As we drove along we talked a little theology, specifically about the things that Christianity and Islam have in common. I commented to Dr. Kahn-Kahn that Islam held Jesus Christ in high regard, not as high as he ought to be, but high nonetheless. He said, "that is true." I commented that Islam loved the Mother of Jesus, in fact that Islam believed in the Virgin Birth. He said, "that is also true." And I commented that it was my understanding that Islam taught that it would be Jesus who would return at the end of time and not Muhammed. He said, "that, too, is true." And I wondered why Jesus would come back, if not to judge us. And Ghazi Kahn-Kahn stuck out a bony finger and with a big grin on his face said, "To tell the Christians that they were wrong!"

I want to work with Ghazi Kahn-Kahn. In fact, the title of this talk could be "All the Reasons I want to Work With Ghazi Kahn-Kahn." And chief among these reasons is that Ghazi Kahn-Kahn is a true believer. That is the only kind of believer I have time for in my work. For I, too, am a true believer.

First, my profession of faith: I am a believing and practicing Catholic. I am loyal to the Holy Father and to the Teaching Authority of the Catholic Church in all things. I believe that God Himself appeared on this earth and on a soft spring day one thousand nine hundred and sixty nine years ago, He was crucified and in that selfless act redeemed me from my sins, opened

Heaven and gave me the possibility of seeing the face of God when I die. I believe He founded the Catholic Church that provides the only sure way to salvation. The Catholic Church teaches that all men are saved through Jesus Christ and that His Church has the sole authority to maintain the truth, the sacraments and sacred scripture. The Church does not teach that only Catholics can achieve the vision of God rather the Church teaches that all men of good will who have live a righteous life, and who have not rejected the claims of the Catholic Church and who at the end of their lives make a perfect act of love toward God may see the face of God in paradise. All of this is achieved through the saving grave of Jesus Christ. The Church teaches that all faiths possess aspects of the truth, but it is only the Catholic Church that possesses the fullness of the truth. I believe all these things. And for this reason I believe that God wants al men to join the Catholic Church, including every single person in this room.

I would bet that any one of your could stand up here and give an equally strong profession of faith, a profession of faith quite different from my own. And in it would be an implicit and explicit rejection of what I believe. I am aware that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints teaches that in the second century a great apostasy swept the ancient world and that the Church was lifted off the earth not to return until the mid-19th Century. This would require a rejection of nearly all that I believe. I am aware that Islam teaches that Jesus Christ was not God, but a prophet, though the second highest. For this reason I am aware that Muslims believe that I am polytheistic. Failing your conversion to the Catholic Church, I would have it no other way. I want to work with men of strong faith, even men who most vehemently reject what I believe. I have little time for those who say these things do not matter. I have little time for those who say that all roads lead to the same place. I have little time for so-called progressive Catholics who pick and choose their faith like getting lunch at the UN cafeteria. Neither do I have much time

for those liberal Protestants who say our strong faiths, though different, are divisive. I do not know for sure, but I suspect that at least a few among the Latter Day Saints are a little squishy on their theology, and I have seen some calling themselves Muslims saying what seem to be the most heterodox things at NGO meetings. As for me, give me Ghazi Kahn-Kahn.

Since the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Church has placed great value in ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue. One need only watch Pope John Paul II reach out to all faiths as he travels around the globe. But the Church recognizes that true dialogue of this sort must begin with those of strong faith and proceed along paths of common interest. And the common interest of true believers, our common interest is clear. We have joined because three sacred sovereignties are under attack; the sovereignty of faith, the sovereignty of family, and the sovereignty of nation. Our enemies seek to destroy these, our only teachers and protectors.

Each of us is born with a part of the natural law, but only a part. We are born with a desire for self-survival, for the survival of mankind, and a desire to know what is true and good. That is a lot but not enough. So, in His infinite goodness, God placed on this earth certain institutions whose nearly sole task is to teach us His law and His truth. Recent history shows that if even one of these institutions goes wrong, we may be harmed. One can look at the perversion of nationhood at mid-century and see that a nation gone wrong can harm the bodies and souls of its own people to an exponential degree. One can look in our own days at either the dilution or the radicalization of faith and see the souls lost forever from a glimpse of paradise. One can look at the breakdown of family bonds and see the permanent damage done to sons and daughters, but also to fathers and mothers. As history clearly shows, if any of these three sacred sovereignties -- faith, family, nation -- go wrong, we may be harmed. If all of them go wrong, we may be utterly lost. And our enemies draw their bead on all of them.

In these days, each draws the ire of the radicals because each institution, properly understood, stands in the way of the radical notion of the complete autonomy of the self. Our enemies look upon faith as something to be subverted. One may read the Bible, the Koran and the Book of Mormon and see plainly that true believers would never allow the radical project to proceed, so the institutions of strong faith must be changed. The faithful must be drawn away from the true faith. The current crisis in the Catholic Church is very clearly an aspect of that radical subversion.

Our enemies look upon the family as a kind of frightening prison ruled by the patriarchy that must be destroyed. They say the family is harmful to women and children. They say that anything may be a family, any grouping of mammals under one roof. They ignore the social science data that shows children and adults live longer and better when under the roof of the natural family.

Our enemies see the nation as the protector of family and faith and in these days have turned the state against both. One need only look at social policy related to home and faith in North America and in Europe to see how the nation can be turned against us. And while we in the north are well down that road, they have their sites set very steadily on Latin American, Africa, the Near and Far East.

Properly understood, each of these three sacred sovereignties conservatively stands in the way of the world view that human beings are no more than bundles of nerves to be massaged, appetites to be sated, and desires to be fulfilled. The radical project seeks to undermine these institutions and put them in the service of humanity's subversion.

So, each of these three sacred sovereignties --- faith, family and nation -- must be changed and in the change they will be made different than how God made them and in this they will be destroyed.

But they did not count on us.

Our coalition was joined prior to the Cairo conference in 1994 precisely because of the fear that the western states, and some within the UN system, sought to change or otherwise harm these institutions, most especially the family, but also faith and certainly the nation. Pope John Paul II made a call for men of good will, men of all faiths, to go to Cairo, there to fight what he calls the Culture of Death. The Holy See made strenuous efforts to bring non-governmental and governmental actors into alliance. Our coalition was born then. The international news media was certainly alarmed at that time by what they deemed then and still call the “Unholy Alliance” between Christians and Muslims, between the Holy See and Islamic states. And they have a reason to be upset. They sought to make abortion a universally recognized human right and they lost because we stopped them. They sought to redefine the family to include homosexual couples and they lost because we stopped them. They sought to expand the definition of gender and they lost because we stopped them. We are a potent coalition that not only angers but also frightens the other side.

At the so-called World Peace Summit at the UN two years ago, the most common theme was a condemnation of Christianity and Islam. The most common denunciation against us was our desire to share our faith with others and thereby to gain adherents. At Cairo+5 UNFPA Executive Director Nafis Sadik privately castigated Muslim Ambassadors for working too closely with Christian NGOs. In a research paper released after Beijing+5, the UN office of the Presbyterian Church noted with great alarm that Christians and Muslims were working in tandem. The paper

said we should be fighting theologically among ourselves. *The New York Times*, the *London Times* and dozens of liberal newspapers around the world regularly denounce this coalition. Just a month ago the Washington Post ran an article about our alliance and in it sought to divide us.

Attacks on our coalition come not just from the other side but also from those who should be our friends. Christians in our coalition regularly receive hate mail from other Christians for working too closely with Muslims. I suspect that our Muslim allies come under attack from their ranks for working so close with us. Evangelicals in our group are severely criticized for working with Latter Day Saints. And an Evangelical in our coalition cannot tell his Pastor that he works so closely with Catholics, and he certainly has never told them he has ever met the Pope. And the criticism has grown larger and taken on a political dimension since September 11. A far right Christian group launched a campaign when the World Congress of Families Washington DC was held several months ago. They called us traitors to our country. Unfair and vicious attacks were launched against all of us in this coalition, and our friend, the kind and generous Ambassador Lamani (UN Ambassador from the Organization of the Islamic Conference) was besmirched by name.

I have a joke with my Mormon friends that after we defeat the radicals, then we can fight. Of course, that is only a silly joke among close friends. It will take a long time to defeat the radicals. I have no doubt even longer than our lives. And when we do defeat them, it is not ordained that we fight among ourselves. It is not written anywhere that this must ever happen. It may but it is not ordained. And the way this is avoided is by what we do now, the common work we undertake in these days.

I want all of you to be Catholics and if any of you are interested, I would be eager to help. Even if you do not join the Catholic Church, what is ordained is that we be not enemies or even allies. What is ordained is that we be friends. The purpose of our common work is to defeat the ideology that threatens us all. But the purpose is larger than that. The purpose also is the growth of love among us and across the whole world.

My friend Tom Farr says in his experience working on religious freedom around this world for the US State Department, that the best example of ecumenical and inter-religious dialogue exists right here in this coalition. I suspect he is right, because in this coalition we start with strong faith, a faith strong enough to believe the other guy is theologically wrong and that these theological differences are vitally important. But also a faith strong enough that we can lay aside our differences and defeat the evil that creeps around us all.

At the final Cairo+5 prepcom, just before the last night session commenced, I walked out on the floor of the conference room and spoke to the Sudanese Ambassador. “Tonight’s session will go all night long. We know it will turn brutal. Arrayed against you is the EU, the US, Canada, much of Latin America, and the entire UN bureaucracy. When it gets really bad and they are coming at you from all sides, just know at that moment right over there 20 Christians will be praying for you.” And that night this good man was a tiger. At times he pounded on his desk and even shouted to be heard over the aggressive pounding gavel of the chairman and the relentless attack of EU and US negotiators. Vigorously did he defend the three sacred sovereignties. Vigorously did he support the natural family, national sovereignty and at one time explicitly he defended us, the Christian NGOs that had come under attack from the EU.

What we know is this. In this fight we cannot do without any one of us. We cannot spare even a single person. There are so few of us that God specifically called into this fight, so few that He has specifically called to defend His creation. Are we not blessed? the most blessed on the face of the earth? I stand with Ghazi Kahn-Kahn, with Jeanne Head, Peter Smith, Richard Wilkins, and Jeremy Rabkin. Muslim, Catholic, Protestant, Mormon, Jew. We cannot do without a single one, and blessed be the name of God.