

## A PLACE WHERE FAITH MUST MEET THE WORLD

*A reflection from Ibrahim Ramey*

As a person committed to radical social change for more than 40 years, I am finally able to admit that, for the first time, I am afraid.

I am afraid that global violence is nearly at a point that overwhelms the capacity for our collective nonviolent responses to the urgent challenges that face our world.

I am afraid that the greed of the few has permanently damaged the lives of billions of people at the bottom of the global economic well, and that the excesses of a pathological fixation of needless consumption, at the expense of investment in basic human needs, has marginalized the need for a revolution in our collective values.

But even more critically, I am afraid that our earth and our biosphere are on life support, and that the death of human civilization is more imminent than most people in our world are prepared to face.

Yet I am prepared to continue to struggle for justice, as all of you are. I am prepared to commit my intellectual and moral resources, my voice, my writing, my organizing and my passion, to the idea that human kind is redeemable, and that our mistakes as a collective presence on this planet can be overturned.

Why? Because I have faith.

As a Muslim, I am reminded that my own religious text, the Holy Qur'an, instructs our community that God has created human beings as guardians of the natural creation. Our role, in the sense of religious commandments, has never been to abuse the riches of the earth simply for our own profit. We are instructed, in a way that also resonates with the scriptural traditions of the Old and New Testaments, to be kind to our earth, and to worship and revere the Creator of the world in which we live.

I have faith that the Lord of Creation has given us clear guidance on the question of the imperative of respecting our environment. But our religion, and our religions, have failed to live up to our charge.

One can argue the truth and moral rectitude of divine revelation as it relates to care for the environment. But sadly, it is also true that organized religions have become, for the most part, complicit in the systems and structures that are part of the problem.

Muslims are an integral part of both production and consumption in the context of the American economy. Like members of other communities, our places of worship consume energy and burn fossil fuels. Our co-religionists drive cars and SUV's. We light and heat our homes, and consume water and food. And we purchase products, like most people in the society, that are often not made with sensitivity for the non-renewable resources required to make them.

And so, while we call on the Lord of Creation for blessings and mercy, we have neither blessed nor had mercy on the earth that sustains us.

Yet faith is not static, and it is not doomed to passively accept the demise of justice and sustainability in our world. Faith is certainly, as Christianity teaches us, the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. It is also a mighty weapon in the struggle for social change, for love, and for life.

Indeed, if it cannot be these things, faith is utterly meaningless.

In the context of what I would call the movement for environmental justice and sustainability, faith has played a critical role. Religiously-inspired activists have contributed to the great and necessary environmental summits in Kyoto and Rio de Janeiro, and have been instrumental in the creation of the Earth Charter and the promotion of Earth Day.

Religious leaders are organizing within their own traditions for "Green" awareness, for the advocacy of the use of renewable energy, for sustainable agriculture, and even for a shift in the dietary habits of Americans that is so linked to the production of pollution, the over-consumption of water, and the generation of greenhouse gasses.

Our pulpits now feature, at least on occasion, messages about the climate change, and what we must do as a nation to address it. And if you look closely, you'll notice that more than a few houses of worship are now illuminated by compact florescent lights.

All of these things are evidence of progress. But the urgency of our planetary crisis demands an even greater qualitative, as well as a quantitative, response.

I am encouraged that such a response is evident in the formulation of a new Interfaith Consortium for an Ecological Civilization, a new formation associated with the United Nations that brings both religious and secular leaders together to build and collaborate, at an international level, for a new global paradigm for sustainability. The importance of the ICEC was emphasized at a Temple of Understanding conference on October 19th, 2010, attended by some 65 interfaith visionary leaders - including my esteemed friend and colleague Reverend Paul Mayer-which brought together, perhaps for the first time, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Jain, Indigenous and humanist leaders who are clear about the need for total interfaith engagement in the solution to the climate crisis.

It was my privilege to serve as a co-chair of this gathering, and I believe that it will be a model for great things to come in interfaith solidarity with the environmental movement.

I close with the observation that the role of religious leaders and faith communities is, and should be, to amplify the understanding of this grave empirical threat while moving human beings to a deeper sense of collective responsibility for addressing it. We are not at odds with our secular friends and activists who work for legislative and economic remedies to help save our earth; indeed, faith leaders can mobilize both political action and direct action in civil society to accelerate that changes that science tells us must come, and come quickly.

Faith alone will not save our world. But faith will motivate many of us who believe in the work of salvation. We who believe in the sacredness of creation will, and must, work side by side with humans of all descriptions and persuasions in this greatest of all challenges before us all.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this message. Peace, and success to all of you. Salaam Alaikum.

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