

When we measure the effects of pollution, how do we do it? Do we sample the cleanest lake and say, see how clean the water is? Or, do we measure the dirtiest lake, and say, see, how polluted the water is?

When we measure poverty, what method shall we use? Do we go to the richest town and boast how much we have progressed? Or do we visit the poorest town and say how much we need to improve?

When we measure the economy, do we sample the earnings of the CEOs, and say, see how well our economy is doing? Or, do we sample the number of the unemployed and their economic hardship, and say whether we are out of recession?

How shall we measure democracy, then? Do we sample the groups of powerful and influential and privileged people, and show how their rights and freedom are preserved? Or, do we focus on the common person, and see how much right and

freedom a common person can enjoy?

In America, a person can exercise one's freedom and burn the Koran, the Bible for the Muslims, and expect with reasonable comfort that no mob is going to show up at his house and drag him out into the street and behead him or stone him to death. That is because we have The First Amendment, and we have democracy in this land. The same man would not dare do it in Afghanistan. Or Iraq. Or in any Muslim country.

The Florida pastor's burning Koran resulted in 7 people being murdered, when the enraged mob swamped a U.N. compound in Afghanistan, seeking revenge. 7 people lost their lives for no good reason at all, and the news is filled with condemnations of this pastor for causing such deaths.

I admit, I find the act reprehensibly stupid. The Florida pastor should have considered the repercussions of his act. What I found strange,

however, was the general lack of outrage against the mob that actually murdered the 7 victims. Most people directed their invectives against the Florida man, while neglecting to hold the mob liable for the murders. Is it because no American was killed there? What is happening here?

What happened to the good old, eye-for-an-eye, tooth-for-a-tooth retaliation? Why didn't they burn a Bible, instead? The mob chose to murder 7 people who had absolutely nothing to do with burning of the Koran. If you thought burning a Koran was stupid, this mass murder was monumentally stupid, and it is the sign of civility that nations did not declare war on Muslim religion over this killing.

Just a few weeks ago, the scenes of protest in Libya filled the TV screens. One small story that surfaced was about a woman who showed up at the hotel where foreign journalists stayed. She told them that she had been kidnapped, bound, and sexually assaulted by more than a dozen

government soldiers. She bore the visible signs of assault and bondage. Then she was dragged away by government officials. Why was she being treated like a criminal? Where is justice for this victim of sexual assault?

In Islamic culture, men are steeped in the mentality that they can treat women and girls any way they please. They think it is culturally normal and acceptable to force a 13 year old girl to marry a 40 year old man who already has multiple wives. To me, this is plain sex slavery with the strong undertone of pedophilia. And if the girl refuses, the father or mother of the child can kill her. Then they call it "honor" killing. No one holds the parents liable for such killing. Do you see any trace of honor in such killings?

You have seen the picture of the Afghan girl that flooded the news, whose nose and ears were cut off. Know that she was not the only victim of such mutilation: such cruel violence is rather common in Arab world, and there are

hosts of many other young women who were mutilated or burned; and the perpetrators are hardly ever prosecuted. You will also find, if you care to search, the scene of beheading a helpless person bound and lying on the ground by a 12 year old boy.

You would think such atrocities happen only in remote Islamic villages. Apologists will say that such practices are limited to Wahhabism, Islam's Al Qaeda branch. Don't you believe it. You do the search, and you will be surprised to find many stories of killings, *right* here in America and Canada: women and girls are stabbed, beheaded, and beaten to death for various reasons. That is because the Muslim men who immigrated to the western world believe that their holy book, Koran, permits them to do so. But to the western eyes, it looks like nothing more than terrorism perpetrated against woman and girls by men.

So if you want to plant freedom and democracy in Islamic nations, where do you start? With the

regime change? With the military action? With the lucrative trade agreement? Or, do you talk to men whose interests are invested in the way the society is structured? Or do you look into how the most vulnerable—women and girls—are treated?

If we truly want to build democracy in these nations, we need to address this intractable injustice and violence being perpetrated against women and girls with virtual impunity, besides sending our military, our money, and our resources. I declare: there is no democracy, unless this injustice suffered by women and girls is redressed.

I believe that most Americans wish for the wellbeing of the Muslims in Iraq and Afghanistan. I believe that most Americans wish that Afghans and Iraqis eventually build their nations into a more just and democratic societies. And I also believe that the people of the U.S. must realize from the ramifications of this event of Koran burning that

we are dealing with people whom we do not understand at all. We cannot assume that the Muslim nations value the same things that we do.

The democracy demands equal rights and equal protection of law for everyone. The Muslim nations can never become democratic nations, unless they begin to enforce strictly against any violence and oppression meted out against women and girls, and guarantee their safety and rights.

If American is committed to democracy in Arab world, in my opinion, the crucial key to the development of true democracy is this: Muslim women's rights and safety are the foremost concern to democratize a Muslim nation. Otherwise, I am afraid that our young men and women will continue to die in vain, and we will waste billions of dollars for nothing.

This incident of murdering 7 innocent victims has a strong religious aspect to the whole

uproar. I believe that we as the disciples of Jesus need to look at the whole situation from the gospel point of view.

I am sure that the Florida pastor felt compelled to carry out what he planned to do, partly because of his faith in Jesus. Our Jesus is the one who gives life, who overcame death. Jesus does not tell us to cause harm, but to do good. The pastor should have asked himself, whether his action would cause harm, or do good.

As for the murderous mobs, I do not care what the Koran says about revenge. It is the action of the Muslim believers that I condemn. They commit all these atrocities in the name of their religion, in the name of their God, and in the name of their prophet, just as the Florida pastor did it in the name of his God and his Savior. These believers put their religion and their God in service of their own human desires, hatred, and blood thirst. I label such religious practices as self-serving.

And there is this self serving aspect of spirituality in our reading today. When he received the urgent message that Lazarus was at the doorstep of death, Jesus intentionally delayed his departure. Jesus stayed two days longer, and by the time he arrived at Bethany, Lazarus had been already decomposing in the tomb for 4 days.

Disappointment is not the right word to describe the pain the family members experienced, who saw Jesus arriving too late to do anything for Lazarus. We can read much more than what we hear from Martha's mouth: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Maybe, Martha and Mary felt that Jesus betrayed them. Everyone knew how long it takes for a person to get to Bethany, after receiving the word. They waited. And they waited. But Jesus never came, and Lazarus breathed his last. How would you feel, if you knew that the only person who could have saved your family member

obviously and intentionally delayed his arrival? Why did Jesus delay his departure?

When our children do not appreciate home cooking, and clamor for the restaurant food, what is a mother to do? How do you teach your children to appreciate the fact that there is food on the table at every mealtime, that their mother cooks for them every day, that they have never had to go hungry, and that they never experienced the despair of not having anything to eat? There is only one way to teach them: the children in the affluent households need to experience hunger.

The same maybe said for the grownups. We rarely appreciate what is good, until it is taken away. We miss our lives, only when we find our selves in the life-threatening situation. We miss our health, only when we are laid up in the hospital bed. We are not in the habit of giving thanks to God, when we are doing well. We are not in the habit of giving glory to God, but

might become motivated to do so, if we had been subjected to a dire situation that robbed us our security, freedom, and peace, and survived it, and lived to tell about it.

Jesus said, "This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory so that Son of God may be glorified through it." Jesus wanted the people to see beyond their self-serving religion, and beyond the Jesus-the-convenient-miracle-worker, and give glory to God for the lives they received.

Why is asking Jesus to come to help a selfish religion? It is simple: how many Lazaruses were raised from the dead? Only one. It becomes a selfish practice of religion, if we have a privileged access to the miracle, to benefit only my family. In politics, it is called the special interest. That is why Jesus delayed.

God is glorified, when we appreciate the value of not just our own lives, but all lives and

everything God created. God's blessing is not in the accumulation of what we want; it is in the knowledge of what we already have received. The people of the selfish religion need to suffer death and pain, in order to appreciate life and celebrate resurrection.

Believers of any religion tend to be selfish, and the depth of their religion is usually limited to the self-serving goals. They invariably suffer from "us vs. them" mentality. Christians expect their God to punish those who cause pain upon them, who call upon the different name of God than theirs. And Muslims probably feel the same way about Christians, and invoke upon Allah to punish them.

If religious people are deemed self-serving, their political goals can be overtly selfish. Can you be religious while practicing the selfish politics? If our nation truly prays for the democracy in Muslim nations, we really need to rethink what we are doing: 1) we need to examine our practice

of regime changes to pick a leader who is friendly to us, no matter how repressive he may turn out to be for his own people; and 2) we need to rethink pushing the trade agreements that favors our economy, without much regards to the welfare of the peoples of other nations. This will reduce in the future our needs to deploy our military in their land, and will save American lives and the tax money.

In today's context, for Christians, giving glory to God must include at least two aspects of life: 1) political justice and 2) spiritual fulfillment for everyone. Our democratic ideals must demand from the Muslim leadership the sanctity of life, rights, and safety for women and girls. That will eventually usher in the proliferation of democracy in the Muslim world. We can certainly leverage that with our trade agreements, and that will be the trade with justice and righteousness.

Our witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ fulfills our spiritual needs in that the promise of Jesus is made available, even to the members of a different religion: abundance of life for everyone for whom Jesus gave up his life.

Ensuring the welfare of the vulnerable ones—including Muslim women and children—is directly linked to giving glory to God: Jesus called it being the neighbor to the victim.

When these two are realized, we would have given glory to God.