

Poll Finds Christian-Muslim Divide on Religious Freedom.
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The Associated Press put out an article on December 31 on a poll taken in the United States about religious freedom. A vast majority placed a higher priority on preserving the religious freedom of Christians (and Jews) than for other faith groups, ranking Muslims as the least deserving of these protections.

The article seems to be critical of American suspicion of Muslims and belief that Islam is more likely than other religions to encourage violence among its followers. "These numbers seem to be part of a growing climate of anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States," said Madihha Ahussain, an attorney for Muslim Advocates, a (Muslim) civil rights group.

This attorney is obviously unwilling to consider that American concern about Islamist violence is not unreasonable. In addition, the article fails to define exactly what "religious freedom" is, nor does it display historic knowledge of how these values came to be.

Religious freedom has never been unqualified. Some religious practices have been against the law in the Western world for the past century, if not longer. Voodoo religious practices include sacrifice of animals, such as beheading a chicken to bless a new car. This is against our laws protecting animals. Earlier religions sacrificed virgins to make a volcanic eruption stop (Polynesian practice). No more.

Before the Mormons were permitted statehood for Utah, they had to give up polygamy, a practice that we do not allow. The same applies to Muslims, some of whom are polygamous (particularly in the UK), tricking the welfare system into supporting multiple wives. Authorities unwisely looked the other way for too long.

Wife and child battery are time-honored practices supported by religion including, at one time, Christianity. These are criminal acts under today's law, no matter how one's religion validates them. We in the United States and many in Europe have confronted "honor killings," in which outraged families murder a disobedient daughter for violating their religious and cultural mores. For too long, these actions were just dismissed as "culture." Now perpetrators go to prison.

European countries being overrun by Muslim refugees are finally setting up rules that "religious freedom" cannot trump. There are new laws about rape: not acceptable just because a woman is wearing a short skirt, nor raping one's wife, despite permission from their religion. Religious mandates to execute apostates (leaving Islam or converting to another religion) violate western law. Killing artists or authors (or speakers) who "insult Islam" is against western law. There are many more issues of religiously-mandated behavior coming in with refugees from "more conservative" cultures that are finally being addressed by western authorities.

Religious freedom has never been absolute. Furthermore, religious "toleration" is only a couple of centuries old even in the Western world. At the conclusion of the exhausting Catholic-Protestant religious wars (16th-18th centuries), England established the rules: British Catholics would have all rights under the law only when the Pope in Rome granted these same rights to Italy's Protestants. They were quite right to insist religious toleration be reciprocal, not unilateral.

A strange double standard appears to be present in articles such as this one about the woes of Muslims living in the west. Some of our political "allies" such as Saudi Arabia permit no religious freedom at all, nor do they permit immigration into their country by non-Muslims. Yet when Saudi visitors to the West are arrested or deported for enslaving their servants, they are indignant and insulted.

No Muslim-majority country practices religious toleration, even for Muslim minority sects. Pakistanis regularly persecute Ahmadis; Saudis persecute Shiites; Iranians persecute Bahais. Yet Muslim immigrants to the west are quick to "lawyer up" when they feel offended. Frowning at a woman wearing hijab is called "Islamophobia."

I think this poll shows very good common sense in the American public. Nobody is advocating persecuting Muslims. But Americans are rightly concerned about religiously-inspired violence. We have already experienced the deadly consequences of jihad, which continues to be a threat. Tolerance must be a two-way street. And trust is not a given; it must be earned.

671 words

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