

Evangelism & Hate Speech, An Impossible Cohabitation: Insights from Public Affairs & Religious Liberty

Ganoune Diop, Ph.D.¹

To evangelize is to share the good news, according to which “God so loves the whole world that He gave His Only Son, so that all who believe in Him may not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). This good news is based on the most foundational revelation, the climax of the Bible: which is “God is love” (1 John 4:8). God shows benevolence towards the whole human family. He became incarnate in Jesus Christ to deliver us from evil. The Gospel, or the evangel, is this good news: God’s gracious offer of forgiveness, deliverance from the dominion of evil, welcome into His fellowship, and sharing of his divine nature.

“His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:3-4).

The Gospel is consequently the good news of the advent of God’s kingdom, kinship, and kingly rule already manifest in all who believe and have surrendered their lives to God’s complete sovereignty.

Among the multifaceted incontrovertible components of the Gospel is the central good news of Jesus Christ’s all-sufficient sacrifice and high priestly ministry for the completion of God’s reconciliation, and everlasting fellowship in love with those who accept his salvation.

The Gospel is also the good news of God’s indwelling the believers through His Holy Spirit, who will teach and comfort them forever (John 14: 15,26).

¹ Dr. Ganoune Diop is Director of GC Public Affairs & Religious Liberty and Secretary General of the International Religious Liberty Association. He also serves as Secretary of the Conference of Secretaries of Christian World Communions.

The Gospel is to be shared God's way, in all freedom, with the gifts, but also with the fruit of the Holy Spirit. This good news is to be shared God's way, not with the weapons of evil, such as demeaning others and denigrating their dignity.

Sharing the gospel cannot use hate speech.

The world has come to a consensus regarding the evil of hate speech.² The international community has concluded through treaties, covenants, conventions, and declarations that ways of relating to others that demean their dignity are unacceptable. In our day and age, accusing others of being apostates—heretics—because they believe differently, is considered a form of evil. These kinds of attitudes are reminiscent of the time of widespread accusations, persecutions, inquisitions, crusades, conquests, and wars of religions in medieval times.

In our contemporary world, the practice of demeaning others' beliefs or religion has given pretext to some countries to adopt so-called anti-blasphemy laws, which undermine religious freedom and make it hard to even practice one's faith openly. Religious freedom is guaranteed by international laws such as the UDHR (The Universal Declaration of Human Rights). Nonetheless, anti-blasphemy laws have been, and are currently, used to persecute minority faiths. Indulging in criticism of other people's faiths creates a toxic global environment where courteous and intelligent witnessing of one's faith is replaced by antagonistic and hostile attitudes towards fellow human beings created in the image of God.

² "The ICCPR (The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights) places an obligation on States Parties to prohibit hate speech. Article 20(2) provides the following: Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence shall be prohibited by law. The ACHR (The American Convention on Human Rights), specifically provides for the banning of hate speech, at Article 13(5), as follows: Any propaganda for war and any advocacy of national, racial, or religious hatred that constitute incitements to lawless violence or to any other similar illegal action against any person or group of persons on any grounds including those of race, color, religion, language, or national origin shall be considered as offenses punishable by law. See Toby Mendel, Executive Director Centre for Law and Democracy, "Hate Speech Rules Under International Law," <http://www.law-democracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/07/10.02.hate-speech.Macedonia-book.pdf>. The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) have provisions similar to those found in the ICCPR.



Evangelism is incompatible with hatred of any kind. The exception is for evil, which should always be denounced, but not human beings. Jonah had to learn that lesson. Clearly, God addressed the evil Jonah was harboring. In the book of Jonah, the same word “evil” is used to describe the deeds of the inhabitants of the city Nineveh and the hatred Jonah had against those same people.

Hate speech is part of terrorists’ *modus operandi* but should certainly not be so for genuine Christians. Atheists, agnostics, and anyone who believes differently, ought to be engaged with the dignity of difference without any form of violence.

Evangelism cannot be reduced to denigrating others, trampling their dignity and insulting their conscience and choices to believe or not to believe. The Gospel Jesus shared was never meant to be hate speech or incitement to violence in any way, but rather, it is an invitation to life.

The everlasting good news articulated in what is called “the three angels messages” of Revelation 14, begins with an invitation to life; that is what it means “to fear God” (Rev. 14:7).

Repeatedly, in Scripture the idiomatic expression “fear of the Lord” is associated with friendship with God, hatred and avoidance of evil, and choosing and embracing life, not death. A few examples will suffice:

- “The friendship of the Lord is for those who fear him
And he makes known to them his covenant” (Ps 25:14).
- “Be not wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and turn away from evil.
It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones” (Prov. 3:7-8).
- “The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil” (Prov. 8:13).
- “The fear of the Lord prolongs life” (Prov. 10:27).
- “The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, that one may turn away from the snares of death” (Prov. 14:27).
- “The fear of the Lord leads to life” (Prov. 19:23).

The good news is also judgement. A time of judgement is necessary for the restoration of justice. In Revelation 6, the martyrs cry out to God for judgment. Revelation 14 announces the



good news of judgement in favor of the saints. It is not for the saints to defeat or demean their enemies.

In Scripture, the saints blessed even their enemies, like Jesus did in praying for those who were crucifying him, those who rejected or abandoned him. Like Stephen did for those who were murdering him. Like Daniel did when he saved lives in Babylon, even the lives of pagan magicians. God's true people are also engaged in saving lives: temperance, health message, the building of hospitals, clinics and life-centers, are all purposed to saving lives and improving the quality of life for our fellow human beings, without discrimination.

Those who are convinced they have a mandate to share the Gospel must do so without denigrating, discriminating or criminalizing others on the basis of their different beliefs.

In the marketplace of ideas, our era is characterized by freedom but also responsibility: the responsibility to respect others. This disposition is a sure antidote against racism, nationalism, tribalism, ethnocentrism, or any form of supremacism.

Hate speech is understood as evil. Evangelists and preachers discredit their message by using violence, hate speech, insults and similar evils paradoxically used to reach out to current generation. Secularists point out to these malpractices to try to discredit religion. They should not be given ammunitions to reduce the power of the gospel. The medieval time is long gone when coercion, fear, intimidation and threats were used as a means to subjugate uneducated masses.

Our world is in need of the real good news. It is possible to present all facts of the gospel of God, the whole plan of salvation, clearly articulated undiluted without resorting to deeds of darkness. The beauty and depth of the gospel deserve to be shared unadulterated unmixed with bitterness, hatred, or the despising of others. Let us give the good news a chance. The Holy Spirit transforms lives at the hearing of the genuine word from the God of love.

The good news is about the defeat of evil and of evil ways of dealing with fellow human beings created in the image of God, meant to become temples of the Holy Spirit.

The Bible portrays evil and evil powers using metaphors such as Babylon or Egypt. For example, when the book of Revelation says that "Babylon is fallen" it signifies the demise of the powers that subjugate, oppress, coerce, or deceive God's people. When God's people heard



about the fall of Babylon, it meant the cancellation of exile, the reversal deportation, and the end of slavery. It is the good news of freedom and of liberation from oppressive and unjust powers.

That is a key part of the good news. It means that God's people can go home. Using biblical texts as weapons against people is not the best way forward. There are ways to affirm one's identity, without compromise, and make claims of one's unique identity, message, and mission without having to put down other people in order to shine. It is possible to give an account of one's faith in a humane way.

The Apostle Paul admonished as follows:

Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.

Let your speech be always with grace,

Seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer every person

(Col. 4:6).

Accusing other denominations is part of incitement to hate, discrimination, criminalization of others. It is not evangelism. It is not the everlasting gospel.

It is vital for Christians, especially in our time, to articulate the gospel not as gloom and doom but as good news especially since climate change, tsunamis, earthquakes, landslides, flooding, wars, and ethnic cleansing are regular bad news that punctuate and impact daily millions of lives.

Jesus is coming to put an end to the reign of evil.

Even better, Jesus Christ is coming to bless those who wait for him. Evangelism is the good news of sharing the anticipation of this upcoming blessing when Jesus will say: "Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matthew 25:34). We invite people to the upcoming feast of blessings.

Christians are certainly called to be prophetic in society, upholding and promoting justice; however, they cannot do that while promoting evil practices or evil ways of dealing with fellow human beings. That would be injustice, and sin.

Civility, courtesy, and all the fruit of the Holy Spirit are a must in civil society. They are an intrinsic part of Christian witness. Slandering fellow human beings, or dishonoring them in any way, is against the explicit biblical commandment to "honor all people" (1 Peter 2:17).



A Christian is called to follow the biblical injunctions of the Holy Spirit voiced through Peter:

Finally, all of you have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart and a humble mind.

Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.

For whoever desires to love life and see good days

Let him keep his tongue from evil

And his lips from speaking deceit

Let him turn away from evil and do good;

Let him seek peace and pursue it.

For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous

And his ears are open to their prayer

But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil (1 Peter 3: 8-12).

The true biblical spirit of evangelism ought to clearly articulate the Christian hope which consists of good news for those whose hope is entirely on God and His coming to restore his kingdom of peace, freedom, and justice. Believers are promised “every spiritual blessing in Christ.” They are predestined in love, chosen, adopted, blessed in the beloved, redeemed, forgiven, given an inheritance, sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (see, Ephesians 1:1-14).

Evangelism is an invitation to this quality of life, consisting in faith, hope and love, but of course the greatest of these is love (1 Corinthians 13).

Loving our neighbors as ourselves is what God who is love expects of all those who join Him in his love.

