Common Ground and Enemy Territory: How Should We Approach Adherents of Other Faiths?

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Abstract

One heirloom already passed on to my oldest son is a small shell-cover purse. It was a prize possession of my paternal grandfather, David Hesselgrave. Grandfather was said to have been an avid student of the Scriptures and became an ordained minister in the Universalist Church. When the first Parliament of the World's Religions was held in Chicago in 1893, grandfather was probably one of its most enthusiastic attendees. It was there that he purchased the purse bearing the Parliament inscription. It was there that he listened to the likes of the Jainist “chosen one,” Virchand Gandhi, and the prominent Hindu philosopher, Swami Vivekananda.

You could imagine how we feel about the punishment of atheist bloggers in Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the persecution of minority Christian and Muslim sects in Iraq and Pakistan, and the “Islamo-fascists” who cite the Qur’an as a justification for violence. When Theo van Gogh was brutally murdered we shook our heads. My rule of thumb for seeking common ground with progressive Muslims is the same with seeking common ground with progressive members of any faith: if you’re a progressive in name only (i.e. if you think LGBT people and apostates deserve to burn in Hell, or that women should be submissive to their husbands, but you say it in a kinder gentler. My approach, and the approach of many modern day Anti-theists, is to get people to think and want to question again. 3. Common Ground and Enemy Territory: How Should we Approach Adherents of Other Faiths? Do missionaries work to find what is common between non-Christian faiths with biblical Christianity or do we work to find distinctives between the two? While finding similar elements of one another’s faith seems attractive to begin and build on the conversation, often the similarities in faith are the word used not their meanings. For example when a Muslim uses the word for God (Allah), the content behind that word is different than a Christian’s. The common ground that Christians have with other faiths