

Northwest University

Christian and Muslim Reconciliation in the
Context of Refugee Care in Jordan:

Final Draft

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Introduction

The child sat in front of me, his face expressing little. His name was Mohammad, and at 14 years old his young eyes had witnessed more of the horrors of life than most adults. Having fled from his home in Daraa', Syria, with his younger brother Omar and mother at the age of nine, he and his family attempted to make their home in Jordan, yet he reported, "I never feel at home." He went on to state that his nights are constantly tormented with nightmares of friends dying and bombs going off. When asked to share about his experiences in the war, the very first story he shared was not about the burning of his home, the separation from his father, or the horrors of the refugee camp — but rather the loss of his dear friend Mohammad. He recounted:

My best friend died in the war by a bomb. We were playing soccer when we heard bombing so we both decided to separate and go home. As I was running home I heard another bomb go off. I later learn that this was the bomb that killed my friend. We stayed in Syria a few months after this before we escaped to Jordan. The Syrian government burned our house and that is when we left. I feel a deep sadness, a deep grief because I never feel at home here.

He went on to share much more, but the sadness he expressed brought both me and my translator to tears.

Other children shared after him. As we all sat in a circle within the walls of Al-Farouq Society for Orphan's Care, I was deeply touched by their vulnerability and honesty as well as what this grassroots, Muslim organization has done in caring for these children. Set in the context of a Palestinian refugee camp, it was built with the intention of serving the "severely poor class of local community," however since the war in Syria has broken out they have

expanded their mission to care for the Syrian refugee families and orphans (al-Farouq 1).

Perhaps it was because of the security these children felt from the organization that they were able to share their hopes and fears, their stories of pain and trauma, as well as their own battles with nightmares and homesickness. Some of them shared their dreams of living in Canada or Europe, others desired to resettle in Saudi Arabia or had hopes of returning to Syria. All of them shared that they often fear they will always remain in the same straits that they now face.

One young man, Thaer, who was 16 years old, shared that he found strength in his faith. As his father was one of the men who led the sacrifices in Homs, Syria, he has a deep connection to his Muslim roots. At sixteen years of age he dreams to follow in his father's footsteps or even return to Syria to fight with the free-army (anti-Assad). He stated, with pride and courage shining in his young teenage eyes, "I have seen many deaths. I even saw my own uncle die by a sniper shot." He went on to share that, "I really want to return to Syria and fight, but my father will not let me. So as my father has taught, I will follow." One could easily see that a deep loyalty rests in his heart for his family and his faith.

We later asked Thaer about his view of Christians and he openly stated that he had many Christian friends in Damascus, but believes that "they are all going to hell." Many people may view the latter part of this statement harsh, but it also showed that he, as a Conservative Muslim, did not view religion as a barrier to forming relationships with other Christians. Other children chimed in that they and their family have received help from Catholic priests and other Christian families and churches. One little girl named Maram shared that her brother actually lives with a Christian in a mission. Their eyes were warm and open and they received us with much kindness as they learned that we too were Christians. Thus, while their stories reveal much pain and

trauma, their experiences in Jordan show that they too are very aware of the help they receive and where it is coming from.

Their stories opened my eyes to many points, including the power storytelling has in bringing healing and building relationships across religions and ethnicities. Although most were too young to discuss the key points of their faith and contrast them with mine, I found in them an openness that surprised me. A few of them mentioned the acts of justice Christians had done for them, and all shared with vulnerability and courage their stories with me, a woman that was neither an Arab or a Muslim. These perceived acts of justice opened doors that furthered our conversation and gave these young people a respect for the Christian religion, paving the way for me and my translator to have an open and vulnerable conversation with them. This paper seeks to explore the power of storytelling, interfaith dialogue, and acts of justice as a means of reconciliation between the Muslim and Christian people within the land of Jordan as the refugees continue to flood their borders. While Jordan is a primarily Muslim nation, the Christian religion continues to spread throughout the Middle East, many reporting that “Thousands of Muslims are turning away from their religion and embracing Christianity amid ongoing violence in the Middle East (Flood). As this continues and Jordan continues to take a stand for cooperation and peaceful relations between Christians and Muslims, particularly in their own nations, reconciliation becomes vital for future peace.

While the Syrian Civil War has wreaked havoc within Syria and has flooded the borders of the surrounding nations with refugees, it has also presented a unique opportunity of giving various religious sects the chance to identify with the same horrors and bond within the same camps. While this type of reconciliation remains a foreign concept to many nations, Jordan

presents an opportune situation as the government continues to encourage Muslim and Christian collaboration and reconciliation under the leadership of King Abdullah II and Queen Rania. King Abdullah II's and Queen Rania's efforts will be discussed later in this paper, as well, as the progress they have made as a nation in leading the way for Muslim and Christian interfaith dialogue. Other instances of Muslim and Christian collaboration will be analyzed as it relates to the Middle East. Through these historical and current examples of Muslim and Christian collaboration, a foundation will be laid for future relations as it relates to the Syrian refugee crisis within Jordan. This paper will examine how reconciliation can truly occur between Muslim and Christian refugees in Jordan through an examination of the refugees' stories, analysis of the historical context, Jordan's own governmental efforts, and through various academic perspectives. The important roles of storytelling, interfaith dialogue, and acts of justice in the art of reconciliation will be presented as foundational for this goal.

This paper is a critical analysis of the refugee crisis and Muslim and Christian relations within Jordan, examining some personal notes gathered in Jordan as well as the theological import of the subject explored. As a Christian, my faith is important to me, and my background in missiological studies, as well as my Christian upbringing, has made theology and my own Christian walk of the highest importance. It is because of my faith that I am writing about the intersection of my deeply held Christian faith and my own personal calling to engage in the international context with interfaith communities. Through this perspective, this paper presents the idea that faith-based, grassroots organizations are uniquely equipped within Jordan to promote peace and reconciliation between the two religious groups within the refugee context. Their unique ability to foster an approach that embraces storytelling, interfaith dialogue, and acts

of justice and kindness on a daily basis while ministering to the needs of the refugee is central to their success as well as their deep appreciation for the role religion plays in the life of the Muslim and Christian refugee. This role of religion in the life of the refugee will now be examined on a more personal note.

Reasoning Behind the Questions

During my time in Jordan, I encountered an issue I had long heard about but had little intimate knowledge of: the plight of the Syrian refugees. However, as I listened to some of the people's stories, I realized how differences had divided both race and religion where similarities should have remained supreme and offered hope. Since my youth, I had been riddled with stories of the never-ending violence of the Middle East, radical Islam, silenced women, and persecuted religious groups. While I would not have confessed it, deep down I saw Islam as a religion rooted in violence. My view was as distorted as some Islamic perceptions of Christianity, equating modern day Christianity with the vices of the Crusades. My views had been dictated by terrorism and radical Islam, their views created in light of the Crusades and other historical atrocities committed in the name of Christianity. Neither is right and in many ways we each have been guilty of comparing the best with the worst. As Dr. Ronald J. Feenstra warns, we should not "compare the best parts of the Christian tradition with the worst parts of Islam," it is neither objective nor wise (38). As I walked the streets of Jordan and interacted with multiple Muslims, I began to realize just how much this view can barricade one from hearing and seeing things as they truly are.

I know I'm not alone in my initial prejudice, and I would like to propose that many of us have suffered from preconceived notions of Islam and the Middle East that hold little truth.

These perspectives have barred many Christians from truly embracing the Muslim people. Now as Christian and Muslim refugees are flooding the borders of various nations, it becomes the call of every Christian to reach out and meet their need regardless of race, nationality, or religious orientation. While this call remains clear, it becomes necessary for Christians to analyze how their own preconceived beliefs may bar them from truly understanding the refugee stories and perspectives.

The hospitality of the Jordanian people was one of the foremost impressions made upon me. My gender, race, religion, or nationality, did not seem to matter as I was welcomed with open arms. Each greeted me with the beautiful blessing *salaam alaykum*, best translated as “Peace be upon you.” I was deeply struck by this greeting as I began to realize that a religion I had viewed as solely violent greeted me, a Christian woman, with the sign of peace. It was a symbolic olive branch. My host, a conservative Muslim couple leading an organization seeking to help widowed Syrians and orphaned children of the Syrian Civil War, would daily drive us to the church that we stayed in and discuss with us our religious values. The conversation was friendly and in it we found shared ground: the important role of religion in our daily lives. Deep down I was shocked. I was shocked by the acceptance I found, shocked by the feeling of love and peace that I felt in their midst. In one conversation, Moon al-Doridee, the co-founder of Dar al-Ehsan, stated in response to her discovery that I was Christian that, “Religion it is a very important thing. I am glad you have it” (al-Doridee). She, along with many devout Muslims, firmly believe that Christians and Jews, as the People of the Book, should be treated “differently than other nonbelievers” as they each share an intimate connection with the Book (Karabell 20).

Syrian, Jordanian, or Iraqi, Christian or Jew, the hospitality shown, the friendship given, was a beautiful gift and gave me hope for future relations between these religious groups.

This interaction with Muslims, particularly in the Middle Eastern context, holds an importance that should not be overlooked by either Muslim and Christian. As Dr. Kathryn Kraft points out, grassroots interactions among those of differing faiths should be embraced and observed more often. As she herself noted, such interactions have “been happening between Christians and Muslims for 1500 years in the Middle East,” and observing this phenomenon should serve as a key to future relations between Christian and Muslim nations (Kraft). I found myself remembering her words as I sat eating meals with devout Muslim women from Syria, their faces and bodies completely covered in black, and yet both of us sharing a communion I had never dreamed possible. As I sat listening to their stories of husbands and sons massacred in the city squares, of bombings endured, and of their sleepless nights in refugee camps, I was struck by the gift they were showing me so freely: their emotional scars that were still hardly healed. At that moment, the differences in our religion mattered very little, what mattered was that I was willing to listen and they were willing to share, and our mutual belief in a higher power somehow made that communion deeper. Kraft writes that, “Grassroots dialogue, a dialogue built on friendship and common interests, is an important first step in breaking down that mutual fear,” (36) and I would dare to add that empathy plays a role that should not be overlooked.

While their stories and interactions with Christians within Jordan will be discussed in greater detail later in this paper, it is important to realize the role fear plays in hindering individuals, religious groups, and nations from truly finding peace with our brothers. As John the

Apostle writes, “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love” (*New International Version*, I Jn 4:18). For far too long the pages of history have been riddled by the nature of fear as Christians and Muslims alike have punished one another for the sins of the past and fear of the future. However, when we love one another that fear is removed and the gap that is created by our differences is bridged. If nothing else, I discovered, in my brief journey among the Muslim people, that listening well and empathizing deeply bridges more gaps than I would have believed possible. Love truly is an inexhaustible source of healing.

William Faulkner stated in his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1949 that one of the greatest issues of his day was humanity’s forgetfulness concerning “the problems of the human heart in conflict,” for this “alone can make good writing because only that is worth writing about” (“William Faulkner - Banquet Speech”). In many ways, this thesis is the product of a “human heart in conflict,” for the argument of reconciliation and collaboration has set me on my own journey of identifying with another’s pain and connecting with those of a religion and culture that are foreign to my own (“William Faulkner - Banquet Speech”). The heartrending plight of the refugees is often so riddled with political propaganda, opinions, and religious rhetoric that the human plight is left forgotten, hidden beneath many words and little action. As a Christian, I feel a personal responsibility to answer their need and show the love of Christ to those stripped of homeland, family, and funds.

The Bible is clear on this point, being littered with verses concerning care for those in need. In Philippians, Paul extols others to “look not only to his own interest, but also to the interest of others” (2:4). Proverbs reads, “Whoever closes his ear to the cry of the poor will

himself call out and not be answered” (Prov. 21:13). Even Jesus states, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Matt. 25:40). James writes that the only acceptable religion is one in which you “visit orphans and widows in their affliction” (James 1:27). While many other verses exist emphasizing the importance of social justice and caring for those in need, these few verses illustrate my own desire to help the refugees and show the love of Christ to those who are in need regardless of their religious orientation. Thus, throughout this paper my own theological orientation will shine through, but hopefully in a manner that brings hope and life and builds bridges of understanding and healing rather than offense and pain. Once the conclusion of this paper has been reached, I hope that a better understanding of the Christian and Islamic refugee plight will be grasped and a true belief in the possibility that peace can exist between these two religious groups within the Middle East.

Syrian Civil War: A Brief History

A key part of this crisis concerns the political and religious atmosphere of Syria. As refugees continue to flood the borders of Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, and Iraq, as well as seek asylum in the West, many may fail to grasp the actual plight these Syrian refugees face. It does not take long to grasp the enormous amount of destruction Syria has faced since the country first erupted in March 2011. The once beautiful city of Aleppo now lies in ruins as does Homs, Daraa, and so many other Syrian cities. The war itself involves five major groups including the pro-government forces, Hezbollah, foreign Shia militias, Iran, and Russia. The opposing forces include the Free Syrian Army, nationalist jihadis, Jabhat Fatah al-Sham, the United States, Turkey, and the Arab Gulf states. Then the Islamic State and Kurdish People’s Protection Units are also involved as separate forces in this war (Council on Foreign Relations). Sources report

that by the “end of 2016, tens of thousands of combatants were involved in the fighting” and “[a]s many as half a million Syrians have been killed” (Laub). The carnage of the war is unbelievable and it still remains to be seen when it will end.

Carpenter writes that this war should not be oversimplified for it is “far more complex and murky,” than many would believe (1). He writes that that the turmoil in Syria has “troubling, long-term implications not only for that country but for the Middle East as a whole, and even for the international system,” and as such should be thoroughly understood (Carpenter 1). It is largely a war with religious roots, as the country is divided up by a family’s religious identity. These divisions exist between the Sunni Arabs, the Christians, Alawites, Druzes, and other Sunni minorities. Carptenter reports that the Alawite Assad family was quite secure in power and held a “loose alliance with Christians, Druze, and sometimes, one or more of the other smaller, ethnic groups” (2). However, this all changed when Sunni rebels took the reigns and staged a rebellion. The ideology, however, that drives this war is what worries many. For while the “Assad coalition is primarily secular, the ideological composition of the opposition is far more opaque,” and evidence of “radical Islamist participation” is proving to be a concern (Carpenter 3). Thus, while saying this war is solely religious in nature would be a gross misunderstanding and oversimplification of the matter. This war does have religious and ideological drives that should not be ignored and this can clearly be seen in the historical rivalry between the Sunnis and the Alawite regime.

The history between these two groups and their rivalry within Syria dates back to World War I. Through political betrayal and religious doctrines, the Alawites and the Sunnis oppose each other on many vital points, and while the Alawites remain a minority, the means by which

they gained power in Syria has long remained a thorn in the side of the Sunni Muslims. When the Alwaite Batthis regime rose to power in the 1960s, the Sunni's distrust for this small band of elite Muslims increased. The Sunnis view this Alawite's regime as "illegitimate, oppressive, and anti-Islamic" (Fildis 2). Furthermore, the Sunnis see the manner in which the Alawite's rule as being too severe as they force laws that restrict their "religious education and *ulema* (Muslim scholars)" (Fildis 2). In the words of Weulersse, "a minority can dominate a majority if it has political, military or economic superiority," (Fildis 2) and this is what the Alawites of Syria have attempted to do until now.

For many, this uprising of the Sunnis against the Alawites has been a long time in coming, and the Christians, Druze, and other religious minorities have been caught in the crossfire along with the entire Middle East. Where it will all end is still unclear, but whether the Sunnis win or lose this battle, the world has been called on to minister to those who have been left wounded and broken in the ongoing war. That a more peaceful religious environment existed is clearly desirable, but whether this can be created within man's drive for power remains unclear. However, what does remain clear is the Christian's call to minister to those in need. If peaceful relations could be built between the Muslim sects, Christians, and other religious minorities, a great war will have been won within and outside the refugee camps. This is the call this paper attempts to answer: building bridges between religions, specifically between Christians and Muslims as they attempt to meet the needs of the Syrian refugees.

Islam: An Historical Tale of Peace or Violence

The conflict within Syria goes deeper than the present, finding its roots within history of Christianity and Islam. However, history, while recording moments of violence between the two

religions, also sketches moments of peace and collaboration. As Zachary Karabell writes, “History is a vast canvas, where it is possible to find support for nearly every belief, every statement about human nature, and every possible outcome of the present” and thus it makes an argument for both peace and war (5-6). The question is not so much whether violence or peace will win out in the history of Islam and Christianity, but whether or not we have been one-sided in our perusal of that relationship. Truth be told, Islam and Christianity share a history of peaceful co-existence, tolerance, and even collaboration. Their story is much like all stories, full of darkness and light, blood and water, peace and violence, thus the question is not what is the dominating feature but whether what will we let characterize future relations. In great part, this question depends on how we depict Islam: as a violent religion or one of peace. It is the stories of peace and collaboration that this paper will now sketch.

History offers hope if one but decides to learn from the lessons it offers. Moments of peace, co-existence, and collaboration share a flickering flame in the history of human relations. One such example can be found among communities of the mid-twelfth century. These communities were called *convivencia* and were created in Spain with the intention of fostering peaceful relations between Jews, Muslims, and Christians. These communities were created amidst the centuries of Christian mission and European imperialism fostering “cultural exchange and the transmission of ideas” between the two groups, art and architecture testifying to this fact (Goddard 200). Studying the moments in history that promoted fear or collaboration, Goddard concludes that looking at the “conflictual and antagonistic or collaborative and dialogical” approach is necessary so that one may gain more insight into how to construct future Christian-Muslim relations in a healthier manner (Goddard 210). A platform for collaboration can only be

built if the relationship between the two groups is fully understood both theologically and culturally. These small communities did just that, and Muslims were largely responsible for the pioneering of such peaceful relations.

Between 711-1492 A.D., the Iberian Peninsula, as well as the Middle East, became the scene in which Muslim and Christian conquerors learned to co-exist in peace. Muslims, as the conquering group, were the main initiators of this co-existence in the lands of Islamic rule. Many people of the West have been guilty of falsely perceiving the Muslims during this time in history as those that sought to drive out Christians and Jews from the land. However, this tale of the eighth century is full of much more hope and peace than violence and discrimination. Here we see a phenomenon where, “born of contact in both the cities and the surrounding countryside, a new, hybrid culture evolved that combined elements of Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism, and of Persian, Byzantine, Egyptian, Greek, and Arab society” (Karabell 38).

This was only the beginning of dialogue and co-existence between Muslims and Christians, as well as many other religious and cultural groups. This is quite astounding to contemplate when one views the conflict that exists between Muslim groups and Christian groups. It is at this period where one sees the Christian leader Timothy I meeting with the caliph al-Mahdi in Baghdad to discuss theological differences, on the heels of Christians splitting with Muslims over theological differences and the family of al-Mahdi at war with Umayyads. Perhaps this is greatly due to the fact that Christians, Jews, and Muslims all held governmental positions within the Muslim state. Whatever the reason, the ruling party showed tolerance towards the People of the Book. Perhaps this was because at this time the Muslim party could afford it, as the Christians “posed little threat” (Karabell 38). Today, this time of peace in Iran,

Iraq, Andalusia, and Spain is little remembered, all that is recalled are the wars that raged before and after these times of peace. While the tales of war and violence cannot and should not be ignored, it is an incomplete picture without the stories of peace and collaboration that followed.

Christianity: A Historical Tale of Peace or Violence

Muslim leaders and conquerors were not the only heroes that promoted peaceful relations just as they are not the only instigators of religious violence. Christians too share in the peaceful triumphs and shaming acts of violence. Miroslav Volf looks back over the history of Christian and Muslims relations and does not balk in his confrontation of the acts of violence committed by the Christians against the Muslims in the name of religion. The “violence committed by Christians” is something he best describes as “mind-numbing” (Volf 11). Yet Christians do not hesitate to name their religion as one of peace despite these historical downfalls. This is a courtesy that should be extended to the Muslim people as much as to the Christians. It is the instigators of violence that should be reprimanded more so than the religious convictions of the violators. This is an age-old argument, however, and the pages of history testify to a time when one Christian leader supported acts of violence against the Muslims due to a political agenda while another advocated for peace and dialogue. This is the story of Pope Pius II and Nicholas of Cusa.

It would be unfair to mark Pope Pius II as a lover of violence or even a supporter of religious war. Both he and Nicholas of Cusa held a very real abhorrence for violence. However, where Nicholas of Cusa remained reactive only to the gospel and the gospel message, Pope Pius II reacted to the political violence felt after the fall of Constantinople. He saw crusades as a necessary evil that had to be endured for the greater good. Pius was also very passionate when it

came to converting Muslim leaders, but his efforts were rather fruitless as he remained active in organizing and supporting crusades against the Byzantine Empire. Perhaps it was his deep-seated abhorrence to violence that caused him to lose the debate with Nicholas of Cusa, or perhaps it was his fruitless conversations with Muslim leaders. Whatever the case, Nicholas of Cusa's petition for peace and dialogue won the day. Volf, when commenting on Nicholas of Cusa's argument, states that it is "not the power of guns, but the power of ideas forged in vigorous dialogue" that bests promote true Christianity and future relations between Christians and Muslims (12).

It is stories like these, stories that hold a strange familiarity with the issues and challenges that confront us today, that stirs up hope that peaceful relations are possible between these two religions. From this historical illustration, one can embrace the fact that collaboration and peace are possible between Muslims and Christians, and is perhaps needed now, more than ever, amidst the carnage of the Syrian Civil War. A key in this bridge being built exists in storytelling, a telling that looks beyond the past into the present and finds a place of connection between two groups that have been largely characterized by their differences.

The Power of Storytelling

Storytelling holds a special power to heal the most traumatized of hearts, and perhaps this is why it plays such a key role when pursuing reconciliation between Muslims and Christians. Dr. Richard F. Mollica, a Harvard Medical School professor of psychiatry and director of the Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma, shares that:

The foundation of storytelling is the capacity of human beings to empathically listen to the suffering of others, an act that is therapeutic for the storyteller and

beneficial to the listener. Not only can storytelling establish a human connection with others, abolishing the isolation caused by violence, it can also enhance the biological extinction of traumatic memories and hasten the psychological recovery of the traumatized person. (Mollica 115)

The key to this miracle lies in the ability of man to empathize, and storytelling unlocks this gift like nothing else. Dr. Mollica believes this is greatly due to the fact that storytelling encourages the listener to “form pictures of what the teller is saying,” (116) and those images are full of life which awakens us to feel the emotions of the one who is sharing. Culture, he believes is no barrier here, as he himself acknowledges that he experienced “their reality visually” and this was “despite our cultural differences,” empathy bridging all of these gaps (Mollica 117).

Of course, barriers to empathy can be built by our own prejudices or distrust, as Mollica himself testifies. However, when a person opens him or herself up to truly listen and engage with the one sharing, then empathy and connection can take place on a deeper level that brings healing to the traumatized victim and understanding to the listener (Mollica 119). I felt the connection that existed through the process of storytelling even when language, culture, and the face of the storyteller was covered. While any one of these things could act as a barrier, it did not prevent me from empathizing on a deeper level with the women who were sharing their traumatic experiences with me. Below is an example of one such story. Through this story I was able to connect with a woman who was of a different culture, race, and religion than myself, yet these differences faded as Fatmeh Ahmad al-Masri opened herself up to let me feel her emotions as a grieving mother and widow:

I lost my husband and my son in the war. I still remember the day my son died. It was 22 days after his wedding during the party. We have a tradition that the guests stay 50 days to bless the marriage. My husband had left that day to go and buy bread from the bakery for our guest. While he was there a bomb went off and he received a bad injury in his chest. We did not know of this but he was rushed to the hospital and died on his way there. That same day the military entered our home and my son blocked their entrance. He refused to let them enter and they shot him. Not long after they dropped a bomb on the building as well. My son was 17 years old and his death has been the hardest to bear. You can still see it on YouTube, it is something I refuse to forget, his bravery and his courage. (al-Masri)

She openly wept as she shared this story, and the connection I felt with her was deep. Perhaps this connection was partly due to the fact that her presence became familiar to me as I went throughout my day at the organization. She always greeted me with a smile, was the adopted grandmother of every child in the building, and was always quick to get me a cool glass of water or a hot cup of coffee to drink. To realize that such pain, such experiences existed behind that ready smile broke my heart.

Many other stories like Fatmeh's, were painted in the blood of loved ones lost and hardships endured. The stories these women shared showed that they prized the memories of the death of their loved ones even though they were full of pain and trauma. Their husbands and sons are memorialized on the walls of their new home, surrounded by flowers, the faces of these deceased ones greeting the guests of the house at first glance. Their deaths were recorded live on

YouTube, their stories printed in newspapers. It is as though these deaths of husbands, sons, and brothers must be memorialized if healing is to occur. As Mollica shared:

The trauma story is one of the survivor's greatest tools for healing. For the listener, a well-told story takes advantage of its cultural and revelatory wisdom to teach the storyteller's profound lessons about human survival and recovery. The mutual sharing and emotional solidarity between listener and storyteller occur, becoming a source of vitality and creativity for each of them. (133)

These women's stories are profound because they memorialize the beauty of human survival as well as their loved one's sacrifice for his or her beliefs. They will not have the sacrifices of their loved ones forgotten, and as they are shared some peace is given to them, some connection is made.

Interfaith Dialogue

Storytelling moves and deeply connects the hearts of the listener and storyteller in the same way interfaith dialogue connects the minds and spirits of those who are often seen as spiritual aliens. Opening up that door of great mystery and daring to connect on a level that we often fear to enter, can be healing for both parties. Relationship and reconciliation call for both empathy and trust. Storytelling builds on both of these qualities, but is insufficient in creating true understanding and relationship if religion cannot find its place in the conversation. For Christians and Muslims, this may be a trying test to undergo, however great reward can be given once this line is crossed. Dr. Ataullah Siddiqui, a Muslim scholar and proponent of interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims, speaks of the important role it plays in the lives of people who hold "a deep conviction that their faith has something to offer to the wider society in

which they live” (MIHE). Because of this deep conviction, it becomes important that communication occurs between the two parties so that true understanding can exist and relationships can be built. Interfaith dialogue is about the “mutual empowerment,” of both parties, he argues, and “engagement in public concerns and the joint pursuit of social justice, human dignity and constructive action on behalf of the common good of all citizens,” as each party draws on “their spiritual resources” (Siddiqui). From such a perspective, interfaith dialogue not only opens the door to mutual respect and understanding, but also for collaboration in the pursuit of justice and care for those in need, in this case Syrian refugees.

Pim Valkenberg expounds on the importance of interfaith dialogue when he writes, “I do think that dialogue between religions is important, not only because of world peace or intercultural collaboration, but mainly because differences matter” (34). “Why should differences matter?” some may ask. Because they exist and those differences are what makes that person’s identity their own and this includes their religion. Barbara Brown Taylor wisely states that while differences should not become places of contention they should be acknowledged in the midst of searching for common ground. As she puts it, “I look for the thing that moves us both to tears” (Taylor). Empathy, once again, is the bond that solidifies interfaith dialogue as well as storytelling. She later states that, “If there is any hope at all for us making it on this planet there must be something more important than establishing who is right or wrong” (Taylor). This is something Siddiqui would agree is the basis to interfaith dialogue, for it is not about conversion or seeking to change the other persons, but rather connecting “with the others in dignity and with respect” (MIHE). Connecting with another human being who is widely different from yourself

not only expands your own inner world, but theirs as well, and in many cases, can be a healing balm to those who are suffering.

Acts of Justice and Kindness

Reconciliation is the key, if not the foundation to true community development. However, reconciliation cannot be discussed without introducing the subject of forgiveness, which, as Lewis and Volf argue, is a key component. Lewis writes that “forgiveness and compassion must become more important principles in public life” if true reconciliation and peace is to flourish (176). For him, love is the answer, for if we “[h]old only to love, only peace in your heart, knowing that the battle of good to overcome evil is already won,” then perhaps a “Beloved Community” can be formed that is “finally at peace with itself” (Lewis 178). Love drives us to say the forgiving word to the Beloved, it builds unity and peace even amidst acts of injustice. Volf champions this idea as he describes forgiveness and embrace and pursuing peace as one of the main Christian goals. But for this type of peace, this type of love to find expression some amount of justice must be realized. As Volf states it, “[p]eace rests on justice” (Volf 197). Furthermore, “Justice forms the basis for cohesion and solidarity,” two things that are very necessary if true reconciliation is ever to occur in a community (Volf 196). Thus, what becomes clearly outlined by these two authors are characteristics of love, forgiveness, justice, embrace, and a peace that is to be pursued at all costs. Through these virtues, it is hoped that a community can experience true reconciliation even amidst past injustices.

This love and solidarity becomes the call of every Christian who wishes to act as a bridge between refugees and their new community. Storytelling plays a key role in this act of reconciliation, but is incomplete in and of itself. Storytelling, like everything, comes through a

filter. As the Syrian refugee narrative continues, their stories have largely been translated from the single-story line of terrorism, stereotypes, political turmoil, and religious misunderstanding, which is of great concern. As Adichie stated, “When we reject the single story... we regain a kind of paradise,” (“Cross-Cultural Conversation”) and this is something that largely needs to be regained when discussing care of refugees and learning how the gospel enters into this conversation. It is our actions that show the world how we interpret the story. If we truly embrace all that their story implies then a cry for justice is raised. As we learn how to make the gospel “their story” and be changed in the process, as Aldred states, then perhaps this can occur. When storytelling and acts of justice merge we can better learn how to become stewards of reconciliation as we redefine boundaries by differentiation rather than exclusion. As Volf proposed, dialogue can open and true understanding can begin to grow.

When words and actions merge, true justice is felt and many take notice. As I shared above, one child shared how deeply they were affected when a Christian priest opened his home to their Muslim brother. These acts of kindness often translate over to massive statements for justice, as this one act states the opinion that all people of all religious beliefs and racial backgrounds deserve care from every hand. As the refugee crisis continues, it becomes a call to all Christians to show kindness to those that are often seen as ideological enemies to their own belief system. As John Dickson writes in his book *Humilitas*, “It should be entirely possible for Christians to reject Islamic doctrine as invalid and untrue... without diminishing their capacity to honor Muslims”(ch. 1). If Christians can show honor and kindness to those often seen as ideological and religious enemies, great strides can be made in the act of reconciliation between these two religious groups within the refugee camps.

Karl Vick describes this current refugee crisis as the “Great Migration,” and it is this very migration that is an invitation for every Christian in every country to show love to those of various backgrounds and belief systems, particularly to their Muslim brethren (25). However, this is easier said than done, for what does true justice look like in places where belief systems and cultures differ? It is easy to manifest the justice of God in the midst of a people, society, or culture who know they “are embraced by the divine persons who love us with the same love with which they love each other and therefore make space for us within their own eternal embrace” (Volf 129). Here the idea of justice is not so complicated as Stackhouse states in his summary of Neibur’s Christ and Culture typology when he wrote the following:

Yet we might also recognize that God has called us to lives of difficult paradox, of painful negotiation between conflicting and competitive values, of seeking to cooperate with God wherever he is at work. Such a position, full of ambiguity and irony, is also full of faith and hope: “in all these things we are more than conquerors” (Rom. 8:37). This is a faith that God can be trusted and honored even when the way is dark and confusing, and a hope that God works all things together for good. (2-3)

Such a statement sheds light on the work of justice amidst a region with different cultural and religious values. This is a place where the concept of embrace and learning where that embrace can become a place of compromise, is necessary. As a Christian, I desire to learn how to negotiate “between conflicting and competitive values,” but I never want to step out of the work God is doing or desires to do in the midst of a culture who does not yet know Him (Stackhouse

2). It is important to learn how to manifest this embrace, this concept of justice, in a place where ideals and values are at odds.

While the idea of justice may differ, acts of kindness do translate. In many ways, showing kindness and justice across cultural and religious boundaries invites one to discover an “authentic local expression of Christian faith,” even within non-Christian societies (Ott 53). While the care of Muslim refugees presents many obstacles, giving them a listening ear and a helping hand remains uncomplicated. Love attracts many, and learning how to manifest the “indestructive love” of God in these situations may be the means of expressing the embrace, peace, and freedom of Christ in a foreign context (Volf 166). In many ways, it is learning how to create “a space for them,” for those of a different perspective and belief system, so that true justice may reign outside of cultural conceptions and agendas (Volf 214). As a Christian, I firmly believe that justice is an extension of God’s nature, and as we partner to make that concept a reality perhaps differing belief systems may disappear as we each become attracted to the God of love, mercy, and justice.

Love and Reconciliation in Both Religious Traditions

This posture of connecting with others on the field of storytelling and faith as well as ministering to others through acts of justice and kindness, is in and of itself a posture of love. However, this love demands something more than just a listening ear and an empathetic heart. It also calls for forgiveness. As stated before, forgiveness is a deep journey and one we are all called to traverse at one time or another, but for the refugee forgiveness comes at a higher price. Simply listening to the stories of the refugees makes this very clear.

The persecution and pain these refugees are now feeling are not alien from the history that exists between Muslims and Christians. Both parties have suffered at the hands of one another as well as within their own sects. Because of this history, unforeseen prejudices can arise blocking trust and relationship. However, these prejudices do not need to be the cruciform for the end of the story. In fact, many Christians and Muslims are arising to make a bridge that, while characterized by differences, is created by love. Christians are fueled by the gospel of love that characterizes their story, but Muslims too share a great desire to show love from their own religious tradition. Thus, while differences remain betwixt these two religions, much hope exists for future relations that are characterized more by peace than war. This offers hope to the refugee who has only seen the pain of hate and has experienced little of the healing balm of love. Yet however much the refugees may wish to experience peace, forgiveness becomes a key component in this discussion, and this is a much harder gift to bring. They are challenged to forgive those who committed the crimes against them, which is often fellow Muslims, as well as extend a more historical forgiveness towards those who they may see as religious enemies. However, this act of forgiveness is absolutely necessary for reconciliation to occur.

Philpott proposes that forgiveness is the bedrock of reconciliation as it often “foregoes a right” (Philpott 407). He thus presents forgiveness as that which “instantiates justice only if justice means something more than rights or deserved punishment” (Philpott 403). Through such a lens, forgiveness has the power to restore the justice of righteousness which is defined as “people living in right relationship—or else a process of restoring right relationship after an act of injustice has taken place” (Philpott 403). Understanding forgiveness, justice, and reconciliation from this standpoint creates a platform where true reconciliation can take place

between Muslims and Christians, a relationship that has experienced much pain and betrayal. As Christ embraced the sinner through the act of forgiveness, reconciling God and man, so Christians are called to the ministry of reconciliation, repenting and forgiving, so that relations between men can again have peace.

Miroslav Volf also addresses the role of love and forgiveness in healing a relationship that is fraught with much violence and tension. In his article, “God is Love: A Basic Christian Claim,” Volf takes on what it means to “love God and neighbor” in the context of Muslim and Christian relations, a relationship he describes as being a “tension-filled intellectual space of wrestling to understand and articulate our similarities and differences” (Volf 29). He successfully maneuvers through these murky waters, highlighting common misunderstandings between Muslims and Christians in their use of certain words as well as their theological differences. He also makes an eloquent assertion for Christianity’s special calling to love those of another religious belief. If God’s love is immeasurable, unconditional, universal, and forgiving, as the Bible would have us believe, then we are called to partner with him in manifesting such love in every relationship we have and this includes our Muslim brethren.

Kierkegaard makes an argument similar to Volf in his book, *Works of Love*, where he writes that the art of loving all of humanity regardless of race or religion is our Christian duty. He writes, “Christian love teaches love of all men, unconditionally all,” and the exception of none (Kierkegaard 63). Much like Volf’s *Exclusion and Embrace*, Kierkegaard relentlessly challenges Christians to take this unconditional love seriously, embracing all men with the love of God in word and action. He encourages one to “take away distinctions and similarities of distinctions— so that you can love your neighbor,” truly and wholly (Kierkegaard 73). So while

the Christian and the Muslim may share vital doctrinal differences, Kierkegaard appears to encourage the laying aside of these differences and concentrating solely on the fact of the equality all of humanity shares “with you before God” is possible and necessary (Kierkegaard 72). This understanding is the first step in the act of reconciliation between both Muslims and Christians.

Christians are not alone in this desire to show love. Muslims also share a high moral regard for the action of love. In fact, love serves as one of the cornerstones to the Islamic faith. Much like Christianity, Muslims believe that God “is love,” showing striking similarities to the verse in I John 4:8 where the Apostle John writes, “God is love” (Heydarpoor 3). Heydarpoor goes on to write that, “God’s love for the world in general, and human beings in particular is unanimously believed and emphasized by all Muslims,” and this serves as a great link between all religions but particularly between the Muslim and Christian religion (4). However, while the Christian God is represented as one who loves humanity even if they are not good, Islam perceives God as one who only loves based on how good one is. This can best be seen in comparison as the Bible states, “God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8) and Islam believes that “God has different levels of love or degrees of love for his creatures” (Heydarpoor 4) only loving those entirely who “repent very much and purify themselves (Qur’an 2:222). However Divine love may be interpreted, both faiths share the belief in the “act of genuine love for mankind as a whole” even if expressions may differ (Heydarpoor 9).

Some may ask if this is true does the Muslim faith promote caring for those of another faith if they are in need? The Qur’an offers an answer to this question when it reads, “And they

give food out of love for Him to the poor and the orphan and the captive. [They tell them:] we only feed you for God's sake: we desire from you neither reward nor thanks" (76:8 & 9). From this verse it is gathered that the Muslim faith does promote care for those in need regardless of race or religion. In many respects the *hadith* and its commands resemble the words spoken by Christ in Matthew 25:31-46 when Christ states that at the Day of Judgement God will ask if they fed Him when He was hungry, nursed Him when He was sick, and gave Him drink when He was thirsty. Heydarpoor contrasts this to the words spoke by the Prophet when he states, "People are all God's family, so the dearest people to Him are those who benefit His family the most," or in other words do good to all of the world (9).

As both religious traditions, Christianity and Islam, acknowledge the primacy of love, it seems that reconciliation would be a desired act between both parties. Christianity clearly shows the supremacy of love and forgiveness as the bedrock of their tradition is founded upon Christ's sacrificial love and his resurrection. Islam too would argue that love is foundational to their belief system and that even forgiveness has a role to play, the Qur'an stating that "whoever forgives and amends, he shall have his reward from Allah" (42:40). Again, in the *hadith* it reads "Whoever suffers an injury done to him and forgives (the person responsible), Allah will raise his status to a higher degree and remove one of his sins" (Sunan At-Tirmidhi qtd. MDI). The Prophet Muhammad even teaches, "Do not be people without minds of your own... Instead accustom yourselves to do good if people do good and not to do wrong if they do evil" (Sunan At-Tirmidhi qtd. MDI). Thus, both Muslims and Christians are encouraged to love their enemies, do good to those in need, and even forgive those who have done them wrong.

Thesnaar explores reconciliation and Christianity in the context of South Africa and apartheid and this sheds great light on the art of reconciliation. While the conflict in the Middle East and the experience of the refugees in Jordan is culturally different from that which was experienced in South Africa, it does offer some great insights into what Christianity can offer in the way of peace. Most significantly it offers a definition for reconciliation which is quite helpful stating that it is, “actively giving the wounds of perpetrators and victims the chance to heal by means of symbols and rituals, so that both parties can find their humanity together and share it with each other” (Thesnaar). As Syrian refugees are both Christian and Muslim, Christians and Muslims are each given an unprecedented opportunity to show love amidst a scene that is characterized by hate. As Thesnaar writes, “It is... an active call for all Christians to seek reconciliation within the storm of conflict,” and “relationships formed between people from opposing sides and the secret negotiations represent the eye of the storm, the bearers of peace, reconciliation and hope in the midst of conflict.” As the storm of war wages on, it is important for Christians and Muslim alike to model such reconciliation for their brothers and sisters in both religious traditions.

Wahba explores this idea of reconciliation of Christians and Muslims within the context of the Middle East. Exploring the interaction between the Christian and Muslim within the context of Egypt, Wahba makes a sound argument for how reconciliation can become a manifest reality. This situation is full of conflict and tension, but one can see the opportunity for reconciliation and the efforts the church in Egypt has made to promote dialogue and understanding. Wahba argues that reconciliation is only possible if “both the church and community adjust their interaction to bring about this ministry” of reconciliation (252). Through

addressing the obstacles that face Christians in Egypt as well as the missional approaches of Christians, Wahba lists ways reconciliation can be promoted in such a context as well as examples of grassroots organizations who are doing much to bridge the gap in Egypt. Through storytelling, interfaith dialogue, and acts of justice and prayer, doors to understanding and relationship open up and true reconciliation can take place. She concludes with the thought that, “All of us need...to defeat the inner fears which bind us so that we can contribute to... the message of reconciliation among others” (Wahba 329). While Egypt is not Jordan, Wahba’s tools and dialogue contribute greatly to the discussion of Muslim and Christian reconciliation in the Middle Eastern context.

It is these stories of reconciliation that brings hope to the field of refugee care in the Middle East. Storytelling, interfaith dialogue, and acts of justice have much more to bring to the table than is often recognized. These simple, everyday acts build a friendship that does more for the cause of building bridges than the political acts of well-meaning governments and the theological dialogue of the academia world. Building trust and friendship amidst the common people of these two religions, is a must if real reconciliation is ever to be made manifest. It is the call of the Christian woman on her way to the market, the Muslim woman taking her children to school, it is these women and men who can bring about the greatest movement of reconciliation and love in a region characterized by religious acts of terror and violence.

Diminishing Muslim Extremism

While the desire for love exists within both traditions, the fact that religious acts of terror and violence have remained a predominant feature in the Islamic faith, particularly in the Middle Eastern context, cannot be denied. A part of reaching a place of reconciliation among Muslim

and Christian refugees is being able to discuss, in a healthy manner, these acts of terrorism, conquering a prejudice that may exist within the minds of Christians and clearing a gross stereotype that has begun to mark many Muslims. When talking to Muslim refugees, it does not take long to realize that they too are victims of Islamic extremism and that many of them embrace the promotion of peace rather than war, revealing an idea best described as “greater jihad,” rather than the “lesser jihad” which characterizes war and Muslim extremism (Kurzman 421). Westernization and war have proven not to be enough when combatting Muslim extremism, but through knowledge concerning the Islamic faith, presenting economic solutions, and meeting with at-risk youth to come up with culturally appropriate solutions that bring community development to Islamic communities, Muslim extremism can be defeated.

If nothing else, the wide-spread ignorance concerning the differences between the many Islamic sects has caused many to take the wrong approach in addressing radical Islam. Too many times the words used, the questions asked, and the people that are pursued concerning this issue have all been wrong. Education in Islam religion as well as Muslim-cultural groups is very much needed if change is to occur so that an educated and diplomatic approach can be initiated. Dialogue between the two groups is vitally important to any community development initiative. Both parties need a voice, both parties need to find a common ground where they can meet and initiate a common vision that will bring about the desired change.

Jihad is a perfect example of how more education in the area of Islam could lead to a revolution in the definition of this term in extremist Islam. For instance, jihad has been long understood for giving a “vibrant local identity, a sense of community, solidarity among kinsmen, neighbors, and countrymen,” the appeal of such an expression of community and solidarity is

strong (Barber 38). If the world wishes to battle “lesser jihad” than they must offer something that is not only seen as morally correct, by the dedicated Muslim, but also gives the individual a sense of community and solidarity that goes beyond the mere statement that they are part of “global humanity.” Jihad should be defined for them in terms that go beyond the lesser idea of jihad which is merely defined as the “struggle against others,” to lead the devout Muslim into the understanding of the “greater jihad,” which is the “internal struggle to lead a good life” (Kurzman 421). It should create in them a deep sense of community and provide a “vibrant” sense of identity. If this can be accomplished perhaps a stepping stone can be created in opening dialogue and finding a solution to the extremist Muslim behavior.

It has been shown that many youth enter extremist Muslim groups not only out of an idea that they are fulfilling the wishes of Allah, but also due to financial crisis. Lack of jobs and money in these war-torn Islamic states leads many to join those who control the wealth which are often extremist Muslim groups. As the Leadership Group on U.S and Muslim Engagement wrote in their “Executive Summary,” “The extremists’ ability to recruit, operate, and inflict harm depends on a more widespread set of active and passive supporters [and] that support is driven by deep-seated frustration with poor governance, constraints on political activity, and lack of economic opportunity.” That “lack of economic opportunity,” is something many development institutions have recognized and are striving to rectify in their economic development programs. Hopefully, when these economic programs are created in partnership with dialoguing with their constituents in knowledge of their faith and culture, true progress can be made.

Targeting at-risk youth who sell themselves into these extremist groups for fortune, fame, or dedication to their faith, may be the greatest strategy a development worker could devise in

the fight against extremist Muslim behavior. Targeting youth through education, economic opportunity, and theological discussions in Islam would all prove extremely useful strategies. Roy points out that “more and more Muslims are living in societies that are not Muslim” and this is causing many of these youth to not only walk away more Westernized, but is also causing them to redefine “what it means to be Muslim” (Roy 423). Westernization and education is not enough, Kurzman pointed out in his article about Bin Laden and other extremist Muslim leaders, there is a political undertone that goes deeper than religion, but if the followers of these men can be shown a better way amidst their attempt to redefine “what is Muslim” perhaps change can occur.

Many sects of the Islam religion have shown a desire for “humanity to become a single family, built on the values of justice, equity, and solidarity” (Lechner 545). If those that are seen as vulnerable to extremist Muslim influences can be grafted into such Islamic groups, perhaps change can occur. Syria and many other countries have begun efforts to “de-program” extremist Muslims so that they may embrace a “more moderate viewpoint” (Hedieh and Farooq 10). If development workers can learn more about the Islamic faith and the fact that Westernization and modernization are not so much contradictory forces to radical Islamic as many have been led to believe, than perhaps the answer to extremist Muslim behavior can be found. Through educated dialogue, economic opportunities, and development practices, perhaps the extremist Muslim can find a more peaceful form of Islam that may gain the attention of the world. Perhaps than the refugee can find some peace outside of their religious orientation, and the Muslim and Christian refugee can work together to build a world where peace is the more dominant characteristic of the Middle East than war.

Arab Christianity

There is one fact that is often overlooked in this discussion, and that is how the Arab Christian views reconciliation with the Arab Muslim. As this paper is largely looking at reconciliation in the region of Jordan and in the context of Syrian refugees this is an important aspect to examine. In a personal interview with Christian Jordanian pastor Assawahri (not his real name) in Amman, he stated that the Arab Christian has something very important to bring to the discussion. His viewpoint as well as the history of the Arab Christian has much to offer to this discussion concerning Christian and Muslim relations in the Middle Eastern context.

These views play an important role in the act of reconciliation within Jordan. Furthermore, the Arab Christian is too often overlooked due to the fact that they are a minority in a predominantly Muslim nation. However, as Syrian Christians, Iraqi Christians and others from surrounding Middle Eastern nations flood the borders of Jordan their number is rising. Within Syria alone, Christians make up 10% of the 22 million population (BBC). Furthermore, Christianity finds its roots within the Middle East and was historically the predominant religion before Islam was introduced. Iraq too has a 4% population of Christians and 33% of Lebanon's population is Christian (Mattar). These numbers in of themselves may be too low of an estimate as persecution arises for a Muslim who has converted to Christianity and thus many will not say whether they are truly Christian or not. However, the Arab Christian population continues to grow, one news article reported the tremendous growth of Christianity among Muslims in the Middle East (Flood). These conversions and Christian growth within Muslim countries provides more of a reason for peaceful relations to exist between Christian and Muslims.

Many Arabs, both Christian and Muslim, share these thoughts. Raja G. Matter, a corporate leader in the Middle East, writes that “millions of Christians are a dynamic part of the Arab landscape and should remain so,” as such it is necessary that both Christians and Muslims “cooperate...to develop a secular society where all citizens are equal regardless of religious affiliation or ethnic (imagined or real) background” (*Al-Hewar Center*). However, as Christians form a minority in these Muslim dominated nations they have a somewhat different perspective. Jeppesen writes that because of this “[Arab Christians] have never developed an imperialistic Christianity like the one we have seen in Europe and the United States” (198). This has made most of them “pacifists,” one scholar argues (Jeppesen 198). Others state that due to being the minority many Arab Christians have felt forced to prove their “efficaciousness and productiveness to their Muslim neighbors” as well as “themselves” (Kattan 51). Their productivity has been measured by their ability to connect the Middle Eastern world to the West, in the past, as well as their contribution to the classical era in the Middle East (Kattan). Because of this fear of having their role diminished as citizens of the Arab world, many Christians embrace the thought of reconciliation and collaboration which shows themselves as useful to the Arab culture and its progress, thus protecting their own identity as Arab citizens.

This idea of being seen as valuable to the surrounding community was introduced in my own conversation with the Christian pastor in Amman. In this interview, he stated that he firmly believed that the, “Church must be made to be seen as valuable to the surrounding community and this can only be done through acts of kindness” (Assawahri). For him, these acts of kindness have translated over to outreaches and provision for Christian and Muslim refugees as they flood in from Iraq and Syria. His church’s program alone has provided care for 14,000 refugee families

with an estimated care of 15,000 families in 2016 and a projected goal of 100,000 families in 2017 (Assawahri). They have recently opened up a school that can hold 150 students and is growing with support from around the world and they have a weekly gathering of refugees where both Muslims and Christians create goods that are then sold in the West for a living wage (Assawahri). He believes it is acts such as these that will make the “local church valuable to the community” (Assawahri). When asked what his motivation was he simply stated, “Love. If a person isn’t changed by love it is my job to love him more,” (Assawahri) and this is exactly what he and his church are seeking to do among refugees on a daily basis.

What is perhaps most startling, is this pastor’s own passion for the global church and unity. As he observes the small number of proclaimed Christians in his nation, he is not deterred by these numbers. Rather he marvels at the survival of the Arab Christian within nations so predominantly Muslim and even persecuted. He testifies, “This can only be Christ and I truly believe revival will come from these seeds” (Assawahri). He believes as unity begins to occur within the Christians church between Catholics and Evangelicals, that a greater unity will begin to be felt throughout the nation. Reconciliation can truly occur between Christians and Muslims, but it is something that starts within the hearts of individuals.

Jordan’s Initiative in Islamic and Christian Collaboration

Jordan is one of the leading Islamic countries advocating for peaceful relations between Christians and Muslims. Through the work of the Very Reverend Father Haddad, Melkite Catholic priest of Jordan who started the organization Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center (JICRC): Promoting Coexistence, much has been done in the area of promoting peace and collaboration between Christians and Muslims in Jordan. One of the great works that have come

forth from this initiative is the organization and book *A Common Word Between Us and You* which outlines Christian and Islamic beliefs, Amman's Message, and the possibility of Christian and Islamic collaboration in Jordan. Within its pages it argues that "Islam and Christianity share, at their core, the twin 'golden' commandments of the paramount importance of loving God and loving one's neighbor" thus calling for "peace and harmony between Christians and Muslims worldwide" (7). Based off of this common "love," it sets the foundation for collaboration between Christians and Muslims who are seeking to show that love to those who are broken and are in need.

Out of JICRC's repertoire has come a document entitled "Document on Islamic and Christian Coexistence" which focuses solely on the coexistence of Muslims and Christians in the Jordan context. Here members outline the necessary steps both religious groups need to take to make coexistence and peace attainable. These include respect of religious beliefs and freedom, "respect of all messengers, prophets, holy books, and religious texts and prohibition of their desecration," respect of holy places and their access, respect for religious symbols and all being permissible, that such respect does not harm the "belief and feelings of others," and the promotion of a continual dialogue and cooperation for the continuation of "justice, peace, development, and decent living" ("Document on Islamic and Christian Coexistence"). Through this commitment, Jordan presents itself and the Christian and Muslim religion as being passionate for collaboration of religious groups as well as the feasibility of such a goal.

However, the story behind JICRC's success rests not only on its creation but on the shoulders of one of its founders the Very Reverend Father Nabil Haddad, priest of Melkite Catholic Church, and his relationship with King Abdullah II. His Very Reverend Father Haddad

has done much to “promote tolerance between Christians and Muslims but also to form an alliance of all Jordanians working together for peace” (U.S. Catholic Interview). He shares how even as a boy he was educated in both Islam and Catholicism which has helped him understand his Muslim friends better as well as open dialogue. He feels strongly that “Christians need to work together with Muslims to make changes from within our society in Jordan,” and thus does much to promote such a collaboration. He also thinks that Muslims and Christians must come together to “form an alliance against ideological extremism” and thus build peace (U.S. Catholic Interview). He believes Christians and Muslims must “concentrate on common values” so that they can both help those in need together (U.S. Catholic Interview). His voice and story are very important in understanding Jordan’s efforts to promote interfaith dialogue as well as collaboration between Muslims and Christians as well as more religious freedom. His work is pioneering much of the future for Muslims and Christians in the Middle East.

Yet his Very Reverend Father Haddad alone is not responsible for Jordan’s impressive work in interfaith dialogue. King Abdullah II, as well as his wife Queen Rania, have done much as each have invited hundreds of lecturers from both Christian and Muslim traditions to share on the importance of interfaith dialogue. Among those invited was David F. Ford who presented a lecture on Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Wisdom at the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque in Amman, Jordan in 2016 entitled “Seeking Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Wisdom in the Fifteenth, Twenty-first, and Fifty-eighth centuries: A Muscat Manifesto.” This lecture presented two thoughts: that wisdom can be gained from these three religious traditions that are often in conflict and that Jordan is the leading Muslim nation in embracing such an education. He strove to find “shared ground,” the “spirit that blows over both what we share and what divides us,”

discussing the differences while also “deepening our mutual respect and friendship.” Through discussing Christian theology’s wisdom and contribution to inter-faith dialogue, he opened the door to a discussion that contrasted these various faiths. He also discussed the work accomplished by Jordan and particularly King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and their Islamic contribution to inter-faith dialogue. Through analyzing Jordan’s work *A Common Word*, he highlighted what contribution it has made in creating a better understanding between Christians and Muslims. As he highlighted points that have encouraged collaboration and dialogue between Christians and Muslims, he promoted interfaith dialogue within Jordan and illustrated well how much Jordan has done to create a bridge between Christians and Muslims within a Muslim-dominated culture.

These are but a few examples of the work that has occurred within Jordan to promote peaceful existence between Muslims and Christians. While much work still needs to be done, King Abdullah II and Queen Rania’s partnership with Christian leaders and professors has created an incredible dialogue between Christians and Muslims on the world academia stage and holds much promise. As the refugees continue to flood Jordan’s borders, this legacy of interfaith dialogue presents a unique opportunity to be translated over to the care of Christian and Muslim refugees alike. What the future holds has yet to be seen, but it remains promising as healthy dialogue is promoted between these two religious groups.

Examining the Pros and Cons of Collaboration Between Grassroots Faith-Based Organizations

What is often ignored in the cause of caring for refugees affected by the Syrian Civil War, is that their situation has largely been fueled by a religious belief system. Here you find Muslims

persecuted by other Muslims, as well as Christians and other minority religions driven out and homes destroyed by a radical religious propaganda. Other causes are also linked to this, but understanding the role religion plays in the lives of refugees should be addressed by humanitarian actors. It is this very principle that Eghdamian explores in his article “Religious Identity and Experiences of Displacement.” He states that within a Muslim nation it is “Christian and Syrian Druze refugees living in urban centers in Jordan” that “experience isolation, insecurity, and discrimination because of their religious identity, revealing the importance of the religious dimension in displacement despite humanitarian desires to avoid or downplay religion” (Eghdamian). Throughout the article Eghdamian emphasizes the importance of religion in the lives of the refugees and how it is too often ignored by large humanitarian organizations like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). The UNHCR even states that “religion is not a focus,” and this forms a barrier between humanitarian aid and refugees as the refugee needs are not fully appreciated or met (Eghdamian). Emphasizing the positive morals of the religious dimension like “forgiveness, fellowship, and compassion” may open doors for healing within the ministry of care for refugees, and while Eghdamian fails to state this fact, grassroots, faith-based organizations are more equipped to do this than large organizations. (Eghdamian). By better understanding the role religion plays in the lives of Muslim, Christian and Druze refugees, collaboration between faith-based organizations can better be encouraged and implemented.

As Eghdamian established the importance of religious identity in the refugee’s life, Benthall establishes the importance Islamic charities can play in the Muslim world. Taking on the issue of Islamophobia in the West, particularly towards Islamic charities, he confronts the

causes behind this prejudice as well as highlights the admirable contribution Islamic charities make particularly in Muslim nations. He writes that while “international Christian NGOs can work effectively in Christian parts of Africa through local church networks...there is surely considerable potential for international Islamic charities to work in a similar way among Muslims” (Benthall 7). However, the dialogue does not end there, as he goes on to write how some Islamic organizations are reaching out to create something called “dialogue on the group” through partnerships with other non-Muslim aid agencies. They are setting “out to build bridges between different humanitarian cultures” to promote “dialogue and toleration” (Benthall 7). This is a testimony to the mutual desire from both Islamic and Christian organizations to see more of a collaborative approach promoted among religious and non-religious organizations so that peace and tolerance can be modeled.

Faith-based, grassroots organizations are nothing new, in many ways faith-based organizations (FBOs) are the forerunners to NGOs, however there are a few differences that should be outlined to bring greater clarity to how collaboration between FBOs should be approached. Matthew Clarke in his article “Understanding Faith-Based Organizations,” describes why FBOs are so important to the world of development and how they differ from the secular NGO. He speaks of how “[r]eligion...provides a meaning for existence,” and encourages its adherents to respond “to those that are materially poor” (Clarke 39). These religious beliefs drive faith-based organizations striving to meet needs within communities. In reality, Clarke argues, the NGO and FBO “have a shared genesis” and “seek to serve common communities” (Clarke 39). Clarke argues, however, that FBOs draw on characteristics of NGOs, civil society, religious organizations, and communities, making them “distinctive and existing in their own right, but

drawing on aspects and parts of other stakeholders” (Clarke 46). In a community setting, this gives them an ability to better contextualize to a community and reach a need in a more personal manner than perhaps large NGOs or INGOs could.

Because of these differences, another type of collaboration is needed that could extend a single faith-based organizations breadth of impact as they collaborate with FBOs of other faiths. J.W. Sinha in his article “Examining the Pros and Cons of Collaboration with Small to Mid-sized, Grassroots, and Strongly Faith-Based Partners,” examines the phenomenon of collaboration among faith-based, grassroots organizations. While partnerships should be closely examined to understand the expectations on both sides and whether this would hurt or build-up the organization, collaboration, in of itself, enables organizations to “share and leverage resources and participate in local service networks, which consist of providers who often work in conjunction with one another to provide services” (Sinha 61). In the context of Muslim and Christian FBOs, it would help each to better understand the religious beliefs of the clientele they are seeking to serve, cultural boundaries, and perhaps exchange resources that may help each better meet the needs of those they are serving. Furthermore, large FBOs partnering with small grassroots organizations may enable them to better meet the cultural needs of those they are seeking to serve.

Religious Refugee Care in Jordan as it Shifts from the Camps to Urban Areas

As the war continues in Syria, a war that has already lasted 5 years, the number of refugees entering Jordan and the needs of refugees already living in Jordan continues to rise. In response to this need Jordan hosted the Resilience Develop Forum which outlined the following plan for Jordan meeting the needs of the refugees. In it, a three-year program was created to

enable Jordan “to respond to the effects of the Syria crisis without jeopardizing its development trajectory” (UNRWA 15). With 630,000 registered Syrian refugees in Jordan and 824,000 members of impacted communities, the need to establish a plan that brings security and hope to refugees and Jordanians alike is great. Moreover, 86% of “Syrian refugee households living outside of the camps live below the poverty line” (UNRWA 4). With this need being witnessed by the Jordanian communities, grassroots organizations have risen up in an effort to respond to the needs experienced by their community. With competition for jobs becoming greater and religious diversity becoming more apparent, Jordanian grassroots organizations, and FBOs in particular, are acknowledging the “importance of delivering coherent and coordinated strategies and interventions that address the immediate relief and evolving resilience needs of affected people within Syria and across the region” (UNRWA 4).

With the number of Syrian refugee children reaching 291,238 in Jordan alone, the need to provide them with a safe, family environment increases. With the UNHCR reporting the rise in “tensions between communities—and even within refugee communities” more people are being put at risk, and it is becoming clear that a stable presence is needed. This becomes particularly necessary when adding the religious tension that exists between Muslim sects and Muslim and Christian groups within refugee circles and Jordanian communities. The “Executive Summary” as presented by the UNHCR makes this particularly clear as the outline the rising number of refugees living within local communities, the number of children in need of a local and stable home rises. Reporting on the partnership between “[l]ocal and international organizations” in an attempt to offer “activities to children and adolescents” they hope to brighten up their day

(UNHCR). Hopefully as this collaboration expands into other avenues, greater stability can be given to the refugee families and children of Syria.

In the document *Rethinking Coordination of Services to Refugees in Urban Areas*, the authors confront an issue that is often ignored in refugee care: the large transition of refugees from the camps to urban areas. As the authors testify, refugees are now living “mainly in cities and towns,” particularly those near the Syrian border, while the “minority of refugees are living in Jordan’s refugee camps” (Culbertson et al. 4). Jordan faces a high difficulty in meeting the refugee needs in such an environment as they are now facing one of the highest refugee to citizen ratios in the world, alongside Lebanon. Environmental, economic, and other issues are now being faced by the government as this migration occurs. After highlighting the new challenges refugees, governments, and humanitarian organizations face due to this migration, the authors began to introduce some solutions to these issues. As the refugees move to cities they look to “ministries” and “community groups,” to meet their needs and less to the large humanitarian organizations like the UN (Culbertson et al. 12). Also, many in the government, as well as citizens, feel that “international humanitarian officials” create conflict with the local government rather than meet local and refugee needs (Culbertson et al. 16). Because of this they argue strongly for “integrated services” which promotes and strengthens local, grassroots organizations and the local community to meet needs outside of international services as well as let the national government take the lead (Culbertson et al. 23). They also found that local, religious NGOs have a better ability to earn the trust of the people. Through their research, it becomes clear that local, grassroots, and faith-based organizations need to take more of lead in creating long-term solutions for refugees in urban areas.

In the document “Local Faith Communities and the Promotion of Resilience in Humanitarian Situations,” the Joint Learning Institute establishes the fact that, “Faith groups are often central to strengthening resilience and reinforcing the local processes of identity and connection that comprise the social fabric of communities disrupted by disaster or conflict,” something that is critically needed among Syrian refugees (3). In their paper, they seek to discover how these faith communities encourage resilience among displaced communities particularly under the philosophy of JLI Resilience Learning Hub and the Local Faith Communities (LFC) organization. Through highlighting LFC’s contribution and strengths, they seek to highlight how their strengths and hidden potential can be capitalized amidst a humanitarian crisis. They make it apparent that local faith communities have much to offer those in a crisis and that partnerships between these communities and organizations, despite “conflicting...religious world views,” is necessary so that a local faith community’s capacity to meet needs is strengthened along with humanitarian actors (JLI 50). Through collaboration between religious communities and humanitarian organizations, the needs of those within the community can better be met holistically and effectively. Thus, their research has much to offer to the ongoing study of what religious communities and organizations have to offer those who are displaced and are in need of humanitarian services.

Conclusion

This paper has sought to introduce the reader to the possibilities of reconciliation that exist between Muslim and Christian refugees as they reside within Jordanian borders. While worldwide reconciliation is desirable, this paper mainly promotes the positive possibilities that exist within the liberal Muslim nation of Jordan as the government, under the leadership of King

Abdullah II and Queen Rania, continues to promote interfaith dialogue between these two religious groups. While the Syrian Civil War and conflict in Iraq has pushed many refugees into Jordan, it has also presented a unique situation of putting groups of people with different religious viewpoints and heritages into close proximity with one another. Moreover, it has also drawn the attention of the world, putting Western and Eastern cultures in much contact with each other. While much remains to be done to bring complete healing to the refugees who have experienced so much, it is this paper's firm belief that storytelling, interfaith dialogue, and acts of justice and kindness can bridge a gap that has long existed and help open a new generation to a more peaceful and reconciling frame of reference.

Syria remains scarred and refugees continue to flood the borders of surrounding nations as this paper reported. However, all is not lost and the Christian call to love as well as the Muslim call to love remains true in the hearts of many. As Syrian refugees continue to open up their hearts and homes and as they share the stories of their past sufferings as both Muslims and Christians, it invites other Muslims and Christians to reach out across religious borders and bring further healing and understanding. If this offering can be made in both friendship and peace, a great shift can occur between two religious groups that have known so much strife.

As historical accounts were shared concerning past peaceful relations between Muslims and Christians, it is the hope that these stories will act as a beacon for future relations between these two groups. As faith-based, grassroots organizations, continue to answer the call to care for the refugee within the nation of Jordan, encouraging storytelling, interfaith dialogue, and acts of justice and kindness, it is believed that much can happen in the way of reconciliation between Muslims and Christians. The story of the Arab pastor and his mission to help both Christian and

Muslim refugees offers hope in a world plagued by the news of war and terror and the Muslim response to his initiative is encouraging. While time will be the true test of this initiative, it is this papers hope that a bridge will be built through this refugee crisis and that Jordan will become a shining beacon to the world how love and peaceful collaboration is much stronger than war and terror.

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