



THE BLOG

Why Do Progressive Religious Institutions Support Conservative Muslims? Part 1

Where are the progressive/moderate Muslim voices? That is a question progressive Muslims often hear. We are present and have been speaking up for years but first a brief description what makes one a progressive versus a conservative Muslim community.

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As founder and President of a progressive Muslim movement I often get invited to speak at progressive Christian churches and Jewish synagogues on what progressive Islam is, its theology, and its lived out realities. For these communities it is like meeting a kindred spirit, a long-lost cousin. They are often shocked to find similarities in our



in an outlook that our respective faiths are not an exclusive club and path to God, but one of many and one of equals. As a Muslim it is an expression of Islam that needs to be heard no matter who the audience is. To those institutions, I thank you for welcoming our perspective.

However, there are many more institutions that bypass us for the more conservative Muslim brand, be it the media, or the secular progressive American institutions. In Part One, I will write about my experiences with some progressive religious institutions who support conservative Muslim institutions who practice gender inequality, homophobia and censorship of one's expression and thought.

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Where are the progressive/moderate Muslim voices? That is a question progressive Muslims often hear. We are present and have been speaking up for years but first a brief description what makes one a progressive versus a conservative Muslim community.

A progressive Muslim advocates for gender equality, which includes women's full participation in society at every level i.e. from empowering women to make healthy decisions regarding their bodies, sexuality and reproduction, to religious empowerment in the



rights in varying degrees and insist that their prayers will not be accepted by God when led by a woman imam.

A progressive community doesn't segregate in prayer, or what we call Mecca-style, whereas a conservative community enforces severe gender separation from segregated prayers spaces to women entering from the back door.

A progressive Muslim supports LGBT rights, to be completely open about their identity as God had intended in his/her creation. A conservative will be out right homophobic or mandate a "don't ask don't tell" system in their community.

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A progressive Muslim will support complete freedom of thought, including the arts. A conservative censors all freedom of expression unless it abides by "sharia law" guidelines and that includes



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Here are a few examples on why you might not have heard more from us Progressive Muslims.

In Los Angeles there are many interfaith alliances, usually made up of Reform and Conservative Synagogues, various churches of various Christian denominations, Buddhists, Hindus, Sikhs and conservative Muslims. At one particular interfaith alliance, I was invited to open their annual Thanksgiving dinner with an azan, the Islamic call to prayer. The invitation was from the head of this religious alliance who was a non-Muslim. The conservative Muslims threatened to boycott the interfaith dinner if I gave the azan because of their belief that women should not lead such a religious practice. As a result of this threat, I was uninvited and the interfaith community remained unaware that there are Muslim communities where women can and do the call to prayer.

What I love about progressive churches and synagogues is the practice of justice for all. The communities not only preach these values at the altar, but they live these values. That takes guts. In that spirit, progressive churches are very engaged on the issue of Islamophobia, the discrimination of all things Muslim and Islam. They often host panel discussions with Muslim civil rights activists as panelists to raise awareness in their communities and beyond to the plight of discrimination toward Muslims in America. I highly commend them for their efforts, but I often find these communities invite Muslims as panelists who themselves do not believe that justice is applicable to everyone, particularly with issues of gender equality, LGBTQ rights and freedom of expression.

I wonder if these progressive organizations realize that some of these Muslim institutions are just like the equivalent of conservative



of their work against women's rights, reproductive rights, LGBT rights, and marriage equality. Why is there a double standard? Shouldn't you hold the same standards with your Muslim partners as you would with your fellow Christians? Is it simply easier just to work with the established conservative Muslim institutions because they are financially well endowed and therefore more organized, more visible?

Why do the many interfaith alliances allow for the conservative Sunni mosques to bully you into excluding the diversity of Muslim voices from the Shiites, Ahmadiyya, Ismaili, Sufi and Progressive communities? Why don't you insist on diversity as represented by the diversity in your Christian and Jewish communities?

Whenever we send out our newsletters we often receive private emails congratulating us on our works, the milestones we've achieved and the "tough stances we take". I thank you for these emails and the words of encouragement, but please, just as you, as progressive communities, stand up for justice for all, include progressive Muslims in that column, and do it publicly.

If you are curious to hear more about [Progressive Islam](#), come join us for a free screening followed by a Q & A at Capitol Hill this April 10th, 2014.

Part II of this series will be directed at the mainstream media and NPR.

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