

Response of Rev. Jan Olav Flaaten to
"U.S. Health Reform and the Elusive Target of Human Rights"
John F. Roatch Lecture given by Dr. Lance Gable
5 March 2010

During these heated debates, there is often a cry to go back to how things were at the start. I convinced that many of those people have never read "the founding fathers" or would wince at where they put the limits of citizen involvement. And sometimes I think that these same people have not read their religious tradition either as they make their arguments about health care. So I wish to make a few points regarding health care reform from the most prevalent of religious traditions in this country, the three Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. As we have seen both religious and political ideology can sometimes side-step the facts, out of a misguided self-interest that certainly does not reflect the religions they sometimes espouse.

Let me start with a word: **Shalom, Peace, Asalaam**

Shalom wishes for someone "wholeness", well-being of the entire individual. Asking for God's blessings in the whole of life, body, mind, spirit. So when we greet each other with that word, it does not simply mean "no war", or "no stress", it is a much more positive word that expresses that the whole of your life be full and whole. People from Biblical and Qur'anic times knew full well that we are a connected piece of God's creation and that you can't separate us into distinct pieces. Mind is connected to Body and Body to Mind, and the Spirit shows itself in both. So taking care of the body is taking care of the whole person, not just the physical.

A second word we could use from our traditions is **Love**. Love God and Love neighbor is in all three Abrahamic religions

Leviticus 19:18:

You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord.

Leviticus 19:34:

The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.

Deuteronomy 6:5:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

That was from the Hebrews scriptures, but Jesus also proclaims Love God and love the neighbor, and calls it the greatest commandment.

I also want to mention a significant document called *A Common Word between Us and You*, October 13, 2006. Written by Muslim scholars from around the world it was an invitation to all Christian churches that we start meaningful dialogue in the place we know we have common beliefs, love of God and love of neighbor.

All scripture and tradition, though is interpreted through a contextual lens. We are not only in America we are also in the West (some would still say the wild west) and we can not ignore the influence that American Individualism has on reading the Bible the religious experience. There are significant parts of the Christian church that emphasize the personal dimension and the need to have a “personal relationship with Jesus” which encourages a deep sense of personal responsibility. This kind of reading of the Bible, though, ignores all the passages that talk of “community”, our need to take care of each other.

Jeremiah 29.7:

But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.

1 Corinthians 12.26:

If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.

All things are connected.

Colossians 1:16-17

For in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

God is a God of justice and mercy, so to leave people out is unjust, unfair.

Deuteronomy 16:19-20

You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

Deuteronomy 27.19:

Cursed be anyone who deprives the alien, the orphan, and the widow of justice.' All the people shall say, 'Amen!'

Isaiah 61.8:

*For I the Lord love **justice**,
I hate robbery and wrongdoing;*

Finally, all of our Abrahamic traditions encourage us to pray for government. Government gives freedom but Government also gives structure in which all its citizen can live and thrive. In my own tradition, Martin Luther is often criticized because he did not side with the peasants when they lead a revolt against the land barons of the day. Luther's fear: chaos would prevent the whole movement of reform from actually taking hold. Order is good, but only if it serves a larger good purpose. Remember that God turned the chaos of the universe into an ordered creation.

I offer these few observations as a way of adding the moral, ethical, religious argument to moving toward positive outcomes in health care reform and seeing the very idea of health care as something that should belong to all human beings.