

# ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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## PERSPECTIVE NUMBER ONE

### *IRAN, NUCLEAR WEAPONS AND WAR IN 2010?*

As we look toward a new year in 2010, one of the most significant issues is Iran and its nuclear weapons program. It is probably the most unresolved issue carrying over from 2009. Indeed, that it remains so volatile is a glaring example of the world community's failure to deal successfully with a monstrous regime, which poses a serious and formidable threat to the peace of this region, the Middle East. In this *Perspective*, I want to analyze the seriousness of this threat.

- First, what is the evidence that Iran is seeking nuclear weapon capability? In the fall of 2009, the world community discovered a secret uranium-enrichment plant in a mountainside on a well-defended military compound outside the city of Qom. The existence of this facility is a clear breach of the safeguard agreements and promises Iran made as a signer of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Iran remains most defiant about this issue, arguing that it has “nuclear rights” as a nation but that its efforts are all directed toward the “civilian” uses of nuclear power. No one believes that! What is required to acquire nuclear weapons? (1) Fissile material (e.g., highly enriched uranium (HEU), or plutonium); (2) a delivery system for the warhead; (3) and the warhead itself. The enrichment plants at Natanz, Qom and perhaps other secret plants give Iran a path to HEU. Iran is also building a heavy-water reactor at Arak, which will produce large quantities of plutonium as a by-product. (This will not be completed for several years.) Iran has also been working hard at developing ballistic missiles. It has liquid-fuel Shahab-3 missiles, with a range of 810 miles or more, which could reach Israel. In May it tested the 2,000 kilometer Sejil missile, a solid-fuel rocket that could be fired from mobile launchers. Missiles are Iran's quickest and most reliable delivery system. Finally, Iran has also been working on fitting a bomb inside a missile cone. International Atomic Energy Association (IAEA) inspectors have found evidence that Iran had designs to make uranium hemispheres used in warheads and had experimented with ultra-fast triggers that would set off the nuclear explosion. Therefore, the only major remaining challenge for Iran is the availability of fissile material. At Natanz, Iran has 8,000 centrifuge enrichment machines. It has accumulated a stock of 5% enriched uranium but it is much easier to produce more once you learn how to do it. Iran refuses to abide by the NPT, to answer any questions about its actions and has threatened to increase its enrichment program 10-fold. What the world does not know is whether there are other secret facilities also enriching uranium. Iran has also hinted that it may actually pull out of the NPT. There is no doubt about Iran's intentions—it is seeking nuclear weapons capability and once it achieves that, the world will change!

- Second, what should the world community do? President Obama has tried his policy of “engagement” with Iran. No one would say that has been successful! In fact, Iran seems more belligerent and arrogant than ever. There was a proposed initial step that would have Iran’s low-enriched uranium taken out of the country and enriched in Russia, for example. At first, Iran seemed interested in pursuing this “first step.” But, it did not take long for the world to see that there was no serious interest in this option. There is no question that, based on NPT, Iran’s actions are illegal and it hence has no credibility with the international community. But, despite these truths, why has the world not brought Iran to accountability? The answer is quite simple. Russia has been selling Iran tons of conventional weapons and has been helping Iran complete a nuclear-power reactor at Bushehr. China has investment contracts in Iran worth an estimated \$120 billion. Iran is also one of China’s largest suppliers of oil. Several European countries maintain significant amounts of trade with Iran. Quite incredibly, until the Qom facility was discovered, both Russia and China have insisted that Iran was not doing anything illegal. However, as Iran nears completion of its nuclear program and as sites like Qom are discovered, a hands-off strategy is no longer acceptable—at least so it seems. The nations most concerned about Iran are other Arab states, for the horror of arch rival Persia having nuclear weapons can only mean intense nuclear proliferation throughout the Middle East. Few see that possibility as comforting; it is in fact terrifying! So, is military action possible? Economic sanctions have not worked and it is doubtful that any future sanctions will work. It is even questionable whether Russia and China would support harsher sanctions anyway.
- So, thirdly, is military action against Iran possible? There is no nation that would carry out military action other than the US or Israel. Israel destroyed Saddam Hussein’s nuclear reactor in 1981 and that is the key reason Iran has dispersed its facilities throughout the nation and hidden others. This, no single military strike would work. For Israel to strike Iran would pose a formidable challenge. Iran is at the limits of Israel’s range, even with air-to-air fueling and Israel would need to cross the airspace of other nations. Further, to do so, Israel would somehow need to neutralize Iran’s air force. For Israel to strike, it would not be a simple operation. Further, it would lead to significant retaliation from Iran, undoubtedly using Hezbollah and Hamas. Either as a combined operation with Israel or if it acted alone, perhaps the only possible nation that could achieve some success would be America. But we are fighting two wars now and it seems nearly impossible to imagine an air war over Iran as a possibility right now. Attacking Iran would forever change the Middle East and Iran’s retaliation would no doubt be significant. So, at least for now, the world community is in effect pursuing a policy of appeasement with Iran. And history tells us that appeasement is a disastrous policy when it comes to an evil nation such as Iran. (One only has to consider Nazi Germany from 1936 to 1939 to understand the point.) The world community should unite behind a determined policy that if Iran does not halt its nuclear operations, combined military action by the world’s leading nations will occur. If that threat were credible, Iran would stop, I believe. But under the current situations, I cannot envision the world community uniting in such a manner. Instead, the world will continue down its path of appeasement and Iran will have nuclear capability. Then, Israel, the United States’ forces in Iraq and Afghanistan, and the other Arab states will all be vulnerable. A nuclear Iran is an unimaginable reality right now. But unless the world is united in stopping Iran with a

credible threat of military action, it will occur. In so many ways, year 2010 must settle the question of whether the world will permit a nuclear Iran.

See the incredibly insightful article in *The Economist* (5 December 2009), pp. 27-30. This *Perspective* was most dependent on this article.

## **PERSPECTIVE NUMBER TWO**

### ***THE FIGHT OVER ABSTINENCE AT HARVARD***

*Newsweek* columnist, Lisa Miller, recently reported on an abstinence movement at Harvard University called True Love Revolution (TLR), a three-year old club promoting a lifestyle of abstinence for women. TLR has caused quite a stir at Harvard. For example, on Valentine's Day in 2007, TLR representatives placed a chocolate in every freshman's mailbox with a heart-shaped card that read: "Why wait? Because you're worth it." The response of the feminist movement on campus was predictable. TLR was accused of promoting a retrograde view of sex, especially because TLR advocated that marriage outside of sex is "harmful to both parties" and is only for those in a "traditional marriage." The last phrase was of course understood as an attack on same-sex marriage. Among other conversations TLR has provoked at Harvard is one which asks the question, "What is true feminism? Is it being able to say yes or say no when it comes to sex?" That, in my judgment, is a healthy question, one that needs debate and discussion. The hook-up culture on our college campuses needs to be challenged; it needs to be confronted. Universities cannot simply hand out condoms and warn its students about sexually transmitted diseases. Colleges and universities need to challenge the proposition that sexual freedom is at the core of personal freedom. It is not! Study after study has shown that sexual freedom is actually the path to dysfunction and enslavement. (See for example the most recent work by Donna Freitas of Boston University.) Indeed, Christine Firer Hinze, a theologian at Fordham University, argues that choosing abstinence can carry a message of strong personal fulfillment. She writes: "A religious viewpoint can point you in a direction that says wholeness, integrity, enjoying life, even being a sensual person, can lead to a kind of fulfillment. Kids don't hear this anymore." Several conclusions:

- First, any sexual ethic must be anchored in what our Creator has said about human sexuality. For that reason, it is always beneficial to review the Creation Ordinance of God in Genesis 2:18ff. After giving clear instructions to Adam about his stewardship of the Garden, God concludes that it is not good that Adam is alone (v. 18). To prove this to Adam, God brings all the animals before him to name (vv. 18-20). Although this establishes his authority over the animals, it also served as an object lesson for Adam: He was the only creature of God truly alone. So, God creates the woman as his complement, his helper (vv. 21-23). Moses then offers a theological commentary on what God did with Adam and Eve (vv. 24-25). First, God established the paradigm for marriage. The man is to "leave" his family with the conscious understanding that he is establishing a new family unit. Second, that means "to cleave" (like glue) to his wife. Third, in separating from his family of origin and making the unqualified commitment to his wife, the two become "one flesh." This concept does symbolize the sexual intercourse that physically unites the two human beings, but it also symbolizes the merging of two personalities, male and female, into a complementary whole.

Their personalities, their idiosyncrasies and their uniqueness all remain; they do not cease. Instead, these two totally different human beings merge into a perfect complement where both--now together--serve God in their integrity. In verse 25, Moses further comments that this couple is “naked” and not “ashamed.” They were so totally “other-centered” that they did not think of self, only of one another. We can properly infer that their sexual oneness was characterized by no shame or discomfort either. Their physical love was beautiful and fulfilling; no selfish or carnal lust was present. The wonder of romantic love was perfectly present in this first marriage.

Theologically, what do we learn from this passage? How does this passage establish the model for a proper understanding of human sexuality and marriage? Allow me to suggest several lessons:

1. When Jesus and Paul deal with questions of marriage or human sexuality, they always refer back to this creation ordinance of Genesis 2:18-25. See Matthew 19:1-12, Mark 10:1-12 and 1 Corinthians 7:10-11. What is stated in these verses transcends culture and time. They constitute God’s ideal for sexuality and marriage.
  2. Marriage is to be monogamous and heterosexual. From this passage it is impossible to justify polygamy or homosexuality. It is the standard, the ideal, for all marriages. Therefore, one simply cannot justify “same-sex” marriages. This is not an option for humans.
- Second, where does this pursuit of sexual freedom come from? It is most easily understood as a dimension of Postmodernism. The center of postmodernism is the doctrine of the autonomous self living in community. In postmodernism, the self defines reality. There are virtually no boundaries for behavior and there are few authority figures that matter anymore. For example, the 7 May 2000 issue of *The New York Times Magazine* devoted an entire issue to this concept of autonomy. Autonomy impacts all aspects of culture—entertainment, business, law, leisure and religion. I, the self, define all aspects of reality. There really is nothing transcendent that defines it for me; I am autonomous. Such a claim has a haunting ring of familiarity to it, for the book of Judges has as its refrain, “Every man did what was right in his own eyes.” When individual autonomy is mixed with America’s deep-seated commitment to rights and liberties, one sees how lethal this becomes in areas of sexuality, ethics and morality. There are no boundaries or absolutes. It is the right of the individual that is absolute. This frames discussion on the key cultural issues of our day—abortion, homosexuality, cohabitation before marriage, genetic and reproductive technologies and their use, and the right to die with dignity. When “every man does what is right in his own eyes,” the limits to freedom and rights are boundless.

A 2002 Zogby International poll of college seniors demonstrates the impact of this radical relativism. Nearly 73% of students surveyed said that when their professors taught ethics, the normal message was that uniform standards of right and wrong do not exist (cited in the John Leo article, *US News and World Report* (22 July 2002), p. 14). Instead, what is right or wrong depends on differences in each individual and in the individual’s culture. So, if all beliefs are equally valid, there is nothing to debate. Nothing separates personal “truth” from

self-delusion. If students currently in college are convinced that ethical standards are simply a matter of individual choice, they are less likely to be reliably ethical in their careers.

Postmodernism also argues that moral and ethical behavior are not the result of any final reality such as God. Rather, morality comes from the needs of society. Every culture develops its own morals and no other culture has the right to judge another's value system. True ethics are based on the needs of the moment, not final truth. Let me illustrate: Two articles in the 1997 *Chronicle of Higher Education* reveal that college students are often unwilling to oppose large moral horrors, including human sacrifice, ethnic cleansing and slavery, because they believe no one has the right to criticize the moral views of another group or culture. Professor Robert Simon, who has taught philosophy for 20 years at Hamilton College in Clinton, New York, indicates that his students acknowledge that the holocaust occurred but cannot bring themselves to say that killing millions of people is wrong. Between 10 and 20% deplore what the Nazis did but their disapproval is expressed as a matter of taste or personal preference. One student responded, "Of course I dislike the Nazis but who is to say they are morally wrong?" Another professor, Kay Haugaard of Pasadena College in California, wrote of a student in a recent literature class who said of human sacrifice, "I really don't know. If it was a religion of long standing. . ." Haugaard was stunned that her student could not make a moral judgment: "This was a woman who wrote passionately of saving the whales, of concern for the rain forests, of her rescue and care for a stray dog." (Both are quoted in John Leo, "Professors Who See No Evil," *US News and World Report* [22 July 2002], p. 14.) The result of Postmodern relativism and morality is tolerance. You must respect the beliefs and distinctives of others. The only wrong is saying that another's beliefs are wrong. Postmodernism has replaced the ethic of truth with the ethic of tolerance. Toleration extends to lifestyle questions and practices. No wonder criticizing the homosexual lifestyle is labeled as bigoted and hate-filled. No wonder condemning abortion is labeled as threatening a woman's rights. No wonder challenging doctor-assisted suicide as dangerous is labeled naive.

But the Bible will have none of this. It contains transcultural principles that form the ethical foundation for all civilizations. It is always wrong to murder, to lie, to commit adultery, no matter the culture.

See Lisa Miller in *Newsweek* (16 November 2009), p. 26; James P. Eckman, *Biblical Ethics*, pp. 47-52 and *The Truth About Worldviews*, pp. 7-15.