

There's No Place for Terror in the Teachings of Islam

By Shawki Allam, The Grand Mufti of Egypt, *Newsweek*, 17 March 2015^{PM}



Egypt's Grand Mufti writes that the Prophet would not condone Islamist acts of murder and violence. MUHAMMAD HAMED/REUTERS

Every Muslim is in utter shock about the senseless, appalling and cowardly attack on *Charlie Hebdo* in Paris, and the other senseless violence against innocents we have seen since in Copenhagen and Libya.

Let us say it plainly: These horrific acts are a complete violation of Islamic law and norms, and the perpetrators are in no way representative of Muslim people or the religion of Islam.

God upholds the sanctity of life as a universal principle. The Koran states in 4:29: "And do not kill one another, for God is indeed merciful unto you." Islam views murder as both a crime punishable by law in this world and as a major sin punishable in the Afterlife. As Prophet Muhammad said, "The first cases to be decided among the people on the Day of Judgment will be those of blood-shed."

This is in keeping as well with Muslim tradition, which rejects terror and violence. This teaching is best shown in the example of the Prophet Muhammad, whose honorable birth was recently celebrated by 1.6 billion Muslims. For Muslims, Prophet Muhammad is the beacon of mercy, the sparkle of compassion, the spring of wisdom and the perfect guide in their journey towards God.

It is therefore ironic and sad that fanatics and extremists have reduced the prophetic example to a set of rituals, crooked projections and warped logic that run counter to the true essence and mission of the Prophet.

They have reduced Islam to slitting throats, burning schools and oppressing women and to killing religious minorities, terrorizing communities and violating the human rights of people in the most blatant manner possible.

They ignore the Prophet's well-documented and indisputable example. They fail to comprehend that faith is ultimately about cultivating a relationship with God, one that cannot be complete unless humans abide by the Divine attributes of mercy, compassion and kindness and treat their fellow man accordingly.

Prophet Muhammad was repeatedly subjected to terrible treatment by his enemies but he consistently disregarded these insults and instead took the path of forgiveness, mercy and compassion.

This is why he is known to Muslims as "the Mercy to all worlds." Indeed, this example is most succinctly summarized in the Koran itself, which instructs believers as follows: "The good deed and the evil deed are not alike. Repel the evil deed with one which is better."

The world is sorely in need of such lessons, which represent the authentic teachings of the Koran and the Prophet of Islam. It is important to separate these noble messages from messages that are inappropriately used by those who have no competencies in religious interpretation, Koranic hermeneutics or the history of Islamic thought.

Unfortunately, the current state of the Muslim world is such that institutions and structures of legitimate authority have been challenged to such an extent that inflammatory rhetoric has taken the place of thoughtful analysis as a motivator of action and a guide for religious sentiment.

Let me be clear again: Islam is utterly against extremism and terrorism. But unless we understand the factors that provide a rationalization for terrorism and extremism, we will never be able to eradicate this scourge. These things must be understood in order to build a better future and bring an end to this grave situation that is threatening the world.

It was unfortunate to see hasty responses and reactions in the news that immediately blamed the Islamic faith for recent incidents. Blaming an entire religion for the acts of these unwell men is clearly unfair and serves no purpose.

It is important for us at this time of great sadness to stand together and process these horrific incidents in a way that is fair and reasonable. It is important that we do not demonize Muslims without cause—not because it is good for Muslims but because our future ability to coexist in peace depends on it.

We are today in desperate need of serious religious leaders who understand the reality of the modern world, complete with its challenges and difficulties, in order to create an environment in which people can coexist. This must be a joint effort from members of all faith groups and cultures.

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