

SUNDAY ARTICLE

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Talking about Islam

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Islam spawns violent terrorism, and yet lots of Muslims aren't violent. So how does that make sense? And if we can't make sense of it ourselves, how do we boil it down to something that we can easily relate to neighbours and friends? Or to MPs? Or to that really contrarian cousin who's sure to comment on anything we say online?

Here are three points we can pass on, each summed up in only a short quote, but each quote memorably put by three very smart thinkers.

1. Islam spawns terrorists because Muhammad is not like Jesus.

Dr Patrick Sookhdeo is the director of the Institute for the Study of Islam and Christianity. In an article in Ligonier Ministries *TableTalk* magazine, called "The Rise of Islam" he explained why Islam spawns mass terrorism:

Muhammad's figure towers over Islam not just as its founder, but as the perfect man who is divinely inspired not only in the Qur'anic revelation, but in all his sayings and deeds. He is infallible, free from sin, and the supreme example

all Muslims are obliged to emulate in every detail.

...Great men usually have great foibles. The Qur'an and hadith actually expose the violence, cruelty, immorality, treachery, and assassinations in the words and deeds of Muhammad. The elevation of Muhammad to a position of sinless infallibility has served to turn his human weaknesses into virtues in the view of many Muslims who seek to emulate him. His use of violence has been sanctified, and this remains one of the unresolved problems of Islam.

So just as Christians seek to be Christ-like, in a similar way Muslims seek to be like Muhammad. But while Christ set us the ultimate example of selflessness by dying for others, Muhammad set a very different example. He won victories with the sword; Jesus triumphed by dying on a cross.

It is Muhammad's violent example – and the encouragement to imitate him – that makes Islam a violent religion.

2. Most Muslims are peaceful because they are theologically liberal.

And yet the majority of Muslims are not violent – why is that? Nabeel Qureshi is the author of *Seeking Allah, Finding Jesus: A devout Muslim encounters Christianity*. In an interview with Ron Rupke he explained that

the reason most Muslims are peaceful is because of the culture in which they've been raised.

Most Muslims inherit their understanding of Islam from those around them... We were told Islam was a religion of peace. Whenever the topic of jihad came up, it was always contextualized, at least in my experience, as a defensive effort. Muhammad had to fight to defend the Islamic religion... [So don't] conflate Islam with Muslims. For though Islam might be violent, and the Qur'an might teach violence, and Muhammad's life exemplifies violence, that doesn't mean that your Muslim neighbour is violent. Muslims have inherited different traditions of Islam and the vast majority are peaceful people.

Just as the majority of professing Christians live like pagans, many Muslims are also more impacted by their culture than their religion. That's why most Muslims aren't violent, even though their religion is. And here's where we come to the pressing problem. A cure that is often prescribed for Islam is that it undergo its own Reformation. Just as Christianity's Reformation spawned new freedoms, prosperity and democracy, the hope is that an Islamic Reformation might do something similar, freeing it from violence.

But as Qureshi pointed out in this same interview, the reason the Protestant Reformation spawned so many good things is that it involved a return to the Bible, and a return to God. But we don't want Muslims taking their Scriptures more seriously. As Qureshi explains:

When we think of reformation we think it's something that will make a religion more modern, more peaceful, because we envision the Christian reformation. The fact is, when you go back to the roots of the Christian faith, Jesus says, "Turn the other cheek," "If you live by the sword you'll die by the sword," "Love your enemy, pray for those who persecute you."... In Islam, though, when we bypass the traditions we've inherited over the centuries and go straight to the Qur'an, we come away with a very violent message. That is what those who tried to reform Islam in the 20th Century kept encountering... ISIS is the Islamic reformation – an attempt to go back to the roots of Islam and curry favour with Allah.

A religion that officially condemns religious liberty cannot be protected by religious liberty.

3. Religious freedom is not a suicide pact.

The Christian basis for freedom of religion is, among other things, based on the understanding that it is impossible to compel anyone to love God (that is the work of the Holy Spirit, not the State).

But what if someone wanted to use our understanding of religious freedom to import and spread a religion that did believe in compulsion? Then we would be faced with a situation in which we would still not tell them what they must believe, but we would have to tell them what they could not practice. As Orthodox Presbyterian Church PC elder and author Dr E Calvin Beisner has explained:

...religious liberty is not a suicide pact. A religion that officially condemns religious liberty cannot be protected by religious liberty. That doesn't mean we have to try to stamp it out, but it does mean that we need not extend to it all the protections we extend to religions that affirm religious liberty.

Conclusion

Saying Islam is violent is an incredibly controversial statement in our culture. But it's also true. And we can't stay silent about it because Christians around the world

are suffering at the hands of its violent followers. If we are going to speak up for our brothers and sisters – and press our government to let more Christian refugees in – then we need to be able to speak to our friends, neighbours, and MPs with clarity and courage on this issue. We have to know how to quickly explain how Islam is different from Christianity, and be able to explain why we should treat it, as a religion, differently too. Silly bigoted talk would sabotage any efforts we do make, so we must not only watch our tongue, but ask God to help us love our Muslim neighbours as ourselves. We should have compassion for them, trapped as they are in a religion that directs them away from God.

These three men – Sookhdeo, Qureshi, and Beisner – have given us wonderful quotes/tools to set our own thinking aright. Now let's use them to help any others who are confused.



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