

IS ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM A THREAT TO WORLD PEACE?

MOST people in the world believe that the creator of the universe has written a book. There are a number of these books, each making a claim of its infallibility. All of the three Abrahamic books contain and justify terrible acts of violence and revenge, but the *Quran* calls for violence against the infidels and the Muslim terrorists cite these texts from the Quran to justify their slaughter of innocent people. The violent acts of radical Islamists cannot be divorced from the religious ideals that inspire them.

Islam is not a religion of peace. Unlike Jesus Christ, who was a peaceful preacher, Muhammad was a conqueror and Islam is undeniably a religion of conquest.

There are, of course many millions of peaceful Muslims in the world, but the call to violence and justification for it are contained in the sacred texts of the *Quran*. It is not just Al-Qaeda and IS that show the violent face of Islamic faith and practice. It is Pakistan, where any statement critical of the prophet of Islam is labelled as blasphemy and punishable by death. In Saudi Arabia, where churches and synagogues are outlawed, beheadings are a legitimate form of punishment, as are amputations. In Iran people are stoned to death and homosexuals are hanged.

It will not do for Muslims to claim that their religion has been hijacked by extremists, because the killers of IS and Boko Haram cite the same religious texts as any other Muslims. In his book *The End of Faith*, Sam Harris, the American atheist and author, is very concerned about the likely possibility of nuclear weapons getting into the hands of Islamic regimes, as we are only a

coup away from that possibility. He claims that the only thing likely to ensure our survival would be to strike first, even though it would be an unthinkable crime as tens of millions of innocent people would die; but an Islamic regime that goes dewy-eyed at the mere mention of paradise would have no hesitation in using such weapons.

Muslim clerics claim Islam would not exist if they got rid of the apostasy punishment and critical thought was permitted. Any cleric who advocates the separation of Mosque and state is declared a heretic and this is what makes Islam different from other religions. Any reformers have been threatened and bullied into silence or exile. Debate or doubt are largely absent in Islam and in no other religion is dissent punishable by death. Churches and Synagogues, though in my view undemocratic institutions, are permitted to have discussions about female bishops and rabbis but not Mosques.

The main problem in the Muslim world today is not so much due to failing economics and poverty but for Islam to deal with the modern and changing society in which we live. When Ayatollaha Khomeini put a bounty on the head of Salman Rushdie, many Westerners wondered why millions of 'moderate' Muslims did not publicly disassociate themselves from this fatwa.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a Somalian born Dutch-American dual citizen activist who has made the journey from fundamental Muslim to atheist. Her latest controversial book *Heretic* argues that Islam needs a reformation and unless this happens and happens soon, the world faces catastrophe. Hirsi-Ali calls on Muslims to tackle five aspects of their faith:

- 1) Ensure that Muhammad and the Quran are open to interpretation and criticism.
- 2) Give priority to this life, not the afterlife.
- 3) Shackle *Sharia* and end its supremacy over secular law.
- 4) End the practice commanding right, forbidding wrong.
- 5) Abandon the call to jihad.

Those who love death

TO Muslims, death is the goal because it leads to the prize of eternal life, and IS and similar organisations know how to exploit this fervour for martyrdom. Mothers of suicide bombers talk as if their sons are going off to get married. Focusing on death is what they are taught from the beginning of their lives and is one of the teachings of the *Quran*. The depiction of paradise with palaces built with emeralds and jewels and 72 dark-eyed virgins waiting for every martyr is, of course, absurd to the unbeliever. These virgins do not sleep, do not get pregnant, do not menstruate, spit or blow their noses and are never sick.

Strangely there is little in the *Quran* about paradise for women. No seventy two, well endowed, studs waiting for the female martyr. I wonder why?

The most spectacular way to enter paradise is as a martyr by the open embrace of an early death. Muslims must stop fixating on the afterlife and get on with living in this world.

Sharia Law

FOR Islam to join the human race Sharia law must be abandoned. We all remember the treatment of Meriam Ibrahim (pictured below), who was eight months pregnant and was sentenced to one hundred lashes and death by hanging for crimes of apostasy and adultery. This sentence was passed because she chose to follow the religion of her mother, a Christian, rather than her father, a Muslim and married a Christian man, but her treatment was in accordance with Sharia law.

Beheadings, crucifixions, cutting off of hands and feet are all sanctioned by Sharia law. The *Quran* urges Muslims not to be moved by compassion in cases of adultery and decrees a public lashing. Most of these punishments remain fully operational in countries like Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, and Sudan. Repeatedly under Sharia law, women are considered to be worth at most 'half a man'.

Men have the right to beat their wives, have unfettered sexual access to their wives, and can have four wives. A woman can be married off without her consent by her father. And so it goes on.

There is probably no realistic chance that countries like Pakistan will give up Sharia law, but the least we can do is insist that it is never used in our country.

Commanding right and forbidding wrong

THIS is the practice of doing exactly what the *Quran* says and forbidding any dissent, which in its most extreme form can lead to honour killings. It provides justification for fathers, brothers and uncles to kill female relatives whom they consider to have committed transgressions.

Ayaan Hirsi Ali argues that it is time the developed world confronted Islamic teaching for all the above reasons, which I feel is all well and good and I would not disagree. However, she fails to criticise the evangelical right in America to any degree. She fails to mention that George Bush claimed that God told him to invade Iraq and that the Tea Party would demand a lot of what is part of sharia law: homosexuality should be criminalised, masturbation considered a sin and so on. The Tea Party have a lot of political clout in the US.

Also she neglects the role of Israel in the middle east which has fomented a lot of the problems. The bombing of innocent civilians in Gaza and the building of Jewish settlements on Palestinian land has certainly had a detrimental effect in the region's problems.

Nevertheless, Islamic fundamentalism, which has this fanaticism for martyrdom and in which any criticism is considered blasphemy punished by death, is the biggest problem which may threaten our very existence unless it is tackled. But how? That is the question.

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