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Healing versus Hate

Islamophobia and the American struggle to overcome 9/11

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Here I discuss the fallacies and dangers of Islamophobia in the context of recent statistics and the lens of history. I also present the argument that groups like ISIS are not Muslim, with support from several passages of the Quran.

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The thirteenth anniversary of the September 11th attacks has certainly been an unlucky one. The Islamic extremist group ISIS controls a portion of Syria and Iraq the size of Pennsylvania. A coalition is forming to counter ISIS, which is estimated to be 31,500 fighters strong. Of those fighters, 15,000 are not native to the region.

The world reluctantly witnessed the videos that captured the beheadings of three innocent westerners. An uncountable number of local Syrians and Iraqis have also been beheaded, executed, or crucified. More than three million refugees have fled their homes to escape the same fate. Meanwhile, Boko Haram continues to ravage Nigeria, abduct young girls, burn schools, and bomb civilians. Al Qaeda is trying to stay relevant by boasting a new syndicate in the Indian Subcontinent.

The resurgence of such groups continues to fuel worldwide Islamophobia. The fears are unjustified, but the distrust, prejudice, intolerance, and discrimination that Muslims endure are no less real. It falsely condones extreme law-enforcement measures against Muslim Americans, such as the recently disbanded NYPD mass-surveillance program. Despite the rightful termination of that program, a poll this year found that 42% of Americans still support the profiling of Muslims, solely on the grounds of their Islamic faith. This policy is also supported by 58% of New Yorkers, according to a similar poll in 2011. A 2010 survey showed that only 35% of Americans had positive feelings towards Muslims; this year, it has dropped to 27%.

This is surprising when one separates the facts from the fears. A Gallup poll in 2010 confirmed that Muslim Americans are the least likely to justify the killing of innocent civilians by the military (at a rate of 78%, compared to 33%-43% for Jews and Christians, and 56% for the non-religious). Muslims are also most opposed to the targeting of civilians by individuals and small groups (89% of Muslims opposed, with 71%-79% for Jews and Christians, and 76% for non-religious). I have yet to read about protesters opposing the erection of a chapel or synagogue near Ground Zero; they remain very vocal about prohibiting mosques.

It is this discrepancy between fear and fact that motivates me to write this piece. Wahhabi/Salifist groups like ISIS, Boko Haram, and Al Qaeda do not represent what true (and most) Muslims believe. In truth, they completely contradict what the Quran teaches. I will compare examples from the Quran with the characteristic tenets of ISIS to prove that these movements are not Muslim.

*All quotations are taken from The Message of the Qur'an, by Muhammad Asad (Kindle Edition). It is widely considered the finest English translation of the Quran available. Asad's interpretation and commentary best captures the "spirit of the Quran" while keeping parallel to the original Arabic. Although no translation can replace the original Arabic text, this version is valuable to first-time English readers and seasoned scholars alike.*

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First Tenet:

ISIS calls upon its members to kill any Muslim who does not practice its version of "True Islam."

Even if ISIS' version of Islam is *correct*, they would still be *wrong*. The Quran specifically states that all Muslims, even those who may not practice Islam perfectly, are worthy of salvation if they accept the word of Allah and His Messenger, and practice with their best intention. Such Muslims are not meant to be killed. Rather, they are to be guided:

THE BEDOUIN say, "We have attained to faith." Say [unto them, O Muhammad]: "You have not [yet] attained to faith; you should [rather] say, 'We have [outwardly] surrendered' – for [true] faith has not yet entered your hearts. But if you [truly] pay heed unto God and His Apostle, He will not let the least of your deeds go to waste: for, behold, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace." Quran 49:14

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### Second Tenet:

**ISIS calls upon its members convert infidels (Christians, Jews, and any "non-Muslim") by force.**

The Quran leaves us with a clear guideline about forced conversion to Islam:

**THERE SHALL BE no coercion in matters of faith. Distinct has now become the right way from [the way of] error: hence, he who rejects the powers of evil and believes in God has indeed taken hold of a support most unfailing, which shall never give way: for God is all-hearing, all-knowing. Quran 2:256**

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Third Tenet:

ISIS glorifies the killing of these infidels.

The Quran teaches that all humans are of the same family, despite our differences:

O men! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is all-knowing, all-aware. Quran 49:13

More specifically, the Quran teaches that the "People of the Book," (or rather, "People of the Previous Revelations"), are worthy of salvation if they believe in God, the Last Day, and are upright in their deeds:

VERILY, those who have attained to faith [in this divine writ], as well as those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Christians, and the Sabians – all who believe in God and the Last Day and do righteous deeds – shall have their reward with their Sustainer; and no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve. Quran 2:62

In fact, the Quran equates Allah with the God of Jews, Christians, and Sabians (a non-Muslim sect from Iraq having shared elements from Judaism, Christianity, and Zoroastrianism). Unless they are committing injustice, the Quran instructs Muslims to be accepting of them:

And do not argue with the followers of earlier revelation otherwise than in a most kindly manner – unless it be such of them as are bent on evildoing -and say: “We believe in that which has been bestowed from on high upon us, as well as that which has been bestowed upon you: for our God and your God is one and the same, and it is unto Him that We [all] surrender ourselves.” Quran 29:46

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#### **Fourth Tenet:**

### **ISIS declares that those who kill infidel women, children, and captives shall see glory in Heaven.**

The Quran explicitly forbids the execution of such innocents, reminding Muslims that Paradise is reserved for those who care for the needy, the orphan, and prisoner. The Heavenly rewards for the merciful are described in exacting detail:

**[The truly virtuous are] they...who give food – however great be their own want of it – unto the needy, and the orphan, and the captive, [saying, in their hearts,] “We feed you for the sake of God alone: we desire no recompense from you, nor thanks...**

**...And so, God will...bestow on them brightness and joy, and will reward them for all their patience in adversity with a garden [of bliss] and with [garments of] silk. In that [garden] they will on couches recline, and will know therein neither [burning] sun nor cold severe, since its [blissful] shades will come down low over them, and low will hang down its clusters of fruit, most easy to reach.**

**And they will be waited upon with vessels of silver and goblets that will [seem to] be crystal...but of silver – the measure whereof they alone will**

**determine. And in that [paradise] they will be given to drink of a cup flavoured with ginger, [derived from] a source [to be found] therein, whose name is “Seek Thy Way.”**

**And immortal youths will wait upon them: when thou seest them, thou wouldst deem them to be scattered pearls; and when thou seest [anything that is] there, thou wilt see [only] bliss and a realm transcendent.**

**Upon those [blessed] will be garments of green silk and brocade; and they will be adorned with bracelets of silver. And their Sustainer will give them to drink of a drink most pure. [And they will be told:] “Verily, all this is your reward, since your endeavour [in life] has met with [God’s] goodly acceptance!” Quran 76:7-22**

In doing so, the Quran echoes the revelations of the Torah. The law could not be explained in any clearer terms: to take the life of one innocent is the equivalent to killing all humankind:

**Because of this did We ordain unto the children of Israel that if anyone slays a human being – unless it be [in punishment] for murder or for spreading corruption on earth – it shall be as though he had slain all mankind; whereas, if anyone saves a life, it shall be as though he had saved the lives of all mankind. And, indeed, there came unto them Our apostles with all evidence of the truth: yet, behold, notwithstanding all this, many of them go on committing all manner of excesses on earth. Quran 5:32**

The Quran also demands Muslims to be kind, just, and show restraint to all, even those who persecute them:

**O YOU who have attained to faith! Be ever steadfast in your devotion to God, bearing witness to the truth in all equity; and never let hatred of anyone lead you into the sin of deviating from justice. Be just: this is closest to being God-conscious. And remain conscious of God: verily, God is aware of all that you do. Quran 5:8**

**[But] it may well be that God will bring about [mutual] affection between you [O believers] and some of those whom you [now] face as enemies: for God is all-powerful – and God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace. As for such [of the unbelievers] as do not fight against you on account of [your] faith, and neither drive you forth from your homelands, God does not forbid you to show them kindness and to behave towards them with full equity: for, verily, God loves those who act equitably. Quran 60:7-8**

All violence must be a last-resort act of self-defense; aggression in Islam is strictly forbidden. War is only excused to prevent oppression, and peace must resume when the enemy submits for peace:

**AND FIGHT in God's cause against those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression – for, verily, God does not love aggressors. And slay them wherever you may come upon them, and drive them away from wherever they drove you away – for oppression is even worse than killing. And fight not against them near the Inviolable House of Worship unless they fight against you there first; but if they fight against you, slay them: such shall be the recompense of those who deny the truth. But if they desist – behold, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace. Hence, fight against them until there is no more oppression and all worship is devoted to God alone; but if they desist, then all hostility shall cease, save against those who [willfully] do wrong. Quran 2:190-193**

Even if the enemy is a pagan sinner, if he seeks protection, Allah demands Muslims to grant it:

**And if any of those who ascribe divinity to aught beside God seeks thy protection, grant him protection, so that he might [be able to] hear the word of God [from thee]; and thereupon convey him to a place where he can feel secure: this, because they [may be] people who [sin only because they] do not know [the truth]. Quran 9:6**

Clearly, the “Islam” practiced by ISIS has no basis in the Quran. Instead, they fabricate the Quran and lie about Allah and His Messenger. The Quran is very clear about the fate of such sinners:

**And who could be more wicked than they who attribute their own lying inventions to God? On the Day of Judgment, such as] these shall be arraigned before their Sustainer, and those who are called upon to bear witness [against them] shall say, “It is they who uttered lies about their Sustainer!” Oh, verily, God's rejection is the due of all evildoers who turn others away from the path of God and try to make it appear crooked – since it is they, they who refuse to acknowledge the truth of the life to come!**

**Never can they elude [their final reckoning, even if they remain unscathed] on earth: never will they find anyone who could protect them from God. [In the life to come] double suffering will be imposed on them for having lost the ability to hear [the truth] and having failed to see [it]. It is they who have squandered their own selves – for [on the Day of Resurrection] all their false imagery will have forsaken them: truly it is they, they who in the life to come shall be the losers! Quran 11:18-22**

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Fifth Tenet:

ISIS encourages its members to cover their faces with black hoods when out in public, or when appearing in the media.

It seems that this is the only thing ISIS got right. The black hoods sported by ISIS offer a stunning prediction of their doom, when they are judged before God on the Last Day:

And [so,] on the Day of Resurrection thou wilt see all who invented lies about God [with] their faces darkened [by grief and ignominy]. Is not hell the [proper] abode for all who are given to false pride? Quran 39:60

ISIS shall see no glory – in neither this life, nor the next.

In conclusion, the line between “Muslim” and “Terrorist” is thick and impenetrable. It is a division that many in the West need to accept if humanity is to recover from the tragedies of the past. To ensure a peaceful tomorrow, we must build upon tolerance today.

If we fail to move down that path, I cannot help but recall a lesson from another one of history’s great tragedies. The ignorant fear and hatred of a single religious group is not new. We have witnessed the burning of forbidden texts before. We are familiar to the sound of nationalist rants that question patriotism and loyalty to the homeland. The practice of cursing with ethnic slurs was salvaged from another generation. The art of fueling hysteria with sensationalist journalism and propaganda was perfected decades ago. We have all seen this before, and we know the evil potential of fear, anger, and hate. We comprehend what this can lead to.

Shall we select the path that Germany chose...the same path that set the Holocaust in motion? Or, shall we walk the paths of civil liberty and religious freedom that was set down by our founding fathers? It is time for us to heal, not hate. The future of this country is in our hands.