

Is Islam Related to Peace?

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Abstract

The word peace means different things for different people. In this article, the word peace refers to the definition used by Martin Luther King Jr. In other words, peace has two parts: the lack of cruelty and, at the same time, the availability of fairness. Muslim population in the world is growing. Therefore, it is necessary to learn about Muslims and Islam from authentic resources and not just accept what the media present. This article presents how the media deals with terrorist acts, what general Muslims believe and how the Quran deals with violent actions.

Key words: Quran, peace, Islam, Muslims, media

Introduction

Religious groups have been accused of being against the U.S. for decades. Between 1920 and 1940, the U.S. was mainly under the auspices of Protestants who considered Roman Catholics to be anti-democratic and only loyal to the Vatican (Colson & Neuhaus, 1995). Jews have been singled out as being disloyal and it was not until the 1950s that they were accepted and included in American communities (Gritz, 2007). Now, it is Muslims' turn to face the same accusations.

For decades, political conflicts have been taking place in the Muslim world, generating news around the world about Muslims fighting non-Muslims. Media, mainly TV, is a business and as such, it strives to increase viewership. Just think for a minute: How many airplanes fly a day? Hundreds of thousands, but how many are reported to viewers? Only the ones with problems. Because of the sensational nature of news reporting, the media fails to introduce the entire picture of what is happening and just reporting problems and dramatic problems. For the most part, what the media presents, offers a negative understanding of Islam and Muslims. The problem is that for people, as listeners and viewers of such accounts, we forget that it is not accurate to use the actions of minorities or extremists to invoke or describe a religion or all followers of the religion.

When introducing any situation, generally people would have two approaches or reactions. The first group, the majority, is to accept and approve while the second is to think, research and ask questions. As for evaluating the question of whether Islam is a peaceful religion, the first group agrees and claims that there is no need to discuss the question, because Islam is a terrorist religion. For those who take this approach, it is easier to reject the entire religion than study, learn about, or even discuss Islam. The proof is what the media presents in current world events, such as suicide bombers in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Palestine; honor killings; the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center; the Charlie Hebdo attacks in France; and ISIS killing all who do not agree with them. These claimants conclude that Islam has little to do with peace and is a religion of violence. Supporters of this claim cite verses from the Qur'an, using them out of context. For example, the verse:

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. (2:191)

The seeker of knowledge would look at the verse, combine it with other verses as a whole and not pick and choose what suits their opinions. The verse 2:191 was not revealed by itself, it was revealed with 4 other verses together. The verse that comes exactly before it and is never introduced states: "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" (2:190). Reading the verses, leads to the understanding that fighting is used here in a defensive manner, as it says, "those who fight you." Yes, the Qur'an asks Muslims to fight, but that fight should occur in a specific context. No one person or group can say, I am going to fight and just do it. The verses (2:190–194) were revealed when the nonbelievers prevented the prophet

Mohammed and his companions from going to Mecca, the holy city of Islam, and wanted to fight them. Fighting is prohibited in Mecca. The verse is not saying Muslims must kill nonbelievers, but it is giving them permission to do so if they had to and there is no other way.

The verse after it says, “But if they desist—behold, God is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace” (2:192), which means, if they stopped fighting you, then you must stop and show forgiveness. If the nonbelievers are trying to stop you from getting to Mecca, and only if they attack you first, even then God is merciful, forgiveness is supreme, and it is better if you do not fight. In short, the verses are asking Muslims to defend themselves if they have to and there were no other options.

The second approach people use when they hear anything new to them is to reject the questioning of Islam because the very word *Islam* is derived from peace. The universal Islamic greeting is “*assalamualaikum*”—“May Allah bless you with peace.” Accordingly, the religion of peace, Islam, has no room for violence. Acts of terrorism have nothing to do with theology but everything to do with political ideology. Terrorism has nothing to do with spirituality, mercy, and love as the basis of religions. When an individual commits a crime, it is because of his sociopolitical agenda, not because of his religion. Such crimes reflect an ignorance of religion. One of the lead American terrorist experts, Robert Pape, conducted a study on 315 cases of suicide terrorism that occurred between 1980 and 2005. He wrote that “there is little connection between suicide terrorism in Islamic fundamentalism or any of the world’s religions” (Pape, 2006). He explained that most suicide terrorist attacks have a particular goal in common, which is to force contemporary democracies to remove their military forces from areas that the terrorists consider their homeland. Thus, the root of most terrorism is land, politics, nationalism, or power: It has nothing to do with faith. Religion is used as a cover only.

1.1. Examples of Terrorism Acts

If religion is to be blamed, then this judgment should be applied to all religions, not just Islam alone. Religions do not force themselves on people; it is people who read their holy book, adapt its teachings, and apply those teachings to their lives. The analysis of a holy book depends on the reader, not the book. The Qur’an and all holy texts have a variety of interpretations. Rather than asking whether a religion is one of peace, we should discuss religions from a theological point of view.

We should also develop a common yardstick by which to judge the events of history and reach mutual understanding. By examining historical facts, we can observe that acts of terrorism and violence have been performed in the name of all religions. In other words, it is the people who perform terrorists’ acts and claim that their religion is asking them to do these acts which are not true. It is people’s own interpretations and ways of thinking. For example, and if you think about it for a moment: Why did the First World War happen? How about the Second World War? Why were 20 million Aborigines killed in Australia in 1865(Scates,1989.)? Who dispatched nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan? Who killed 150 million Indigenous people in the United States and Latin America? Who brought 180 million African people as slaves, with nearly 21.5 % of them died in their way so they were thrown into the Atlantic Ocean (Klein, Haines & Shlomowitz, 2001)? Muslims were not responsible for any of these atrocities. Is it fair to blame Christianity, Judaism, or other religions for these killings? The media did blame individuals for these acts. Therefore, it is difficult to see how the media can condemn Islam as an inherently violent religion while blame individuals for other acts. The judgement should be applied for all. It is people, not the religion.

One can find many examples of religious acts of terrorism in recent history that have not been labeled as such. The media did not call Adolf Hitler a terrorist for the killing of at least 6 million Jews and 11 million others. They did not label the massacre of Palestinians in the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps in Lebanon by Maronite militias in 1982, in which 2,000 Palestinians were killed, as terrorism (Jewish Voice for Peace, 2015, para. 4). In 1994, about 600,000 people were massacred in Rwanda, a predominantly Roman Catholic state in east-central Africa (Lacey, 2004). The media did not present the killing of Muslims by Catholics or Protestants as terrorist attacks. They were only attacks.

In July 1995, according to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Orthodox Christian Serbians killed more than 7,000 Muslims in Bosnia and excluded more than 20,000 Muslims from their homes and lands. This mass murder—the worst Muslim massacre in Europe perpetrated by Christians since World War II—was referred to as *ethnic cleansing* rather than an act of Christian terrorism. U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke described the situation as “the greatest failure of the West since the 1930s” (The History Place, 1999, para. 15).

In 2002, Mitchell Trumble and three friends burned down a Sikh temple in Palermo, New York. The temple’s name was Gobind Sadan USA, and the attackers said in their defense that they thought it said, “Go bin Laden” (Cheney-Rice,

2015). Ten years later, in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, Wade Michael Page killed six people at a Sikh temple using a semiautomatic weapon. The Phineas Priesthood, a movement identified as Christian that hates all forms of liberal tendencies, homosexuality, and race mixing has launched numerous attacks that garner little media attention as acts of terrorism (Hoffberger & King, 2014). For example, in 1999, a security guard and Phineas Priesthood follower shot up a Jewish community center in Los Angeles.

Another example, Larry McQuilliams, known as a Phineas Priesthood high priest, fired more than 100 rounds at a police headquarters and another government building in Austin, Texas, in 2014 (Vertuno, 2014).

Even looking at Buddhism, which most people believe to be a relatively peaceful religion, one will find examples of violence. The Dhammapada, the collection of Buddha's sayings written centuries after his death, has no violence in it, but in 2013, Buddhist monks had a major role in initiating hatred and encouraging aggression toward Muslim minorities in Myanmar and Sri Lanka. They and their followers attacked mosques and burned more than 70 homes in Oakkan, north of Rangoon, after a Muslim girl riding her bike crashed into a monk. They claimed that killing Muslims was necessary to protect Buddhist culture (Alan Strathern, 2013, BBC News). This example is not meant to show that Buddhism is a violent religion, but rather, that some Buddhists have their own interpretations of their holy book's teachings. Even Buddhists may have a desire for violence (Strathern, 2013).

A final example of acts of terror rarely labeled as such are the violent attacks at abortion clinics, including murders, bombings, and acid attacks, perpetrated by those who have a conservative Christian religious agenda. Why do the media typically not refer to these attacks as Christian terrorism? Do these examples demonstrate that Christianity is a terrorist religion? No. They are Christians who happen to be terrorists. Yet Christians rarely must explain that Christianity is a peaceful religion every time a self-avowed Christian commits a terrorist act. The same courtesy should be extended to Muslims.

These examples present just a small sampling of religiously motivated killings. Rather than attempt to tally which country or culture has suffered more loss of life or which group might be responsible for more human deaths over time, a more equitable approach would be to acknowledge that anyone who spreads terror is a terrorist and to keep in mind that there is never any justification for terror attacks. We must strive for consistency in the application of labels and in our analysis of the causes and effects of violence.

1.2. Islamic Teachings

Although the Qur'an states that Islam is the final religion, it also instructs Muslims to accept other religions, as all are sent by the same God—Allah—as well as to accept and love all people to live in peace with them. In addition, the Qur'an clearly warns Muslims not to force anyone to convert to Islam, because each person has their own mind, freedom of choice, and accountability for their own actions. Multiplicity is rooted in Islam, but on occasion, some followers take verses from the Qur'an out of context to justify their own ideologies. Nevertheless, what most Muslims think and know is that terror and violence are not a part of Islam because it asks its followers to accept and live-in peace with other religions. As the Qur'an states, "There should be no coercion in the matter of faith." (2:256) Further,

God does not forbid you from showing kindness and dealing justly with those who have not fought you about religion and have not driven you out of your homes, that you should show them kindness and deal justly with them. God loves just dealers. (Qur'an 60:8)

Similarly, "Let not the hatred of others make you avoid justice. Be just: that is next to piety; and fear Allah, for Allah is well acquainted with all that you do" (Qur'an 5:8). Accepting other religions, cultures, and peoples is ingrained in Islamic teachings. Muslims and all people need to find their spiritual peace by understanding others.

History proves that early Muslims lived peacefully with Europeans. During the Ottoman Empire's Muslims coexisted with all other religions and faiths in their territory because the Qur'an states clearly, "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" (49:13). This is a directive to respect Christians, Jews, nonbelievers—all people.

For Muslims, the Qur'an is the word of Allah. Yet the Qur'an, like the Torah and the Bible, is not an easy text to read. The Qur'an, the same as the Torah and Bible have verses that deal with war as well as verses calling for peace. It has verses encouraging its followers to spread the word of God as well as verses forbidding Muslims to force people into Islam. The prophet Mohammed asked his people to stop fighting nonbelievers: "Art thou not aware of those who have been told, 'Curb your hands, (from unrighteous violence) and be constant in prayer, and render the purifying dues'?"

(Qur'an 4:77). The prophet's companions ceased fighting and all torture of nonbelievers. History does not record any incidents of Muslims fighting nonbelievers in Mecca. Allah says, "And (thus, O Prophet) We have sent thee as grace towards all the worlds" (Qur'an 21:107). Later, after the prophet's migration to Medina and when the nonbelievers broke their contracts with Muslims and started to attack Muslims' trades and families, the Muslims were allowed to fight back to defend themselves, their families, and their property.

I will conclude this section by stating that 113 chapters in the Qur'an out of 114 start with the following verse: "In the name of Allah the compassionate, the merciful" meaning this is the message of Islam and keep it in your minds in all your actions. This verse is always used by Muslims before starting any action as eating, drinking, entering the house, driving the car... and many more.

2. Getting Things Straight

Let us begin this section by defining the word *terrorism*. According to the Official website of the United States government, Terrorism 2002/2005, the U.S. Code of Federal Regulation defines terrorism as "the unlawful use of force and violence against persons or property to intimidate or coerce a government, the civilian population, or any segment thereof, in furtherance of political or social objectives" (28 Code of Federal Regulation, Section 0.85). Laura Beth Nielsen (2013), the director of legal studies at Northwestern University, stated that terrorism is any crime that makes people afraid to go to work (such as 9/11), send children to school (such as the Columbine High School massacre in 1999), or even take a Tylenol capsule (as with the tampering incident in Chicago in 1982). Thus, the word terrorism may refer to any crime that causes people to feel afraid. Note, however, that the Columbine shooting, and the Tylenol poisoning were not labeled as terrorist attacks. Nielsen concluded that there is no common definition of terrorism, and the FBI acknowledges this. Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Glenn Greenwald agrees with Nielsen, writing in 2013 that "the concept of terrorism is widely debated as there is no agreed upon definition of terrorism."

Let us look at some recent reports. According to the annual EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, 99.6% of terrorist attacks in Europe between 2008 and 2010 were perpetrated by non-Muslims (Danios, 2010). The worst terror attack in Europe took place in 2015, when 90 people were killed in a terror attack shooting at the Bataclan theater in France. According to ABC News, Breivik explained that the killing was necessary to save Europe from Islam. In the United States, an FBI study reported that between 1980 and 2005, 94% of terror attacks were carried out by non-Muslims (Obeidallah, 2015). In 2014, a study conducted by the Department of Sociology at the University of North Carolina stated that since 9/11, Muslims had killed 37 people in the U.S.; during the same period, 190,000 people were killed by non-Muslims (Kurzman, 2015). The Daily Beast wrote, "It's not your mistake if you do not know that most of the attacks (that) happen in the U.S. are done by non-Muslims, it's the media that promotes these ideas" (Obeidallah, 2015).

If we are to understand the causes of violence, then we must conduct a more dispassionate examination of history and avoid the urge to demonize Islam, Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, or any other religion. Instead, we must recognize that all religious traditions throughout history have had their share of violence committed by their followers according to individual interpretations of their holy books. Holy books are not the problem; the problem lies with those who interpret holy books in a way that justifies violence and bloodshed. The crusaders were Christians, the monks in Sri Lanka were Buddhist, and ISIS militants are Muslims. Yet the media often singles out Islam as a religion of terror, an assertion that is easier to make when Islam is presented as a religion of outsiders. We need to have clear standards in our minds and think carefully about what we hear, watch, and read. What the media, especially TV, is doing is giving us shaky standards of judgment. When someone makes fun of women, then it is a gender issue; when someone makes fun of Jews, then they are anti-Semitic; when you humiliate a Black person, then it is racism—but when you make fun of Islam and Muslims, then it is called freedom of speech, not Islamophobia. We cannot favor any religion over Islam because of the actions of an extremist group that calls themselves ISIS. I would like to quote what President Barack Obama said in his State of the Union speech in 2016, when he rhetorically asked why we are calling them ISIS: "We should call them by their real name: fanatics and killers" (Office of the Press Secretary, 2016).

Although it is certainly troubling to criticize any religious tradition, having grown up with a faith that respects all religions, I deem it necessary to dismiss the enduring myth that only Muslims commit violence. Under the Islamic Ottoman Empire, Christians, Jews, Muslims, believers, and nonbelievers lived in peace and harmony together. Where was the purported teaching of Islam and violence at that time? Does this mean that Muslims at that time did not have the same brand of Islam because they were living in peace with other religions? Muslims are proud to have the same version of Arabic Quran for over 1400 years with different translations in almost all languages. Certainly, this is not

how to evaluate or teach a religion. My hope as a human being, for the next generation's sake, is that people will understand each other and talk to each other rather than resorting to violence to settle differences.

Often, Muslims do not know how to respond when we hear about a new attack or mass killing. The first thing that comes to mind is, "Please, God, do not let the attacker have a Muslim name." Although it does not matter which religion an attacker claims—a criminal is a criminal—the media makes it seem as if an act is less criminal when it is committed by a non-Muslim. The situation with the Lufthansa German wings flight crash is a good example: When it first happened in March 2015, Muslims were hoping that the pilot was not a Muslim because they were concerned about the consequences.

It turned out that the pilot, who was not a Muslim, but was mentally ill and the killing of the 144 passengers and six crew members was not a terrorist attack. The killer had depression and suicidal tendencies, so it was not a terrorist act (BBC News, 2017, German wings crash: What happened in the final 30 minutes).

3. Dealing with Unawareness

One last important point that deserves attention here is how to deal with terrorist acts. Let us use the January 2015 attack on the Charlie Hebdo magazine headquarters in Paris as an example of how to deal with a situation as prescribed in the Qur'an. Seven people were killed at the French satirical magazine's headquarters by armed gunmen in response to cartoons of the prophet Mohammed that the publication had printed.

To understand this from the Muslim point of view, it is necessary to know that Muslims hold a great respect and love for all prophets. Muslims are not allowed to have any type of visual representation of any prophet, including the prophet Mohammed. They can read a physical description of the prophet Mohammed from the words of his companions, but they are not allowed to draw him, and certainly not in a derogatory or mocking fashion. Therefore, when Muslims saw the magazine's drawings, they were justifiably offended, insulted, and angry. The gunmen, however, were not justified in carrying out the killings. I am not familiar with any violent interpretations of the Qur'an and cannot find any justifications for the killings. There are countless stories in Sunna, the life, and teachings of the prophet Mohammed, of being ridiculed, abused, mocked, or attacked, and he consistently responded with patience and peace. The prophet used to offer a prayer for those who insult him, saying, "Please Allah forgive them as they do not know." One of his non-believer neighbors used to throw garbage in front of his house every day. When the prophet left his house one day and did not see the garbage, he knocked at his neighbor's door to ask if he was OK. The neighbor was shocked by the prophet's attitude and later converted to Islam. This is the teachings of the prophet of Islam. Thus, I cannot understand how some Muslims, or any other person can come up with reasoning to kill others.

Some might argue that the cartoons of the Prophet are freedom of speech and everyone is entitled to express their own opinions. Freedom of speech does not mean that you can insult or harm other people's feelings. If you were to go into a crowded theater and scream "Fire!" how would people react to your incitement? Freedom of speech without limits can have disastrous consequences. Pope Francis asserted that there should be limits to freedom of speech when he spoke about the Paris terror attacks, especially in regard to someone's faith (Winfield, 2015). According to Winfield, the pope explained, "If my good friend Dr. Gasparri says a curse word against my mother, he can expect a punch. ... It's normal. You cannot provoke. You cannot insult the faith of others. You cannot make fun of the faith of others." (Winfield, 2015, para 2)

Additionally, please keep in mind that Muslims condemned the Charlie Hebdo killings. Allah told Muslims in the Qur'an:

You shall most certainly be tried in your possessions and in your persons; and indeed, you shall hear many hurtful things from those to whom revelation was granted before your time, as well as from those who have come to ascribe divinity to other beings beside God. But if you remain patient in adversity and conscious of Him—this, behold, is something to set one's heart upon. (3:186)

Even though Muslims may be hurt by what they hear and see from nonbelievers, this verse instructs them how to react to these situations. Muslims are expected to be patient. The right step, mentioned in the Qur'an, is to ignore and try to talk to the people in control directly to try to solve the issue. Allah said that Muslims should not publicize evil or participate in spreading it, but rather, just leave it: "And (once again): Why do you not say, whenever you hear such (a rumor), It does not behoove us to speak of this, O Thou who are limitless in Thy glory: this is an awesome calumny" (Qur'an 24:16). The Qur'an explains the right process for Muslims to follow. In other words, Muslims do not have to look at these cartoons and can easily ignore the drawings.

At the beginning, when the prophet Mohammed started teaching people about Islam, those who did not believe in him called him a liar, a poet, and a magician; they ridiculed him. Yet he never killed any of his doubters or asked his followers to kill any of them. He explained to them that Allah created the world with many different features and colors, not merely black and white. Allah said, “And had thy Sustainer so willed, He could surely have made all mankind one single community: but (He willed it otherwise, and so) they continue to hold divergent views” (Qur’an 11:118). In other words, we are different; we cannot be one.

What the French magazine published was offensive, but it is not appropriate to seek revenge for the cartoon. Instead, Muslims must “Call thou (all mankind) unto thy Sustainer’s path with wisdom and goodly exhortation and argue with them in the kindest manner” (Qur’an 16:125).

Religious people are expected to be open-minded; Allah encourages discussion and asking questions. In the Qur’an, the prophet Ibrahim asked Allah for proof of His powers:

“O my Sustainer! Show me how Thou givest life unto the dead!” Said He: “Hast thou, then, no faith?” (Abraham) answered: “Yea, but (let me see it) so that my heart may be set fully at rest.” Said He: “Take, then, four birds and teach them to obey thee; then place them separately on every hill (around thee); then summon them: they will come flying to thee. And know that God is almighty, wise.” (2:260)

Allah was not angry with the prophet Ibrahim and did not punish him; rather, the opposite occurred. Allah provided the prophet Ibrahim with the evidence needed to teach people how to deal with each other. Allah wants Muslims to have open minds and hearts. It is not a Muslim’s job to convert others to Islam. Allah told the prophet, “It is not for thee (O Prophet) to make people follow the right path, since it is God (alone) who guides whom He wills” (Qur’an 2:272).

Further, Allah will judge all people—it is not people’s job to judge:

Verily, as for those who have attained to faith (in this divine writ), and those who follow the Jewish faith, and the Sabians, and the Christians, and the Magians, (on the one hand,) and those who are bent on ascribing divinity to aught but God, (on the other,) verily, God will decide between them on Resurrection Day: for, behold, God is witness unto everything. (Qur’an 22:17)

Another verse states:

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 Serbians—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. (Qur’an 2:62)

Muslims are to reevaluate themselves first, and then move to teach others about Islam. Allah said that people must support each other through good deeds, not through harm:

And never let your hatred of people who would bar you from the Inviolable House of Worship lead you into the sin of aggression: but rather help one another in furthering virtue and God-consciousness, and do not help one another in furthering evil and enmity; and remain conscious of God: for, behold, God is severe in retribution! (Qur’an 5:2)

I am perplexed by how the world has given so much attention to the Charlie Hebdo attacks in France, in which seven people were killed. Many world leaders attended the funerals for the victims. At the same time, dozens of Syrians are killed daily by Syrian security forces while the Syrian regime is not called a terrorist system, and Western media rarely covers the killings there.

Religions do not promote violence or terrorism; rather, it is people’s interpretations of religion that are to blame for violence. Instead of citing extremist acts to demonize any faith, it is better to apply a neutral standard in news coverage of violent acts and in the labels applied to the perpetrators of those acts. Moreover, we as people would do better still to keep in our minds and hearts a desire to end violence, to live in peace with each other, and to see others as human beings first and people of faith second.

Muslim countries, Islamic associations, and Muslim scholars condemn killing as decidedly un-Islamic behavior. Muslim voices from all over the world, including here in the United States, denounce extremist violence. One of many statements is the *fatwa*, or religious ruling, announced by the Islamic juristic body, the Fiqh Council of North America, which was published in *The Boston Globe* in 2010:

We are concerned and saddened by the recent wave of vitriolic anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic sentiment that is being expressed across our nation. We are even more concerned and saddened by threats that have been made against individual writers, cartoonists, and others by a minority of Muslims. We see these as a greater offense against Islam than any cartoon, Qur'an burning, or other speech could ever be deemed. (Singal, para. 3)

The Fiqh Council's standpoint confirms that any act of terrorism in any form, including targeting civilian life and property, is forbidden in Islam. Whether an act is perpetrated individually or in coordination with a group, it is prohibited. In fact, Muslims have a religious duty to protect civilians' lives. Another statement by the same council announced, "Islam strictly condemns religious extremism and the use of violence against innocent lives. There is no justification in Islam for extremism or terrorism" (Singal, para. 2). Yet, a viewing of Western news reports would make one believe that the Islamic world supports killing as a dictate of its religion.

A 2011 Gallup survey of people from different religious backgrounds, including nonbelievers, found that Muslims were the least likely group to approve of killing civilians, with only 11% believing that killing civilians might be justified for military reasons. About 58% of the Catholics and Protestants interviewed reported that killing civilians might be justified for military reasons, and 64% of Mormons shared that opinion. The poll further found that in general, about 70% of Americans do not justify attacks on civilians by individuals or small groups, whereas 89% of Muslim Americans oppose such attacks. All this is to say that Islam and Muslims are peaceful and loving.

To conclude this section, I would like to add that the stories mentioned in the Quran are told to teach Muslims and other readers. They are used as examples to be followed and to learn from them whatever applies to our lives. For example, the story of the prophet Noah mentioned that prophet Noah tried very hard to convince his son to believe in God and ride with him in the ship, but he did not. Prophet Noah just left him with no punishment or any other action. In the verses talking about the Prophet Ibrahim, it explained that his father was a disbeliever and was worshipping idols. The prophet Ibrahim did not do any negative re-action at all, all what he did is made a prayer for his father. Another story is of the prophet Lut whose own wife was a disbeliever in him and did not follow his teachings, so all what he did is left her and went out of town. Finally, the prophet's Mohammed's uncle was a disbeliever who used to advocate against him and torture him and, again, he did not kill him or re-act back to his behavior. All what he did is made a prayer for him and all who did not believe in him. So why people who pretend to are know religion killing each other?

4. Muslims in America

In this section, I will introduce some of the Muslim contributions and participations in U.S. society. As you might know, Islam is the second leading religion in the US. Muslims racially very diverse. "American Muslims are the only faith community surveyed with no majority race, with 25 percent black, 24 percent white, 18 percent East Asian, 18 percent Arab, 7 percent mixed race, and 5 percent Hispanic" (Mogahed, D & Chouhoud, Y., 2020). Muslim history in America goes back more than 400 years. There is evidence to suggest that Muslims were aboard Columbus's ships. In his 1983 book *Saga America*, Barry Fell wrote that Muslims were present in the United States in the early 17th century and founded schools in present-day Nevada, Colorado, New Mexico, and Indiana. Indeed, the clearest evidence is that Muslims came to the United States during the 17th century on slave ships from Africa. Scholars estimate that about one-third of the slaves were Muslims (Curiel, 2008). "Mohammed Alexander Russell Webb established a mosque in 1893 in New York City." (Abd-Allah (2006)

Muslims participate in all professions in the U.S., from doctors, lawyers, accountants, and academics to taxi drivers, homemakers, athletes, and entertainers. American Muslims are Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts as well as members of Kiwanis Clubs. They have established an array of institutions and actively participate in educational, charitable, health care, interfaith outreach, and other civic engagements. Muslims volunteer in American communities, serve on school boards, and are civil servants. A notable example is Kareem Rashad Sultan Khan, who received the Bronze Star and Purple Heart and died while serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom. Another example is Salman Hamdani, who was honored as one of the first responders on 9/11.

In 1992, Muslim students at the University of California, Los Angeles and Charles Drew University established a free health service through the University Muslim Medical Association in Los Angeles. In 1995 in Chicago, Muslim students and community leaders developed the Inner-City Muslim Action Network, a nonprofit organization that provides free health care and support services to the uninsured population of southwest Chicago. Two Muslim Americans living in Jackson, Mississippi—Emad al-Turk and Okolo Rashid—created the International Museum of Muslim Cultures, which details the contributions Muslims have made in different eras and places, such as Spain, Africa, and the United States (Curiel, 2008).

Like other religious communities, Muslims have their own centers of worship and mosques in almost every state. They have established public institutions such as the Islamic Society of North America, based in Indiana and serving about 300 mosques and Islamic centers, and the Council on American-Islamic Relations, which was founded in 1995 to provide an Islamic perspective on topics important to the American public.

Well-known American Muslims include religious leader Malcolm X, legendary boxer Muhammad Ali, successful TV personalities Fareed Zakaria and Dr. Oz, basketball player Shaquille O'Neal, rapper and music entrepreneur Lupe Fiasco, and former Miss USA Rima Fakih. Prominent business figures include the chief executive officer of Ethan Allen Interiors, Farooq Kathwari; health care leader Malik M. Hasan; and computer component manufacturing mogul Safi Qureshi. American Muslim political leaders include the first Muslim to be elected to the U.S. Congress, Rep. Keith Ellison (DFL-Minn.); Rep. André Carson (D-Ind.); and Mohammed Hameed Uddin, the former mayor of Teaneck, New Jersey. American Muslims vote as Democrats, Republicans, conservatives, liberals, and libertarians.

I would like to conclude by inviting people of all different religions to hold hands and start looking at each other as human beings, instead of using some extremists' religious violence and behaviors to demonize Muslims or Islam. In October 2020, Sakshi Venkatraman wrote "Overall, Muslims still face the highest rates of institutional and interpersonal religious discrimination in the country, with 44 percent of respondents reporting discrimination at airports, 33 percent when applying for jobs, and 31 percent in interactions with law enforcement." Therefore, it is very important to learn and communicate to live peacefully with each other. Islam is a peaceful religion, and the Quran orders its followers to treat all people with respect, love, and peace. If a Muslim does not like any action or was disrespected in any way, all s/he has to do is just leave or provide advise respectfully without harming or hurting the feelings of anyone. If Muslims behave differently, it is because of their own personality or opinions not because of the teachings of Islam.

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