

MORE ON THE RELIGION
of
WAR AND PEACE

Some of our faithful brought the following articles to my attention:

Silence from Muslim-Americans

By Peter Skerry and Gary Schmitt

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AMID THE uproar earlier this month over the assassination, of Salmaan Taseer, the secularist governor of the Pakistani province of Punjab, Muslim-American organizations have been largely silent. At a time when mainstream Muslim leaders have *been* trying to demonstrate their embrace of religious tolerance and pluralism to their fellow Americans, few have had a word to say about this People's Party leader whose denunciation of Pakistan's draconian blasphemy law led to his death at the hands of a Muslim zealot — a zealot who has since been celebrated by fundamentalists around the globe. The most notable silence is on the part of the Islamic Circle of North America. Operating in this country for about 40 years, this organization has ideological ties to the Jamaat-e-Islami, one of Pakistan's main Islamist political parties. The Jamaat explained away the assassination of Taseer on the grounds that it could have been avoided if the government had simply removed him from office. Though the Islamic Circle of North America does not necessarily take orders from its Pakistani parent, it appears unwilling to challenge the views of its overwhelmingly immigrant membership from Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh — many of whom seem to have little sympathy for the slain politician's secularist views.

Nor is this the first instance of such silence. Last May, when the Pakistani Taliban slaughtered 93 members of a persecuted Muslim sect, the Ahmadiyya, the Islamic Circle of North America held its annual convention in Hartford. Speakers continually reminded the several thousand attendees that "Islam is a religion of peace," yet one of us in attendance heard not a word about the killings all weekend. Other Muslim-American organizations, none of which has such direct and exclusive ties to Pakistan and the region, had even less excuse for their silence.

While Muslim-American leaders are constantly reminding their followers to exercise their rights as Americans, they also embrace the view that Muslims here are part of the worldwide community of fellow believers — the ummah. As such, these organizations are riven by numberless fissures that run along linguistic, ethnic, racial, and doctrinal lines. Their leaders are preoccupied

with not saying or doing anything that would cause such fissures to develop into major ruptures.

So while many Muslim-Americans may abhor what happened in Pakistan, others may agree with friends and relatives back home that Taseer's killing was justified, or at least to be tolerated. In between are Muslims who are conflicted about such events but who get little guidance from leaders who seem to lack either the wisdom or the courage to speak with moral clarity. Some of these leaders are not the pluralists they claim to be. Others have simply grown accustomed to avoiding the difficult choices facing them and instead, especially since 9/11, would rather mobilize and unify their fractious members by pointing to a common enemy — whether it is the FBI, the Patriot Act, or Islamophobes.

The situation is not hopeless, however. It is certainly noteworthy that all the leaders and organizations that have been silent about Taseer's assassination have been equally vocal and explicit in their denunciation of the slaughter of Coptic Christians in Egypt on Jan. 1. They clearly understood that the killing of Christians by Muslims is not something about which they could remain silent. Now these leaders must confront the reality that in contemporary America, genuine religious pluralism requires them to be just as outraged when Muslims kill Muslims.

In the name of Muslim unity, many Muslim-American leaders and organizations have been less than coherent when it comes to violent extremism. As a result, they have confused their members as to what true religious toleration and pluralism require, and consequently feed the very suspicions of those inclined to doubt the possibility of Muslims fully assimilating to the American way of life. This is a profound disservice to the many Muslim-Americans who are doing just that.

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Martyrdom muted: World shrugs as Christians persecuted

by Clifford D. May

Imagine if Muslims in Europe were being arrested for nothing more than peacefully practicing their religion. Imagine if Muslims in South America were being sentenced to death for "insulting" Jesus. Imagine if mosques were being bombed and burned by terrorists in a growing list of Christian-majority countries.

Now here's what you don't need to imagine because it is all too real: In recent days, Christian churches have been bombed in Egypt, Iraq, Nigeria and the Philippines. In Indonesia a mob of 1,000 Muslims burned down two Christian churches. In Iran, scores of Christians have been arrested. In Pakistan, a Christian woman received the death penalty for the "crime" of insulting Islam; the governor of Punjab promised to pardon her - and was then assassinated for the "crime" of blasphemy.

I could provide dozens of additional examples of the persecution and, in many cases, "cleansing" of Christians in what we have come to call the Muslim world. If the situation were reversed, if such a war were being waged against Muslims, it would be the top story in every newspaper, the most urgent item at the United Nations, the highest priority of all the big-league human rights groups.

What we have instead is denial.

Professor Janice Stein of the Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto insists there could be no connection among these dots. The assassination of Punjab Governor Salman Taseer, she said, should be viewed as the consequence of class conflict, not religious extremism.

The assailant who gunned down Taseer - Mumtaz Qadri, one of his own bodyguards - exalted afterward: "I have killed a blasphemer!" He did not say: "I have killed a member of the bourgeoisie!"

Stein also spoke of the "conflict" between Muslims and Christians in Egypt as though both were equally to blame when, in fact, it is clearly Egypt's ancient but diminishing Coptic community that is under siege with little means to defend itself, much less to wage a campaign of reciprocal oppression.

I remain convinced that most Muslims do not want to be at war with the West - with Christians, Jews, Hindus and others.

That leads to this question: How do moderate and tolerant Muslims fight the tyrants within their community? How do they avoid being killed if they dare speak up in defense of their own freedom and rights - much less in defense of religious minorities, ethnic minorities and women?

We cannot possibly come up with an adequate answer so long as we refuse to look reality in the eye. And the reality is this: Within the Muslim world today are regimes, movements and individuals convinced that their religion justifies - and benefits from - the most heinous atrocities. They are determined, ruthless and lethal - as Christians and other minorities across a broad swath of the world have been finding out.

If we in the West fail even to speak up for them, can we really expect moderate Muslims to do more?

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