

CHAPTER 9

The “Nice Islam” of the West

THE ATTACK AGAINST THE UNITED STATES on September 11, 2001 caused major damage to the image of Islam. Islam is now like a wounded lion trying to stay alive. Muslim leaders, particularly in the West, are focusing on damage control, trying to present a different image of Islam.

I frequently speak on university campuses, sometimes at the invitation of Christian groups and sometimes by my own initiative at Muslim meetings. Twice I have seen pamphlets titled “Some Misconceptions About Islam.” These pamphlets are always filled with verses from Mecca, presenting a version of Islam that sounds more like Christianity than Islam. Some who practice Islam sincerely believe these teachings are true. But well-educated Islamic leaders know that these teachings are part of a strategy to make Islam look good to Westerners.

In this chapter, I want to respond to these teachings. Not only do Muslims use them, but often Westerners pick them up and unwittingly perpetrate them as well.

WHAT IS A JUSTIFIED WAR?

While speaking at a university in the United States, I heard a familiar challenge. “Muhammad had to fight because he was defending his revelation and his people. His battles were

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justified.” Those who say Islam is a religion of peace often argue that Muslims are only permitted to fight a justified war.¹

The question of what makes a justified war made me think of the wars that Muhammad and his successors fought. How were they justified? I answered the student this way:

What did my country Egypt do to Muhammad that he came and ruined my country? Egypt never attacked Muslims, but the Islamic army came and killed more than four million Egyptians during the first century of Islam.²

Muslims did not stop after Egypt; they went south to Sudan and west to conquer all of North Africa. What did the countries of North Africa do to provoke Muhammad or his successors? Nothing.

What danger was Spain, Portugal and Southern Europe to Muhammad and his successors? Islam attacked them, too.

The Quran commands Muslims to go and rule the entire world and submit all mankind to the religion of Islam. That is the basis of war in Islam.

Let’s look at where people are getting the term “justified war.” It stems partly from Surah 17:33:

And do not kill anyone whose killing Allah has forbidden, except for a just cause. And whoever is killed wrongfully . . . We have given his heir the authority [to demand *Qisas*—Law of Equality in punishment—or to forgive, or to take *Diyah* (blood money)].

I would like to point out that this verse is not talking about war. It refers to a murder that is committed in society. The verse goes on to describe the rights of the victim’s family. It is part of a passage in the Quran that gave guidelines for daily life, such as honoring parents, giving to the poor, sexual morality and the treatment of orphans, among other things.

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Since this verse is not about war, it does not impact the many other verses in the Quran that speak of jihad.

ARE THEY LYING OR DREAMING?

Here’s another type of question I often hear. A man at one of my meetings was holding a newspaper. In it was a quote from the imam of a local mosque who had said that Islam is a religion of peace. “How can he say this?” the man asked.

I don’t know this imam personally, but his statement comes from one of two motives:

1. *Wishful thinking.* He really believes that Islam should be about peace, so he preaches the peaceful side of Islam. He sincerely believes he is practicing Islam, but peace is not the final revelation of Islam.
2. *Deception.* Some imams will try to make Islam look attractive to Westerners. In other words, they know the truth about Islam, but they disguise it in order to appeal to more people. The interesting thing is that in Islam a Muslim may *profess* to deny *nasikh* if doing so is for the purpose of protecting the image of Islam and furthering missionary activity. This is particularly acceptable if the Muslim is living as a minority in a non-Muslim country (such as the United States). But this denial must be in words only. In their hearts, Muslims must continue to accept *nasikh* and follow the full and final development of the Quranic revelation.

Either way, this imam is not telling the truth, and he is just adding to the confusion about Islam.

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TELLING HALF THE STORY

Now let's look at what some Western writers have been saying.

High schools and universities have been using a best-selling book titled *Islam: A Short History*. This book says, "Muhammad never asked Jews or Christians to accept Islam unless they particularly wished to do so, because they had received perfectly valid revelations of their own."³ As support, the author quoted Surah 29:46:

And argue not with the people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians), unless it be in (a way) that is better (with good words and in good manner, inviting them to Islamic Monotheism with His Verses), except with such of them as do wrong; and say (to them): "We believe in that which has been revealed to us and revealed to you; our *Ilah* (God) and your *Ilah* (God) is One (i.e. Allah), and to Him we have submitted (as Muslims)."

This verse sounds like tolerance embodied. The problem is that this verse is a Mecca revelation. As such it is canceled out by the verse of the sword, which is a Medina revelation (Surah 9:5).

When I read a statement that says, "Muhammad *never* asked Jews or Christians to accept Islam," I really wonder about the author's motives. Is this statement made out of a lack of understanding, or is it the result of pushing a specific agenda?

The books about Islam that are written in English seem designed to make Islam look nice. They are often written by Western scholars who quote other books written in English. These people have read about Islam, but they have not experienced it.

One of the most deceptive ways I have seen of presenting Islam is to leave out the Medina revelations altogether. That

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is the strategy taken by a book called *Approaching the Qur’an: The Early Revelations*.⁴

What is most disturbing is that this book was approved as mandatory reading for all freshman students entering the University of North Carolina for fall of 2002. No wonder Americans are so confused about what Islam really teaches!

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

You now know some of the basic facts about Islam. You are also equipped to deal with some of the confusing messages you have been hearing in the media and in popular books about Islam written in the English language.

You are probably now wondering about your friends, neighbors, coworkers and acquaintances who are Muslims. Do they really believe what I have just described? I will answer that question in the next chapter.