



WHERE ARE THE MODERATE MUSLIMS?

HUSSEIN ABOUBAKR

After every new Jihadist attack against the West, politicians reassure us that the atrocity does not represent the true nature of mainstream Islam. Of the 1.6 billion Muslims in the world, they constantly reassure us, the overwhelming majority are as law abiding as any members of any other monotheistic faith. Only a tiny fraction engage in terror. And Islam is a religion of peace. Furthermore, we are told, the great majority of Muslims hold moderate views.

But what does that mean? How moderate are moderate Muslims? Given the threat of radical Islam, it would seem to be a fair question. Let me start to answer it by telling you something of my own story.

I was raised in a middle class Muslim home in Cairo, Egypt. Growing up, I was told, among many other things, the following: That every day that passes on the Islamic nation without a caliphate is a sin. That the failures and miseries of the Muslim world started the moment we Muslims gave up conquests and wars against the infidels. That our prosperity depended on conquering new lands and converting new believers. That anyone who leaves the faith must die. And I also remember how my teachers and my mosque imams reacted to the news of 9/11 when it happened: joy.

My experience was typical, and there is data to prove it: According to the Pew Research Center, 88% of Muslims in Egypt, 62% in Pakistan, 86% in Jordan and 51% in Nigeria believe that any Muslim who chooses to leave Islam should be put to death. Similar, if not identical, numbers are in favor of stoning people who commit adultery, severely punishing those who criticize Muhammad or Islam, and chopping off hands for theft.

All of these practices are a part of the penal code of Islamic law, which is known as Sharia. And 84% of Muslims in South Asia, 77% in Southeast Asia, 74% in the Middle East and North Africa and 64% in Sub-Saharan Africa support Sharia as the law of the land. Less drastic, yet significant, percentages are to be found even among Muslim communities in the West.

So, too, most of the world's Muslims believe that any acts of violence against Israel, including suicide bombers in buses and restaurants, are justified. Now, does any of this sound moderate to you? Yet if anyone raises these inconvenient truths here in the West, he is sure to be called an Islamophobe, a hater of Islam. Again, my own story is instructive.

In February of 2015, I was yelled at, cursed at, and successfully prevented from speaking at Swarthmore College by students and others who did not agree to what I was saying. Some of them were Muslim women who fit the image of the unveiled, perfect English-speaking, moderate Muslim young woman. Other seeming "moderates" tried and failed to do the same

during my speech at Temple University the next day. Some of them, sadly, were students of journalism.

It is not Islamophobic to note the tragic fact that, at this time in history, the Muslim world is dominated by bad ideas and bad beliefs. That is why millions of so-called moderate Muslims do not rise up to denounce Islamist terror – because the word “moderate,” as we understand it, doesn’t really apply. If moderation means you tolerate freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of the press, women’s rights and gay rights, moderate Muslims are a distinct minority. Of course, they exist. Millions of them. But among believing Muslims, they do not represent anywhere near a critical mass.

The values of the West and the values of Islam as practiced in the Muslim worlds of the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia, and more and more in Europe, are not compatible. Western politicians can deny this, but this denial does not change the reality. It is these bad ideas and beliefs that provides the soil in which radical Islam grows. Ignoring this only prevents us from effectively fighting Islamist terror, and at the same time it hurts those heroic Muslims who really are moderate.

Until we begin to tell the truth about Islam – always in respectful language – the only solution to Islamist terror will never take place. That solution is Islam reforming itself.

I do believe that reform is possible. It can, of course, only be done from within Islam. The West can be a part of that reform, but only if it faces – and tells – the truth. The sooner it does so, the better – for all of us.

I’m Hussein Aboubakr for Prager University.