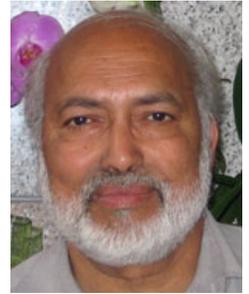


Redefining Jihad

ARABS are 15 to 18 percent of the 1.3 billion Muslims worldwide. Nevertheless, their religious interpretation of the Quran and Islamic literature goes unchallenged.

Conservative or conventional Arab scholars who lived nearly 1,000 years ago, such as Ibn Kathir and Ibn Taymiyyah, have more influence on present-day Muslim minds than progressive, pluralistic and interfaith-friendly Muslim scholars of later days.



For the more traditionalist scholars, the conquest and Islamization of Christian centers such as Damascus, Antioch, Jerusalem, Alexandria, and present-day Istanbul — the most important heartland of Orthodox Christianity — were fair game. Those happened when Muslim and Christian armies fought each other for centuries and the Kingdom's line of control shifted back and forth for nearly a millennium. Still, the Muslim world today is intellectually frozen as in the days when Muslims were inventors of scientific inventions and superpower of the world for centuries. They look to past glories, lament the loss of Spain, and the defeat of the Ottoman Sultanate. In those days the radical Muslim thought, and military Jihad fit snugly in the Muslim populace. How do we defeat the Muslim radical thinking now which still persists in some of us? We do it by redefining what is Jihad.

Lesser Jihad and Greater Jihad: Prophet Mohammed put Jihad in two categories: Lesser Jihad and Greater Jihad. The radical Islamists have distorted and extended Lesser Jihad to indiscriminate civilians and non-combatant killings. Combatants fight to settle disputes as a last resort, among warriors only, and kill and maim each other. They have pitted Muslims against the rest of the world. They divided the world into house of Islam (darul Islam) and house of war (darul harb).

Prophet Mohammed never glorified even **Lesser Jihad**, and he limited it strictly to self-defense in times of aggression where Muslims were driven out of their homes and tyranny was imposed on them. Moreover he advised his followers to get engaged in fighting the **Greater Jihad**, because it improves your daily lives spiritually and centers on God consciousness. One of his famous sayings is, "Ink of a scholar is holier (or better) than blood of a martyr." This means, give up aggressive warfare and the glorification of dying a martyr. Honor life, which is made sacred in the image of God. Do not take life except through due process and justice, because life is sacred. Preserve and cherish it — do not indiscriminately kill or destroy it. Solve your disputes through negotiation, and adopt peaceful means. It also says to me: Arm yourself with knowledge. Do not devise means of how to become a martyr, because modern warfare is not what Mohammed, Jesus, Buddha or Moses would have recommended if they were living today. We have to make aggressive wars "obsolete" in conflict resolution.

To me, this is what Greater Jihad should be today:

-Establish high class Arab and Muslim universities in the Muslim world with science and technology as center. -Make human rights also an integral part of education for all.

-Establish jobs for all Muslim citizens and become a part of global economy.

-Give up acquiring weapons of mass destruction.

-Adopt peaceful means of conflict resolution and teach global sustainability for all humanity.

-Encourage Muslim women to take a more dynamic role in improving Muslim societies.

Muslim women must come out and be more assertive in fighting the Greater Jihad that the Prophet preached.

-Teach interfaith friendly message of Islam at schools, colleges and universities in the Islamic world.

**Iftekhar Hai is the president of the United Muslims of America Interfaith Alliance.
Next week: Rev. Anthony McGuire**

Comments from Readers

Robert Dickson Crane

transcendentlaw@aol.com (Robert Crane (Islamic name Faruk ul Haq) Principal foreign policy adviser from 1963 to 1968 to President Nixon. On January 20, 1969, Nixon appointed him as Deputy Director of the National Security Council for Planning, and in September, 1981, President Ronald Reagan appointed him as U.S. Ambassador to the United Arab Emirates)

I define every religion as what it was before the process of corruption crept in, which is why I object to people talking about reforming Islam and "letting the true Islam speak up," as if there were a false Islam or a false Christianity or a false Judaism or a false Buddhism.

There are ignorant adherents of each religion, but their ignorance does not define the religion itself. And, of course, the ultimate denial of human rights would be for the ignorant in any religion to usurp the right to define any other religion.

All of which are the reasons Paine was drawn to Deism and to write *The Age of Reason* as an exploration into true spirituality.