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History 110-50 Holiday

Paper 2

The religion of Islam is often misunderstood and is wrongfully correlated with the actions of extremists, which has fueled islamophobia for hundreds of years. While it is the second largest religion in the world, the majority of westernized cultures are ignorant of the beliefs and practices of the culture. Both of the religions texts of Christianity, the Bible, and Judaism, the Torah, are confirmed by the Muslim holy text of the Quran. In essence, the Muslim faith does not reject the ideologies of these religions since they all believe in the one all-powerful God, there are small differences in the root of faith. Unfortunately, most of non-Muslims do not understand how intertwined their faiths are and instead have stereotyped the actions of some Muslims as the explanation of their entire faith. The attacks on September 11th, 2001 did not follow the Islamic belief listed in the Quran, neither does the practice of veiling women. The Quran is supposed to be the literal word of God delivered by the last prophet Muhammad in Arabic, and the message is lost in translation when taken in different languages where some interpretation is not the same. The false impression that the Islamic faith is an attack on other monothematic religions, has caused unnecessary strife and broke the ability to have a worldwide Ummah.

When Islam got its first followers, there was a level of peace and cooperation between the Muslims and the Jews in Medina, creating the *Ummah* or community. Muhammad migrated from Mecca to Medina to escape the hatred and unholy actions of the Quraysh in Mecca (50). AS he arrived, there were already Jewish tribes in the city, and Muhammad refused to align with any of them in order to be an unbiased third party and keep the peace between the tribes and the new Muslims (51). The cooperation between all the Medians no matter what religion, created a sanctuary in the city where everyone lived in unison. In the text, Reza Aslan comments that “all Muslims regard Medina as the model of Islam… Medina is what Islam was meant to be” (53). As the city became a representation of peace, Muhammad established a constitution and incorporated practices from the Jewish religion into the everyday lifestyle of all. Mecca would have been this universally accepting city, but when the Quraysh came to power and began to monopolize the economy and terrorize the people, no one felt safe to worship God. The city of Medina under Muhammad’s rule, allowed for anyone to feel accepted, because while you were automatically a part of the community fi you were born in, you could also join by simply saying “there is no god but God, and Muhammad is God’s messenger” (58). This level of acceptance for all people was unparalleled, and it set the standard for how communities should get along.

Sadly, all good things must eventually come to an end, and the dissemblance of the Ummah in Medina was the beginning of tensions between practices of different faiths. Aslan points out that the battle of the Uhud was the moment accredited to the destruction of the Ummah (90). The battle and the bloody carrying on for two years pushed Jewish tribes out of the oasis. The Qaynuqa tribe, who betrayed Muhammad by going to the Quraysh and telling them that Muhammad and his followers were coming, were the first to go. According to Arabic culture, “the men were to be killed, the women and children sold into slavery, and their property dispersed as bounty”, but Muhammad’s unwavering mercy convinced him to let them leave in peace and with most of their belongings (90). His benevolence was not seen through due to Sa’d ibn Mu’adh, the Shaykh of the Aws, becoming the mediator of the situation. Sa’d was a traditional Arab believer, and therefore he sentenced the Qaynuqa to the fundamental punishments aligned with the crime ending in a mass execution and dismemberment of the tribe. This historic massacre became a staple for scholars to call the nation of Islam “a violent and backward religion” and that “our consciousness as Christian and civilized men, that this God, or at least this aspect of Him, is not ours” (92). In response, to show that the Muslim culture is not based in savagery, Islamic intellectuals tried to prove that this execution was not true due to inconsistencies and the bias of Jewish stories since they had motive to make the Qaynuqa martyrs (93). Whether one believes that this event did or did not take place can be the defining difference as to whether they believe that the Muslim faith is rooted in violence.

In addition to not understanding the basis of Islam, there is also a misunderstanding as to the subsets of the religion including; Shiism, Sunni, and Sufi. After Muhammad’s death, there was conflict over who was next to be the Caliph and there were two schools of thought; that Muhammad named his son-in-law and cousin Ali the next ruler, and that the ruler just needed to be a part of Muhammad’s bloodline. The Sunni believed Ali was the rightful Caliph, and they had the majority of the Muslim’s had the same belief. They also believed that the Quran was the uncreated word of God, the Sunni were the orthodox Muslims and still carry the majority. On the other hand, the Shiites believed that anyone could be the Caliph so long as they were somehow a part of Muhammad’s bloodline. Shiites also believe in the religious authority of the Imam who created the Shayna, the five pillars to follow by. The separation of the Muslim faith is often unknown, but is important to understanding the religion.

Islam needs to be more understood by the world because it is clouded by the stereotypes of radicals who have taken advantage of the religion to impart personal beliefs. The ignorance by others has created a world in which society is prejudice of anyone who follows the Muslim faith. Muslims are persecuted at airports solely with the assumption that anyone following the faith is aligned with the views of those like Osama Bin Laden, and that is simply not true. Reza Aslan’s work No god but God goes in detail about the history of the faith up until now, and it is a crucial piece of work to lessen ignorance in the world.