

Islam and the Role of the Shepherd

Dr. Stephen M. Kirby

A good shepherd protects the flock and defends it from anything harmful or dangerous. The priest, as the shepherd making present Jesus the Good Shepherd, does this through the function of teaching as well as by preaching and catechizing.

Bishop Paul S. Loverde

I was recently advised of an article titled “Extremists don’t accurately represent the faith of Muslims” that appeared in the *Catholic Voice* on December 4, 2015. Looking online, I found that this article has appeared in a number of publications since the latter part of November under titles such as “Our Muslim Brothers and Sisters” and “Muslims, our brothers and sisters”

The article was written by Oblate Father Ron Rolheiser, a theologian, teacher, and president of the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio, Texas. The focus of the article was on getting Christians to understand that Islam was being misrepresented by *jihadist* groups like ISIS, and that “moderate Muslims” were not only being physically victimized by these *jihadist* groups, but these “moderate Muslims” were also being psychologically victimized by non-Muslims who were becoming hostile to Islam as a result of the *jihadists*’ activities.

Let’s consider some of the statements that Father Rolheiser made about Islam in his article.

Violence is not Inherent to Islam

Father Rolheiser mentioned that violence being done by “radical Islamic groups” was becoming more prevalent. He noted:

Popular opinion more and more blames the Muslim religion for that violence, suggesting there is something inherent in Islam that’s responsible for this kind of violence. That equation needs to be challenged, both in the name of truth and in the name of what’s best in us as Christians. First of all, it’s untrue.

So let’s examine his claim.

Islamic Doctrine is based on the commands of Allah in the Koran and the teachings and example of Allah’s Messenger Muhammad (the *Sunnah*). Here is some of what the verses in the Koran and the *Sunnah* have to say about violence:

1. *Jihad* (holy fighting) is “ordained” for Muslims, whether they like it or not (2:216).

2. Muslims are commanded to kill non-Muslims in general, and are allowed to kill non-Muslim women, children, and other non-combatants (9:5 and *Sunnah*).
3. Muslims are commanded to fight against Jews and Christians (9:29).
4. Muslims are commanded to be harsh toward non-Muslims (e.g. 9:14, 9:73, 9:123, 48:29, and 66:9), and can even severely punish and torture non-Muslim captives (8:57 and *Sunnah*).
5. Amputation is a punishment for theft (5:38 and *Sunnah*).
6. Adulterers should be stoned to death (*Sunnah*).
7. Apostates from Islam should be killed (4:89 and *Sunnah*).
8. Crucifixion is allowed (5:33).
9. Flogging is a legitimate punishment (24:2 and *Sunnah*).
10. A Muslim man can beat his wives (4:34 and *Sunnah*).
11. Muslims can take non-Muslim female captives as sex slaves (4:24 and *Sunnah*).
12. Non-Muslims can be beheaded (8:12, 47:4, and *Sunnah*).
13. Mutilation of non-Muslims is allowed (5:33, 8:12, and *Sunnah*).
14. Non-Muslims can be burned alive (*Sunnah*).
15. Non-Muslims who criticize Islam, Allah, and/or Muhammad can be killed (e.g. 5:33, 33:57, and *Sunnah*).

The only way to maintain that there is nothing inherently violent about Islam is to deny Islamic Doctrine. Nevertheless, Father Rolheiser wrote:

Any interpretation of Islam by a radicalized group that gives divine sanction to terrorist violence is false and belies Islam.

Untrue - *jihadist* groups who commit any of the above acts of violence have already been given divine sanction.

We Have the Same God

Father Rolheiser repeats the mantra that, "We have the same God." If this is so, what does Allah, the god of Islam, have to say about Jews and Christians? Consider the following:

1. Allah states that the only religion acceptable to him is Islam (e.g., 3:19 and 3:85). And Allah states that Islam is to be made superior over all other religions, even if the non-Muslims don't like it (e.g., 9:33, 48:28, and 61:9).
2. Allah states that he is angry with the Jews, and the Christians are misguided in their beliefs (1:7). In fact, Allah curses the Jews and Christians (9:30). He states that the Jews and Christians are among the worst of creatures who "will abide in the fire of Hell" (98:6), while Muslims are the best of creatures (3:110 and 98:7). He forbids Muslims from being friends with Jews and Christians (5:51). Instead, Allah commands Muslims to fight the Jews and Christians until those Jews and Christians pay the *jizyah* (protection tax), with willing submission and feeling themselves subdued (9:29).
3. Allah specifically states that the Jews are among the worst enemies of Islam (5:82).
4. Allah states that Christianity is a false religion. Allah says that Jesus was not crucified, but it only appeared so (4:157-158). Allah states that he took Jesus bodily into paradise and made one of Jesus' disciples look like Jesus; it was that disciple who was crucified. So Muslims who know their religion look at a crucifix or a painting of the Crucifixion and see an imposter hanging on the cross. And of course, if there was no Crucifixion, there was no Resurrection. So Islam teaches that Christianity is based on a fraud.
5. Allah also states that those who believe that Jesus is the Son of God commit the one unforgiveable sin in Islam, *Shirk* (e.g., 4:48 and 4:116). In fact, Allah curses Christians specifically for this belief (9:30) and says that those who so believe will go to Hell (e.g., 3:151 and 5:72-73).
6. And speaking of Hell, Father Rolheiser wrote about a Trappist monk who was killed by Islamic terrorists in Algeria in 1996. The monk had earlier written to his family that if he was to be killed by the terrorists, he had already forgiven them and he foresaw himself and his killers "in the same heaven, playing together under God's gaze." The reality is that Islamic doctrine says otherwise; Muhammad said that the sins of Muslims would be removed and placed on the backs of the Jews and Christians (*110 Ahadith Qudsi: Sayings of the Prophet Having Allahs Statements*, No. 8), Jews and Christians would actually take the place of Muslims in Hell (*Sahih Muslim*, No. 2767R1), and Jews and Christians who died without converting to Islam would go to Hell (*Sahih Muslim*, No. 153).

So if Jews, Christians and Muslims all have the same God, then Jews and Christians believe in and worship a God who hates and curses them, orders Muslims to fight them, and condemns them to Hell. And only Muslims will be playing together in Heaven.

Authentic, God-fearing Muslims are the First Victims of Jihadists

Father Rolheiser states that *jihadists* “have killed thousands more Muslims than they have killed Christians or persons of any other religion.” This is a common statement made by those who are trying to claim that the violence done by *jihadists* is not supported by Islamic Doctrine.

This claim is best addressed in a recent article by Raymond Ibrahim titled *But ISIS Kills More Muslims than Non-Muslims!* Ibrahim makes the following observations:

1. ISIS does not consider its victims to be Muslim. ISIS is a Sunni Muslim organization and views all non-Sunnis as false Muslims (and, on the other hand, Shia Muslims view all non-Shias as false Muslims).
2. If fellow Sunnis are accidentally killed by ISIS, those Sunni victims are considered martyrs, destined to enter Islam’s paradise.
3. Sunnis who are intentionally killed by ISIS are considered to be infidels and, therefore, to be non-Muslims.

Ibrahim aptly summed it up:

In short, to Sunni jihadis – not just ISIS, but al-Qaeda, Boko Haram, Hamas, et al – all non-Sunni peoples are infidels and thus free game. As for fellow Sunnis, if they die accidentally, they are martyrs...and if fellow Sunnis intentionally get in the way, they are denounced as infidels and killed accordingly.

Hitler was a Christian?

Father Rolheiser paraphrases a scholar who wrote that

we should always judge a religion by its best expressions, by its saints and graced history, rather than by its psychopaths and aberrations.

Father Rolheiser then proceeds to state, “Hitler was somehow a product of the Christian West, as was Mother Teresa.”

It is unfortunately common to hear attempts to excuse the violence done in the name of Islam by equating the actions and beliefs of Hitler with Christianity. But what is unanswered, even by Father Rolheiser, is where in the teachings of Jesus is there Christian doctrinal support for the Nazi concentration camps and the slaughter of millions of civilians? This question is not pursued by such folks because the answer undermines any attempt to link Hitler’s beliefs and actions with Christianity. The answer is simple: there is nothing in the teachings of Jesus to support such beliefs and actions.

Conclusion

In his role as a priest, Father Rolheiser is called upon to protect his flock from danger and harm. One of the ways of doing so is by teaching his flock about the sources of that danger and harm. To varying degrees Islam has been at war with non-Muslims since the 7th Century. This war is based on the commands of Allah and the teachings and example of Muhammad. The shepherd does his flock a great disservice by denying this, for the flock will perceive a sheep dog where they should recognize a wolf.

Dr. Stephen M. Kirby is the author of three books and numerous articles about Islam. His latest book is *Islam According to Muhammad, Not Your Neighbor*.