

Respect, Understand and Comprehend— The Correct Perspective towards Islam

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To many Americans, “Islam is evil”. 48% of Muslim Americans reported in a 2010 survey that they had been discriminated racially and religiously. (Ali *et al.*, *Fear, Inc.*) The discriminatory stereotype has been getting worse from the past to present. The level of respect in the US for Muslim societies consistently dropped from 44% in 2008 to 40% in 2011 according to research projects conducted by Gallup. (“Islamophobia”) In 2016, a Muslim couple was threatened by an armed white American for murdering their whole family due to their ethnicity. (Vlsser, “Man Allegedly”) This event is essentially emblematic of the Islamophobia issue in America. While many possess a biased opinion towards Muslims, it is inaccurate and unjust to label a religion as bad. In fact, the disadvantageous treatment received by the Muslim could be attributed to two major reasons, which are the ongoing hatred of the Western people towards Islamic terrorism and their superficial understanding of the Qur’an. In order to prove the invalidity of the stereotypes, the following essay will compare the Qur’an with the Bible, which represents the dominant Christian religion,

and is a globally influential religion. By understanding both texts, it is hoped that the prejudices against Islam can be clarified and reviewed.

Before investigating why the bias against Muslim is invalid, it is crucial to first understand “Islamophobia” in America by analysing its origin. Islamophobia had already existed before the 9/11 Attack, but the term has been getting more notorious after the destructive act. (“Islamophobia”) The recent threats from the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), which represent an extreme expression of Islamism, have further strengthened the idea of Islamophobia in the hearts of Americans. According to Dr. Ashraf Ezzat, ISIS terrorists claimed themselves to be the true followers of Mohammed the Prophet: they are dedicated to Islam’s god “Allah” and their actions followed the holy writing *The Qur’an*. The claim has spread fear amongst Americans as they subconsciously connect terrorism with Islam. The hatred grows alongside their shallow understanding of the Qur’an, building the sense of fear. As a result, people lay the blame on the religion for being the culprit behind the craze.

As the Certified Instructor for The National Rifle Association of America and the Second Amendment Activist, Jan Morgan proposed much criticisms on the Qur’an. To begin with, Islam is accused of being an aggressive religion as it encourages believers to resort to violence when handling disbelievers. (“Proof that Islam”) Believing that disbelievers are ignorant, “disbelievers . . . are deaf, dumb, and blind, and they understand nothing”, (*Qur’an* 2:171) the Qur’an suggests that it is of little possibility to convince them to have faith in the religion. The Qur’an also warns the disbelievers to “beware of the Fire prepared for the disbelievers, whose fuel is men and stones.” (2:24) To put the idea to the extreme, the Qur’an asks the believers to “kill them whenever you encounter them, and drive

them out from where they drove you out.” (2:191) The idea of revenge also exists in the Qur’an, “If they do fight you, kill them—this is what such disbelievers deserve.” (2:192) From these sayings, many anti-Muslim Americans are then convinced that Islam is the religion promoting violence and rudeness.

Nevertheless, as many Americans lack a thorough understanding of the Qur’an, they indeed neglect some important principles behind. Instead of educating the disciples to take an active lead in starting wars, a critical condition in the Qur’an that the general public misses out is that only defensive wars should be fought. When analysing the above-mentioned quote about revenge, a strong sense of passivity can be observed from “if they fight you, kill them”. It reveals an important presupposition that only when disbelievers attack you can you fight back. The concept of self-defence can also be found in other quotes in the Qur’an, for example, “Fight in God’s cause against those who fight you, but do not overstep the limits: God does not love those who overstep the limits”; (2:190) and “If they cease hostilities, there can be no hostility, except towards aggressors.” (2:193) It implies that only a passive and defensive “just war” can be accepted. Thus, it is unfair for the Americans to accuse Islam as vicious and threatening by only referring to certain quotes, without clear interpretation of the underlying ethics. Thus, the stereotype is the result of the lack of precise reading, a wrong perception and misunderstanding.

In the contemporary world, where gender equality and feminism are widely promoted and advocated, Islam is also accused of disrespecting women. (Morgan, “Proof that Islam”) The Qur’an is blamed for underestimating women as it says “Call in two men If two men are not there, call one man and two women . . . , so that if one of the two

women should forget the other can remind her.” (2:282) It is suggested that women are regarded as the inferior and less intelligent gender when compared to men, as women are characterised as having poorer memory. By labelling women and doubting their abilities in general, the religion is questioned to be not appreciating the values of women.

However, it is unfair to criticise Islam only since Islam also respects the demands and rights of women in some ways, notwithstanding the similar perspectives on gender issues from both the Bible and the Qur’an. The Qur’an believes that “divorce can happen twice, and wives either be kept on in an acceptable manner or released in a good way.” (2:229) It reveals the Qur’an allows women to exercise their rights when unequal marriage happens upon them. This grants women freedom and authority to pursue their life as a human being but not a good. Even at times of separation, women should be treated well and no incidents of torture can be accepted. Instead, Bible treats marriage as an untangled lock, “Whosoever shall put away his wife, and marry another, committeth adultery against her. And if a woman shall put away her husband, and be married to another, she commits adultery.” (Mark 10:11–12) It shows that the women’s rights in marriage are not secured as they have no second chance in a marriage, binding them to their husbands. The Bible also repeatedly emphasises the importance of women purity, as shown from “. . . whose shall marry ther that is divorced committeth adultery” (Matt. 5:32) and “A widow, or a divorced women, or profane, or an harlot, these shall [the priest] not take: but he shall take a virgin of his people to wife.” (Lev. 21:14) It reveals that the Bible, especially chapters from the old testament, values women’s purity by virginity. Conversely, the Qur’an treats the same issue in a more humane way. “If any of you die and leave widows behind, the widows shall wait for

four months and ten days before remarrying. When they have completed this set time, you will not be blamed for anything they may reasonably choose to do with themselves . . .” (2:234) . Divorced women in the Qur’an are granted the ability to marry another man under the wills of God. While Morgan criticized the Qur’an to be not appreciating the values of women, it is very important for us to understand that both the Bible and Qur’an are ancient texts. As both ancient texts, the Bible and the Qur’an hold similar attitudes towards gender. It is therefore insubstantial to merely accuse Islam of being patriarchy just because of the initial hatred towards the religion.

Another point that is worth noticing is that both religions try to teach their disciples to be caring and loving to the underprivileged. As two different interpretations of the Mohammed, the religions coincidentally pursue kindness. The Qur’an promotes sharing between men, according to the sayings, “give charitably from the good things you have acquired . . .” (2:267) and “if the debtor is in difficulty, then delay things until matters become easier for him.” (2:280) Altruism and thoughtfulness are the ideal virtues upheld by the Muslims. The religion is composed of good mottos, which provide guidelines for its believers to follow. Same as the Qur’an, the Gospel of Mark also records scenes of Jesus helping the needy. “[T]hey went out and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them”. (Mark 6:12–13) Jesus also tries to ease the suffering of patients as Jesus uses his power to heal a deaf person in Mark 7:31–37. Jesus offers help to the ones in need, neglecting whether his effort can eventually be rewarded. Christianity encourages followers to learn from the selflessness and considerateness of Jesus. Jesus also takes care of the weak as he feeds the five thousand starving people with five loaves and two fish. (Mark

6:38). Both religions indeed consider helping each other as a valuable quality, and disciples should try to sacrifice for others, from “those who fight in the cause of God will be rewarded many times over.” (2:243) and “[w]ith the measure ye mee, it shall be measured to you: and unto you that hear shall more be given” (Mark 4:24). It is not difficult for disciples to understand the importance of sacrificing themselves for the greater good and the heaven, the afterlife of them. Both religions serve their community as the potion for being a good person. Loving each other is the common motto of both religions.

Summing up, the stereotype has exaggerated fear and hatred toward Islam, thus resulting in discrimination of Muslim in the American society. Regarding social aspect, it may be inevitable that cultural differences can hinder communication and interpersonal relationships. Yet, in terms of religion, the hostility created by the pure stereotype towards Islam is unreasonable and unjustified. In fact, ideas in Gospel of the Mark can be concluded into one simple sentence—To love your neighbour. By respecting, understanding and comprehending the religious texts of Islam, it is hoped that the anti-Muslim Americans can better take in the foreign religion and give more tolerance. As neuroscientist Abhijit Naskar said, “Don’t hate the Muslims or Islam. Hate if you must, the fundamentalists who consistently compel the human society to turn away from even the peace-loving Muslims.” (“Quotes about Islamophobia”) It is worth remembering that both the Bible and the Qur’an are texts that educate its disciples to love and to respect one another. Instead of casting the blame on the ideas of Islam, it is no exaggeration that the incomprehensive understanding of Qur’an and the deep-rooted hatred are the underlying reasons for the unfairness in the American society, which eventually threatens the well-being of

Muslim Americans and destroys social harmony. This phenomenon does not only emerge in America, but the misunderstanding has been spreading throughout other parts of the world, thus threatening the interests of mass disciples of the Muslim religion.

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Teacher’s comment:

Motivated by the harm prejudices directed against particular religious communities may cause, Leung offers a careful analysis to show that these prejudices are groundless. He does so by first reflecting on how the prejudices may arise out of a partial reading of religious teachings, and then, by engaging closely with the traditions of Christianity and Islam to reveal more complex and nuanced problems. With the inquiry, Leung demonstrates the possibility of forging inter-faith dialogues, and how purposeful reading of ancient texts could bring insight to understanding the contemporary human condition. (Yeung Yang)