

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Seeking peace during a time of fear and confusion

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What a confusing time. Especially for Christians eagerly anticipating Christmas. In the middle of what is supposed to be a happy, cheerful season, we find that fear of terrorism is now higher than it has been since shortly after 9/11.

At a time when we are trying to live out the themes of "goodwill to all" and "peace on Earth," we keep hearing fear and hate, not just from bloggers and nasty comments online, but from candidates for our highest office.

We are told that banning a whole religion from entry into the United States will make us safer. Yet we know that vastly more people are killed each year by Americans who are not Muslims. In the United States, there have been 46 persons killed by

Muslim terrorists in the 14 years since 9/11, while there have been over



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200,000 murders during that same period.

It must also be a confusing time for Muslims in America who came here seeking to get away from the terror that a minority of their faith has perpetrated on other Muslims.

They had believed that in the United States, one is free to practice one's religion, only to find that something as simple as a scarf on the head can lead to derision, and in some cases, a violent response.

On average, American Muslims are better educated than the general public but they still feel treated as second-class. Many are doctors, scientists and

engineers contributing to our economy, health and way of life, but are told they are not welcome.

In a recent posting titled "Paris and Beyond: How Christians Should Respond," best-selling evangelical author Philip Yancey wrote: "Can we respect and dignify the majority of Muslims while simultaneously striving to root out the extremist minority? Can we resist the temptation toward vigilantism and prejudice against all Muslims? Can we not only accept them as neighbors but love them, as Jesus commanded? Can we live in a way that demonstrates to the Muslim world that "the Christian West" does not equal decadence, just as "the Muslim world" does not equal extremism?"

Can we maintain our cherished values of freedom and justice while under assault from forces

that undermine them?"

These are questions for all Americans. Can we acknowledge that the great majority of Muslims are not extremists, just as we would hope that the Muslim world would not view America only as a culture of pornography and violence as seen through the movies and news that appear in their media?

If it is safety that we seek, why would we demonize the vast majority of law-abiding, patriotic Muslims and further alienate them?

The Muslim community cooperates with federal authorities in pointing out potential terrorist plots. Over half of the thwarted plots have been because of tips from the law-abiding Muslim community. Pushing people away, who have provided such vital information to the authorities, does not make us safer. Even from a security

perspective, we should bring them closer to us and honor their contributions to our society as well as helping insure our safety.

Christians and Muslims represent over half of the world's population.

It is most unlikely that we can seek peace on Earth without a better understanding between these two religions.

The theologian, interfaith leader, and former Bishop of Sweden, Krister Stendahl, admonished us, "When trying to understand another religion you should ask the adherents

of that religion and not its enemies."

Let us not sink into the vicious demonizing that our faith traditions and our American heritage have warned against. Let us renew the affirmation of that common teaching that "whatever is hateful to you, do not do to others."

Or in other words, "Love God and love your neighbor."

By understanding and loving our neighbor we will enhance our security and seek that desired peace on Earth.

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