

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Responding to violence in a world plagued with conflict

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Once again, the world has been shocked to see terrorists killing innocent people, this time in France.

Once again, questions are raised about why Muslims don't condemn these killings. Once again, the concern is raised that this only will increase Islamophobia.

Let's review some of the facts regarding these issues. First, it is important to emphasize that the terrorists do not represent Islam. They misuse the religion of Islam just as others have misused religion for violent and immoral purposes. It is also the case that the vast majority of the innocent victims of such terrorists' acts

are Muslims. Over 17,000 civilians were killed in Iraq alone last year, in part because of the Islamic State (commonly called ISIS) activity there. Shi'a and Sunni mosques have been destroyed and children forced into becoming soldiers or taken as sex slaves. It is also the case that the vast majority of Muslims condemn such acts of violence and are as opposed to ISIS as anyone else. They want no part of living in a violent dictatorship as represented by this rogue organization.

The brother of Ahmed Merabet, the police officer who



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was gunned down in the Paris Charlie Hebdo attack, called such barbarity the act of "false Muslims." He said of his brother that he was proud to be Muslim and "proud to represent the police and of defending the values of the Republic — liberty, equality, fraternity."

In the Western World, we hear a lot about the non-Muslims being killed, but very little about the thousands of Muslims dying in this savage conflict by the hands of demagogues who would kill anyone with whom they disagree.

Why don't Muslims condemn such brutal acts? They do.

There are literally thousands of cases where clerics, scholars, political leaders and others have condemned these acts of terror,

but it is not considered news.

You seldom read that an airplane landed safely at our airport or that someone did a kind deed. Condemnations of the recent attack in France, however, have been reported from leaders of many Muslim countries, including, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia, Iraq, Turkey and Palestine.

Will these acts of violence increase Islamophobia? It is certainly possible, especially in France where the far-right forces have exploited anti-Muslim tensions for populist political gain. One of the goals of the terrorist groups is to inflame anti-Muslim sentiment in the West since it feeds their own agenda of promoting conflict between their views and those of the rest of the world. In our own country,

we must be careful not to feed this conflict agenda. Even from a selfish viewpoint, it is in our best interest to encourage moderate and peaceful Islam and not give encouragement to those who would like to see our way of life as something to be destroyed.

In religious terms, we are to love our neighbor. And from a Christian perspective, we are challenged to even love the enemy.

How much more should we love the person who only looks like or worships like someone we consider an enemy, but who is in fact a fellow spiritual pilgrim of deep faith.

Let us not promote hate and division, but find ways to encourage love and peace.

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