

DAILY NEWS

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How Interfaith Solidarity Can Help Defeat the Evil of Terrorism

By Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf

Another terrorist outrage has rocked the United States, this time New York City. American Muslims denounced the attack. The international press registered their distress.

And headlines, like this one in England's Independent, state the obvious: "New York Suspect's Muslim Neighbors Express Their Disgust: 'We Have Nothing To Do With This Guy.'"

Of course they don't. Nor has genuine Islam anything to do with Sayfullo Saipov's terrorist ideology. God proclaims to Muslims, "I have made you a moderate people (ummatan wasatan)" (Quran 2:143). The Prophet himself warns against extremist religiosity. But is anyone who needs to hear this listening?

All Muslims need to know, but especially those tempted by terrorism, that America is already a deeply religious country in ways that Islam unequivocally affirms.

America has its own Muslim-friendly answer to terrorist violence. It's to see the world from God's perspective. That's a move that beats terrorist ideology at its own game. It outdoes all false religiosity. But to convince the potential terrorist of that, all Americans need to remember God's perspective.

Whether we're religious or not, God's lookout places us high above the fray. We'd be like the astronauts who take the earth in whole from their orbit above. Viewed from space, the Earth is one. So are its inhabitants.

America forgets that its founding documents and national motto position us at God's perspective. For Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence, the rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness rest on "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God." Our national motto declares, "In God We Trust."

That motto shows on our currency and in our courts. American law has religious ground. The memory of that raises us up to God's perspective.

The Supreme Court reminds us. On a frieze decorating an interior wall, celebrating the great-law givers of the world, both Moshe (Moses) and Muhammad appear in sequence with John Marshall, the fourth chief justice of the Supreme Court. Religious law precedes and grounds secular law.

American Muslims and Jews know this better than anyone. For Muslims and Jews observe religions of law. When they refuse to murder or steal, they obey Muslim and Jewish law as much as American law.

Both Muslim and Jewish law carry an idea of natural religion. Natural religion is what Jefferson had in mind when he cited "the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God." This is religion that nature teaches. It precedes Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It's the undergarment of those fully clothed religions.

Single words in Hebrew and Arabic make the point that law is religion: *din* in Arabic and *dat* in Hebrew do double duty for both law and religion. The words work this way because the justice of divine law is merciful. Justice without mercy is unjust. Justice is a function of love.

No one taught that better than Jesus of Nazareth. Jews and Muslims agree with him when he instructs his disciples to love God with all their heart and their neighbor as themselves (Luke 10:27). That is Jesus' precis of the law. Jews and Muslims help their Christian friends remember that Jesus promotes the same law Moshe brought (Matthew 5:17). But there's a law that precedes Moshe's.

For Jews, the law that precedes revealed law is Noachide law; for Muslims, it's din al-fitrah — the law/religion of divine nature. Muslims and Jews together believe that these "natural religions" embrace everyone. Jefferson thought so too.

What do they teach? That life and dignity are paramount; that freedom of thought and religion are guaranteed; that family and property are protected.

Americans need reminding that a natural religious law grounds our Republic. That fact should stop terrorists in their tracks. "One Nation Under God" is not an empty phrase.

Taken to heart, it elevates us to that place of God above us. We look down upon our violent aggressions with regret. The distance from our neighbor shrinks. We've opened to a love we didn't know we could feel.

Link: <http://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/interfaith-solidarity-defeat-evil-terrorism-article-1.3617670>