

In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful

...if any one slew a person-unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land- it would be as if he slew all human beings: and if any one saved a life, it would be as if he saved all human beings...
(Qur'an, 5: 32)

...but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere, who say, when afflicted by calamity: "To God we belong, and to Him is our return"
(Qur'an, 2: 155-156)

Americans woke up on September 11th, 2001 to tragic scenes that left them in a state of disbelief. And while the clouds of dust and smoke covered the sites of the attacks, there was another cloud of sadness engulfing the entire United States. Indeed, the impact reached far away, and people from every corner of the earth were with the Americans in their prayers and feelings. Many world leaders rushed to condemn the attacks and to pledge support. At least equally important are those unknown people who wanted to help in a practical way, such as the faculty and staff at Al-Quds University; they donated blood at Al-Maqasid Hospital in East Jerusalem for the sake of those who were injured. Other Palestinians showed their support in various other ways.

In addition, prominent Muslim scholars, throughout the Muslim world, condemned these terrorist attacks with the strongest words and without any reservations. Amongst those were Dr. Yusuf Al-Qaradawi, who is the scholar par excellence in the Muslim world and one of the most prominent leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood movement. Dr. Al-Qaradawi asked Muslims to donate blood and money for the sake of the victims. In addition, the Mufti of Saudi Arabia Sheikh Āl Al-Sheikh condemned the attack. In Egypt, Sheikh Tantawi of Al-Azhar University, the oldest and most prominent Islamic University in the world, joined the other Muslim scholars in their condemnation of these terrorist acts. Moreover, Sheikh Muhammad Hussein Fadlullah, the highest Shi`ite authority in Lebanon had the same position.

The list is very long and cannot be mentioned in its entirety here. Arabic newspapers are loaded with names of theologians, intellectuals and officials who were either interviewed or they took the initiative and wrote to these newspapers to express their views. Not even once, in all that I have read, was there any article that condoned what has befallen America or rather the world as a result of these tragic events. Yet, while all Muslim scholars condemned the terrorist attacks and conveyed their condolences, they all expressed hope for a fair American foreign policy, the lack of which might have been the motivation behind all that has happened.

One of the major issues where US foreign policy adversely affected the state of affairs is the Palestinian question. The Palestinian people, Christians and Muslims, continue to suffer from an assault on their lives and everything that rightly belongs to them. Fifty-three years of pain and misery could have been avoided had the foreign policy of the US been based on righteousness and not on interest. "Israel" is spoiled by the unconditional support it receives from the US. Spoiled enough to terrorize the Palestinian people with total disregard to international laws, agreements and norms. When combating terrorism, state terrorism should rank highest on the list.

A great number of Americans, including Jews, and many others around the world, despite the overwhelming tragic events, defended Islam and showed magnanimity by rendering support to their fellow Muslim citizens, including the much-appreciated visits to Mosques and Islamic centers. It is quite unfortunate though, that the presence of irresponsible mass media that reinforces stereotyping by invoking the religion of the attackers or suspects, a *false* connection is established between Islam and terrorism. This suspicious media coverage led to the transformation of pain into anger. Some people lost track of common sense, and instead of bringing those who stand behind these attacks to justice, a wave of hate crimes against Muslims began to unfold, not only in the US, but also throughout the world.

I spent more than six years in Boston, my second home, where I earned my MA and Ph.D. from Boston College. I know that the American people cherish freedom, equality and justice. Unfortunately, these are still rare commodities in many parts of the world. I do believe that to uproot the problem of terrorism, the world has to enjoy the same rights and privileges. We have missed a great opportunity at the turn of the new millennium, to correct some of the injustices, by refusing to accept the Pope's call to cancel the debt of the third world countries. Had this call been accepted, it would have been a step in the right direction towards opening a new chapter between the north and the south.

There is a great need to open our hearts for change and to turn to God for help and guidance. We should reclaim our sense of direction. For, how could we cry, as an example, for the thousands of those who were killed in the attacks on the US and not cry for the millions of those who are killed every year in abortion clinics for cosmetic reasons? Let us read anew the story of the Good Samaritan. Let us rethink what turning the other cheek means in the aftermath of these heinous crimes? Let us reflect on the story of the children of Adam in the Qur'an, when one of them declared his intention to kill his brother, the other one responded by saying:

"If thou stretch thy hand against me, to slay me, it is not for me to stretch my hand to slay thee: for I do fear Allah, the Cherisher of the Worlds"
(Qur'an, 5: 28)

It is our duty to reconfirm the sanctity of human life regardless of ethnic or religious background. Let us join hands for the welfare of humanity at large. Humanity has the right to live in a world devoid of weapons of mass destruction. The last thing that the peoples of the earth need is war, unless it is waged against crime, poverty and diseases.

I pray to the Almighty God to help the bereaved families, for the full recovery of those who were injured, to heal the spiritual injuries and to guide us all to what is right.

Dr. Mustafa Abu Sway

Director,

Islamic Research Center / Al-Quds University

(P.S. Article was circulated by the Catholic Theological Union of Chicago)