

Duke Professor Omid Safi: Islam for 1,400 Years Has Had Clear Emphasis on “the Sanctity and Dignity of Human Life”

by Hugh Fitzgerald



Omid Safi

In late June, Javad Zarif, Iran’s foreign minister, announced by way of riposte to Donald Trump’s warnings to Iran not to renew its nuclear weapons program, that there was no need for such warnings, for Islam itself forbids such a program.

This same statement has been made several times in the past, ever since 2010, by the Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, who has claimed that nuclear weapons are “forbidden under Islamic law.” **Omid Safi, an apologist for Islam at Duke University,**

has explained, with his taqiyya at full throttle, that while “the Koran was revealed in the 7th century, there were no nuclear weapons in the world. The Koran, Bible and Torah don’t say anything about nuclear weaponry, chemical weaponry or biological weaponry. **What the Koran has, and what the Islamic tradition has had over the last 1,400 years is a clear emphasis on what it calls the sanctity and the dignity of human life.**”

Is that what comes to mind when you think of the last 1,400 years of Islamic conquest and subjugation of many lands and many peoples – “the sanctity and dignity of human life”? Think of Muhammad himself, wishing aloud that someone would rid him of those who had criticized or mocked him – Asma bint Marwan, Abu ‘Afak, and Ka’b bin al-Ashraf – and his loyal followers needed no further prompting; all three were murdered by different followers of Muhammad eager to please. Muhammad also ordered the torture of Kinana of Khaybar, to force him to reveal where the treasure of the Jews in that oasis had been hidden, and then, once Kinana had done so, Muhammad ordered that he was to be killed. He apparently forgot all about “the sanctity and dignity of human life.” Muhammad himself took enthusiastic part in killing between 600-900 bound prisoners of the Banu Qurayza, though he might have let them live since they were no longer a threat; again, he appears to have overlooked the “sanctity and dignity of human life” in Islam.

The Muslims who conquered India were certainly not observing the “sanctity and dignity of human life” when, long after the Hindus had been subjugated, the Muslim conquerors continued to kill staggering numbers of them, estimated by the historian K. S.Lal at 70-80 million over several hundred years of Mughal rule. Hindus were the main, but not the only victims of Muslim aggression. Under the Muslim so many of India’s Buddhists were killed or fled that the faith virtually ceased to exist in the land of its birth. Two-thirds of the Buddhists in Bangladesh survive in one tiny enclave, in the Chittagong Hills tract

in present-day Bangladesh; Buddhists make up less than 1% of the country's population.

Nor do the the wars relentlessly carried out by Muslims in the Middle East and North Africa, where Christians – Nestorians, Copts, Catholics – continued to be killed long after their lands had been conquered, demonstrate that respect in Islam for – according to Omid Shafi – the “sanctity and dignity of human life.” They were killed because they were non-Muslims, Unbelievers, kuffar, and that was all the justification that was needed.

The vast Arab slave trade in black Africans hardly demonstrated an appreciation for the “sanctity and dignity of human life.” The main use of African slaves was as eunuchs, for harems, and thus it was that the Arabs primarily seized, in the bush, young – sometimes very young – black males, castrated them in situ, and brought those who survived the painful operation and the long march, chained together in a line (known as a slave coffle), to the slave markets of Islam, by land to Egypt or by dhow from East African ports to Arabia (Pemba and Zanzibar were entrepôts for slaves intended to be shipped off to the Sultan of Muscat and Oman, and then to other slave markets, including Baghdad and Istanbul. According to Jan Hogedoorn, author of *The Hideous Trade*, an economic study of the Arab slave trade in Africa, the mortality rate for the black African boys who had been castrated was about 90% – that is, only 10% survived – and the millions seized by the Arabs far exceeded the numbers that were bought by Europeans for the Atlantic Slave Trade.

The murderous behavior of Muslims during the past 1,400 years finds its explanation in the Qur'an itself. 109 Qur'anic verses command Muslims “to fight” and “to kill” and “to smite at the necks of” and “to strike terror in the hearts of” Infidels. Such commands leave little room for the “sanctity and dignity of human life.”

And over just the last few decades we have had a good look at Islam's supposed solicitousness, as the egregious Omid Safi puts it, for the "sanctity and dignity of human life." We saw it when the Muslim Arabs in Iraq mass-murdered 182,000 Kurds in Operation Anfal; when Saddam Hussein's Sunni Arabs, after the end of the Gulf War, suppressed the Shia uprising in southern Iraq. We saw in the Iran-Iraq War the Iraqis again use chemical weapons. In the Syrian civil war, Iran was the great ally of Bashar Assad, who repeatedly used chemical weapons on his own civilians. Saudi Arabia has been wantonly bombing Houthi civilians in Yemen for years; no sanctity, and no dignity, of human life has been in evidence.

With Saddam Hussein removed from Iraq, Iran is now the cruelest of all the regimes in Muslim lands. The shrieks of the tortured in Teheran's Evin Prison, the piles of the executed in the prison yards, the bodies of homosexuals hanging from cranes – this is the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Islamic Republic of Iran tells the world that it is ideologically opposed to acquiring nuclear weapons and seeks nuclear power only for civilian purposes. Is that why it built 20,000 centrifuges? Would the Israelis have risked the lives of their agents, who picked off Iranian nuclear scientists one by one, if those scientists had only been involved in peaceful uses of nuclear energy? Don't you think Mossad has better intelligence on Iran's nuclear program than anyone else?

And does it make sense that Iran would invest tens of billions of dollars purely in nuclear energy, when the country has 10% of the world's total proven petroleum reserves? At recent rates of production, Iran's oil reserves would last more than a century even if no new oil was found. As of this year, Iran has proven crude oil reserves of 155 billion barrels, both easy and cheap to recover. There must be some other reason for enriching all that uranium. What could it be?

Zarif pointed to the past use of nuclear weapons by the US, in

light of comments by Trump that he had called off a military strike on Iran because it would have killed 150 people.

“You were really worried about 150 people? How many people have you killed with a nuclear weapon? How many generations have you wiped out with these weapons?” Zarif said.

“It is us who, because of our religious views, will never pursue a nuclear weapon.”

Yes, how true. No Muslim country would ever “pursue a nuclear weapon.” Why then was Saddam Hussein attempting to acquire nuclear weapons through the guise of buying nuclear reactors for power generators? The only reason he did not succeed was that eight Israeli F-16s bombed Saddam’s Osirak Reactor to smithereens in 1980. Another Muslim leader who failed to realize that Islam prohibited the acquisition of nuclear weapons was Muammar Qaddafi. As soon as Qaddafi came to power in 1969, Libya began to pursue programs to develop or acquire weapons of mass destruction. Qaddafi abruptly stopped the program in late 2003, not because he had been reading the Qur’an more deeply and realized that the program violated Islam, but because by that time he had seen what the American military had done to Saddam in Iraq and to the Taliban in Afghanistan, and was not about to have them follow suit in Libya.

Finally, there is one country, full of Muslims, that is not only a nuclear power, but now has 180 nuclear warheads, nearly twice the number that Israel possesses. Apparently Pakistan’s rulers never got the Iranian memo about Islam’s opposition to nuclear weapons.

“War is deceit,” said Muhammad, the Perfect Man and Model of Conduct, in a famous hadith. And when it comes to Iran’s nuclear program, we need only add, by way of a coda to the pronouncements of Omid Safi, Javed Zarif, and Ayatollah Khomeini, “and how.”

First published in