

In Tyler, Texas, Dispelling “Myths” About Islam

by Hugh Fitzgerald



One more Open-Mosque Ask-Muslims-Anything Night, this time in Tyler, Texas. The story is [here](#):

People who don't believe Jesus was a prophet cannot be Muslims. About one-third of Africans brought to the United States as slaves were believed to be Muslim. And Muslims don't consider Christians infidels.

So Christians are to be impressed that Muslims consider Jesus to be a prophet; he's one of 124,000 prophets in Islam, albeit the most revered after Muhammad himself. Mention of Jesus in this way is supposed to be evidence of how close Islam is to Christianity ("See? We revere Jesus, too.") But the main fact about Jesus for Christians is that he is the Son of God, which belief Muslims contemptuously deny. It might be more meaningful to rephrase that first sentence above as this: "People who believe Jesus is the Son of God can't be Muslims."

As for the second sentence, with its claim that "one-third" of slaves brought to America "were believed to be Muslim," there is not here, nor anywhere, evidence presented to support this claim, which is hedged here by the word "believed" and elsewhere by "thought to be" or "some think." Who are these unnamed people who "believe" or "claim" that one-third of the slaves were Muslims? Where has their "research" been peer-reviewed and published? Give us their names, their qualifications, and the papers they have written on the subject of Muslims in the American slave population, so we may read and judge their work for ourselves. Have they somehow been able to collect data on the religious beliefs of slaves that has escaped everyone else? The Africans whom European slavers bought on the coast of West Africa were mostly from areas where Islam had not yet fully penetrated. That doesn't mean that no Muslims were sold as slaves in the Atlantic slave trade, just that they must have been very few not to have been noticed. The slave traders did not record Muslims as being part of their human cargo. Furthermore, if one-third of all the slaves had been Muslims, why did the slave-owners themselves never comment on what would have been a hard-to-miss presence of these Muslims? Surely that would have been a fact worth recording.

There was a handful of Muslims among the slaves, and the same half-dozen Muslim names are always invoked, out of many millions. The slave traders and plantation owners and overseers didn't notice these Muslim slaves, nor did the non-Muslim slaves. All of them failed to mention these Muslim slaves in written records. I know of only one such report, about a certain Bilal Muhammad and the claim that he served dozens of Muslims as imam, on a plantation on Sapelo Island, Georgia. It should be noted that only in recent decades have such extravagant claims about Muslim slaves started to be made.

The third sentence claims that Muslims "do not consider

Christians to be infidels.” Not exactly. When in the Qur’an reference is made to Unbelievers, or infidels, this refers to all non-Muslims, including Christians and Jews. At the same time, Christians and Jews also have a special designation, Ahl al-Kitab, or People of the Book. Some Muslims suggest that this means they are not to be considered infidels, but another category altogether. Yet Muslims are commanded in 5:51 not to take Christians and Jews as friends, “for they are friends only with each other.” And in 98:6 they are told that all non-Muslims, without exception, should be considered “the most vile of created beings.” That certainly sounds like there is little difference between “Infidels” and “Christians and Jews.” The only difference would have been after conquest by Muslims. Christians and Jews, the People of the Book, then had the three options of death, conversion to Islam, or remaining alive as dhimmis, while other non-Muslims had to choose between death and conversion. Zoroastrians, and then some Hindus, would later be treated as dhimmis in order that the Jizyah might be exacted from them.

Those were some of the facts that members of the community made clear at the 16th annual open house of the East Texas Islamic Society, a mosque on Texas Highway 64 in Tyler where hundreds worship on Friday afternoons.

The roughly 200 guests were offered complimentary copies of the Quran, a book on the similarities between Christianity and Islam, and iftar, a ceremonial meal that Muslims eat after sundown to break their fast during Ramadan.

Much of the Qur’an is difficult to comprehend without a commentary. Who would know without a commentary that a “struggle on the path of Allah” can mean violent Jihad? I’d recommend to all those guests who came away with their “complimentary” Qur’ans to read the verses very s-l-o-w-l-y, and to accompany those readings with the explanatory line-by-line commentary to the Qur’an offered by Robert Spencer, at

his “Blogging the Qur’an” site. That will prevent many misunderstandings.

The free iftar dinner is always one of the enticements at these Open-Mosque nights. Food is a big part of all Muslim outreach events. It’s amazing how grateful and pleased people are to be given a free meal consisting of exotic dishes. The food, as intended, fosters feelings of camaraderie and good fellowship between Muslim hosts and non-Muslim guests. Are people so constituted that they can be swayed by such things? Yes, I’m afraid so.

Ramadan is the ninth month in the Muslim calendar, the month that Muhammad was shown the Qur’an by God, and Muslims observe it by fasting from sunrise to sunset. At the East Texas Islamic Society, observers broke their fasts at 8:17 p.m. with a prayer, followed by the community meal.

Like Christianity and Judaism, Islam is rooted in the story of Abraham. The religion believes that Abraham was the first prophet of God; that there were several other prophets, including Adam, Noah, Moses, Jesus and others; and that Muhammad was the final messenger of God’s law.

There are not just “several other prophets,” but according to a hadith, Muhammad said there were 124,000 prophets in Islam.

In Muhammad’s time, mosques were not just for Muslims to go and worship,” Anwar Khalifa, a member of the East Texas Islamic Society, told attendees. “They allowed Christians to come and hold their services in the mosques.

Anwar Khalifa deceptively describes Christians being allowed to pray in “mosques” in Muhammad’s time. What happened was not a routine practice but a single instance, when the Christians of Najran were invited by Muhammad to pray in a mosque, before engaging in a dialogue with him. Khalifa ought

to have said: "In one instance, Muhammad invited the Christians of Najran to pray in a mosque before meeting with him." It was not an invitation to all Christians, nor was it an invitation to pray in any other mosque, and at any time, but only once, in that particular mosque, an invitation extended by Muhammad only to the Christians from Najran, just before they were to meet with him. That puts quite a different slant on the occasion.

"We want to be following the tradition of Prophet Muhammad and have our place open for anyone who wants to use our mosque," Khalifa said. "So in that tradition, our place is open, and we have our open house here and we welcome people to come."

Yasmeen Khalifa, a student at the University of Texas at Tyler, told the crowd some basic facts about Islam and Muslims. She also defined terms that people might see misused in other places, like jihad or Sharia.

Yes, we are all aware just how often that word "jihad" is misused to refer to a struggle, ordinarily using violence, against non-Muslims. How wrong can you get? In reality, as Yasmeen Khalifa will be happy to explain, Jihad refers to that inner struggle to master yourself and your desires; it's a spiritual discipline and has nothing to do with violence against Unbelievers, as 109 verses in the Qur'an might possibly lead you to believe.

Islam is based on five pillars: professing the faith; praying five times a day; dedicating one-fortieth of your wealth to helping people in need; fasting from food, water and worldly pleasures during Ramadan; and making a pilgrimage to Mecca.

The Five Pillars of Islam are no cause for alarm, but there are two key points left out of this recital.

First, when Muslims say the five daily prayers, in those prayers, they are cursing the Infidels 17 times a day. Robert Spencer explains:

In the course of praying the requisite five prayers a day, an observant Muslim will recite the Fatihah, the first surah of the Qur'an and the most common prayer in Islam, seventeen times. The final two verses of the Fatihah ask Allah: "Show us the straight path, the path of those whom Thou hast favoured; not the (path) of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray." The traditional Islamic understanding of this is that the "straight path" is Islam – cf. Islamic apologist John Esposito's book Islam: The Straight Path. The path of those who have earned Allah's anger are the Jews, and those who have gone astray are the Christians.

Second, when Yasmeen Khalifa describes Zakat, or charitable giving, she describes it as "helping people in need." Sounds good, but it's not true. The Zakat should only be given to fellow Muslims. But it would not have sounded sufficiently generous for her to have said: "dedicating [2.5% of your wealth] to helping fellow Muslims in need."

Jihad means struggle, she said, and can mean small struggles like helping people who are oppressed, or the greatest struggle, trying to make yourself a better person every day.

That's it? Jihad can mean "small struggles like helping people who are oppressed"? Might that include sending money to Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah, to pay for weapons and fighters, as a way to help the poor Palestinians who are "oppressed" by the Zionists? I suspect that's what she has in mind, and hopes the unwary infidel guests will not understand. As for the greatest Jihad being that of "trying to make yourself a better person every day," that definition is undermined by the 109 Qur'anic verses that matter-of-factly command Jihad – Jihad not as daily self-improvement, but as violence, warfare,

terrorism.

Sharia includes tenets of Islam like taking care of your family and your parents, practicing business fairly, not lying and not committing adultery, she said. No country implements Sharia, or Islamic law, and Muslims are expected to follow the law of the land, she said.

“No country implements Sharia”? There are 15 Muslim states that implement important parts of the Sharia: Afghanistan, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, certain regions in Indonesia, the Maldives, Malaysia, Mauritania, Nigeria, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen.

Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran, and Sudan are the countries that are most Sharia-compliant, especially in family law, criminal law, and the laws pertaining to blasphemy and to apostasy. Yasmeen Khalifa dismisses Sharia as almost irrelevant; this is a dishonest attempt to allay the justified fears of non-Muslims. As for Muslims following “the law of the land,” she knows perfectly well that there are Sharia courts dispensing Muslim justice alongside the regular courts, in the U.K., but also in France, Germany, the Benelux countries, Denmark, and Sweden. Muslims may be “expected to follow the law of the land,” but their use of Sharia courts suggests they do not feel bound to do so.

Khalifa wears a type of head covering called a hijab, which covers the hair and then wraps around the neck. She said Muslim women wear different types of coverings, or none at all, based on their own personal preferences. In her family, she wears a hijab and her sister does not.

She says that wearing the hijab is purely a matter of a woman’s personal preference. That’s wildly misleading. Women who took off their hijabs in a group protest have been imprisoned in Iran. The lawyer who defended those women was

herself sentenced to 38 years in prison. No woman in Afghanistan would appear in public without her burqa; no woman in Saudi Arabia would dare to appear without her niqab. It's not only the state, represented by the religious police, that enforces the wearing of cover, but the male relatives, too, who make sure that no dishonor is brought to the family by the failure of a girl or woman to wear the appropriate cover. 91% of the world's honor killings are committed by Muslims. They are seldom, to only mildly, punished. For her failure to wear a hijab, Aqsa Parvez was strangled to death by her father and brother. There have been many others who have suffered the same fate in Muslim countries; her case is known because she was murdered in Mississauga, Ontario.

She said it's believed that 30 percent of enslaved Africans brought to the United States were Muslim. Jesus is equal to all other prophets, such as Adam or Moses, and Muslims believe he was the Messiah, but, unlike Christians, do not believe he was the son of God.

This '30 percent of slaves were Muslims' is a factoid plucked out of the ether. It is discussed in a paragraph above. There is no basis for this extravagant claim, and many reasons (see above) for dismissing it. As for Jesus, it is surprising that Ms. Khalifa passed up a chance to declare that Jesus is, after Muhammad, the most revered of the prophets. Jesus is referred to by name 25 times in the Qur'an. In at least one of those 25 times, he is called the "Messiah."

Forced marriages are not allowed, but consensual marriages have some defined characteristics. "With property rights, once a woman is married, what's hers is hers, but what's his is theirs, so that's kind of cool," Khalifa said. The crowd started applauding.

"Forced marriages are not allowed"? Tell that to the girls aged 10 to 13, who are married off to men 20, 30, 40 years

older, by their families in Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia. Aisha was six when she was forcibly betrothed to Muhammad; she was nine years old when Muhammad consummate his marriage to her. Muhammad, the Perfect Man, is to be emulated. Forced marriages, often to cousins, or to much older men, are to be found all over the Muslim lands. What can Yasmeen Khalifa possibly be thinking, other than "I can say anything, and these kaffirs will believe it."

The property picture is much less favorable to women than Yasmeen Khalifa would have you believe. The Muslim husband acts as the manager of his wife's property, for he is "superior" to her (4:34) in the relevant skills. If he dies, she is entitled only to 1/8 of the total property if there are children, and 1/4 if there are none. If she dies first, the surviving husband is entitled to 1/4 of the property if there are children, and 1/2 of the property if there are none. According to Islamic law, a daughter inherits only half that of a son. And if a Muslim wife wants a divorce, she has to return the bride-price, or *mahr*, to her husband. To say that "what's hers is hers, but what's his is theirs" is a travesty of Islamic family law.

Shamsa Ashraf, the principal of the society's Faith Academy, said she and her students have a day just like most elementary schools. There are assemblies, classes and the students take the same standardized tests that are given in Texas public schools.

Ashraf said children start out their lives as innocent people, and somewhere down the line many lose the tolerance, respect and love that they once had. She said that loss is learned, and it's important for schools to teach children children [sic – possibly "teach compassion to children" is meant]

"We need to make sure that when those children grow up to be teenagers and later on adults – if they have that same

attitude, those same attributes, that same behavior, we would have a better world," Ashraf said.

What causes little Muslim children to “lose the tolerance, respect, and love” – for whom? – they once had? Could it be their exposure to such Qur’anic verses as 5:51, where Muslims are instructed not to take Christians and Jews as friends? Or 98:6, where they are told that non-Muslims are the “most vile of created beings” while they learn, in 3:110, that as Muslims they are the “best of peoples”? Could it be all those verses that instruct them to “fight” and to “kill” and to “smite above the necks of” and to “strike terror in the hearts of” Unbelievers? Or are they affected by learning, when they start to read the hadith, that Muhammad himself boasted that “war is deceit” and that “I have been made victorious through terror”?

Shamsa Ashraf doesn’t say. Under the circumstances, can you blame her?

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