

Islam, Terrorism and Denial

My tweet simply said: "We know that most Muslims today are not terrorists. We also know that most terrorists today are Muslims."

I tweeted this out on Friday night in the midst of the terror attacks in France, and I didn't think it would be controversial at all. In fact, it seemed self-evident.

To my genuine surprise, the tweet generated a flood of negative responses. How dare I make such a statement!

But is it really debatable?

According to Middle Eastern scholar Daniel Pipes, since 9/11, there have been "27,000 attacks globally connected to Islam," many of which have involved Muslims killing Muslims. This number certainly dwarfs all other terrorist attacks worldwide by non-Islamic groups, reinforcing the simple message of my tweet.

Yet some called the tweet racist (I didn't know Islam was a race) while others challenged the factuality of my statement, as if there were more non-Muslim terrorists than Muslim terrorists.

When I asked for support of this claim, I was given responses including, "Westboro Baptist Church," despite the fact that, as bigoted as these people are, they don't murder people and they represent just a handful of individuals.

Another response was, "Timothy McVeigh," despite the fact that McVeigh was not a Christian acting on his faith, and even if he was, how many Timothy McVeighs have there been in the last 20 years?

And where, pray tell, are the Christian (or other religious) equivalents to ISIS, al-Qaida, the Taliban, Boko Haram, Al-

Shaabab, Hamas, Hezbollah and other Islamic terrorist groups? And where are the videos of Christian terrorists beheading their captives in Jesus' name? And how many Christian suicide bombers are blowing themselves up in churches? (On a tragically regular basis, Muslims are doing this in mosques among rival Islamic groups.)

According to analyst and researcher Daniel R. DePetrus, the five deadliest terror groups in the world are all Islamic. Is anyone surprised?

One Twitter follower who must not have been watching the news actually rebuked me for assuming the Paris attacks were related to Islam.

This is willful ignorance.

But worse than willful ignorance is outright denial, specifically, the claim that these terrorists are not really Muslims and that this is not really Islam, which is the position firmly embraced by President Obama and Hillary Clinton. (Note that French leaders were quick to attribute the attacks to "radical Islam," retaliating and cracking down accordingly.)

There are simply too many devout Muslims—including theologians and political leaders—who promote terrorism as a religious act to deny that this is Islamic. And these theologians and leaders can point to too many texts within the Quran and Islamic tradition, along with examples from the life of Muhammad, to say that this is not Islam.

The fact is that Muhammad was first a spiritual leader, then a political leader, then a military leader. To contrast the spirit of Christianity with that of Islam, remember that Jesus was crucified and ordered His followers not to fight back whereas Muhammad beheaded hundreds of captives.

I'm fully aware that the majority of Muslims are repulsed by

today's terrorism and that a large number of Islamic theologians and leaders say that these terrorists are misrepresenting their religion in the ugliest possible way.

In light of this, I always attribute these terrorist acts to "radical Islam" rather than to "Islam" in general.

That's why I also tweeted out on Friday night, "Let's pray for the millions of Muslims who are repulsed by these acts of terror in the name of their religion. May God open their hearts!"

Of course, others chastise me for referring to "radical Islam" rather than "Islam" in general, since, they assert, true Islam is violent Islam while non-violent Islam is not true Islam, but I believe this can be debated.

During my three years of studying classical Arabic in college and graduate school, I spent time with a number of very devout Muslims, sometimes reading Islamic texts with them, and to my knowledge, they would have been appalled by terrorist acts in the name of their faith, as would multiplied millions of their colleagues.

At the same time, it is undeniable that Islam has a violent history and that radical Muslims can point to authoritative texts and historic exemplars to justify their actions. And it is undeniable that there are multiplied millions of devout Muslims who are radical and who espouse violent Islam.

To deny this is to stick one's head in the sand and perhaps, one day in the future, to lose one's head.

In short, we can acknowledge that there are millions of peace-loving Muslims while at the same time confronting radical Islam—and I mean confronting it ideologically and by name, in the radicalized mosques and communities as well as on the battlefield.

To fail to do so, at this point in history, is inexcusable.