

Obama Says ISIL Does Not Speak for Islam—Is He Right?

Sunday night in a rare address from the Oval Office, President Obama spoke to the nation about the growing threat of terrorism from ISIL. Just a few months ago the President dismissed the group as a “JV squad.” Now, after attacks in Paris and here at home in California, they have earned a prime-time presidential address. That’s quite a feat and telling of the danger this group really poses.

ISIS has been misunderstood and underestimated thus far. Our government’s continued failure to accurately define and address this “JV squad” has cost lives. Not only here in the U.S. but in the Middle East where thousands have been slaughtered and millions displaced. Political correctness will not win this fight. If we cannot deal with the truth, we’ve already lost.

During the speech, the president once again tried to draw a distinction between ISIL and Islam saying, “ISIL does not speak for Islam. They are thugs and killers, part of a cult of death, and they account for a tiny fraction of more than a billion Muslims around the world.”

Is the president correct? Are they a perverse extreme of an otherwise peaceful religion?

ISIL (or the Islamic State as they call themselves) would most certainly disagree. They hold themselves to be purists who strictly observe the Quran and Hadith. Even their videos are carefully scripted to document how closely they follow the teachings of Muhammed. ISIS contends that it is the moderate Muslim who has perverted Islam.

Their goal is to call all Muslims back to true Islam and re-establish a single Islamic State in the Middle East. ISIS has

their Islamic text to support their cause. They are not misquoting the Quran, and their argument to Muslims is compelling. This is their appeal, and it is why they continue to find willing Muslims around the world to join their ranks. ISIL is unmistakably purely Muslim.

This past year, I've been honored to get to know Dr. Hormoz Shariat. He is the founder of Iran Alive Ministries. Dr. Shariat was born into a Muslim family in Iran. He came to the United States after the Islamic Revolution of 1979 and found Christ while he was in graduate school. He now operates a satellite network that beams the gospel into Iran and the Middle East. His ministry is a huge support to the underground church in Iran. I'm looking forward to sharing some of the amazing stories coming out of their ministry very soon.

Dr. Shariat understands Islam well and has seen firsthand the violence this religion can produce. This is how he answered the question, "Is ISIS/ISIL true Muslims?"

If we ask this question about Christianity, isn't it logical to say whoever most closely follows the teaching of Jesus and His example is the most true Christian? The definition of a good Christian is not subjective, but comes from solid criteria. Whichever people follow the example of their holy book and their leader, they are the better adherents to that faith.

This same criteria will tell us who is a good Muslim: the one who lives out the teaching of the Quran and follows the example of Muhammed more closely.

Using that objective criteria, we must conclude that the members of ISIS are very good Muslims. What they are doing is based on numerous Quranic verses and the practices of the Prophet Mohammad. Yes, indeed they are following Islam more closely than "moderate Muslims" who ignore those call-to-violence verses in the Quran, and downplay their own

historical record of what the Prophet Mohammad did.

ISIL is painting the picture for the world to see of what strict, radical adherence to Islam looks like. While they may represent a "tiny fraction," that minority has set the Middle East on fire and is growing with each passing day. ISIL is pure radical Islam and they are challenging all Muslims to take a hard look at their faith. For some, ISIL is a very attractive expression of Islam, but for millions of Muslims, it is unsettling. This presents a great opportunity that the church is best poised to answer.

Dr. Shariat said, "Many Muslims are taking up that challenge, looking at the Quran more objectively, and coming to the conclusion that the root of their problem is not ISIS but Islam itself."

Islam really is the problem and ISIL is yet another manifestation of that problem. There is no question that the religion provides a foundation for groups like ISIS, al-Qaida, Hamas, Hezbollah, Boko Haram and Al-shabaab to arise.

As these terror groups continue to expose Islam's violent roots, many Muslims are finding themselves at a crossroad. Most really are decent people who desperately want to connect with God. They are not the problem; their religion is.

This is where our prayers and missions outreaches are needed the most. We must intercede on behalf of the millions of Muslims who are seeking refuge both physically and spiritually from the damaging effects of the Islamic world. The world is watching the Middle East and concerned about a global conflict. The church should be watching the Middle East with an expectancy for a massive end-time harvest of Muslims.

The president said, "We cannot turn against one another by letting this fight be defined as a war between America and Islam."

He may not declare war with Islam, but we must. Not a war against the Muslim, but for the salvation of the Muslim. Our faith does not allow us to turn a blind eye to a billion people that Christ died to save. Islam is not only an enemy to us, but it is an enemy to the Muslim as well. It is a thief that kills, steals and destroys life from its followers. Fortunately, we know the One who offers life in all its fullness.

Church, stay alert, stay informed and stay on your knees!