

Pray for Freedom

Democracy is an obstacle to Islam. It will never bring cooperation from Muslim radicals.

This month, as Americans elect a president, people increasingly are asking if the United States has made the best decisions in establishing democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan. They wonder why some groups would rather tear their own countries apart than participate in a democratic system. Instead of trying to place blame on the U.S. methods, let's look at how Muslims view democracy.

Muslims can be divided into two groups: moderates and radicals. Worldwide, the vast majority of Muslims are moderates. They just want to be safe and to build good lives for their families while practicing the religious aspects of Islam. The moderates tolerate democracy because they do not necessarily believe that Islamic law must control government, economics and so on.

When I practiced Islam and taught at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, I tried hard to be a moderate. In fact, in the thesis for my master's degree, I described how the first four leaders of Islam (known as the rightly guided caliphs) practiced shura, which means taking counsel before taking action.

Before making a decision, sometimes the caliph would get the opinion of a group of prominent people in society. I argued that shura, therefore, justifies a representative style of government. The Egyptian government liked that kind of thinking and broadcast the defense of my thesis live over Holy Quran national radio.

Now that I am no longer a Muslim, I can see the teachings and history of Islam more objectively. I have to admit that the radicals' understanding of Islam and politics is a much more honest evaluation of the material.

Radicals make up perhaps 5 percent of all Muslims, but they are consistently opposed to democracy. Let's look at three foundations of their political philosophy.

Man must be free from every authority except God. This philosophy comes from such verses in the Quran as: "O you who believe! obey Allah, and obey the Messenger, and those charged with authority among you. If you differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger, if you do believe in Allah and the Last Day: that is best and most suitable for final determination" (Surah 4:59).

The point is that man is not allowed to make law. He is always pointed to Allah or Muhammad.

Sayyid Qutb (Ku'tib), known as the "Martin Luther" of Islam, stated: "Islam is a declaration of the freedom of man from servitude to other men. Thus it strives from the beginning to abolish all those systems and governments which are based on the rule of man over men" (Milestones,). He was executed for his writings by the Egyptian government in 1965, but without doubt, all major radical leaders have read his books and hold them in high esteem.

Democracy is an obstacle to Islam's message. A secular government will block people's ability to choose Islam, Qutb argued; therefore Islam "has the right to destroy all obstacles in the form of institutions and traditions which

limit man's freedom of choice. ... It is the duty of Islam to annihilate all such systems as they are obstacles in the way of universal freedom" (Milestones, pp. 136-137).

The wishes of the majority are not relevant. Democracy bases its authority on the wishes of the people. The Quran teaches that authority is based on Islamic law (Sharia), not the will of the people, and that legislation is for God and not for representatives.

The bottom line is, there is no method of establishing democracy that will bring cooperation from Muslim radicals. Instead, the United States must partner with and support Muslim moderates as they resist radicals in their own countries.

This month in the United States, we have the privilege of voting. As you go to the polls, remember to pray that our elected leaders will find ways to help moderates in Muslim countries establish free societies in which every person can make choices without fear.