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Blindly following extremism



The Arab and Islamic world is going through a political transformation. There are forces that continue to exploit sectarian differences to widen the divisions among Muslims and Arabs. The role of Muslim scholars and researchers is crucial. A more responsible and scientific dialogue is needed to put an end to disputes between Islamic factions and restore the true image of Islamic tolerance, which has been distorted by extremist organizations that have exploited our differences to achieve their objectives.

Religious writers and concerned citizens need to play a bigger role in addressing the hatred among the faithful that is threatening Muslim societies and endangering the lives of innocent women and children. Extremists among us have encouraged terrorist ideas that have pervaded Muslim communities. Distorted interpretations of the Qur'an and the Sunnah and erroneous fatwas have tarnished the true image of Islam. Terrorism fatwas are not confined to one sect, and many Muslims of different sects have been misguided by extremist Muslim scholars. They have preyed on the minds of innocent people who are victims of their extremist intolerant ideas.

Dwelling on difference

In many parts of the Muslim world there are still those who blindly follow extremist scholars who propagate a rigid interpretation of Islam. Decision makers have failed to address the ambiguities in the teachings of the Ulema, and there is a need for meaningful efforts to influence a stronger collective stand toward a moderate Islamic rule that can put a stop to the violence that has erupted in the Muslim world.

We have yet to see genuine efforts by moderate religious scholars to dispute discriminatory rulings in the name of Islam. Today, Muslim scholars are called upon to pursue solidarity, tolerance and moderation, reject discrimination, and fight extremism and sedition. There should be no regimentation in our Islamic education. Young people should be taught tolerance and more respect for the other's point of view.

To date, the Muslim world has not benefited from objective research conducted by Muslim scientists, thinkers and researchers on the beliefs and jurisprudence of all sects. Unfortunately, Muslim scholars of different sects are reluctant to recognize the shared traits between them and continue to dwell on the differences that lead to conflicts, paying lip service to dialogue. There are few genuine efforts that could lead them toward points of agreement.

Scholars have an obligation to set their differences aside. They need to show respect for the characteristics of each sect and not use it as a justification for discord and conflict. The continued discord has led to conflicts and violence and has created an atmosphere of animosity among Muslims. Sectarian diversity is a reality that should not continue to be a divisive factor; Muslims scholars have a responsibility to promote understanding and harmony within the Muslim nation.

Muslim communities have suffered from Muslim scholars who openly attack one another and spread hatred among Muslims of different sects. It is time for our Ulema to show more tolerance and acceptance of the differences between sects that stem from differences in the juristic understanding of the events in the Qur'an and in evaluating the Sunnah. Scholarly discussions of diversity and differences should be conducted in closed scholarly circles. Differences in religious understandings should not be topics of daily discussions that create a divide and hatred among the faithful.

Inter-sect dialogue

King Abdullah has called for the creation of a center for inter-sect dialogue, with the hope of preventing the spread of extremism and terrorism. It is a call for rapprochement between Muslim sects and for correcting the misconceptions that have led many Muslims astray. Muslim scholars should make more efforts to reach beyond the hypothetical rhetoric and attempt to reach the masses to address the violence that has spread in the Muslim world.

More religious scholars should engage in the dialogue to oppose incitement. The rift in Muslim communities continues, and Muslim scholars, researchers and academics should strive to remove sectarianism from circulation, put an end to strife and isolate those who advocate hatred and revenge. Meanwhile, the media has not played an effective role in ending sectarianism and addressing the violence that has erupted in the Muslim world. It should expose those who create interreligious tensions and conflicts between different religions and sects.

Islam is a religion of dialogue and understanding and not a religion of enmity, fanaticism and violence. Extremist religious leaders who have spread intolerance and supported sectarianism and sedition need to be stopped. Muslim leaders must make a stand to protect the lives of thousands of Muslims who are dying because of sectarian conflicts. Extremists continue to propagate hate rather than tolerance. It is time for responsible and moderate religious scholars to take the lead and speak more loudly and forcefully to put an end to the hatred and intolerance that is driving the misguided among Muslims to violence and intolerant behavior.

The dispute among some Muslim scholars and the lack of Muslim consensus on Islamic teachings continues to threaten our Muslim world and undermine our image. It also reflects badly on our culture and heritage around the world

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