

A Unitarian looks at Islam

Recently, the “You Deserve to know about Islam”, pamphlet was delivered to my home. A project of the Islamic Society of St. Catharines (ISSC), development and distribution of the pamphlet was initiated in response to a verbal and physical attack on a Muslim woman by three teenage girls as she was leaving the mosque in September 2013. The pamphlet clarifies many aspects of the Muslim faith and, hopefully, corrects many negative stereotype that could lead to attacks such as this. It does reveal considerable common ground with our Unitarian faith and probably many other faith groups as well.

While Unitarians Universalists (UUs) do not place the authority “of God’s word” on the Prophet Muhammad’s teachings, his wisdom is included among the “words and deeds of prophetic women and men” that contribute to our ongoing search for meaning. As well, the “Wisdom from the world’s religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life” can include wisdom from the Islamic faith. Both Unitarianism and Islam draw from Christian and Jewish sources and a variety of prophets. A comparison of five of the seven UU principles with some of Muhammad’s teaching reveals many commonalities.

UUs affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person. Muhammad said:

“No Arab is superior to a non-Arab and no non-Arab is superior to an Arab, nor is any white superior to any black or any black superior to any white except on account of his/her piety,” and “Women are the twin halves of men” He promised Paradise to parents who treat their sons and daughters equally and He gave women the right to inheritance, education, own property, and have a say in marriage.

UUs affirm and promote justice, equity, and compassion in human relations. Muhammad said:

“Whoever harms a non-Muslim under the protection of Islam, I shall be his/her opponent on judgment Day...”;
“Whoever believes in God and the Day of Judgement should say only what is good, be kind to their neighbours and hospitable to their guests,” and “. . .none of you truly believes until they love for others what they love for themselves.”

UUs affirm and promote a free and responsible search for truth and meaning. Muhammad said, “Seeking knowledge is an obligation on every Muslim (male and female).”

UUs affirm and promote the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and

justice for all. The ISSC pamphlet notes that those who manipulate verses from the Quran to justify violence against innocents contradict the Quran's call for tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Islam is against terrorism. And Muhammad said, "Do not start a war. If you must fight, then strike only at those combatants who attacked you ..."

UUs affirm and promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. Muhammad prohibited polluting water sources and promised a heavenly reward for planting trees to feed animals, birds, and humans. He prohibited the killing of animals for game, slaughtering an animal in front of other animals, and forbade overburdening animals and underfeeding them.

Many religions share with Islam the fact that their beliefs have been distorted by extremists to justify unjust acts. Regrettably, the ISSC pamphlet will probably not be read by those who most need to be aware that extremist acts do not follow the teachings of Muhammad nor reflect the religion of our Muslim neighbours nor the teachings of most faith groups.