

A Letter to the Western Youth on Islam. Why are People Frightened?

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The recent events in France and similar ones in other Western countries have persuaded me to speak to you directly about them. I address you, the youth, not because I disregard your parents; rather, it is because I see the future of your peoples and nations to lie in your hands and the quest for truth to be more alive and conscious in your hearts. I do not address your politicians and statesmen either, because I believe that they have deliberately separated politics from honesty and truth.

I would like to talk to you about Islam, in particular the image of it that has been portrayed to you. Many attempts have been made over the past two decades—since about the time of the dissolution of the Soviet Union—to depict this magnificent religion as a terrifying and hostile force.

Unfortunately the instigation and exploitation of fear and hatred has a long history in Western politics. Here, I do not wish to go over all the different “phobias” with which Westerners have been inculcated up until now. By just taking a cursory glance at recent critical studies of history, you will clearly see that in the revised histories, Western powers have been criticised for their insincere and deceptive treatment of other peoples and cultures.

If the history of America and Europe could self-reflect, it would be ashamed of its slavery, guilt-ridden by the colonial period, and embarrassed by its oppression of people of colour and non-Christians. Your academics and historians are deeply ashamed of the bloodshed wrought in the name of religion between Catholics and Protestants or in the name of nationality and ethnicity during the First and Second World Wars. This in itself is commendable.

Moreover, by recounting here only a part of this long history, I do not intend to condemn it; rather, by it I would like you to ask your intellectuals as to why it is that the public conscience in the West awakens and comes to its senses only after a lag of several decades, or sometimes even centuries. Why should this revision within the collective conscience apply only to the distant past and not to contemporary issues? Why is it that attempts are made to prevent public awareness regarding an issue as important as the manner in which Islamic culture and thought have been treated?

You know well that humiliation and spreading hatred and imaginary fear of the “other” have

been the common stock of all those oppressive exploitations. But now, I would like you to ask yourself this: Why is it that the old policy of spreading “phobia” and hatred has targeted Islam and the Muslims with an unprecedented intensity? Why do the powers that be in today’s world seek to marginalise and pacify Islamic thought? What ideas and values in Islam disturb the stratagems of the super powers, and what interests of theirs are safeguarded by misrepresenting Islam?

Hence, my first request is that you question and probe the incentives behind this widespread tarnishing of the image of Islam.

My second request is that in response to the overwhelming prejudices and propaganda at hand, try to gain a direct and firsthand knowledge of this religion. Basic reason dictates that at the least you understand the nature of what it is that they are frightening you about and distancing you from.

I do not insist that you accept my reading or any other reading of Islam. What I want to say is this: Do not allow this vital and transformative reality in today’s world to be introduced to you based on ulterior and dubious motives. Do not allow them to guilefully introduce their own recruited terrorists as representatives of Islam.

Receive knowledge of Islam from original and firsthand sources. Become acquainted with Islam through the Qur’an and the life of its great Prophet. I would like to ask you whether you have directly referred to the Qur’an of the Muslims. Have you studied the teachings of the Prophet of Islam and his humane, ethical doctrines? Have you ever received the message of Islam from any source other than the media?

Have you ever asked yourself how and on the basis of which values did this very same Islam, through many centuries of its history, cultivate the greatest scientific and intellectual civilization of the world and produce the most distinguished scientists and intellectuals?

I would like you not to allow the derogatory and despicable misrepresentations to create an emotional gulf between you and the truth, taking away the possibility of an impartial judgment from you. Now that modern means of communication have effectively allowed you to break through geographical boundaries and fences, do not allow them to besiege you within imaginary boundaries and fabricated fences.

Although no one can single handedly narrow the rifts that have been created, each one of you can construct a proverbial bridge of ‘fair thought’ so as to enlighten yourself and those around you [about what lies on the other side]. While this staged confrontation between Islam and you, the youth, is not a pleasant affair, it can serve to bring about new questions in your inquisitive minds. Attempts to find answers to these questions will provide you with valuable opportunities to discover new truths.

Therefore, do not miss the opportunity to gain a proper and unbiased understanding of Islam so that perhaps, due to your sense of responsibility towards the truth, future generations will write about this period of history of the interaction between Islam and the West with less aggravation and with a clearer conscience.

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