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Building mosques and burning Qurans: What would Jesus do?

BY Ali and Adil Nizamuddin | Posted: Friday, August 27, 2010 12:00 am

The past few months have cast doubt in the hearts of many American Muslims about their role and future in this country. Two local issues have taken on national primacy and even received worldwide attention: the planned burning of the Quran on Sept. 11 and the Islamic cultural center in lower Manhattan.

A small church of less than 100 followers in Gainesville, Fla., has decided to burn the Quran on Sept. 11. As such, a few zealots have successfully shaped our national discourse. Like other religious extremists, their myopia and hate prevents them from understanding the national and global impact of their actions.

The Quran is a sacred book for 1.57 billion people worldwide and approximately 8 million to 10 million American Muslims. It contains the narrative and teachings of about 25 prophets and messengers of God, including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Solomon and Jesus Christ. An entire chapter is devoted to Mary and her story. Jesus Christ is mentioned 25 times by name, and his virgin birth, miracles, heavenly ascension and ultimate return are preserved in the Quran.

Islam is the only religion that makes it an article of faith to believe in Jesus Christ. Any rejection of him and his narrative leads one to disbelief, and such a person no longer is classified as a Muslim. The love and reverence that Muslims have for Jesus are the direct result of the Quran and its teachings. In fact, there is so much overlap in the Biblical and Quranic accounts of events that burning the Quran is equivalent to burning the Bible.

The Bible is a revered book for Muslims, and the Quran classifies Jews and Christians as "People of the Scriptures." Even the most brutal and tyrannical of Muslim regimes would not tolerate the burning of the Bible. Our public discourse has become increasingly intolerant, and the actions of some may be beneath the standards of the enemies against whom we are fighting.

Similarly, the proposed construction of an Islamic cultural center has sparked a mass hysteria. Islamophobia has become so widespread that it is now acceptable to deny Muslims the same rights and privileges as other Americans. The actions of a handful of terrorists have demonized an entire civilization that spans 57 countries. An onus of collective guilt for the actions of a few has been the consequence. It has lumped all Muslims as being "the other" and the idea of being Muslim-American seems inconceivable.

The humanity gap emanating from a lack of knowledge is precisely what the cultural center seeks to address. It is a facility that is designed to serve multiple purposes, and it would be open to people of all faiths. Denying this project or any mosque sends the wrong message to Muslims worldwide, and reaffirms in the minds of the extremists that America is intolerant and engaged in a war against Islam. Christians are supposed to preach the Gospel to the entire world. Burning Qurans and restricting construction of places of worship fuels the flames of hate and precludes interfaith outreach.

This country has a history of dehumanizing others (Native-Americans, African-Americans, Hispanics, Japanese, etc.) with catastrophic consequences. Before we add another ugly chapter, reasonable-minded people should stand up to the extremists among us and tame the hate.

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