

Belief and Writing: It Must Be True If It Is Written Down.
Posted On:December 31, 1969

Fanatics are not called "true believers" for nothing. Whether the belief is religious or political, somebody's writings are always the basis for "true belief." Communism originally stemmed from the practices of early Christianity, but with the writings of Marx and Lenin, the basis shifted. Russian communists were fervent believers in the truth of the observations of Marx and Lenin.

The Nazis based their Aryan Superiority ideology on the 19th century anthropologist Arthur de Gobineau, who theorized that people of Aryan origins (speakers of the Indo-European language family) were a Master Race to which all others owed obedience. All sorts of pseudo sciences sprang up in defense of this dubious nonsense, including measuring skull dimensions and supposed brain power. Hitler based his entire Nazi ideology on these crackpot notions.

Christians, of course, believe in the testimony of the Gospels, the accounts of the earliest Church Fathers who told of the mission, death, and resurrection of the radical reformist rabbi, Jesus of Nazareth. This testimony (New Testament) is at the heart of Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christianity. For the Protestant sects, the Old Testament (Hebrew Scriptures for Jews) is also a key document.

For Muslims, the documents are the Koran, believed to be the words of the prophet Mohammad as dictated by an angel of god; the Hadith, which contain the recollections of the wives and companions of the Prophet; and the Sharia, a compilation of Muslim law that froze in the 12th century when all discussion stopped.

It is one thing to have one's beliefs documented providing a historic trail---but another to be incapable of exploring and criticizing the historicity of these documents. In Judaism and Christianity, there has been an evolutionary trail of commentary and biblical analysis, a process that has changed and accumulated over the many centuries since they began. The way modern Christianity and Judaism are practiced is to accept the eternal verities of wisdom in their scriptures but never to take all the accounts as literal.

Since the birth of the scientific revolution in the 16th century and the Enlightenment of the 18th century, it has become difficult to interpret scripture as literal. Most Christians and Jews (with some exceptions) accept the theory of evolution as fact and the Biblical accounts of man's origins as metaphorical. This in no way denigrates their religious experiences. When modern Catholics take communion, they understand that the wafer and wine are symbolic of something else, blood and flesh. They are not compelled to believe that this is an actual transformation; yet its profundity is still there.

Islam has not had a process of scriptural criticism. There are many educated Muslims who accept modern science, but they have no way of marrying modern science to their 7th and 8th century scriptures. This lack of textual criticism has given rise to something nightmarish in our world: a literal interpretation of their religious duty to emulate the examples of their Prophet and his 7th century companions.

Most Muslims in the world today do not follow this literal path; it is estimated that only 5 percent do. But if the numbers are correct, this means that 65 million followers are fundamentalist believers. This is a stockpile of people who are willing to carry out the basic mission of Islam: to conquer the world until everyone is Muslim. This is nonsense, of course, and does more damage to the rest of the Muslim world than it does to the West, which it cannot hope to overcome. Seventh century values cannot compete with a world in which there are increasing standards of modern rule of law.

People need to know that just because something is in print does not make it so. For the benefit of the world's Muslims, we must not tiptoe around scriptural criticism in the fear of offending. ISIS and its ilk must have their religious certainties criticized and condemned. Rational modern Muslims must take this on and transform their religion from a literal mandate to acceptance of Islam's wisdom, not its primitive history, for their practices.

675 words

Dr. Laina Farhat-Holzman is a historian, lecturer, and author of God's Law or Man's Law. You may contact her at Lfarhat102@aol.com or www.globalthink.net.