

Ammad Bahalim Helps Brandeis Combat “Islamophobia”

by Hugh Fitzgerald



The Bahalim Student Fund was [set up last year](#) at Brandeis, made possible by a donation from Ammad Bahalim '04. The fund is designed, in its own words, to “support student-led public events intended to combat Islamophobia and promote an understanding of Islam as a tradition of learning and critical thinking.”

Its aim, then, is not disinterested research about, or promoting a deeper understanding of, what Islam teaches. Instead, it combats “Islamophobia,” a word now used on every conceivable occasion to scare off, or to sully the reputations of, all those who are critical of Islam, no matter how grounded in the texts of Islam – Qur’an and hadith – and in Islamic history those critics may be. “Islamophobia” should

refer only to an irrational fear of Islam. But where do we see this “irrational” fear? Is the fear of Nigerian Christians, under constant assault by the Muslim Hausa fanatics of Boko Haram, waving their Qur’ans, and by the Muslim Fulani herdsmen who, even more than Boko Haram, have been destroying Christian villages and massacring their inhabitants, “irrational” and “Islamophobic”? Are the Hindus of India, who remember hundreds of years of Islamic rule, and the mass murder of between 70-80 million Hindus, and the destruction of tens of thousands of their temples by Muslim conquerors, “irrational” in their fear and hatred of Islam? Are the Christians who are right now being attacked and killed by Muslims in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Iraq, Syria, and Egypt full of “irrational” fears of Islam? What of the Islamic State, and its public decapitations of Western journalists, Christians, and Shi’a? What about the kidnapping and mass rapes of Yazidi girls and women by members of the Islamic State, victims who have testified that their rapists would pray to Allah both before and after raping them? The killers of Drummer Rigby, too, grinningly held up their Qur’ans for their selfies. Is it “Islamophobia,” or common sense, to fear Muslims and Islam?

In Europe, after Muslim terrorists have many times struck in London and Paris, as well as in Manchester, Toulouse, Nice, Magnanville, Madrid, Barcelona, Brussels, Amsterdam, Berlin, Hamburg, Anspach, Munich, Vienna, Copenhagen, Malmö, Stockholm, Turku, Helsinki, St. Petersburg, Beslan, would it be “irrational” for Europeans to fear Islam? Does the fact that the prisons of Europe are overflowing with Muslims – as in France, where more than 70% of all prisoners are Muslim, despite being less than 10% of the population – suggest that, despite the lavishing of every conceivable welfare benefit on Muslim migrants, their integration is not exactly going well?

In America, we have not only endured the mass terrorism by Muslims in New York and Washington on 9/11, but since then, there have been terror attacks in New York (several times),

Boston, Los Angeles, Chicago, Minneapolis, Fort Hood, Little Rock, Chattanooga, San Bernardino, Orlando and many other places. Is it “irrational” for Americans to fear Islam?

Since there have been nearly 36,000 separate terror attacks by Muslims since 9/11, isn't that enough to create a rational fear of Islam all over the Western world?

When we educate ourselves, by reading the Qur'an and the Hadith, does our anxiety about Islam decrease, or does it, rather, increase the more we know? When we discover in the Qur'an that there are 109 verses that command Muslims to engage in violent Jihad, to kill Unbelievers wherever they find them (see, e.g., 2:190-194, 4:89, 8:12, 8:60, 9:5, 9:29, 47:4), when we find that several of those verses (e.g. 4:89, 8:12, 8:60) tell Muslims to “strike terror” in the hearts of Unbelievers, wouldn't it be “irrational” not to fear Muslims and Muslims?

When we read the verse that tells Muslims not to take Christians or Jews as friends, for “they are friends only with each other” (5:51), what should we make of that? Is it “Islamophobic” to worry about that?

When we read some of the Hadith, and discover that Muhammad had sexual intercourse with his last wife, Aisha, when he was 54 and she was nine years old, that he ordered the torture and then the killing of a man, Kinana of Khaybar, in order to find out where some valuables were hidden, when we further learn that Muhammad himself took part in the killing of 600-900 bound prisoners of the Banu Qurayza, when we discover that Muhammad was delighted to learn of the murders, by his followers, of three who had criticized or mocked him – Asma bint Marwan, Abu 'Afak, Ka'b bin al-Ashraf – and then, after learning all this, we then find out that Muslims regard Muhammad as the “Perfect Man” (al-insan al-kamil) and the “Model of Conduct” (uswa hasana), surely that justifies a deep anxiety and fear about the ideology of Islam. Does Ammad

Bahalim think we are wrong to be disturbed by these all these Qur'anic verses about jihad, and sowing terror, and despising Infidels, and by Muhammad's behavior as described in the Hadith?

While not directly about Jihad, there are other verses that are most unsettling. Those who have read the Qur'an will have come across the description of Muslims as "the best of peoples" (3:110) and of non-Muslims as "the most vile of creatures" (98:6). It is hardly "Islamophobic" to find these contrasting descriptions appalling.

Finally, there are the words of Muhammad himself in the hadith, where he says in one place that "war is deceit" and in another, "I have been made victorious through terror." Is it "Islamophobic" to find such claims by the Perfect Man and Model of Conduct threatening?

Is it wrong to judge Islam on the basis of both the observable behavior of Muslims toward all Unbelievers, over the past 1,400 years, and the contents of Qur'an and hadith? Wouldn't it be irrational not to do so? What should we make of Muslims who in discussing Islam leave out so much that is significant, and misrepresent what they do discuss? Haven't we earned the right by now to be extremely wary of how Muslim apologists present Islam?

The Bahalim Fund hopes not merely to combat "Islamophobia," but "to promote an understanding of Islam as a tradition of learning and critical thinking." What tradition of learning is that? The Qur'an is the essential text. Many Muslims think that is all the learning they need. There is a tradition of learning not by discussion or disputation but by rote; the Muslim who memorizes the entire text of the Qur'an is praised as a hafiz, by their lights a learned man. Muslims can read, and parrot, but dare not question, the Qur'an or the classic Qur'anic commentators and jurists. Far from encouraging critical thinking, Islam discourages free and skeptical

inquiry at every step. For such inquiry might cause some Believers to begin to question aspects of Islam itself, and that would never do. If Allah has said something, no matter how inexplicable it may seem, it's the Muslim's lot not to reason why, for Allah Knows Best.

The Ammad Bahalim Fund might have been given a different task by its founder. Instead of creating a fund for propaganda on behalf of Islam, labeling any criticism as Islamophobia, it might have been set up to encourage real discussion. It might have been created for another purpose: to encourage Muslims and non-Muslims alike to consider two questions. First, "In what ways does Islam need to be reformed?" and second, "When does Islamocriticism become Islamophobia?"

That would have been an achievement. That would have truly helped Muslims. But that was never the intention of Ammad Bahalim, who now works for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, where he may be in a position, though it is not his official remit, to influence where large sums could be directed to promote the defense of Islam. I allow myself to believe that Bill and Melinda Gates will, without the personable Ammad Bahalim's proffered help, study the Qur'an and hadith on their own, and possibly, too, look into the 1,400-year history of Jihad. Then they would be in a position to distinguish legitimate Islamocriticism from what it is too often called, with malice aforethought, as in the description of the Ammad Bahalim Fund, "Islamophobia."

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