

Confrontations Between Good and Evil are Here to Stay

Following the New Zealand tragedy, much has been said and written about Islamophobia, hate, racism, extremism, etc. The causes, objectives and modi operandi of the unfortunate phenomena have been dealt with extensively and with different degrees of success by a great many religious leaders, politicians, educators and social activists alike, with New Zealand and its prime minister leading the way.

The discourses transcended the boundaries of race, nationality, religion and culture, resulting in myriads of voices coming out together and in unison condemning all manifestations of hate, bigotry, extremism and terrorism, and their protagonists, while at the same time emphatically preaching and propagating their antitheses: love, tolerance, peace and dialogue.

However, several questions still must be asked, such as: now what in the wake of such an outpouring of emotions and rhetoric, and what is the next step?

Will the world go back to its old ways until something similar, or worse, happens and we then do the same thing again, making thereby in the eyes of Islamophobes and other hate and terror-mongers a mockery of ourselves and the ways we deal with some of the most perilous issues?

Or will the world do something genuinely meaningful and enduringly effective, facing head-on and trying to contain the contagious menaces which, it is no exaggeration to say, have brought the whole world to a historic crossroads.

The importance of pragmatism

Whatever the case, long-term comprehensive strategies and policies should overtake impulsive rhetoric, which is normally coupled with short-term actions and programs and aims but to paper over recurring tragic incidents and their devastating consequences.

In the same vein, initiatives at all levels ought to be proactive rather than reactive, and action to be rational rather than purely emotional. Needless to say that before there could be a way, there must be a will and inclusive designs and procedures.

The above questions are legitimately compelling, begging for satisfactory answers at once in theory and practice.

That is so because although life is intrinsically positive and good, man, who possesses propensities for both good and evil, never fails to contaminate and stain it. The Holy Qur'an reveals that "corruption has appeared throughout the land and sea by reason of what the hands of people have earned..." (al-Rum, 41).

Terrestrial existence with man at its helm is a theatre of good and evil and their various manifestations as well as effects. Its dynamic unfolding, furthermore, denotes a stage for permanent confrontations between the forces of the two poles, one relentlessly trying to outdo and subdue the other.

Nevertheless, one should not be disheartened and fall into despair, for that is exactly what life was meant to be. The Creator perceived it that way.

This fleeting life is a place of temptations and trials. It is a means for attaining the Almighty's love and good pleasure, and to move on to another much better life in the Hereafter where things and experiences will be completely different and perfect beyond our imagination. Similarities between the two lives are only in names.

Attempting to imagine and live this earthly life differently is as much futile and meaningless as distressful and counterproductive. In passing, we should perceive and live life only according to the will and plan of the Creator and Sustainer of life, not according to our shallow understandings and vested interests in relation to it and its infinite vicissitudes. That connotes the core of the Islamic monotheistic worldview.

Being utopian and dreaming of a perfect and evil-free life in this world is utterly impractical and merely a form of philosophical escapism. Indeed, there is nothing wrong with dreaming, but yes, there is much wrong with being just a passive idealist and perennial dreamer. That is by no means an Islamic way.

As a small digression, when Plato wrote "The Republic", al-Farabi "*al-Madinah al-Fadilah* (The Virtuous City)", Thomas More "Utopia", Francis Bacon "The New Atlantis" - and many others - they did so principally as a form of intellectual self-gratification. At most, the books served as a motivational factor for trying to envision and create a better future for humankind as much as possible. Such undertakings were never meant to signify provision of specific and viable blueprints for a universal socio-political and cultural awakening and development.

Hence, one of the most appealing and commendable aspects of Islam, as a way of life, was always its pragmatism. It treats man with all his assets and shortcomings just the way he is, and life with all its ups and downs just the way it is and should be lived.

For example, man is not asked to be excessively acquiescent and passive, and to love and forgive everyone unconditionally - including criminals and bitter enemies. Something like that is impossible, and everybody knows that.

Rather, man - who cannot become an angel, nor infallible, and who, conversely, is not to be let live at a low ebb and become a devil either - is bidden to love and forgive as much as he can, which is assured as the best course of action. But if he cannot - which sometimes is

perfectly human - heavenly justice, on whose principles the heavens and earth have been created and exist, is to be allowed to take its course, and where no wrongness or excesses of any kind and degree should be perpetrated.

That is why even Prophet Muhammad's Madinah, the prototype and most exemplary socio-political context and urban environment in Islam, was a place never fully devoid of elements of mischief and depravity, regardless of their size and intensity and by whom they were committed.

At the same time, for the sake of comparison, Christianity, with most of its theological and moral precepts, is too impractical and unreal that it fails to appeal to most people who seek to integrate it into all spheres of life and harmonize it with the challenges that such an undertaking entails. Perhaps, Jesus' crying out to God, while dying on a cross, saying: "*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken (abandoned) me?" (Matthew, 27:46), symbolizes this gap between the fundamental teachings of Christianity and the affairs, along with the troubles, of everyday life.

Rhetoric *versus* action

It goes without saying that the world should be better equipped to deal with evil and evildoers. Evil and evil people are here to stay. Thus, the forces of goodness and goodwill should always be on full alert and not allow the villains to outmaneuver and outstrip them.

The question should not be as much about evil and its presence as about how it is confronted and managed. The question, furthermore, should be if the world is ready to face and contain the inevitable intellectually and in real life. Is it willing to do so?

While rhetoric and positive emotional outpourings are, to some extent, good and can be useful as far as they go, global signs and trends, nevertheless, are not very encouraging for long-term visions.

It is obvious that at the intellectual level, Islamophobes, hate and terror-mongers with their ideological proclivities and agendas are yet to be fully distinguished, let alone the prospect of fully comprehending and coming to terms with them. The world still dwells on the plane of sheer concepts and definitions in that particular regard. That is a weak spot targeted as a typical technique by skeptics and the proponents of general uncertainty and turmoil.

Knowledge is the foundation of fruitful actions. Correct and well-founded knowledge spontaneously leads to what is right, as well. This ethical intellectualism is encapsulated in the words of Socrates: "If only one knows what is good, one will also do good. Nobody is voluntarily doing evil."

Our practical reality is a fusion of the results of some people's eternal penchant for a utopian thought and its shamming bravado, together with the results of numerous inherent human weaknesses that translate themselves into the realm of incompetent policies and programs.

It is a damning assessment but the world is not yet ready for what is gradually befalling and eating into it. The bad guys are better cognizant of their strengths, working tirelessly on improving them, than the good guys of their limitations and weaknesses, taking them lightly and viewing the situation with unfounded positivity.

And that is the crux of the problem, yet its root cause.

Far-right politics

What happened in New Zealand - as tragic and disturbing as it was - was just an effect. The bloodthirsty criminal, too, was a product of the philosophy and school of far-right politics and their unobstructed existence and operation.

As an illustration, "far-right political parties and groups have sprung up in Australia consistently over the years. Three such parties that have been around for a few years and have gained seats in parliament

are the One Nation Party, Family First and Fred Nile's Christian Democratic Party and its predecessors. Nile has been a NSW state MP since 1981. The Australian League of Rights - which is more of an interest group than a party - was established in 1946. The Citizens Electoral Council was founded in Australia in 1988. But there are a growing number of far-right parties and movements that have only sprung up in Australia in recent times..." (<http://theconversation.com/explainer-australias-tangled-web-of-far-right-political-parties-45619>).

It does not make any sense, therefore, to worry about and condemn the effects, while ignoring and absolving the causes and sources that beget them. Nor does it seem right that the New Zealand criminal is widely vilified and kept in jail, while those ideas, individuals, institutions and political parties with their manifestos which had inspired and created the monster are overlooked, or just superficially censured.

Certainly, for instance, the far-right Australian senator, Fraser Anning, who is proudly anti-Islam and anti-Muslim and who blamed rather Muslims and Muslim immigration for the New Zealand massacre, is to be blamed as much as the murderer himself.

The senator is a microcosm of a phenomenon and school of thought, and how unhindered the tangled web of far-right political parties and movements functions. He also demonstrates the agonizing limitations of governments and generally the people of goodwill, and how vague and disjointed their efforts are.

While the New Zealand murderer was a product, Fraser Anning, and such as like him in various capacities, personify entire processes and their production and supply lines. They, it stands to reason, are more dangerous and more blameworthy.

While the murderer attacked with bullets, the ideological fathers of far-right politics across the globe attack mercilessly with vicious

ideas and statements. The latter is far more hazardous and devastating.

While the murderer is in jail and is bound to spend the rest of his miserable life therein, the ideological fathers are free to continue with their crusades through the legitimate means and channels of politics, media, education and social development. They freely form political parties, contest elections, create institutions and live their daily lives normally, taking full advantage of the inherent downsides of the systems of prevalent liberal democracy.

Strangely enough, worldwide petition campaigns have been created and run in order to request that Fraser Anning be "pushed to resign from his position as Senator, and if appropriate, be investigated by law enforcement agencies for supporting right wing terrorism". However, it's all proving in vain. Nothing concrete has emerged from the Australian or any other government.

But when the same senator on account of his inflammatory views and statements was egged by a teenager, after which he struck the boy, Australia's prime minister was quick to say that the senator should be charged for his wrongdoing. The prime minister told reporters: "The full force of the law should be applied to Sen. Anning."

One wonders why, as well, "the full force of the law" cannot be applied to the senator for being an "ideological terrorist" or an "ideological motivator of terrorism".

Surely, as long as those sentiments, ideas and their proprietors are on the loose and roaming freely, there will be enduring fear and cyclical violence. As long as there are causes, there will be outcomes. Dealing only with the outcomes essentially solves nothing, whereas addressing the causes gives hope and reasons for optimism.

The role of the media

Finally, as the true face of society, several aspects of especially the Western world's media also seem to be at a loss as to how exactly to

report about the New Zealand tragedy, and about other unfortunate episodes that take place elsewhere and are identical in nature and purpose.

The media are torn between the obvious criminality of events, on the one hand, and their innate inclination to the dialectic of "us *versus* them" and a feeling that the integration and multiculturalism drives are proving a failed experiment, on the other. There is a feeling that an outright criticism may well turn into a form of self-criticism, may undermine "our values and identity" in favor of "theirs", and most worryingly, may put "them" in a more favorable position and thus may start - God forbid - giving "them" the edge over "us".

Manipulating and abusing the labels of terrorism and terrorists, partly due to the widespread ignorance and partly due to yet more widespread hidden agendas, add significantly to the problem. Hence, proper knowledge and ultimate truths are habitually least wanted. Tragically, they sometimes may even correspond to an offence and illegality.

Be that as it may, the role of the media in either improving or worsening the situation will always be critical. As Malcolm X once said: "The media's the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that's power. Because they control the minds of the masses."

Since the notions of honesty, fairness and objectivity have long since become abandoned and forgotten in many circles, it's perhaps time to start pursuing what China calls a New World Media Order. Likewise, dramatic changes in world social, political and ethical thought, and in balances of power in international relations, are badly needed, so that in the orbit of perpetual confrontations between good and evil the balance is substantially tipped in favour of the former.