

# Americans Don't Understand Islam As It Is, Historian Says

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Historian Serge Trifkovic saw his homeland torn apart when the Muslim government in Bosnia declared its independence from Yugoslavia in 1992. The move reopened old wounds and led to years of fighting.

The Muslim leader, Alija Izetbegovic, was a well-known militant. In his 1974 "Islamic Declaration" he wrote, "There can be no peace or co-existence between the Islamic faith and non-Islamic societies and political institutions."

But the U.S. blamed the Serbs for not submitting to Muslim rule. Today, Trifkovic hopes, Americans will be more understanding.

His new book, "The Sword of the Prophet," is meant to set the record straight on Islam as it appears in history and in its own sacred texts.

IBD asked him how that differs from what Americans often hear.

**IBD:** *What's wrong with what our elected leaders are telling us about Islam?*

**Trifkovic:** Everything, and that's the basic motive for the book itself: to debunk the notion that there is a "real Islam" that is as peaceful, as tolerant, as respectful of other religions as most other religions are of each other today.

Most character witnesses for Islam are Westerners who are not Muslims and don't know much about Islam.

Because of their liberal, humanistic outlook, they assume that the legal parity these religions enjoy in the West automatically translates into a theological parity: Every religion is assumed to be much like every other religion.

That, as we know from the historical record and from the source texts of Islam itself, is simply not true.

**IBD:** *What do we find in Muslim scriptures?*

**Trifkovic:** What we find in the Koran is a fairly incoherent and sometimes contradictory set of statements.

Most apologists for Islam will quote some of the more conciliatory ones, such as "there is no compulsion in religion."

Not many non-Muslims realize that the rule of abrogation applies here: if you have a quote that contradicts another quote, the one that came later takes precedence.

In the early days of his prophetic career, Mohammed was a powerless, marginalized and often despised teacher in the city of Mecca, where he had only a handful of followers and where, perforce, his statements were conciliatory and moderate.

After the emigration of Mohammed and his followers from Mecca to Medina, where he established himself as a successful political leader, he started settling scores with opponents in Medina.

The Sira of Mohammed — another ancient Muslim text — tells us this included 27 murders and the slaughter of the Jewish tribes living there.

That's when Mohammed starts having very different visions.

## Serge Trifkovic



■ Author of "The Sword of the Prophet: Islam - History, Theology, Impact on the World" (Regina Orthodox Press, 2002)

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That's when Allah tells Muslims to strike their enemies, to kill the infidels, to enslave them or else force them to pay the poll tax once they have submitted to Islamic rule.

That's the part of Islam that multicultural apologists don't like to talk about, yet that is the part that retained its validity by virtue of coming after the early Meccan verses.

**IBD:** *How does the Wahhabi sect fit into Islamic tradition?*

**Trifkovic:** An attempt has been made to present Wahhabis as Muslim Anabaptists — stern heretics who have somehow overturned the more tolerant tenets of Islam. On balance, this analysis simply does not stand.

The Wahhabis are much closer to the original teaching and practice of Mohammed and his immediate successors — the four so-called Rightly Guided Caliphs — than any other major variety of Islam.

Wahhabism as practiced today in thousands of mosques throughout the Western world is much closer to the original spirit of early Islam in its vigor and simplicity than the more sophisticated layers imposed in later centuries.

It would be very difficult to establish the claim that Wahhabism is heretical whereas, for instance, Sufism is not.

Sufism, which is popular with Western New Agers because of its woolly headed ambiguities and mysticism, is quite clearly contrary to the stern, Manichean, black-and-white clarity of orthodox Islam.

**IBD:** *What about the "two faces of Islam," which some say are Arab extremism and Turkish moderation?*

**Trifkovic:** Any claim by Turko-philic in the West to present Ottoman Islam as a more enlightened or tolerant variety must deal with the unpleasant reality of the disappearance of Middle Eastern Christians under Ottoman rule and the series of slaughters throughout the 1700s and 1800s, culminating with the Armenian genocide and the Greek exodus from Asia Minor in the early 1900s.

**IBD:** *Can Islam reform itself into a religion at peace with the modern West?*

**Trifkovic:** There are those who say that, faced with the cultural message of Hollywood, consumerism, pornography and the glittering lights of the Western world, Islam will somehow succumb and Muslims will relativize and disrespect their own faith just as Westerners have relativized and abandoned their own spiritual legacy.

But what evidence do we have for this?

Every Islamic community in the West is faced with such temptations, but the rot is not really hap-

pening.

Maybe there is a quiet majority of Muslims who are perfectly happy to sink into the Western mainstream, where little Aishas and Ahmeds become little Johnnies and Chelseas, thanks to state education and television.

But it's not happening with a sizable core of serious Islamic believers, who remain not only undeterred by Western temptations but even more deeply committed to destroying them.

A tolerant, user-friendly Islam is like the unicorn. You can visualize it, you can draw it up, but you cannot bring it to life.

It would require such a thorough rewriting of the sayings of the Prophet and of Allah himself, as they would see it, that it would result in a whole new religion.