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Report on global Muslims reveals similarities with Catholicism

Maureen Fiedler | May. 13, 2013 NCR Today

It?s always fascinating for me to interview those of other faith traditions and sometimes discover similarities with Catholicism. And Islam certainly has some similarities.

Last Thursday on *Interfaith Voices*, I interviewed two scholars [1] ? James Bell, director of international survey research at the Pew Research Center, and Amaney Jamal, an associate professor of politics at Princeton University ? who played key roles in developing and analyzing a new survey of Muslims in 39 countries around the globe on a wide range of issues.

The research [2], sponsored by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, was extensive: face-to-face interviews with almost 40,000 Muslims from Pakistan to Bangladesh, from Egypt to Turkey and the United States.

Not surprisingly ? to people who know Muslims ? most reject suicide bombing, or any violence done in the name of protecting Islam. In fact, most fear extremism and violence based on religion, especially when the perpetrators are Muslim themselves.

Many want an Islamic legal system, commonly called Sharia law, but the vast majority would have it apply only to Muslims, not those of other faiths.

My guests made clear: ?Sharia law? is not neatly codified in a book somewhere. In fact, it differs sharply in different parts of the Muslim world. It is much more conservative in Saudi Arabia, for example, than in a place like Morocco. Think of it more as ?Islamic common law.?

When asked specifically about corporal punishments often written about in the West, the Muslims surveyed did not favor the idea. Rather, they prefer the parts of Sharia that deal with domestic law, such as divorce or inheritance. Of course, such domestic law usually favors males, and Jamal, one of my guests and a Muslim herself, said that most Muslim societies have a way to go on that score. (Ah well, I thought ? so does the Catholic Church!)

American Muslims are a distinct group in the survey. They are much more likely than those in other countries to have egalitarian views of women and gender relations, and they are more likely to believe that people of other faiths can go to heaven.

Apparently, traditional Islam has its own version of that old Catholic teaching, ?no salvation outside the Catholic Church.? In their case, it?s ?no salvation outside Islam,? but the belief is waning in societies ? like the United States ? where people know people of other faith traditions and count them as friends.

Good interfaith friendships bear good fruit!

You can listen to the full interviews at the archives page [1] of Interfaithradio.org.

You can view the full report on the world?s Muslims [2] at Pewforum.org. To view the poll results.

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[1] http://interfaithradio.org/Archive/2013-May/Pew__s_Muslim_Survey__Writing_Letters_as_a_Spiritual_Practice__and_More
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