



## **In His Own Words: The Imam Behind the Ground Zero Mosque**

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There's been growing debate about the background and the beliefs of Imam Feisal Rauf, the Imam behind the planned Islamic mosque at Ground Zero in New York City, where thousands of Americans were murdered on 9-11 by Islamic terrorists.

Imam Feisal Rauf's *What's Right with Islam is What's Right with America: A New Vision for Muslims and the West* has been heralded by many as a means to cultivate mutual respect between Islam and America. It is not. The following are excerpts taken directly from Rauf's book:

In *Chapter 1: Common Roots* in the section entitled *Ideals versus Realities: Keeping the Faith is Hard to Do* Imam Rauf states that humans have difficulty "understanding something unless they can relate it to themselves. . . For example, the word *Jesus* evokes different images for different people. European Christians often depict him as blue eyed and blond haired, Mexican Christians depict him as black eyed and black haired. Obviously, Jesus could not be both..." (24).

Later in *Chapter 3: What's Right with America* Imam Rauf takes it upon himself to blame the United States for any tension that remains between them and Muslims. He states, "If there is any quarrel Muslims have with America, it is that the United States does not always live up to its own ideal of ethics and values" (79). In sub-chapter *America: A Sharia-Compliant State*, Rauf states "(w)hat I am demonstrating is that the American political structure is Shariah compliant, for a 'state inhabited predominantly by Muslims neither defines nor makes it synonymous with an Islamic state. It can become truly Islamic only by virtues of a conscious application of the sociopolitical tenets of Islam to the life of the national, and by an incorporation of those tenets in the basic constitution of the country.' By the same token, a state that does incorporate such sociopolitical tenets has become a de facto Islamic state even if there are no Muslims in name living there, for it expresses the ideals of the good society according to Islamic principles. For America to score even higher on the 'Islamic' or 'Shariah Compliance' scale, America would need to do two things: invite the voices of all religions to join the dialogue in shaping the nation's practical life, and allow religious communities more leeway to judge among themselves according to their own laws" (86).

America's values are from "the principles of the Declaration and Constitution are consistent with divine ordinance, the particular method of government and a particular scheme of

sociopolitical cooperation that follow from it are thereby invested with divine sovereignty and command an authority that comes from God. The power of the community is of a vicarious kind, being held, as it were in trust from God. A Shariah-compliant states owes its existence to the will of the people and is subject to control by them, although it derives its ultimate authority from God” (107).

Further, Rauf believes that “(it) also would not be a violation of church-state separation to have a subsidiary entity within judiciary that employs religious jurists from diverse religious backgrounds to comment on the compliance of certain decisions with their religious laws and to provide guidance to their religious communities on how kosher or Shariah compliant these decisions are” (111).

While trying to understand the thoughts that go into suicide bombing in *Chapter 4: Where the Devil Got in the Details* in the section entitled *A Sociological View of Suicide Bombing* Imam Rauf implies that blame falls on society for such suicidal acts and not solely on the perpetrator himself. He quotes George Simpson, an editor of sociologist Emile Durkheim, saying, “The most widely accepted view today in psychoanalysis is that suicide is most often a form of ‘displacement’; that is, the desire to kill someone who has thwarted the individual is turned back upon the individual himself . . . the individual inflicts upon himself the result of the frustration and anger caused by the perceived unraveling of the social fabric of his world” (145).

In *Chapter 6: A New Vision for Muslims and the West* in the section entitled *What American Jews Can Do: Redouble Efforts for Peace in the Holy Land* Imam Rauf considers the constant violent tension in the Middle East between Israel and Palestinians and seems to neglect America’s ties to its allies, namely Israel, in order to appease the Muslims. He states, “If the United States were to press for Middle East Peace, even placing its troops between the Israelis and the Palestinians if necessary to keep the peace . . . it would be interpreted as an expression of its genuine desire to foster better relations with the Muslim world.” He continues to admonish America for not taking such action saying, “American willingness to allow the Palestinian problem to fester indefinitely is interpreted by Muslims as a dismissive attitude that ignores the concerns of the global Muslim community” (261).

In this final chapter and section (entitled *What Interfaith Dialogue Can Do: Help Us See God’s Image in One Another*) of his book, Imam Rauf states that Muslims must communicate certain points in order to be better understood. The final point he lists is, “That religious militancy is not found uniquely within the Muslim community and that such militancy would be attenuated if the political issues fueling it were addressed” (278).