

**EAST OREGONIAN**  
Founded October 16, 1875

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Publisher  
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**OUR VIEW**



A sign welcoming Syrian refugees is placed at the entrance to the office of the Arizona governor during a rally on Tuesday in Phoenix. AP Photo/Ross D. Franklin

# Keeping our humanity in times of terror

After a day of being noncommittal on the matter, Oregon Governor Kate Brown said Tuesday the state would continue to accept Syrian refugees.

"The words on the Statue of Liberty apply in Oregon just as they do in every other state," wrote Brown.

The point is a noticeably minor one in the global cause of compassion, as well as the global war against terrorism. The United States, at this time, is expecting to resettle 10,000 Syrians, compared to more than 500,000 expected to seek asylum in Europe. About 100 of those refugees are expected to call Oregon home. (A mere diversion to Brown's decision is the still outstanding legal debate over whether a state has any say at all in federal refugee programs.)

The vast majority of refugees are fleeing a total breakdown of the Syrian state, where whole cities have been turned to rubble, lawlessness reigns where ISIS's Sharia law does not, and beheadings and bombings are a constant threat. An economy is nearly nonexistent, jobs that don't require killing are too, and education is all but an impossibility. The future remains dark, considering that the majority of moderate, decent people left the country. Only the extremists remain — those in favor of despotism, and those in favor of a caliphate.

It's no wonder that Paris and Portland are preferable.

But in the wake of the latest terrorist attack, dozens of governors and nearly all the Republican presidential candidates have said the United States cannot take the risk of allowing any more refugees from Syria. It seems the spark for this position came from a Syrian passport was alleged to have been found at the scene of the violence. The suspected leader of the attack, authorities revealed Tuesday, was a Belgian national who had been in Syria fighting on behalf of ISIS. It is currently unknown how he reentered the European Union. Some argue this lack of knowledge about the

reality of Syria and the background of all those seeking asylum means the doors to our country should be closed.

We would argue that generalizations on an entire nation of people, and to an entire faith, are fraught with inaccuracies and prejudice. They are no way to inform policy.

We're reminded of the hashtag #porteouverte that trended on Twitter in Paris after the attacks. It translates to "open door." Parisians from every arrondissement were asking stranded strangers to knock on their door and find a place to stay safely for the night. It became a sign of humanity and civilization on what was surely a terrifying night in the City of Lights. If it can be done then and there, surely the rest of the world can do it, too.

The United States must do what it can to be safe and secure. Each and every refugee should be vetted — but they shouldn't be barred entry solely because of their country of origin.

This fear is nothing new. In a 1938 poll by Fortune Magazine, 67 percent of respondents said we should try to keep German, Austrian and other political refugees out of the U.S., while only 5 percent said we should raise our quotas to make room for more people — mainly Jews — trying to escape a hellish Europe. Again, as the Vietnam War came to an end, 62 percent of respondents to a Gallup poll disapproved of allowing more refugees from Indochina.

The desire for revenge and war and destruction is real and heartfelt, but we must resist the urge. A war in Syria, Iraq and the Middle East is in the long-term interest of ISIS. It is not in ours.

Both the United States and Islamic State have a military. Both have proven the ability to blow things up, but neither has proven the ability to hold territory in the Middle East for a long period of time.

What makes us different is our heart, the decency to open our doors to the downtrodden and terrorized. That we cannot lose.

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**OTHER VIEWS**

## Finding peace within the holy texts

It's easy to think that ISIS is some sort of evil, medieval cancer that somehow has resurfaced in the modern world. The rest of us are pursuing happiness, and here comes this fundamentalist anachronism, spreading death.

But in his book "Not in God's Name: Confronting Religious Violence," the brilliant Rabbi Jonathan Sacks argues that ISIS is in fact typical of what we will see in the decades ahead.

The 21st century will not be a century of secularism, he writes. It will be an age of desecularization and religious conflicts.

Part of this is simply demographic. Religious communities produce lots of babies and swell their ranks, while secular communities do not. The researcher Michael Blume looked back as far as ancient India and Greece and concluded that every nonreligious population in history has experienced demographic decline.

Humans also are meaning-seeking animals. We live, as Sacks writes, in a century that "has left us with a maximum of choice and a minimum of meaning." The secular substitutes for religion — nationalism, racism and political ideology — have all led to disaster. So many flock to religion, sometimes — especially within Islam — to extremist forms.

This is already leading to religious violence. In November 2014, just to take one month, there were 664 jihadi attacks in 14 countries, killing a total of 5,042 people. Since 1984, an estimated 1.5 million Christians have been killed by Islamist militias in Sudan.

Sacks emphasizes that it is not religion itself that causes violence. In their book "Encyclopedia of Wars," Charles Phillips and Alan Axelrod surveyed 1,800 conflicts and found that less than 10 percent had any religious component at all.

Rather, religion fosters groupishness, and the downside of groupishness is conflict with people outside the group. Religion can lead to thick moral communities, but in extreme forms it can also lead to what Sacks calls pathological dualism, a mentality that divides the world between those who are unimpeachably good and those who are irredeemably bad.

The pathological dualist can't reconcile his humiliated place in the world with his own moral superiority. He embraces a politicized religion — restoring the caliphate — and seeks to destroy those outside his group by apocalyptic force. This leads to acts of what Sacks calls altruistic evil, or acts of terror in which the self-sacrifice involved somehow is thought to confer the right to be merciless and unfathomably cruel.

That's what we saw in Paris last week. Sacks correctly argues that we need military weapons to win the war against fanatics like

ISIS, but we need ideas to establish a lasting peace. Secular thought or moral relativism are unlikely to offer any effective rebuttal. Among religious people, mental shifts will be found by reinterpreting the holy texts themselves. There has to be a Theology of the Other: a complex biblical understanding of how to see God's face in strangers. That's what Sacks sets out to do.

The great religions are based on love, and they satisfy the human need for community. But love is problematic. Love is preferential and particular. Love excludes and can create rivalries. Love of one scripture can make it hard to enter sympathetically into the minds of those who embrace another.

The Bible is filled with sibling rivalries: Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, Joseph and his brothers. The Bible crystallizes the truth that people sometimes find themselves competing for parental love and even competing for God's love. Read simplistically, the Bible's sibling rivalries seem merely like stories of victory or defeat — Isaac over Ishmael. But all three Abrahamic religions have

sophisticated, multilayered interpretive traditions that undercut fundamentalist readings. Alongside the ethic of love there is a command to embrace an ethic of justice. Love is particular, but justice is universal. Love is passionate, justice is dispassionate.

Justice demands respect of the other. It plays on the collective memory of people who are in covenantal communities: Your people, too, were once vulnerable strangers in a strange land.

The command is not just to be empathetic toward strangers, which is fragile. The command is to pursue sanctification, which involves struggle and sometimes conquering your selfish instincts. Moreover, God frequently appears where he is least expected — in the voice of the stranger — reminding us that God transcends the particulars of our attachments.

The reconciliation between love and justice is not simple, but for believers the texts, read properly, point the way. Sacks' great contribution is to point out that the answer to religious violence is probably going to be found within religion itself, among those who understand that religion gains influence when it renounces power.

It may seem strange that in this century of technology, peace will be found within these ancient texts. But as Sacks points out, Abraham had no empire, no miracles and no army — just a different example of how to believe, think and live.

David Brooks became a New York Times Op-Ed columnist in September 2003.



**DAVID BROOKS**  
Comment

**Alongside the ethic of love there is a command to embrace an ethic of justice.**

**YOUR VIEWS**

### Story of black cops killing white boy not getting attention

On Nov. 3 at about 9 p.m. Christopher Few was driving his white SUV with his 6-year-old son Jeremy strapped into the seat belt on the passenger side.

Suddenly, they were being pursued by black Marksville, Louisiana, city marshals Norris Greenhouse and Derrick Stafford. The officer's own body cams show the SUV coming to a dead end and trying to back up. The video shows driver Few with his hands up while the two cops fire 18 times into the vehicle. There was no warrant for Few's arrest, he was unarmed, and there was no apparent reason for chasing or stopping the SUV. The father was critically wounded, but the 6-year-old autistic child was killed when hit in the head and chest with 5 of the 18 bullets. The father was so badly wounded he could not even attend his own son's funeral.

Maybe by the time this is printed there will be some answers, but there are none at all so far. The state police chief calls it the most disturbing thing he has ever seen. The two black cops are now charged with murder and being held on \$1 million bail.

Can you imagine the outcry if this had been a black father and son and two white cops? Al Sharpton would have been on the first plane to Marksville along with Rev. Jesse Jackson.

The black mayor of Ferguson would be leading a march, and Quentin Tarantino would be preaching his cop hatred from the podium. Prince would be doing a benefit concert with the black federal prosecutor in Ferguson up on the stage, and the "Black Lives Matter" folks would be encouraging more defiance and anarchy. We would see people marching in the streets with more looting and burning of stores and vehicles. More police would be shot at and spit on. President Obama would go on national TV to say if he had a son he would look just like little Jeremy Few. Media outlets would have a 24-hour-a-day barrage of reports from Marksville. More college presidents would be forced to resign.

The media coverage has been quick and quiet. I guess no one has been willing so far to come out and say that "White Lives Matter Too." There should now be thousands of T-shirts printed saying "Hands Up — Don't Shoot" — except that this time it is actually true.

David Burns  
Pendleton

**LETTERS POLICY**

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