

## Enough already

Editorial  
June 23, 2010

With his June 4 column about an interfaith gathering on the steps of Boston's new Roxbury mosque, Charles Jacobs triggered a torrent of words – pro and con – that shows no sign of abating. But on one point everyone should agree: Jacobs has finally gotten everyone's attention.

Whether that will be a good thing depends on where we are after the dust settles. Right now, the furor has been as much about Jacobs as it has been the threat of Muslim extremism – the topic of so many of his columns and the cause of the group he heads, Americans for Peace and Tolerance.

Jacobs set himself up for that by going after a highly esteemed rabbi, Eric Gurvis of Temple Shalom in Newton. Jacobs assailed Gurvis for appearing at the Islamic Society Cultural Center along with other religious leaders to denounce gubernatorial candidate Tim Cahill. A few days before, Cahill had called Governor Deval Patrick soft on terrorism after he attended a meeting of some 1,000 Muslims at the mosque. Jacobs, not one known for understatement, speculated that Gurvis' appearance was motivated by his "need to demonstrate his moral superiority by caring for the 'other' – no matter how radical or extreme."

Had Jacobs restricted his criticism to the rally and Patrick, he probably wouldn't have kicked up such a ruckus – at least not to the level that would prompt scores of rabbis to sign a letter accusing him of waging a "destructive campaign against Boston's Muslim community ... based on innuendo, half-truths and unproven conspiracy theories."

Jacobs could have made his point about Gurvis without resorting to ridicule. And with his subsequent column firing back at the rabbis, Jacobs invites questions about the thickness of his skin. But the Jewish community will have wasted an opportunity to address the real danger of Muslim extremism if it allows itself to get sidetracked by an internal war of words.

For years, Jacobs has been investigating attempts by extremists, armed with Saudi dollars, to infiltrate and take over American mosques. The Roxbury mosque became the focus of controversy after it came out that the city sold the Islamic Society the site for well under market value and Jacobs, then president of The David Project, and *The Boston Herald* alleged it received funding from Mideast sources with terrorist ties. The society countered with a lawsuit that backfired when the discovery process revealed that millions indeed came from Mideast sources. The lawsuit was dropped, but not before scaring the media and others away from further investigation.

To his credit, Jacobs has not been cowed, but his repeated attacks on the mosque have failed to rally the Jewish establishment. If anything, they may have had the opposite effect, culminating in this month's angry exchanges.

Much of what Jacobs writes does smack of guilt by association, and Jews – who were overrepresented among McCarthy's victims – are particularly sensitive to that. But it is no easy thing to nail down just who controls the levers at the mosque. Bilal Kaleem, the mosque president, expresses bafflement at Jacobs' allegations. "If I want to subvert America, what type of America do I want to leave for my son?" he told the Advocate.

We have no basis on which to question Kaleem's sincerity. But we still wonder why Saudis and others in the Mideast would underwrite American mosques and not expect to have a say.

While Jacobs has succeeded in putting the mosque on the front burner, he has also ignited a fire within the Jewish community that threatens to singe us all.

We need to simmer down and figure out a way to establish the facts. Who really calls the shots at Boston area mosques? Whose teachings do local imams subscribe to – and what lessons are they passing onto their students? How do we frame such questions in a way that forces direct answers?

It may turn out that we have nothing to fear and everything to gain by engaging with Muslim leaders – or it may be that the mosque has been subverted by extremists.

One thing we know for sure: Bickering and bemoaning our bickering get us nowhere.