

Reflections On Terrorism

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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

Over a month has passed since I posted the last newsletter (No 74, September 6, 2001). This unusual delay has caused some of you to wonder if something has happened to me. Let me reassure you that I was not in any of the three hijacked airplanes used as lethal weapons last September 11, 2001. All is well with me and my family. The problem has been simply lack of time for writing this timely essay on the significance of the recent terroristic acts. Several of you have asked me to comment on this infamous act of terrorism. I hope that you will profit from my historical and eschatological perspectives on the terroristic acts of September 11.

Two major factors have caused this unintentional delay. The first was the completion of the two CD-ROMs project. For the past four months I have worked every waking moment preparing these two CDs, which contain all my 16 books, over 100 essays, and my the popular PowerPoint lectures on the Sabbath and Second Advent. This project proved to be far more time-consuming than I had anticipated. I am surely glad that finally this task is completed. In fact during the past few days we processed all your orders. Now I need to catch up with other important tasks. One of them is to answer the over 1000 messages you have emailed to me.

A second fact which has caused this unusual delay is the recent lecture tour in Italy and Germany. I was away from my desk for about 10 days. While overseas I was planning to write this newsletter, but I had no free time to think. The overseas trip was a heartwarming experience. First, I was able to visit with my aging mother (86 years old) in Rome, and then to worship and fellowship with our fellow believers in Rome (a Tuesday evening meeting on October 9) and in Darmstadt, Germany (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, October 5-7). Let me give you a brief report about my trip to Germany.

THE VISIT TO THE EBERSTADT SDA CHURCH, IN GERMANY

On October 5, 6, and 7, I spent three delightful days with our Adventist fellow believers of the Erberstadt SDA Church, in Darmstadt, near Frankfurt. The invitation was extended to me by the local church board, a procedure frowned up by the local conference president, who declared my visit "illegal," because it was not approved by his Conference. In 27 years of itinerant ministry around the world, I never had to worry about Conference approval. I have always dealt directly with the church or institution inviting me. Incidentally, I mistakenly identified one of the organizers, Detlef Roeske, as the church pastor. Detlef is a very active local church member, but not a pastor. I have been asked to make this correction.

I accepted the invitation with some reluctance and apprehension. The reason is that German Adventists have the reputation for being liberal and critical of conservative preachers like me. I was afraid that only few Adventists would attend my lectures, especially I wrote two controversial books on music and women's ordination.

My apprehensions were totally unfounded. The attendance to the three days meetings surpassed my fondest expectations. Already on Friday evening, the church that could seat about 250 people, was packed to capacity. To alleviate the overcrowded condition, on Sabbath morning many chairs were brought in and a closed circuit was set up in the fellowship hall downstairs. Every inch of space was utilized. People were sitting wherever they could find some space—even along the outer walls on the boxes of the heaters. Truly I can say that in all my travels around the world I have never spoken to a more receptive and responsive congregation.

A tangible proof of the amazing interest was the Sabbath afternoon meeting, which turned out to be a marathon session from 4:00 p. m. to about 9:00 p.m. During the five hours session, we had only 15 minutes break between the two PowerPoint presentations on the Sabbath and Second Advent. This was the first time in my life that I spoke almost continuously for almost 5 hours. Surprisingly at the close of the meeting on Saturday evening the church was still packed. Very few people had left.

After such a long sessions on the Sabbath, I thought that few people would show up on Sunday morning, especially since the time of the meeting had to be anticipated from 11:00 to 9:00 a. m., in view of my United flight to Chicago which was leaving at 1:30 p. m. It was a pleasant surprise for me to see the church practically full even on Sunday morning.

The experience of this trip has caused me to reject the stereotyped view of German Adventists as liberal and indifferent. Somebody had told me before leaving that our German young people go to church only when there is a rock concert. I can assure you that there was no rock concert to draw the young people. Yet many of them came and listened attentively to the proclamation of God's Word. Truly I can say that our fellow believers in Germany are very eager to deepen their understanding and experience of timely Bible truths. Let us pray for them as they face the formidable challenge of reaching secular minds with our timely message.

THE RELEASE OF THE TWO CD-ROMs

After several months of painstaking efforts, the two CD-ROMs containing my 16 books, over 100 essays, and my PowerPoint Seminars lectures, are finally out. If you have already ordered them, you should receive your set within the next few days. All the orders received were processed last week. If you were unable to order them before, you can still order them at the special price of only \$100.00 for the two CD-ROMs, instead of the regular price of \$140.00 (\$70.00 per each CD).

The first CD-ROM includes not only my books, but also over 100 essays on timely biblical teachings that I have authored during the past 30 years. This CD-ROM offers altogether over 7000 pages of Biblical research on topics relevant to our times. An ACROBAT search engine makes it possible for anyone with a PC or Apple computer, to locate immediately what I wrote on any given topic. By typing in the name of a topic or of a text, you will have at your finger tips the findings of my research.

The second CD-ROM contains my popular PowerPoint lectures on the Sabbath and Second Advent. Each lecture is illustrated with over 100 colorful slides. Each slide comes the text which can be printed separately. This makes it possible for anyone to use and modify my lectures for Bible studies. I have spent over 1000 hours preparing these lectures which are popularly received everywhere. The CD-ROM comes with a free version of the PowerPoint program that you can easily install in your PC or Mac computer, if you do not have the program.

The regular price of the two CD-ROMs is \$70.00 each, but we offer the two CD-ROMs together for only \$100.00, postage paid. You can order the two CD-ROMs by calling us at (616) 471-2915 or by mailing your check to: BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES, 4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49103.

THE NEXT NEWSLETTER WILL RESPOND TO THE LATEST ATTACKS AGAINST THE SABBATH

During the past few months several Adventist pastors have resigned from their ministry and left the Seventh-day Adventist Church. One of them, Greg Taylor, who served as the senior pastor of the Ashville SDA Church in North Carolina (about 500 members), has prepared a 40 pages document entitled "An Open Letter to Our Friends and Family," (copyrighted on August 9, 2001). In this lengthy "Open Letter" Taylor sets forth his reasons for rejecting the Adventist view of the law in general and of the Sabbath in particular.

In view of the fact that this document is circulating far and wide, many Adventists have urged me to respond to its anti-Sabbath arguments. I will be glad to do so in our next newsletter. Since Taylor recycles many old arguments against the law and the Sabbath, it may be necessary to devote two newsletters to this subject. We shall see what happens.

These latest attacks against the Sabbath have confused a considerable number of Adventists. My estimate is that during the past 5 years about 5000 former Adventist, including about 20 former pastors, have embraced the so-called "New Covenant Theology" which rejects the Sabbath as an Old Covenant institution. Some of the Adventists who are on the verge of leaving the church, have contacted me, asking me to answer their questions. They have warned me that if I do not provide them with satisfactory answers, they will leave the church. I regret that due to time constrains, I have been unable to reply to their questions. My response to Taylor's "Open Letter," will deal also with their questions, hoping to satisfy their expectations.

On Friday November 23, 2001 at 10:00 a. m., I have been asked to met with the Adventist pastors of the Hendersonville area, in North Carolina. Apparently some of them have been shaken by the resignation of their colleague, Greg Taylor, and would like me to address some of their questions. I will be glad to do so. If someone is interested to attend this pastors' meeting, they should contact Pastor John A Sweigart at (828) 697-9876 for information about the location.

On the evening of the same day we begin a special rally sponsored by the local SDA churches. I will present my popular SABBATH ENRICHMENT SEMINAR at the Youth Activities Building of the Bonclarken Conference Center, located at 500 Pine Drive, in Flat Rock, North Carolina. If you live within driving distance, you are welcomed to attend the meetings.

The number of pastors and members who have recently left the Adventist Church, raises some serious questions about the theological training of our ministers. Reading their literary attacks against the Sabbath, clearly reveals a faulty method of Biblical interpretation. Their arbitrary use of few selected Bible texts to support their conclusions, shows that they have never been taught how to examine all the relevant passages, before jumping to conclusions.

Part of the problem may be a deficient seminary training on the proper method of Biblical interpretation and on the doctrinal foundations of our faith. In recent years the tendency the pressure on our Theological Seminary has been to focus more on the practical aspects of the ministry such as church growth, and less on doctrinal, exegetical, and historical studies. This shift may account for the fact that some of our pastors seem to be confused on our fundamental doctrines. In view of the recent developments, it may ne necessary for our Theological Seminary to set up a task force to determine how to best deal with the problem of the alarming number of pastors and church members who are leaving the church.

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY TOUR ON A CD-ROM

Linda McDonald, a graphic designer and wife of an Adventist pastor, has prepared an excellent CD-ROM with 1400 digital photos from the sites of the Great Controversy and the Reformation in Europe. She took the pictures during a recent Great Controversy Tour. I have found this Evangelistic collection of pictures a most valuable resource for my PowerPoint presentations. The CD includes two Powerpoint presentations that are ready to use. The cost of the CD is only \$45.00, postage paid. For further information, feel free to contact:

Linda McDonald
RR 1 Box 1208
Shamokin, PA 17872-9729
570-644-5638
oldmacfarm3@yahoo

A UNIQUE SABBATH TRAIL

Washington, New Hampshire is known as the birthplace of the first Sabbathkeeping Adventist Congregation. It was established in the autumn of 1844 by William Farnsworth. The original church still exists and is used during the Summer months.

Pastor Merlin Knowles of the Washington church, in answer to prayer, was impressed to build a Sabbath Trail next to the church, that would beautifully tell the story of the Sabbath to visitors of all denominations who visit the historic church each year.

Dedicated in 1998, this unique one mile long trail is located in the woods surrounding the church with thirty-one sites where visitors can sit on benches and read attractively engraved granite markers that tell the story of the Sabbath from Creation to the New Earth.

May I encourage you to make a visit to the Sabbath Trail either in person or via the Internet at: <http://www.tagnet.org/washington/>. You will find this to be a most pleasant experience.

THANK YOU FOR INVITING YOUR FRIENDS TO SUBSCRIBE

Every week I receive a average of 100 new subscription from people who received an ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER from a friend. Thank you for sharing these Bible studies with your friends. Just let them know that all what they need to do to subscribe is to email me a request at: <sbacchiocchi@qtm.net> As a result of your promotional endeavors over 13,000 people are already benefiting from these Bible studies.

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the seminars for the months of October and November 2001. Every Sabbath it is a great privilege for me to meet our subscribers who travel considerable distances to attend the seminar. Feel free to contact me at (616) 471-2915 for a special seminar in your area sometimes during 2002. All the weekends for 2001 are now taken. Each of the three seminars on the Sabbath, Second Advent, and Christian Lifestyle are now presented with PowerPoint slides which add a visual dimension to our message. If you have attended one of my seminars in the past, you will find the new PowerPoint version to be substantially improved.

OCTOBER 5-6-7: FRANKFURT, GERMANY : DARMSTADT SDA CHURCH

Location: Advent Gemeinde Darmstadt-Eberstadt, Heidelberger Land Strasse 191

For information call Detlef Roeske at 0049-6151-183560 or email him at detlef_roeske@roehm.com.

You can also call the local elder, Brother Lothar Mueller. at: 06151-144390

OCTOBER 12-13: ATLANTA, GA: CONYERS SDA CHURCH

Location: Conyers SDA Church, Conyers, Georgia

For information contact Pastor Michael Leno at (404) 317-9401.

OCTOBER 18-20: AMES AND NEVADA, IOWA

Location: October 18 and 19: Iowa State University, in Ames, Iowa

For information call Prof Graeme Quick at (515) 294-1320

October 20: Nevada SDA Church located at 224 South Sixth Street, Nevada, IA 50201

For information call Pastor David Lincoln at (515) 382-4134

OCTOBER 26-27: PORTLAND - SANDY SDA CHURCH, OREGON

Location: 17150 University Avenue, Sandy, OR 97055

For information call Pastor Greg Middlestetter at (503) 668-6144

NOVEMBER 2-3: ORLANDO - MT. DORA SDA CHURCH, FLORIDA

Location: 18440 Us Highway 441, Mt. Dora, FL 32757

For information call Pastor David Canther at (352) 383-4100 or (352) 728-4880

NOVEMBER 9-10: MIAMI - MARANATHA SDA CHURCH, FLORIDA

Location: 18900 N. W. 32nd Avenue, Miami, FL 33055

For information call Pastor Keith R. Harding at (305) 620-9091

NOVEMBER 16-17: ERIE SDA CHURCH, PENNSYLVANIA

Location: 190 Hunter Road, Erie, PA 16509

For information call Pastor Thomas Cusack at (814) 864-8124 or

Elder Lowell Freeman at (814) 739-2360

NOVEMBER 23-24: HENDERSONVILLE - UPWARD SDA CHURCH, NORTH CAROLINA

Location: Youth Activities Building of the Bonclarken Conference Center

located at 500 Pine Drive, Flat Rock, North Carolina

For information call Pastor John A Sweigart at (828) 697-9876 or (828) 696-7922

REFLECTIONS ON TERRORISM

Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,
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The infamous act of terrorism of September 11, which caused the collapse of the two majestic towers of the World Trade Center, the death of over 6000 innocent lives, and an international economic uncertainty, is raising serious questions on the origin, nature, and goals of terrorism. Inquiring minds are asking, "What were the Moslem terrorists trying to accomplish? What motivated them to sacrifice their own lives in order to strike at the financial center of the USA and kill so many innocent lives? Were these Moslem terrorists mentally deranged individuals, controlled by demonic powers? Or, Were they highly intelligent, Moslem fundamentalists totally committed to advance the cause of Islam?"

The questions of the ideological roots and goals of Moslem terrorists are largely ignored by the media. The focus of the media is primarily on the activities Osama bin Laden and similar terroristic organizations. The prevailing assumption is that these organizations are made up of religious fanatics who "misread religious texts and find arguments to justify holy war against anyone or any country believed to be promoting a purported 'anti-Islam agenda.'" (USA TODAY, Oct 1, 2001, pag. 15A). Thus, many believe that to eliminate the threat of terroristic acts against American institutions and people, it is imperative to capture and punish bin Laden and similar fanatical leaders found in many countries.

This popular assumption is faulty because Moslem terrorists do not misread the *Koran*. On the contrary, as we shall show, they read correctly what the *Koran* teaches about the extermination of anti-Islam individuals and nations. They take the teaching of the *Koran* seriously and are willing to stake their lives to obey its directives. This means that the war against terrorism cannot be won solely by striking at selected terroristic organizations, because supporters for a holy war (Jihad), especially against America, are found throughout the Moslem world.

Everywhere there are Moslems extremists who accept at face value the teachings of the *Koran* about the suppression of those who oppose Islam. They are known as "Moslem fundamentalists." This means that the problem of Moslem terrorism cannot be resolved without first striking at its roots by exposing the immorality, shamefulness, and senselessness of its teachings about the extermination of infidels.

THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS CONVICTIONS

Americans must not underestimate the importance of the deep religious convictions that motivates Moslem terrorists. History teaches us that religious fanatics have committed many unspeakable massacres of innocent people. We shall refer to few example shortly. We shall see that the recent Moslem acts of terrorism are not much different from those committed by Christian crusaders against Moslem, Jews, and reformatory movements.

Moslem fundamentalists are willing and anxious to give their life for what they believe to be a "Holy War" against the foremost enemy of Islam, America, because they are guaranteed entrance into paradise. Why do they hate America more than any other country, in spite of US generosity toward all the Moslem countries, including Afghanistan. The latter has received millions of dollars in financial aid, and is receiving drop-shipments of food, even during the bombing. The answer is to be found in their view of America as the foremost enemy of Islam, especially because of its open support for Israel.

Capturing and killing some terrorists will hardly eliminate the threat against Americans, because their ranks will be replenished immediately by thousands of Moslems willing to sacrifice their lives for the same cause.

Another fact to keep in mind is that the war against terrorism is not a clear linear warfare. There are no clear "hot spots" to strike with high technology weapons. American technological superiority will be helpful, but is not decisive in eliminating terrorism, because

its leaders understand the fundamentals of modern warfare, namely, simplicity, security, and surprise. They strike in surprisingly unexpected ways. Nobody would have imagined that they would use airplanes loaded with innocent passengers as lethal weapons to strike at the financial and military centers of the USA.

THE NEED TO EXPOSE RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

To resolve the problem of terrorism, which is causing a paralyzing fear in the American society, besides costing billions of dollars to the international community of nations, it is vitally important to understand the religious intolerance that fuels such senseless, immoral acts of terrorism. Religious intolerance arises not only from bigotry and fanaticism, but also from a mistaken zeal for truth manifested in intense religious convictions about the need to eliminate “infidels” and “heretics.”

In the case of Moslem terrorists, the inspiration for their destructive behavior derives from their mistaken zeal for the teachings of the *Koran* regarding the extermination of the infidels. Thus, to deal with the problem of Moslem terrorism, it is imperative to embark in a worldwide educational program designed to expose the immorality of those teachings which call for the suppression and extermination of those who practice a different religion. Such teachings are found, not only in Islam, but also, as we shall see, in Christian Churches.

This strategy of exposing the immorality of religious intolerance, may not be politically correct, because it can alienate moderate Moslems living in the USA and overseas. To avoid such a backlash it is important to distinguish between the teachings of Islam about the exterminations of the “infidels,” and the Moslem people themselves who may not understand and/or accept such teachings. The same principle applies to any religion. For example, it is unfair to blame the Catholics for the historical teachings of their church regarding the suppression of the heretics, because most Catholics today ignore and/or reject such teachings.

American politicians, including President Bush, have been misled to believe that fundamentally Islam is tolerant and peaceful religion. The terroristic acts of September 11 were allegedly committed by a group of deranged fanatics, who misinterpreted the teachings of Islam. This view is totally untrue. Yet to defend this sanitized view of Islam, American politicians have enlisted the help of moderate Moslem leaders who have embraced Western democratic views.

But moderate Moslems hardly represent the historic teachings of Islam, which are still embraced by millions of devout Moslems. Moderate Moslems can be compared to those liberal Christians who explain away as time-bound and culturally conditioned those teachings of the Bible which are unpopular today.

An example is the Biblical teaching on the exclusion of women from the headship role of priests in the OT and elders/pastors in the NT. Liberal Christians reject this teaching as culturally conditioned, and thus, not applicable to our times. If Politicians were to call upon liberal Christians to explain to the media that Christianity does not teach the exclusion of women from serving in the headship role of pastors, they would be misrepresenting the many Evangelical Christians who accept the permanent nature of the Biblical teachings on role distinctions.

PART I TERRORISM FROM AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

As a church historian by training and profession, I would like to reflect upon Moslem terrorism, first historically and then eschatologically. Historically, today's Moslem terroristic acts can be traced back to the teachings of their founder, Mohammed himself. A study of Mohammed's life indicates that he was determined to exterminate idolaters, Jews, and Christians, commonly referred to as "infidels."

In 627 with army of 305 enthusiastic followers, Mohammed conquered several Jewish and Christian tribes, ordering and watching in person the massacre of 600 Jews in one day. In 630 Mohammed entered triumphantly into the city of Mecca, destroying the 360 idols of the Kaaba and massacring many idolaters.

To the very end of his life Mohammed strongly believed in exterminating the infidels, that is, the idolaters, Christians, and Jews who did not embrace Islam. Among his last utterances were: "The Lord destroy the Jews and Christians! Let his anger be kindled against those that turn the tombs of their prophets into places of worship! Let there not remain any faith but that of Islam." (Philip Schaff, *The History of the Christian Church*, vol. 4, p. 166).

The root of the Moslem religious fanaticism is to be found in the teachings of Mohammed himself: "The sword is the key of heaven and hell; a drop of blood shed in the cause of Allah, a night spent in arms, is of more avail than two months of fasting or prayer; whoever falls in battle, his sins are forgiven, and at the day of judgment his limbs shall be supplied by the wings of angels and cherubins." (Ibid., p. 171).

This notion that dying for the cause of Islam is the surest way to heaven, motivates sincere Moslems to sacrifice their lives in fighting those who are perceived to be the enemies of their religion. This teaching appeals especially to the million of Moslem who live in abject poverty. Sacrificing their life for the triumph of Islam, becomes for them a sure way to bring to an end to their present miserable life in the hope of entering immediately into the bliss of paradise.

The battle-cry of Mohammed's successors, known as Califs, has been: "Before you is paradise, behind you are death and hell." This intense religious fanaticism has been inspired by the Islamic Holy Book, the *Koran*, which clearly teaches the extermination of those who oppose Islam. For example in Sura 9:5 we read: "Fight and slay the pagans [those who do not embrace Islam] wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem of war."

According to the *Koran*, those who resist Islam: "shall be put to death or crucified or have their hands and feet cut off on alternate sides..." (Sura 5:51). Moslems are instructed not to associate with Jews or Christians: "Believers, take neither Jews nor Christians for your friends. They are friends with one another. Whoever of you seeks their friendship shall become one of their number. Allah does not guide the wrongdoers." (Sura 5:51).

Throughout the centuries devout Moslems have followed the dictates of the *Koran*, by systematically eliminating the presence of pagans, Jews and Christians from the territories they conquered. Those who dispute this historical fact, only need to look, for example, at the map of North Africa. During the first six centuries, North Africa was populated predominantly by flourishing Christian communities, which produced such influential Christian leaders as Tertuttlian, Cyprian, and Augustin. But, beginning with the Moslem conquest of the seventh century, Christianity were systematically suppressed. Today the presence of Christians is practically nonexistent in the Moslem North African countries of Lybia, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. In these countries Moslem have succeeded to systematically eradicate Christianity and other religions.

This historic Moslem policy of eradicating competitive religions, helps us understand the recent acts of terrorism. In the case of the USA, the goal of these Moslem extremists, is not to exterminate the Christian and Jewish population. They are fully aware that this is an impossible task. After all the Moslems in the USA are only a small minority.

Rather, their policy is to punish America for her alleged anti-Islam policies, hitting Americans in their "comfort zone." This entails in forcing Americans to "pay more and play less," by burdening them with billions of dollars of expenses to fight terrorism at home and abroad, It also consists in distressing Americans with the constant fear of unsuspected attacks. By keeping Americans on the edge and thus undermine their traditional sense of security, many devout Moslems believe that they are scoring a major victory for the cause of Islam. They think that they are showing to the world that their God, Allah, has empowered them to humiliate the most powerful nation, America. For them this represents the triumph of Islam over Christianity.

MONOTHEISM AND RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

Why is Islam such an intolerant religion that promotes the suppression of all other religions? The answer is to be found largely in the monotheistic nature of Islam. Like Christianity, Islam teaches that there is only one true God, which for Moslems is Allah. Monotheistic religions tend to be more intolerant, because they believe that their God is the only true God and their religion is the only true religion which has the right to exist. To some extent this view is shared by the American Religious Right movements that want to impose their views on the whole nation.

The Polytheistic religions of ancient Rome had no problem in accepting other gods and religions, as long as these did not destabilize the social and political order. In fact, in the Roman Pantheon there was an empty niche reserved for unknown gods. Initially Judaism was a *religio licita*—a lawful religion, and it remained so as long as the Jews were submissive to Roman authorities. It became a *religio illicita*—unlawful religion, when the Jews started uprising against the Roman government as a result of their resurgent messianic expectations.

The same was true for Christianity. Roman Emperors tolerated Christians, as long as they were not perceived to be a threat to the stability of the socio-political order. They persecuted Christians when they saw in the Christian teachings and lifestyle—especially the Christian refusal to worship the Emperor as *Dominus et Deus* (Lord and God)—a threat to the social and political stability of the Empire.

The sad reality is that after gaining religious freedom in A. D. 313 by the famous Edict of Milan issued by the Emperors Constantine and Licinius, the Christian Church became as intolerant toward pagan religions and Christian "heretical" movements, as the Roman authorities had been toward the Christians. For examples, Emperor Theodosius I in 380 and 381 issued edicts which banned pagan religions and made Christianity the exclusive religion of the Empire. Gradually and systematically fanatical Christian leaders dismantled and destroyed pagan temples, schools, and religious practices. Christian leaders became as an arrogant persecutors of paganism as Roman authorities had been of the Christianity.

It is important to remember that Christians in the past have committed the same atrocities against Moslems and Christians dissenters, that Moslem fundamentalists are doing today. The "Christian" perpetrators of these atrocities were not called "terrorists," but "crusaders," because they wore in their clothing the emblem of the "Cross." But, in actual fact the crusaders in most cases were plain criminals who delighted in slaughtering mercilessly innocent people.

For more than two centuries, beginning in 1095, Popes, Emperors, Kings, and church leaders called upon Christians to participate in armed pilgrimages to Jerusalem under the banner of the Cross. The goal of these Crusaders were not much different from

the goal of Moslem fanatics today. The recognition of this fact can help us to place Moslem terrorism within the broader historical perspective of religious intolerance.

The Crusaders were called “soldiers of Jesus Christ,” commissioned by the Pope to exterminate the infidel Moslems and to recapture the holy places in Jerusalem. For such murderous exploits, the crusaders were promised absolution for their past sins and a guaranteed entrance into Paradise. Abbot Guibert, a chronicler of the First Crusade, declared that God invented the Crusades “as a new way for the laity to atone for their sins, and to merit salvation.” It is evident that the “Holy Wars” conducted by the Christians crusaders in the past, were not much different from the Jihad carried out by Moslem extremists today.

CRUSADES AGAINST REFORMATORY MOVEMENTS

The Crusades against the Moslem infidels were only a prelude to the later crusades against such Christians reformatory movements as the Albigenses, Waldenses, Huguenots, etc. The powerful Pope Innocent III organized four distinct crusades against the Albigenses, a reformatory, rigoristic Christian movement located especially of Southern France. The Pope promised “with all confidence . . . the heavenly kingdom,” to all those who would participate in the slaughter of the Albigenses.

Reading the account of the massacre of innocent Christians who dared to reject the dictates of a corrupt papacy, is for me far more revolting than listening to the reports about the Moslem attack against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. After all the Moslem attack lasted only few minutes and affected a relatively smaller number of people, when compared to the countless thousands killed by the Crusaders and the Inquisition. The crusades against reformatory movements lasted for centuries and resulted in the extermination of hundreds of thousands of Bible believing Christians.

For example, Beziers, a town in Southern France with a large number of Albigenses, was stormed in 1209 by an army led by the papal legate, Arnold of Citeaux. A horrible butchery occurred. “The wild soldiery heeded well the legate’s command, ‘Fell all to the ground. The Lord knows His own.’ Neither age nor sex was spared. Church walls interposed no protection and seven thousands were put to death in St. Magdalen’s church alone. Nearly twenty thousands were put to the sword. According to the reports of the papal legates, Milo and Arnold, the ‘divine vengeance raged wonderfully against the city . . . Our [soldiers] spared neither sex nor condition. The whole city was sacked, and the slaughter was very great.” (Schaff, vol 5, p. 511).

The annals of Christian history are replete with “the glorious” accounts of massacres of innocent Christians who dared to worship God according to the dictates of their conscience, rather than the directives of apostate church leaders. Think, for example, of the massacre of the Calvinistic Christians living in France, called Huguenots, that took place on the night of August 23-24, 1572. It is estimated that between 10,000 to 100,000 were slaughtered in Paris and neighboring towns.

Another example, is the 1655 massacre of the innocent Waldenses that took place in the Piedmont valleys. Their crime consisted in translating and distributing portions of the Bible and calling upon people to live godly lives, according to the teachings of the Word of God. The horrors of this massacre shocked the Protestant world of the time and inspired Milton to compose this sonnet:

“Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold,
Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones.”

These few examples of “Holy War” waged in the past by Christian leaders against Moslems and fellow Christians, helps us to place the religious fanaticism of Moslem terrorists in historical perspective. They remind us that Christians too in the past

have been blinded by the same hate of religious fanaticism displayed by Moslem terrorists today. Like some Moslem extremists today, Christians have committed in the past horrible, atrocious massacres, which defy the Christian conscience.

THE LESSON OF HISTORY

The lesson of history is clear. To eliminate the threat of religious terrorism, it is imperative to eradicate from Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, and all other religions, those teachings and beliefs that foster religious intolerance and destructive efforts toward those who believe differently. This may appear an impossible task, but it is a task that must be undertaken, if the root problem of religious terrorism is to be resolved. This task entails, not only apologizing for the sins committed by our forefathers, but also repudiating those historic texts and teachings that foster hate, hostility, and the destruction of dissidents.

A fitting example is the recent apology of Pope John Paul II for the atrocities—which could rightly be called “terroristic acts”—committed by the Catholic Church for centuries against the Jews, the Moslems, the Greek Orthodox, and the Protestant first during the Crusades and then during the Inquisition. The Pope is to be commended for the courage to apologize for these atrocities, but a confession alone is not enough. The Pope needs to have the courage to publicly reject those Catholic teachings, found in countless official church documents, which justify the extermination of “heretics.”

For example, Thomas Aquinas, who is rightly regarded as the most influential Catholic theologian who ever lived, clearly states in his *Summa Theologica* that heretics are not to be tolerated, but exterminated. He wrote: “With regard to heretics two points must be observed: one, on their own side, the other, on the side of the church. On their own side there is a sin, whereby they deserve not only to be separated from the Church by excommunication, but also to be severed from the world by death. For it is a much graver matter to corrupt the faith which quickens the soul, than to forge money, which supports the temporal life. Wherefore, if forger of money and other evildoers are forthwith condemned to death by the secular authority, much more reason is there for heretics, as soon as they are convicted of heresy, to be not only excommunicated but even put to death” (Question 11, Article 3).

This fundamental Catholic teachings that “heretics,” if they did not recant, must be not only excommunicated but also exterminated, is found in numerous documents of the Inquisition. The history of the inquisition is probably the most revolting chapter of Christian history. Church leaders sat as arbiters of human destiny and in the name of religion applied atrocious tortures to countless victims, pronouncing upon them death sentences which were usually carried out by the State.

It is hard to believe that Church leaders, who should have represented Christ’s love and compassion, revealed instead their cold heartlessness, by inflicting pitiless penalties on harmless people, whose only guilty was that of following the dictates of their conscience, rather than the directives of an apostate church.

The cold heartlessness in which church leaders suppressed dissenters, can be seen also in some of the paintings and sculptures of the time. A good example is the statuary found in the Church of Jesus in Rome, which is the Mother Church of the Jesuits. I am very familiar with this church, because I spent five years studying at the Pontifical Gregorian University, which is the leading Jesuit university founded by Ignatius of Loyola. The Church of Jesus is located near to the Gregorian University, and both of them are dedicate to their founder, Ignatius.

On the facade of the Church of Jesus, above its main entrance there is a niche with a life-size statue of Ignatius of Loyola, to whom the church is dedicated. Ignatius tramples on the neck of a “heretic,” suffocating him to death. Inside the church, there is a similar statuary beside the altar of St. Ignatius. It portrays a woman, representing the Catholic church, treading under foot Luther and Huss. The statuary portrays the mission of the Jesuits to suppress Protestantism.

If the Pope and the Catholic Church are truly sorry for the atrocities (terroristic acts) they committed in the past in the name of Christ, they ought to cover up such embarrassing monuments, which are a living witness to their religious intolerance. The least they could do is to attach a disclaimer besides these monuments, that could read something like this: "This monument stands as a sad reminder of the sin of religious intolerance committed by the Catholic Church. We ask God and the Christian people in general to forgive our past sins. May we all learn from our terrible past sins to be tolerant and respectful toward people of all religions." A disclaimer of this nature would show good faith on the part of the Catholic church to condemn and renounce their past religious intolerance. Unfortunately, there are no indications that such a disclaimer is forthcoming.

PROTESTANT RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

The foregoing discussion may give the impression that religious intolerance is primarily a Moslem and Catholic problem. But this is hardly the case. Protestants, both of the Lutheran and Calvinistic tradition, have been equally guilty of religious intolerance. They believed to be their duty to God and themselves to suppress and punish heresy as well as civil crimes. Lutheran Reformers persecuted Catholics in their territories by confiscating their church properties, prohibiting their worship, and often exiling them.

Calvin stands out among the Reformers as the most embarrassing example of religious intolerance. The role that Calvin played in the trial, condemnation, and execution of Servetus—a brilliant scientist of the time who espoused a unitarian view of God—has tarnished Calvin's image to this very day.

Servetus was caught by the Geneva police one night while he was travelling through the city in a disguised way on his way to Italy to practice medicine. Because Servetus refused to renounce his unitarian view of God and to accept the trinitarian view, he was burned to death at Champel on the 27th of October, 1553, with green wood and sulphur to better re-enact the destructive smoke and fire of hell.

Calvin was primarily responsible for this execution, because he presided over the whole trial. The fires kindled by the atrocity of that execution are still burning and casting their lurid sparks into the religious intolerance of Calvin. It is hard for me to believe that a man like Calvin, who wanted to make Geneva a haven for the religious oppressed, could be so intolerant toward a renowned scientist who discovered the pulmonary circulation of the blood, to have him executed in a most cruel way.

THE NEED TO BAN RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

The foregoing examples of atrocities committed by Moslems, Catholics, and Protestants, who were inspired by a mistaken zeal for truth, serve to highlight the need to embark on an international educational program, designed to expose the immorality and shamefulness of all forms of religious intolerance.

After 6000 years of bloodshed, often caused by religious intolerance, the time has come for Moslem, Jews, Catholic, Protestants, and all other religious, to publicly apologize for the atrocities committed in the past in the name of their religion against innocent victims. The time has come to reject as immoral, scandalous, shameful, and deplorable all those writings and teachings which promote the suppression and extermination of those who believe and live differently from us.

The time has come to help people of every nation understand that we are all members of one family, the human family—a family made up of different races, cultures, and religions. Any religion that teaches the suppression and extermination of members of other religions, should be condemned for what it is: a religion based on bigotry and superstition, that violates the fundamental human rights to freely worship God according to the dictates of one's conscience.

Christians should set an example by proclaiming and practicing the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man. In order for our proclamation to be credible, we need to show to the world, that we accept Moslem, Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, and people of all religions, as children of the same God, equally important in His sight.

It is a formidable challenge to embark on a worldwide educational program designed to strike at the roots of terrorism by exposing the immorality of religious intolerance and by promoting the right of all people to practice their own religion. Yet, it is a challenge that must be undertaken, if the problem of religious terrorism is ever to be resolved. This is a challenge that calls for the commitment and resources of people of goodwill everywhere. One would wish that some of the 40 billion dollars recently voted by Congress to fight terrorism, could be spent on educating the human family on the roots and dangers of religious intolerance.

PART 2 TERRORISM FROM AN ESCHATOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

During the past few weeks, many have asked me to comment on the prophetic significance of the terroristic acts of September 11, 2001. Some wonder if such an act may be the fulfillment of a specific endtime prophecies. The attempt to link the tragedy of September 11 to a specific Bible prophecy, reflects the efforts that Christians have made throughout the centuries to look for the fulfillment of the endtime signs in the events of their time.

Before commenting on the prophetic significance of the recent events, it is important to remember that the function of the endtime prophecies, is *to point toward the nearness of the end, without pinpointing its exact time*. To use an analogy, we could compare the endtime prophecies to *highway markers* which give the number or the name of the highway, but *not to highway mileposts* which specify the exact distance to the nearest town.

When I drive from Chicago to Detroit, I know that I need to stay on Interstate 94 to reach my destination. Every time the Interstate 94 sign appears, I am reassured that I am on the right highway to my destination. In the same way the frequent appearance of the endtime signs during the course of history have served to reassure Christians of journeying on the right way “to the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God” (Heb 11:10).

The endtime signs offer to the believer the assurance, not only of journeying on the right way to the Kingdom, but also of drawing near to the end of the journey. The “near,” however, is never defined in terms of months or years, because the signs given in the Bible are like highway markers and not like highway mileposts.

The believer who sees the appearance of the endtime signs is constantly assured to drawing nearer and nearer to the end of the journey, though he can never measure the exact distance to the End. The latter is a secret which God has reserved for Himself (Mark 13:32). The endtime signs enable believers to experience a sense of certainty and imminence, that is, the assurance of journeying on the right way and of progressing toward the end of the journey when the meeting with the Lord will take place.

CONTEMPORARY RECOGNITION OF ENDTIME SIGNS

The fact that the prophetic endtime signs are of a generic nature which have found a degree of fulfillment in every age, does not mean that it is wrong to look for their contemporary fulfillment in the events of our time, such as the recent acts of terrorism. The justification for contemporarizing the endtime prophecies can be found the in the New Testament.

Paul, for example, saw in such signs as the Gospel's proclamation to the known world (Rom 15:19-24) and the rebellion and lawlessness being “already at work” (2 Thess 2:3, 7; 2 Tim 3:1-5) indications that “the appointed time has grown very short.” “The night is far gone, the day is at hand” (1 Cor 7:29, 31; Rom 13:12).

Peter say in “the fiery ordeal” that was about to come upon the Christians (1 Pet 4:12)—presumably an allusion to the Neronian persecution—a sign that “the end of all things is at hand” (1 Pet 4:7).

John perceived in the contemporary arising of Antichrists, that is false teachers who denied the messiahship and the incarnation of Christ (1 John 4:2-3), the sign that “it is the last hour” (1 John 2:18). He draws this conclusion explicitly when he says: “you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come; therefore we know it is the last hour” (1 John 2:18).

James regarded as an endtime sign the social injustice experienced by laborers who were paid unfair wages, or sometimes not paid at all by greedy rich landowners (James 5:1-9). He urges Christians to be patient because “the coming of the Lord is at hand . . . the Judge is standing at the doors” (James 4:8).

Throughout the centuries there have been Christians who, like Paul, Peter, John, and James, have seen in certain contemporary happenings precursory signs heralding the Return of Christ. Luther, for example, worked hastily in 1530 to complete his German Bible translation because he feared that Christ would return before the completion of his work. “For it is certain from the Holy Scriptures,” he wrote, “that we have no more temporal things to expect. All is done and fulfilled: the Roman Empire is at the end; the Turk has reached his highest point; the pomp of papacy is falling away and the world is cracking on all sides almost as if it would break and fall apart entirely.”

This fact that Christians in the past have seen the fulfillment of the endtime signs in certain significant events of their time, suggests that no hard-and-fast rule can be drawn regarding which specific signs are being fulfilled at any given time or at different historical periods. What Paul perceived as being a sign of the times may not have been the same event that impressed John or, later on, Luther, you or me.

INTENSIFICATION OF THE ENDTIME SIGNS

To acknowledge the fulfillment of the endtime signs throughout Christian history does not mean to deny their intensification before Christ’s Return. The Scripture teaches that the conflict between the forces of God and the forces of Satan will intensify as we draw closer to the Second Advent. Apostasy, lawlessness, terrorism, and rebellion will increase; suffering and persecution will culminate in a “great tribulation”; the Gospel will be preached as a testimony to all the nations.

The intensification of the endtime signs is suggested by Christ’s saying that the manifestation of wars, wickedness, earthquakes, famines, and pestilences are “but the beginning of the sufferings” (Matt 24:8; Mark 13:8). The phrase “but the beginning” presupposes that there will be more and worse disasters yet to come. These will cause such a “great tribulation” that, Jesus said, “if those days had not been shortened, no human being would be saved” (Matt 24:22; cf. Mark 13:20).

Christ’s prediction of the intensification of calamities before the End finds support in the prophetic books of the Old and New Testaments. For example, Daniel speaks of a final “time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time” (Dan 12:1; cf. Dan 8:23-24). Similarly in Revelation the intensification of calamities is portrayed dramatically in several visions. In the vision of the Four Horsemen, each of the four horses that appears at the opening of the first four seals, depicts in a crescendo the intensification of calamities and of their consequences.

The extension and intensification of warfare before the Coming of Christ are depicted in Revelation also in conjunction with the sixth plague, which describes the preparation for a final eschatological battle, known as the battle of “Armageddon” (Rev 16:14-16). “Demonic spirits” are presented as going “abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty” (Rev 16:14).

Henry B. Swete comments “There have been times when nations have been seized by a passion for war which the historian can but imperfectly explain. It is such an epoch that the Seer foresees, but one which, unlike any that has come before it, *will involve the whole world in war.*” (Henry B. Swete, *The Apocalypse of St. John* (London, 1951), p. 208). The preparation for this worldwide war takes place just prior to the Coming of Christ, which is clearly described in the following verse by the familiar metaphor of the “thief”: “Lo, I am coming like a thief!” (Rev 16:15).

This prediction of a final worldwide military conflict before the End can be traced back to Old Testament prophets. Joel foretells the coming of a great and terrible Day of

the Lord (Joel 2:11) when God would gather all the nations in the valley of Jehoshaphat and execute judgment upon them (Joel 3:2). Similar description of a final conflict involving a gathering of nations against Israel are found in Zechariah 14:1-5 and Ezekiel 38, 39. God intervenes in this climactic global conflict, executing judgment upon the ungodly nations of the world.

The ethnic and geographic aspect of these Old Testament prophecies are transformed by John in Revelation into a Christocentric perspective. To put it simply, the forecast by Israel's prophets of a final conflict of nations, which are destroyed by the Lord when He comes to establish His messianic Kingdom, become in John's Revelation the final worldwide conflict (Armageddon), which is brought to an end by the Coming of the "King of kings and Lord of lords," who destroys all the evildoers (Rev 19:14-21) and inaugurates a "new heaven and a new earth" (Rev 21:1).

MOSLEM TERRORISM AND ARMAGEDDON

In the light of the prophetic scenario of an endtime global conflict (Armageddon) that ushers in Christ's glorious coming, we may ask if the Moslem terroristic activities of recent years, which culminated in the infamous massacre of September 11, are a prelude to the prophetic worldwide final conflict, known as the battle of Armageddon.

No dogmatic answer can be given, because the future is unknown to us. All what we can say is that the acts of Moslem terrorism we have witnessed during the past few years, could easily drag many nations in a worldwide conflict. This may well be bin Laden's ultimate goal. This possibility is recognized by perceptive social analysts.

A personal friend, Prof. Jarrod Williamson who teaches in California, emailed me sobering essay by Tamin Ansary, who is a brilliant Afghani-American writer. In his essay Ansary argues that the conflict between America and Moslem terrorists, could easily become a worldwide conflict between Islam and the West. If this were to happen, the prophetic climactic Battle of Armageddon could take place sooner than we could anticipate.

Ansary wrote: "We're flirting with a world war between Islam and the West. And guess what: that's Bin Laden's program. That's exactly what he wants. That's why he did this. Read his speeches and statements. It's all right there. He really believes Islam would beat the West. It might seem ridiculous, but he figures if he can polarize the world into Islam and the West, he's got a billion soldiers. If the West wreaks a holocaust in those lands, that's a billion people with nothing left to lose, that's even better from Bin Laden's point of view. He's probably wrong, in the end the West would win, whatever that would mean, but the war would last for years and millions would die, not just theirs but ours. Who has the belly for that? Bin Laden does. Anyone else?"

It is reassuring to know that we do not need to have the belly to witness the destruction of million of lives because Scripture tells us that God will have the final word. He will not allow bin Laden, Islam, or the West to drag mankind in a prolonged worldwide conflict that will decimate the population of this planet. Christ reassures us that "for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened" (Matt 24:22).

The recent unprecedented and unspeakable acts of terrorism represent a clear fulfillment of the endtime intensification of wickedness. Jesus predicted that "because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold" (Matt 24:12; NIV). But as believers in God's Word, we have no reason to despair, because Christ's prophetic words reassure us, that "when these things begin to take place, look up and raise your head, because your redemption is drawing near" (Luke 22:28).

A CALL TO REPENTANCE

A more immediate significance of the tragedy of September 11, is its sobering effect upon the human mind. The shocking images of the World Trade Towers burning and collapsing like paper boxes, have challenged many complacent, self-centered, and self-sufficient Americans to acknowledge their finiteness and helplessness and thus to seek God. Suddenly, after September 11, God is everywhere, as ubiquitous as the American flags.

It seems that after September 11 atheists have disappeared. America is now all about God and country. Attendance to churches and synagogues almost doubled overnight. Political and marital infighting ceased. I read in a report that in the week following September 11, 400 couples in the Boston area withdrew their divorce papers and decided to continue to live together again. There seems to be a new unity of purpose in America, which has been resurrected through an unspeakable tragedy. We have repeatedly witnessed America's leaders praying, singing, pledging, and asking the people to join with them.

These positive developments suggests that the tragedy of September 11 has served as a much needed wake up call. It has challenged people to re-examine their lives, humble their hearts, and repent of their sins. Tragedies, however, are used by God not only to summon people to repentance, but also to announce His final judgment which is associated with the Day of the Lord in the Old Testament and with the Day of Christ's Coming in the New Testament. For example, Joel saw in the disastrous drought and fire which destroyed the harvest, a sign that "the day of the Lord is near, and as destruction from the Almighty it comes" (Joel 1:15).

From a prophetic perspective, tragedies like that of September 11, serve as harbingers of the final judgment to come. Jesus made this important point when he explained that the eighteen persons who were killed by the collapse of Siloam's tower were no worse offenders than the rest of the people in Jerusalem (Luke 13:4). That tragedy, however, was to bring home the important lesson that "unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:5).

In many ways the sudden collapse and disintegration by fire of the most imposing World Trade Towers, offered a most realistic and dramatic preview of the destructive fires that will be ignited by Christ's coming. We read that "the heavens will be kindled and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire" (2 Pet 3:12). In view of the fact that all what we see will be destroyed like the towers of the World Trade Center, we need to heed Peter's exhortation: "What sort of persons ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of the God" (2 Pet 3:11-12).

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