

Violence In The Koran And The Bible

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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

The last ENDTIME ISSUES newsletter (No. 84) on "The Agenda of Islam" generated a flood of responses, which surpassed my fondest expectations. The vast majority of the messages were positive, expressing appreciation especially for the insights into Islam's religious/political agenda. Some of the messages came from Christians suffering intolerance and suppression in dominant Moslem countries.

Several messages, however, were rather critical of Prof. Moshe Sharon's evaluation of Islam as a militant religion, committed to conquer the world, ideologically, if not militarily. Some of these writers are Arab-Christians who have lived in moderate Moslem countries like Lebanon. They maintain that the moderate Muslims they have known over the years are a peace-loving people, who strongly condemn the recent acts of terrorism. In their view Islam is a religion of peace—not of war.

My response is that a distinction must be made between the Moslem people in general and the Islam's teachings in particular. The same applies for any religion. For example, the vast majority of Catholics reject their church teachings on the suppression of "heretics," abortion, divorce, birth control, celibacy, and women ordination. But their rejection of such teachings does not alter their church position, because the Catholic Church, like Islam, is not a democratic institution which reflects the thinking of the laity. Rather, both institutions are governed by the autocratic authority of their leaders.

Many Muslims know very little about the teachings of their sacred book, the Koran. Some of them have lived for years in Western democratic countries, and have embraced religious tolerance as a basic human value. Consequently they openly reject the use of violence and warfare to promote the faith and rule of Islam. Since September 11, they have been telling the world that Islam is a religion of peace that condemns the killing of people. But does this propaganda reflect the teachings of Islam or adopted Western values?

The media and our politicians have accepted the sanitized version of Islam. We are told that Muslims who commit terroristic acts are twisting the teaching of the Koran. We are reassured that we are not at war with Islam because there is nothing in the teachings of the Koran that condones the senseless destruction of innocent lives by suicide bombers. And truly, there are many Muslims in America and around the world who deplore these heinous crimes.

In his article "In the Beginning There Were the Holy Books," published in *Newsweek* (February 11, 2002), Kenneth L. Woodward writes: "Since September 11, brave voices scattered across the Middle East have condemned the terroristic acts of killing civilians and judged suicide bombing contrary to the teaching of the Koran" (p. 57).

The objective of this essay is to determine if indeed the brave Muslim voices who condemn the use of violence to promote Islam, are expressing the teachings of the Koran or their adopted Western values of religious tolerance. In other words, we want to find out if Islam is a religion of peace that condemns the killing of people, or a religion of war that sanctions the killing of those who are perceived to be the enemies of Islam (infidels).

Stories of Violence in the Bible

Some people attempt to exonerate the recent acts of violence by appealing to the stories of violence in the Bible. Some subscribers to our newsletter wrote to me arguing that the recent acts of violence in the name of Allah against the “infidels” hostile to Islam, are not different than the use of violence by ancient Israel or by Medieval church leaders. In these instances violence was used to kill people perceived to be God’s enemies. Woodward himself in *Newsweek* appeals to the stories of violence in the Bible, saying: “The Bible, too, has its stories of violence in the name of the Lord. The God of the early Biblical books is fierce indeed in his support of the Israelites warriors, drowning enemies in the sea” (p. 53).

The argument that the violence in the Koran is not different from the violence we find in the Bible, is widely used to exonerate the recent acts of violence. For example, in another article published by *Newsweek* and entitled “Why They Hate Us: The roots of Islamic Rage—and What We Can Do About it,” Muslim scholar Fareed Zakaria writes: “The historian Paul Johnson has argued that Islam is intrinsically an intolerant and violent religion. Other scholars have disagreed, pointing out that Islam condemns the slaughter of innocents and prohibits suicide. Nothing will be solved by searching for ‘true Islam’ or quoting the Qur’an. The Qur’an is a vast, vague book, filled with poetry and contradictions (much like the Bible). You can find in it condemnations of war and incitements to struggle, beautiful expressions of tolerance and stern pictures against unbelievers. Quotations from it usually tell us more about the person who selected the passages than about Islam. Every religion is compatible with the best and the worst of humankind. Through its long history, Christianity has supported inquisitions and anti-Semitism, but also human rights and social welfare.”

Is this a fair assessment of the teachings of the Koran and of the Bible? Are the teachings of the Bible on the use of violence no different from those of the Koran? Does the Koran teach peace and war, tolerance and intolerance at the same time? To find an answer to these questions, I spent considerable time reading the teachings of Islam regarding the use of violence, as found in the Koran and the Hadith. The latter is the collection of the traditions regarding the teachings of Muhammad passed on through reliable sources. The nine volumes collection by Al-Bukhari is regarded as the most authoritative.

In this newsletter I will attempt to present a brief summary of what I have learned about violence in the Koran as compared to the teachings of the Bible. This report is based on the study of selected significant books and articles. There is a considerable amount of literature dealing with violence in the Koran and the Bible. At the James White library of Andrews University I found a listing of over 2000 publications dealing with different aspects of Islam. A thorough study of Islam’s faith and practices would take months or even years to complete. In the 150 hours I devoted to the preparation of this essay, I could only read some of significant studies which I believe shed light on the terroristic acts of violence we are witnessing today.

The intent of this essay is to help all peace-loving people around the world, including peace-loving Muslims, to better understand what is motivating some Moslem men and women to cause unspeakable harm to innocent people, including themselves, by blowing themselves up with explosives in public places. How can sensible people choose to turn their bodies into weapons to destroy many innocent people? This is the question that is troubling many thinking persons today. We shall seek for an answer by examining the teachings of Islam from its primary sources, the Koran and Hadith (the collection of Muhammad’s teachings). We want to ascertain whether the Koran teaches devout Muslims to advance the cause of Allah by peaceful persuasion or by violent warfare.

A New Look at the Antichrist

During the course of this investigation this question has kept harping in my mind: Could it be that our Adventist prophetic interpretation of the Antichrist as referring exclusively to the person, work, and claims of the Papacy needs to be expanded to include Muhammad and his teachings? After all Muhammad's successors for a thousand years (from the seventh to the seventeenth century) have persecuted and exterminated Christians far more extensively and intensively than the Papacy! Furthermore, Islam's denial of the divinity, incarnation, and crucifixion of Christ, clearly fits John's description of the Spirit of the Antichrist (1 John 4:1-2).

By focusing exclusively on the role of the Papacy in persecuting dissident Christians and promoting false teachings during the Middle Ages, we Adventists may have overlooked the equally persecuting power of Islam which for a thousand years has practically uprooted Christianity in most of the countries it conquered. Do you think that this topic should be examined in a future ENDTIME ISSUES newsletter? Or, should I leave it alone because of its controversial nature? Your comments are greatly appreciated.

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the month of June 2002. Every Sabbath it is a great pleasure for me to meet our subscribers who travel considerable distances to attend the seminars. Feel free to contact me at (616) 471-2915 for a special seminar in your area. I still have a three weekends open in the latter part of 2002. Each of the three seminars on the Sabbath, Second Advent, and Christian Life-style is now presented with PowerPoint slides which add a visual dimension to our message.

JUNE 7-8: VICTORIA, BC: REST HAVEN SDA CHURCH

Location: 9300 Willingdon Road, Sydney, BC V8L 3S6, Canada
For information call Pastor Petar Kjakov at (250) 381-9750

JUNE 14-15: ORLANDO KOREAN SDA CHURCH

Location: 2735 Sand Lake Road, Longwood, Florida 32779
For information call Pastor Sung Ho Jang at (407) 389-1042.

JUNE 21-22: CHICAGO: HINSDALE FIL-AM SDA CHURCH

Location: 9East 59th Street, Hinsdale, Illinois 60521
For information call Pastor Daniel Ocampo at (630) 655-9786

JUNE 28-29: LAS VEGAS: ABUNDANT LIFE SDA CHURCH

Location: 1720 North J Street, Las Vegas, Nevada 89106
For information call Pastor Harold Goodloe at (702) 360-2332

AN UPDATE ON RECENT WEEKEND SEMINARS

The recent weekend seminars have been attended by capacity crowds consisting of both Adventists and friends of other faiths. On May 10-11 we had a great rally at the Grants Pass SDA Church, in Grants Pass, Oregon. The church was packed with about 800 persons.

Among those attending the seminar, there was Pastor Roger Davis and his Salvation Army congregation. On Sabbath afternoon he shared his gripping testimony. An Adventist gave to Pastor Davis a copy of my book THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE, which he took with him on a trip to Scotland. He was surprised to see many churches in Scotland referring to Sunday as the Sabbath.

As he read the book he became aware of the fact that Sunday is not the Sabbath. The two days have a different origin, meaning and experience. Upon returning to the USA, he began sharing his discoveries with his close friends who met at his home on Friday evening for a Bible study and to open the Sabbath. The group grew to about 40 persons.

At this point Pastor Davis felt that he had to inform his congregation about the Sabbath message he had accepted. The response was quite positive. After a series of Bible studies that lasted several weeks, the congregation decided on a business meeting to move their services from Sunday to Saturday. Surprisingly the Salvation Army district commander has been willing to accept them as a Sabbatarian congregation.

While listening to the testimony of Pastor Davis, I was reminded of the power of the printed page. During the past two years about 200 ministers have accepted the Sabbath after reading THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE. If your church wants to sponsor copies to your local pastors, we offer it by the case of 32 copies for only \$170.00, postage paid, that is, \$5.90 per copy, instead of the regular price of \$20.00. I will supply you with a nice cover letter to attach to the book.

Last weekend May 24-25, we had a marvelous rally at the Redlands SDA Church, in Redlands, California. The reception and response was truly heartwarming. The sanctuary, the gallery, and the transept were all filled with standing room only. Hugo Martines, the manager of the church told me that he has never seen such a crowd during the past 16 years he has served the church. Many people had to leave because there was no room.

On Sunday night when I arrived home, my email box was filled with numerous notes of thanks from people that attended the seminar at the Redlands SDA Church. Let me share one of them with you.

Dear Brother Sam:

You do not need to reply to this message. I have been in the church all my life and have been following all the things that I was taught. I attended the Adventist educational system both overseas and here in the USA. I graduated from LLU school of medicine and did 5 years of residency there.

During that entire time I never heard a message as relevant to my life as I heard yesterday morning and afternoon in Redlands, my home church. The way you present the Sabbath makes it so much more than a day to avoid doing certain things. I always knew what the concept of the Sabbath was, but never could fully explain it or more importantly live it.

Thank you so much for coming out to Redlands and for spending all your time on the road teaching others what you have learned. Truly you have a gift from God and you just shared it with me and my family.

I also enjoyed your presentation a lot.

God bless you in all your efforts,
your brother in Christ

Let me reassure you that messages like this warm my heart and challenge me to accomplish greater things for the Lord.

NEW SABBATH SEMINAR IN DVD DISKS AND VIDEO TAPES

Finally it is out! I have been anxiously waiting to see the DVD version of the SABBATH SEMINAR that was recorded last March 15-17, 2002, at the First Fort Worth SDA Church in Texas by the TEXAS MEDIA CENTER. We spent a lot of time and efforts preparing for this new recording where I use about 100 PowerPoint slides for each presentation. When I received the 3 DVD masters yesterday, I stopped everything to view them. "MAMMA MIA!" I said. I could not believe that the DVD disks are 10 times clearer than the video tapes, which are also very good.

This has been an expensive project, requiring an investment of about US\$10,000.00 to convert the video recording into DVD format and duplicating the masters. It has also taken several weeks to complete the project. But it was well-worth it, because small congregations in America and overseas that are unable to invite me because of the travel costs, will now be able to enjoy the same messages which I deliver every weekend in different parts of the world. All what they need is a VCR or DVD player.

This new SABBATH SEMINAR, which is available both on 3 DVD DISKS and 4 VIDEO CASSETTES, is an ideal tool for sharing the message of the Sabbath with your church members and friends. Churches that have a video-projector, can plug their VCR or DVD players to the projector and view all the lectures on a large screen.

The new SABBATH SEMINAR consists of a total of 8 one-hour lectures covering the following topics: the gripping story of my search for the Sabbath at a Vatican University in Rome; the discoveries I made in Vatican libraries on how the change came about from Sabbath to Sunday in early Christianity; practical principles on how to keep the Sabbath to experience Christ's rest and peace in our lives; an update report on the most recent Sabbath/Sunday developments; and a sacred concert entitled THE SABBATH IN SONGS which was recorded in a television studio in South Bend, Indiana.

The SABBATH IN SONGS offers a unique presentation of the Sabbath through words and songs. I introduce the messages of the Sabbath and two gifted tenors interpret them with 17 sacred songs. Prepare yourself to learn how God's Holy Day can revitalize the mental, physical, and spiritual components of your life.

To make it possible for our believers in America and overseas to benefit from this special SABBATH SEMINAR, I have decided to give a special introductory offer UNTIL JUNE 31, 2002, on both the DVD and VIDEO versions. Both versions contain the same presentations. These are the special introductory prices.

1) THE NEW DVD VERSION OF THE SABBATH SEMINAR consisting of 8 one-hours lectures, in THREE DVD disks packaged in a triple jewel box, is offered UNTIL JUNE 31, 2002 at the special introductory price of only US\$80.00, airmail postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$130.00. The DVD disks are compatible with all TV systems overseas. No conversion is necessary.

2) THE NEW VIDEO VERSION OF THE SABBATH SEMINAR consisting of 8 one-hours lectures, in four video tapes, is offered UNTIL JUNE 31, 2002 at the introductory price of only \$50.00, postage paid, for the American Version, and US\$60.00, airmail postage paid, for the Overseas Version (PAL, SECAM, and NTSC). This represents a 50% discount on the regular retail price of \$120.00.

The easiest way to order the new DVD or VIDEO versions of the SABBATH SEMINAR is with your credit card. You can order by phone calling us at (616) 471-2915 or by emailing us your credit card number, expiration date, and your address. If you prefer to pay by check, mail your check to: BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES, 4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, Michigan 4990, USA. We guarantee to process your order immediately.

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If you looking for a new home near Andrews University, you will be pleased to learn that our son, Dan Bacchiocchi, who is both an architect and a licensed builder, has just completed two lovely homes of 2000 and 2400 square feet respectively. They are located only three miles from Andrews, in two large wooded lots.

Each custom designed home offers: high quality construction, many architectural features, no maintenance construction, decks, porches, 200+ ft. paved driveways and a high-efficiency geothermal heating and cooling system. The homes are reasonably priced. For more information contact Dan Bacchiocchi at 616-471-9272 or email me at dan@keystonedevlopment.com

THANK YOU FOR INVITING YOUR FRIENDS TO SUBSCRIBE

Thank you for sharing these Bible studies with your friends. Just let them know that they can receive this newsletter directly simply by emailing us their request at: <sbacchiocchi@qtm.net> As a result of your promotional endeavors over 15,000 people are already benefiting from these Bible studies

ENDTIME ISSUES No 85: VIOLENCE IN THE KORAN AND THE BIBLE
Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,
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This is a sad time for peace-loving people around the world who wonder what motivates Moslem terrorists to blow themselves up with explosives in public places in order to kill the largest possible number of innocent people. The impetus for such heinous crimes must be very powerful. The fear of these senseless acts of terrorism has changed our lives forever.

In seeking to find a solution to the problem of Moslem terrorism, it is important to understand what motivates these people to engage in this frightening self-destruction. We are told by many moderate Muslims and political leaders that Islam is a religion of peace and it does not allow the killing of innocent people. The deplorable terroristic acts we have witnessed in recent months are supposed to be condemned by the teachings of Islam.

It is not my intent to judge Islam as a violent religion on the basis of some terroristic acts done by those who claim to follow its teachings. The same must be said of Christianity. We cannot conclude that Christianity teaches violence because of the violent crusades some Christians have waged in the past against Moslem, Jews, and so-called "heretics." Such a method of interpretation is wrong, because not all who claim to act in the name of their religion are necessarily following its teachings.

The right method is to go back to the sources of Islam and Christianity and see what they have to say about violence and peaceful coexistence with people practicing other religions. This is the procedure we shall follow by examining, first, what Islam has to say about warfare, and then by comparing its teachings with those of the Bible.

THE TEACHING OF ISLAM ABOUT JIHAD OR THE FIGHTING FOR THE CAUSE OF ALLAH

Some scholars view as futile the attempt to define the teaching of the Koran and the Hadith (collected teachings of Muhammad) regarding the use of warfare to advance the cause of Allah. The reason given by Moslem scholars like Fareed Zakaria, in the article cited earlier, is that "The Qur'an is a vast, vague book, filled with poetry and contradictions (much like the Bible). You can find in it condemnations of war and incitements to struggle, beautiful expressions of tolerance and stern pictures against unbelievers."

Is it true that the Koran is a contradictory book that condemns war on the one hand and commands warfare on the other hand? The answer is "No!" We shall show below that the contradictions in the Koran are resolved by recognizing Muhammad's progressive teachings from peace to war during the course of his life and experiences.

At the beginning of his mission, Muhammad urged his followers to meet opposition with patience and persuasion. Scholars refer to these texts of the Koran as "verses of forgiveness and pardon." For example, the Koran says: "Invite (all) to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and argue with them in ways that are best and most gracious: for thy Lord knoweth best, who have strayed from His path, and who receive guidance. (16:125)." "Nor can goodness and evil be equal. Repel (evil) with what is better (41:34)."

After consolidating his power, however, Muhammad explicitly ordered the use of offensive warfare against unbelievers. Scholars refer to these texts of the Koran as the "Sword Verses." Here are two examples: "Fighting is prescribed for you, and ye dislike it. But it is possible that ye dislike a thing which is good for you, and that ye love a thing which is bad for you. But God knoweth, and ye know not (2:216)." "But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity, then open the way for them: for God is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful (9:5)."

The Resolution of the Contradiction

People like Fareed Zakaria cited earlier, maintain that the contradiction between those texts advocating tolerance and those urging warfare, simply reflect the contradictory nature of the Koran, which is a "vague book, filled with poetry and contradictions (much like the Bible)."

This simplistic explanation is rejected by Islamic scholars who have examined the question closely. They have concluded that the contradictory statements reflect the "progressive revelation" that was tailored to fit Muhammad's circumstances. In his book *Jihad: The Origin of Holy War in Islam*, published by Oxford University Press in 1999, Reuven Firestone, writes: "Muslim scholars came to the conclusion that the scriptural verses regarding war were revealed in direct relation to the historic needs of Muhammad during his prophetic mission. At the beginning of his prophetic career in Mecca when he was weak and his followers few, the divine revelations encouraged avoidance of physical conflict."

"After the intense persecutions that caused Muhammad and his followers to emigrate to Medina, however, they were given leave to engage in defensive warfare. As the Muslim community grew in strength, further revelations broadened the conditions under which war could be waged, until it was concluded that war against non-Muslims could be waged virtually at any time, without pretext, and in any place" (p. 50).

In a 26 pages compelling paper on "Jihad: The Teaching of Islam from Its Primary Sources: The Quran and Hadith," Richard Bailey traces the evolution of the Koran's teaching from tolerance to warfare through four stages. He provides an ample documentation for each stage. For the purpose of this essay, I will simply mention each stage, giving only few exemplary verses from the Koran. I would be glad to email the complete paper to anyone interested in this documentation.

Some readers may find this brief analysis of the evolution of Muhammad's teachings on violence, rather boring. Please do not give up. If you do, you will miss the second half of this study where I compare the Koran with the Bible and offer a Christian response to the problem of terrorism. You will find that the time devoted to the reading this newsletter to be well-spent.

I have tried to simplify the subject, but reading Koran verses can be tedious, because the structure of the sentences is archaic, much like KJV. But, it is important to make the effort to understand the development of Muhammad's teachings on warfare, because this helps us understand why Muslims have used in the past and are still using today armed conflicts to advance the cause of Allah throughout the world. The references from the Koran are given as Sura, which means chapter, followed by the number of the verses.

Stage One: No Retaliation

When Muhammad began preaching Islam in 610 A. D. in Mecca, his fellow tribesmen (Koreish) became increasingly hostile toward him because of his condemnation of their idolatry. The chapters (suras) of the Koran which originated during the 13 years Muhammad continued to live in Mecca, contain no instruction about fighting, in spite of the

severe persecution suffered by his small band of followers. Why? Simply because his few followers stood no chance to win in a physical conflict. Thus it was a wise survival strategy to avoid violent confrontations. Few verses will serve to illustrate this teaching.

In Sura 73:10,11 Muhammad urges his followers to be patient toward those who deny the truth: "And have patience with what they say, and leave them with noble (dignity). And leave me (alone to deal with) those in possession of the good things of life, who (yet) deny the truth, and bear with them for a little while."

In Sura 52:45,47,48 the prophet admonishes to leave the unbelievers alone and to wait patiently for the Lord to punish them: "So leave them alone until they encounter that day of theirs, wherein they shall (perforce) swoon (with terror) ... And verily, for those who do wrong, there is another punishment besides this... Now await in patience the command of thy Lord, for verily thou art in Our eyes."

Stage Two: Defensive Fighting is Permitted

On July 15, 622, the increasing opposition forced Muhammad and his followers to flee from Mecca to Medina, a distance of 250 miles North. This is an important date, known as the *Hegira*, because it marks the beginning of the Moslem calendar. In Medina Muhammad was recognized as a prophet and was able to consolidate his power. His followers began looting the Meccan caravans passing through Medina. This practice eventually led to several battles between the Koreish tribes of Mecca and his followers.

Muhammad gained the first victory in the Battle of Badr in 624 with an army of 305, mostly citizens of Medina, over a Koreish force twice as large. He conquered several Jewish and Christian tribes and ordered and watch in person the massacred of 600 Jews in one day. It was at this time that Muhammad instructed his followers to defend themselves by fighting and killing.

An example of this instruction is found in Sura 22:39-41 where permission is given to engage in defensive fighting : "To those against whom war is made, permission is given (to fight), because they are wronged, and verily, God is most powerful for their aid." Again in Sura 22:58 rewards are promised to those who die in jihad: "Those who leave their homes in the cause of God, and are then slain or die, on them will God bestow verily a goodly provision." The promise of paradise to those who die fighting for Allah, has inspired countless Muslim through the centuries to become martyrs for their faith. It is this promise that inspires devout Muslims young men and women today to become suicide bombers for the cause of Allah.

Stage Three: Defensive fighting is Commanded

A few months after granting permission to fight in self-defence, Muhammad instructed his followers in making war as a religious obligation. At first the enemies were the idol worshippers of the Koreish tribe in Mecca, but later it included the Jews and Christians who did not accept Muhammad as prophet.

This teaching is found in numerous verses of the Koran. Richard Bailey lists 32 passages, annotating them with valuable comments. For the sake of brevity I refer only to four of them. In Sura 2:190 instruction is given to fight until persecution is stopped and Islam is established: "Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for God loveth not transgressors. And slay them wherever ye catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out; for tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter."

In Sura 2:216 Muslims are commanded to fight for the cause of Allah, even if they do not like, because Allah knows what is best for them: "Fighting is prescribed for you, and ye dislike it. But it is possible that ye dislike a thing which is good for you, and that ye love a thing which is bad for you. But God knoweth, and ye know not." Statements such as these make it abundantly clear that for a devout Muslims who follows the teachings of

the Koran, fighting to advance the cause of Islam is a divine obligation that can hardly be ignored.

In Sura 8:12,13 Muslims are instructed to cut the necks and fingers of those who opposed God and to never turn their back on unbelievers: "Remember thy Lord inspired the angels (with the message): 'I am with you: give firmness to the believers. I will instill terror into the hearts of the unbelievers. Smite ye above their necks and smite all their fingertips off them. This because they contended against God and His Apostle. If any contend against God and his Apostle, God is strict in punishment ... O ye who believe! When ye meet the unbelievers in hostile array, never turn your backs to them. If any do turn his back to them on such a day – unless it be in a stratagem of war, or to retreat to a troop (of his own) – he draws on himself the wrath of God, and his abode is hell, – an evil refuge (indeed)! It is not ye who slew them; it was God."

The instruction is clear. When in combat, there is no room for second thought. Muslim soldiers are to finish the job by smiting the head and cutting the fingers of their enemies. The intent of these amputations was to make it impossible for the victims ever to fight again.

Sura 61:4,11-13 teaches that God loves those who fight in His cause with determination. He will give them victory, forgiveness of sins and admission to the pleasure of paradise: "Truly God loves those who fight in His cause in battle array, as if they were a solid cemented structure ... that ye believe in God and His Apostle, and that ye strive (your utmost) in the cause of God, with your property and your persons. That will be best for you, if ye but knew! He will forgive you your sins, and admit you to gardens [Paradise] beneath which rivers flow, and to beautiful mansions in gardens of eternity. That is indeed the supreme achievement. And another (favor will He bestow), which ye do love—help from God and a speedy victory. So give the glad tidings to the believers."

One of the benefits of fighting for the cause of Islam is the permission to take captured women as concubines, in addition to several legitimate wives. Sura 33:50: says: "O Prophet! We have made lawful to thee thy wives to whom thou hast paid their dowers, and those whom thy right hand possesses out of the prisoners of war whom God has assigned to thee ... For the believers (at large), We know that We have appointed for them as to their wives and the captives whom their right hands possess ..." The notion that God would assign captured women as concubines to Muslim believers who fight for His cause, hardly reflect high moral standards of the Islam faith. Polygamy and servile concubinage have destroyed the dignity of women and the beauty of the home. In this areas the infinite superiority of Christianity is clearly evident.

By teaching that those who die fighting for the cause of Allah will have their sins forgiven and are admitted into the pleasure of Paradise, the Koran has inspired Muslims throughout the centuries to fight unto death for the cause of Allah. Today it is inspiring young Palestinians become suicide bombers. For them a "martyr's death" is the surest and quickest way to a better life of comforts, prosperity, and pleasures in Paradise. "Suicide bombers" see themselves as carrying out the teaching of the Koran, while serving their communities and acquiring admission in paradise.

Sura 55:52-58 describes Paradise as a place where there "will be fruits of every kind, two and two... They will recline on carpets, whose inner linings will be of rich brocade. The fruit of the gardens will be near (and easy to reach)... In them will be (maidens), chaste, restraining their glances, whom no man or Jinn before them has touched ... like unto rubies and coral."

The sensual element pollutes even Islam's vision of Paradise. Believers are promised not only blooming gardens, abundant food, fresh fountains, but also beautiful virgins. Seventy-two beautiful virgins will be created for the enjoyment of the meanest believer. A moment of pleasure will be prolonged a thousand years. This pleasure-oriented Paradise differs radically from the Biblical view of the world to come as this planet earth restored to its original perfection for the habitation of the redeemed who will engage in productive activities and the elevating worship of God.

Stage Four: Offensive War is Commanded Against the Pagans, Christians and Jews.

The final phase of Muhammad's teaching on warfare developed after he conquered Mecca in 630 A. D. Most of the pagans living in the city became Muslims. At that time Muhammad was able to take over the city and cleanse the Ka'aba (sacred shrine) of some 360 idols resident there.

At this point it became evident to Muhammad that Jews and Christians would not accept him as prophet, so they became part of the list of Islam's enemies to be conquered. Thus, warfare was no longer to be a defensive fighting, but an aggressive Jihad against all unbelievers. This is the final teaching of the Koran which is still in force today and has inspired the recent acts of terrorism.

There are several texts commanding offensive warfare to kill the pagans, Jews, and Christians. Among them Sura 9:5 stands out for its explicit injunction to slay the infidels: "When the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war). But if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity [become Moslem], then open the way for them." The best way for people to save their lives, was by renouncing their religion and adopting the Islam faith. In some instances conquered people could save their lives by paying a heavy tribute and becoming submissive to Muslim rulers.

In the same chapter, Sura 9:29-31, Muslims are commanded to fight Jews and Christians until they are subdued. Those who submitted themselves to Muslim rulers were to be subjected to a heavy tribute. The reason is because God's curse is upon them: "Fight those who believe not in God nor the last day, nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by God and His Apostle, nor acknowledge the religion of truth, (even if they are) of the people of the Book [Christians and Jews], until they pay the *jizya* [tribute] with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued. The Jews call Uzair [Ezra] a son of God, and the Christians call Christ the Son of God ... God's curse be on them."

Sura 5:36-38 prescribes four types of punishments for those who oppose Allah and his prophet, Muhammad: "The punishment of those who wage war against God and His Apostle, and strive with might and main for mischief through the land is execution, or crucifixion, or the cutting off of hands and feet from opposite sides, or exile from the land. That is their disgrace in this world, and a heavy punishment is theirs in the hereafter, except for those who repent before they fall into your power. In that case, know that God is oft-forgiving, most merciful. O ye who believe! Do your duty to God. Seek the means of approach unto Him, and strive with might and main in His cause, that ye may prosper."

The four types of punishments (cutting off the head, crucifixion, maiming, or exile), which were to be applied according to the circumstances, reveal the ruthless methods used by Muslims invaders to advance their religion. Such methods stand in stark contrast to the teachings of Jesus to win men and women for the Kingdom of God by proclaiming the Good News of God's saving grace through the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

The Teachings on Holy Warfare in Muhammad's Traditions ("Hadith")

The teachings of the Koran on the use of the sword to advance the cause of Islam, are corroborated by the collections of traditions ("Hadith") concerning the teaching of Muhammad. The nine volumes by Iman Bukhari are generally regarded as the most authentic of the Hadith literature. In volume 4 alone Richard Bailey found 283 passages teaching holy warfare (Jihad) to advance the cause of Islam. For the sake of brevity I will quote only four of them

Muhammad said, "A single endeavor (of fighting) in Allah's cause in the forenoon or in the afternoon is better than the world and whatever is in it" (4:50). Again he said, "Know that Paradise is under the shades of swords." (4:73). For Muhammad fighting for the cause of Allah was a way of life. He said, "My livelihood is under the shade of my spear, and he who disobeys my orders will be humiliated by paying Jizya" (4:162b).

The "Jizya" is the poll tax paid by subjugated peoples in return for their right to exist. Muhammad said, "I have been ordered to fight with the people till they say, 'None has the right to be worshiped but Allah,' and whoever says, 'None has the right to be worshiped but Allah,' his life and property will be saved by me except for Islamic law, and his accounts will be with Allah (either to punish him or to forgive him.)" (4:196). The order is clear. Muslims had to fight people until they became Muslims.

Scholarly Support for the Four Stages Evolution of Jihad

We have briefly sketched the four stages evolution in Koran's teaching on "holy war" (Jihad) from no retaliation, to permissible defensive fighting, to obligatory defensive fighting, and finally to offensive war at all times. Numerous scholars recognize that this evolutionary teaching on the use of warfare corresponds to the stages of development in Muhammad's thought and circumstances. Two quotes from reputable sources suffices to prove this point.

The first quote is from Dr. Muhammad Muhsin Khan, the English translator of Sahih Al-Bukhari's nine volume collection of the traditions (Hadith) regarding the teachings of Muhammad. In his introduction to these volumes, Dr. Muhsin Khan writes: "So at first 'the fighting' was forbidden, then it was permitted and after that it was made obligatory: (1) against those who start 'the fighting' against you (Muslims) ... (2) and against all those who worship others along with Allah ..." (p. xxiv).

The second quote is from the article on "Jihad" found in the *Brill's Encyclopedia of Islam*. The author writes: "The jihad is a duty. This precept is laid down in all the sources. It is true that there are to be found in the Kur'an divergent, and even contradictory, texts. These are classified by the doctrine, apart from certain variations of detail, into four successive categories: those which enjoin pardon for offences and encourage the invitation to Islam by peaceful persuasion; those which enjoin fighting to ward off aggression; those which enjoin the initiative in attack provided it is not within the four sacred months; and those which enjoin the initiative in attack absolutely, at all times and in all places."

The article continues, saying: "In sum, these differences correspond to the stages in the development of Muhammad's thought and to the modifications of policy resulting from particular circumstances; the Meccan period during which Muhammad, in general, confines himself to moral and religious teaching, and the Medina period when, having become the leader of a politico-religious community, he is able to undertake, spontaneously, the struggle against those who do not wish to join this community or submit to his authority. The doctrine holds that the later texts abrogate the former contradictory texts ... to such effect that only those of the last category remain indubitably valid" (p.538).

The doctrine in question is known as “the law of abrogation” which is accepted by Muslim scholars. According to this doctrine the later “verses of the sword” superceded the earlier “verses of forgiveness.” This means that gradually Muhammad came to accept the military Jihad as a legitimate and essential strategy to promote the expansion of Islam. No matter what people may think, Muhammad was not only a religious leaders, but also a military commander who waged war against his enemies as soon he consolidated his power and developed a fighting force.

Islam Expanded Through Warfare

A most compelling proof that Muhammad taught his followers to advance the cause of Allah by the use of the sword, is provided by the example of his immediate successors, known as Califs. They followed his intense fanaticism in waging relentless wars of conquests against Christians, Jews, and pagans. In a relatively short time they carved an enormous empire for themselves. At the height of their power, the Muslims’ territories stretched from northern Africa and southern Europe in the West to the borders of modern India and China in the East. Their battle cry was: “Before you is paradise, and behind you are death and hell.”

Most of the people the Muslims conquered were nominal Christians who surrendered their faith because they had lost the vision of the Christian message and mission. A major reason is that church leaders at this time were wasting their time fiercely quarreling about metaphysical questions such as the divine/human nature of Christ, rather than inspiring Christians to proclaim the Gospel to the pagan nations. The first seven ecumenical councils held between 325 and 787 A. D. were largely concerned with the definitions of the nature and relationship between the three Beings of the Godhead. Bitter battles were fought over metaphysical questions that should be accepted as mystery. By losing their evangelistic vision, many Christians succumbed to Islam, instead of bringing to the Muslims a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

During its first century of Islam’s expansion from 632 to 732, Muhammad’s successors subdued Egypt, Palestine, Syria, part of Turkey (besieged Constantinople twice in 668 and 717), and all the countries of northern Africa. In 711 they crossed from Africa to Spain and crossed the Pyrenees into southern France. They boasted that they would soon stable their horses in St. Peter’s cathedral in Rome. But in 732 the Frankish ruler Charles Martel defeated them at the Battle of Tours and checked their progress in the West.

In the East the Muslim conquest continued unabated. In the ninth century they subdued Persia, Afghanistan, and a large part of India. In the thirteenth century they conquered the Turks and the Monguls. Bulgaria, Serbia, and parts of Hungary were soon to follow. Finally in 1453 the city of Constantinople itself fell into the hands of the Muslim Turks, who turned the magnificent church of St. Sophia into a mosque where the Koran is read instead of the Gospel. From Constantinople the Muslims spread panic in Europe and threaten the German empire until they were finally defeated at the gates of Vienna in 1683.

The Decline of the Muslim Power

At this time began the decline of the Muslim power with the rise of European nations which gradually broke up and divided among themselves much of the Muslim territory known as the “Ottoman Empire.” The development of strong European nations and a powerful America, coupled with the aggressive missionary movement of the 19th and 20th centuries, has created serious problems for Muslims. The political-religious Islam movement which during the Middle Ages seemed destined to rule the world, has gradually been humiliated by Western colonial powers which have divided much of the Muslim territories among themselves. What ended the expansion of Islam was not a change of beliefs, but the European military might.

Anger Driving Terrorism

The humiliation Muslims have experienced in the last two centuries, is a contributing factor to the anger that is driving terrorism today. In recent years Muslims have been humiliated not only by the Jews in Palestine, but also by Christian Serbs in Bosnia and Kosovo, by atheistic or Christian Russians in Chechnya, and by Hindus in Kashmir and Pakistan.

It is hard for some Muslims to accept the shame of their international failure. After being the superpowers for over a thousands years, believing that Allah had empowered them to wipe out Christians, Jews, pagans, and to rule the whole world, today they find themselves governed politically or controlled economically by nations made up mostly of "infidels." Many Muslims are angered by the superior power of Western countries, especially America, because they still believe in the superiority of their religion and culture which they want to impose on the rest of the world.

In his book *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam* (Princeton 1996), Rudolf Peters, Professor of Islamic Law at the University of Amsterdam, observes: "The crux of the doctrine is the existence of one single Islamic state, ruling the entire *umma* [Muslim community]. It is the duty of the *umma* to expand the territory of this state in order to bring as many people under its rule as possible. The ultimate aim is to expand the territory of this state in order to bring the whole earth under the sway of Islam and to extirpate unbelief" (p. 3).

The fact that the expansionistic vision of Islam to bring the whole earth under its sway, has suffered constant set backs during the past two centuries, and especially in recent years, is inspiring some concerned Muslims to commit the terroristic acts reported in the daily news. Their aim is to show that in spite of their state of humiliation, Muslims are still capable of terrorizing Western superpowers like America. This is another way for them to show that Allah is still empowering them to accomplish their mission.

Concerned Muslims want to punish America for her alleged anti-Islam policies, by hitting the people 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 Allah has empowered them to humiliate the most powerful nation, America. For them this represents the triumph of Islam over Christianity.

The threat is heightened by the development of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons of mass destruction by such Arab countries as Iraq, Iran, and Libya. If a student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology could devise a nuclear bomb in five weeks using published material available in a good library, it is conceivable that these and other developing countries could assemble thermonuclear weapons. When this happens, even a small use of nuclear weapons by Muslim countries committed to advance the cause of Allah by humiliating the Christian superpowers, could degenerate into a major international conflict which would bring ruin to all and victory to none.

Is Islam a Peace-loving Religion?

The preceding survey of the teachings of the Koran and of Muhammad's traditions (Habith) regarding warfare, discredits the popular claim that Islam is a peace-loving, peace-preaching religion. There is no question that there are many peace-loving Muslims who condemn the use of violence to promote their faith, but this can hardly be said of the teachings of the Koran and Hadith.

To say that Islam is a religion of peace, means to ignore the example and teachings of Muhammad. He fought all the pagans, Jews, and Christians in Saudi Arabia, until he subdued them, forcing them to accept Islam. What Muhammad did is reflected in what he taught about fighting and slaying the infidels: "When the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war). But if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity [become Moslem], then open the way for them" (Sura 9:5).

The claim that Islam is a peace-loving religion, is openly contradicted by the Koran that reads like a terrorist manifesto. We must not be fooled by the speeches of Arab leaders who condemn the acts of terrorism when their people are out in the streets in a carnival-like atmosphere celebrating the carnage of innocent people by suicide bombers.

Real peace with Muslims is impossible as long as they believe in the example and teaching of Muhammad. For the Prophet peace comes only through submission to Islam, which is the very meaning of "Islam," namely, "submission." But the Islamic concept of peace as a world dominated by Muslims is ultimately a mandate for war.

The challenge that we face today in seeking to establish peaceful relations with the Moslem world, is to help our Muslims friends understand the fundamental flaws of the teachings of the Koran regarding the use of violence to advance the cause of Allah. A religion that advocates engaging in "holy war" (Jihad) to propagate its faith, is a repressive movement that violates the fundamental human right to choose whom to worship. This fundamental right is recognized and respected by the God of biblical revelation who says: "Choose ye this day whom you will serve" (Jos 24:15).

VIOLENCE IN THE BIBLE AND THE KORAN

This leads us to the discussion of violence in the Bible and in the Koran. The debate over this question has intensified after the events of September 11. Those who want to exonerate the use of violence by Muslims, are quick to point out that Christianity is not different, because the Bible and Christian history are filled with violence. Earlier we cited Kenneth Woodward who wrote in *Newsweek*: "The Bible, too, has its stories of violence in the name of the Lord. The God of the early Biblical books is fierce indeed in his support of the Israelites warriors, drowning enemies in the sea" (*Newsweek*, February 11, 2002, p. 53).

How can we respond to this popular argument that the violence in the Koran is not different from the violence we find in the Bible? For the sake of brevity I will limit my response to three major considerations

1) Christians Have no Biblical justification for Using Violence in the Name of Christ

There is no question that Christians have used violence, torture, and military crusades to destroy "infidels" and "heretics," but those who committed these shameful acts, betrayed the Person and teaching of Christ. They turned the Christian church into a terroristic organization acting against the teaching of Christ who condemned the use of violence as a means to establish His Kingdom. He told Peter who cut off the ear of the high priest's servant, "Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword" (Matt 26:52).

While Muhammad commanded his followers to fight pagans, Jews and Christians until they were killed or subdued, Christ taught his disciples to endure persecution and pray for the persecutors. "Blessed are you when men revile you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven . . . I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven" (Matt 5:11-12, 44,45).

Muslims who use violence, warfare, and terrorism to advance the cause of Allah, can legitimately claim to be following the example and teachings of their prophet, Muhammad. He was both a religious and political leader who fought until he subdued the people of Mecca and the Christian and Jewish communities living in Saudi Arabia. He taught: "Know that Paradise is under the shades of swords." (4:73)

But Christians who have resorted to violence to advance God's Kingdom, cannot appeal to the teachings or example of Christ. They have betrayed His teachings. Christ chose to be crucified rather than to slay His enemies with the sheer power His spoken word. He taught His followers to establish the Kingdom of God, not through *physical confrontation*, but through the *peaceful proclamation* of the saving grace of God.

Christianity turned the Roman world upside down during the first three centuries by the sheer power of the grace of God manifested in the loving and forgiving attitudes of Christians, who were willing to suffer and die for their faith. By contrast, Islam conquered much of the Roman world during the first century of its expansion (632-732) by slaughtering a countless number of innocent people and forcing their faith upon the survivors. What a difference! Christ condemned the use of violence to promote the Christian faith, while Muhammad commanded the use of the sword to advance the cause of Islam.

2) The Extermination of the Canaanites Was a Divine Punishment for their Wickedness.

Some appeal to passages found in the book of Joshua regarding the extermination of various tribes living in Canaan, to argue that the Bible is not different from the Koran in sanctioning a "holy war" to promote the true worship of God. If this allegation were true, then the teachings of the Bible on the use of violence would be similar to those of the Koran.

The problem with this allegation is the failure to recognize that the extermination of the various tribes living in Canaan was a divine punishment for their wickedness, and not a method to convert them to the religion of Israel. Dead people cannot change their religion.. Like Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed because their wickedness had reached the limits of God's mercy, so the tribes living in Canaan were exterminated on account of their sinfulness.

Hundreds of years before the invasion of Canaan, God told Abraham that his descendants would be sojourners in a foreign land for "four hundred years" (Gen 15:13), before they could settle in the land of Canaan. The reason given for this waiting period is clearly stated: "for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete" (Gen 15:16). In other words, God was willing to wait for several generations before exterminating the tribes living in Canaan, because their wickedness had not yet reached the limits of His mercy.

Later God warned the nation of Israel to be careful in not repeating the sins of the Canaanites, otherwise they would suffer a similar punishment. The warning was in vain. Eventually God used the Assyrian and Babylonians as the instrument of His justice to punish the people of Israel for their sinfulness, in the same way as He had used Israel as an instrument of His justice to purge the land of Canaan of its sinfulness.

There is a dramatic difference between the account of the extermination of the Canaanites and the events of the early history of Islam. The primary theme in the biblical account is that of God's holiness manifested in the punishment of unrepentant sinners. This theme is missing in the early accounts of Muhammad's raid and wars. Instead, the primary motivation we constantly encounter in the accounts of Muhammad's warfare is the spreading of the rule of Islam by destroying and looting the enemies.

3) The Bible Does not Enjoin the Use of Warfare to Promote the Worship of the True God

Another important point to consider is that nowhere the Old or New Testaments command God's people to attack pagan nations, either in self-defence or as a way to promote the true worship of God. The proclamation of salvation in the Bible is always by witnessing and persuasion.

God placed Israel in the land of Canaan because of its strategic location at the crossroads of the ancient world. The Israelites were to be God's showcase to the ancient world, especially to the merchants and armies crisscrossing Palestine. This so-called "King's Highway" was an obligatory "interstate" route for people who traveled from the South to North or from the North to the South of the Middle East. God wanted to establish His people at the hub of the ancient world for them to be a light to the nations. "The Lord will establish you as a people holy to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and walk in his ways. An all the people of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord; they shall be afraid of you" (Deut 28:9-10).

The Israelites were called to promote the true worship of God, not by conquering nations through warfare, as enjoined in the Koran, but by being a shining light to the world. "Arise and shine; for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. . . . And the nations shall come to your light, and the kings to the brightness of your rising" (Is 60:1, 2). There was no need for the Israelites to promote their faith by the sword, because God promised to fight for them and to bring the nations to their door steps to learn about the true worship of God (Zech 8:20-22).

The OT anticipation of the proclamation of salvation to all the nations, becomes in the NT Christ's great commission to His followers: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19). This great commission is to be fulfilled, not by the use of the sword, but by "teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matt 28:20).

Islam is a Violent Religion

A comparison between the teaching of the Koran and that of the Bible on the use of violence, shows the fundamental difference that exists between Islam and Christianity. We have found that Islam is a violent religion because the Koran teaches holy warfare (Jihad) to force people to submit to its religious/political system. A religion that resorts to violence to force its teachings upon others, can hardly be called a "religion," because a true religion presupposes reverence for God and respect for fellow-beings. It would be more appropriate to label violent religions as "terroristic organizations."

The designation of "terroristic organization" applies not only to Islam, but also to Christian churches that became violent during certain periods of the history. For example, during the Middle Ages the Catholic Church became a formidable "terroristic organization" that organized crusades to exterminate Muslims, Jews, and so-called "heretics." The Catholic church terrorized people in Western Europe, especially through the inquisition. The latter was a travelling court that went from town to town seeking out for "heretics" to interrogate, torture, and execute if they did not abandon their beliefs.

Recently the Pope apologized for the unspeakable atrocities committed by the Catholic church when it became a terroristic organization committed to subdue Muslims, Jews, religious dissidents, and Greek Orthodox Christians. We only wish that Muslims religious leaders would follow the example of the Pope by apologizing for the countless number of innocent people they massacred during their millennium of territorial expansion. If they truly believe that Islam is a peace-loving religion, then they have a moral obligation to show their heartfelt sorrow for slaughtering millions of innocent people who refused to submit to the Islam faith and rule. They also should apologize for the daily terroristic acts committed by Muslim suicide-bombers. They should condemn these acts of violence as a betrayal of Islam. But this is wishful thinking, because there are no indications that such an apology and condemnation is forthcoming from Muslim religious leaders.

Today, May 28, 2002, a Fox News reporter said that during the long months she has spent in the Middle East reporting the current conflict, she has never heard a Muslim religious leader condemning the killing of innocent people by suicide bombers. She found it hard to comprehend why Muslim religious leaders do not speak up, especially when suicide bombers kill mothers strolling their your children on the street.

Why are Muslim religious leaders silent? Simply because they believe that suicide bombers are "martyrs" who are acting in accordance with the example and teachings of their prophet, Muhammad. After all, he called upon his followers to "fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war)" (Sura 9:5).

Muhammad practiced what he preached. He waged war against his enemies as soon as he consolidated his power in Medina. He used the sword to force people to accept his religious and political system. For Mohammed fighting was a way of practice his religion: "My livelihood is under the shade of my spear, and he who disobeys my orders will be humiliated by paying Jizya [tribute]" (Hadith 4:162b). A religion that uses violence to promote its beliefs and practices, can hardly be considered as a peace-loving religion.

Christianity is a Peace-Loving Religion

By contrast, Christianity is a peace-loving religion because it is inspired by its founder, Jesus Christ, who did not force people to submit to anything. He called upon people to voluntary accept the Good News of His substitutionary death for penitent sinner and the power of His transforming grace. He taught His followers to "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and the good" (Matt 5:44-45).

Christ is rightly called "THE PRINCE OF PEACE" (Is 9:6), because he offers us PEACE WITH GOD by bearing the *penalty* of our sins, PEACE WITH OURSELVES by offering us the *power* to overcome sin in our life, and PEACE WITH PEOPLE by granting us the capacity to *love* even those who hate us.

At Jesus' birth, the angels sang: "Glory to God in the highest and on earth PEACE, GOOD WILL toward men (Luke 2:14). Thirty three years later while dying He prayed for those who mocked and crucified Him: "Father forgive them for they know not what the do!" (Luke 13:34). And to all who trust in Him and accept His gracious provision of salvation, Christ promises: "My PEACE I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

The peace that Christ offers is not territorial, but internal. It is achieved not by making the whole world Muslim through territorial expansion, but by experiencing the restful assurance of divine forgiveness, protection, and salvation. It is an internal peace that enables us to live in a trouble world without letting our hearts be troubled or afraid. Ultimately, this is the peace that every human being needs. The is the peace that can help Muslims to live at peace with God, themselves, and others.

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO ISLAM

What contributions can Christians make toward a resolution of the threat of terrorism, sponsored by Muslim organizations? It is naive to think that anyone can offer a magic solution to the complex conflict between Islam and Christianity that has been going on for the past 14 centuries? The most we can hope to accomplish is to start a thinking process leading toward a solution. With this in mind I am submitting three suggestions:

1) Christians Need to Understand the Root of Terrorism

To resolve the problem of terrorism, which is causing a paralyzing fear in the American society and many Western countries, besides costing billions of dollars to the international community of nations, it is vitally important to understand that the root of Muslim terrorism is theological, not merely political or territorial. By this I mean that the acts of terrorism we are witnessing daily are inspired, not merely by the desire to get a larger share of the land controlled by Israel, but by the clear teaching of the Koran “to fight and slay” the infidels until the whole world is under Islam’s rule.

Keep in mind that 99.9 percent of the Middle East lands are controlled by Muslim countries today. Only one-tenth of one percent is controlled by Israel. The Muslims, whose original homeland is Saudi Arabia, have succeeded through the centuries to systematically subdued all the countries of the Middle East, by practically uprooting all the Christians and Jews living there.

What this means is that the Arabs are not satisfied with the 99.9 percent of the Middle East lands they have occupied. They are fighting for the one-tenth of one percent of the landmass which is controlled by Israel. Will territorial concessions on the part of Israel bring about a lasting peace? Absolutely not, even if Palestinian received all the land they claims as theirs! Why? Simply because history teaches us that no matter how much territory the Muslims conquered, they still wanted more. What has been true in the past, is still true today. They want all the land of Israel.

Am I suggesting that Palestine does not belong to the Palestinians? There is no question that the Palestinian have the right to a homeland in Palestine, but they can hardly claim that historically Palestine has been their own country, governed by the Palestinians, with a distinct Palestinian culture and language. The fact is that Palestinians are Arabs who have occupied what in Bible times was known as the land of Canaan. They are indistinguishable from Jordanians, Syrians, Saudies, Lebanese, Iraqis, Iranians, etc.

Prior to the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, there was no serious movement for a Palestinian homeland. The territories that Israel captured during the Six-Day War, did not belong to Yasser Arafat or the Palestinian Authorities, but to Jordan’s King Hussein. It is only after Israel won the war that these Arabs discovered their national identity as Palestinians.

The truth is that term “Palestine” was coined, not by native Arabs to designate their homeland, but by the Romans after they captured Judea in 70 A. D. After committing genocide against the Jews and smashing the Temple, the Romans decided that Judea would no longer exist as the land of the Jews. To add insult to injury they changed the name from Judea to Palestine, a name derived from the Philistines– tribal people living in the southern costal region and conquered by the Jews at the time of David.

Palestine as a State Never Existed

What this means is that Palestine as a state with its own language and culture, has never existed. Its territory has been ruled alternatively by the Romans, Islamic and Christian crusaders, the Ottoman Empire, and briefly by the British after World War I. The British agreed to restore part of the land to the Jewish people as their homeland.

From a historical perspective, the Jews have a 4,000-year-old birthright to Palestine. It is the land of their religious, ethnic, and historical roots. The fact that in the past they were expelled from their homeland by Romans, Christians, and Muslims, does not mean that they should be forced out of their homeland again today! After all, they have no other land which they can rightfully claim as their homeland.

This is not the case with the Palestinians. From a historical perspective they can legitimately claim several Arab countries as their homeland, because that is where are found their religious, cultural, ethnic, and linguistic roots.

Some try to prove the Muslim's roots in Palestine by appealing to the Al Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, which are popularly regarded as Islam's third most holy sites. In my reading I found that the Koran says nothing about Jerusalem. It mentions Mecca and Medina countless times, but never mentions Jerusalem. In fact there are no historical evidences to suggest Muhammad ever visited Jerusalem.

How then did Jerusalem become the third holiest site of Islam? Largely as a result of a gratuitous interpretation of a vague passage found in the seventeenth chapter (sura) of the Koran, entitled "The Night Journey." It relates that in a dream Muhammed was carried by night "from the sacred temple to the temple that is most remote, whose precinct we have blessed, that we might show him our signs...."

In the seventh century, some Muslims identified the "temple that is most remote" as being the Mosque in Jerusalem. It is hard to believe that Muhammad would be carried away in a dream to the Mosque in Jerusalem that did not yet exist at the time of his death in 632 A. D. By contrast, the Jews can trace their roots in Jerusalem back to the days of Abraham (Gen 14:18).

Recently Arab leaders met in Beirut to find a solution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. They adopted the proposal of the Saudi Crown Prince Abdullah to persuade Israel to return certain territories to the Palestinians in exchange for granting to the State of Israel the right to exist.

Why Arab Leaders Do Not Give Some of the Land to Palestinians?

What I find difficult to understand is why all these Arab leaders who control 99.9 percent of the vast landmass of the Middle East, and have incredible financial resources from oil exports to the West, do not open the doors of their countries to the relatively small Palestinian population of only 2,895,683 people, according to the 1997 census? After all the Palestinians are their own Arab brethren. They share the same religious, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic heritage.

Why do Arab leaders prefer to finance refugee camps in the West Banks rather than inviting Palestinians to settle in their own countries? Why Arab countries don't follow the example of America who has given asylum to persecuted people of all races and creeds, including many Arabs? Why are Arab leaders more interested to take away some land from Israel—an extremely small country— than give some of their own land to their Palestinian Muslim brethren?

I believe that answer is to be found in the call of the Koran "to fight and slay" the infidels until the whole world is under Islam's rule. For Arab leaders to offer asylum to their Palestinian brethren, would mean to stop the ongoing conflict with Israel—an enemy of Islam that must be ultimately driven out of the land. By fueling the present conflict, especially with financial subsidies to the families of suicide bombers, they hope to achieve their objectives. What is at stake, then, is not more land for the Palestinian, but total Muslim control of the Middle East.

Some may feel that I am not fair to the Muslims. Let me repeat the issue is not the Muslims people as such, most of whom are peace-loving people whom I love and respect. Rather, the issue is the teachings of the Koran which call for the suppression and extermination of those who practice a different religion. This is the root of the problem that needs to be addressed by Christians and the international community of nations.

Suicide bombers are inspired by the teaching of the Koran. Muslim religious leaders indoctrinate young Arab men and women to become martyrs by killing the enemies of Islam. They are told that the Koran guarantees them the forgiveness of their sins and admission into the pleasure of paradise. Such an appalling, immoral, and senseless teaching is firing up poor young Muslim men and women to become suicide bombers. By killing the enemies of Islam, whether it be at the World Trade Towers in New York City or in the shopping centers in Israel, they become immortalized as martyrs for the cause of Islam who have gained admission into the pleasure of Paradise.

2) Christians Need to Expose the Immorality of the Koran's Teachings on the Use of Violence

To deal with the root problem of Muslim terrorism, it is imperative to embark in a worldwide educational program designed to expose the immorality of the teachings the Koran which calls for the suppression and extermination of those who practice a different religion.

This strategy of exposing the immorality of the Koran's teachings on the use of violence to advance the cause of Islam, may not be politically correct. It can alienate moderate Moslems living in the USA and overseas. But I am persuaded that the truth that "hurts" is better than a lie that "soothes."

To minimize a backlash it is important to distinguish between the teachings of Koran about the exterminations of the "infidels," and the Moslem people themselves who ignore or openly reject such teachings. The same principle applies to any religion. For example, most Catholics know very little about the historical teachings of their church regarding the suppression of the heretics.

Most Catholics would be appalled to read what Thomas Aquinas, the most influential Catholic theologian, teaches in his *Summa Theologica* about the extermination of the "heretics." 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 do not recant, must be not only excommunicated but also exterminated, is found in numerous documents of the Inquisition. When the immorality of such teachings are exposed, most Catholics openly reject them, choosing instead to accept the teachings of the Gospel to "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

What is true for the Catholics is also true for the Muslims. We need to help our Muslim friends understand that the teachings of the Koran on the use of violence to advance the cause of Islam, are immoral and to be condemned by all peace-loving people. We need to help them understand that the sword of itself never brings peace to the world. Above all, we need to help them discover the beauty and power of the message of the Gospel—which is a message of love and forgiveness, a message of peace through internal transformation, rather than through external suppression of enemies and territorial expansion.

3) Christians Need to Become Involved in Meeting the Needs of Suffering Muslims

Exposing the immorality of the teachings of the Koran on the use of violence, is not enough. Actions speak louder than words. Christian relief organizations need to become actively involved in relieving the pain and suffering of Muslims living in desperate situations.

Christian relief centers need to be established where Muslims are suffering today. Muslims need to see Christian love in action. This should happen not only in the Palestinian refugee camps, but also in Afghanistan—a country which has been devastated by 22 years of fighting, three years of famine, and five years of Taliban rule. Christian relief and assistance in Afghanistan cannot stop at the end of the military operations. The presence of dedicated Christian doctors, nurses, social workers, teachers, and technicians involved in developments programs, can go long way in giving credibility to the Christian witness.

Ultimately the most compelling example of the difference between the teaching of the Koran and that of the Bible on the use of violence, is the unselfish and compassionate service offered by dedicated Christians even to Muslim terrorists. The manifestation of Christian love in action, has the potential for changing the Muslim world today as it did change the Roman world twenty centuries ago.

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