Evil Has No Religion

In the wake of the terrorist attacks in New York City and Washington on Tuesday 11th September 2001, a Sikh petrol station attendant was almost immediately murdered. Evidently, his assailant thought he was Muslim. Here we have a cameo of ignorance and prejudice combined, and to deadly effect. Reports of other racist violence across America and within Australia suggest that those behind the wilful murder of thousands in the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon are successfully realizing their evil objectives. In other words, they are turning us against each other so that destruction escalates.

Scratch the surface of our usually harmonious western multicultural, multifaith societies, and you find that we remain irrationally afraid of those who differ from us. Routinely, we equate Islam with all peoples of Arabic descent. We assume, for example, that all Palestinians are Muslim. In fact, thousands of Palestinians are Christian, belonging to churches indigenous to the Holy Land since the time of the apostles. When we do encounter Muslims, our ignorance of Islam means we cannot discriminate between the faithful and the fanatic.

Scratch the surface of our usually harmonious western multicultural, multifaith societies, and you find that we remain irrationally afraid of those who differ from us. Routinely, we equate Islam with all peoples of Arabic descent. We assume, for example, that all Palestinians are Muslim. In fact, thousands of Palestinians are Christian, belonging to churches indigenous to the Holy Land since the time of the apostles. When we do encounter Muslims, our ignorance of Islam means we cannot discriminate between the faithful and the fanatic.

In the current volatile situation it is vital to see clearly and think rationally in order to act generously and humanly. We need to be aware of the violence done to Muslims individually and corporately by small groups of misguided zealots if we are not to blame all followers of the Prophet. After all, barbarism knows no ethnicity, and evil has no religion.

In the current volatile situation it is vital to see clearly and think rationally in order to act generously and humanly. We need to be aware of the violence done to Muslims individually and corporately by small groups of misguided zealots if we are not to blame all followers of the Prophet. After all, barbarism knows no ethnicity, and evil has no religion.

Islam, in common with all the great world religions, teaches unqualified respect for life.

Media reports suggest that Islam is inherently violent. The word jihad, used loosely to mean a "holy war", suggests violence is a tenet of Islam just as love of neighbours is central to Christianity. This is a simple mistake with significant consequences in terms of attitudes and sympathies. The Holy Quran, God's revelation as delivered to Muhammad, is written in Arabic, and it is more than just semantics to point out that harb, not jihad, is Arabic for war. Far from referring to war, jihad means struggles of the human spirit. Traditionally, a distinction is made between greater and
lesser *jihad*. Lesser *jihad* is a specific and narrowly defined struggle against religious oppression. Resistance is appropriate, and force may sometimes be necessary in self-defence. Muhammad defined greater *jihad* as struggling with the soul's negative tendencies. In other words, the greatest battle is always the battle for the heart - will we be generous or selfish, greedy or giving, loving or hateful, peaceful or brutal, forgiving or vengeful?

The conviction that Islam is inherently violent is fed by suspicion that individual Muslims are contemptuous of their own lives as well as the lives of others. In this scenario, violence breeds violence, and human life is cheap all round. But nothing could more distort Islam. Suicide in Islam, as in most religious traditions, is seen as the ultimate demonstration of ingratitude by one of God's children, refusal of life freely given to us, the life God lovingly shares with us. Many Muslim scholars condemn suicide as an act which places a person beyond redemption. It is true that there is an impressive strand of Muslim scholarship which argues that God the all-merciful understands the desperation of the suicide and forgives, but this in no way suggests that there is any such thing as *justifiable* suicide. Islam teaches that suicide is *always* sin, sin which only God the merciful can forgive. It follows that there is no justification in Islam for suicide attacks on living persons or other targets.

If all this is true, how is Islamic terrorism to be explained?

Islam has no central teaching authority, so individual scholars and schools offer their interpretation of the Prophet's teaching. Such learned opinions are known as *fatwas*, by means of which faithful Muslims attempt to apply Islam to specific situations. *Fatwas* compete for authority in the Muslim world, but it is believed that through them the authentic voice of Islam will eventually be heard.

In 1998 Osama bin Laden issued a *fatwa*, although he is in no way qualified to do so. Scholars point out that Osama's justification of terrorism in his *fatwa* required twisting the entire consensus of tradition based in the Quran, and wholesale rejection of the reports of what Muhammad said and did. In other words, in order to justify terrorism it is necessary to reject traditional Islamic teaching and, indeed, the whole of Islamic history. Consequently, Osama bin Laden is universally condemned by Muslim scholars and ostracized by Islamic nations. Only in Afghanistan was he respected and sheltered – by the Taliban, an illegal government of militant Muslim extremists who never represented the will of the Afghani people. In fact, the people of Afghanistan were the first victims of these religious fanatics who enforced a culture of repression, particularly of women and children, and used violence to crush any opposition or resistance.

Jesus Christ says that we recognise genuinely religious people by the fruits of their lives - love, joy, peace, as opposed to hatred, misery and death. Times of terror and great suffering can bring peoples of faith closer together, or push us apart.

Faith is peace-maker or peace-breaker. The choice is our own, and we share responsibility.

Let our watchword be that barbarism knows no ethnicity, and evil has no religion.

---

**Multifaith Chaplaincy Service**

All campuses
Churchlands: Room 7.217
Joondalup: Room 4.202
Mount Lawley: Room 8.115


**University Chaplain**
Rev Joanne Baynes
Mobile: 0438 952 399
Email: j.baynes@ecu.edu.au

**Visiting Chaplains**
Rev Dr David Wood (Anglican)
Mobile: 0417 207 217
Email: david.wood@ecu.edu.au