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Is Islam A Religion of Peace?

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Abstract

One of the most troubling and controversial doctrines in Islam is that of jihad. Yet, in the West its meaning is unclear. Does it mean the struggle of the human soul to develop a wholesome spirituality, or is it more a struggle that results in terrorist attacks upon all who oppose Islam? Many politicians and academics in the West, along with many journalists and opinion-makers in the mainstream media insist that Islam, rightly understood, is a religion of peace. That means that Islamic jihadists who engage in wanton terrorism upon all who stand in their way are an aberration. They are interlopers and hijackers of this religion. This paper argues that the Qur'an, which Muslims insist is a timelessly relevant document, argues otherwise. So too does the Hadithic literature, which is also regarded as sacred in Islam, argue otherwise. Furthermore, Islamic theologians since the seventh century have insisted that jihad requires violent attacks upon the enemy. Only in the early twentieth century has a version of Islam emerged that is moderate in its orientation, and thereby stands opposed to militant jihad. Reformed Islam, a version of Islam that emerged in the late twentieth century, also stands opposed to militant jihad. Yet, the paper argues that far from being an aberration, fundamentalist Islam has a long pedigree within Islam and must be recognized as such. To do otherwise is to misunderstand the religion—and with misunderstandings come misapplications. When the nature of militant jihad is considered, especially as it has been presented in the Gaza Strip and Israel in recent days, careful and correct analyses of this religion are most important.

Keywords

Islam, jihad, terrorism, fundamentalism, Gaza Strip

Cover Page Footnote

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Is Islam a Religion of Peace?

Is Islam a religion of peace? This is a tough question. In answering it, academics, members of the media, and politicians are divided, with almost everyone else caught in the middle without a clear understanding of what to think. The recent attack of Hamas upon Israel has not answered the question. It has merely instead inflamed the two sides to speak more loudly, some at a shrill—with those in the middle, once again, not knowing how to parse the two sides.

A second question is this: if Islam is a religion of peace, have the Islamic jihadists hijacked this religion and morphed it into something that it is not? What is motivating Islamic jihadists to engage in terrorism? Is it economic disenfranchisement? Is it psychological or social derangement? Or is it, perhaps, more correctly a theological problem, that they believe that the Qur'an and its corresponding Hadithic literature are indeed sacred documents, that Muhammad is a true Prophet from Allah, and that these documents and the words and works of Muhammad affirm not only terrorism, but also affirm terrorism in its most barbaric form? These are not sterile questions asked in classrooms or parlor games. Due to recent events in Israel with the barbaric attack of Hamas upon Israel, with the threat of more attacks coming to Israel and all who support Israel, such as the United States of America, correctly answering them has become enormously important.

This paper will make the following assertion: if the Qur'an, Hadithic literature (which is also sacred in Islam), the example of Muhammad, and his original followers serve as the baseline of inquiry, the conclusion is inescapable: Islam is *not* a religion of peace. Hence, the problem of Islamic terrorism is fundamentally a theological problem, and the threat posed by Islamic terrorism to the entire world is not only real, but its barbaric zeal, as evidenced on October 7, 2023, is also quite real.

A caveat, however, is required here. Not all Muslims use the Qur'an, Hadithic literature, the example of Muhammad, and the example of Muhammad's original followers as a baseline for their understanding of Islam. A case in point is that sector of the Islamic world characterized as *folk Islam*, a group that reportedly makes up three-quarters of the Muslim world. Folk Muslims have a superficial grasp of the history of Islam, the Qur'an, and Hadithic literature. That which lies beneath this veneer are indigenous beliefs and practices that are both independent of Islam and serve as their true religion. As a result, the world of folk Islam is an amalgamation of local cultures and Muslim beliefs. Folk Muslims therefore have little interest in jihad. They simply go along with the prevailing politics of

wherever they happen to live.¹ Another group, *moderate Islam*, is a second case in point. Moderate Muslims are influenced by Western culture and therefore also have little interest in jihad. Their concerns lie elsewhere, in global integration—the blending of Islamic values into Western culture. They believe that the West is amid its own identity crisis. The West could benefit, they say, from Islamic values.² A third group called *reformed Islam* is a final case in point. Though reformed Muslims profoundly disagree with the fundamentalists, most of their attention is directed against the moderates. They claim that the moderates wish to have it both ways—embrace the Qur’an and the words and works of Muhammad alongside an embrace of the Western ideals. This, the reformists say, is a slippery slope. It will eventually land moderate Muslims back into the arms of Islamic fundamentalism. Reformed Muslims neither believe that the Qur’an is a divinely inspired document, nor that Muhammad is a divinely inspired prophet. They insist that Islam must fundamentally rethink its understanding and commitment to the Qur’an and Muhammad. They therefore strive to steer Islam in a wholly different direction: towards a religious secularism with a mere faint Islamic veneer. Only then will Islam remain relevant in the twenty-first century, they say.³

That leaves the fundamentalists. They are the ones committed to a literal (historical-grammatical) reading of the Qur’an and follow the example of Muhammad as laid out in the Hadithic literature. And that takes the reader back to the original premise of this paper. If the reader is to understand the fundamentalists’ barbaric terrorism upon Israel, and other atrocities they committed in other nations, not only must he or she understand their theology, but

¹ For further discussion on folk Islam, I recommend Joel C. Rosenberg, *Inside the Revolution* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House, 2009), Bill A. Musk *The Unseen Face of Islam* (London: Monarch Books, 2003), Rick Love, *Muslims, Magic and the Kingdom of God* (Pasadena: William Carey Library, 2000), Christine Malouhi, *Waging Peace on Islam* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2002), Samuel Zwemer, *The Influence of Animism on Islam* (New York: Macmillan, 1920), and Hans Küng, *Islam: Past, Present & Future* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009). Küng, for example, writes: “The more Islam spread, the less monolithic it became. It mixed with the practices and convictions of the popular cultures in which it found itself taking root. In this way it succeeded in penetrating groups of people, integrating them into states and often giving them a new social identity” (p. 393).

² For further discussion on moderate Islam, I recommend John J. Donahue and John L. Esposito, eds., *Islam in Transition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), Asaf A. A. Fyzee, *A Modern Approach to Islam* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1963), Khaled M. Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), Abdullah Ahmed an-Na’im, *What Is An American Muslim?* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2014).

³ For further discussion on reformed Islam, I recommend M. Zudhi Jasser, *A Battle for the Soul of Islam* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2012), Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam* (New York: The Free Press, 2006), *Infidel* (New York: The Free Press, 2007), *Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now* (New York: Harper, 2015); and Irshad Manji, *A Muslim’s Call for Reform in Her Faith* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2003).

the reader must also understand that which their theology is buttressed: the words and works of Muhammad as they exist in the historical record.

Historical Analysis

Military Campaign Against Mecca

Muhammad was born and raised in Mecca, the city where he first attempted to win its citizenry to his Islamic vision. At the age of forty he was expelled from Mecca whereupon he traveled northward to Yathrib which became his new home. Yathrib was a collection of small villages and forts situated near a large oasis, approximately 200 miles northeast of Mecca. It was a major way station on the caravan route stretching from Yemen located at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula to Persia, located to the far north.

The people of Yathrib were divided into a collection of Jewish and Arabic tribes. The Jewish tribes occupied the place of economic superiority which generated resentment among the Arabic tribes. Their strained relationships had already resulted in brief episodes of violence, including a citywide war in the early seventh century. Both the Jews and Arabs sought a time when this clash of cultures would come to an end. That opportunity came in A.D. 622 when Muhammad migrated to Yathrib. The Arabs embraced him as a leader who could align with them and restore order, with the Arabs now in ascendancy. The Jews were more suspicious yet reluctantly accepted the new political order. Today, the world knows Yathrib by its alternate name Medina, an Arabic word that simply means "the city." Its complete name is *Medīna-tu an-Nabī*, "the city of the Prophet." It is here where the first Islamic state was formed, fully theocratic in character and militarized, prepared for war.

Now the new chief of Yathrib, Muhammad initiated the establishment of Shari'a law upon the city and commenced a war against Mecca. His military strategy initially took the form of guerrilla warfare. He sent out small bands of warriors to raid caravans coming to and from Mecca. His intent was to damage the economy of Mecca by disrupting its caravan trade. Since Mecca depended upon the caravan trade for its economic survival, this disruption was a serious threat. A secondary benefit of the raids was the acquisition of enormous wealth from the booty. Muhammad eventually conquered Mecca and established himself as Prophet in Mecca. For the sake of brevity, the following analysis will be limited to two of the battles/raids of this war.

Raid at the Wells of Muraysi (A.D. 626)

Muhammad suspected that the Jewish tribe of al-Mustaliq, whose residence was one of the districts in Yathrib, was secretly preparing to launch an attack on the Muslims and start a citywide civil war. Muhammad responded by launching a preemptive strike. He ambushed the tribe while they were watering their cattle at the Wells of Muraysi. “The fighting men were killed and their women and children were taken as captives.”⁴ Since the Muslim soldiers were hungry for sex, Muhammad allowed them to rape the Jewish women. Ibn Muhairiz, an eye-witness to this event, explained:

I entered the Mosque and saw Abu said al-Khudri and sat beside him and asked him about al-Azl (i.e., *coitus interruptus*). Abu said, “We went out with Allah’s Apostle for the Ghazwa of Banu al-Mustaliq and we received captives from among the Arab captives and we desired women and celibacy became hard on us and we loved to do *coitus interruptus*. So when we intended to do *coitus interruptus* before asking Allah’s Apostle who is present among us. We asked him about it and he said, “It is better for you not to do so, for if any soul (till the Day of Resurrection) is predestined to exist, it will exist.”⁵

Hence, Muhammad opposed the practice of *coitus interruptus*. He sanctioned rape but did not allow for its interruption. Many of these raped women, some of whom became pregnant, were later sold as slaves. Throughout his career, Muhammad repeatedly sanctioned the rape of female captives (Surahs 4:24; 23:5-6; 24:32; 33:50; 70:29-30).⁶

Battle of the Trench (A.D. 627)

The Jewish tribe Banu ‘n-Nadir, which had been banished by Muhammad from Yathrib, traveled to Mecca seeking help in vanquishing Muhammad. The

⁴ Sahih Bukhari book 3, hadith no. 717 (https://sahih-bukhari.com/Pages/Quran/Quran_english_arabic_transliteration.php?id=2).

⁵ Sahih Bukhari book 5, hadith no. 459; also see Sahih Bukhari book 3, hadith 718, and Sahih Bukhari book 9, hadith 506. The historical background to Surah 24 is the raid at the Wells of Muraysi; also see Alfred Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A Translation of Ibn Ishaq’s Sirat rasul Allah* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 490-493.

⁶ In the Qur’an, the term “your right hand possesses” is a euphemism that means “your female captive.” A good example of this phrase is Surah 33:50 where it states: “O thou prophet! Verily, we make lawful for thee thy wives to whom thou hast given their hire, and what thy right hand possesses out of the booty that God has granted thee... We knew what we ordained for them concerning their wives and what their right hands possess...”

leaders of Mecca decided to attack Medina again, this time with the intent of putting an end to this war with Muhammad. A confederacy of forces was organized which began its march upon Yathrib.

Learning of the impending attack, Muhammad dug a trench around the principal district of Yathrib—ten yards wide and five feet deep. As the trench was dug, Muhammad praised his workers and promised them direct access into Paradise in the afterlife (Surah 24:62), and rebuked those who refused to help, declaring that they would suffer a fiery eternity in the afterlife (Surah 24:63-64). When the Meccan confederacy arrived at Yathrib, they were stunned at the sight of the trench, having never seen this kind of defensive tactic in previous battles. A siege commenced that lasted one month.

During the siege, the supplies of the Meccan army dwindled, and camels and horses died due to the lack of food and water. Then, when the siege continued into the month of Dzul Qaedah, the first of four consecutive months in the Arab tradition when no hostilities were permitted (a tradition strictly observed throughout the Arabian Peninsula), the confederacy withdrew and returned to Mecca. With the withdrawal of the enemy forces, Muhammad's small army claimed victory.

Muhammad had suspected that the Banu Qurayza (another Jewish tribe of Yathrib) had secretly been in league with the Meccan confederacy. Because the Qurayza lived in a district with its own protective walls, a second siege ensued, which lasted twenty-five days. At its conclusion, the Jewish tribe surrendered unconditionally, followed by a military tribunal. Since Muhammad believed that the Archangel Gabriel had secretly told him that "their warriors should be killed, their women and children should be taken as captives, and their properties distributed,"⁷ these alleged angelic words were used as testimony against the Jewish people.

British historian William Muir notes that "each company as it came up was made to sit down in a row on the brink of the trench destined for its grave, there beheaded, and the bodies cast therein...The butchery began in the morning, lasted all day, and continued by torchlight till the evening."⁸ Some historians believe that as many as 900 men were executed that day. Ibn Ishaq, an eighth century Muslim historian, wrote:

Then they surrendered, and the apostle confined them in Medina in the quarter of d. al-Harith...Then the apostle went out to the market of

⁷ Sahih Bukhari book 5, hadith no. 448; also see book 4, hadith no. 280; book 8, hadith no. 278; Sunan Dawud book 8, hadith no. 2665; book 33, hadith no. 4390; Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad*, 466.

⁸ William Muir, *The Life of Mohammad from Original Sources* (Edinburgh: J. Grant, 1923), 307, 308.

Medina (which is still its market today) and dug trenches in it. Then he sent for them and struck off their heads in those trenches as they were brought out to him in batches... There were 600 or 700 in all, though some put the figure as high as 800 or 900... This went on until the apostle made an end of them.⁹

The Battle of the Trench was a turning point in Muhammad's war against Mecca. In three years he would conquer Mecca. He would then die two years after this prized victory, with many Muslims later believing that he had been poisoned by one of his subordinates, and possibly by Aisha, the wife whom he loved the most.¹⁰

Given that Muhammad is, as per the Islamic religion, the *sine qua non* of the Perfect Man, the historical record makes it plain that what the West calls barbaric terrorism is not only affirmed by Islam but sanctified and declared to be righteous and necessary in the Qur'an and Hadithic literature—a total inverse of Western sensibilities and values. The Qur'an, Islam's most sacred book, and the hadithic record underscore this divide between the West and the Islamic fundamentalist world.

The First-Generation Muslims

Muhammad died in A.D. 632. At the time, the Muslim empire was limited to the cities of Mecca and Medina. It was in the remote western Arabian desert—the backwaters of the Middle East. Yet, within one hundred years this tiny Islamic state would swell to gargantuan size, stretching from the Straits of Gibraltar in the west to the Persian Gulf in the east, and with ambitions to conquer both Christian Europe and Hindu India.¹¹ Moreover, this impressive achievement was the result of the first generations of believers of Islam.

⁹ Ibn Ishaq, *op.cit.*, 464. Surah 33:26-27 is a brief description of the slaughter that took place at the battle of the Trench.

¹⁰ For this insight, I am indebted to Mohammad A. Khan, "Why Aisha Likely Poisoned Muhammad, Not a Jewish Woman," in *Jihad Watch*, Feb. 17, 2011.

¹¹ Many individuals mentioned in the Old Testament we deemed apostles in the Qur'an and they preached Islamic theology to the peoples under their purviews. This included Adam, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Lot, Moses, etc. These apostles taught that there was no god but Allah and all who failed to worship him aright would suffer accordingly (Surah 10:13). The catastrophes most often mentioned in the Qur'an as examples of divine judgment are Noah's Flood (Surahs 7:59-64; 11:25-48; 21:76-77; 23:23-30; 25:37; 26:105-122; 29:14-15; 37:75-82; 50:12; 51:46-49; 53:52; 71:1-28), the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Surahs 7:80-84; 11:77-83; 15:51-77; 18:59; 27:54-58; 29:28-35; 54:32-39), and the destruction of Pharaoh's army at the Red Sea (Surahs 11:96-98; 17:101-104; 20:49-79; 26:10-68; 28:39-40; 40:23-38; 43:46-56; 44:17-33; 51:38-40; 69:9-10; 89:10-13; 73:15-16; 79:15-26). A corollary was that Muhammad was not only

The first-generation believers of any religion are presumed to possess a more perfect understanding of that which its founder or prophet propagated. Later generations are always saddled with the problems of linguistic and cultural distance that can skew interpretation and analysis. Evaluating the system of beliefs of early believers is more fruitful when their words are compared with their behaviors. This is because belief is determined not in one's words alone but in how those words are lived out in the rough and tumble of the real world. The first-generation Muslims were (a) jihadists, (b) theocratic, (c) globalists, and (d) did not believe in religious pluralism. They set the standard from which all future Muslims were to be measured.

Theological Analysis

In Medina, under the leadership of Muhammad, Islam was both a religion and a state, and given to both Jihad and Shari'a. Later, Muslim scholars brought clarity to these two doctrines. In reference to the doctrine of Jihad, the esteemed Islamic jurist Abu Hanifah (d. A.D. 767) coined the terms Dar al-Islam and Dar al-Harb as a way of justifying militant jihad against the infidel. He explained that the world was divided into two houses: the Dar al-Islam (the House of Peace) and the Dar al-Harb (the House of War). The Dar al-Islam constituted that region of the world where Muslim rule and law prevailed. The Dar al-Harb constituted the rest of the world. Thomas Asbridge writes:

The express purpose of the jihad was to wage a relentless holy war in the Dar al-harb, until such time as all mankind had accepted Islam, or submitted to Muslim rule. No permanent peace treaties with non-Muslim enemies were permissible, and any temporary truces could last no more than ten years.¹²

The logic behind this teaching was that Allah was sovereign over all creation. Faithfulness to Allah, then, required Muslims to actively participate in the transformation of the Dar al-Harb into the Dar al-Islam.

The Qur'an validates this understanding of Holy War. Surah thirty-three, for example, states: "And He drove those of the people of the Book [i.e., Old and New Testaments] who had helped them from their fortresses and hurled dread into their hearts; a part ye slew and ye took captive a part; and He gave you their land,

an apostle, but he was also the last apostle. Allah now commissioned Muslims to take the message of the Qur'an to the world (Surah 23:52).

and their dwellings, and their property for an inheritance, and a land ye had not trodden, for Allah is ever mighty over all” (Surah 33:26-27). In another Surah, the hurling of dread, or terror, into the hearts of the enemy is understood as an essential component to victory: “I will cast dread into the hearts of those who misbelieve—strike off their necks then, and strike off from every fingertip” (Surah 8:12).

In short, the wars of Islam, from its beginning in the seventh century to the present time were a form of spiritual liberation. Muslim jihadists were deemed to be, in so many words, freedom fighters.

Jihadism

Clément Huart (1854-1926) a world-renowned scholar of the Arabic, Persian and Turkish languages, stated that a central component of Islamic spirituality—that which he described as “of capital importance”—is its commitment to military jihad. And, according to Islam, said Huart, military jihad is “holy war”—war sanctioned and blessed by Allah.

Among the unconditional duties imposed on the conscience of a Muslim is one that is *of capital importance* for those men who are not an integral part of the Muslim nation, who are outside of the society made up of the followers of Islam, and who do not accept the two inseparable foundations of the Islamic faith: the oneness of God and the mission of Muhammad. That duty is jihad, holy war.¹³

Citing Surah 3:200, Huart added that Allah expects “perseverance, endurance, and steadfastness” when it comes to one’s participation in jihad.¹⁴ All Muslims who lacked a commitment to jihad would be consigned to the fires of Hell in the afterlife.¹⁵

Ibn Khaldun, an esteemed fourteenth century Islamic scholar, summarized the opinion of five centuries of Islamic scholarship on jihadism:

In the Muslim community, the holy war is a religious duty, because of the universalism of the Muslim mission and [the obligation to] convert everybody to Islam either by persuasion or by force...The other religious

¹³ Clément Huart, “The Law of War” cited in *The Legacy of Jihad*, ed. Andrew G. Bostom (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2008), 282.; italics added. Also see Sahih Muslim book 20, hadith no. 4626.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 342.

¹⁵ See Surah 3:32; 4:69, 79-80; 5:80-81; 8:13, 20-23; 4:69, 79-80, 136; 5:80-81; 8:13, 20-23; 24:47-48, 50-52, 54, 63-64; 57:19; 59:4; 72:22-23; 48:8-17.

groups did not have a universal mission, and the holy war was not a religious duty for them.

In contrast, Islam was under divine obligation “to gain power over other nations.”¹⁶

Ibn Hudayl, another fourteenth century scholar, offered a rationale for the jihadic conquest of the Iberian Peninsula and other parts of Europe:

It is permissible to set fire to the lands of the enemy, his stores of grain, his beasts of burden—if it is not possible for the Muslims to take possession of them—as well as to cut down his trees, to raze his cities, in a word, to do everything that might ruin and discourage him...[being] suited to hastening the Islamization of that enemy or to weakening him. Indeed, all this contributes to a military triumph over him or to forcing him to capitulate.¹⁷

In short, the logic of jihad is that Allah is sovereign over all creation. Those who refuse to submit and worship him forfeit their rights to possess land, any land—indeed, they forfeit their rights to life. Their existence itself is an outrage, causing them to be the *de facto* aggressors against Allah. In response, Allah wills that their lands be given to others, people who are true in their worship and obedience to him.¹⁸ Understood in this context, the Muslim wars since the seventh century (the era of Muhammad) are not a form of imperialistic aggrandizement.¹⁹ They were and continue to be a form of spiritual liberation. Muslim warriors are, in so many words, freedom-fighters—warriors who fight on behalf of Allah. They are blessed and anointed by Allah to do whatever is necessary to defeat the infidel and advance the sovereign rule of Allah over the earth. Nothing is deemed to be too brutal or barbaric to achieve this end.

¹⁶ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, transl. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 291.

¹⁷ Ibn Hudayl, *L'Ornement des Ames*, transl.: Louis Mercier (Paris: Michael J. Miller, 1939), 195.

¹⁸ Infidels who lived in Islamic lands, known as *dhimmis*, were offered three options: (a) convert to Islam with the upgrade of status from infidel to believer with corresponding social and economic advantages, (b) refuse to convert to Islam with corresponding social and economic disadvantages, (c) refuse to convert to Islam and refuse to accept the social and economic disadvantages, a choice that would result in their slaughter (see Surah 2:192-193). Al-Mawardi (c.974-1058) noted that vanquished populations who forfeited their lands due to jihad were allowed to stay on their lands provided that they recognized Islamic ownership and made an annual payment (*jizya*) to the Islamic authorities: “the enemy make a payment in return for peace and reconciliation” (*The Laws of Islamic Governance*, transl. Asadullah Yate [London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1996], 77).

¹⁹ See Walid Phares, *Future Jihad* (New York: Palgrave, 2005), 36.

Shari'a Law

Since many of these statutes that became part of Shari'a law were within the Qur'an, they were regarded as divinely inspired. Their authority transcended all other laws, no matter the nation where they were found. Shari'a Law was therefore the final word of authority in all civil and criminal matters. Jake Neuman explains:

Democracy and freedom are an affront to Allah. All constitutions are an offense to Allah and must be destroyed and replaced with Sharia Law. For Muslims, Sharia Law is the Rule of Law... Sharia is the legal code ordained by Allah for all mankind. To violate Sharia or not accept its authority is to commit rebellion against Allah, which Allah's faithful are required to combat... It is the long term goal of Islam to replace the U. S. Constitution with the Sharia, since it contradicts Islam. For that matter, democracy violates Sharia law. Democracy assumes equality of all peoples. Islam teaches that a Muslim is a better person than *kafirs* [infidels] and that the *kafirs* should submit to Islam. But in voting, a Muslim's vote is equal to a kafir's vote. This violates Islamic law since a Muslim and a kafir are never equal.²⁰

Such a view is echoed by many Islamic jurists who portray democracy as antithetical to the supremacy of divine law. Syed Abu al-Maududi (1903-1979) acknowledged that Shari'a stands opposed to the principles of democracy that typify many nations in the West. He commented: "In such a state no one can regard any field of his affairs as personal and private. Considered from this aspect the Islamic State bears a resemblance to the Fascist and Communist states."²¹ That said, Maududi was not opposed to Shari'a, he merely stated the obvious. In addition, Asaf Ali Asghar Fyzee, a moderate Muslim scholar from India, also acknowledged that Shari'a and the ideals of democracy stand opposed to one another. Nevertheless, he favored democracy:

The mind and conscience of man is free. He must be permitted to believe what he will in respect of the ultimate things in the universe, and he

²⁰ Jake Neuman, *God of Moral Perfection* (East Sussex: Gardners Books, 2009), 23. Also see Larry Mead and David Sagar, *Fundamentals of Ethics* (Amsterdam: CIMA/Elsevier, 2006), 33, 34.

²¹ Syed Abul Maududi, *Islamic Law and Constitution*, transl. Khurshid Ahwad (Lahore, Pakistan: Islamic Publications, Ltd., 1980), 146.

cannot be fettered in his faith and imagination. There is thus an internal strife in Islam...[T]he ageless concepts of religious law [i.e., Shari'a] come into conflict with modern civil law [i.e., democracy].²²

The goal, Fyzee added, is to “give a fresh meaning to the faith of Islam.”²³ Though the message of the Qur'an is eternal, it must be understood within the context of “the science, philosophy, psychology, metaphysics, and theology of the modern world.”²⁴ And this means, among many things, that Shari'a must be replaced with the ideals of democracy.

The trend in modern Islamic states is to adopt hardline legal codes grounded in Shari'a. According to the 2013 Pew Research Center report, for example, 99% of Muslims in Afghanistan, 91% of Muslims in Iraq, 84% of Muslims in Pakistan, and 74% of Muslims in Egypt want Shari'a to be the official law of their respective countries. In addition, 86% of American Muslims opposed suicide bombing. This means that 14% of American Muslims (roughly 460,000 people) approved of suicide bombing.²⁵

Reasons for such a strong support for Shari'a are due to its connection to the Qur'an. Though Shari'a did not officially come into existence until the eighth century, when the 114 qur'anic surahs were collected, canonized, and bound into a single volume,²⁶ Shari'a is indisputably rooted in the era of Muhammad (seventh century) when the Surahs were allegedly first spoken to Muhammad by the Archangel Gabriel and then repeated by Muhammad to his Muslim followers.

The Heavenly and Earthly Qur'an

A correct understanding of the Qur'an requires one to believe that the earthly Qur'an (that which can be purchased, touched, and read) is an exact copy of the Heavenly Qur'an (that which cannot be purchased, touched, and read).

²² Āsaf A. A. Fyzee, “The Reinterpretation of Islam” in *Islam in Transition*, eds. John J. Donohue and John L. Esposito (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 189. Also see Abdullah Admed an-Na'im, *What Is an American Muslim?* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2014), 29. In a similar vein, Khaled Abou el Fadl admits that democracy emerged within the West, and not in the Islamic world, yet embraces democracy and opposes all non-democratic systems, such as theocracy—though he does not mention Shari'a by name (*The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* [New York: HarperCollins, 2007], 187).

²³ Fyzee, “The Reinterpretation of Islam”, 190.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Pew Research Center Religion & Public Life, *The World's Muslims: Religion, Politics and Society*, April 30, 2013.

²⁶ The problem was that many of the Surahs had been written down on “fragmentary scripts of paper...palmed stalks, thin white stones and also by men who knew it by heart” (Bukhari, book 6, hadith no. 509). Added to this problem was that not all the Surahs that had been collected were deemed to be genuine. The Qur'an was officially canonized in the eighth century.

The Heavenly Qur'an is called the Perspicuous Book. The word perspicuous (Arabic: *mubin*) means plain and clear and, in the case of the Qur'an, refers to a lucid and wholly understandable book. The *Fikh Akbar II* (The Second Great Creed) claims that the Perspicuous Book exists eternally in Paradise. "The Qur'an is the speech of Allah, written in the copies, preserved in the memories, recited by the tongues, revealed to the Prophet. Our pronouncing, writing, and reciting the Qur'an is created, whereas the Qur'an is uncreated."²⁷ Daniel W. Brown adds:

If the heavenly Qur'an was, indeed, eternal and uncreated, then the book that Muslims held in their hands was, in some sense, a manifestation of an eternal aspect of God. Accordingly, some theologians went so far as to argue that every syllable, sound, and written character of the Qur'an is pre-existing and eternal.²⁸

This idea of the eternity of the Perspicuous Book speaks to it being almost on par with Allah since Allah too is eternal. Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb explain: "Whereas in Christianity in the beginning was the Word and the Word became flesh, in Islam in the beginning was the Word [the Perspicuous Book] and the Word became a Book [the Qur'an]!"²⁹ Textual criticism is thereby firmly rejected in Islam on the grounds that the Perspicuous Book is uncreated and divinely preserved without error or variation in the replicated Earthly Qur'an. To think otherwise is heresy.

According to the Qur'an, the Heavenly Qur'an (the Perspicuous Book) was sent down to earth to various apostles (see Surahs 10:94; 14:1; 15:6, 9; 16:30, 44, 64, 89; 18:1; 20:2; 21:10, 50; 22:16; 25:1, 32; 28:87; 34:41; 42:15, 17; 43:31; 46:30; 64:8; 76:23). "Has not the story come to you of those who were before you," the Qur'an asked, "of the people of Noah, and Ad, and Thamud, and those who came after them?" (Surah 14:9). Some apostles received more of the Heavenly Qur'an than others, yet all received enough to make a clear presentation to the communities in which they lived.

Muhammad believed that he was one such apostle, with the sole distinction being that, unlike the apostles who had come before him, he was the beneficiary of the entire Perspicuous Book (the Heavenly Qur'an). Hence, in the mid-seventh century, the Heavenly Qur'an and the Earthly Qur'an merged and finally became one and the same.

²⁷ Arent J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development* (London: Frank Cass, 1965), 189.

²⁸ Daniel W. Brown, *A New Introduction to Islam* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2004), 177.

²⁹ Norman Geisler and Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 100.

Committed to its uncreated eternity and otherworldliness, fundamentalist Muslims believe the Perspicuous Book (the Heavenly Qur'an) to be timeless, and directly applicable in every culture and every epoch. It needs neither updating, revision nor interpretation. Rather than insights from contemporary culture judging the Heavenly Qur'an, the Heavenly Qur'an is always that which judges contemporary culture. People should therefore read it as written, fundamentalists say, independent of insights emerging from philosophy, psychology, sociology, alternate religions, or anything else for that matter.

Frozen in its own timeless uncreated eternity, the Qur'an stands as the final word of all cultures in all historical epochs. Since the Perspicuous Book (the Heavenly Qur'an) was sent down to earth via the Archangel Gabriel in the seventh century, the culture of seventh-century Islam has become idealized, as per fundamentalist Muslims. It is therefore to be replicated in all succeeding centuries. This explains, for example, the garb of burkas and hijabs worn by Muslim women. This also explains why fundamentalist Muslims are insistent that the Qur'an can only be rightly understood when read in the Arabic language. Even the *Shahadah*, Islam's most basic creed, spoken as a profession of faith, must be recited in the Arabic language to be efficacious, no matter the mother tongue of the person making the profession. The Arabic language is the *lingua sacra* of the Islamic world.

And finally, this explains why the Qur'an is not so much a book to be studied and critiqued as it is to be believed, obeyed, and embodied. This point cannot be stressed enough. Kenneth Cragg is on target when he writes that for fundamentalist Muslims, the task of reading the Qur'an "is not so much exploratory, still less fellowship, but rather obedience and allegiance."³⁰ Mainstream fundamentalist Islamic scholarship has therefore uniformly understood Surah 25:51-52 as a mandate to engage in militant jihad, which includes the use of violence to achieve the Islamification of any and all cultures in the world. Referencing Surah twenty-five, Tanwir al-Miqbas (fourteenth century Islamic jurist) wrote that jihad should be done "by means of the Qur'an" and "by the sword."³¹ Maulana Muhammad Ali (1874-1951), a leading figure of the Ahmadiyya Movement in India, added:

Every exertion to spread the Truth is, according to this verse, a *jihadist Kabir* ("mighty striving") or the *great jihad*. Fighting in defense of religion received the name of *jihad* because under the circumstances it became necessary for the Truth to live and prosper; if fighting had not

³⁰ Kenneth Cragg, *The Call of the Minaret* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), 57.

³¹ *Tafsir Ibn Abbas*, commentary on Surah 25, p. 402 (<https://archive.org/details/TanwirAl-MiqbasMinTafsirIbnAbbasEng/IbnAbbas/page/n411/mode/2up>).

been permitted, Truth would surely have been uprooted. The commentators all accept this significance of the word here. It should be noted that the greatest *jihad* which a Muslim can carry on is one by means of the Qur'an, to which the personal pronoun *it* at the end of the verse unquestionably refers, because it must be carried on by every Muslim under all circumstances.³²

The last phrase is noteworthy. Jihad “must be carried on by every Muslim under all circumstances”—some on the front lines where the killing and terrorizing of infidels take place, and others in the background where they offer logistical and moral support.

Another fundamentalist Muslim, Sayed Abul a'la Maududi (1903-1979), founder of the Jammāt-e-Islami, a radical Islamic organization similar to the Muslim Brotherhood and Hamas and operating in northern India, referenced this passage from Surah 25 in his writings: “To fight against the enemies of Islam on all possible fronts with all one's resources in order to raise high the Word of Allah [i.e., the Qur'an]. This will include jihad with one's tongue, pen, wealth, life, and every other available weapon.”³³

With such commitment to these jihadist commands located within the Qur'an, it is, therefore, foolish to insist, as Westerners habitually do, “that the violent acts of radical Islam can be divorced from the religious ideals that inspire them. Instead, we must acknowledge that they are driven by a political ideology, an ideology embedded in Islam itself.”³⁴ It does not matter that a jihadist may possess a reluctance to engage in acts of barbaric violence, conscience and rational analysis are to be suspended and obedience enacted.

Modern Muslim Analysis

Hasan al-Banna

Historians generally agree that following the Battle of Vienna in 1683, the battle which halted the Islamic advance into Europe, Islam experienced defeat after defeat, and ended with most of the Muslim world colonized and subject to the laws of various European nations. Enormously discouraged, during this era

³² Maulana Muhammad Ali, *The Holy Qur'an: Arabic Text with English Translation, Commentary and Comprehensive Introduction* (The Lahore Ahmadiyya Movement, 1985), 705; italics in the original.

³³ Sayed Abul a'la Maududi, *Tafhim al-Qur'an*. This phrase is a commentary on Surah 25, verse 67 (<http://www.englishquran.com/Quran/25/index.html>).

³⁴ Ayaan Hirsi Ali, *Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation Now* (New York: Harper, 2015), 2.

the Muslim world fell into a state of spiritual slumber. Its demise seemed imminent—all the more so with the secularization of the newly formed nation of Turkey, a cultural phenomenon which took place following the cessation of the First World War. Under the leadership of President Kemal (called Atatürk, meaning the Father of the Turks), the Turkish people—mostly those under the age of thirty—embraced the values and culture of the European Enlightenment, and did so at a pell-mell speed. In this brave new Turkish world, a world that only recently had been the great Ottoman Empire, religion was privatized and atheism had become the preferred alternative. Atatürk personally thought nothing of religion and regarded Muhammad to be a backwards Arab Bedouin. Islam, he added, was nothing more than an ossified irrelevant religion wholly unsuitable for the modern world.

It was at this time that a young Egyptian, a man by the name of Hasan al-Banna (1906-1949), had a vision of what could and should be the future of Islam. In 1927, he walked into a coffee house in Cairo, Egypt, stood on top of a chair, and began preaching. He spoke of the people's poverty, lack of jobs, and missteps in their devotion to Allah. He tied all three together and made the case that their economic woes were due to their disobedience to the commands written in the Qur'an. He then went to other coffee houses and preached the same message. Drunkards mocked him and religious leaders argued against him. Yet, he disregarded both groups and pressed onward. With time, his words took hold in the minds of the people. Al-Banna had given the Egyptian people a dream. It was not his dream. It was Muhammad's dream, he said, as presented in the Qur'an.

In March of 1928, al-Banna founded the Society of Muslim Brothers, also known as the Muslim Brotherhood. He assumed the title *al-Murshid-al-Aam*—the Supreme Guide. The Muslim Brotherhood promoted an interpretation of the Qur'an where all its commands were believed to be timelessly valid and therefore to be wholly obeyed in the present world. Most importantly, the Brotherhood was a full-throttled commitment to militant jihad. The Muslim Brotherhood was, in so many words, the resurrection of Islamic fundamentalism in the modern world.

In his tract *Toward the Light*, al-Banna explained the overall objectives of the Muslim Brotherhood. He said that it was a liberation movement. This liberation was to take place in four stages. It would be a liberation from

- Muslim nations governed by apostate Muslim leaders
- Muslim nations controlled by non-Islamic forces
- Non-Muslim nations previously ruled by Islamic caliphates
- All non-Muslims located in the rest of the world

In other words, since the Islamic fatherland encompasses the entire world, this liberation is necessarily global in scope. If the Muslim people obeyed these

commands, al-Banna explained, Allah would bless them once again and raise them to a place of power and authority in the world. But if they did not obey, Allah would curse and punish them.

Al-Banna was a devout admirer of Adolf Hitler. Understandably, then, in the 1930s and 1940s the Muslim Brotherhood stood with the Nazis before and during the Second World War. Muslim Brotherhood members translated *Mein Kampf* into Arabic, calling it *My Jihad*. They also promoted the anti-Semitic forgery of *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which stated that it was the vision of the Jewish people to take over the world.

Following the Second World War, the Muslim Brotherhood remained unrepentant in its affirmation of Nazi Germany and its genocidal Holocaust enacted against the Jewish people. Al-Banna was instrumental in providing political asylum for the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Haj Amin al-Husseini, who was sought throughout Europe for war crimes against the Jews in the Balkans. Al-Banna died in 1949.

Since 1948, this global liberation embraced a fifth stage. Now that Israel, under the auspices of the United Nations, had become a bona fide nation in the Middle East, specifically inside Palestine, it had to be defeated and removed from the land—by any and all means necessary. This meant, of course, that a two-state solution was absolutely and utterly rejected. This fifth stage was prioritized and became the first and most important of the five stages of liberation.

Omar Abdel-Rahman

Omar Abdel-Rahman (a.k.a. The Blind Sheikh) is a scholar of the Qur'an and hadithic literature and a doctor of Islamic jurisprudence. He graduated from al-Azhar University in Cairo, a major Islamic institution in higher education for over a millennium. His area of expertise is Shari'a law.

Abdel-Rahman was the leader of *Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya*, a terrorist Islamist movement centered in Egypt. This group is responsible for many acts of violence, including the November 1997 Luxor massacre, in which fifty-eight foreign tourists and four Egyptians were killed.

Abdel-Rahman is currently serving a life sentence at the Butner Federal Correctional Institution in Butner, North Carolina. He was convicted of seditious conspiracy, due to the failed attempt to bomb and destroy the World Trade Center in 1993. A telling testimony about Abdel-Rahman comes from Andrew C. McCarthy, who led the prosecution against him. In his preparation for the case, McCarthy immersed himself in the writings of both Abdel-Rahman, which were extensive, and the Qur'an. He concluded that Abdel-Rahman's interpretation of the Islamic sacred texts was compelling and a "coherent interpretation of Islamic

doctrine. He was not perverting Islam—he was, if anything, shining a light on the need to reform it.”³⁵

Yet, according to Abdel-Rahman, reform means a return to a literal hermeneutic of the sacred literature and, hence, jihadist fundamentalism. Such a return is, as Supreme Court Justice Robert Jackson previously wrote, “the antithesis of Western law.”³⁶ Among many things, it is a rejection of freedom of speech, the freedom of religion, and equal rights between men and women. McCarthy added:

Americans were horrified by the beheadings of three Western journalists by ISIS. American and European politicians could not get to microphones fast enough to insist that these decapitations had nothing to do with Islam. Yet within the same time frame, the government of Saudi Arabia beheaded eight people for various violations of sharia—the law that governs Saudi Arabia.³⁷

McCarthy concluded that Abdel-Rahman’s Islamic fundamentalism is not only hermeneutically sound but also mainstream in many parts of the Islamic world. McCarthy lamented: “Stubbornly unwilling to deal with the reality of Islam, our leaders have constructed an Islam of their very own.” It is, he explained, the “triumph of willful blindness and political correctness over common sense.”³⁸

Osama bin Laden

One of the more celebrated Islamic fundamentalists of recent years is Osama bin Laden (1957-2011), mostly due to his leadership in orchestrating the successful attack on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on September 11, 2001. Prior to this attack, bin Laden offered justification for a jihad against the West with his comments on the Qur’an. It was his vision to bring the entire Muslim world to his jihadist understanding of Islam. The only way that this could be achieved, however, was to demonstrate that the Qur’an validated his vision.

³⁵ Andrew C. McCarthy, “*Islam — Fact or Dreams?*” (Imprimis: February 2016): 3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Declaration of War

In this document, published on October 14, 1996, bin Laden made the case that the message of the Qur'an validated a call for a global jihad. Yet, this message of the Qur'an contradicted the current status quo in the Middle East which validated the existence of Islamic nation-states who were preoccupied with their own internal affairs and content to exist in a world where non-Islamic nation-states were allowed to co-exist.

Bin Laden believed that if he were to be successful in convincing the Muslim world to join him in his call to jihad, he needed to accomplish three things: (a) demonstrate that the Qur'an indeed validated a call to jihad, (b) demonstrate that the current status quo in the Middle East was out of step with the Qur'an, and (c) speak in terms of a caliphate, not personal fiefdoms.

He began his document with a call to "fear Allah," citing three key passages from the Qur'an to validate this call (Surahs 3:102; 4:1; 33:70-71). He then connected this call with a reference in the Qur'an pertaining to the Prophet Sho'haib (also known as Jethro, the father-in-law to Moses). Sho'haib, he explained, sought to right injustices in his day and draw people back to Allah (Surah 11:88). Hence, without stating it directly, bin Laden laid the groundwork of the need for a modern-day apostle. The implication was that he was that apostle.

Bin Laden then turned his attention to the two modern-day enemies of Islam: America and Israel, whom he called the Jewish-Crusader Alliance of Aggression. His argument was that Islam had been afflicted with the oppression, hostility and injustice by a Judeo-Christian alliance throughout the world. "The massacres that have taken place in Tajikistan, Burma, Kashmir, Assam, the Philippines, Fatani, Ogaden, Somalia, Eritrea, Chechnya, and Bosnia-Herzegovina send shivers down our spines and stir up our passions," he wrote. He then accused the United States of America of "blatant imperial arrogance...under the cover of the immoral United Nations." He also declared that the people of Islam were the targets of this Judeo-Christian alliance. Furthermore, he condemned the Saudi government, whom he called "the authorized agent," because of its cooperation with America. If it were not for Saudi Arabia, he added, the American military could not have launched its military offensive against Iraq in 1990.

Included in the *Declaration of War* were several ancient Muslim scholars, which included Ibn Taymiyyah (1262-1328) who lived during the Mongol invasion of the Islamic Empire. Citing Taymiyyah, he wrote: "Jihad is better than

the hajj and umrah.”³⁹ Bin Laden also relied upon several jihadist citations from the Qur’an to make his case, which included the Verse of the Sword—Surah 9:5.

Fatwah

Two years later, bin Laden wrote a *fatwah* which served as a legal ruling that validated his Declaration of War. In the Islamic world, a *fatwah* is a legal ruling by a qualified Islamic jurist. It was published on February 23, 1998. The Verse of the Sword (Surah 9:5) was presented prominently at its outset, setting the theme for all that followed. His justification for targeting the United States of America for jihad was grounded in three points:

- United States has been occupying the lands of Islam in the holiest of places, the Arabian Peninsula, plundering its riches, dictating to its rulers, humiliating its people, terrorizing its neighbors.
- Despite the great devastation inflicted on the Iraqi people by the crusader-Zionist alliance, the Americans are once again trying to repeat the horrific massacres upon the Islamic world.
- The aim of the Americans was to protect the Jewish illegal occupation of Palestine and thereby guarantee Israel’s survival.⁴⁰

As such, the United States of America was engaged in a “war on Allah, his messenger, and Muslims.”⁴¹ War against the United States of America was therefore defensive in nature and altogether justified.

Bin Laden then cited three ancient Islamic scholars who argued similarly about jihad and its justification. In particular, he quoted al-Qurtubi (1214-1273) who wrote:

As for the fighting to repulse [an enemy], it is aimed at defending sanctity and religion, and it is a duty as agreed [by the *ulema*]. Nothing is more sacred than belief except repulsing an enemy who is attacking religion and life.⁴²

The *fatwah proper* came next. Bin Laden gave this charge to the entire Muslim world:

³⁹ Cited in the *Declaration of War*. The quote from Ibn Taymiyyah comes from his multi-volume work: *Majmu al-Fatawa*, (Dar al-Fikr, 1983), 35.160.

⁴⁰ Osama bin Laden, *Fatwah*, Feb. 23, 1998.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

On that basis, and in compliance with Allah's order, we issue the following *fatwah* to all Muslims: the ruling to kill the Americans and their allies—civilians and military—is an individual duty for every Muslim who can do it in any country in which it is possible to do it.⁴³

The comment in the above *fatwah proper*, that jihadists kill both civilians and military, is noteworthy inasmuch as it buttressed that of Muhammad who practiced the same.

Bin Laden concluded the *fatwah* with five passages from the Qur'an: Surahs 2:193; 4:75; 8:24; 9:38-39; and 3:139. Each sanctioned jihad against the infidel. The final Surah is also noteworthy. Surah 3:139 was (allegedly) revealed to Muhammad following the Muslim defeat at the battle of Uhud (A.D. 625). By including this passage in the *fatwah*, bin Laden's point was that even after prior defeats against the infidel, final victory would be assured provided that the jihadists remained true in their perseverance, endurance, and steadfastness to the cause of Allah.

Bin Laden's *fatwah* was endorsed by the leaders of four terrorist organizations: Ayman al-Zawahiri (amir of the Jihad Group in Egypt), Abu-Yasir Rifa'i Ahmad Taha (Egyptian Islamic Group), Shaykh Mir Hamzah (secretary of the Jamiat-ul-Ulema-e-Pakistan), and Fazlur Rahman (amir of the Jihad Movement in Bangladesh).

Reflecting back on bin Laden's career as a renowned Islamic statesman and terrorist, that which provided validation to his credentials as an authentic leader in fundamentalist Islam is the similarity of his vision and actions associated with that of (a) Hasan al-Banna, the martyred founder of modern-day fundamentalist Islam, (b) esteemed Muslim jurists reaching back to the eighth century, and (c) the Qur'an and Hadithic literature which reaches back to Muhammad in the seventh century.

Conclusion

Far from being an aberration of true Islam, Islamic fundamentalism possesses a long pedigree within mainstream Islam, reaching back to the seventh century and carrying forward to the present day. It is rooted in an understanding of the Qur'an where it is defined as perspicuous, uncreated, and thereby timelessly relevant to all the cultures of the world and all historical epochs. And since the Qur'an promotes both jihad and Shari'a law, the West should not be quick to call Muslims who embrace a fundamentalist interpretation of the Qur'an aberrant in the practice of their religion.

⁴³ Osama bin Laden, *Fatwah*, Feb. 23, 1998.

Eminent Islamic scholars throughout history have been fundamentalists, recognizing jihad and Shari'a law as foundational to true Islamic spirituality. It is not without reason, then, that terrorists such as Osama bin Laden, would cite these ancient scholars in their *fatwahs* and declarations of war to validate their calls to jihad. It is also not without reason that jihadists from the Gaza Strip, as has been recently observed, would attack Israel with barbaric zeal. Though those in the West call rape, decapitations, and the burning of people to death, young and old, civilians and military, as raw barbaric evil, jihadists call such behavior sanctified by Allah and exemplified by Muhammad, their sacred prophet. Moreover, not all Islamic fundamentalists are jihadists, in the strictest sense of the word, yet all are expected to support the jihadists in all manner possible—morally, financially, logistically, and so on. A failure to do this would condemn them to the flames of eternal fire.

Herein lies the dilemma facing the West. With fundamentalist Islam living in its own cultural bubble—in its seventh-century premodern past, a past replete with Shari'a and Jihadism—the multiculturalism that now defines much of the West is in an awkward position. This is especially the case, given the atrocities of October 7, 2023. Either the West renounces its own multiculturalism as an untenable worldview and returns to a world of moral absolutes or it allows barbaric terrorism a place at the table, to be one of the many legitimate cultures in the current world, such as it is. A third option is to cast a blind eye to what happened in Israel on that infamous October day. Ignorance is bliss, many people are prone to say.

Christians, however, are aware of a fourth option. Serving as salt and light in the world (Matt 5:13-16), they are to make the case that evil must be faced squarely in the world, especially horrific barbaric evil. They are also to renounce the sophistries and illogicalities of the multicultural worldview and make that plain from their pulpits and in the public square. It is a call to social action in a world that is hurling itself into a new dark age.

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