



Faces of
ISLAM

A Christian Perspective

Questions and answers with Rick Love about Islam and terrorism

Rick Love has served for more than 20 years among Muslims. He holds a D.Min. degree from Westminster Theological Seminary and a Ph.D. from Fuller Theological Seminary. He is the author of Muslims, Magic and the Kingdom of God (see page 41) and Peacemaking: Resolving Conflict, Restoring and Building Harmony in Relationships (William Carey Library, 2001). He is adjunct professor of Islamics at Fuller Theological Seminary and Columbia International University. He presently serves as International Director of Frontiers.

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Q: How can people do such evil things in the name of religion?

A: Since September 11, people around the world have been asking this question. The atrocities of that day shocked and astounded. As horrific as they were, Christians must still be guided by the wisdom of our Lord Jesus who said, "Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ... You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye."

Sadly, church history is replete with examples of evil perpetrated in the name of Christianity. There have been far too many times when Christians have blatantly violated the example and teachings of Christ. Perhaps the ugliest, most relevant and well-known example is the Crusades of the Middle Ages, when true Christians and "professing" Christians engaged in "holy" war. They brutally tortured and slaughtered thousands of Muslims to regain a piece of territory both groups deemed holy.

Without diminishing the horror and inhumanity of the suicide bombings, Christians must admit that in the misguided name of "religion," we have also committed atrocities. We can't point the finger!

As Christians, we not only need to get the logs out of our eyes, but we also need to speak truth and not bear false witness. This means that we must be accurate and fair when we describe another religion. So, why did the

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Muslim terrorists feel they were right in committing these atrocities in the name of Islam?

It is common to read articles and hear speeches in the present crisis that describe Islam as a peace-loving religion. But is this really accurate? It is one thing to say that there are many peace-loving Muslims (which I believe) and quite another thing to say that Islam is a peace-loving religion.

Let me explain. I see at least two things inherent in the religion of Islam that have been used by terrorists to promote violence.

First, Muhammad rode into Mecca on a stallion with a sword in hand to conquer by force. By contrast, Jesus saddled up a donkey to ride into Jerusalem to humbly suffer and die for the sins of the world. Herein lies the difference. Jesus founded a religion based on moral persuasion. From the beginning, Islam has condoned the use of the sword. Historically, not all Muslims have used it. Thankfully, many modern Muslims refrain from it. But Islam is a religion which sanctions force, if necessary, to advance its purposes.

One other aspect of Islamic faith also has the potential to fuel the fire of evil. The Islamic faith (at least at a popular level) puts a strong emphasis on salvation by works. Muslims have no assurance of heaven. However, if a Muslim dies while engaging in holy war (jihad), he is assured of entering heaven. According to the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, jihad “is an act of pure devotion”; it is ‘one of the gates to Paradise;’ rich heavenly rewards are guaranteed for those who devote themselves to it; those who fall in the jihad are the martyrs of the faith.”

The deluded terrorists who crashed into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon thought they were in a holy war against America. In fact, they saw themselves in a battle against infidels everywhere, including moderate Muslim governments. They were willing to lose their lives in this attack in order to secure paradise.

Thus, these tragic acts represent an earth-shattering clash of worldviews. The terrorists’ perspective of the world, filtered by a radical interpretation of Islam, sees only two sides: “true Islam” and “infidels.” This narrow viewpoint resulted in these unforgettable atrocities.

Q: Do most Muslims think they are in a holy war against America?

A: Absolutely not! Islam comes in a variety of forms:

liberals, moderates, conservatives, non-violent fundamentalists and violent fundamentalists (who embrace terrorism), to name a few. So we must distinguish between the majority of Muslims and the minority of violent revolutionaries. We must differentiate between the radical fringe of Islam and the mainstream. To be sure, fundamentalist terrorism is a cancer in Islam. But to lump all Muslims together as terrorists would be comparable to saying that all white Christian men in the United States are part of the Ku Klux Klan or the Neo-Nazi movement. This is unjust, unloving, and unchristian. And it’s plain wrong.

The majority of Muslims in the world do not see themselves in a holy war against America. They are peace-loving moderates, law-abiding citizens, and good neighbors. They want no part of terrorism. In fact, Muslim

nations are joining the international coalition to respond together against terrorism. In a crisis such as this, Christians need to respond as peacemakers. As Christine Mallouhi says, now is the time to “wage peace” on our Muslim neighbors!

Q: Why do they hate the United States so much?

A: Many of us viewed with shock the scene of Muslims celebrating in the streets after the terrorist attacks. How could anyone revel over such horrific events? It is true that the vast majority of Muslim governments were appalled by the attacks. But a large number of Muslims applauded the attack. Why?

Let me briefly outline six reasons, many of which are political. I am not arguing for the rightness or wrongness of any political position in this litany of charges, but only explaining

Muslim perceptions around the world. (Nonetheless, I think it would be wise for the entire Western world to carefully reconsider political policies pertaining to the Muslim world during this crisis. At the very least, we Christians in the West need to get the logs out of our own eyes).

1. Muslims (like Christians) reject secular modernity, with its materialism, pornography and high divorce rate. Muslim leaders have caricatured the West (and especially America) as the “Great Satan” precisely because the worldly pleasures of Western culture are luring the faithful away from the straight path of Islam, just as it lures many Christians away from a close walk with the Lord Jesus. Thus, for Muslims who feel most powerfully alienated, an attack against America can be seen as a triumph for Islamic values.



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2. Radical Islamic movements perceive the United States to be culpable in the deaths of Muslims around the world. As many Americans realize, U.S. support of Israeli action against Palestinian and Lebanese civilians has caused burning hostility among Muslims. But many Muslims see U.S. policy at fault in other situations, too. In their minds, the United States was criminally slow to react when nominally Christian Serbs began to slaughter Bosnian Muslims. In yet another recent historical example, many Muslim nations stood with America in the war against Iraq. But the post-war economic sanctions imposed on Iraq have not enjoyed the same consensus. UNICEF's 1999 report estimates that 500,000 additional children have died during the 1990s as a result of these economic sanctions. So Muslims around the world ask, "Do Saddam Hussein's crimes justify the mass starvation of innocent children?"

3. Muslim perceptions of the West have been molded by their media—a media often strongly biased against the United States. (I might add that Western media tends to be biased against Muslims.) In addition, "many Muslims in the Middle East and elsewhere are exposed not to the positive aspects of U.S. society—such as individual liberty, the rule of law, and economic prosperity—but to the worst traits of American culture, including materialism, militarism, and racism."

4. Muslims believe they are destined to be the dominant force in the world today. Nations with majority Muslim populations feel they ought to be the most prosperous and victorious countries in the world. The unacceptable reality is that in most cases they are not. The levers of political, economic, technological, media and even moral power are in the hands of the West.

5. Muslim outrage is also caused by the presence of "infidel" troops based in the "holy" land of Saudi Arabia during and since the Gulf War. This has focused their anger on the West, as well as what they view as corrupt and impotent Muslim governments.

6. I have many non-American Christian friends. Like moderate Muslims they, too, can be critical and negative of America. Some of the anger brewing in the Muslim world is related to the fact that America is a superpower. America is a lightning rod for criticism. Sadly, it is human nature to want to take people down a notch.

Q: What do you think God could be doing, and how should we be working with him?

A: I believe God may use these tragic events to change the global landscape in many ways. Here are the kinds of things I pray for and could envision. Would you join with

me in prayer for these things? The future hangs in the balance.

First, the devil would love to see the world divide into two camps: Islam vs. the West. So would the terrorists! A wisely orchestrated international alliance against terrorism could result in a different way of dividing the world. I could foresee Islam being divided into two camps: *non-violent* moderates and fundamentalists vs. *violent* fundamentalists and terrorists. Potentially, this could lead to a greater respect for human life and dignity and a recognition of common values between us.

Secondly, I am praying for the advance of God's kingdom in Muslim countries. Because of the alliance between Muslim countries and Western countries, more Christians are being confronted with the needs of the Muslim world. I am praying this results in more workers being mobilized to serve among Muslims.

Ultimately, this tragedy could result in greater receptivity among Muslims and greater freedom to preach the Gospel. In the past, Islamic militancy or the imposition of Islamic law has sometimes caused a backlash among ordinary Muslims. Following the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran, Muslims became disillusioned with Islam and looked for meaning and hope elsewhere. Disillusioned Muslims around the world may be more receptive to the Gospel—that is, if they have an opportunity to hear it!



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Q: What can I do to demonstrate Christ's love to Muslims?

A: First, we must stand against all forms of hate crimes and racism aimed at Arabs and Muslims around the world (and especially in America). Now is an unprecedented moment for Christians to express our love to innocent Arab and Muslim neighbors by protecting them and helping reassure their personal security at this time.

Second, Christians, especially those in the West, should seek out Muslims and begin building bridges of love. If we show real love now—if we make innocent Arabs and Muslims feel that we are together in this international tragedy—then we will touch their hearts in ways that will not soon be forgotten. They will tell other Muslims around the world of how they were touched by our love. And that will make much easier the job of every Christian who is involved in evangelism among Muslims, both in our country and around the world, for a long time to come.

Third, now is the time for church leaders to meet with leaders of local mosques to enhance mutual understanding and perhaps discuss ways to work together against terrorism. As I said before, let's wage peace on Islam!

Q: How should Christians battle against terrorism?

A: We should begin here: Behind this terrorist attack lurks the one described in the Bible as “the Evil One”—the one who seeks to deceive and destroy. The devil and the hosts of hell are ultimately behind this grievous act. We must also recognize the demonic nature of all evil. Our hatred and anger should be channeled against the enemy of our souls. As Paul says, “Our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”

Thus, through prayer the Church needs to resist the devil—our adversary who prowls around like a roaring lion. We also need to pray that the Kingdom would come on the nations of the world, that the power, righteousness, peace and joy of the Kingdom would rest on political and religious leaders throughout the world.

We need to pray that true justice will prevail. As God’s Word makes plain, “Justice and only justice you shall pursue.” Government pursuit of justice against the terrorists should not become an excuse for indiscriminate bombing of thousands of innocent people. This is revenge, not justice. And it is not Christian.

As citizens of heaven, it isn’t up to us to determine what political forms a just response might take. But one thing is sure. The response to this attack will in all likelihood trigger a host of other responses that could either help or hinder the spread of the Gospel. Thus, we should pray for a strong coalition of nations—including moderate Muslim nations—that will vow together to see that terrorism cannot continue. Strength of relationships between Western and moderate Muslim nations, rather than military might, will most likely be the key to victory in the response against terrorism.

Q: How do these terrorist attacks impact the church in Muslim countries?

A: What most Christians need to understand is that they have brothers and sisters throughout the Muslim world. We are fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household. In a recent prayer meeting, I joined our staff in praying for the small fellowships of Muslim-background believers in Pakistan—some of whom dress just like Osama bin Laden!

There is immense tension throughout the Muslim world. Our organization has already evacuated workers.

Others may have to leave their countries soon. But let’s not forget the potential for massive violence against our national brothers and sisters who are left behind. Military action against Afghanistan could trigger a blood bath against our precious fellow believers around the Muslim world. As Christians, we have family in these Muslim nations! Please don’t forget to pray for them.

Q: Should we continue to evangelize Muslims under the present circumstances?

A: I see parallels between our present crisis and the life of Queen Esther. Esther knew her people were targets of terror! She was face to face with evil. But God raised her up “for such a time as this.” She boldly stepped out, trusting the Lord with the famous words: “If I perish, I perish.” As God used Esther to avert the destruction of her people, so too I believe he wants to use the church to avert



the destruction of innocent Muslims. Even more importantly, this is an opportunity to avert the eternal destruction of Muslims by redoubling our efforts to reach them with the words of eternal life.

There are more than one billion Muslims in the world today—one-fifth of humanity. The vast majority wake up every morning with no Bible, with no church, with no one to tell them of the way, the truth, and the life. In the last 25 years, more than 100 times as many American Christians have gone to the Middle East to serve their country in a military capacity than have gone to the Middle East to serve the King of kings by proclaiming the Gospel of peace! Where are the Christian heroes who will step forward in this pivotal time in history to be involved in the greatest of all rescue missions? Where are the Christian heroes who will lovingly demonstrate Christ’s mercy and boldly proclaim Christ’s truth to Muslims for such a time as this? 🌐