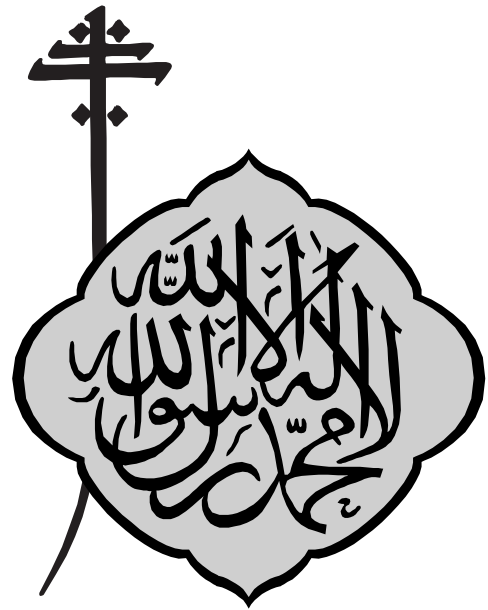# The Struggle Within Islam

What is the mindset of those who would terrorize for Allah?

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Ever since the barbaric attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, we have received numerous inquiries from people trying to understand Islamic terrorism: What is there in Islam that would lead someone to commit such atrocities? Does orthodox Islam sanction such heinous acts? Or are they the aberration of a few radical Muslims? How can a suicidal terrorist who takes the lives of thousands of innocent victims be considered a good Muslim? How should we as Christians respond to the present situation in the light of these insights? Such are the kinds of questions Christians are asking.

I can understand that Muslims in America, to try to assuage the fears and the animosity of the public, have been speaking out in an effort to distance themselves from those who perpetrate such crimes. In recent days, there have been news items and interviews with Muslims on this topic in the local newspaper, or on TV, all affirming that "Islam does not teach or approve such actions." We are told that "Islam means 'Peace,' and is a religion of peace,"

or that "taking one's own life is not Islamic and is disapproved."

I can also understand that our government feels a need to make a sharp distinction between Islam and Islamic terrorists, as the President has done in his speeches to the nation. Many of our citizens, as well as many not-yet-citizens in our workforce, are Muslims, and we cannot afford to build a wall of alienation between these and other citizens. And we need to speak out and act decisively against all forms of vigilantism that lash out at any who look like they could be Arabs or Muslims. What's more, the government needs desperately to maintain peaceful relations with the some forty Muslim-majority nations of the world, and to obtain the support of as many as possible in the war against terrorism. We must work with them, not against them, if we are to make any headway.

But where does the truth lie? Does Islam sanction such terrorist acts? Or is it truly a religion of peace? That is the question. The answer, however, is not so simple. The truth is that both tendencies exist in Islam—in conflict with each other. There are two sides to Islam so to speak, two faces.

On the one hand there is normative Islam; to a majority of Muslims this is what Islam is all about. It involves

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them in believing in the six articles of Islamic faith and practicing the five required "Acts of Worship"—from the five ritual prayers that are performed daily, to the month-long fast of Ramadan, to the pilgrimage made to Mecca at least once in a lifetime, and so on. Between seeking to fulfill these and other duties imposed on them by Islamic Law, participating in various Islamic festivals, and trying to put food on the table, the average Muslim would seem to have little time for much else. But there are those who do know the other side of Islam, but do not want to acknowledge it, or what is worse, do not want the truth to be known.

> ## Islam is not just a religion, it is an ideology with a political agenda.

The truth is that there is another side to Islam, a side that embraces violence "in the way of Allah." As has often been said, Islam divides the world into two zones, *Dar as-Salaam* ("House of Peace"), and *Dar al-Harb* ("House of War"). Islam is not just a religion, as I have written elsewhere; it is an ideology with a political agenda. It holds that all men are created to live in submission to Allah, as prescribed by Islamic law. Muslims believe that Islam's destiny is to extend its control until the whole Dar al-Harb is subject to Islamic law in an Islamic state, and this includes the use of force. The word "Islam" does *not* mean "peace." It is related to the Arabic word for peace (salaam), but it means "to surrender, to submit (as a slave to his master—Allah), to make peace by laying down one's arms in submission." It has a militaristic connotation. Herein lie the origins of radical Islam.

It is a fact that killing and violence have always been part and parcel of Qur'anic teaching. This even includes giving one's life to advance the cause of Islam. In saying this I do not mean to imply that such acts have always and uniformly been practiced throughout history, at least to the extent of the barbarity seen on September 11th. In our modern world, at any rate, most Islamic nations try to live at peace with other nations and have taken a position against violence and terrorism, but these have been present to a greater or lesser degree from the very beginning of Islam. In a word, one cannot make as hard and fast a distinction between normative Islam and radical Islam as some would like.

One can readily find passages in the Qur'an that exhort the faithful to fight and kill the "unbelievers," that is, to wage Jihad (Holy War). Consider, for example, Sura 2:190-191a: "Fight in the way of Allah against those who fight against you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! Allah loveth not aggressors. And slay them wherever ye find them, and drive them out of the places whence they drove you out, for persecution is worse than slaughter…" (See also 2:216-218; 8:38-41; 9:5-6 & 29 etc.). Other verses promise the shahiid (martyr), who gives his life "in the way of Allah," the forgiveness of sins and direct entry into Paradise. Take Sura 3:195b: "So those who fled and were driven forth from their homes and suffered damage for My cause, and fought and were slain, verily I shall remit their evil deeds from them and verily I shall bring them into Gardens underneath which rivers flow—A reward from Allah…" (See also 3:169; 4:74-77 &100; 22:58, etc.) And then there is the example of the Prophet himself who, as has been recorded in the Hadith (Islamic tradition), did not hesitate to have his opponents and critics killed.

One will, of course, find many apologists who condemn acts of violence. Claiming that Islam has only been extended by peaceful means, they maintain that Muslims fight only in "self-defense," as the verse cited above seems to indicate. It is amazing, however, how far "self-defense" can be stretched.

One could say that Islam is at war with itself. On the one side are the "moderate" Muslim governments that are trying to run a modern ship of state within the family of nations, more or less within the framework of normative Islam. Nearly all have Islam as the "religion of state" in their constitutions. On the other side are a number of

radical Muslim movements, usually on the outs with their own governments, which are usually headed by radical Mullas. These teach that the Muslims are in trouble because they have forsaken true Islam and that the solution is to return to pure Islam. To these movements,

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"the enemy" is mainly the West, especially the U.S. (the "Great Satan"), but also the "moderate" (to us) governments of the Muslim world. Between the Muslim governments of the world and the radical Muslim movements are the rank and file of Muslims who try to live their lives in accordance with Islam as best they can, but often they are the ones to suffer the most.

As North American Christians, what then should be our response to the present situation? First of all, pray.

Pray that our government and its partners act wisely in the war against terrorism; pray that the actions taken do not anger the masses more and precipitate a rush to the side of radical Islam. Pray also for the terrorists around the world who have been duped into thinking that if they become "martyrs" through such acts they go straight to Paradise. Have you ever thought about what awaits them on the other side? Do we dare to pray that God would call someone to go to such people with the love of Christ?

We should also be reaching out in friendship to the Middle Easterners, Asians and other aliens in our midst, whether Muslim or otherwise. And we should speak out against every form of harassment or violence perpetrated against them simply because they are Muslim, or look like they could be Muslim.

In a word, the churches of North America should begin to become much more active one way or another in outreach to the Muslims in our midst. They are everywhere, especially in urban settings, an estimated six million of them. Outreach ministries to Muslims have been launched in a number of cities, and they are doing an excellent job. But the vast number of churches have been content to let these specialized individuals or ministries do the job, while they remain uninvolved. We need to see each church involved in some way in outreach to the Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus, and Buddhists in our midst. Several churches may need to partner together to put together an outreach team. But let's get on with it. We have a job to do. ⊕