

*Excerpted from the  
new book by Don  
McCurry*

# Islam and Christian Militarism

How Christianity has fueled Muslim violence

**Don McCurry**

**F**or the first three centuries of its history, the Church kept itself separate from secular power. That changed with Constantine, the Roman Emperor who, after his victories in the civil wars that wracked the empire, embraced Christianity and then declared it the official religion of the empire. Around A.D. 312 Constantine, as a Christian Emperor, went forth to conquer using the symbol of the cross on the shields of his warriors. From that time forward, Christianity has been compromised with various levels of entanglement with empire and plagued by those who have failed to distinguish the secular realm from the spiritual, who have used force to defend their faith, or promote it, as a banner under which to wage its unholy wars.

It is not my intention to get into a long discussion on the question of the separation of church and state. But I do embrace the idea, and believe that those who have sought

to advance the gospel of Christ by military means, for example, the Spanish Conquistadors, have done tremendous harm to the cause and the name of Christ. Nowhere has this been more apparent than in the fourteen centuries of Christianity's interaction with Islam.

Muhammad (A.D. 570-632) was aware throughout his lifetime of the long struggle between the Persians and the Christians. The latter was called the Eastern Roman Empire or Byzantine by their foes. In the year that Muhammad made his fateful emigration from Mecca to Medina (A.D. 622), the Byzantine Emperor Heraclius launched a seven-year "holy war" against the Persians. Instead of serving as a check and balance to the Byzantines' militaristic excesses, the Church joined with it, thus weakening the effectiveness of the spirit and teaching with which Christ wanted to establish His kingdom.

How tragic that Muhammad, watching a Christian empire in action, drew the conclusion that one's faith should be wed to the sword. In the most vivid way, Muhammad saw in the example of the Byzantines a model for wedding the sword to the faith. It only took his inventive mind to appropriate the ancient Bedouin tribal tradition of *razzia*, that is, raiding one another's caravans, and rename it *jihad*, that is, striving in the way of God.<sup>1</sup>

The period of the Crusades (A.D. 1095-1291), those Christian military expeditions commissioned by the Church to wrest the "Holy Land" out of the hands of the Muslims, were not an exception to wars fought in the name of and with the blessing of the Church. Rather, they were in keeping with unbroken tradition of Christian militarism introduced by Constantine in the early fourth century.

Muslims gradually came to learn that Christians were dangerous. If ever that was in question, the colonial period (roughly A.D. 1450-1970) laid that doubt to rest forever. Spain and Portugal led the way in the sixteenth century with their warrior-missionary adventures. The next century saw Dutch, French and English enter the field in a mad race to build empires. Before it was over, Belgium,


Germany, Italy and Russia had jumped into the game. Of them, only France is still at it, occupying the island of Mayotte and French Guyana. The six Central Asian Muslim republics, which formerly belonged to the

recently dissolved Soviet Union (Azerbaijan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan), have only recently become free (December 1991). To this could be added the ill-fated Russian invasion of Afghanistan (1979-1988).


To be fair, by the latter end of the colonial period, many of these Western powers no longer went forth in the name of God and their countries, for in several of them the idea of separation of church and state had taken hold. But missionaries, often of the same nationality as that of the occupying colonial power, followed quickly in their wake. Even though these were technically not religio-military incursions, they were perceived as such by the Muslims. Since Muslims make no distinction between religion and state, they tend to see others the same way. That is,

they assume there is an implicit link between our governments and our missionaries.

When one marks on a world map the extent of the colonial powers' occupation of the Muslim world, it



How tragic that  
Muhammad,  
watching a  
Christian empire  
in action, drew  
the conclusion  
that one's faith  
should be wed  
to the sword.



### **Healing the Broken Family of Abraham: New Life for Muslims, Don McCurry, Ministry to Muslims, 2001.**

This is a book about winning Muslims to Christ. It is about healing for the broken family of Abraham. It is a book to help Christian workers learn to work with the sons and daughters of Ishmael, who were given this name because Muhammad and his followers chose to identify with Abraham's family through the lineage of Hagar and Ishmael. The book is not for the scholar; it is for the worker. It is designed to be an introduction to ministries with Muslims. For those rare workers who have the privilege of having undertaken graduate study in Islam, or for those workers who have taught themselves as they went along by keeping abreast of current reading, this book will hold nothing new. But for those workers who have had neither the privilege of graduate study in missiology and Islamics, nor access to the latest books in the field, this volume is designed to fill the gaps in their preparation.

The history of humanity's redemption begins and ends

with Jesus Christ, the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end of God's activity in relation to the human race. But that history is sketched out against the background of the family of Abraham. Abraham is held up to us as the one who believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness (Gen. 15:6). At the end of human history, all the redeemed are gathered at a marvelous feast where we will sit down with Abraham (Matt. 8:11).

The key to being included in the true family of Abraham has to do with how one relates to Abraham's greatest son, Jesus Christ. This book will take up in careful detail what Muhammad and Muslims ever since Christ have done with Him. And, of course, it will suggest ways for bringing Muslims into the family of Abraham. The book is available from Ministry to Muslims for \$15 plus shipping. Quantity discounts are available. To order, contact MTM at the address below.

4164 Austin Bluffs Parkway, #357

Colorado Springs, CO 80918

Phone: (719) 597-0609

e-mail: 76361.3344@compuserve.com

comes to about ninety percent. In appendix C, the reader will see just how recent the relinquishment is of these occupied Muslim lands and how fresh the wounds are which Western powers inflicted on Muslims. If only we could go into the Muslim world clean! But it is not to be, especially if we happen to have been born a Westerner. It is easier for missionaries who go forth from countries that were never colonial powers. Even so, Islam contains an inherent animus toward Christianity that must be overcome.

### Islam and American Militarism

American readers may need to remind themselves that their country, too, has stained its hands with Muslim blood, beginning in 1898 when America defeated Spain and took over the Philippines. Spain had been trying for centuries to rule the Muslim peoples of Mindanao and the islands of the Sulu Archipelago. They had been at war intermittently with these Muslims for almost four hundred years. America stepped in where Spain left off, and fought the Muslims of the Philippines.



In more recent times, America has exhibited a strange ambivalence in its relations to Muslim countries. She invaded Lebanon in 1956. She bombarded it from the sea in 1986. America is the chief supporter of the modern state of Israel since 1948, and yet she stepped in and forced France, Britain and Israel to back off from their attempted seizure of the Suez Canal in 1956. In the Iran-Iraq War (1979 to 1988), the United States assumed the responsibility of defending Kuwaiti ships, and later all ships under attack by Iran, thus tilting toward Iraq. Yet later (1991), the United States went to war with Iraq to expel Iraqis from Kuwait. The United States' quarrel with Libya is well known. We could say more of our armament deals with several Muslim countries, beginning with Saudi Arabia, and others such as Egypt, Jordan, Pakistan

and the Afghan resistance movement.

But the most painful thorn in the side of Islam is what the West and its friends did to bring into being the modern state of Israel. America was the first country to recognize the state of Israel following the United Nations Resolution of 1948. Ever since then, in the eyes of Muslims not only in the Middle East, but around the world, Americans have been perceived as the power behind Israel, and hence the real enemy of Islam. Muslims ever since the Jewish victory in the War of 1967 feel they have been deprived of one of their most treasured possessions: Jerusalem. Muslims consider Jerusalem their third holiest city, after Mecca and Medina. The Dome of the Rock and al-Aksa Mosque, both in Jerusalem, are sought out by pilgrims from all over the Muslim world. In addition, Palestinians were driven out of their land by the Jews in 1948, forced to leave their farms, orchards, businesses, and homes. Palestinian refugee camps can still be found today in Lebanon and Jordan.

When the pain of losing these sacred places, which Muslims had controlled for almost thirteen hundred years, is compounded with the pain of what the Jews have done to the Palestinians, it becomes the most inflammatory issue between Islam and the West—and in line with the way they perceive Westerners. We are considered guilty because of our blind support of Israel. It's as though all of our vaunted espousal of democracy, the rights of individuals, and our well-publicized stance on "human rights" has washed away in the flood of our unquestioning support for political Israel, right or wrong.

One modern day writer, Barbara Tuchman, has tackled this inexplicable blind spot in our uneven treatment of Jews and Palestinians in her book, *Bible and Sword* (1956).

Tuchman, who only traces the history of this issue up to the time of the Balfour Declaration of 1917, maintains that the attachment of the British to the Bible as well as the British drive for empire culminate in their policy to rehabilitate the Jews in their ancient homeland after an absence of two millennia.<sup>2</sup> Adroitly, she develops through British history the early fascination with the Bible, and hence, the "Holy Land," their involvement in the Crusades, their fascination with the fulfillment of prophecy concerning the Jews, the historic role they saw themselves playing in bringing that about. She also, demonstrating a great feeling for the British instinct for empire, shows how this converged with the religious-cultural preoccupation with the question of the Holy Land from their Christian perspective, and led to the amazing movement

to provide the Jews with a homeland again.

In the end, when the British lost interest with the waning of their empire, it was the Americans, like the British, fascinated with biblical history and prophecy, who took up the cause of a homeland for the Jews. The birth of Israel in 1948 could not have happened without the United States. Jewish-Americans responded as volunteers and spilled Muslim blood in vouchsafing the land to the Jews.

The explosion of outrage in the Muslim world was instantaneous. The Muslims have never forgotten. Every ruler of Saudi Arabia from the late King Faisal to the present has proclaimed jihad (holy war) against Israel. That it is not being prosecuted militarily at the present in no way means it has been forgotten. The Muslims, in spite of various peace efforts, are waiting for the most propitious time to commence jihad militarily.

In addition to the pro-Israel foreign policy posture of the United States government, a segment of the American church, based on its own understanding of biblical prophecy, has given unqualified monetary support to Israel. Because of this, Christians are perceived as being religiously, politically, and militarily anti-Muslim. In plain words, we are perceived as the ultimate enemy.

Undoubtedly, Islam presents a formidable challenge to Christian missions. All cross-cultural missions involve replacing or radically altering a people's worldview with one based on the Bible. The clash between that of Islam and a biblical worldview, on the surface so similar, is so sharp that every effort must be made to avoid any other complicating clashes on lesser issues such as nationality, patriotism, political opinions or military adventurism. That is, unless of course, Muslims commit aggressions that force the rest of the world to become involved.

All of these comments, based on recent events, tend to reinforce the impression in Muslim eyes that America is either an extremely suspect friend or a potentially dangerous enemy, or both. The fact that the majority of Protestant missionaries abroad are from the United States (so far) sends mixed signals to our Muslim friends. Their question is, "Are you in league with the political leadership of your country?" Muslims who have never had a

personal missionary friend think our answer would be "Yes." They assume Christians are like them. They have seen very few, if any, models of Christians whose supreme loyalty is to a supranational and even a supernatural kingdom of God.

In the several pages we have just been through, we see what happens when Christians disregard our Lord's teaching about the abuse of power. If His kingdom is not to be characterized by soldiers, political boundaries, military adventurism, conquest and forcible subjugation of others, what is it about?

The kingdom of God is about love. It is about serving. It is about humility. It is about truly caring for others. It is about striving to restrain others from their headlong plunge into destruction and instead bringing them into the everlasting kingdom of God's dear Son. The central person of this kingdom is, of course, Jesus Christ, the King who emptied Himself and took upon Himself the form of a servant, and who, in the end, died for us. His teaching is about the renunciation of power, the denying of one's self, giving one's self in service to others.

Muslims, who in my opinion have erred massively in confusing spiritual power with worldly power—power of the sword, fear, and intimidating tactics—are hypersensitive in detecting the same in others. Perhaps no other religion heightens the stark difference between the world's way and the way of God as does Islam. There-

fore, the burden is on the Christian to separate himself from the ways of the world, as seen in the history of military states, crusades, colonialism and modern power politics, and to enter the harvest fields equipped only with spiritual weapons and power. The Christian worker who intends to work with Muslims must have come to a deep understanding of the nature of Christ's kingdom, lest he or she become confused and begin to fall back on the use of worldly power, pride, and prejudice.

And the work will not be easy. Jesus, who came as a lamb, sends us as sheep among wolves. 🌐

1. W. Montgomery Watt, *Muhammad: Prophet and Statesman*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1974), 108.

2. Barbara W. Tuchman, *Bible and Sword*, (New York, Funk & Wagnalls, 1956) ix, x.



**The Muslims have never forgotten. Every ruler of Saudi Arabia from the late King Faisal to the present has proclaimed jihad (holy war) against Israel. The Muslims, in spite of various peace efforts, are waiting for the most propitious time to commence jihad militarily.**

