

Faith, Fundamentalism and 21st Century Terrorism

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People of faith

Faith is a source of strength to each of us. In this 21st century we live in an Australia where interfaith dialogue is a mature, welcome feature of our society. Respect and understanding continue to grow and Churches such as St James contribute to that process most positively.

Faith also underpins our attitude to human dignity.

If we can each articulate our faith-based commitment to human dignity, we can take that dignity and extend it to others who are of a different faith or culture. None of that requires any compromise of our essential articles of faith.

When I sit and study with Christian friends, I seek to listen actively to how they understand their own texts, and their own parables. Whilst I necessarily view them through Jewish glasses, I know that to listen accurately, I must not impose my own gloss upon a faith that is not my own.

Similarly, many Christians and Jews read the Koran in English translation (or indeed in other translations) but miss the many layers of interpretations – Hadiths – contributed by centuries of Islamic learning. Respect to our Islamic brothers and sisters requires that we question in order to learn and not with the intent to criticise.

Equally, when Muslims and Christians study Jewish texts, it is essential to understand that the texts are not words alone but rather the foundation stones for centuries of learning. One must not impose a gloss upon a faith that is not one's own.

Yet not everyone adheres to these principles of respect and understanding, and that is one of the issues that I wish to develop in this paper.

Fundamentalism and Exclusiveness

All faiths have their fundamentalists; people who decline to engage inclusively with modernity.

For them their religion provides absolute answers and removes uncertainties, and disconnects troubling questions from their lives. For a fundamentalist there is no room for any "other" answer for life's most difficult questions.

If faith is a tool for managing ambiguity and uncertainty, then fundamentalists are not necessarily people of faith. Fundamentalism and the refusal to engage with modernity are challenges which must be taken up by all faith communities.

Exclusiveness is a claim that a particular faith or culture is the only path by which man can succeed before God. It is an essentially illiberal concept. It incorporates a relative denial of the

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rightness or equivalent goodness of the other. Exclusivism stresses the *inequality* of man. A liberal multi-cultural society however requires a belief in the equality of man.

In the Western world, principally a Christian world, the foundation of justice, and the foundation of the idea of that the rule of law is an essential element of a just society is the idea that all human beings are made in the image of God. Our society is the product of the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Enlightenment. We accept that each of us, made in the image of God is entitled to equal dignity, freedom and fairness. These are concepts which we often assume are shared across all civilised nations.

Once that belief in equal dignity, freedom and fairness is removed or even opposed, terrorising and murdering people who are not entitled to such dignity, freedom and fairness becomes justifiable.

The dehumanising of the "other" was central to the rise of the National Socialist in pre-World War II Germany. It is central to the rise of Islamic Fundamentalism today.

Perceptions of Christianity

To much of the Islamic world, Christianity is seen as a compromised monotheism, and the persistence of Judaism having been once superseded by Christ and then superseded by Mohammed is puzzling. The idea that in a pluralistic world each religious people can have autonomy but not mastery over the others is a concept with which Islamism is ill at ease.

Meanwhile gentle Islam, the moderate version, struggles to come to grips with the concepts of modernity and pluralism. Muslims who live in Western democracies are able to pursue the concept of *Ijtihad* (the method of Islamic legal reasoning that does not rely on the traditional schools of jurisprudence) and survive very well in a pluralistic, democratic environment. Much theological and sociological work is being done to develop an authentic Muslim construct that affords equal dignity to other monotheists, namely, Christians and Jews continues.

There is no insuperable reason why Muslims and westerners cannot live peaceably with each other, but the promotion of world-wide terrorism in the name of Islam – and there is no comparable promotion of world-wide terrorism in the name of either Moses or Jesus – provides the single greatest barrier to such peaceful coexistence.

The many nations of the Islamic world, and Muslims living in the West, include both moderate, deeply faithful Muslims, and fundamentalists (or Islamists) whose absolutism does not extend to the practise or promotion of violence and terrorism. But there are Islamists whose absolutism does extend to violence and terrorism.

The fundamentalist view of human rights and human values

From the perspective of the Islamist value system, infidel governments and nations have achieved great wealth and corrupting power in ways that it does not approve of. It does not approve of the concept of freedom. It does not understand that from dignity and freedom, human initiative develops and wealth is created.



In the Islamist theory of human rights, there are three classes of human being. The highest, and only noble class is that of the believer, who has accepted Islam. There is a second class of person, the *Dhimmi*. The *Dhimmi* is the monotheist, Christian or Jew, who believes in the one god, but has not accepted Islam. *Dhimmi* may pay a price for protection, and avoid the sword if they accept supremacy of and government by Islamic law and Islamic government. The third class of person is that of the non-believer. The non-believer has two choices, to convert or die. The idea that any other person could accept any other value system is, of course, unacceptable.

A sense of disempowerment

The Economist on 4 August 1994 published a survey entitled: "Islam and the West." It asked the question: "Are Muslims and the people of the West doomed to perpetual confrontation?" It raised then the following explication:

In Europe, Bosnian Muslims have for more than two years been brutally harried by Serbs who are theoretically Christians. On the border between Europe and Asia, Christian Armenians have thumped Muslim Azeris, admitted with rather more provocation, and Jews and Muslims still shoot each other in Palestine. Farther east, Muslims complain of the Indian army's brutality to them in Kashmir, and of Indian Hindus' destruction of the Ayodhya mosque in 1992. Such experiences tend to make Muslims think the world is against them. If it is, then they are against the world.

From the time when Napoleon landed in Alexandria over two centuries ago the combination of Islam, power and success went into decline.

As the mufti of Jerusalem put it some years ago, "Before, we were masters of the world, and now we're not even master of our own mosques."

This sense of disempowerment has given rise to Fundamentalist Islam, also known as Islamism, which reflects an ideology that rejects ambiguity and rejects peaceful coexistence with other value-systems, whether Christian, Jewish, Buddhist or Hindu, because such acceptance weakens the success of Islam. It promises a radical utopia.

Fundamentalist Islam or Islamism needs to be distinguished from Islam as a faith grouping. Whilst many in the West continue to believe that only a minority of Muslims is Islamist, the

number and geographic reach of its adherents has grown sharply over the last thirty years and seems to be on the increase still.

Radical, Islamist movements are active in well over 60 countries ranging from Australia and Indonesia in the east to Morocco in the west, and even in Europe and North America.

There are a wide variety of Islamist groups. A small but energetic international grouping of local organizations called al-Qaida; Muslim Brotherhood branches, Hamas, and Hizballah are the best known. What is the relationship of Islamism to Islam? Islamism grows out of Islam and its advocates easily find widely accepted and very basic Islamic principles that justify their world view and behaviour.

Where one adds to such fundamentalism an overwhelming sense that injustice is perpetrated against the believer and that the injustice stems from the rejection of key religious, fundamentalist absolutes, one has a recipe for a sense that only through violent means can such injustice be removed from the face of the earth, and one has a recipe for fundamentalist terrorism.

One can discern the moderate from the Islamist in a number of ways. One of them is by attitudes and conduct. Moderate Sunni Muslims will tell you, for example, that Wahhabism is a controversial, extreme doctrine that causes many problems because of Saudi money. They will not change to subject to talk about Salafist pioneers of the Islamic faith. Such a return to original intent is more common among fundamentalists than moderates. Moderate Muslims, including Shias as well as Sunnis, do not refer to followers of other religions as "unbelievers" They recognise that they have more rights and opportunities for advancement in most Western countries than in most Muslim lands, and they and exercise those rights and opportunities.

What is terrorism?

The Australian Government's White Paper updated in 2004² noted as follows:

There is no internationally accepted definition of terrorism. Not even the United Nations has been able to achieve consensus on this contentious issue.

Experts the world over have argued about all encompassing definitions of terrorism, without agreement, for many decades. Perhaps, indeed, for many centuries.

There is of course no all encompassing definition. Some definitions include acts which Western conventional wisdom would not consider terrorism. Other definitions exclude acts which Western conventional wisdom would consider definitely terrorist.

This paper does not attempt to resolve those definitional conundrums.

Non-western definitions raise even further issues of inclusion and exclusion. For example, Ramy Zamzam, arrested a few weeks ago in Pakistan for trying to fight alongside the Taliban, responded in an interview with the Associated Press: "We are not terrorists. We are jihadists, and jihad is not terrorism."

The difference between belief-based terrorism and guerrilla warfare

Consider first, wars for liberation. They can be seen to end at a specific time with surrender, peace treaties and declarations of victory. The withdrawal of a colonial power is another means

² <http://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/terrorism/chapter1.html>

by which liberation wars end. The ends are clearly identifiable and usually involve particular borders or particular people being "*liberated*".

Sometimes liberation wars fail. The defeat of the Tamil Tigers last year is a good example of that. Over its long history, terrorism has had a chequered record of stunning successes and dismal failures. Think about the Contras in Nicaragua, Unitas in Angola and, depending upon your viewpoint, the Irish Republican Army.

Belief-based terrorism is a form of terrorism that attacks and rejects values. It is not about the overthrow of one government or taking control of any one particular nation or territory.

It is unlikely to emanate from western cultures because once one accepts the equal dignity of human beings, the very theory of human rights that underpins the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there is no call to subjugate other peoples. They are entitled to dignity even if they do not accept our western Judeo-Christian values.

Options for fighting Islamist terrorism

If we are indeed to preserve our values, we have to recognise that we must strike an appropriate balance between preserving our security and preserving our liberty. We have to exercise our democratic right to argue about, debate and thoughtfully construct the appropriate balance.

Yet the options are restricted because there is no common conversation based on core common values that is available.

It is not possible to persuade Islamists by negotiation. Negotiation depends upon a presumption that there is a common value of respect for the other person and that agreements, once reached, will be honoured. When one comes from a human rights perspective that says that the word of *Dhimmi* or the word of a non-believer cannot be accepted against the word of a Muslim, negotiation and agreement are not an available option.

Islamists are nevertheless rational

However, Islamists are rational in analysing power relationships. Consequently, deterrence through the threatened, and sometimes actual, exercise of overwhelming force can be effective. Unfortunately, with a few exceptions, the Western world has sent a signal to terrorists that terrorism works. And so, the choice of terrorism as a means remains a rational choice.

In the western, free world, terrorism works because its perpetrators know that by murdering innocent civilians they will attract attention to their perceived grievances, secure "*understanding*" and "*eliminate the root causes*". Too often in the west, we respond to terrorist conduct by seeking to understand grievances and responding to them. There is no correlation between the elimination of poverty in the third world and terrorist conduct.

Gandhi succeeded by non-violent means. The Tamil Tigers failed. The contrast should be brought home.

Terrorism works

In the context of the wave of hijackings perpetrated by Palestinian terrorists from 1968 – 1974, one can easily see that the massacre at the Munich Olympics was far from a unique and unexpected event. Not only did the German authorities, despite warnings, refuse to provide a special security detail to the Israeli Olympic team, not long after the massacre, the then

Chancellor, Willy Brandt, negotiated a process pursuant to which the Palestinian terrorists could be released. A Lufthansa flight from Beirut carrying 11 German and a skeleton crew, a flight for which no bookings were accepted, was hijacked. The hijackers demanded that the three remaining Munich murderers be flown to freedom in an Arab county. Brandt gave in to the demands and released the Olympic murderers. Both Palestinian and German sources have subsequently revealed that the Lufthansa hijacking was a sham and the Germans were only too happy to free the murderers so that they would not have responsibility for them.³

In 1974, the Palestinians moved on from aircraft. Kindergarten buses, airline offices, passenger terminals, schools and pizza parlours became the targets. This terrorism led to the head of the terrorist organisation receiving an invitation to speak at the United Nations General Assembly, where his organisation was granted observer status. In 1982, Pope John Paul II welcomed Yasser Arafat to the Vatican. He welcomed him again six years later. On each occasion, the welcome was extended just a few months after a massacre at a synagogue. The first, in 1982, was a massacre at the Vienna synagogue. The second in Istanbul in 1986.

When Yasser Arafat in July 2000 walked away from the Camp David peace talks, refusing an offer that even included the sharing of Jerusalem as a Palestinian capital, promotion of suicide or homicide bombings escalated. The policy of suicide or homicide bombings was not an act of desperation. There are many peoples on this planet, such as the Kurds, the South Sudanese, and those oppressed by Latin American dictators, who are far more desperate than the Palestinians. Nor, was there any expectation that Israelis, who had fought war after war for their own survival, would simply walk away in the face of waves of suicide bombings. The plan had to be long term, and it had to have a long-term driver. Securing widespread international support for the perpetrators of terror is that driver.

Islamists learned from these successes. By reason of the successes they adopted a Palestinian cause that originally was not their own. It was not their own if only because before Hamas became the most powerful political force among the Palestinians, the Palestinian leadership was largely secular. But it was publicly adopted.

In April 2002, Sheikh Muhammed Sayyed Tantawi, the leading Islamic scholar at Al-Azhar University in Cairo – yes, the very university chosen by President Obama for his historic address a little over a year ago – declared that "*martyrdom operations*" were the "*highest form of jihad operations*", and that suicide attacks were "*an Islamic commandment until the people of Palestine regain their land and call the cruel Israeli aggression to retreat*". Tantawi's example has been followed on countless occasions.

Empathy does not defeat terrorism

In February 2008, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr Rowan Williams, proposed that some aspects of Sharia law be accepted into the British legal system. He saw this step as 'unavoidable'. Dr Williams argued that adopting parts of Sharia law would help maintain social cohesion. He also acknowledged in his proposal that nobody in their right mind would want to see in the UK the kind of inhumanity that is sometimes associated with extreme punishments and attitudes to women practised in some Islamic states.

The Archbishop of Canterbury did not however seek to resolve the question as to who would choose which aspects of Muslim law would be accepted. Nor did he seek to resolve whether a

³ (See: Simon Reeve: "*One Day in September*" New York – Arcade books 2000 pages 59, 158, 228, 236, 238.)

condition of such acceptance was that the law of the land would remain supreme. Inherent in that issue, of upholding the rule of law, was commitment to its foundation stones of equality, dignity, freedom and fairness. The proposal also did not address whether it was sought to counter the Islamist sense of disempowerment and the resort to terrorism.

The public debate ended at least temporarily when Conservative leader David Cameron on 26 February 2008 rejected any expansion of Sharia law in the UK, saying it would undermine society and alienate other communities.

Islamists know how to use western media

One must also wonder why we perceive that terrorist acts are directed against Western governments and Western civilians. That, indeed, is all we seem to hear about. Totalitarian regimes such as China and the former Soviet Union have enforced a policy of disallowing media reports of terrorist acts. The internet has to some degree undermined that policy, but only to a small degree. Totalitarian regimes deter terrorism by imposing harsh policies of repression, and denying publicity to the terrorist.



The BBC, for example, however does the opposite. It gives regular and frequent air time to a British chap by the name of Anjem Choudary (pictured here microphone in hand).

Extracted below, however, is the interview that is not from the BBC. The Middle East Media Institute (MEMRI) picked it up from Press TV on 13 January 2010:

Anjem Choudary: Let me just clear, first of all, that Islam4UK is a

platform of the global Islamic movement Al-Muhajiroun, whose leader is Sheikh Omar Bakri Muhammad, who is currently in Lebanon. Our objective is to struggle in order to implement the shari'a wherever we are – whether in Britain, or America, or indeed in Iran, or in Lebanon.

Part of our struggle involves being part of the umma globally, and trying to liberate our land from occupation. Hence, in Britain, we do expose the British government for their foreign policy of hegemony in Muslim countries, the occupation of Muslim land, and in fact, the lies that they are telling the British – that they are there for freedom and democracy.

[...]

We believe, as Muslims, that there are two camps in the world today. There is the camp which believes in the Truth – the haq - and there is the camp which believes in the Falsehood – the battel.

The camp of the truth are the Muslims – people who want to call for the shari'a, those people who want to live by the shari'a, those people who want to liberate their land, those people who are working to establish the khilafa [caliphate].

On the other hand, you have the camp of the battel – those people who want to silence the truth, they want to put out the light of Allah, who want to occupy our land, and want to make sure that the giant, known as Islam, known as the khilafa, will never rise again.

We can see that in this camp... The head of this camp is Barak Obama, and his stooge, at the current time, is Gordon Brown. They will do everything they can to silence Islam and the Muslims. They will use banning, they will use proscription, they will bomb us, they will arrest us, they will imprison us. On the other hand, you have the Muslims. We will do whatever we can in order to implement the shari'a.

[...]

If you look in the dictionary at the word "terrorism," it is the use of violence against a community, or a section of the community, for political purposes. That is precisely what the British government is doing in Muslim countries. They are bombing us in Iraq and Afghanistan, and saying: "We are doing it under the banner of freedom and democracy."

You do not spread freedom and democracy with a B-52 bomber, and carpet-bomb people in Afghanistan, and then say: "We're helping them." This is complete nonsense. When you speak about the oppression, and when you expose them – then suddenly, you are glorifying terrorism, you're now the criminal.

This is a classic case of the faraun [Pharoah] calling the believer, Musa [Moses], and his followers that they are the people who are the danger, when they know very well that they are the tyrants, they are the oppressors. So, we carry this ban as an honor for us. If you follow in the footsteps of the Messenger Muhammad and his companions, you will face the same thing.

We are a minority, we agree. The strangers are always a minority in every community... Those people who speak the truth. The majority of the people are in the Hellfire. We do expect, in fact... There will always be a minority on the Truth, who will continue to call for the shari'a, who will work for the liberation of their land.

[...]

What we need to do is to get rid of the Americans and British from Muslim land, and implement the shari'a. I think then we will have a real power in the world, and that power, God willing, will one day even spread, and we can implement the shari'a in the whole of the Arabian Peninsula, and in the whole of the Indian continent, and we can have the revival that all of the Muslims are striving for.

Courtesy of MEMRI (The Midel East Media Institute) <http://www.memritv.org/clip/en/2349.htm>

There also is narrative popular in academic circles that dismisses the whole notion of the "war on terror" as an aberration of the Bush-Blair era.

According to this version of events, Islamist terror is mostly the consequence of "Western foreign policy" (for example, the Iraq War was directly responsible for 7/7).

With Bush and Blair out of power, and al-Qaeda supposedly on its last legs, it follows that the winding up of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan will bring the whole sorry chapter to an end, and we can all get on with life as normal.

This influential but nonsensical approach reflects a double standard compiled in the face of the cynical Islamic manipulation of the arithmetic of pain.

Beware false moral equivalence

We need to understand that to speak about a moral equivalence between those who deliberately target innocent civilians and those who respond to such provocations and inadvertently kill innocent along with not-so-innocent civilians is both immoral and as a practical matter encourages terrorism. We must stop emphasising the "*body count*" of those killed in order to suggest that those who kill more people are more morally culpable.

Intriguingly, we also condemn non-violent responses designed to deter and stop the terrorist. For example, when Israel built its security barrier, only 5% of which is actually a wall, the barrier worked. The numbers dying at the hands of homicide terrorism dropped, as did the number dying in Israeli responses to terrorism. What did the western world condemn? Not the attacks on the innocent civilians in pizza parlours, kindergartens and on buses, but the building of the barrier which prevents further such attacks. This is again immoral and sends a green light to terrorism.

Turkish Armenians and the Kurds do not engage in the same behaviours. The Bahais, who are persecuted in Iran, receive little attention. The world does not reward them. Indeed, the world hardly listens to them. Yet, the Palestinians, who have rejected every offer of their own nation state, continue to attract western empathy. Terrorism works, because it is rewarded. It will be reduced and ultimately eliminated when the green lights go red, its perpetrators cease to attract international support and Islamists acting rationally see that terrorism cannot succeed.

Islamists seek the destruction of the Western way of life by suggesting that violence is the only legitimate response for the ordinary Muslim to take when the ordinary Muslim is unfairly denied wealth and power by an illegitimate and corrupt western set of values. Is it so different? Many ordinary Palestinians consider that the relative wealth, education levels and freedoms enjoyed by Israelis, including Israeli Arabs, are unfairly denied them, and therefore they support terrorist acts to bring down the State of Israel. Neither appreciates the idea that wealth can only flow when human dignity and freedom are respected. They block out the proposition that the cause of poverty and disempowerment in the Arab world might more likely be caused by corrupt and dictatorial governments which do not respect human dignity and freedom and by teachings of beliefs which do not promote the respect of human dignity and freedom.

The Islamist terrorist is inspired by religious zealotry, and does not have a negotiable political goal. Witness the pseudo-triumphalism of the five men convicted in February 2010 of terrorism-related offences who were sentenced to maximum sentences ranging from 23 to 28 years in prison in Sydney. Each of the men according to the Supreme Court was driven by a religious zeal, more menacing than the individual acts of the participants. As they were sentenced the cry could be heard in Arabic: "Be patient. Allah is with you."

Is Iran a challenge?

Iran is building a nuclear bomb. Also, that is no longer a secret. The western world is divided as to its response. Also, Russia and China have blocked every effort in the Security Council to

impose collective sanctions. Iran has simultaneously build Shahab IV and V missiles capable of reaching London and New York and which are capable of carrying nuclear weapons. Bellicose talk about Israel ceasing to exist masks a far wider objective. Yet the world does not wish to punish the Iranian people, who have begun to revolt albeit with little success, by imposing harsh responsive measures. This dithering has continued for a number of years. The Iranian regime is taking full advantage of it.

Just as Iran funds and supports Islamist terrorism. Only interdiction of the nuclear weapon input supply lines and the funding sources and networks will succeed. Lesser measures simply will not. Empathy makes the situation worse.

How urgent is the problem?

Are we overreacting?

Sheikh Omar Bakri Muhammad (pictured adjacent), the London-based founder of Hizb Al-Tahrir made it clear that one of his organisation's goals was to establish an Islamic state anywhere in the world, even in Britain. Hizb Al-Tahrir, by the way, is permitted operate freely on Australian campuses.



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Weapons of mass destruction are now being traded. Iran currently funds terrorist organisations around the world. Terror training camps are not only in Afghanistan. They are in Venezuela. Within a few months, Iran, with Chinese and Russian support, the key promoter of Islamist terrorism, will have nuclear arms.

Conclusions

The Economist in 1994 argued that the Muslim world's contribution to peaceful coexistence required three things of Muslims: "in rising order of difficulty, coping with a modern economy, accepting the idea of sexual equality, and, hardest of all, learning to absorb the principle of democracy". The Economist was right in 1994, but one must add today, a fourth and absent requirement, a tone from the top - from faith and community leaders - rejecting and stopping the tool of terror.

Let me finally quote from a lecture given by the Chief Rabbi Sir Jonathan Sacks in May 2001:

"... too much of human history has been written in the blood of human victims who – because they were not like 'them', who didn't live like 'them', they didn't share 'their' faith – who were regarded by 'them' as the infidels. They were regarded as the unredeemed, the sub-human. That is why the single most important statement in the rabbinic tradition is that famous mishnaic teaching that when a human being makes coins in the mould they all come out the same. God makes every human being his image and they all come out different. That is why each life, each culture, is a universe."

Surely that is something worth preserving and even fighting for.