

## On atrocities and Islam

The series of atrocities, and now those in London, raise many confusing issues. This note attempts to clarify some of them without pretending to Islamic, police, military or political expertise. It is a reconsideration of material which originally responded to the so-called 9/11 atrocities in the United States.

We must not imagine that God supports the “western way of life” or “liberal democracy” or the financial system based on interest. These are close to the worship of Mammon, or, if you will, to several of the Seven Deadly Sins. The Church for a long time maintained the ban on interest just as Islam still does; we might still wonder (with CS Lewis) whether that ban should have been continued. Maybe these Western inventions are essential to maintaining our “standard of living” (a controversy which dates back at least to Mandeville’s “Grumbling Hive”) but *affluence is not a Christian objective* even if the relief of abject poverty is. Nor is it important from a Christian viewpoint that we should have and use the vote, though certain basic freedoms are of value (and under threat in the strange modern culture of “human rights”). These modern secular inventions are at the best least evils. We may give a cautious support to some aspects of them, but we must always remember that “our citizenship is in heaven” *and not here*.

We do not belong to the secular system in this country - but that does not give us the right to kill those who do. Others likewise think they do not belong. Neither have they the right to kill. *And nobody has the right to make either us or them belong*.

We must always remember that Christ is God’s *final and complete* Word to man. Therefore Islam (or for that matter the Mormons) cannot have a new revelation of God. Nor can the secular world. Either Christianity is right in making this claim or it is nothing. Either Islam is right or it is a damnable lie. *There is no middle course*. If Christ were only a lesser prophet, as Islam claims, or only a human teacher however wise, then we would dishonour God by continuing to worship as Christians. If the secular world has anything in the sphere of morals or religion to teach us, then we should abandon the faith at once.

It is alleged that Jews, Moslems and Christians worship the same God. This is false. “We worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in unity”. We regularly say “Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost” and “through Jesus Christ our Lord, who liveth and reigneth with thee (the Father) in the unity of the Holy Ghost, one God world without end”. No Jew, no Moslem will for one moment accept these forms. Those who take part in multi-faith worship are inevitably therefore denying the faith.

It is alleged that Jews, Moslems and Christians are all children of Abraham. Obviously this is not asserted genetically, but in the way of faith. However, even the Old Testament used the story of Hagar and Ishmael to show that one might be a descendant of Abraham and yet outside the promises. St. Paul took the argument further (Galatians 3 and 4). “To Abraham and his seed were the promises made” and that seed is one only, namely Christ. Even the Jewish dispensation, in his view, is in the succession of Ishmael and outside the promises. Much more, he would surely argue, a new religion springing up after Christianity and in opposition to the unique work of Christ.

None of this is to pass any judgement as to what God will do about Moslems, any more than what he will do about humanists, or liberal christians, or Hindus, or the ordinary secular masses of the western world. That judgement belongs to God, who is both just and merciful. It does not belong to us, at least not in this life.

Christians are not allowed hatred in act or thought. We are called upon to “love our enemies” and “to do good to them that hate us”. That is our plain duty towards those behind the atrocities, that is those still alive. We should be praying that they will “turn from their wickedness, and live”. If so with them, how much more must we love ordinary Moslems, who may well not approve of the atrocity or wish us evil. “Love” does not mean “like”; there is no sentimentality here. But there is no wriggling out of “do good”.

One of the biggest mistakes we can make is to slide from the tenable view that error has no rights to a denial of rights to those in error. Islam itself has no rights but its adherents do have rights. Islam may be evil but that does not make all its adherents evil.

Of course we do not attack them or their buildings; I know none of us even thinks of doing so. But positively, our duty is to pray for them. It is of course a doubtful matter (given limited resources, contacts and abilities) for who we should mainly pray, but we must never forget that "God wishes all men to be saved and come to knowledge of the truth". In the present and emerging legal situation, there is very little we can do except pray. Serious criticism of Islam, which is a necessary part of the attempt at conversion, or even the commendation of Christianity, may soon be made illegal.

We do not know what proportion of Islam supports terrorist acts. There is nothing we can do to assist those who do not support such acts. Our arguments will not be listened to, if even the arguments of those within Islam are not. I see no purpose in interfaith dialogue.

If and when it becomes clear that terrorism is inherent in Islam, then it will be for secular authority, and not for us, to remove the danger from this country so far as may be possible. It is not yet clear that this is the case. We do not pretend to expertise about the practicalities of removing the danger and we must be cautious about the kind of remedy which might next be turned on Christianity.

There is little point in Christians getting involved in the argument about Iraq (and Israel, Afghanistan, Bosnia and Kosovo and so many other places). Whether secular rulers were wise or not in the past, the situation is as it now is. I do not believe that any change in the state's conduct now will stop terrorism here or even divert it to other nations.

Nobody should imagine that the police are infallible. But under almost all circumstances they deserve our support and our prayers. This is a simple consequence of "rendering to Caesar" and of Romans XIII. I do not doubt the duty of any secular ruler to take measures against those who kill indiscriminately, and if by force, "he beareth not the sword in vain". It is an inevitable horror of terrorist situations that mistakes are made.

For oneself, one must "turn the other cheek" and "resist not evil"; on behalf of others, which in this case seems to be almost everybody alive, it may be perfectly right to resist. When I once saw somebody being attacked in the street, I used force on the attacker; I do not think I was false to the Gospel. If we see Moslems being similarly attacked, we certainly still have a duty to defend them if possible (even though they are enemies to our faith). That is one possible instance of what the command to love one's enemies means.

Doubtless it is uncomfortable to "live this day as if 'twere thy last", but to that we *always* were called. We need an old discipline of Holy Dying (as well as Holy Living) to cope with the threat of terrorism, not a new one. That may not be an easy discipline, but we should learn it quite apart from terrorism.

There is little comfort for us, then. We have no comfort to offer the vast majority in this situation - except the Gospel, if we are allowed to offer that.

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