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Fanaticism, Fear and Faith

Milton L. Boyle, Jr.



Friday, September 5, 1986: BEIRUT BOMB KILLS 3 FRENCH SOLDIERS IN UN PEACE FORCE (*Boston Globe*)

Saturday, September 6, 1986: AT LEAST 18 DIE, 127 WOUNDED AFTER JET HIJACKED IN PAKISTAN; Four gunmen opened fire on passengers (*Boston Globe*)

Sunday, September 7, 1986: 22 KILLED IN TERROR ATTACK IN [ISTANBUL] SYNAGOGUE; Two 'suicide gunmen' die (*Boston Herald*)

Monday, September 8, 1986: TURKISH LEADER LINKS LEBANON WITH SLAYINGS (*Boston Globe*)

Tuesday, September 9, 1986: UN FORCES FACING INCREASING ATTACKS IN SOUTH LEBANON (*Boston Globe*)

Wednesday, September 10, 1986: TEACHER FROM MALDEN SEIZED IN WEST BEIRUT; Caller says Islamic group responsible (*Boston Globe*)

Thursday, September 11, 1986: ISRAELI JETS RAID LEB 'ARMS DEPOT' ...AS GUNMEN KIDNAP ANOTHER (*Boston Herald*)

**Religion appears
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who hold a different faith
or point of view.**

The above headlines taken from two Boston newspapers in one recent week demonstrate that nearly every day the newspapers chronicle new acts of terrorism, and the world quakes. People change, postpone, or cancel their travel plans, embassies double their security forces, officials hire bodyguards and curtail their public appearances, workers in foreign countries come home, and affected governments impotently threaten vengeance. And the terrorist, alive or dead, grimaces in victory.

Scholars search their books and minds to discover the roots of terrorism, but have as yet failed even to agree on a definition of the word. Terrorist actions are too varied in scope and common denominators are elusive. Responsibility may lie with nations, ethnic, military or religious groups, or individuals, and the variety of such activities is limited only by the outer parameters of the human capacity for cruelty. Victims range from the soldiers at war, soldiers trying to keep the peace, businessmen, tourists, children and mere passers-by. Research reveals only that there is always a burning cause: a real or imagined injustice, lust for power or greed. There is also a desire to act so outrageously that the "enemy" will be terrorized into acceding to the perpetrator's demands and the whole world will be forced to take notice.

Some of the difficulty in defining terrorism is that your definition depends upon the side to which you belong. Our President has noted, "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter." Only your enemies are terrorists! Yet, not all agree with this assessment. In a recent book, *Terrorism: How the West Can Win*, Benjamin Netanyahu says such an attitude is playing into the hands of the terrorist. He advocates universal adoption of the definition formulated by the first conference on terrorism sponsored by the Jonathan Natanyahu research foundation in Jerusalem in 1979: "Terrorism is the deliberate and systematic murder, maiming and menacing of the innocent to inspire fear for political ends." Note especially the word "political" which eliminates other motiva-

tion, including religious motivation. Many will disagree with the use of the word "innocent" and would include the military among the victims, as I will here.

There is another rather common denominator. Terrorist groups and activities are almost always connected in some way or other with a religious faith. In Northern Ireland, we find Catholics and Protestants pitted against each other. In the Middle East, it is the Jew and the Muslim, or the Christian and the Muslim, or the Sunni Muslim and the Shi'ite Muslim. In the East, it is Buddhism and Christianity, Hindus and Sikhs, and frequently, late-arriving Islam against the more established religions of the area. Religion appears not only to congeal but to divide; it draws people with a common faith together, but also sharply, and often militantly, sets them against others who hold a different faith or point of view. Religion almost universally proclaims the brotherhood of man, yet seems to justify crimes of a most heinous nature, and from that background, to contribute significantly to the enormity and ugliness of those crimes.

The religious factor in terrorism, however, seems strangely ignored. While there is a plethora of articles on the hows and whys of terrorism, surprisingly little is written about its religious aspects, including possible religious roots. It is not difficult to understand why religious leaders themselves are reluctant to publicize this apparently sordid and embarrassing side of religion, but journalists also largely pass it over. Perhaps that is because

they consider it insignificant, too difficult to understand, or, as they seem to regard religion in general these days, of little common interest. The *Boston Globe*, for example, responding to a rising curiosity about middle eastern religions, recently published a series of articles on "Islamic Revival" (March 2-6, 1986) with some interesting accompanying supportive material but with scant reference to Islamic terrorism. It is also easy to find scientific considerations of terrorism, (see "The Technology of Terrorism," in *Discover*, June, 1986), but a perusal of even religious periodicals reveals little that deals specifically with religion and terrorism as joint ventures in human enterprise.

In the past year or so, the *Christian Century*, a liberal periodical noted for its interest in religion and public affairs, has published only a handful of articles which deal even peripherally with terrorism: "Tithing for Terrorism?" (May 8, 1985); "Terrorism and Television" (July 3-10, 1985); "Hijack Aftermath and Prospects for Peace" (October 30, 1985); "1985 Religious Newsmaker: The Shi'ite Fundamentalist" (January 1-8, 1986); "Qaddafi as Villian Fulfills Media Needs" (January 29, 1986); "Libya Raid Undermines Morality and Security" (April 30, 1986), and one other, about which I will comment shortly. Careful reading of these articles reveals virtually nothing about the religious roots of terrorism. One reads the more conservative journals in vain; it is for them as though the terrorist has no religious roots. In fact one learns virtually nothing at all about the causes of terrorism from these publications.

There is one searching and thoughtful article in the April 9, 1986 issue of the *Christian Century*, written by Robert L. Phillips, director of the Program for War and Ethics at the University of Connecticut at Hartford. Entitled, "The Roots of Terrorism," the article discusses the intellectual or philosophical roots of terrorism "which, ironically, are peculiarly Western: popular sovereignty, self-determination and ethical consequentialism." Dr. Phillips explains that popular sovereignty is belief that all people in a

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nation comprise the state, are thus equally responsible for the acts of that state, and are, therefore, legitimate targets of its enemies, including, of course, terrorists. The philosophy of self-determination dictates that every religious and ethnic group has a right to its own state; ethical consequentialism avers that "just war" may be fought to insure that right. The author notes that there is religious support for this last tenet:

Friendship with God is closely linked to walking the path of justice; it is understood that to damage any basic human value is to attack the very source of value and being. What Plato understood to be the consequence of injustice -- self-destruction -- the Judeo-Christian tradition understands as the cutting off of oneself from the very source of being. It follows that one may do evil to accomplish ultimate good; the end justifies the means.

Dr. Phillips' article barely touches on the religious facets of terrorism, and while it is not always easy to tell where philosophy ends and religion begins (or vice-versa), his emphasis is on the intellectual rather than the spiritual. But the terrorist is not generally an intellectual. He is a feeling, reacting human being totally committed to his cause. He burns with a ferocious desire to accomplish his goals and is willing to use any means at his disposal, from a plastic toy gun to the most sophisticated plastic bomb. He is willing, sometimes eager, to die in the attempt. Such is more characteristic of religious man than intellectual man. The terrorist is a fanatic, using fear as his major weapon, often justifying his actions by his faith.

In the following, the word terrorism will include acts of extreme violence against both the military and the "innocent" non-military. A major aim of such activity is seen as the terrorizing of the enemy to force submission and to awaken the world at-large to the terrorists' cause. Examples are taken from Judeo-Christian and Islamic sources and would surely apply to cases where terrorists are closely allied to one of these traditions. Further research would be necessary to determine

whether there are some common principles here which could be extended to cover other religious traditions to which terrorist activity may be linked.

Terrorism is not a new phenomenon, and we make a serious mistake if we treat it as such. It is probably as old as man himself. Ancient religious literature chronicles the use of fear often against the innocent, to accomplish the ends of the religious fanatic. It may be difficult for the faithful to accept, but the Bible recounts numerous terrorist events, some of which are perpetrated by its heroes, not only by its enemies. (One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter!) The classical use of terrorism is found among the Assyrians whose cruelty was apparently unmatched in the ancient world. Captured enemies were impaled, drawn and quartered, and beheaded in large numbers. Shalmanezar III boasts of burning young boys and girls alive and thousands were hideously mutilated by his order. The idea was to so terrify Assyria's enemies that they would simply lay down their arms and submit to the approaching army in the hope of avoiding Assyrian wrath. So successful were they that when the Assyrian capital, Ninevah, fell the whole world rejoiced. (See the Book of Nahum which is written in celebration of the event.)

The Israelites, themselves, use fear tactics to frighten their enemies into submission. In many battles, every man, woman, and child is slaughtered regardless of their guilt or innocence. The law of herem, a biblical law of proscription, is invoked on captured cities so that their inhabitants are totally annihilated, and even livestock and

possessions are destroyed (*Joshua 6:15-19, e.g.*). After the destruction of the Midianite army, its "sons and women" were slaughtered, but its virgins were taken by Israelite conquerors for themselves (*Numbers 31*). The Judge, Gideon, "killed the men of Succoth with thorns and briars" (*Judges 8:13-16*). And Sampson, in true terrorist fashion, kills himself with his Philistine enemies as, blinded, he pulls down the pillars of the temple and the building collapses upon them (*Judges 16:25-30*).

More outrageous acts of terrorism are to be found in Exodus 1:22 where Pharaoh decrees the death by drowning of all male Hebrew babies, in Matthew 2:16 where Herod orders the slaughter of innocent boys, two years old and younger, in and around Bethlehem, and in Exodus 12:29-30, the Passover event:

At midnight the Lord struck down all the first born in Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh, who sat on the throne, to the firstborn of the prisoner who was in the dungeon, and the firstborn of all the livestock as well. Pharaoh and all his officials and all the Egyptians got up during the night, and there was loud wailing in Egypt, for there was not a house without someone dead.

In terror, Pharaoh releases the Israelites, and they begin their journey through the Wilderness to the Promised Land.

To the modern Israeli, who rails against Arab terrorism, the Arab points out the terrorist activities of Jewish "gangs" in the difficult years before the partition of Palestine in 1947. Still, it is the Arab who predominates in the media as the perpetrator of current terrorism. To the major religion of the Arab, Islam, I would now turn in search for understanding.

The foundation of the religion of Islam is the Qur'an. Dictated by Allah through the angel Gabriel to the Prophet, Muhammad, Muslims believe it to be co-eternal with Allah, a precise copy of the heavenly original. The Qur'an plus the life and lore of the Prophet are determinative of Muslim activities, and thus provide justification for Islamic terrorism. Islamic law is, by Judeo-

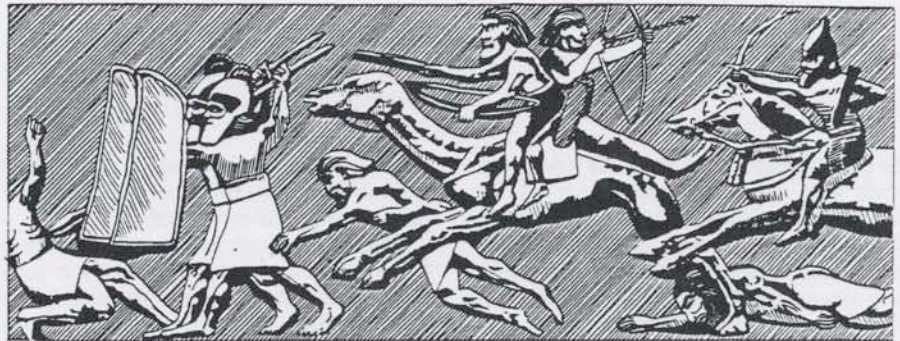
Christian standards, harsh and unrelenting toward the unbeliever. The medieval cry of "death to the infidel" is fully expressive of the belief that those who refuse to accept the teachings of Muhammad are better off dead than continuing in their unbelief. The Qur'an teaches that gentle persuasion, economic and social sanctions are all to be tried on the unbeliever, but Muhammad's actions indicate that when all else fails, the killing of the unbeliever is fully warranted.

Fight in the cause of God those who fight you, But do not transgress limits; For God loveth not transgressors. And slay them wherever ye catch them, And then turn them out from where they have Turned you out; for tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter....; But if they fight you, slay them. Such is the reward of those who suppress faith.

Sura ii, vv. 190, 191.

Thus, Muhammad's policy, and that followed by succeeding caliphs, was one of death and annihilation of the infidel enemy, but when the enemy converted to the Faith, they were no longer fair prey. Quickly, as the Islamic horde rolled onward through the Middle East, foes and potential foes adopted Islam and saved their lives. Part of the reason for the great and rapid spread of the Muslim empire was that they had to reach ever further into the frontier to find legal prey -- the unbeliever.

In 627, an incident occurred which struck terror in the hearts of Muhammad's enemies -- the massacre of the Jewish tribe of Qurayzah. Before this incident, Muhammad had been willing to exile Jews from the land he had taken from them, and even willing to allow them some income from its produce, but at Qurayzah the policy changed. Since they would not convert to the Islamic faith, the male Jews (reportedly 600 of them) were beheaded in a single day; all the women and children were sold into slavery. Arab-Jewish enmity has a long history. Perhaps the fear engendered among the unbelievers by this event made future Islamic victories come more easily.



The Qur'an, Sura ix, vv 20-22, promises:

Those who believe, and suffer exile and strive (Arabic "jihad") with might and main, in God's cause, With their goods and their persons, have the highest rank in the sight of God: They are the people who will achieve (salvation).

The Lord doth give them glad tidings of a mercy from Himself, of his good pleasure, And of gardens for them, wherein are delights that endure:

They will dwell therein forever. Verily in God's presence is a reward, the greatest (of all).

The key to winning the favor of God and of gaining eternal bliss near God in paradise is "jihad," striving. The faithful strive both for God (see quote above) and against God's enemies:

Therefore listen not to the unbelievers, but strive against them with the utmost strenuousness...

Sura, xxv, v.52

It is in this latter sense that Jihad has come to mean "holy war" although this is not its root meaning, and the orthodox Muslim scholar generally rejects that meaning. Still, it is the cry and motivation of those who fight (strive) against overwhelming odds, with little concern for death, against those whom they perceive to be the enemies of God. We have read of the hundreds of largely unarmed Iranian boys who have charged superior Iraqi forces and who have died believing that the glories of Muslim Paradise would at once be theirs. This is the same religious spirit of the terrorist who drives his truck laden with explosives into an ambassadorial compound to die with his victims, or who willingly dies on a commandeered airplane held hostage with its passengers.

The taking of hostages, a common terrorist practice, has horrified the West. It seems unconscionable that

innocent people should be kidnapped and held for ransom and that whole nations should thus be held at bay. The effectiveness of these tactics cannot be denied, but their immorality seems beyond human comprehension. Kidnapping in the West is usually punishable by death since it is regarded as the equivalent of the very taking of human life. In fact, the suffering caused loved ones may be even more agonizing than killing. In the Middle East hostages were taken forcibly, or sometimes given voluntarily to secure a pledge, to be redeemed when the pledge was paid. Muhammad often used this method of coercion against his enemies; hostages were given and taken to assure that word would be kept, or they were traded off for favors or concessions.

A similar example from our own traditions is found in Genesis 42 and 43 in the story of Joseph. Joseph's brothers are forced by famine to go to Egypt to buy grain. There they are met by the brother whom they have sold into slavery, though they do not know him, and he accuses them of spying. When they deny the charges Joseph tells them that the only way they can prove their innocence is for them to return home and bring their youngest brother, Benjamin, their father's favorite, back with them. In the meantime, they must leave brother Simeon with Joseph in Egypt as hostage, as security for their pledge. The desperate plight of the brothers, and their honesty, is demonstrated when they do, indeed, bring Benjamin with them to Egypt. The hostage is redeemed. Then, and only then, can reconciliation occur.

Thus, hostage-taking and redemption was well understood by the people of biblical times, though its meaning has been lost on the West: so Job out of his misery cries, "I know that my Redeemer lives," (19:25) and the Psalmist prays, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart

be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer," (19:14). In fact, the whole theme of Christ's sacrifice revolves around the same idea. Man was held hostage by his own sinfulness, unable to free himself from this bondage. God himself must pay the price of redemption, nothing less than his first-born son. So the Christian sings,

Up Calvary's mountain one
dreadful morn,
Walked Christ my Saviour
weary and worn;
Facing for sinners death on the
cross,
That he might save them from
endless loss.
Blessed Redeemer! Precious
Redeemer!
Seems now I see Him on
Calvary's tree;
Wounded and bleeding, for
sinners pleading,
Blind and unheeding, dying for
me!

A group of terrorists calling themselves "Islamic Jihad" have captured and are holding, at this writing, several American citizens. In their name they declare themselves religiously oriented, and justify their actions as appropriate to holy war, just as their founder justified his actions. In the cause of God, there are no rules, for God, as the author of law, is beyond the law and those who act in his name are exonerated from criminal charges. They would simply point to Muhammad's attack on Meccan caravans during sacred months when caravans travelled without military guards. It was unthinkable that anyone should attack them on holy days, but Muhammad in God's service was not bound by the law. So the Ayatollah Khomeini was unbound by the law when he held American hostages for 444 days. And the righteousness of his actions was proven by their success. How could a tiny and weak nation hold the strongest nation on earth at bay for more than a year unless their actions be blessed by their God? The Ayatollah gained enormous strength and prestige throughout the Islamic world because he proved once again, as the Arabs had in the 7th and 8th centuries, that those on the side of

Allah cannot be defeated. The most massive military might of man is impotent against the power of God.

I expect enough of a foundation may have been laid now so that we may draw some conclusions regarding the relationship of terrorism to religious faith. Accordingly, I should like to make these observations:

1. The terrorist does not usually take his root cause in his faith. He is not primarily seeking to convert the unbeliever, but to coerce the enemy to meet his demands, be they for territory or for the release of prisoners or hostages, or for money, or in a few cases for love. The terrorist is a fanatic about at least this one issue. For him any action that makes the world notice him and his need is justified, and if it takes a crime of inhuman proportions to gain his end, so be it.
2. There can be no doubt that religion can be and is used to justify terrorist activity. It is difficult, perhaps impossible, for us to know the mind of the terrorist to determine whether he really believes his faith's teachings and truly acts in the name of his god, or whether he uses the names and trappings of his faith to gain favor with and support from his peers, or perhaps for both reasons. Did Islamic Jihad choose that name because its members are true believers in Allah and faithful followers of the Prophet? Or did they take that name because they seek the support of the Muslims amongst whom they live? Their motives, if solely political, would appear to derive more from the latter than the former!
3. Religion and social practices are mutually dependent, and we cannot always tell whether religion hallows traditional social activity or gives rise to that activity. Hostage-taking, for instance, was practiced long before the advent of Muhammad, but Muhammad sanctified it when he took his first hostage -- a holy man can only perform a holy deed. Thus, we cannot say that religion causes a particular type of activity, but in later times it makes little difference to the faithful one which came first.

He is not only justified in this action, his religion demands it, and he rightly seeks the glorious heavenly rewards promised him.

Those who study terrorism must more thoroughly consider the role religion plays in terrorist activity. To concentrate on political motives, as Benjamin Netanyahu's definition cited above would require, is quite inadequate. The same can be said of economic, scientific or psychological studies. All of them must be included, but so must religion. This may be the most difficult study of all, for religion encompasses all the others and is inextricably interwoven among them. Yet, if the world is ever to sigh its relief at the demise of terrorism, it must first understand its religious roots.



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