

WHY IS “CHRISTIAN TERRORISM” A TABOO PHRASE?

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*The term “Christian terrorist” is practically taboo;
even as the term “Islamic terrorist” is ubiquitous.*

~Frederick Clarkson, *Religion Dispatches*

*He’s a Christian and I’m a Christian and
he dedicated his life to fighting abortion.*

~Crystal Davis, supporter of Eric Rudolph, the Olympic Park Bomber

*He rooted his hate and his terrorism in Christian thought and
Christian history, particularly the history of the medieval
Crusades against Muslims, and current efforts to renew that clash.*

~Prof. Stephen Prothero on Christian terrorist Anders Breivik

*We the undersigned, declare the justice of taking
all Godly action necessary, including the
use of force, to defend innocent human life.*

~The American Army of God

*“Whosoever sheds man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed”
[Gen. 9:6]. We are forced to take arms against you. Our life for yours.*

~Army of God manual

As head of a religious studies program for 23 years, I received my share of interesting calls. In 1982, during the Lebanese civil war, a woman from White Bird telephoned to say that the press was wrong to call the Lebanese Phalangist militia “Christian,” because her savior was the Prince of Peace.

During the days of September 16-18, 1982, while Israeli forces surrounded the Sabra and Shatila refugee camps, the Christian Phalangists massacred 3,500 Muslim

civilians. After a thorough investigation, Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon was forced to resign over the incident.

In response to the lady from White Bird, I agreed with her that in an ideal world without sin people could follow the precepts of Christ. I then informed her that the Phalangists were members (not excommunicants) of the Maronite Christian Church, the only Eastern Orthodox Christians affiliated with the Roman Catholics.

I forgot to add that the Maronite Christians aided the Crusaders when they repeatedly terrorized the Holy Land and killed thousands of Jews and Greek Orthodox Christians on the way. In 1099 Richard the Lionheart sacked Jerusalem and an estimated 40,000 Muslims and Jews were either slaughtered or exiled.

I also neglected to ask the good lady if we should call Catholics “Christians.” Or were the Ulster Protestants really “Christians” when they bombed Catholics in Northern Ireland? (Both Protestant and Catholic militants were arrested under the British Prevention of Terrorism Act.) Furthermore, in Northeast India the Baptist Church of Tripura supplies arms and funds for Christian guerillas who convert hapless Hindus at the point their rifles.

During the Taiping Rebellion (1850-64) fanatical Chinese Protestant armies—converting people (including Chinese Catholics) at the points of their swords—left a swath of utter devastation across Southeast China. Estimates of those killed range from 20-50 million, far more per capita than number of those liquidated by the Communist regime over a longer period of time. For more see www.class.uidaho.edu/ngier/Taiping.htm

In the U.S. there is a double standard in reporting about terrorist attacks by Christians and Muslims. Invariably, the Christian terrorists are labeled anti-government, anti-abortion, or anti-gay, but Muslim militants are always identified by their religion. The implication is that there is nothing inherently violent in Christianity as opposed to Islam.

Contrasting the murderer of abortion doctor George Tiller to a Muslim army major’s shooting at Fort Hood, Dan Mattewson complains that the press “relegated Tiller’s killer Eric Roeder’s religious motivation to the margins, while it played up Nidal Malik Hasan’s connections to Islam” (*Religion Dispatches*, 6/5/09).

All major anti-abortion organizations condemned Tiller’s murder, but when Muslims groups do the same for Islamic terrorists, there are still complaints that they are not doing enough or that they are still harboring militants in their mosques. Why is it that the Christian religion of peace can call its extremists outliers, but all Muslims are suspected of being terrorists?

Many of the American Christian terrorists are affiliated in some way with the Army of God, whose manual was first published openly in 1996 by David Leach in his

Prayer and Action News. One statement from the manual is quite chilling: “Whosoever sheds man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed” [Gen. 9:6]. We are forced to take arms against you. Our life for yours.”

Eric Roeder wrote an article for *Prayer and Action News* just before he gunned down George Tiller. The Army of God first came to prominence in 1982 when three men kidnapped and then released unharmed an abortion doctor and his wife. In 1985 the same men planted bombs at seven abortion clinics on the East Coast.

The Army of God also took responsibility for the actions of Eric Rudolph—most widely known as the Olympic Park Bomber—but also involved in killing two and injuring 150 others in anti-abortion anti-gay attacks across the Southeast. Early on Rudolph was associated with the Christian Identity movement but in the end he claimed to be a Roman Catholic.

Christian political activist Gary Bauer claimed that Rudolph would not be supported by “any branch of Christianity” and “no Christian neighborhoods burst into celebration at the news of the bombings. The contrast with radical Islamic teachings couldn't be more stark.”

Bauer is clearly misinformed. Even the most conservative Saudi clerics condemned Al Qaeda and the Saudi government has arrested every militant it can find. At the news of the 9/11 attacks an Iranian soccer game was stopped for a moment of silence (not cheer) for the victims. Every Muslim majority government sent condolences, and a widely circulated video footage of Palestinians celebrating in the streets was not connected to 9/11 at all.

Bauer is also wrong about support for Rudolph, which actually was widespread in North Carolina. (He could not have possibly survived in the woods as long as he did without assistance.) Crystal Davis of Murphy declared: “Rudolph's a Christian and I'm a Christian and he dedicated his life to fighting abortion.” One restaurant’s marquee read “Pray for Eric Rudolph,” and a *New York Times* reporter wrote that he found the community “fiercely loyal” to Rudolph.

Bauer implies that the Qur’an promotes violence but the Bible does not. He might be correct if one focuses only on the words of Jesus, but most fundamentalist preachers are not be embarrassed by anything the Bible says, including the genocide of the Canaanites and capital punishment for homosexuals. Contrary to widespread belief, the Qur’an does not have stoning as a punishment, but the Bible prescribes this form of execution for adulterers and disobedient children (see Deut. 21:18-21).

Unfortunately, there are far too many in Europe who would support the Norwegian Christian terrorist Anders Breivik, who committed the largest mass murder in modern history. Rejecting the charge that Breivik is no Christian, Professor Stephen Prothero contends that “he rooted his hate and his terrorism in Christian thought and

Christian history, particularly the history of the medieval Crusades against Muslims, and current efforts to renew that clash.”

Sadly, Islamophobia has taken hold in a culture that is usually better at containing fear with good education and outstanding newspapers and journals. As far as terrorist attacks are concerned, 85 percent of them have come from militant separatists such as the Basques, and only .4 percent came from Muslims. Breivik was not only influenced by right-wing propaganda in Europe but also by anti-Muslim polemicists in the U.S. such as Robert Spencer.

Bill O'Reilly of Fox News, who called George Tiller “Tiller the Baby Killer” numerous times, declared that Breivik was no Christian: “No one believing in Jesus commits mass murder.” Catholic journalist Andrew Sullivan disagrees: “Do the countless criminals who have gone to church and believe in Jesus immediately not count as Christians the minute they commit a crime? Of course not.” Those who preach most about sin are the first to neglect its consequences.

During the course of the year 2011, Gallup pollsters asked 2,482 Americans if they could ever justify that “an individual person or a small group of persons target and kill civilians.” Both Protestants and Catholics answered “No” by 71 percent. The American Muslim negative response was much higher at 89 percent, and atheists are rejoicing that they came in at 76 percent against. It is still troubling there are 74 million Christian, but only 29,000 Muslim, potential terrorists among us.

Polling in Muslim countries in 2006 by the University of Maryland found an even greater split between Americans in general and Muslims. In answer to the question of whether “bombing and other attacks intentionally aimed at civilians” are justified, only 46 percent of Americans said “never.” In stark contrast, the percentage of “never” in Indonesia was 74; Bangladesh, 81; and Pakistan, 86—all overwhelmingly Muslim in belief.

At the end of March 2010 federal authorities arrested nine people in Michigan who were members of Hutaree, which according to their website means “Christian warrior.” Fox News reported that the Hutaree militants were “charged with conspiring to kill police officers and then attack a funeral in hopes of killing more law enforcement officials.”

Ironically, in a YouTube video a representative of God’s Army—after instigating 30 years of anti-abortion and anti-gay violence and calling Eric Rudolph “an American hero”—declared that they reject the Hutaree because it is a terrorist organization and has taken up arms against the government.

The “pastor” of the group—with “Jesus” on the front of his T-shirt and “God’s Army” on the back—explains that his group is always armed because they preach the

Gospel in violent neighborhoods. . . . And then the Buddha, Jesus, and Gandhi wept, but they still continued—without a gun, sword, spear, or dagger—their ministry among the poor and oppressed in areas just as turbulent as modern ghettos.

When the Jewish priests arrived to arrest Jesus, Peter took his sword and severed the ear of the high priest's servant (John 18:1-14). Jesus told his disciples to stop the violence and he miraculously restored the ear. I urge Christians of every denomination to stop fighting hate with hate, respond with love and non-violence, and heal the wounds of past offenses.

Nick Gier taught religion and philosophy at the University of Idaho for 31 years. Read his columns on Islam at www.home.roadrunner.com/~nickgier/IslamPage.htm.