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Presumption of Guilt by Association reframing extremism in the response to terrorism

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Introduction

There have been repeated efforts by the Muslim community to disassociate themselves from the terrorist acts of militant Islamic fundamentalism and its "jihad". Suspicion of Muslims in general remains -- and has already been much increased by 7/7. Victimization and scapegoating are challenging communities. *Who benefits from this?*

Publicly unacceptable racist prejudices are readily disguised as totally acceptable prejudices against Islamic terrorists. Curiously however, Christians make little effort to dissociate themselves from the militant branch of Christianity intimately involved in what it prefers to label as a "crusade" against Islam -- a view shared by its preferred president in the USA. The degree of involvement of radical Christianity in perpetrating the war against Islam should not be forgotten. This was exemplified by the much-publicized declaration to an evangelical church in 2003 of the US Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence, General Boykin, regarding the satanic nature of Islam [more | more | more], without making it clear that he was speaking in a private capacity. Boykin's actions were subsequently defended by the US Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld [more].

With respect to 7/7, as an illustration of typically premature media closure and jumping the gun, Mohamed El-Menshawy (*Washington Report*, Center for Defense Information) was asked on CNN World News (9 July 2005) why Muslims around the world did not immediately go into the street to demonstrate against, and dissociate themselves from, those who had seemingly "hijacked their religion" on the occasion of 7/7. The same question might well be asked of those Christians who are faced with an effort by fundamentalist Christians, who have seemingly hijacked Christianity, seeking to frame Islam as satanic in pursuit of their evangelical agenda.

Muslim death cults

Mohamed El-Menshawy was also asked on CNN when Muslims would recognize that they had a "death cult" in their midst and act against that -- a question raised by Thomas L Friedman (*If It's a Muslim Problem, It Needs a Muslim Solution*, *New York Times*, 8 July 2005). The "death cult" label was also used by Polly Toynbee (*In the Name of God*, *The Guardian*, 22 July 2005) in relation to the London attack of 7/21. Again the same question might be asked of ordinary Christians with respect to fundamentalist Christians committed to the military action in Iraq that has resulted in deaths estimated to be between 25,000-100,000 [more].

Christian death cults?

Friedman's argument was, with respect to the Muslim community: "If it does not fight that death cult, that cancer, within its own body politic, it is going to infect Muslim-Western relations everywhere. Only the Muslim world can root out that death cult" [more]. Does the same not apply with respect to any Christian "death cult"?

Should the Christian fundamentalist doctrinal commitment to "rapture" in the *very near future* then also be interpreted as an indicator of "death cult" status -- especially given the total indifference to the fate of the "left-behind" and the condition of the planet thereafter? (cf Kurt Seland, *The Post-Rapture Survival Guide*). Given the sympathy of President Bush for such views, they are a current factor in US inaction on long-term strategic issues, notably climate change (cf Glen Scherrer, *The godly must be crazy: Christian-right views are swaying politicians and threatening the environment*, *Grist Magazine*, 27 October 2004). This challenge was confirmed by Bill Moyers in his acceptance speech of the 2004 Global Environmental Citizen Award (Joel Makower, *Bill Moyers on Climate Change, Christian Fundamentalists, and the 'Rapture Index'*, December 2004). From a doctrinal perspective the process of rapture involves a death ("in a twinkling of an eye") and resurrection in heaven (as with the Muslim "suicide bombers").

For those who have then to deal with the consequences of this Christian commitment to their own multiple simultaneous deaths in the near future, the sudden departure of the enraptured are recognized as likely to be the direct cause of multiple deaths of others (for

example if the pilot of an airplane is "taken up"). Those to be so enraptured are indeed completely indifferent to these deaths. Just as non-Muslims may have difficulty understanding the Muslim belief with respect to *jihadis*, so non-Christians may have great difficulty in distinguishing the beliefs of Christian fundamentalists from those of the Jonestown People's Temple who died in a mass "suicide" in 1978 [more] -- an earlier "death cult" of partly Christian inspiration.

The preoccupation with rapture of some fundamentalist Christians is closely intertwined with Israeli policy towards Palestinians (cf George Monbiot, *Their beliefs are bonkers, but they are at the heart of power US Christian fundamentalists are driving Bush's Middle East policy*, *The Guardian*, 20 April 2004; Rick Perlstein, *The Jesus Landing Pad: Bush White House checked with rapture Christians before latest Israel move*, *Village Voice*, 18 May 2004). As noted by William Wallis (*Evangelicals see opportunity in Promised Land*, *Financial Times*, 16-17 July 2005):

Evangelicals draw their backing from Jewish claims to the "promised land" from various passages in the Old and New Testaments...A minority of US evangelicals are Christian Zionists who believe Israel's existence is a necessary precursor to end-times and the second coming of Christ. For theological reasons, some prominent US pastors are unyielding towards Palestinians' own yearning for statehood and have joined settler groups in campaigning against...plans to withdraw from the Gaza strip. They have also helped to fund Jewish settler expansion...one of the main obstacles to resolve the conflict between Israel and Palestinians... evangelicals can also afford more easily to adopt hard-line views.

The Catholic Church is renowned for the torture-assisted processes of its [Inquisition](#), possibly followed by burning at the stake. These were framed as essential to "defending the faith" and "saving the souls" of those who would otherwise be damned. Given the numbers killed by this process, it might also be understood as the activities of a "death cult". The Inquisition was committed to the eradication of heresies -- effectively the process now advocated for Muslims holding views that give rise to what is defined as "terrorism". Few would doubt the terror associated with the Inquisition's processes. Some continue to defend them.

As with other faiths, Christianity has been intimately associated with massacres and genocide throughout history -- for example the millions killed in the Belgian Congo at the beginning of the 20th century. Perpetrators in the past century have often been notable for having received a Christian education, or even of being of deeply committed Christians, like George Bush and Tony Blair. More problematic however is the manner in which Christian churches have been complicit in such slaughter -- or condoned it with only token protest or expressions of regret. It is readily forgotten that the large numbers of deaths associated with the process of colonialization, and the "resettlement" of indigenous peoples, was condoned by Christian churches, whether Protestant or Catholic. As a primarily Christian country, it is most significant that the leadership of the USA now finds itself obliged to guarantee itself -- by various deals -- impunity from conviction by the International Criminal Court for charges of crimes against humanity.

Religious "slow death" cults

Ironically, in the light of one of the few agendas which they share, it might even be argued that the [Abrahamic religions](#) (Christianity, Islam and Judaism) are all "death cults" -- through their continuing effort to avoid any constraints on population growth, or effective debate on the matter. In the absence of adequate food and water supplies, or the capacity or will to deliver them -- and through associated issues of health and poverty -- this agenda ensures a maximum number of deaths in the immediate and foreseeable future. The numbers involved far exceed those resulting from terrorist incidents. More generally, there are many ongoing violent conflicts around the world sustained by those same religions (cf James A. Haight, *Holy Hatred: Religious Conflicts of the '90s*, 1995).

Whilst religions are highly complicit in the deaths resulting from their support of military action, it might also be asked to what extent the denial by religions of any right to an "assisted death" -- in the event of a chronically painful and undignified health condition -- justifies recognition of them as slow "death cults". The commitment to ensuring the maximum pain of others in this condition, for the longest period of time, is especially repugnant. This commitment is especially evident in the insistence on avoiding abortion of severely handicapped fetuses -- condemning the affected to a life of suffering and discrimination.

Curiously the Abrahamic religions all have blood rituals as key features of their pattern of worship -- whether or not blood is actually or symbolically shed or consumed. In all three religions, blood is an essential symbol of life and is associated with celebrating different understandings of sacrifice -- again an indicator of a "death cult". Before a bullfight, Spanish matadors light candles at makeshift altars to solicit divine protection and appease a Catholic audience -- for the slaughter they intend to undertake.

One commentator suggests that "There is a strong sense in which the holy warrior -- whether crusader, jihadi or zealot -- longs for a literal ecstasis (death)" [more]. For Michael Ortiz Hill (*Mainlining Apocalypse*, 2004):

The Crusader/Jihadi makes real its cosmos by drawing to itself final things: The afterlife, the end of the world, the full sanctification of the children of God. This sacred solipsism translated into a religious vernacular the Mutually Assured Destruction of the Cold War. Without detente.

"Shoddy theology"

Ian Buruma (*Homeland insecurity*, *Financial Times*, 16-17 July 2005) develops an argument with respect to fundamentalist Muslims that might also be seen as of some relevance to an understanding of fundamentalist Christians in their preoccupation with rapture and their disinterest in the future of the planet:

The promise of escape, of a new collective identity, of heroic martyrdom, the ideal of dispensing with all rational thought in the

name of a great cause, the thought of reaching for heaven will continue to attract second- and third-generation immigrants who feel rejected by a society that consequently fills them with such hatred that the dream of blowing it up.

In the light of the above, current efforts to accuse Islam alone of "shoddy theology" -- with respect to its ambiguous attitude towards declaration of *jihad* and "terrorist" action -- could be usefully extended to encompass all Abrahamic religions.

Inculcating extremist values

Suspensions are now attached to Muslim "training camps" and *madrasas* -- following CIA funding of them to train terrorists against the Russian occupation of Afghanistan. Current suspicions might, however, be usefully extended to the widespread Christian promotion of the dubiously-named "crusader camps" and the foundations which support them [more]. Whilst there is concern about the encouragement of *jihad* in *madrasas*, it might be asked whether any attention has been focused on the function of "crusader schools", notably grouped in [The Army Crusader Schools League](#) in the UK. There are over 100 such schools in Australia. In the USA there are numerous "crusader academies". "Crusader College" was long used as a name for the US Naval Air Station Miramar, which during the 1960s was highly successful in preparing fleet pilots for combat cruises on the F-8 Crusader gunfighter [more].

Questions might be usefully asked about the extremist values and doctrines cultivated in such locations, if only implicitly through the "crusader" metaphor -- and of how these may even drive some to illegal militant action against abortion clinics (cf Teresa Whitehurst, *'I'm Ready to Die': Fundamentalist Christianity instills in millions of American followers a depressing- and dangerous - nihilism*, 7 February 2005) or to aspire to Christianize Muslims in their homelands, possibly with military backing. Another comparative thread worth exploring is that relating to the active concept of "Christ militant", notably as adopted by white supremacists and the extremist Patriot movement in the USA (cf Brian Levin, *The Patriot Movement: past, present, future*). It was the armies of "Christ Militant" that comprised the First Crusade and captured Jerusalem on 15 July 1099. Such themes are especially relevant with the recent switch in terminology by the Bush regime from "global war on terror" to "struggle against violent extremism" [more]. Violence does not only take physical forms. As remarked by Johan Galtung, "physical violence is for amateurs".

Comparing "holy warriors"

Of particular interest in comparing "crusader", "jihad" and "zealot" is the protests that many of their protagonists would make against the violent military connotations exclusively applied to their own case:

- **jihad**: connotes a wide range of meanings: anything from an inward spiritual struggle to attain perfect faith to a political or military struggle to further the Islamic cause. Although *jihad* can apply to warfare, the term is frequently mistranslated to mean "holy war" in English. Mainstream Muslims consider *jihad* to be the most misunderstood aspect of their religion by non-Muslims. A person who engages in any form of jihad is called a "mujahid", meaning "striver" or "struggler", though this Islamic term is indeed often used to mean a person who engages in fighting. It is not limited to fighting or warfare however, a Muslim struggling to memorize the Quran is a mujahid, for example [more]
- **crusade**: the crusading spirit and the crusading movement affected every social class and every generation from 1100 to 1500 -- involving virtually every geographic location accessible to Europeans. Since the 17th century, the term has carried a connotation in the west of being a "righteous campaign", usually to "root out evil", or to fight for a just cause. In a broader sense, "crusade" can be used, always in a rhetorical and metaphorical sense, to identify as righteous any war that is given a religious justification and asserted to be holy, however dubious the justification [more]. Ardent activists may also refer to their causes as "crusades," as in the "Crusade against Adult Illiteracy," or a "Crusade against Littering." [more] It is in this sense that the "crusading spirit" can be understood (cf Michael Whitcraft, *Rekindling the Crusading Spirit*, 2005)
- **zealotry**: the corresponding action of Jewish extremists tends not to be explored in the same context even though there is a striking parallel between the actions of modern Islamic fundamentalists (even against other Muslims) and the actions of the early Jewish zealots [more]. Their doctrines had a strong focus on the necessity of violent actions against the enemies of Judaism. Some scholars have argued that Jesus was a zealot [more]. There is also a striking parallel in their willingness to commit collective suicide at Masada -- a defining moment in Jewish history [more]. Traces of the doctrines of the early zealots are evident in modern Jewish fundamentalism. In its more militant form, it might be argued that the behaviour of the *Irgun* in the liberation of Israel from the British has now been institutionalized in the actions of Mossad. In the light of that mindset, conspiracy theorists and those antagonistic to the "Christian-Zionist crusaders" frequently suggest Mossad complicity in terrorist attacks [more | more | more | more | more | more]

In the historical sense, both "crusade" and "jihad" each tend to be viewed by the other culture as terms for aggression directed toward it. In a non-historical common or theological use, "crusade" has come to have a much broader emphatic or religious meaning --substantially removed from 'armed struggle.' Thus the Western term "crusade" and the Islamic term "jihad" substantially mirror each other in both the personal and the socio-cultural meaning--such that translators between English and Arabic, for example, may use them interchangeably. In recent years, however, there has been some heightened awareness among Westerners to the historical and political problems with the use of the term "crusade", and where any casual respect for Muslim culture has relevance, the term has largely fallen into disuse. [more]

Who benefits from the lack of any objective comparison between the patterns of indoctrination of the religious "schools" and "camps" of those of Christian (Evangelical, Catholic), Muslim or Jewish persuasion -- and their consequences for those of other faiths? What proportion might be assessed as dangerously extreme, and how? How is the radicalism of their respective "clerics" to be assessed -- when, in case, they incite to extreme violence, or condone it?

Within a day of the announcement of the new UK anti-terrorism legislation -- focusing notably on incitement by radical (Islamic) clerics - the leading US tele-evangelist Pat Robertson, exemplified extreme Christianity when he recommended, on the [Christian Broadcasting](#)

Network, to his 7 million viewers the assassination of the president of Venezuela:

"We have the ability to take him out, and I think the time has come to exercise that ability... It's a whole lot easier to have some of the covert operatives do the job and then get it over with." [more more more]

Reverend Robertson, a former US Presidential candidate, is founder of the [Christian Coalition of America](#) -- a prime supporter of George Bush. Neither George Bush nor the US Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, condemned such incitement with any vigour. Robertson subsequently attempted to deny that he called for the assassination [more]. Incitement of this extreme kind will need to be handled with the same rigour as that applied to the "radical clerics" of Islam. Evangelists have claimed that Reverend Robertson does not represent the views of evangelical Christians [more]. This clearly implies that, those whose views he does represent should be "rooted out" in the spirit of eliminating "death cults" from the body of the Christian community. But, most intriguing was the extremely muted media "outcry" in comparison with what would be the reaction to such a statement by an Islamic cleric. On 24 August, for example, CNN endeavoured -- most inappropriately -- to reframe the incitement to assassination through humour.

What is the significance of the pressure of evangelical chaplains on cadets in military academies -- exposed in one instance by a resigning whistleblower? Reports indicate that the cadet wing at the Air Force Academy is about 90 percent Christian (about one-third Catholic, one-third mainstream Protestant, and one-third evangelical), but the evangelicals have a much bigger voice among the chaplains there, reflecting the pattern in the chaplain corps of the Air Force overall [more] [more]

The academy in question is located in Colorado Springs, home to NORAD Headquarters, Air Force Space Command, multiple Air Force Bases, and numerous other military installations. One commentator Devlin Buckley (*Theocon Valley: A door in the wall of separation, Theocracy Alert*, 29 April 2005) noted that: "The academy leadership... has proactively contributed to creating a religious institution out of the Air Force Academy". Is there no concern at the nature of their mission as Christians in being primarily responsible for bombing and strafing Iraqi towns -- from on high? How is this issue related to the pattern of promotion of born-again Christians within the military charged with operations against Islamic countries? [more]

The agenda of the early Christian crusaders has not been forgotten in the Middle East. The current suspicions regarding the Muslim agenda towards an [Islamic Caliphate](#) might now be reviewed in the light of the Christian "[Great Commission](#)" and the theology of [dominionism](#) (cf Katherine Yurica, *Conquering by Stealth and Deception: how the dominionists are succeeding in their quest for national control and world power*, 14 September 2004) [more]. The Great Commission, with its "marching orders for Christians", is "a comprehensive task that aims at developing a worldwide Christian civilization and culture" [more]. This perspective might be reviewed in the light of the agenda of the so-called theocons in relation to the Bush administration. (cf Sasha F. Chavkin, *Unmasking the Theocons*, 23 March 2005). Bush's use of "crusade" should not be forgotten -- nor its appeal to his supporters (Robert Parry, *Bush's 'Crusade'*, 25 September 2001; Peter Ford, *Europe cringes at Bush 'crusade' against terrorists*, 19 September 2001; James Carroll, *The Bush Crusade*, 20 September 2004). Nor should it be forgotten the degree to which the prime ministers of the UK and of Australia share the faith of George Bush.

Converting the world

Whilst the Muslim focus on establishing a Caliphate of countries of primarily Muslim faith may indeed be questioned, how does this equate with the active agenda of "Christianity" to Christianize the whole world? (cf John Noe, *Restoring the Kingdom-of-God Worldview to the Church and the World*, 2004). Has the "Christian" community, or its leadership, condemned such cultural aggression? Why not? **Who benefits** from their failure to do so? Who is complicit in this failure,

On a website of the intergovernmental [Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization](#), Muhammad 'Imarah (*The Tolerance of Islam*) states: "The Christian West has sought to Christianize Muslims inside their own abodes under the auspices of Western secularism". He substantiates this using the statement of a conference in Colorado in May 1978:

Islam is the only religion whose original sources contradict the principles of Christianity. Moreover, the Islamic system is the most harmonious religious system concerning social and political affairs. We need hundreds of centers to understand Islam and to penetrate it cunningly. Thus, Christianizing Muslims is the first of all our priorities."(*Christianization : A Plan to Conquer the Islamic World*, Papers of Colorado Conference, Arabic edition. Malta, 1991).

Whatever the many deficiencies of Islam in the eyes of other faiths, how are those of that faith to distinguish the Christianization agenda from the actions of a Christian-led Coalition of the Willing, especially when a Christian pastor of the same faith can address a much-cited letter to George Bush in the following terms:

I need to ask you: Do you know what the values and vision of Jesus are? I ask the question because I am baffled and confused by your behavior. You claim Christ but act like Caesar. There is blood all over your hands, with the promise of even more blood to come....You claim you are of the Sustainer of Life, but you practice the terror of Death. You are spreading the war....Many people, in the name of God, have taken up the sword. And many have come to ruin. Thinking themselves capable of naming evil, they have become the very evil they name. (Rich Lang, *Fire and Brimstone: A letter from a Pastor to the President*, 18 April 2002)

Manipulating terror

What indeed is to be said of the images of an afterlife of "fire and brimstone" deliberately cultivated and used by Christian and other religions down the centuries to terrorize their adherents into obedience -- "striking fear into their very souls"? [[more](#) | [more](#)] For those who have had that experience, why should this not be considered a form of terrorism -- as with the terrifying so-called "Acts of God"? (cf *Is God a Terrorist: Definitional game-playing by the Coalition of the Willing?* 2004). Ironically many schisms in Christianity resulted from rejection of such interpretations -- although the groups cultivating such views continue to survive in democratic societies. Also ironically, this schismatic process might be seen as a precursor of what Muslims are now being called upon to do in rejecting Islamic extremists.

It might also be asked whether the faith-based leadership of the Christian Coalition of the Willing is effectively regressing to the original source of Christian power in the exploitation and manipulation of existential terror -- vamping up public levels of terror associated with terrorist incidents. It is clear that in terms of power politics leading a terrified nation, in which any criticism is declared to be traitorous, is much easier than leading one in which a diversity of critical views can be expressed.

Matching insight into "shoddy theology" has been that with respect to the shoddiness of foreign policies giving rise to the injustices exploited by such theology (cf Salma Yaqoob, *Our leaders must speak up*, *The Guardian*, 15 July 2005).

As noted by an editorial in the *Financial Times* (14 July 2005):

Common to all Islam is a doctrinal concern to build a just society and to preserve the unity of the Umma, the worldwide community of believers. This is already a powerful and appealing political combination even before the spark of belief is added. Add to it the familiar list of timeless and actual Muslim grievances, the sense of a religion under assault combined with a sense of lost glory, and what begins to emerge is a liberation theology.

Who benefits from provoking schism within the Umma of Islam -- a global communion which Christianity lacks, as exemplified by the problematic relations between the [World Council of Churches](#), the [International Council of Christian Churches](#), and the Catholic Church?

Stifling debate

The above editorial continues:

It is also important to recognise that the international jihadism franchised by Osama bin Laden is almost entirely a Sunni Muslim phenomenon... It remains a self-inflicted wound at the heart of Islam that the Sunni establishments for all practical purposes closed down philosophical speculation in the 12th century, believing it to be divisive as well as inimical to their monopoly of power. This stifling of debate and enquiry, of curiosity and innovation, is or should be at the heart of debate about Islam and modernity.

Curiously it is the "stifling of debate and enquiry" that is now a feature of the response to 7/7 -- even within the Parliament of the UK. As a believer in a particular version of Christianity, Tony Blair (Parliament, 13 July 2005) called for the mobilization of the "moderate and true voice of Islam" to tackle the "extreme and evil ideology" associated with 7/7. What would be the "moderate and true voice of Christianity" in Northern Ireland? He stressed the nature of the threat whose roots lay in "a perverted and poisonous misinterpretation of the religion of Islam". Would it be the Catholics or Protestants who were seen to constitute "a perverted and poisonous misinterpretation of the religion of Christianity" in Northern Ireland -- or both? How does the Christian community deal with abuses within -- and its tendencies to militant fundamentalism or the terrorizing of parishioners?

Action against evil

But setting religions against each other in degrees of "death cultishness" or "theological shoddiness" is not helpful, as the following quotes imply:

- Dietrich Bonhoeffer has : "There is nothing quite so terrible as evil masquerading as virtue."
- Anon: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing."
- Blaise Pascal: "Men never do evil so completely and cheerfully as when they do it from religious conviction."
- Henry Thoreau: "There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root."
- Hannah Arendt: "The sad truth is that most evil is done by people who never make up their minds to be good or evil."

With respect to the Bush-Blair rallying cry for action against evil, as an American sociologist, Wendell Bell (*All About Evil*, 28 October 2002) points out:

In all sincerity, we Americans view our own recent aggressions as justifiable, perfectly understandable, and rational acts designed to destroy evil. But in our efforts to destroy members of Al Qaeda and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, we also killed and injured civilians, demolished homes and places of work and worship, and created still more innocent victims. "Regrettable collateral damage," we said.

And what of Osama bin Laden, his Al Qaeda followers, and other violence-prone Islamic fundamentalists? Do they see themselves, as we have defined them, as evil incarnate? If we would take the time to study and to listen, we would learn that no, they do not. They see themselves, just as we see ourselves, as righteous, moral, and sincere as they try to destroy what *they* regard as evil in the world. They claim to believe that they are following the bidding of their God, willing to become martyrs in the struggle against evil. Thus, their thinking, too, is held hostage by the rhetoric of evil. They are, if you can think an

unthinkable thought, mirror images of us Americans as we react with violence to destroy evil in the world.

As the above example from CNN illustrates, the media run the risk of repeating the errors in relation to 9/11 and WMD -- focusing distraction and cultivating denial (cf *Destructive Weapons of Mass Distraction vs Distractive Weapons of Mass Destruction*, 2003). Under the circumstances, it is tantamount to inciting people to racism. *Who benefits?*



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