

POSITION OF RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS TOWARDS ISLAM  
AND THE MUSLIMS

A POST-SEPTEMBER 11 REVIEW

by

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## **Executive Summary**

This report examines the position of Christian institutions in the United States following September 11. It sought to determine the position of American Christianity toward Muslims, Islam, US policy in the Muslim world, and evangelism to Muslims.

### **Attitudes towards Islam**

The attitude of the Catholic Church and Liberal Protestants, such as the Methodists, to Islam has been comparatively positive. Most all have refrained from blaming Islam as a religion for the events of September 11, and many have called for Islam not to be judged on the basis of the actions of some Muslims. An interesting trend however has been that whilst speaking of Islam in a positive light, Catholics and Liberal Protestants have, at the same time, made very strong calls for the Muslim world to adopt Western-style religious pluralism. This call has incorporated calls for the education system in some countries (meaning perhaps Saudi Arabia) to be revised to remove any negative reference to other faiths.

The Conservative Protestants however, which includes the Southern Baptists, have adopted a very antagonistic position towards Islam. This would be expected given their belief that other religions are, by their very nature, demon-led. Generally, their leaders such as Franklin Graham and others have actively attempted to link Islam with September 11. When George Bush began speaking of Islam in positive terms, making overtures towards Muslim leaders, and the like, it

attracted the wrath of a large segment of the Conservative Protestant bloc, who in some cases was moved to activism.

### **Attitudes towards Muslims**

Catholics and Liberal Protestants saw September 11 as an opportunity improve relations between the two faith communities and this has been reflected in their actions – which have a heavy emphasis on dialogue and a “coming together” of the faiths.

Conservative Protestants have generally rejected the entire “interfaith” movement. They have even charged some of their leaders with blasphemy for attending the type of interfaith prayer-gatherings that have become almost a ritual amongst the Liberal protestant communities. Conservatives were also angered by the amount of attention given by their Liberal and Catholic counterparts to anti-Muslim hate-crimes and the like.

### **Attitudes towards American Policy in the Muslim World**

World Catholics seem to have essentially adopted a pacifistic stance towards the “war on terror”. However, the North American division of the Church took a more militant approach describing the US military action as a “just war”.

Palestine remains an important issue for Catholics and they have made intensified calls for the peaceful resolution of the issue following September 11. Similarly, there have been strong calls for Iraq sanctions to be lifted.

The Catholics have however stopped a long way from directly criticizing the United States’ policies in the Middle East.

Liberal Protestants, particularly the World Council of Churches, have been open critics of US policy – even alluding to the US’s own role as a state-terrorist or back of state terrorism in Latin America. They have made very strong calls for a resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict,

and the National Council of Churches in the United States participated in a march carrying pro-Palestinian placards.

It was impossible to find a critical word amongst Conservatives other than criticism that the US is not being “tough enough”. There is a growing group of Christian Zionists who have been strong supporters of Israel and dogged opponents of the Palestinian cause. Some of them have even openly called for the US to untie Israel’s hands and unleash a more vicious response on the Palestinians.

A common thread amongst all denominations was the linking of al-Qaeda to their opponents, in order to perhaps get mainstream legitimacy for their various causes. Sudan was a hot topic, with the US Catholic Bishops lobbying the US to include Sudan in their ‘war on terror’.

### **Attitudes towards Evangelism**

The Catholics view interfaith dialogue as their primary evangelizing tool post-September 11. Statements made by Church leaders within their congregation show clearly that it is viewed as the optimum means of getting access to Muslims post-September 11.

Conservative Protestants are the most aggressive evangelists. Their missionary organizations have effectively declared a war for Muslim souls, and are raising considerable amounts of money for evangelical work in the Muslim world. Even Muslims in the United States have been targeted, and they are using what they termed “stealth evangelism”, like offering ESL classes, to get access to Muslims. . Whilst there was some hesitation after September 11, the Conservatives have intensified their call with their claim that September 11 shook the faith of Muslims worldwide.

It was difficult to determine what position the Liberals had adopted towards evangelism post-September 11. Since they tend not appear as aggressive missionaries, and seem to have given more priority to charity and aid work. As such, it is no surprise to see that they have rapidly begun establishing in Afghanistan, setting up schools, camps and providing food supplies. One of their primary objectives is to educate girls in order to “reintegrate them into society”.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The study seeks to examine the position of Christian Institutions towards Islam and the Muslims, following the events of September 11.

The scope of this analysis was limited to the major, mainstream religious groups, with an emphasis on those groups in the United States. Table 1 on page 11 lists the major Christian denominations in the United States, with an estimate as to what percentage of the population each group represents.

Whilst there are differences between each group, it is possible to classify them into three distinct groupings, based on their religious beliefs.

The Christian institutions in the West can be classified into Catholics, Conservative Protestants, and Liberal Protestants. Such a classification is based on the research undertaken at the Hartford Seminary (a leading religious institution in the United States), and has proven to be one of the more common classifications of Christian doctrine in academia.<sup>1 2</sup> The Princeton Religion Research Centre (PRRC), in their 1977 poll of religions in the United States, proposed a three mode criteria of Liberal, Moderate and Conservative.

For the purpose of our research however, Moderate has been categorized with Liberal. Whilst not to understate the doctrinal differences that do exist between these distinct groups, there is very little difference in terms of their position on the issues being studied in this paper.

### **Demographic data on religion in the United States**

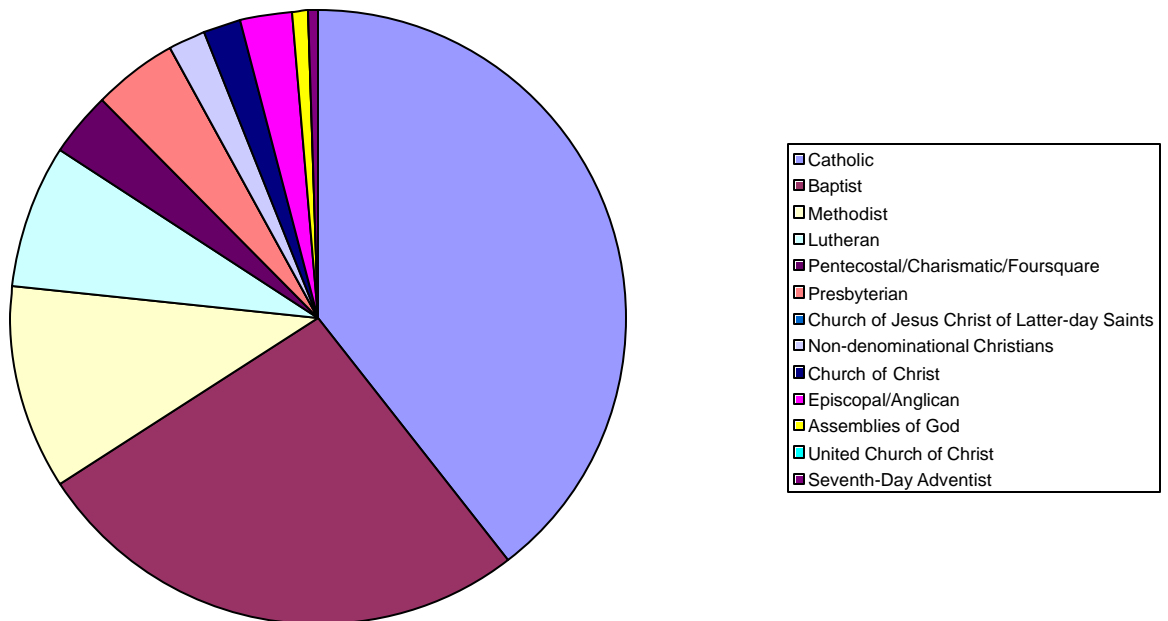
Denomination	Classification	2000 Estimated Adult Population	Percent of Population
Catholic	Catholic	50,873,000	24.5%
Baptist	Conservative Protestant	33,830,000	16.3%
Methodist/Wesleyan	Liberal Protestant	14,150,000	6.8%
Lutheran	Majority Liberal Protestant but breakaway group of Conservatives (Missouri Synod)	9,580,000	4.6%
Presbyterian	Liberal Protestant	5,596,000	2.7%
Pentecostal/Charismatic	Conservative Protestant	4,407,000	2.1%
Episcopalian/Anglican	Liberal Protestant	3,451,000	1.7%
Mormon (Church of Jesus Christ and Latter Day Saints) <sup>1</sup>	Non-Protestant	2,697,000	1.3%

<sup>1</sup> The Church of Jesus Christ and Latter Day Saints (Mormans) are a group that has differs considerably from mainstream Christianity in their religious beliefs. Founded by Joseph Smith, this religion holds that Jesus visited the United States, that the genealogical discovery of one’s ancestors means they are “saved”, and a host of other beliefs that place them well outside the pale of mainstream Protestantism or indeed mainstream Christianity.

Non-Denominational Christians		2,489,000	1.2%
Church of Christ	Liberal Protestant	2,593,000	1.2%
Assemblies of God	Conservative Protestant	1,106,000	0.5%
United Church of Christ	Liberal Protestant	1,378,000	0.7%
Seventh-day Adventist	Non-Protestant	724,000	0.3%

**Table 1 - Christian Denominations in the United States (Source: adherents.com)**

**US Christian Denominations (Source: adherents.com)**



**Figure 1 - Breakdown of US Christian Denominations**

Table 2 shows the number of churches for each institution organized from largest to smallest. As can be seen, in terms of number of Churches, the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) have the most, whereas Catholic Churches tended to have much larger congregations (approximately 4.5 times larger than Southern Baptists).

Religious Body	Churches	Adherents	Adherents per Church
Southern Baptist Convention	37,893	18,923,085	499
United Methodist Church	37,203	11,072,711	298
Catholic	22,400	53,308,466	2,380
Churches of Christ	13,092	1,680,041	128
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)	11,416	3,543,706	310
Assemblies of God	11,144	2,160,839	194
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	10,899	5,222,445	479
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints	9,207	3,540,484	385
Jehovah's Witnesses	8,547	1,381,000	161
Episcopal Church	7,299	2,429,013	333

**Table 2 - Number of Churches per Institution (source: adherents.com)**

Table 3 shows the number of states of the United States where each institution is in the top 10 churches. This gives some indication as to the sphere of influence for each Church. For example, the Catholics, United Methodists, Episcopal and Assemblies of God, are amongst the top 10 throughout the 50 states.

Church	Number of States where Church is in Top 10 Christian Institutions
Catholic Church	50
United Methodist Church	50
Episcopal Church	50
Assemblies of God	50
Southern Baptist Convention	49
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)	48
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America	47
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints	46
Black Baptists Estimate *	42
Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod	40
Seventh-Day Adventists	39
Jewish <sup>2</sup>	38
Church of The Nazarene	38
American Baptist Churches in The U.S.A.	36
Churches of Christ	31
Christian Churches and Churches of Christ	31
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	26
Church of God (Cleveland, Tennessee)	22

**Table 3 - Number of states where Church is in Top 10 (source: adherents.com)**

<sup>2</sup> This is an estimate (adherents.com)

It is difficult to qualify the amount of political influence that that each denomination exercises. One possible indication is the religious affiliation of past American presidents.

Denomination	Classification	Number of Presidents	Percent of Presidents	Percent of Current US Population	Ratio % of Presidents to % of Population
Episcopalian	Liberal Protestant	11	26.20%	1.7%	15.4
Presbyterian	Liberal Protestant	6	14.30%	2.8%	5.1
Methodist	Liberal Protestant	5	11.90%	8.0%	1.5
Baptist	Conservative Protestant	4	9.50%	18.0%	0.5
Unitarian	Liberal Protestant	4	9.50%	0.2%	47.5
Disciples of Christ	Unclassified	3	7.10%	0.4%	18.7
Dutch Reformed	Unclassified	2	4.80%	0.1%	48.0
Quaker	Unclassified	2	4.80%	0.7%	6.9
Catholic	Catholic	1	2.40%	26.0%	0.1
Congregationalist	Liberal Protestant	1	2.40%	0.6%	4.0

**Table 4 - Religious Affiliation of Past American Presidents (source: adherents.com)**

As can be seen from Table 4, the vast majority of US Presidents have been Liberal Protestant. The Conservative Protestants have had considerably less adherents in the Oval Office, and the Catholics have only had one.

In terms of recent US Presidents, George W. Bush is a Methodist (Liberal Protestant), Bill Clinton is Baptist (Conservative Protestant), George H. W. Bush is an Episcopalian (Liberal Protestant), Ronald Reagan was affiliated to Disciples of Christ (Undetermined), Jimmy Carter was a Baptist (Conservative Protestant), Gerald Ford was an Episcopalian (Liberal Protestant) and Richard Nixon was a Quaker (Undetermined).

Even though the Conservatives have had relatively few adherents in the Oval office, one should not underestimate the influence that the Conservatives have had over past US Presidents. Billy Graham, the popular Baptist evangelist, has been an advisor of sorts to several US presidents, most notably Richard Nixon. George W. Bush is also known to seek counsel with a number of Conservative Protestant ministers.

### **Denominational differences**

Conservative Protestants have certain theological beliefs that distinguish them from other Christian denominations. Amongst them are a rejection of apostolic succession, a divestment of authority from the Church, baptism is performed later in life, and the Bible is seen as God's literal, inerrant word. Other religions are seen as being demon-led and false. As a result, Conservatives often adopt positions on ethical issues such as abortion and so forth that are diametrically opposed to those adopted by their Liberal counterparts.

The largest Conservative Protestant group in the United States is the Southern Baptists, overseen by the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), a democratic senate of regional Baptist

conventions. The SBC also run a vast array of organizations such as the North American Mission Board (NAMB) and the International Mission Board (IMB).

Most of the popular television evangelists such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson and Billy Graham are Southern Baptists. The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod are also considered to be Conservatives.

Catholics, on the other hand, believe in an apostolic succession from Paul, which makes the Pope the leader of the Church by succession. Authority is invested with the Church, and its authority is seen as absolute in that a Papal decree is generally held to be law.

Liberal Protestants differ from their Conservative Protestant brethren in that they do not always take a literal view of the Bible, and are far more ecumenical in their approach. An example of a Liberal Protestant group are the Anglicans (Episcopalians), Lutherans and the United Methodists. George W. Bush is a Methodist<sup>3</sup>, being the third Methodist President of the United States<sup>4</sup>. His father was an Episcopalian.

It should be noted however that within most Protestant denominations, there are liberal and conservative factions. For instance, there are Conservative Lutherans, known as the Missouri Synod.

In the United States, the National Council of Churches is the national body of liberal protestant churches. On an international platform, their equivalent is the World Council of Churches. The WCC represent several hundred distinct institutions.

## **Research Method**

The first step was to identify the primary religious groups in the United States and Europe. This was a case of examining demographics and also assessing those groups who, whilst not

possessing a large demographic, are still influential. For instance, the Episcopal Church in the United States is relatively small, yet was included because of its connection to the highly influential Church of England (also known as Anglican Church).

Each Church was then classified as Liberal Protestant, Conservative Protestant or Catholic. The basis for this was the research of D.R. Hodge who, along with 25 religious scholars, sorted America's churches into an order from most conservative to least conservative (most liberal)<sup>5</sup>.

Then, for each Church, primary sources were identified. Where possible, primacy was given to press releases, articles, and other documents relating the official position of the Church.

These were then supported through reference to magazines, journals, web sites and other publications considered mainstream to that denomination.

Finally, a search was conducted of all major newspapers and magazines.

### **Institutions included in this study**

The following institutions were identified for inclusion:

1. Roman Catholic Church (Catholic);
2. Anglican (Liberal Protestant);
3. Episcopalian (Liberal Protestant);
4. United Methodist Church (Liberal Protestant);
5. Evangelical Lutheran Church of America – ECLA (Liberal Protestant);
6. Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (Conservative Protestant);
7. Southern Baptist Convention (Conservative Protestant);
8. Various Evangelical groups (Conservative Protestant);

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> “Where Protestants Part Company”, Bruce Bawer, Opinion Column, New York Times, 5/5/1997

<sup>2</sup> “A Test of Theories of Denominational Growth and Decline”, D.R. Hodge, Pilgrim Press, 1979.

<sup>3</sup> Washington Post profile on George W. Bush, 2000. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/politics/elections/2000/whitehouse/bushgeorgew/>

<sup>4</sup> George W. Bush will become third Methodist President, United Methodist News Service, 14/12/2000

## Notes

<sup>5</sup> “A Test of Theories of Denominational Growth and Decline”, D.R. Hodge, Pilgrim Press, 1979.

## **Chapter 2**

### **An Analysis of Catholic Trends**

#### **Attitudes towards Islam**

The attitude of the Catholic Church towards Islam has been generally positive in so much as they have refrained from any direct attacks on the religion. The Church has not, unlike other denominations, attempted to link Islam with the events of the September 11. There have been clear statements made by the Church urging its followers not to link Islam to the terrorist attacks, and the Pope has himself opposed the depiction of a “religious war”.<sup>1</sup>

The US Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a statement entitled, "Living with Faith and Hope after September 11". The statement was distributed to all Catholic churches in the United States. The document described as “troubling” attempts to justify or link the terrorism with Islam. They opposed the attribution of the extremism of a few to Islam as a whole, or suggestions that the religion was, by its nature, a source of conflict. The Bishops also called for an increased understanding of Islam.

Similarly, the Vatican’s web page, includes an article outlining the views of the Church on Islam. The same document was widely distributed by the Catholic Church, including the US Conference of Catholic Bishops. The document is essentially a collection of quotes from Pope Paul IV, Second Vatican Council, and Pope John Paul II, stating that the Catholic Church has a

“high regard for Muslims”, and that they “worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of Heaven and Earth”<sup>2</sup>.

A survey of websites belonging to Catholic organizations in North America, United Kingdom, and Australia, show that the majority are now including information on Islam, or links to websites about Islam. It is interesting to note, however, that in most all the websites surveyed that featured information on Islam, selected information written by non-Muslims.

Shortly after September 11 (September 22-27), the Pope visited Kazakhstan – a majority Muslim country. During the visit, he said that the Catholic church has a great respect for “authentic Islam”: “I wish to reaffirm the Catholic Church's respect for Islam, for authentic Islam, the Islam that prays, that is concerned for those in need..”<sup>3</sup>

### **Freedom of Religion and calls for adoption of pluralism**

At the same time as the Vatican and Catholic Bishops speak well of Islam in general terms, there has been a concerted effort to undermine certain aspects of what they perceive to be Islam’s opposition to pluralism and freedom of religion.

In an interview in October, Father Justo Lacunza, president of the Pontifical Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies, was asked about the fact that in “some Arab countries” (perhaps meaning Saudi Arabia), a crucifix cannot be worn around the neck.

He replied:

“Religious liberty was sanctioned by the U.N. Declaration of Human Rights. Its defense is the competence of the United Nations, the European Union, parliamentary assemblies and governments of countries, not of the Church or citizens. Can you recall any time when the European Parliament seriously debated religious liberty? This problem, like that of violence, did not begin on Sept. 11. Perhaps there is fear of becoming an enemy of some Arab politician or some leader.”<sup>4</sup>

Vatican leaders, addressing a UN conference in Spain in November, called for the concepts of pluralism and freedom of religion to be incorporated into the education of children. Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, the Vatican representative at the UN in Geneva, addressed a conference on “School Education in Relation to Freedom of Religion or Belief, Tolerance and Non-Discrimination”.

He said:

"Religious freedom constitutes a fundamental human right and can certainly be considered one of the cornerstones of the edifice of human rights, because it touches such an intimate sphere of human existence and personal identity, the relationship between a person and the transcendent"

In a thinly-veiled reference to the textbooks in Saudi Arabia and other Islamic societies, he said.

“...formation of future teachers should pay special attention to their ability to sensitively address divisive historical issues. Where necessary, school textbooks and curricula should be revised to remove harmful or unbalanced presentations of other religious traditions and historical events.”<sup>5</sup>

The attack on the education systems of the Islamic world has been present even in the most secular forums. The idea that these systems, particularly the Saudi education system, have played some role in propagating the kind of extremism that manifested on September 11, has gained currency amongst liberals and conservatives alike<sup>6</sup>.

Cardinal Francis Arinze, head of the Vatican’s interfaith arm, in his end of Ramadan statement to Muslims, called for special attention to be given in educating the young to live in “a society marked by ethnic, cultural and religious plurality”, emphasizing the need to “see humanity as a single family in both its diversity and its common aspirations”.<sup>7</sup>

On September 25<sup>th</sup> in Tehran, Cardinal Francis Arinze, gave a speech entitled "Christian-Muslim Collaboration in the Promotion of Justice and Peace" to the Iranian Foreign Ministry’s Institute for Political and International Studies. Citing Paragraph 18 of the 1948 UN Declaration

of Human Rights, he said that religious freedom is precious and that religion should be proposed, but never imposed.<sup>8</sup> Again, this seems to be directed at Islamic societies.

The response of Catholics in Arab and Muslim societies was more aggressive in its approach. Father Joseph Mouannes, the rector of the Catholic University of Kaslik in Lebanon, said:

“Muslim intellectuals know what fundamentalism is, and if they so wish, they also know how to stop it. The religious leaders, in turn, know how to stop or encourage people in that way. They are also responsible for what has happened. Now they must condemn the Koranic schools in which terrorism is justified and [lessons are given] on how to attack women and children.”<sup>9</sup>

Such calls have been common in most Christian denominations. Interestingly, those denominations (Catholics and Liberal Protestants) who have been the most supportive of Muslims in general, have also been the most aggressive in pushing for a liberalization of laws relating to apostasy of Muslims, and to the revision of the education system to remove negative references to their own religious beliefs. In that sense, it may be that the Church is putting this forward as the price that Muslims will have to pay for their support.

### **Attitudes towards Muslims**

The Pope encouraged all Catholics to engage Muslims in dialogue and to show “understanding” to them. The attitude of the Catholic Church towards Muslim communities, particularly those in the West, has been generally positive in that they have opposed the demonisation of Muslims and have made attempts to improve relations. It is perhaps fair to say that the relationship between Muslims and Catholics has never been as good as it is today – if the measure is increased dialogue and efforts to improve mutual understanding.

An Israeli Franciscan\*, jurist of the Holy See Custody, Father David Jaegar, issued a statement to Catholic news service, Fides, warning of the dangers of Islam-phobia. He said, “I would warn against the real danger of Islam-phobia, which could become the anti-Semitism of our day. We have just freed ourselves of the evil of anti-Semitism endemic in our European societies, woe to us if we were to call into this new trap. The fact that a terrorist or killer calls themselves Muslim says nothing about Islam as a religion, or its more than one billion followers. We must remember that some of the worst criminals in the Balkans claimed to be defending Christianity.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Statement of US Catholic leadership and US Muslim leadership**

The US Conference of Catholic Bishops issued a joint statement with various American Muslim organizations (ISNA, AMC, ICNA and WD Muhammad’s Muslim American Society), calling for unity during the “national tragedy” and encouraging “cooperation among all ethnic, cultural, racial, and religious groups constituting the mosaic of our society”<sup>11</sup>. They also expressed their support for the United States government in “the pursuit of those who were responsible for Tuesday's terrorist acts, always mindful of the moral imperative to act with restraint and respect for civilian lives.”

The statement called for Catholics and Muslims to join together in prayer services and community programs promoting peace.

Throughout the West, similar statements were issued by the leaders of the various faith communities – all with the common theme of encouraging dialogue and understanding.

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\* The Franciscans are an order of Catholic monks, named after St. Francis of Assisi, who founded the order. Of particular note to Muslims, St Francis is famed for having traveled to the Muslim world to meet and enter into dialogue with Muslim leaders.

## **Dialogue between Muslims and Catholics**

The events of September 11 have been met with increased calls for interfaith dialogue, particularly between Muslims and Christians. The Catholic Church has been amongst the most active in calling for such dialogues.

This dialogue has taken place on several levels. At the highest level, there was the meeting at Assisi (January 24, 2002) between the Pope and delegates from over 50 religions, in which they prayed for peace. At lower levels, there have been countless meetings throughout the West and even the Arab world, between Catholics and Muslims. The nature of these dialogues has varied, but a common theme has been participating in group prayer and discussion to affirm their shared humanity and supposedly common beliefs in God.

The Pope urged Catholics to share their daily life with Muslims, particularly immigrants, turning the phenomenon of migration into an opportunity for interreligious dialogue.<sup>12</sup>

## **Doctrinal Challenges from Interfaith Dialogue**

Interfaith dialogue and prayer with Muslims has presented problems to some Catholics, particularly due to something called “Domunius Iesus”. Domunius Iesus was a declaration of faith issued by the Vatican in 2000. The declaration affirmed that the only way to salvation was through the Catholic belief of Jesus, and that interfaith dialogue is part of the Church’s “evangelizing mission”<sup>13</sup>.

The close contact between Catholics and Muslims that occurred after September 11 and the Papal call to dialogue led some Catholics to develop doubts about Church doctrine. Some came to accept, in spite of Domunius Iesus, that there is some “divinity” in Islam.

Eamonn Conway, a Catholic and Head of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies in University of Limerick, Ireland wrote the following:

“When you sit around a table or pray with Muslims, you know this is not the case - "God plays in a thousand places" (Hopkins). There is no justification in Church teaching or Catholic theology for the playing down of God's gracious presence in other religions. God's grace is not like a product that becomes devalued because it is freely available; this is the clear teaching of the Second Vatican Council. Christians can acknowledge this without in any way selling short their own conviction that Jesus Christ represents the ultimate expression of God's self-giving.”<sup>14</sup>

### **Fasting with Muslims**

The Pope declared the last day of Ramadan a day of fasting and prayers for Catholics. At the encouragement of the Catholic leadership in the West, this call was taken up by Catholics and non-Catholics, who fasted and prayed alongside Muslims.

It was met with applause by sections of the international Muslim community. For instance, Hussam Ayloush, executive director of the Southern California chapter of the Council of American Islamic Relations:

"In these tough times, it's certainly touching and it indicates a strengthening and increasing bond of brotherhood between the followers of these two major religions...If we can show these religions as a source of peace, then we've certainly taken a great step.”<sup>15</sup>

Cardinal Francis Arinze, President of the Pontifical Council on Inter-religious Dialogue, issued a public statement on Eid al-Fitr. After congratulating Muslims on completing their fast, he mentioned that fasting and prayer was evidence of the “spiritual bonds which unite us”.<sup>16</sup>

He also invited Muslims to help Catholics to “protect and promote” human values under threat by technological change. This invitation to join in a common cause was "a sign of esteem and friendship on the part of the Catholic Church".<sup>17</sup>

## **Assisi Day of Prayer**

A pivotal part of the Pope's response to September 11 has been the Assisi day of prayer. Pope John Paul II announced on November 18 that he was inviting representatives of the world's religions to go with him to Assisi on January 24 to pray for peace. In particular, he said he hoped to bring Christians and Muslims together to proclaim to the world that religion must never be a reason for conflict, hatred and violence.<sup>18</sup>

Muslims and Christians boarded a train at the Vatican and traveled for two hours to Assisi where they prayed for peace. They did not, however, pray together. Cardinal Walter Kasper, president of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, said that the disparate religions could not pray together because their prayers are "expressions of faith" that they do not all share. He did say, however, that all religions shared the following: respect for God and the divine and the desire for God or the divine; respect for life; and the desire for peace with God or the divine, for peace among peoples and peace in the cosmos.<sup>19</sup>

## **Attitudes towards American policy in the Muslim world**

### **Questioning the legitimacy of the war on terror**

As soon as the United States began military action against Afghanistan, a debate erupted within the Church over whether the war is “just” or not. We can imagine that this debate will intensify as the military action continues and if it is then extended to other states.

Catholic teaching holds that war may be declared if the cause is just, if it is led by a legitimate authority and not guided by revenge, if the results do not produce more evil than the good sought, if it is waged as a last resort, if there is a reasonable chance of success, and if the goal is peace.

It is possible to identify, within the Catholic church, two distinct positions with regards to this issue of the war on terror being a “just war”.

The Pope’s statement to the Philippine ambassador on February 8<sup>th</sup> suggests a clear adoption of pacifism. He said, "(we) cannot think that justice and forgiveness will come as the result of violence and conflict; they are moral virtues that entail our personal and collective responsibility to choose what leads to the common good and avoid all that denies or distorts the truth of our being." He emphasized "that violence in all its forms is totally incompatible with true religious sentiment, and indeed with human dignity." In the same address, the Pope warned Phillipine Catholics of the “illusion of policies” whose sole objective is “economic progress, which is all too often measured in terms of increased consumerism, as if that alone could satisfy people’s aspirations”<sup>20</sup>.

The Catholic Bishops of England similarly adopted a position opposing a war of vengeance and said war is only a last resort after diplomatic methods had been exhausted<sup>21</sup>.

The Catholic peace movement, Pax Christi\* have been amongst the most open and aggressive opponents of the war. They said: "On September 11 humanity took a step backward. On October 7 it took another one"<sup>22</sup>

On the Catholic Church's World Peace Day (January 1), the Pope restated the position that nations have the right of self-defense against terrorism. Without mentioning Afghanistan or the United States, he said that the terrorists and not entire nations should be called into account.<sup>23</sup>

It is possible that there is now some struggle between the more hawkish "just war" exponents and the dovish pacifists. It is interesting to note, for instance, that although the Pope has refrained from giving the war on terror his approval, a Vatican spokesman, Joaquin Navarro-Valls has said that the Vatican would "understand" if the United States decided to use aggressive means of "self-defense," as long as they were "proportionate to the threat" and did not harm innocent people. He insisted: "The pope is not a pacifist."<sup>24</sup> Whether this is a true reflection of the Papal stance is unclear, however given the Pope's own statements, it does seem somewhat contradictory.

The "just war" faction is exemplified by the US Catholic Bishops, who declared categorically that the US-led war on terror as "moral", saying the United States "has a moral right and a grave obligation to defend the common good against mass terrorism." For Catholics in uniform "to risk their own lives in this defense is a great service to our nation and an act of Christian virtue"<sup>25</sup>

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\* Pax Christi are an organization founded in 1945 and is also termed as "The International Catholic Movement for Peace". The movement's objective is defined as being a "crusade of prayer for the nations". In doing so, they have encouraged the involvement of the Church in socio-political activism and have been a very strong proponent of the peaceful resolution to international conflicts. Refer to <http://www.paxchristi.org.uk/Hist1.htm> for more information.

## **Linking enemies to terrorists**

The events of September 11, and the fervor surrounding Bin Laden, have enabled Catholics to draw attention to conflict between Christians and Muslims in other countries. A common theme has been the attempted linking of their “enemies” with Islamic terrorism in general, and Bin Laden and al-Qaeda in particular.

**India** The Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta, for instance, claimed that they were being targeted by two Muslim fundamentalist groups, “one of which is linked to Osama bin Laden’s al-Qaeda network”.<sup>26</sup>

**Algeria** The situation of Christians in Algeria has also been linked to the Bin Laden group or other groups of similar ideology. Archbishop Teissier, of Algeria claimed that the killing of Christians and Muslims in Algeria was carried out by the “the same group with the same idea and same plans” as those who attacked the World Trade Center.<sup>27</sup>

**Sudan** The country that has received the most criticism from the Catholic Church in the wake of September 11 has been Sudan. Bin Laden has been used to draw attention to the ongoing conflict between Muslims and Christians there. Bishop Mazzolari drew a link between the Sudanese government and Bin Laden, claimed Bin Laden had chemical facilities in Sudan, and that the Sudanese persecution of Christians had intensified after September 11 and the US dropping of sanctions. Bombs had struck schools, hospitals, churches and homes, it was alleged. Rather than calling for a renewal of sanctions or military action, the Bishop has called for an immediate halt to the extraction of oil. The Bishop also opposed the role of Egypt and Libya as mediators in the conflict, and warned of Sudan being transformed into “new Saudi Arabia”.<sup>28</sup>

Such a position was not unique to the Catholic church, but rather forms a consistent positioning throughout Christianity. For instance, the Council of Churches of New Sudan issued a news release claiming Sudan is a “hotbed of terrorist activity and continues to have links to the al-Qaeda network”. The organization has alleged that Sudan has a salient role in international terrorism and that role is increasing, referring to Sudan as a “frontier of Muslim expansion”.

Describing the urgent matters to be resolved post-September 11, the US Conference of Catholic Bishops stated<sup>29</sup>:

“As the U.S. seeks Sudan's cooperation in the campaign on terrorism, our nation cannot ignore the systematic campaign of terror waged by the government in Khartoum against its own people, especially Christians and practitioners of African traditional religions. Stopping the war in Sudan and finding a peaceful settlement to this conflict is of urgent importance.”

### **Attitudes to Palestine**

The Catholic Church has been very vocal in calling for a resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. The head of the Italian bishop's conference has said that “the principal now that remains to be unraveled is that of the Holy Land and the Arab-Israeli conflict”.<sup>30</sup>

The US Conference of Catholic Bishops stated, in their document endorsing the war:

“This decades-old conflict must receive urgent attention from all parties, including the United States, to put an end to the violence and to return to comprehensive negotiations leading to a just and peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that respects human rights and international law. We support real security for Israel and the establishment of a viable state for Palestinians. We recognize that each side in this conflict has deep, long-standing and legitimate grievances that must be addressed if there is to be a just and lasting peace. Engagement by the U.S. government and the international community is necessary and must continue. This urgent engagement should respond respectfully to the legitimate claims of both parties and not acquiesce in unilateral actions which undermine prospects for a return to negotiations.”<sup>31</sup>

A similar stance can be found with the Catholic Bishops of the United Kingdom. On 16<sup>th</sup> November, 2001, the Catholic Bishops of England and Wales called for an end to illegal

occupation, and said that adherence to UN resolutions is the only basis for peace. They said, in part:

“The Resolutions of the United Nations remain the necessary basis for justice in the region, and for the secure peace of both Israelis and Palestinians. In particular, the illegal Occupation needs to be brought speedily to an end: otherwise the appropriation of territory by force will have been successfully consolidated. The invasion and blockade of Palestinian cities likewise cannot be condoned: this practice destroys the fabric of their social and economic life.”<sup>32</sup>

The Church has also sought to remove any religious aspects of the Palestinian issue, with the Vatican’s Fides news service stating:

“..in the Holy Land, conflict between Israel and Palestine, the longest war on earth, continue to bloody the Middle East. But after Assisi 2002, neither party can arm itself with religious motivations: the war is political and ethnic, but it does not say that coexistence between Jews, Christians and Muslims is impossible.”<sup>33</sup>

At the same time, there has been increased hostility towards Muslims regarding the building of a mosque in the shadow of the Basilica of the Annunciation in Nazareth, the largest church in the Middle East. Vatican officials described it as a “clear provocation” and have petitioned Sharon and Bush to halt construction.<sup>34</sup>

### **Attitudes to Iraq**

The Pope called on the world to lift the sanctions on Iraq.<sup>35</sup> The US Catholic Bishops statement endorsing the actions against Afghanistan as “just war”, also stated a series of issues that must be resolved in the post September 11 world. Amongst them was Iraq, about which the Bishops said<sup>36</sup>:

“The continuing massive suffering of the Iraqi people over the past decade is simply intolerable. As we have done in the past, we deplore the unconscionable policies which have led to the death, from disease and malnutrition, of hundreds of thousands of children. The leaders of the Iraqi regime bear a heavy responsibility for this suffering, not least because of their misuse of resources. They have a moral responsibility to comply with the reasonable international obligations, especially to end efforts to develop weapons of mass destruction. At the same time, the comprehensive economic sanctions, even as modified by the

"oil-for-food" program, are causing horrendous suffering and must be brought to an end without delay. The goal is not to reward the Iraqi government, but to relieve a morally unacceptable situation where innocent civilians suffer for the actions of a regime over which they have no control."

## **Root Causes of Terrorism and the Response**

The Pope has said terrorism should be fought not only with bombs but also with "a courageous and resolute political, diplomatic and economic commitment to relieving situations of oppression and marginalization which facilitate the designs of terrorists."<sup>37</sup>

Vatican Pontifical Council president Cardinal Francis Arinze said a common approach was necessary as the issue was too large for any one religion to tackle alone.<sup>38</sup>

He said it was necessary to get to the root of international terrorism and not just condemn it: "We should ask ourselves why does terrorism arise? What can be done so that it does not arise?"

Arinze said acts of terrorism may be the result of people getting angry after being oppressed, repressed or being the target of injustice.

"If people are hungry, if people have no work, they get angry. If there is a big gap between the rich and the poor, if they are angry or hungry, they can become violent," he said.

Describing Catholic-Muslim relations as being better than 50 years ago, he said terrorism was also the result of events in history which had been left unresolved. He said the Vatican supported the idea of dialogue and interaction with Muslims as was the case of common prayer sessions during the Gulf crisis.

The Archbishop of Madrid, Cardinal Antonio Maria Rouco Varela stated the same position, attacking globalization, and economic injustice. Interestingly, the Cardinal called for the creation of a "real international authority with sufficient juridical instruments in the field of international criminal and procedural law, and of police and executives in general."<sup>39</sup>

America's Catholic Bishops issued a public statement saying, in part: "Without in any way excusing indefensible terrorist acts, we still need to address those conditions of poverty and injustice which are exploited by terrorists".

The European Union of Catholic Bishops also linked poverty to terrorism, and proposed that the solution to the problem is to "cancel debt" and develop aid packages for Muslim countries that "openly and definitively dissociate themselves from terrorism"<sup>40</sup>

Whereas the Catholic Church in the West has been very restrained in its criticism of the role that US foreign policy may have played in September 11, Father Grech, Secretary-General of the Conference of Latin Bishops of the Arab Region was not. He said that the foreign policy of the Bush administration has increased anti-American feeling: "People are disappointed; they say Bush is too much on Israel's side. For the future there will be the problem of the American position regarding the Muslim world. There are several questions needing attention: Jerusalem, Palestine, Iraq, Iran"<sup>41</sup>.

With this being said, there has been little or no identifiable criticism of American foreign policy by the senior members of the Vatican. At best, there have been heavily veiled references to American economic policy and the global financial hegemony; however they have stopped long short of any direct criticism. A further trend is that more emphasis is being placed on financial injustice and poverty as the source of terrorism than on political injustices.

## Attitudes towards Evangelism

In Pope John Paul's Missionary Prayer Intentions for 2003, issued on 2/8/2002, he identifies a number of regions to be given special attention – amongst them Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Africa, and Central Asia.

In an address on 28<sup>th</sup> October, 2001, the Pope said that there is an urgent need for men and women to take the Gospel everywhere “regardless of language, ethnicity or culture”.

The Pope visited Kazakhstan on 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2001, where he addressed mainly Muslims. The Vatican's Zenit News Service described him as “forcefully expressing the Gospel to several hundred young Muslims”<sup>42</sup> According the news report, some experts believe the visit of the Catholic Pope to majority Muslim Kazakhstan is intended to curb the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the former Soviet republics of Central Asia. However, the Pope candidly expressed the ultimate objective of his visit as: "Allow me to profess before you, with humility and pride, the faith of Christians: Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of God made man 2,000 years ago, came to reveal this truth to us, through his person and his teaching...Religion itself, without the experience of wondrous discovery of the Son of God and communion with him, who became our brother, becomes a mere set of principles that are increasingly difficult to understand, and rules that are increasingly hard to accept."

September 11 made things difficult for missionaries and for Christians in Muslim countries. Roman Catholic bishops from Muslim countries in Northern Africa and parts of Asia are desperately worried about what American attacks on Afghanistan will mean for their safety. There is a fear amongst Catholic missionaries and clergy that they will be held responsible for the US attacks on Afghanistan.<sup>43</sup>

The Catholic Church is relatively subtle in its approach to missionary work. The U.S. Catholic Mission Association, an umbrella organization for 650 groups that send 3,800 missionaries abroad, told their missionaries that they can preach in countries where it is permitted, or can show the virtue of their faith by quietly doing health, education and relief work<sup>44</sup>.

The Franciscans have announced a “peace mission” to Afghanistan – following in the footsteps of their patriarch who was famous for evangelizing to Muslims.<sup>45</sup>

### **Dialogue as a method of evangelism**

The Vatican sees dialogue as a method of evangelism. A telling example is the comments of a Catholic missionary of the Salesian Order, who responded to growing difficulty in missionary work in Quetta, Pakistan by saying: “The majority of Pakistanis are good people, open to dialogue, but the real problem is ignorance. In a nation with 70% illiteracy, the population is strongly influenced by the Mullah, the Islamic religious leaders.”<sup>46</sup> From this, it can be seen that his mission is termed a “dialogue” and that the missionary views the “Mullahs” as being the greatest bulwark to that “dialogue”.

Cardinal Francis Arinze, the President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue said that dialogue must be “based on orthodoxy” because, above all else, the bishop is “the teacher of the doctrine of the faith...While interreligious dialogue may start with the horizontal dimension -- joint pursuit of justice, peace, harmony and social values -- it should above all keep clearly in sight the vertical dimension -- looking for God, search for religious truth, effort at greater openness to divine action”<sup>47</sup>

"The Church's approach to people of other religions is built on her faith in Jesus Christ," the Nigerian cardinal explained. "All humanity belongs to Christ, the firstborn of all creation. For the

Church, interreligious dialogue or collaboration is marked with hope, hope that, ultimately, everyone and everything will be reconciled in Christ, Lord of history and the desire of all hearts."

He then cautioned that, as a teacher of Christianity, the Bishop "has to keep watch over theological ideas on interreligious dialogue in his area...[But] even more important, he has to feed his people with the rich doctrine enshrined in the magisterium....(A) Christian, who meets people of other religions, is first of all a witness to Christ. Through that Christian, other believers should see, hear, experience, touch, speak with and work with Christ."

As the Cardinal in charge of all inter-religious dialogue for the Catholic Church, Arinze's statement is as authoritative as one kind find as to the Catholic position on the matter.

In an address to the Vatican's Pontifical Council on Interreligious Dialogue, the Pope described dialogue as a means of purifying and perfecting the other religions<sup>48</sup>

Addressing the Catholic clergy in Kazakhstan, the Pope called on Catholics to proclaim the love of Christ in Central Asia with the "gentleness of dialogue." He added that whilst the Church did not wish to impose her own faith on others, "it is clear, however, that this does not exempt the Lord's disciples from communicating to others the great gift which they have received: life in Christ."

As an interesting aside, whilst discussing the difficulty of dialogue in Pakistan, the Bishop of Islamabad singled out Sufis as having the most potential. He said, "In these crisis situations, the highest values are the first thing to recede into the background. However, a certain kind of Islam, the mystical Sufi current, is quite close to the Christian, and it is possible to talk, to begin a dialogue."<sup>49</sup>

Whilst not necessarily representative of any increased missionary activity or a particular trend, it is interesting to note that Islamic Relief and Catholic Aid also joined forces, with a Catholic press statement saying that it sent a “a powerful message that the current crisis is not a battle between Islam and Christianity.”<sup>50</sup>

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- <sup>8</sup> Religion Has Key Role in Peace, Says Cardinal Arinze, Zenit News Services, 25/9/2001
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- <sup>10</sup> INTERNATIONAL FIDES SERVICE – September 14th 2001 - No 4263 – NE 497
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## **Chapter 3**

### **An Analysis of Liberal Protestant Trends**

#### **Attitudes towards Islam**

The Liberal Protestants have been the most positive in their presentation of Islam. This is, of course, expected, as these denominations are the most inclined towards ecumenicalism and have been the flag-bearers of the “interfaith movement” for a long time.

As a gesture of friendship, the National Council of Churches has published “God is One: The Way to Islam”, a book that apparently received acclaim from both Christians and Muslims, though it is difficult to find any Muslim organization or individual who has endorsed this book. The book is targeted at Christians and highlights commonalities between the two faiths and discusses aspects of Muslim belief and practice<sup>1</sup>.

Richard Nolan, an Episcopal Priest, and distinguished Professor of Philosophy, authored an article entitled, “A Concise Introduction to Islam”<sup>2</sup>. The article was non-polemical and seemed to be, in the view of the researcher, an honest attempt to elucidate the facts on Islam. He described Islam as being, for Muslims, the fulfillment of what Judaism and Christianity anticipated, and mentioned that Islam is the authentic religion of Abraham and Adam, predating Christianity. Interestingly, he noted that, in the sense of scriptural literalism, all Muslims are

fundamentalists, and that “extremist” or “militant” is a more appropriate term for those exhibiting what Nolan termed, “aggressive behaviour”.

Nolan’s article is arguably the most prolific account of Islam found in the Liberal Protestant media since September 11, and it demonstrates a fairness and accuracy in describing Islamic belief that has not been visible in the work of other denominations.

In trying to reassure Muslims that this was not a war against Islam, the Archbishop of Canterbury appeared on Al-Jazira, the Qatari satellite channel. He said, “this is not a religious conflict. Christians and Muslims are not at war. It is a fight against terrorism...I hope that the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> will act as a catalyst for us to deepen our dialogue and our commitment to one another. I believe we have a lot in common”<sup>3</sup>. In the same interview, he denied any link between Islam and terrorism and said that most people in the West accepted that as well.

The Methodists News Service ran a series of articles on Islam. After positive comments were made, some readers wrote calling the Qu’ran a book of “hate and evil”. This prompted an article to be distributed entitled, “Do not bear false witness against Muslims” which rejected such claims, called Islam a great living faith, and exhorted Christians to firstly not bear false witness against Muslims, then to not judge any religion by a few of its adherents and lastly, to establish contact with Muslims, visit their mosques, and work together<sup>4</sup>.

Perhaps concessionary overtures towards Islam went too far however when the name of the Prophet Muhammad (saw) appeared on the Church of England’s web page as part of a prayer for All Saints Day. The Archbishop of Canterbury rebuked the author and said that such a prayer was “theologically unacceptable”. The prayer was apparently sourced from the United States branch of the Church of England known as the “Episcopal Church of the United States”<sup>5</sup>.

## **Freedom of Religion**

Just like the Catholic Church, the Liberal Protestants have made strong calls for a lifting of “oppression of Christians” in Muslim societies. The Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr George Carey visited Bahrain after September 11 and used his main speech there to call for more freedom of worship. He also said that Christians in Muslim societies do not enjoy the same freedoms as Muslims in Christian societies<sup>6</sup>.

Frequent reference has been made to Sudan when calling for an adoption of religious pluralism in Muslim societies.

## Attitudes towards Muslims

The Liberal Protestants have been amongst the most positive in their attitude and relationship with Muslim communities in the West. They have regularly spoken up against hate-crimes, and seem to have made an effort to improve relations between Muslims and Christians.

The day after September 11, the United Methodist Church (of which George W. Bush is a member) issued a statement on Islam and Muslims. The statement read in part<sup>7</sup>:

“Muslims are followers of Islam, one of the three Abrahamic faiths, along with Christianity and Judaism. Islam has members around the world and, like Christianity, most of its members are peaceful, law-abiding citizens who worship the one God. Also, as with Christianity and other faith traditions throughout history, its teachings have been used by some people to justify violence.”

The article went on to mention not all Arabs and Muslim and not all Muslims are Arab, and it exhorted all Americans not to make assumptions or stereotype.

The National Council of Churches (NCC), a representative body of American Liberal Protestant churches announced monthly meetings with America’s Muslim leadership in order to build understanding and work to improve community attitudes to Islam. The top priority of the working group was to work with the media to provide the correct information on Islam.<sup>8</sup>

The NCC also attended an *iftar* dinner with Muslims. The President of the NCC and other participants commented that had it not been for September 11, relations would not have been so close.<sup>9</sup> The belief that September 11 had the “positive effect” of bringing Muslims and Christians together and improving relations has been a consistent theme amongst both Catholic and Liberal Protestant circles.

George Carey, the Archbishop of Canterbury, visited a mosque<sup>10</sup>, and has made very visible efforts to engage Muslims in dialogue and to allay fears that the events of September 11 do not represent the first blow in a clash of civilizations.

At an interfaith gathering at Lambeth Palach, the Archbishop signed an agreement with Dr Muhammad Sayyid Tantawy in which a committee of representatives from each faith promised to meet once a year in Egypt or the UK. On the same day, Zaki Badawi, a British Muslim leader, and the Archbishop published an article in The Times describing their intent of the meeting and also responding to claims that such interfaith dialogues devalue faith. They described the intent behind the meeting as building understanding and friendship<sup>11</sup>. The meeting was attended by over 40 religious leaders.

Blair praised the meeting and called for the globalization of knowledge, stating that terrorism can be prevented with knowledge of each other<sup>12</sup>.

The United Church of Christ board (the UCC are arguably the most liberal Christian institution in the United States) issued a public statement on October 28, 2001 in which racial profiling, detention of Muslims, and anti-Muslim hate crimes were all highlighted as key issues. The UCC warned of civil liberties being curtailed by laws.<sup>13</sup>

The United Methodist Church of the United States has also been actively engaging Muslims in dialogue. Its members have been encouraged to attend Open Mosque days, and following September 11, the UMC made grants available to community groups wishing to work with Muslims on projects. The UMC have made definite efforts to reassure Muslims and help them as much as possible following September 11<sup>14</sup>.

Bishop Kenneth Carder, a Methodist clergyman, wrote an analysis of the situation post-September 11. He wrote, in part:

“The real threats today do not arise from the differences among Islam and Christianity and Judaism, but from the hate, violence, cruelty, arrogance, exclusion and oppression justified in the name of all religions. I cringe at the notion that Osama bin Laden and his followers may motivate a religious war between Muslims and Christians and Jews. Equally disturbing is the person I

heard on "talk radio" recently who used some of the same violent language in calling for Christians to destroy the "evil and demonic Muslims"<sup>15</sup>

Like other denominations, the Methodists have been involved in interfaith dialogue with Muslims. A United Methodist commission and two Muslim groups have issued a joint statement affirming a "common commitment to living together, under God, in the unity of mutual respect and compassion." The faith groups also called for greater understanding between Christians and Muslims. "We join voices against all forms of racism and anti-Muslim, anti-Jewish and anti-Christian attitudes and practices, wherever they occur. We unite in our prayers for the victims of terrorism and their loved ones; for the courageous rescuers; for the leaders of the nations; and for all who stand in harm's way this day.

"While our faith traditions have clear differences, we share the common commitment to living together, under God, in the unity of mutual respect and compassion," the statement concluded. "We invite others to join in this commitment."<sup>16</sup>

Methodist leaders have attended gatherings at Islamic centres<sup>17</sup>, and appear to have gone to great lengths in order to reach out to Muslims.

### **Interfaith Dialogue**

As with Catholics, interfaith dialogue has formed the dominant response to September 11.

The World Council of Churches noted that interfaith dialogue has become more difficult since September 11. This is an assessment in stark contrast with other institutions who actually believe September 11 has made dialogue easier or at least increased the opportunities and sense of urgency for interfaith dialogue.

According to the WCC, in some countries, such as Scotland and Germany, interest had increased, citing mass purchases of the Koran as evidence that many people were now interested in Islam.

WCC has defined the way forward as being a mission of “developing our common humanity, affirming our common God, developing our common values, and understanding our common mission”. They have been pursuing this objective through a series of organized dialogues between Muslims and Christians.

For instance, on December 17-21, a meeting was held in Cairo between WCC officials and 30 local Christian and Muslim leaders. A meeting was later held centering on Arab Muslims and both Arab and non-Arab Christians and their views on the world post-September 11. The meeting, "Relations between Nations, Cultures and Religious Communities Today: A Perspective from the Arab World", was sponsored by the Arab Group on Christian-Muslim Dialogue. This group works with the Middle East Council of Churches (MECC) and the WCC<sup>18</sup>.

The output of the conference is a document that they have termed: *al-mithaq*. It details the terms of interfaith dialogue, a primary component of which is the affirmation of shared spirituality between Muslims and Christians.

In a 21 December, 2001 press release the World Council of Churches stated said: “The mutual interpretation of each other's religion, the discussion of the history of violence, the notion of Jihad and "just war" as well as the impact of global religious confrontation on local relations are among the main areas on which Christian-Muslim dialogue should focus in the future.”

## **Attitudes towards American policy in the Muslim world**

### **Attitudes towards Palestine**

The Liberal Protestants have been at the forefront of efforts to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict. Bishops marched in a rally, carrying banners reading “Christian-Muslim solidarity in the face of Israeli invasion” and “Destruction in Bethlehem”<sup>19</sup>.

The National Council of Churches issued a statement calling on Sharon and Arafat to cease hostilities and for Bush to join the push for an international monitoring force to be deployed to the region<sup>20</sup>.

The World Council of Churches has been aggressively campaigning for a peaceful solution in Palestine. On 20 December 2001, they launched an anti-violence campaign, producing a resource pack of “prayers and messages to help its member churches and partners launch a campaign in 2002 in support of peace in the middle east – a campaign which focuses on ending the illegal occupation of Palestine”<sup>1</sup>

In an October 12, 2001 letter to President Bush, the Presiding Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America described the root cause of the September 11 attacks as the problems in Palestine and called for an equitable solution to be brought.<sup>21</sup>

### **War on Terror**

The National Council of Churches (NCC) has been at the forefront of the peace movement in the United States. A NCC petition to Bush urging him to show restraint was signed by over 1,200 people, including famous people such as Harry Belafonte (singer), Danny Glover (actor) and Rosa Parkes, a famous Black civil rights activist<sup>22</sup>. Interestingly, all three are Black

Americans, though it is difficult to draw any conclusions as to whether this had any bearing on their support.

The Archbishop of Canterbury, the spiritual leader of the Church of England, gave his support to the war against the Taliban. He emphasized that this was not, and should not be seen as, a war against a particular religion or civilization.<sup>23</sup>

The Archbishop's support of the war could perhaps be linked to his quasi-official role with regards to the British establishment. Certainly, it is a minority view, even within the United Kingdom. For instance, the Archbishop of Wales was categorical that bombing is not the answer<sup>24</sup>.

### **“One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter”**

At the Post-September 11 WCC conference in Switzerland, the definition of a “terrorist” was debated. At least one Bishop described terrorism as being the response of people who have no alternatives, and alluded to “one man's terrorist being another man's freedom fighter”, pointing to the example of Nelson Mandela.

### **Criticism of US**

At the WCC conference, Pablo Richard, a Latin American priest, criticized the US government and said that Latin America was facing the effects of “US State Terrorism”, and said that the first September 11 took place in Chile in 1973, when the US overthrew the democratically elected Allende regime.

A paper presented to the conference entitled, “War without End”, sought to put the US attack on Afghanistan in a historical context by showing long-standing attempts by the US to project its power into the region. The paper predicted that the attempts of the US to project its military, economic and political power will continue and probably intensify.

The WCC also criticized “Western leadership” for failing to see the role that religion is indeed playing in this conflict. An Indonesian Christian minister noted that whilst Indonesians had been sympathetic, as soon as the conflict was termed a “crusade” that changed.

WCC participants, such as representatives of Nigeria, noted that perhaps the biggest effect that the events of September 11 have had on the Muslim world has been in demonstrating the vulnerability of the US and shattering the myth of invincibility. Some expressed their hope that this event may have led the US to develop an affinity for the third world, but noted that, on the contrary, vengeance had become the dominant emotion.

Overall, as a WCC report on the conference stated, there was a pervasive theme of US involvement in terrorism. This was unique amongst religious groups in this study.

The United Methodist Women’s Division produced a document entitled “Responding to the Events of September 11 and the Aftermath”. In a section entitled, “State Terrorism”, they mentioned acts of state-terror in Latin America, particularly Nicaragua and Guatemala and the role that the US has played in supporting it<sup>25</sup>.

In seeking to identify the solution to terrorism, the WCC stated in their “Beyond September 11” declaration that: “The need [is] to address the root causes and breeding grounds of international terrorism – social injustice, cultural arrogance, lack of coherence and illegitimacy in global governance. This needs to be with a perspective of conflict prevention and demands a comprehensive approach, including UN reforms”. The WCC also suggested the need for a Muslim permanent member on the UN Security Council.

## **Attitudes towards Evangelism**

Unlike other denominations, the Liberal Protestants are not aggressive evangelists, although they do send missionaries throughout the Muslim world. This was evident after the US started bombing Afghanistan. For instance, the United Methodists expressed concern for the safety of their missionaries in Pakistan<sup>26</sup>.

It would appear that their method of evangelism is through the provision of aid and, by doing that, to demonstrate “Christian values”. This seems also to have been the focus post September 11. Protestant charities have been amongst the most active in Afghanistan and elsewhere in the Muslim world.

For instance, the United Methodist Church collected 100,000 pairs of shoes and 50,000 blankets to be sent to Afghanistan<sup>27</sup>.

### **Aid as an entry point to Afghanistan**

The war in Afghanistan, removal of the Taliban, and opening up of its borders, have created many opportunities for Christian organizations to gain access to Muslims via aid.

For example, the United Methodists Committee on Relief (UMCOR) is running a shelter project in Northern Afghanistan, providing food and assistance in building shelter.

Christian World Service is a charity organization made up of several protestant, orthodox and Anglican denominations. They have been a very active provider of aid to Afghanistan, particularly food aid.

### **Education of women**

The establishment of schools in Afghanistan, particularly schools for girls has been a consistent theme in aid organizations projects for 2002. Worldvision have announced a plan to

build five schools in Herat Afghanistan. Worldvision program manager in Western Afghanistan has described this as part of a wider program to reintroduce girls into society<sup>28</sup>. Other Protestant aid organizations, such as Christian Aid, and others, all have plans in place to build similar schools.

Given the apparently low-emphasis that Liberal Protestants place on open missionary work, it was difficult to find documentation on what exactly their activities are in the Muslim world. However, it is clear that following September 11, and particularly the bombing in Afghanistan, their aid organizations are increasingly active and appear to be gaining a massive foothold in the region.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> NCC's Friendship Press offers book on Islam, United Methodist Church, 13/12/2001

<sup>2</sup> A Concise Introduction to Islam, Richard Nolan, Episcopal News Service, 20/9/2001

<sup>3</sup> Archbishop of Canterbury Interview on Al-Jazeera TV, Qatar, Anglican Communion News Service, 13/11/2001

<sup>4</sup> Do not bear false witness against Muslims, Rev. Bruce Robbins, United Methodist News Service, 17/9/2001

<sup>5</sup> Christians outraged over All Saints prayer for Mohammed, Johnathan Petre and Hazel Southam, Sunday Telegraph, 25/11/01

<sup>6</sup> Archbishop demands freedom of worship, BBC News, 4/11/2001

<sup>7</sup> Basic points about Arabs, Muslims, United Methodist News Service, 12/9/2001

<sup>8</sup> NCC, MUSLIM LEADERS AGREE TO MONTHLY MEETINGS IN SEPT. 11'S WAKE, National Council fo Churches, 28/9/2001

<sup>9</sup> NCC General Secretary joins Muslim Iftar – Interfaith Dialogue, National Council of Churches, 12/12/2001

<sup>10</sup> Attack on Afghanistan: Backlash: Suspicion stalks anxious Muslims: Air of unease lingers among Islamic worshippers, Vikram Dodd, The Guardian, 17/10/2001

<sup>11</sup> Inter-faith dialogue will not devalue our beliefs, Zaki Badawi and George Carey, The Times (London), 17/1/2002

<sup>12</sup> Campaign against terrorist: Blair: Extremism can be prevented by knowledge, Chris Gray, The Independent, 18/1/2002

<sup>13</sup> Justice and Witness Ministries Board statement, United Church of Christ, 28/10/2001

<sup>14</sup> United Methodists pursue contact with other faiths, United Methodist Church, 4/2/2002

## Notes

<sup>15</sup> Commentary: Jesus offers alternative to religious warfare, Bishop Kenneth Carder, United Methodist Church, 15/11/2001

<sup>16</sup> United Methodists, Muslims affirm mutual respect, United Methodist Church, 15/10/2001

<sup>17</sup> Islamic center warmly welcomes United Methodists, United Methodist Church, 15/10/2001

<sup>18</sup> WCC – Christians and Muslims look at impact of September 11 , WCC Press Release, 13/12/2001

<sup>19</sup> Bishops join in Pro-Palestinian Rally, Michael Paulson, Boston Globe, 31/10/2001

<sup>20</sup> NCC General Secretary Issues Statement On Escalating Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, National Council of Churches, 5/12/2001

<sup>21</sup> Letter to President Bush, Office of Presiding Bishop, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America

<sup>22</sup> Prayers and messages for peace in the Middle East, WCC Press Release, 20 December 2001

<sup>23</sup> Religious leaders unite in backing action, Victoria Combe, Daily Telegraph (London), 9/10/2001

<sup>24</sup> Comment & Analysis: For God's sake, stop this talk of war: The Archbishop of Wales argues that bombing is not the answer, The Guardian (London), 21/1/2002

<sup>25</sup> Responding to the Events of September 11 and their Aftermath, United Methodist Women

<sup>26</sup> Afghan events could affect Pakistan's Christians, United Methodist Church, 1/10/2001

<sup>27</sup> Churches collect huge quantities of shoes for Afghans, United Methodist News Service, 18/12/2001

<sup>28</sup> World Vision Supports Education of Girls in Herat , Worldvision, 29/1/2002

## Chapter 5

# An Analysis of Conservative Protestant Trends\*

### Attitudes towards Islam

The response of the Conservative Christians towards Islam can be typified in the remarks of Franklin Graham. Graham is the son of the famous evangelist, Billy Graham, a southern Baptist, and a very popular TV presenter.

He generated an enormous amount of controversy when he termed Islam a “wicked” religion on his TV show. In the segment, he said: "We're not attacking Islam but Islam has attacked us. The God of Islam is not the same God. He's not the son of God of the Christian or Judeo-Christian faith. It's a different God, and I believe it is a very evil and wicked religion."<sup>1</sup>

This did attract some criticism from Catholics and Liberal Protestants, however, the response from the Conservative denominations was mixed. Many supported Graham's statements and praised him for being a bulwark against moves to corrupt Christianity. Rejecting Graham's assertion, New Orleans Baptist Seminary president, Chuck Kelley said that:

A few terrorists are not representative of an entire people. Many Arabs and Muslims are likely to be just as horrified as Americans. We should pray that God will show whatever Christianity our nation has left in our culture<sup>2</sup>

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\* Conservative Protestantism equates with what is commonly known as Christian Fundamentalism. Conservatives distinguish themselves from other Christian through a literal interpretation of the Bible. This then leads them to adopt positions that are often markedly more extreme than their Liberal and Catholic counterparts. For example, Conservatives reject completely homosexuality as an abomination, whereas other denominations, with the possible exception of Catholics, accept even openly homosexual priests.

Richard Cizik, vice president for governmental affairs for the National Association of Evangelicals, said Islam is more complex than Graham pictures it.<sup>3</sup>

However, Baptist Minister Chuck Baldwin, described Graham as the “one bright light”, and described the liberals who opposed him as being “cowardly”. He concluded that Franklin Graham has shown the “kind of grit not seen in a long time” and that “he refused to surrender or apologize for his convictions...He is a breath of fresh air, and he gives me something for which to be thankful...”<sup>4</sup>

The evidence would suggest that the majority of Baptists supported Graham’s comments, and share similarly negative views on Islam. At a recent conference entitled, “Onward Christian Soldiers”, R. Albert Mohler, the President of the Southern Baptist Seminary, said of Islam<sup>5</sup>:

"It doesn't take a theologian to see that we have two fundamentally different worldviews here... As I said in a chapel sermon here, the biggest threat from Islam is not that it leads a person to kill other human beings; it's that it kills the soul. It is an anti-gospel. It is a way that leads to destruction and death."

The Southern Baptist Seminary is the principal training college for Baptist ministers in the United States and Mohler’s comments carry considerable weight.

At the annual meeting (November 1-2, 2001) of the Baptist Convention of New York, a resolution was passed that whilst Christians should love and respect all human beings, it must be made known (to Muslims) that the God of the Christian Bible, His Son Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit is the One True God for all mankind.<sup>6</sup>

Pat Robertson blamed Islam for the events of September 11. In a show screened February 21<sup>st</sup>, he portrayed Muslim Americans as apologists for terrorism and made a series of inflammatory comments regarding Islam and America’s large Muslim minority.

Robertson then went on to say, “I have taken issue with our esteemed president in regard to his stand in saying Islam is a peaceful religion. It’s just not. And the Qu’ran makes it very clear, if you see an infidel, you are to kill him”.

In the same interview, Robertson concluded that “Islam is not a peaceful religion that wants to coexist. They want to coexist until they can control, dominate and then if need be, destroy”<sup>7</sup>.

### **Attitude towards Christian-Muslim rapprochement**

As much of the Christian world made overtures towards Islam, describing it in oft positive terms and attempting to demonstrate the similarities between the two faiths, the Conservative Christians responded by reaffirming the differences and aggressively arguing that Islam is not an “acceptable religion”.

President Bush’s consistent description of Islam in positive terms and his inclusion of Muslim leaders in various events, led to a big backlash from the Southern Baptists and Evangelicals.

David Crowe, director of Restore America, a grassroots conservative Christian political organization based in Oregon, said: “A lot of people think Bush has bent way too far over backward to say nice things about Muslims.”<sup>8</sup>

Mark Coppenger, a Baptist minister, and influential columnist in Baptist News asked regarding Bush’s comments on Islam: “But a clean bill of health for a religion which denies the divinity of Christ, has always had a very weak grasp of democracy and religious freedom, and is prone to keep and indulge a lot of bad company?”

The influential Family Policy Network issued an action alert urging Christians to contact President Bush to oppose Islamic prayers in the White House.<sup>9</sup>

Joe Glover, of the Family Policy Network, a Conservative Christian lobby group, issued a public statement making three demands on the President regarding his position on Islam. He demanded that:

1. "He SHOULD NOT (especially as a self-proclaimed born-again Christian) host a Muslim Ramadan service in the White House.";
2. He SHOULD NOT mischaracterize the teachings of Islam (which direct faithful followers to "kill infidels") by calling it a religion that teaches "peace" and
3. He SHOULD NOT attack Christian leaders in America (like Franklin Graham and Jerry Falwell) who speak the truth about the violent nature of Islam.

The President of the SBC Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission has said that whilst he would not refer to the Qu'ran as "holy", he has no problem with Bush attending the iftar dinner. "He is the president of all the people, and to me pluralism is not pretending we don't have different religions in America, but giving religions in America equal acknowledgement from the government." Land, who has ties to the Administration, called Islam "one of the great religions of the world" and said it has a "higher moral code" than, say, Hinduism. He suggested the outreach to Muslims was "calculated" by the Administration to head off anti-Muslim backlash.<sup>10</sup>

A Baptist pastor organizing the drive to display the Ten Commandments in a government building said people of religions other than Judaism and Christianity need not join the effort. Hindus and Muslims are not welcome on the organizing committee because their religious traditions are not part of America's heritage, said the Rev. Mickey P. Carter, pastor of the Landmark Baptist Church in Haines City.<sup>11</sup>

Even the Eid stamp released at around the same time as September 11, attracted vehement opposition from Conservatives. An article on Baptist News accused the stamp selection committee of having a secret agenda other than honoring "wellsprings of American greatness", and that they pandered to "a range of ideologies alien to both our founders and our best hopes".<sup>12</sup>

In justifying their antagonistic position towards Islam, Evangelists frequently took verses of the Qu'ran out of context or manipulated their meanings, in order to "prove" that Islam was intrinsically violent. When stopped from speaking at a university for fear of inciting hate against Muslims, one such Baptist evangelist threatened to sue.<sup>13</sup>

Another Southern Baptist Minister, Evangelist Anis Shorosh\*, compared Muhammad (saw) to Satan and told a Muslim student he was bound for hell "Your religion is a lie. Your Allah (god) is the devil himself." "I sincerely love all Muslims," Shorosh said. "I am one of thousands of Christians who every Friday night fast and pray for the fall of Islam." He said the United States should call all U.S. citizens back to America and drop atomic bombs on the capitals of several countries in the Middle East.<sup>14</sup>

Cal Thomas is one of the most popular syndicated columnists in the United States. Whilst not representing any Conservative protestant denomination, he does hold views that are indicative of the Conservatives as evidenced by his statements, as well as the fact that he is syndicated by several of the most important Conservative publications (including crosswalk.com and Covenant News). In a radio broadcast (December 10, 2001), Thomas said, "Our mandate is to preach the gospel. Let's get about God's business of transforming men and women and not man's business of attempting to improve fallen humankind"<sup>15</sup>.

In January/February, the Saudi Embassy in Washington, DC undertook a program to mail Islamic information to several thousand American schools. Thomas decried the move and called it an attempt to undermine America from within by the Saudis who "export terrorism"<sup>16</sup>.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> January, 2002, Robertson interviewed Daniel Pipes. Robertson asked, "You have written that the United States government, with taxpayer dollars, has actually helped to spread Islam. Could you expand on that a little bit?". Pipes replied:

“You are putting it a little more strongly than me. I wrote an article recently showing that, if one takes the last 10 years, if one takes President Clinton, and to a certain extent President Bush, and their aids, one finds a constant pattern of promoting Islam, saying that this is a wonderful religion and has nothing to do with terrorism, and Americans need to know more about it, and it's great that there are more Muslims. And this is a striking contrast to the approach of the American government toward other religions - in particular Christianity.

One finds over and over again that Islam is given special privileges. You may have followed that in New York and in Philadelphia; the school systems at the end of last year permitted Muslim students to use the schools as a place of prayer. I don't need to point out to your audience that that is not something that Christians get to avail themselves of. So there is this contrast, this special treatment of Islam that I think needs to be noted. And, you know, the government needs to be much more cautious about this...”<sup>17</sup>

This suggests the formation or solidification of an alliance between Conservatives and others who share an ideological opposition to Islam (such as Pipes, who is a Zionist Jew). One can expect that in the future, this relationship will strengthen. The Conservatives will utilize the “expert knowledge” of the likes of Pipes to further their campaign against Islam, whereas Pipes might be expected to use the support of the Christian right (Conservative Protestants) to improve credibility and promote his own ideological cause amongst the large number of American’s who are Conservative Christians.

### **Response to joint prayers**

Following September 11, there have been a number of joint prayers held with Christians and Muslims. This attracted considerable opposition from Conservatives.

The National Association of Evangelicals sponsored a post-Sept. 11 memorial prayer service exclusively for conservative Christian clergy from 50 denominations because they deemed the interfaith civic services insufficiently religious.

Baptist News ran an article opposing joint prayers:

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\* Shorrosh is a Palestinian by birth who is most famous in the Muslim world for having debated Ahmad Deedat.

“In another vein, I wish we'd go easy on the joint prayers. Clergy should stand together for religious freedom, but let's be careful about giving the impression we're all praying to the same God. There are nine Michael Smiths in our local phone book, and I mustn't think that by calling one, I hit some sort of Michael Smith amalgamation. Our God is a jealous God, and he is offended at the homogenization of his name with that of Allah.”<sup>18</sup>

Reflecting an intolerant attitude to members of its own denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention threatened to expel the DC Baptist Convention and end their 124-year relationship. Amongst the grievances was the DC Convention “must agree not to promote the cultural festivals that include non-Christian religious denominations”.<sup>19</sup>

The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (not to be confused with the liberal protestant, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America), went to point of charging two of their leaders with blasphemy for attending an interfaith gathering. The offending priests had attended “A Prayer for America” at Yankee Stadium on September 23<sup>20</sup>.

### **Don't let your children grow up to be Muslims**

The example of accused Taliban fighter, John Walker, has also been utilized as a useful argument by Conservative Christians in their campaign against Islam. Walker was cited as an example of what happens if parents allow their children to grow up to become Muslims and an example of the fallout of “political correctness”. Chuck Colson, founder of the Prison Fellowship\* said: “Since September 11, many of our elites have bent over backwards to obscure, even hide, Islam's true nature....that's why people like Walker and his parents believe that Islam is a peaceful faith...The Walker case, you see, is really a metaphor for what happens if Americans buy into the politically correct talk about Islam being peace-loving. Christians have to be prepared to take the lead in setting the record straight.”<sup>21</sup>

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\* The Prison Fellowship is a large, nation-wide, evangelical group focused on spreading Christianity in America's prison system.

Given that anecdotal evidence would suggest that Islam is amongst the fastest, if not the fastest, growing religion in America's corrections system, it is not surprising that an organization charged with spreading Christianity in that same setting, would be adopting such a position.

## **Attitudes towards Muslims**

The approach of Conservative Christians towards Muslims has varied quite significantly. At the more positive end of the spectrum, Conservatives showed what they would term “Christian love”. For instance, a New Orleans Baptist Church personally delivered letters to Muslims in his area. The letter said Christians were praying for them, and that they opposed all acts of intolerance and bigotry against Muslims. The letter also explained that such bigotry was against the teachings of Jesus.<sup>22</sup>

However, Conservatives tended to be very antagonistic towards Muslims after September 11. For instance, even fairly innocuous Muslim activism in the wake of September 11 attracted the wrath of some sections of the Conservative Christian media, notably Cal Thomas (I am not certain if Cal Thomas is not per se identifiable with a religious organization or is he just a Conservative writer. Let us just check on this.). Referring to an “Action Alert” that provide guidelines on how Muslims can respond positively to September 11, he wrote:

“America's enemies know us better than we know them. They take their faith in a false god more seriously than we take our faith in the true one. Be careful with what you see and hear. Chances are, a lot of these people on TV are trying to undermine our resolve and commitment to ending this terrorist assault against us”<sup>23</sup>

At times, however, they were more candid in their approach to Muslims, with one Baptist Church placing a sign outside saying that Muslims were “dammed”.<sup>24</sup>

Some Conservatives were angered that other Christians were speaking out for Muslims who had experienced harassment or other discriminatory practices. One article in Baptist News

asked: "We might ask these indignant spokesmen if they've ever done this on behalf of persecuted Christians in their North African/Middle Eastern homelands. If not, I would invite them to visit Voice of the Martyrs at [www.vom.org](http://www.vom.org) and get started."<sup>25</sup>

Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) ran a story entitled, "The Islamic Invasion of California's Schools"<sup>26</sup>. The article questioned a three-week study of Islam as required curriculum for 7<sup>th</sup> grade public school children. Of concern to them was the supposed portrayal of Islamic beliefs in the text as "matters of fact" – notably that the Qu'ran is the final revelation, that the message of Muhammad (saw) is the same as that of Abraham (as). CBN was also concerned about students adopting Muslim names and "pretending" to be Muslims. Noted Zionist, Daniel Pipes also chimed in, releasing an action alert requesting those concerned to write to the Californian education authorities opposing such moves.

This highlights what has been an identifiable trend in conservative Christian circles of opposition to what they perceive as a double-standard wherein Islam is tolerated, explained and given ample focus, whereas Christianity is not. A similar debate has been taking place over prayer in schools where Christian groups are arguing that they should be allowed to pray in school because Muslims are.

Cal Thomas, in his syndicated column, targeted illegal immigrants from the middle-east as being targets for a program of immediate deportation. He argued that attention should be given to these people over and above other illegal immigrants<sup>27</sup>.

Pat Robertson adopted a similarly confrontational position towards Muslim minorities in the United States. In an episode of his popular television broadcast, Co-host Lee Webb asked Robertson: "As for the Muslim immigrants, Pat, it makes you wonder, if they have such contempt for our foreign policy why they'd even want to live here?". Robertson replied, "Well,

as missionaries possibly to spread the doctrine of Islam”. He then went on to criticize American immigration policies claiming, “the fact is that our immigration policies are now so skewed to the Middle East and away from Europe that we have introduced these people into our midst and undoubtedly there are terrorist cells all over”<sup>28</sup>.

Clearly, the attitude of Conservatives to Muslims has got worse post-September 11, or at least September 11 is being used by them as the “exception that confirms the rule”.

## **Attitudes towards American policy in the Muslim world**

### **Growth in Christian Zionism**

A noticeable trend following September 11 has been the increased visibility of “Christian Zionism”. Whether it has grown as an ideological force, is difficult to ascertain, however, it appears that September 11 has aided it and provided it with a cloak of some legitimacy.

Israel has launched a series of efforts targeting Conservative Protestant groups, such as the Christian Coalition, offering them free travel to Israel, and “strategy sessions”. A report<sup>29</sup> in the Washington Post described the initiative.

The objectives are to revive Israel’s flagging tourism industry through increasing interest in the “holy land”, and to solidify support for the state in America.

Within the Conservative Protestants, are a group of “Christian Zionists” who believe that the Jews are God’s chosen people, and have a divine right to the land of Israel.

"If I felt the administration or anyone in Congress was moving away from support of Israel, believe me, I'd encourage people to pick up the phone and tell their legislators, 'Don't you dare!' " said Janet Parshall, who hosts a weekday syndicated show on evangelical radio stations across the country.

The support of Israel and Zionism amongst Conservative Christians is recognized by the Israeli government as one of the reasons that Bush remains sympathetic to Israel and its cause<sup>30</sup>.

Touchpoint Solutions, a Colorado Springs Consulting Agency, was hired by the Israeli Ministry of Tourism to build a program targeting American evangelicals. The identified objectives are:

1. Persuade the top 30 evangelical Zionists, through face to face meetings, to visit and promote Israel. The Christian Zionists were identified in the study as Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, John Hagee, Tim LaHaye, and Parshall;
2. Sending letters to the 100,000 largest Evangelical churches in the US and postcards to 350,000 others, inviting them to the Israeli tourism site, GoIsrael.com;
3. Conducting "Israel Solidarity Days" in 100 cities, beginning with Colorado Springs, from Feb. 24 to March 1. Publicly, prayer ceremonies will focus on Israel and its biblical importance. Privately, local evangelical leaders -- whether pastors, business people or athletes -- will be urged to make "solidarity trips" to Israel. Some will have their expenses paid by Israel.

An article in Covenant News, lists seven grievances with George Bush, including:

“Bush has turned his back on the people of Israel (and the Word of God) by promising to carve up the land God gave to Israel and give it to PLO terrorists. If Christians in the United States sit back silently on this issue (like they have virtually every other issue since Bush became president), we will forfeit the right to ask God to bless America.”<sup>31</sup>

Cal Thomas, a conservative Christian columnist actually called for Israel’s “hands” to be untied and a full-scale onslaught to take place against Palestinians:

“For too long, the United States has tied Israel's hands. Now it's time for Israel to fight back. Yasser Arafat must be eliminated from the region and returned to exile in Tunisia... So let the next war begin and may it end like all the others: With a swift Israeli victory and this time with leadership on the Palestinian side that will make peace and not war, if that is possible.”<sup>32</sup>

In an interview with Alice Smith, an “intercessor” who is purported to receive messages from God, Pat Robertson asked her about what God has revealed to her after September 11<sup>33</sup>. She warned of the Church entering into a “legal covenant or contract with Islam”. Robertson then commented that the United States was setting a tone of accommodation of Islam that never happened in this country before. Smith then replied that God had informed her that there would be no peace in Israel in 2002, and that God asked her to pray for Bush that he doesn’t succumb to the pressure of the well-meaning to give more land to the Palestinians. If he does, then America will be subjected to the worst natural disasters ever experienced.

Clearly, there is an overwhelming support for Israel and Zionism within the ranks of the Conservative Christian leadership in the United States. September 11 has only served to strengthen that and to give legitimacy to it. This should not be overlooked as it is perhaps one of the driving forces behind Bush's support of Israel.

### **Root Causes of Terrorism**

Generally, Conservatives have been far more inward looking – blaming America's descent into "moral depravity" for the events of September 11.

Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network issued a four page statement saying that God had lifted his protection from America. "We have imagined ourselves invulnerable and have been consumed by the pursuit of health, wealth, material pleasures and sexuality"<sup>34</sup>

Falwell, a Baptist minister, said on Robertson's 700 Club television show, that he blames the attacks on pagans, abortionists, feminists, homosexuals, and civil libertarians. He said: "All of them who have tried to secularize America, I point the finger in their face and say, 'You helped this happen'...God continues to lift the curtain and allow the enemies of America to give us probably what we deserve." Robertson agreed and said, "I think we've just seen the antechamber to terror. We haven't even begun to see what they can do to the major population."<sup>35</sup>

Whilst this position was condemned by other Christian denominations, the Baptists and other Conservative Protestants have continued to maintain that part of the reason for September 11 was America's secularization.

Rick Love, the International Director of Frontiers, an evangelical organization that focuses on Muslims, was asked by Pat Robertson's Christian Broadcasting Network as to why Muslim hates the United States so much<sup>36</sup>.

He listed the following reasons:

1. Muslims (like Christians) reject secular modernity, inclusive of pornography, high divorce rate, and materialism;
2. Belief that the United States was culpable in the deaths of Muslims in Palestine, Bosnia and elsewhere;
3. Muslim perceptions of the West are molded by their media which is intrinsically biased against the USA.
4. Muslims believe they are destined to become a superpower;
5. Muslims are outraged at the presence of infidel troops in Saudi Arabia;
6. America is a lightning rod for criticism;

## Attitudes towards Evangelism

There has been a definite focus on missionary activities directed towards Muslims after September 11. Both Baptists and Evangelicals have been extremely aggressive and open about efforts to convert Muslims to Christianity. The events of September 11 appear to have given legitimacy to these efforts, and also provided them with increased fundraising potential amongst their congregations.

The International Mission Board (IMB) is the missionary arm of the Southern Baptist, and arguably one of the largest missionary organizations in the world. Reflecting a fear that September 11 and the subsequent attack on Afghanistan would trigger a backlash against missionaries, IMB warned their members, “Christians should not use the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11 as an excuse to back away from the Muslim world”<sup>37</sup>.

IMB have been very aggressive in calling for increased missionary work in Muslim countries. The president, Jerry Rankin said, “This is not a time for putting missionary activity on hold. It is a time for seizing the opportunity to proclaim our living Savior in every effort to extend the kingdom of God into the strongholds of darkness... The current developments, as with other crises in the past, provide unprecedented opportunities for ministering to a world dominated by paranoia and fear. It is a unique time to share the hope and security that can only be found in Jesus Christ.”<sup>38</sup>

There is a perception that the Muslim world is disillusioned following September 11, and the missionaries must “break down that last stronghold of resistance to global evangelism”<sup>39</sup>.

In a statement entitled “Islam: Crises and Challenge”, Jerry Rankin, the president of International Mission Board said that the global crises provided “unprecedented opportunities” to evangelise to Muslims and that the uncertainty of Muslims was beneficial to their mission.<sup>40</sup>

Lee DeYoung of Word of Hope, another evangelical Christian group, says the involvement of some Muslims with terrorism has weakened the faith of many other Muslims, making them susceptible to conversion. "This could be a time of great opportunity," DeYoung told CBNWorld.com, the website of Pat Robertson.<sup>41</sup>

### **A war for souls: concern over the spread of Islam**

Pat Robertson’s Christian Broadcasting Network has termed the situation post-September 11 as a “war for souls”, and Islam is identified as the major opponent<sup>42</sup>. He said:

“Since that day when the world froze in horror at the sight of violent massacre and destruction, a spiritual hunger was unleashed in America. With the physical world forever shaken, a desire for a transcendent world filled the hearts of many. Seeking souls have flocked to everything from Christianity to New Age to, believe it or not, Islam”

Concern for the growth in Islam has been a common theme in much of the Conservative criticism post-September 11. Clearly, Islam is seen as a major threat to their continued growth.

In looking to apportion blame for this phenomenon, they typically looked to the Saudis who were described as being very militant and “out to convert”.

The International Mission Board has launched a “ambitious multi-year project” called “Beyond the Wall” that is designed to target Muslims and present Christianity to them in a “culturally sensitive manner”<sup>43</sup>.

Dayna Curry, the missionary who was released by the Taliban after the fall of Kabul, has been very active in espousing the need for increased missionary work in the country. In an

interview with SBC's International Mission Board, she identified the use of radio and the Jesus Film amongst the most effective means of reaching Afghan Muslims<sup>44</sup>:

In Vancouver, Canada, a "Mission Fest" was held (February 1-3, 200), which attracted over 13,000 people<sup>45</sup>. At the festival, discussion was held on how to convert Muslims to Christianity and some of the opportunities that exist.

Amongst the topics of discussion were:

1. "Stealth" missionary work: How to avoid being arrested for evangelizing.
2. Is it more Christian to win Muslim converts or offer them aid?
3. What are the ethics of converting someone to a faith for which they'll be persecuted?
4. Is evangelizing in person less effective than broadcasting Christian messages?
5. What are the chances of widespread conversions among Muslims?

The situation in Afghanistan has provided a fertile ground for Missionary activities. IMB have been very active in the region. Following September 11 and the attacks on Afghanistan, they announced a number of aid initiatives which they have quite candidly linked to evangelism.

A letter sent by the head of IMB to their missionaries reads in part:

"But as bleak as physical conditions seem, the spiritual situation of the Afghan people is even worse. While the United Nations rushes to distribute tons of food and warm clothing to Afghanistan's destitute, the country is closed to missions agencies that could fill the spiritual void in people's hearts."

They have also been actively canvassing their several million members for donations. Their web page features a plea for funds that reads, "the funds will not only be used to help people with their physical needs, but it will also create an opportunity for people like us to be among them, help them and share with them".

Franklin Graham's Samaritan's Purse missionary organization has plans to establish a hospital in Afghanistan as a means of furthering their call.<sup>46</sup> In the lead up to Christmas, 2001, they sent presents to one million children<sup>47</sup>, with over 100,000 dedicated to Afghan children<sup>48</sup>.

Frontiers, one of the larger missionary organizations that specialize in evangelizing to Muslims, released a set of frequently asked questions (FAQs) following September 11. These are included on their web site and provide an insight into the methodology that is now being adopted by missionary groups. The three steps proposed by Frontier are:

1. Stand against hate crimes and anti-Muslim racism in order to “express love for Muslims”;
2. Seek out Muslims and build “bridges of love” – the kindness shown to them will make evangelizing easier.
3. Meet with leaders of mosques to “enhance mutual understanding”.

Baptists have also developed programs to carry out missionary work amongst local Muslims. The Baptists of Rochester, New York, for instance, have established classes to teach English to local Muslim migrants. A spokesperson said: "I feel like it's what the Lord wants me to do. We have a lot of internationals here in Rochester. ESL is something we can do to help them and have a witness to them."<sup>49</sup>

The Christian Broadcasting Network features a wide range of material on how to evangelize to Muslims, and particularly how to respond to Muslim beliefs. One such document is entitled, “Islam: How to respond” and exhorts Christians to “befriend their Muslim neighbours” and then use the material within to evangelize to them. (refer <http://www.cbn.com/spirituallife/understandingislam/>)

## **Day of Prayer and fasting**

Like the Catholics, the Baptists also called for a day of prayer to mark the last day of Ramadan. The difference was that the Baptists were asked to “pray and fast that God will miraculously reveal himself through Jesus Christ to Muslims”.<sup>50</sup>

Southern Baptist Convention’s president, James Merrit called for prayer on December 16, and said<sup>51</sup>:

"Right now, Muslims are observing their holy month of Ramadan, and many Christians have been praying that God would speak to Muslims about His love for them and their need for His forgiveness. In recent years, God has honored our prayers with multitudes of Muslims coming to Christ. "We see the opportunity increasing for Muslims to come to Christ, especially since devout Muslims will soon observe the 'Night of Power,' spending the entire night in a prayer vigil in which they ask God to reveal Himself to them."

## **Whitehouse**

It is important to note that George W. Bush and the Republican Party have very strong ties to Conservative Protestantism. The link between Republican administrations and the Religious Right\* dates back several decades. Billy Graham, conservative evangelist and father of Franklin Graham, was an advisor to President Nixon. Likewise, George W. Bush is also understood to also seek counsel with some conservatives.

These ties, both political and ideological, have meant that the White House has had to carefully navigate between its perceived pro-Islam statements and position, and the statements of Graham, Robertson, and indeed much of the Conservative Protestant bloc. As can be observed, for the most part, the Bush administration has failed and has drawn the considerable ire of the religious right who have labeled the Bush administration as being “soft” on Islam.

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\* Term usually used to describe the right-wing Conservative Protestant factions in the United States.

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