

## CONFESSIONS OF A RELIGIOUS EXTREMIST

I first visited Islamabad in 1990. In August I made my tenth visit. I have experienced the Pakistani paradox: animosity and appreciation for Americans. I minimize my Americanism by donning the "chelvar chamis" (the loose, flowing Pakistani apparel), and submerging into the landscape. I reside in private homes. I take Frisbees, go to a park and get a few young people to toss the disc around. Many of them know English and are eager to speak to an American. I've given away many Frisbees. My American sensibilities are jarred by how foreign it all is. "This is not Kansas, Toto." But this is not Mars either. Pakistanis are people, like other people. They are concerned for their families, their work, their day-to-day lives.

But I do not visit Pakistan as an American for political or financial purposes. I am a preacher. I preach at an annual conference for Protestant Pakistani pastors. I have also preached in churches in Islamabad: "The City of Islam". My perspective is not simply that of an American, but of a Christian, and, contrary to Pakistani conventional wisdom, "American" and "Christian" are not synonyms.

In 1995 I visited a seasoned missionary in Peshawar, an ancient city near the Afghan border. The Afghan civil war was raging just miles up the road. My missionary friend had lived in this region for 40 years. I asked him about Islam. When he spoke, I listened intently. He didn't speak of "The Five Pillars", or of Islam's battles or heroes. He spoke of the moral core of Islam in the east and, as only the aged and experienced can, he distilled years of observation into one pithy definition: "Islam is being angry for God."

I flew into Islamabad on August 20, 1998 and learned that, while I was in flight, America had launched missiles against bin Ladin in Afghanistan. I stayed indoors for three days. Anti-American rallies were common. I was assigned an armed military guard stationed around the clock outside my residence. Understand that all my activities are legal. In fact, the white stripe on the flag of Pakistan symbolizes the political legitimacy of non-Muslim Pakistanis. The opposition comes not from civil authorities, but from the ubiquitous Islamic anger fomented by militant mullahs. That Sunday, I preached to western missionaries and their children. They were afraid. Many were preparing to leave. But the Pakistani pastors came to the conference. I preached from Acts which profiles the early church. There we saw Christians being persecuted for their faith. The pastors were familiar with persecution. Several had been imprisoned, some

beaten for preaching the gospel. One pastor told me how he hid in the field outside his village watching a mob burn down his church and destroy the shops of Christians. Why? It was rumored that a Christian child had torn off a page of the Koran and written on it. As I preached, I wept for those men. I would soon fly back to American affluence and indifference. Those men would face persecution from those who pervert anger into a religious virtue.

On September 11th I saw something I had seen before: Islamic anger for God. I know, many Muslims honestly repudiate terrorism. Any bigoted reprisal against our American Muslim neighbors is neither just nor civil. Americans recognize each other's civil rights. We also recognize that the terrorists are extremists. But what are they taking to an extreme? Is it not Islamic jihad, this anger for God? I've met Christian extremists too, like those missionaries and pastors in Pakistan. What do they take to an extreme? The love of God. They go to the extreme of denying themselves to minister aid to the needy and to declare that *God is love* (1 John 4:8). Maybe being an extremist is not so bad. Maybe the issue is what is being taken to an extreme.

Many Muslims in the world applaud terrorist extremists as heroes of Islam. Religious extremists are not applauded in America. We value pluralism, tolerance, diversity. As men relating to men, such civil values are commendable. But should men relate to God according to these values? Have we transformed civil values into religious values? Has religious discernment been sacrificed on the altar of tolerance? Many relegate religion to the realm of the private, the subjective, the sentimental. The ecumenical moderate says religion is religion is religion, and as long as you are sincere, you will find your own way to God. But if religious sincerity is the measure, what better example is there than that of the terrorists on September 11th? Sincerity cannot be the measure. What they did was wrong! Right? But, as we rightly judge them to be wrong, we are appealing to an objective moral standard of right and wrong. Men can be sincerely wrong. Men can sincerely believe religious lies.

Osama bin Ladin has not only challenged America politically and militarily, but religiously as well. Americans need to be religiously discerning. Jesus says, *Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide, and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and many are those who enter by it. For the gate is small, and the way is narrow that leads to life, and few are those who find it. Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits.* (Matthew 7:13-16a)

Compare the fruit of Mohammed's teachings to Jesus' teachings. On the broad way there are

false religions which lead to eternal destruction. But the way to life is narrow and entered into by faith in Jesus Christ. *I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.* (John 14:6) Salvation only through Jesus? A bit extreme? I confess. I am a religious extremist. But what is so bad about taking the love of God to an extreme?

I hope to return to Pakistan. I pray for my friends there. I pray for my enemies as well. I hope that in the midst of the anguish of war that many, in Pakistan and in America, will become religious extremists by faith in Christ and thus find that narrow way that leads to life. (October 9, 2001)

Alan Dunn, Pastor. Grace Covenant Baptist Church, 35 Court Street, Flemington, NJ 08822  
(908) 996-7654.

Our society extols religious tolerance moderation.

Islam, in its fullness, produces a theocracy: a society submitted (Islam means "submit") to Islamic law and its deity. In the subcontinent, we see Islam as it really is: a theocracy. Islam puts on a different face when it turns West. Once embedded in America's pluralistic tolerant society, the angry impulse of Islam is moderated. America is not a theocracy. As I said, "American" and "Christian" are not synonyms. We must make that distinction. The events of September 11th require us to make other distinctions as well.

"Jihad" is redefined as the struggle to live in obedience to the Islamic code. But Islam of necessity must commandeer all of culture into submission. That is the eschatological orientation of Islam. Islam is oriented to become a theocracy by the moral and religious by a more liberal Islam is yet undeveloped for its design is to become a theocracy. not the same as that evidenced in a theocracy. I wince when I hear President Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair describe Islam as "a religion of peace"; a religion which "teaches love". They are commendable statesmen, but incompetent theologians. The microphone passes to the ecumenical religionist. We all worship the same God, they say. Religion is religion is religion and as long as we're told that the terrorists are extremists. What are they taking to an extreme? Anger for God. I listen to the moderate Muslims who honestly denounce the terrorist attacks of September 11th. But I wonder whether they, like my moderate "Christian" neighbors, have not read their own Koran. Many professed Christians are also ignorant of the Bible. The moderates would have us think that we all worship the same God; that there are many ways to God; that religion is religion is religion. We're told that the only thing that matters is religious sincerity. If you're sincere, your religion is as good as the next guy's and you can keep your religion to yourself, thank you very much. But if sincerity is

In Peshawar, I bought my young son a stuffed mongoose wrapped in mortal combat with a stuffed cobra. He loved it - was applauded in "show and tell". It reminded me of the violence of Peshawar. The next day, six people were shot down in a drive by assault right outside the shop where I bought that gift. It's war. Life goes on.