
Terrorism And The Whole Armor Of God

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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As the United States prepares to mark the fifth year after September 11, 2001, I notice all sorts of television specials scheduled. There are documentaries and reports on Osama bin Laden. One well known television channel is planning simply to re-broadcast the entire twelve-hour footage of their September 11, 2001 broadcast, so that folks can re-live the horrible and confounding drama of that day, minute by minute. The day still astounds and scares us.

Unfortunately, popular sentiment seems simply to want to be titillated again by the emotional and physical horror, or to have shallow prejudices bolstered again. Against those elements, I am more deeply impressed by those trying to understand, trying to clarify, and trying to contribute something benevolent and beneficial in a world struggling with the threat of terrorism. Toward that end, I highly recommend the book *The Looming Tower: Al-Qaeda and the Road to 9/11*, by Lawrence Wright. Reading that book is a worthy way to mark the anniversary of a dreadful event.

As Wright tells the remarkable story, one of the heroes is the American Muslim, Ali Soufan, who was born in Lebanon. Soufan "knew what it was like to live in lawlessness and chaos, to see cities destroyed. His family fled to America during the civil war, and he loved America because it allowed him to dream. In return, America embraced him. His experience was completely the opposite to that of the alienated Muslims in the West who had turned to Islamism as a way of finding an identity. He never personally experienced prejudice because he was an Arab or a Muslim; on the contrary, he was elected president of his student body and presented with many academic awards, he had developed a fascination with the American Constitution, and like many naturalized citizens, he had a feeling of indebtedness for the new life he had been given. He thought the chances that a Muslim American scholar of Arab extraction would be hired by the FBI were laughably remote," (pages 321-322).

But Soufan was called into the FBI, and he turned out to be a key interrogator of one of the Al Qaeda operatives, Abu Jandal. Apparently, Abu Jandal "was confounded by Soufan and what he represented: a Muslim who could argue religion with him, who was in the FBI, who loved America. [Abu Jandal] quickly consumed the history that Soufan gave him and was shocked to learn of the American Revolution and the passionate struggle against tyranny that was woven into the American heritage. His worldview depended on the assumption that the United States was the wellspring of evil in the world" (pages 364-365).

Thus, it is a Lebanon-born Muslim who is able to teach someone the heritage of the United States of America, and it is he who is the example of the best of America's values. His example is a critical lesson for the rest of us. How can we use the best of America to defeat terrorism?

Two Sundays ago, I preached on the passage of Ephesians which admonishes us to take up the "whole armor of God" (Ephesians 6: 10-20). I point out again that this armor, and this equipment of God, is not what we usually consider as military might. "I long for us Christians to use the spiritual equipment that God has given us. If we want to enjoy security and peace, and order and civilization, we must stand with something else besides mighty horses and high tech chariots. We must stand with the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the word-that mighty and loving and peace-giving word-of God" (from the sermon of August 27, 2006).

The war against terrorism, too, is not a war against flesh and blood. Weapons and violence may win small battles. But if our response is only imperialist arrogance, or pugnaciousness, and or naïve brawn, then we have lost the war. The enemy of terrorism is order and civilization; thus, the way to defeat terrorism is by living out those values which lead to order and civilization.

Consider the classical values of the Christian faith: prudence, temperance, fortitude, and justice. They are the cardinal virtues in the Christian faith (alongside the three theological virtues: faith, hope, and love), and they merit our attention more than ever. The folks who call into talk shows with the flippant advice "why don't we just send in our fighter plans and blow up [insert country here]" are the most naïve. The western world, and the Christian world (and, indeed, the Muslim and Jewish worlds, too), should be waging not violence, but benevolence. The best tools for that work are truth, righteousness, and peace. Ultimately, benevolence defeats violence in the commonwealth of God.

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