

ESSAYS

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A Critique of Islamic Jihad

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PART 1

I come from a typical Christian (Ilonggo) Visayan family that migrated to Mindanao in the early 1900s for economic reasons, although I myself have been born and raised in Manila. I have never harbored any ill-feeling or bias against Muslims until the following events occurred. One, my aunt got kidnapped by Moros. My family had to pay a huge amount of ransom in order to secure her release. Two, the newly married wife of a cousin also got kidnapped. Something went wrong, and her Moro kidnappers shot her dead. This young woman was idealistic, bright, pretty, a professional, and totally innocent. Even as I write these words, my pen trembles at the memory of the Moros' abominable deed.

Several years passed, and an uncle gave me an English translation of the Koran. I eagerly read and studied it for I wanted to understand Islam. I was shocked. Having read the Koran, and being rooted in the New Testament in my religious beliefs, I am pleasantly stunned at the truth and beauty of many of the Koran's passages. I am also frankly appalled and horrified at the implications of jihad and the angry passages of the Koran. In the following paragraphs, I shall present historical facts, basic doctrines of the world's major religions, and citations from sacred scriptures. As much as possible, in order to avoid being bogged down in the complexities and complications that theological debates are notorious for, I shall stick to the basic representative sacred scriptures of each major world religion. Discussions and conclusions shall also be presented based on the above, but the reader should make his or her own conclusions. These two essays are written in a circular manner, and so the reader ideally has to read quite a bit into the essays before the conclusions punch in. It is well known that the Asian mind, of which yours truly is an example, typically thinks in circles. I am also assuming that you the reader are Christian and that you have access to a Bible so that you can check out the passages that I shall cite, in case you are interested, in order to verify the truth; and that you do not have a Koran. However, you can by all means read this material even without a Bible; in which case just ignore the Biblical references cited in the parentheses.

The Koran, the Muslim Holy Scripture (Quran or Recitation),

begins each chapter (sura) with the words "In the name of God (Allah), the compassionate, the merciful..."¹ No other statement is repeated more often in the Koran. Muslim theologians have been discussing the Koran for centuries, and typically many Islamic theological theses exist, but off hand, as an outsider who has read the Koran for the first time and who has not been influenced by any Muslim theologian and his particular interpretation, my first impression is this. To surrender (Islam) to the will of God, who is compassionate and merciful, a Muslim (person surrendering to God) should be compassionate and merciful. In my disinterested and detached point of view, this is the main theological thesis of Islam. It says so in the beginning of every chapter in the Koran.

To get a flavor of the truth and beauty of many of the Koran's passages, listen to its first chapter, called the Exordium (Al-Fatiha): "In the name of God the Compassionate the Merciful, Praise be to God, Lord of Creation, the Compassionate, the Merciful, King of Judgment day! You alone we worship, and to You alone we pray for help. Guide us to the straight path, the path of those whom You have favored, not of those who have incurred Your wrath, nor of those who have gone astray."

The Koran was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (the highly praised one), starting about 610 CE until his death in 632 CE in a series of visual and/or auditory mystical experiences first mediated by Jibril (the Archangel Gabriel in Christianity). Later God Himself spoke. An auditory revelation was then rendered by Muhammad into a recitation (Quran) of God's word. These recitations were collected into the Quran in about 650 CE (during the time of the 3rd Caliph Uthman).² In reading the Koran, one can clearly perceive what Muhammad must have surely sensed: overwhelming wonder, awe, and gratitude at the greatness and graciousness of God in the always ongoing creation process. All God has to say is "Be," and it is.

So why is it possible for an Islamic group to kidnap, rape, kill, and desecrate in the name of religion? Is this the will of God?

The answer lies in the concept of "jihad" (fighting or struggle). Jihad is an important Islamic doctrine that allows Muslims to fight the enemies of the faith, both humans and one's own psyche.² Physical violence to a person is theologically acceptable if done in "jihad". The trouble is that "jihad" is a term that can be interpreted in many ways.

Is jihad compatible with peace (which follows from compassion and mercy)? Yes! Peace and violence both exist in Islamic

theology, and peace (the favorite greeting in Islamic paradise) prevails in most cases, but violence (in jihad) is allowable in certain circumstances.

Thus, the concepts of peace and violence in Islam are said to be in "tension" (a favorite word of Biblical exegetes).

Admittedly, the above statements may sound offensive. So will the statements that will follow. Sometimes, truth offends, but this jihad concept has to be faced squarely and honestly, and pretending that it does not exist because one is offended or might offend others is folly.

And Islamic jihad may sound offensive to Christian ears. Muhammad was a prophet and a mystic, but he was also a political and military leader, in the tradition of Old Testament prophets. Muhammad consistently used armed forces in order to achieve his ends. The following paragraphs are a no-holds barred, distressing, unpleasant, probably offensive, but necessary summary of the violence of Islamic jihad in human history. We ought to learn from history. The paragraphs certainly are not meant to degrade, demean, belittle, or insult the main theological message of Muhammad, which is Islam - to gratefully submit to God's will. With respect to submission to God's will, Islam and Christianity are in complete harmony. Let the Christian reader be reminded of the Lord's prayer taught to us by the immanent God incarnate that goes "...Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Mt 6:10). And who can forget such a vigorously expressed message by Christ that "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father." (See Mt 7:21 and also Lk 6:46, Mt 26:39, 42, Mk 14:36, Lk 22:42, Jn 6:38, Heb 10:7-10, and so on.) In addition, submitting oneself to the will of God essentially also means trusting in His gracious will. Right in its first chapter (see above), the Koran announces that those who are on the straight path are on it by God's grace or favor. From this angle, Islam and Christianity are again in complete harmony. A central Christian doctrine is salvation by God's grace. (See Mt 11:25-26, 16:13-17, Jn 1:16-17, Rom 3:24, 5:15-21, 11:5-6, 1 Cor 12:3-6, Gal 1:15, Eph 2:5-10, 2 Tim 1:9, Tit 3:4-7, Jm 4:6-7, 1 Pet 5:5, and so on.) The New Testament letters, inspired by God's Holy Spirit, almost all begin and end with the word grace, as though the Spirit is making sure that we never forget this: that it is God who does the saving, not you, and don't you forget that!

Islam was firmly established in 630 CE at the capture of Mecca after years of military campaigns that included massacres and

enslavement of opposing peoples including Jewish tribes. [622 CE - the migration of Muhammad and the first Muslims from Mecca to Medina (hiraj) occasioned by political pressure and threats by non-Muslim Arabs, the beginning of the Islamic era; 624 CE - defeat of the Quraysh tribe, Muhammad's own Arabic tribe; 626 CE - defeat of the Jewish al-Nadhir tribe; 627 CE - successful defense of Medina from attacking Meccan forces in the famed War of the Ditch; 627 CE - Jewish tribe of Qurayza massacred, with 800 men beheaded and women and children enslaved; 629 CE - Khaybar Jews massacred; 630 CE - Mecca taken and converted to Islam.] 1,2,3 Even as early as this time, Islamic jihad had the propensity to behead the men (the Koran recommends beheading enemies in the battlefield) and enslave the women and children of enemy cultures (the Koran presupposes the legitimacy of taking captives and hostages and enslaving them, and it also mentions holding captives for ransom), and massacres were common.

Islam spread throughout the Middle East and North Africa through the violence of military conquest. After successfully vanquishing the North African tribes, Arab Muslim forces under the Umayyad Caliphate in 711 CE subjugated most of Christian Iberia (the territory of present-day Spain and Portugal) then under the Germanic Visigoths.³ Their expansion into northwestern Europe was halted in Poitiers France in 732 CE upon their defeat in battle by the Christianized Franks under Charles Martel.³ By 715 CE, other Umayyad Caliphate forces were on their way to an invasion of India.^{2,3} Successive waves of Muslim invasions followed. By 1027 CE, the Indian province of Punjab was under Islamic rule.³ The most well-known Islamic empire in India was the Mughal Empire (1526 - 1761 CE).³ In 1453 CE, the spiritual center of Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Constantinople, was captured by the Muslim Ottoman Turks.³ The forcible subjugation of the Balkan Christians soon followed (the Greeks, Serbs, Bulgarians, Macedonians, Montenegrins, Albanians, Romanians, Hungarians, and so on). The westward expansion of the Turks was stopped only at the gates of Vienna Austria in 1529 CE.³ Only in Indonesia and Malaysia was the spread of Islam largely peaceful, but it was still significantly helped by Muslim states.

Everywhere the Muslims went they established theocracies, societies that did not separate religion and state. Islam is the state religion. Shariah ("oasis, source of water",⁴ Islamic laws based mainly on the Koran and Hadith, the sayings of Muhammad) reigns across the land.

Conversion to Islam in conquered territories followed quickly.^{2,3}

People of the Book (Ahl Al-Kitab) - Christians and Jews whose religion was based on sacred writings - were required to pay a per capita tax (Jizya) in order to continue existing as protected peoples (dhimmis) under the "House of Islam" (Dar al-Islam). Thus, the only way to prevent the impoverishment of your family was to convert to Islam. Little choice. Other unbelievers (not of the Book) had no choice at all. Convert to Islam or die. Later, the status of people of the Book was extended to Zoroastrians and Hindus. The use of state coercion was (is) normal in the propagation of Islam.

Shariah itself was designed to push unbelievers into converting to Islam.^{2,3} The building of new churches or worship places of non-Islamic religions was prohibited. A Muslim who converted to another religion was to be executed for apostasy. Slavery was allowed, and the Muslims preferentially captured and enslaved non-Muslims ("kidnapped" in modern vocabulary). Thus, a person can prevent his enslavement by converting to Islam. A man of the People of the Book can marry a Muslim woman, but only if he converts to Islam, and their children must be raised as Muslims. A woman of the People of the Book can marry a Muslim man and retain her faith, but their children must be raised as Muslims. The Koran in many ways exhorts believers to spread Islam, and history has shown that many serious Muslims have tended to use coercive means in following such exhortations rather than the one Koranic passage, that says "there is no compulsion in religion," that most clearly expresses religious tolerance.

In the Islamic state under Shariah, there is official state discrimination and even persecution of non-Islamic religions, designed to pressure people into converting to Islam. This was true in the past and may still be true today. Allowing traditional Shariah to prevail unmodified and unchecked over parts of Mindanao will lead to the discrimination of Christian families who choose not to convert to Islam. Much as it feels uncomfortable and disturbing, we really have to seriously consider this theory, which is based on Islamic history itself.

The typical Christian reader at this point probably will have no idea of what the above paragraphs fully mean. This is completely understandable because most Christians are only familiar with the New Testament, which never mentions converting people to Christianity by fear or force. However, the concept of coercive religious conversion does occur in the Old Testament: "And many of the peoples of the land embraced Judaism, for they were seized with a fear of the Jews (Es 8:17)." The Koran is similar to the Old Testament in that it does not hesitate to talk about

violence. This really sounds disturbing, but an extremely fundamentalist believer can always choose to interpret some passages from the Koran and the Old Testament as teaching that might is right. If you are a Christian who has a Bible somewhere around the house but does not have a Koran, and you would like to get an idea of the use of fear and force in the propagation of religion, you can check out passages from the Old Testament that talk about violence. It's hard not to miss them because there are lots of them. Being a Christian myself, who considers the Old Testament as divinely inspired, I find myself becoming nervous as I write these words, but more on this later. Just keep on reading.

Jihad to a large extent has determined the world's religious map. Until the present, many Muslim groups, often labeled as "fundamentalist" or "extremist", still adhere to jihad as a means to propagate religion. However, if one reads history well, jihad has been the legitimate way of propagating Islam! The Koran is littered with passages referring to jihad, and there is even a passage that exhorts believers to make war until God's religion reigns supreme. Muhammad himself was not averse to waging wars in order to propagate religion. Jihad is a very important doctrine in Islam and we must face it squarely and honestly. We must not sidestep the concept of jihad just because we find its violence offensive, nor tolerate its more violent forms ("jihad of the sword") for the sake of "freedom of religion" or "autonomy of the Muslim peoples" or "Muslim-Christian dialogue and reconciliation," or for the sake of a dishonorable, hypocritical, ephemeral, and fake "peace."

Christians indeed should regard peaceful Muslims as brethren inasmuch as both Christianity and Islam profess the Faith of Abraham in the same monotheistic God. There are many teachings common to both the Koran and the Bible. The Koran, in harmony with the Jewish and Christian Decalogue or 10 Commandments, teaches the believer not to steal, commit adultery, or bear false witness, and to be kind to one's parents and to pray on the Sabbath (Friday in Islam). Killing a human being (without a just cause) is like killing the whole of humanity; saving a human life is like saving the rest of humanity. Female infanticide, which the pre-Islamic Arabs often practiced, is especially condemned. Faith in God and His prophet Muhammad, prayer, alms-giving, and fasting are also emphasized, and these have become pillars of Islam, along with pilgrimage to the Sacred Mosque that contains the black stone (Kaba) in Mecca. Both Muslims and Christians should listen to the following Koranic teachings: Act in justice; do not walk proudly on earth; do not defame, backbite, mock, spy on one another; avoid immoderate

suspicion, avoid excessive drinking and gambling, avoid usury; be fair ("Give full measure, when you measure, and weigh them on even scales. That is fair...") in your business dealings; take joy in your wives and children. On the other hand, allowing Muslim individuals, sects, and organizations that adhere to violent jihad to freely spread their teachings is something else. One cannot give freedom to a thought-system (religion or ideology) that is already overtly violent to freely propagate itself. To tolerate freedom of violence is an absurdity and the folly of follies. The ancient Israelites knew this well, as described in the Old Testament, and the world once again learned this lesson in World War II when the violent ideology of Nazism had to be stopped. The lessons of Nazism and Stalinism should not be conveniently forgotten.

To a Christian, the normal historical method by which Islam propagated, namely through a combination of jihad in order to politically control a territory and Shariah in order to pressure the people of a politically controlled territory to embrace Islam, is almost incomprehensible. It does not even cross the ordinary Christian's mind. This is because Christianity is normally spread through missionary work, which places emphasis on the persuasion of the individual by evangelization. In Christian conversion, there is normally no state coercion involved and there is individual freedom of choice.

Obviously, this combination of jihad and Shariah is a very effective method. For example, in less than a hundred years after the establishment of Islam in Mecca, Islam had already spread throughout the Middle East, North Africa, and most of the Iberian peninsula. The only other thought-system to spread even faster is Marxism in the 20th century. ³ In fact, Marxism employed the very same method of Islam. The Red Army militarily conquered Czarist Russia and Eastern Europe, and Marxism was made into the official state ideology, taught in schools and disseminated in the mass media. Political deviants (the equivalent of heretics in religion) were imprisoned, banished, or executed. In Asia (China, Mongolia, Vietnam, Cambodia), Marxist armies did the same thing. Thus, the combination of military conquest and subsequent state coercion must be the fastest way to spread a thought-system (a religion or ideology).

It is interesting to note that the Spaniards, who were controlled or strongly influenced by the Islamic state, also employed the same method of military conquest and subsequent state coercion in the 1500s to the 1800s in the Americas and the Philippines. (Consider this traditional picture. On one side is a group of Spanish soldiers armed with muskets and Spanish priests armed

with crosses. On the other side is a group of overwhelmed natives being baptized by the priests. Conversion comes from the barrel of a gun.) Consequently, Roman Rite Catholic Christianity suddenly became the most widespread religion on earth. As discussed below, this is not a traditional way by which Christianity is propagated, but is a phenomenon directly related to the Muslim conquest of Iberia.

Many of the troubles of the world today stem from the initial Muslim jihad conquests. Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan are still in conflict. This is no small matter since both sides may possibly have nuclear weapons.

Balkan Christians (Serbs, Greeks, Bulgarians, and so on), who suffered especially so under Turkish Islamic rule, have demonstrated time and time again that they have long cultural memories and still resent the Muslim groups planted by the Ottoman Empire. These Eastern Orthodox Christians tend to see these Muslim groups left behind by the retreating Ottomans as "Turks."

The most abominable Turkish practice was the *desvirme* system (from the 14th to the 17th century CE).³ Every 5 years, one out of four boys of Balkan Christian families aged between 10 and 20 years was legally kidnapped, brought to Istanbul (formerly Constantinople), and forcibly converted to Islam. Most were trained to do government administrative work. Some were made into elite soldiers of the Sultan in the Janissary corps. These Janissaries were an elite infantry unit armed with muskets and were the most effective fighting arm of the Turkish army. Many were sent back to the Balkans to maintain Turkish military rule. Your own apostate son was sent back to beat you to submission. That must have hurt to the nth degree. Besides this, Christian girls were often taken to the Sultan's harem. Frankly, this was outright slavery of the Christian peoples. Justice has never been done for the Serbs, Greeks, and other Balkan peoples for the centuries they suffered Turkish depredation. Until the present, the Serbs vent their anger on the Muslim Albanians and Bosnians who were originally Christian. The Serbs often contemptuously call them "Turks". The Western powers, epitomized by the Americans and the English, should try to be aware of this historical background when dealing with Serbs, Bulgarians, Greeks, and even Russians who more than any other nation caused the fall of the Turkish Ottoman Empire.

Moreover, the Turks caused one of the greatest genocides of history.³ In 1915, irked by the Christian Armenians within the Ottoman Empire, the Turks intentionally deported the whole

population of Turkish Armenia numbering 1,750,000 to Syria and Mesopotamia, to mainly desert areas in which there was little hope of survival. In this manner, 600,000 Armenians died, a stunning 1/3 of the whole Armenian population. This horrific "final solution" to the Christian Armenian "problem" was consciously imitated by the Nazis one generation later in response to the Jewish "problem." If you can't convert them, kill them. Justice has never been done for the Armenians either, and as a people to this day, they hate the Turks, possibly even more than the Greeks, Serbs, and Bulgarians (who the Turks at least did not try to kill off). More recently, the Muslim Indonesians may have tried to do the same to Christian East Timor, and they have partly succeeded. Some estimates claim that at least 200,000 East Timorese have died since the 1976 Indonesian invasion until the present (2000 CE) as a direct result of Indonesian politico-economic-military action. We should shudder to think what might have happened had the Australians, who sent an armed force with U.N. approval to Timor in 1999 in order to stop the killings, not acted in time or, worse, at all.

The Balkan and Caucasus peoples were much helped morally and even militarily by their Russian Orthodox co-religionist brethren who waged a succession of wars against the Ottoman Turks for 400 years,³ nibbling away at the Turkish Empire and draining its resources over the centuries. The Russian rulers adopted the title of "Czar", a transliteration of the Roman "Caesar", considering themselves as the successors to the Caesars' throne in Constantinople. The Russians' golden goal was the recapture of Constantinople, the seat of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. In a military campaign from 1912 to 1913, a Balkan alliance of Serbs, Bulgarians, Greeks, and Montenegrins, helped by the Russians, expelled the Turks from all of Europe except for a strip of land surrounding Constantinople.³ In fact, one of Russia's overt aims during World War I was the recapture of Constantinople.³ Not surprisingly, the Serbs and the Bulgarians tend to see the Russians as liberators, something the Americans do not seem to comprehend. The Americans, with a typically chauvinistic and imperialistic attitude, tend to just think of incorporating these Balkan groups into their political and economic sphere of influence away from their traditional enemies, the Russians.

Until now, in the back of the heads of Eastern Orthodox Christians (which include most of the Balkan and Caucasus peoples and the Russians) is the fact that their spiritual center, Constantinople (now Turkish Istanbul), is in the hands of their historical enemy, the Muslim Turks. If you are Catholic, do not laugh at this. Rome itself was briefly occupied by Muslim Saracens (probably a combination of Turks and Arabs), who desecrated many of the sacred Christian places, in 846 CE, and if

they were not driven off by the Italians and had permanently occupied Rome, you would know how the Eastern Orthodox Christians feel. The taking of Constantinople was by violent military conquest, and not through legal negotiation. Suppose that Jews took Mecca, the spiritual center of Islam, by force of arms today. Is their continuing occupation of Mecca 600 years into the future in 2600 CE legitimate? Likewise, the Muslim Turks took Constantinople by force of arms in 1453 CE, almost 600 years ago. Is the present day Turkish occupation of Constantinople legitimate? Logically, if one says "no" to the first question, one has to say "no" to the second question as well. It is highly probable that if another major war were to erupt between Turkey and Russia (or any other predominantly Eastern Orthodox Christian country), Constantinople will once again be a political issue and a military objective.

Moreover, if you are Protestant, a permanent Islamic occupation of 9th century Rome 700 years before the Reformation in the 16th century is even less cause for laughter. Missionaries based in Rome evangelized most of Europe, and it follows that a permanent Islamic occupation of Rome at such early stage would have warped Christian history so much that Protestantism most likely would never have come to existence. Islamic jihad and Shariah probably would have reduced Christendom to a few isolated communities barely eking out a survival amidst Islamic theocracies. This can still happen if a super extremist Islamic sect with a Kharijite or Assassin-like theology (discussed below) were to take over the world. History has already given us little bits of warning, and therefore be warned should the big one approach.

After waging the violent reconquista (reconquest) against the Muslim Moors for 700 years (they completely succeeded in driving out the Moors in 1492 CE with the recapture of Grenada), the Spaniards had become very anti-Islamic. In the Philippines, they once again met their old enemies, the Muslims, whom they called Moros from the word "Moors." And so the trouble began here in the Philippines. The Spaniards passed on their biases to their Christian converts who also learned to call the Muslims Moros (as though Filipino Muslims are Arabic Moors!). This bias is alive and well today, and causing trouble. Some Filipino Muslims have done their share of promoting this bias by waging jihad on Christians. But remember, it was in jihad that the Moors conquered Spain, and if we are to be truly truthful, that started the whole chain of events that troubles Mindanao today.

You see, in the course of the reconquista, the Spaniards not only had to develop the strongest military force during their time (in order to be able to drive away the highly civilized Moors), but

had also become economically impoverished. The lure of economic gains plus the strongest military in the world naturally led them to conquer Latin America and the Philippines. Furthermore, they were strongly influenced by the Islamic theocratic state in which they lived in or were warring with for 700 years, and they adopted it themselves. The Spaniards knew no other state but the theocracy for 700 years. There was no question of the separation of Church and State in Latin America and the Philippines. The Spaniards used the Islamic method of religious propagation - a combination of military conquest and subsequent state coercion. There is little doubt that if the theocratic and anti-Islamic Spaniards had also conquered the territory of present-day Indonesia and Malaysia (instead of the more liberal Dutch and English), these would have been forced into Catholic Christianity too. As a corollary, if the Dutch and English had experienced Islamic jihad and the Islamic theocratic state with its Shariah laws in their own countries, Indonesia and Malaysia would probably have experienced a Protestant form of conquista/jihad and Shariah, and would probably have been converted to Protestant Christianity in short order.

Both Islamic jihad and the Spanish conquests for God and King explicitly had as their primary objective God first, or religious propagation, although economic and political gains were undeniably also of great importance. In contrast, colonization by the English and Dutch seemed to have been aimed primarily for secular economic and political gains, although Christian missionaries also went along the colonizers in order to evangelize.

In Spain itself, the state quickly expelled Muslims and Jews (who were seen as allies of the Muslims) by the thousands. Near the end of the reconquista period in 1478 CE, the Spanish state started to use the terrifying weapon of the "Inquisition" (the benign meaning of which is "investigate" or "inquire into", but in actuality consisted of torture of person and confiscation of property for heretics) on the Muslims and Jews who stayed behind in Christian territory.^{2,3} The Spanish Inquisition was a very cruel and very effective method to force the Muslims and Jews to convert to Christianity (apparently even more effective than Shariah in forcing unbelievers to embrace Islam). Soon there were none left in Spain. Interestingly, the Pope Sixtus IV himself, upon hearing of its malignant cruelty, tried to curb the excesses of the Spanish Inquisition, but the Spanish state defied him in this.² But then again, after the Spaniards had struggled mightily for more than 700 years to repel the Muslim Arabs, undeniably a valiant saga of epic proportions, no person is in the proper position to judge them for using extremist tactics in

claiming Spain back for Christendom. A theologian sympathetic to the Spaniards can say that judgement belongs to the Lord (see Mt 7:1-2, Lk 6:37, Rom 2:1, 1 Cor 4:4, Jam 2:13, and so on).

All these sound offensive to Muslim and even Christian ears, but if we are to truly comprehend the Mindanao religious problem, the concept of jihad has to be faced. Pretending that it does not exist is folly. If the Moors had never conquered Spain in jihad, then Spain in all probability would have remained an innocuous aggregation of Latinized Iberian tribes instead of exploding into the Americas and Asia 800 years later as one of the most potent religious-political power the world has ever known bent on their own type of jihad - to conquer for God and King.

Muslims have claimed that Christianity is a foreign religion in Southeast Asia. But so is Islam. The first major world religion to come to our shores is Buddhism. Even our vocabulary is replete with Buddhist/Hindu word-concepts (hari-king, dukha-suffering, guro-teacher, gaba-karma). The polite Filipino habit of bowing and clasping his or her hands in front as if in prayer (tabi-tabi in Ilonggo) while passing in between an audience and the show that it is watching (nowadays usually on television) is very Buddhist. The Borobudur, the greatest Buddhist monument in the world is in Muslim Indonesia, built by the Sri-Visayans about 778-850 CE.^{2,3} The Buddhist Sri-Visayans flourished from the 7th to the 13th century CE.³ Its successor empire, the Java and Bali based Majapahit empire (which was also Hindu influenced), arose in the 13th century and lasted until the 15th century when it eventually lost out to Muslim states.³ The name "Visaya" comes from the Sri-Visaya empire. "Sri" is merely an Indian honorific. Present-day Visayans are most likely descendants of Sri-Visayan citizens who were left behind and isolated after the dissolution of the empire.

At the time of the Spanish arrival to our shores, Islam was already well established and was spreading fast. Indeed, the capital of present-day Philippines, Manila, was ruled by the Muslim Rajah Soliman, a son-in-law of the Sultan of Borneo. Soliman was named after Suleyman, the magnificent Kurdish-Turkic ruler who made mincemeat out of the Christian crusaders. The Spanish conquistador, Miguel Lopez de Legaspi defeated Soliman in battle in May 19, 1571, thus taking Manila by force. It is safe to say that if the Spaniards did not arrive, all Filipinos would be Muslims, like the Malays of Indonesia and Malaysia. In fact, there would never have been any "Philippines". We probably would have formed nation-states separately based on tribal affiliations (as the Europeans did) or joined partly or wholly

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with other Malays to the South.

It is so obvious that a Federal Philippines (in a political-economic-linguistic context, but not in a religious context that does not separate religion and state and which would just create more trouble) would be a good "correction" to the artificial boundaries set up by the Spanish colonialists; and would go a long way to satisfy the cultural aspirations of the different Filipino ethno-linguistic groups (including the predominantly Muslim culture groups), and to promote the economic self-reliance of the peripheral regions.

The theory that we should have been all Muslims without Spanish colonialism is the bone of contention of the Filipino tribes who remained Muslim (such as the Maranaos, Maguindanaos, Tausugs, Yakans, Bajaos, and so on, who were never completely conquered by the Spaniards). However, as stated above, the Buddhists were clearly here first. If Muslim Indian and Arabic traders did not arrive, we would all be Buddhists (like most of mainland Southeast Asia) or Hindus (as the Bali-Indonesians still are, partly protected as they are by the island nature of their territory).

Thus, if we are to follow the logic of "the first is to be followed", we should all be Buddhists. If not Hindus. Interesting, isn't it?

Karma ("something that is done" or "deed" or "action") is one of the central doctrines of Hinduism-Buddhism-Jainism, and what it says is that every event is both a cause and an effect, and thus every act or thought has consequences which themselves have consequences. The whole gamut of life and history is one most complicated web of interlinked causes and consequences.¹³ "He who digs a pit falls into it; and a stone comes back upon him who rolls it" (Prv 26:27, Ps: 7:16-17, 35:8, 57:7, Ec 10:8-9, and so on) is how the Bible succinctly puts it. If we use the karma concept of some of our Buddhist ancestors (and most or all Filipinos surely have at least one, given the widespread extent and the long history of the Sri-Visaya in Southeast Asia), a predominantly Christian Philippines is the karma (gaba in Visaya) reaped by Islamic jihad in the Iberian peninsula 1300 years ago.

Listen to this thesis. If a concept does not exist, it cannot be used.

In the uniquely Christian New Testament, there is no instance of Christian violence with the sole exception of the Apostle Peter, acting in an understandably human manner, cutting off the right

ear of one of those about to arrest Jesus, for which he was actually rebuked by Jesus. Jesus then went on to miraculously heal the cut ear. This incident is a clear statement by Jesus Christ that one cannot do violence in His name. A Christian does not go to heaven or become a martyr by killing somebody. If a Christian does violence to another human being, he does it in self-defense, for the sake of the nation, for the masses, in the name of justice, for liberty, freedom, and democracy, for independence and autonomy, as part of police or military work, and so on, but never in the name of Christ.

No one goes to heaven for the reason that he has killed another human being. There is no real Christian theological equivalent to the Islamic jihad. If one studies the great violent predominantly religious movements of Christian history, they all occurred under the shadow of an actual Islamic jihad. As mentioned, Spanish conquests followed their liberation from Islamic invasion and threats. The Christian crusades (1095 to 1270 CE) ³, with the motto of "God wills it!", were aimed specifically to establish routes to and retake Jerusalem from conquering Muslim Turks. Even the violent Russian expansion, starting in the 16th century, into one of the greatest land empires of history was justified as the "gathering of Russian lands",³ which started partly as a reaction to the power of invading Muslim Turkish tribes in the Caucasus and Central Asia, and was intrinsically linked to the Christian Orthodox dream of recapturing Constantinople back from the Turks. (This might account for much of the popularity in Russia of the ongoing war against the Muslim Chechens in the Caucasus; the Chechens used to be part of the Turkish Ottoman empire. Czarina Catherine the Great has been reported to have boasted of her soldiers going off to war against the Turks with smiles on their faces.)

One possible exception is the bloody Thirty Years war of Europe (1618 - 1648 CE) fought between Catholics and Protestants, ³ but this seems to have been as much of a political power struggle between secular European states trying to secure their national identities as much as a religious war. It is also interesting to note that the religious wars waged on behalf of Christianity mentioned in the above paragraph all occurred during historical times when church and state were not separate; and that during its first 300 years and last 300 years when Christianity was (is) mostly separated from the state, there has not been any major war waged explicitly for the propagation of Christianity. Today, any Christian who is presented with the facts of the Thirty Years war can easily state that it was an unChristian war. In keeping with the New Testament teachings on peace, many Christians now in fact characteristically denounce the

Crusades or the Spanish Sword and Cross conquests as unChristian. On the other hand, one would be hard pressed to find in the literature of a Muslim theologian a declaration of the numerous jihad wars of Muslim expansion as unIslamic. The Koran even refers to some of the early Islamic wars, including to the ones wherein Arabic Jews were crushed militarily.

Part 2 >>

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A Critique of Islamic Jihad

by jed pensar

PART 2

So far all bad and offensive news. I apologize for any hurt feelings, but then again, to pretend that jihad does not exist is folly. Jihad has already caused a lot of trouble, is presently causing much trouble, and will no doubt cause more trouble in the future.

Listen to another thesis. If a concept exists, it can be used.

Christians may ignore "jihad" because it sounds offensive to Christian ears, but Muslims cannot do so because it is part and parcel of Islamic theology. The Koran is littered with references to jihad. Muhammad himself led the Muslims in numerous wars. The very boundaries of Islam in the world today have been determined to a large extent by jihad. Indeed, the fact that Islam is so widespread may be due largely to successful military jihad in the past. Jihad is a way to propagate the Islamic religion.

How then does jihad jive with compassion, mercy, and peace?

Muslim theologians have thought through this question for centuries. They themselves seem to have come up with the following answers.

One, jihad of the sword (sayyaf) or lesser jihad.² The Muslim physically fights with unbelievers and enemies of the faith. Throughout history, in the eyes of the Muslim extremist engaging in lesser jihad, the definition of "unbeliever" and "enemies of the faith" has included not only non-Muslims but also people who consider themselves as Muslims as well, often those Muslims inclined to be more peaceful and libertarian but do not totally agree with the theology or politics of the extremist. It has also often happened that two Muslim groups have officially waged jihad on each other, the most obvious recent case being the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s wherein a million people were slaughtered, and there will no doubt be more of such cases in the future for as long as the word-concept of jihad is in existence. In other words, even if the whole world has been converted to Islam, there most probably will still be Muslim extremists (and also plain opportunists in need of a tried and tested rationale) who will

wage jihad on whoever they perceive to be an unbeliever or enemy of the faith, for as long as the word-concept of jihad is in existence and can be used.

The Muslim who dies in combat goes to heaven (described in the Koran as a materialistic paradise of soft couches, streams and fountains, fruit trees, gardens, and vineyards, non-intoxicating drinks and food, rich garments, gold ornaments, and silver dwelling places, and a harem of eternal virgins called houris - the Muslim may find it strange that this idea of heaven is shocking to a Christian). Listen to this Koranic passage that violent Islamic sects may have taken seriously in the past, and might very well take seriously at present or in the future. "God has purchased of the faithful their lives and worldly goods and in return has promised them the Garden. They will fight for the cause, slay, and be slain." This kind of jihad predominates among many Muslim "fundamentalists" or "extremists". However, as mentioned above, much of the Muslim expansion in history was precisely through this type of jihad, and these conquests have never been repudiated by orthodox Muslim theologians. It used to be, and still is for many Muslims, a legitimate form of jihad! Any Sunni (as Filipino Muslims are) or Shiite Muslim community, however peaceful, due to their acceptance of jihad as legitimate, is sooner or later bound to produce individuals or movements who think this way, especially during times of social stress, political and cultural oppression, and economic impoverishment. It is only a matter of time. However offensive and unsettling it might sound, let us be honest about it and concede that this is a problem that peaceful Muslims and the followers of other religions have to face and solve.

The most notorious of the violent Islamic sects known to Christendom was the Assassin (Hashshash or hashish smoker) sect of Iran. 2,3 They were derived from the Ismailite Shiite sect in 1094 CE during a leadership dispute over the true successor of Muhammad in Shiite theology. 2 The Assassins were professional killers and were the terror of Middle East Christians and of the Abbasid Islamic Caliphate (which succeeded the Umayyads in 750 CE after a major battle)^{2,3} whose generals, statesmen, and even Caliphs they regularly assassinated.³ They reputedly drugged themselves in order to induce ecstatic trances before they set off to murder their enemies as a religious duty. If an Assassin died in the course of this duty of murdering a fellow human being, he was believed to go to heaven. (As mentioned in the paragraph above, a Koranic passage proposes that "to fight, to slay, and to be slain" assures the believer of passage to the Garden of Paradise, something that violent Islamic sects may have taken seriously in the past, and might very well take

seriously at present or in the future.) They killed efficiently, amorally, without any compunction, and were highly skilled in the art of murder. More peaceful Muslims must have tried for 200 years to teach them the error of their ways. Ominously, they remained as vicious as ever and still at the peak of their military prowess until the very end.

It took violence to end their violence, or if we are to be Buddhist or Hindu about it, their violence reaped a karma of violence. Abruptly, in 1258 CE, the Mongol army, then the most powerful military in the world, led by Hulagu Khan, one of Genghis Khan's grandsons, wiped them out (except for a few small still existent groups that have become more peaceful).² The Mongols gave them no quarter. They sacked the Assassins' hill fortresses and castles in Iran, and "doomed" them, killing all who fought them. The Assassin grandmaster was sent off to Mongolia where he was publicly executed.

The Assassin sect has left its very name as a legacy to the world, an apt description of the cold-blooded, amoral, efficient, and highly skilled professional killer.

If the Assassins were so bad, you might ask how they lasted for nearly 200 years. If the Mongols did not doom them, they probably would have lasted much longer. Obviously, they had mass-based support and many outright followers and members. Paradoxically, the majority of the population sometimes supports groups espousing extremist thought-systems, especially during times of political and cultural oppression and economic poverty. The classic case that most Christians are familiar with is Nazi Germany. Nazism won through for the unsavory but simple reason that most Germans liked it in the 1930s. Let us pretend that the Assassin sect was suddenly resurrected in a presently troubled predominantly Muslim area (such as some parts of Mindanao). There is no doubt that many if not most Muslims will vote for them. That does not make the Assassins right. Majority vote does not make a cause right. Most of those who will support the Assassins will be ordinary people who are simply seeking a way out of political and cultural oppression and economic poverty. Common Muslims will also support the Assassins out of a sense of ethnic loyalty, because they perceive them also to be Muslims. Most of the supporters will be simple folk living ordinary lives, but a few will be extremely fundamentalist Muslims who will see a way through the Assassin sect of literally fulfilling such angry Koranic passages as "Make war on them until idolatry is no more and God's religion reigns supreme," or "Those that make war against God and His apostle and spread disorders in the land shall be put to death or crucified or have their hands and feet cut

off on alternate sides, or be banished from the country."

If we Filipinos get into a similar situation in Mindanao, one answer is to Federalize the Philippines in order to allow the local peoples themselves to resolve political and cultural oppression and economic poverty. Now pay attention. Separation of religion and state, freedom of religion, and basic women's rights must be protected. In other words, the basic freedoms and basic equality of all men and women that is characteristic of modern representative democracies must be maintained and enforced by Federal laws that supersede local state laws. For the Federation to give in to the wishes of Assassins or their ilk constitutes the perversion and betrayal of its basic Spirit of Freedom.

An earlier notorious Islamic sect was the Kharijite,^{2,3} who murdered the 4th Caliph Ali, the husband of Muhammad's favorite daughter Fatima. The Kharijites were well known for their puritanism and fanaticism, did not consider the Sunnis and Shiites as true Muslims for theological reasons, and were a painful thorn on the side of the Caliphates until most of them were destroyed in the numerous wars of the Islamic world before the turn of the millennium. (A moderate subsect survives until today in Oman and North Africa.) In contrast to the other Muslims, jihad for them was a pillar of Islam, and by all accounts they were a terrifyingly violent sect that employed murder as a usual and regular method to deal with perceived enemies. In terms of the disruption that they brought to society, most of their victims were other Muslims, and modern Muslims now living in liberal societies should learn a lesson in this before they convert to an extremist theology similar to that of the Kharijites and the Assassins.

The existence of angry passages urging believers to commit acts of physical violence in the Koran makes Islam susceptible to violent sectarianism, much more so than say Buddhism or Christianity. Although it sounds offensive and disturbing, history has clearly shown that ever since the inception of Islam there have always been Muslims who did violence in the name of religion, and no doubt there will be more in the future for as long as Muslims take the angry passages of the Koran literally. Any peaceful person or society should immediately be wary of any person or group professing Islam that advocates a Kharijite or Assassin-like theology. Such a group, as history has shown, will no doubt try to control a territory, by direct military or more deceitful means, and coercively enforce their theology in that territory. It is a relatively simple matter to emphasize the angry passages of the Koran over the compassionate ones in the schools, mosques, and other organizations that such a violent

group controls, thereby allowing it to gain more converts. If civil war is to be avoided, it is virtually necessary for the rest of society to regain control of the territory, schools, mosques, and other organizations that such a violent group controls.

Furthermore, the problem often does not stop after the political power of the violent Islamic sect has been broken. Teaching the angry passages of the Koran to a Muslim population is like letting the proverbial jinn out of the bottle. Much of the population will remember that the violently angry passages can actually be put into practice, and thus will serve as a mass base for any resurgence in violent Islamism in the future. Other Muslims, whether they be new converts or millennium-old Islamic ethnic groups, from other places and times might even catch the infection via preachers, teachers, teachings, writings, the mass media, or the Internet. After all, any Muslim (or even any person) can just peruse any copy of the Koran in order to confirm the existence of passages that urge the believer to commit acts of physical violence; it is a matter of public knowledge.

Peaceful Muslims have for centuries, even until today and no doubt in the future too, tried to step around these angry passages, for example by claiming that they apply only to specific conditions (see the discussion on defensive jihad below), or that they are entirely metaphorical (see the discussion on greater jihad below). Unfortunately, these passages undeniably still exist, written in stone in the sacred scripture of Islam forever. If a concept exists, it can be used. An educational curriculum supported by state laws that deliberately debunks violent and coercive Islamism and teaches religious love, peace, and freedom should be taught to the affected population. You do not have to delve deeply into sacred scripture, theology, philosophy, sociology, history, or political science in order to come to this commonsensical conclusion; you only need to use your brains. In such matters, do not think of such laws as infringing on freedom of religion; rather think of them as purging freedom of violence. Thus, can the violent jinn, created of fire and hostile to Adam, be purged from the world through the light of learning and returned to the bottle of the angry passages for another thousand years.

Portentously, these Islamic sects, who considered it their duty to kill their enemies, had to be destroyed by violent means. It was probably impossible to reason out or negotiate with these religious fanatics because they believed that what they are doing is correct and is a means to send them to heaven.

Two, defensive jihad, most compatible with the concept of jihad

of the tongue and hand,² propagating Islam by proselytizing and by doing right and correcting wrong. Defensive jihad obviously means self-defense ("Fight for the sake of God those that fight against you, but do not attack them first.") and it can also be legitimately used as a theological rationale for fighting off invaders of Muslim territory. This means that one cannot launch a military offensive against a neutral or friendly culture group just for the sake of propagating Islam. Classically, no action can be justified as jihad if any of the following occurs: killing of non-combatants, POWs, or diplomatic personnel; use of poison weapons (originally pertaining to poison-tipped arrows and swords); inhumane means to kill; atrocities including mutilation of people and animals and despoliation of natural resources; and sexual abuse of women.⁴ Following such criteria, a Muslim should not kidnap, rape, murder (like killing civilians, executing captives and hostages, and bombing public places full of people), and desecrate the sacred places of other religions (like burning churches and eliminating crosses).

Unfortunately, many Koranic passages can be read the other way. Here is an unpleasant, no-holds barred, probably offensive, but necessary enumeration of some of these passages. Example one: Some Koranic passages describe or presuppose taking captives and "spoils," which some may take to mean both property and persons, during jihad. In the chapter entitled "Spoils," one passage states "Enjoy, therefore, the good and lawful things which you have gained in war." Another passage mentions holding captives for ransom. "Then grant them their freedom or take ransom from them." This could allow religious bandits to justify kidnap and ransom.

Example two: The Koran considers having sex with an unspecified number of female slaves as legal. "Blessed are the believers who restrain their carnal desires except with their wives and slave girls, for these are lawful to them." Slavery is approved of and the obvious way to acquire slaves is by enslaving captives. Putting two and two together to equal five, sex maniacs may use such passages to justify the rape of female "slaves". ("You are also forbidden to take in married women, except captives whom you own as slaves.") As a possible correction, the Koran also advises the believer to respect the decision of female slaves to remain chaste in the context of avoiding prostitution, but of course there are many ways to persuade captive female slaves to consent to sex without turning them into prostitutes.

Example three: The Koran recommends terrorizing, beheading, maiming, cutting off alternate limbs, arresting, besieging, ambushing, banishing, crucifying, killing, and warring with

unbelievers. ("...you may strike terror into the enemies of God and the faithful, and others besides them." "I shall cast terror into the hearts of infidels. Strike of their heads, maim them in every limb!" "Make war on them until idolatry is no more and God's religion reigns supreme." "When the sacred months are over slay the idolaters wherever you find them. Arrest them, besiege them, and lie in ambush everywhere for them." "Those that make war against God and His apostle and spread disorders in the land shall be put to death or crucified or have their hands and feet cut off on alternate sides, or be banished from the country." And so on.) Such passages can be used to justify executions, mutilations, torture, and whatever else these passages literally mean.

Example four: There is a Koranic passage that exhorts believers to be "ruthless to unbelievers but merciful to one another." This is a general statement and can thus be used to justify all manners of atrocities on whoever is perceived to be an unbeliever. Contrast this to the New Testament teaching: "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you... Do to others as you would have them do to you. For if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them (Lk 6: 27-36)," and so on.

Example five: Although the Koran recommends forgiveness, it clearly accepts the validity of the talion law (better known to Christians as "an eye for an eye..." explicitly repudiated by Christ in the New Testament - review Lk 6:27-36 above, and also Mt 5:38-48, Ro 12:9-21, 1 Cor 4:12-13, 1 Cor 6:7-8, 1 Pt 3:9, and so on). As the Koran says: "Retaliation is decreed for you in bloodshed," "Let evil be rewarded with like evil," "Those who avenge themselves when wronged incur no guilt," "a life for a life," and so on. There is thus theological justification for religious war freaks to carry on revenge and vendettas for any perceived injustice done to them.

Example six: The Koran considers idolatry an unforgivable sin. "God will not forgive idolatry. He will forgive whom He wills all other sins. He that serves other gods besides God has strayed far from the truth." Next, the Koran has a passage that seems to accuse Christians of having three separate gods. "Do not say 'three.' God is but one. God forbid that He should have a son!" Finally, the Koran also repeatedly condemns in the strongest of terms the Christian belief in Jesus' divinity, denoted in Koranic passages with phrases referring to Jesus as the son of God. The uninformed Christian will probably be shocked to hear these two angry Koranic passages. "Admonish those who say that God has begotten a son. Surely of this they could have no knowledge,

neither they nor their fathers: a monstrous blasphemy is that which they utter. They preach nothing but falsehoods." "Those who say: 'The Lord of Mercy has begotten a son,' preach a monstrous falsehood at which the very heavens might crack, the earth break asunder, and the mountains crumble to dust."

If that did not register in your brain, let me repeat that the Koran considers Jesus' divinity, which is the basic Christian belief of God's immanence and sign of His love (see Jn 3:16 and 1 Jn 4:9), as a "monstrous blasphemy" and a "monstrous falsehood at which the very heavens might crack, the earth break asunder, and the mountains crumble to dust." It does not take much imagination to equate the existence of churches, crosses, and other Christian symbols that are signs of the Christian belief in Jesus' divinity as idolatry. Let the imaginative reader guess as to what the overzealous anti-idolaters' imagination might lead them to do to churches, crosses, and other Christian symbols; and to Christians themselves.

Example seven: The Koran forbids manslaughter without a "just cause" as a condition, unlike the 10 Commandments of Judaism and Christianity which prohibits it unconditionally. Let the reader think through the implications of this!

This can go on and on, for passages similar to these abound in the Koran, but let us cut this sorry and depressing discourse with the statement that such angry passages have been, are being, and will be used by people without compassion and mercy to justify all manners of violence. If a concept exists, it can be used. A peaceful person will of course simply sort of ignore these passages, or take these passages entirely metaphorically, or believe them as valid only during certain situations. At present, most Muslim theologians fortunately have opted for the last, standing for defensive jihad with such stringent criteria as mentioned above. The term "defensive" can still be the subject of debate, and this is a problem because any Muslim community that accepts defensive jihad sooner or later will produce individuals or movements that will define "defensive" in offensive terms, especially during times of social stress, political and cultural oppression, and economic impoverishment. It is only a matter of time.

Written as they are in stone in the sacred scripture of Islam for eternity, the implications of many of the Koran's angry passages for non-Muslims, including Christians and Jews who are specifically named and targeted, both today and thousands of years from now, are frankly appalling. A Muslim extremist can always choose to interpret these passages as telling him to

forcibly convert unbelievers to Islam, or to kill them. This is actually what happened in the initial expansion of Islam when unbelievers had to choose between Islam or death; it might still be happening in some parts of the world, and will surely happen again in the future for as long as the angry passages of the Koran are taken literally. Yet, the by now horrified Christian reader should be mindful enough not to fall into a tunnel vision of Islam. It must be emphasized that the main theological message of Muhammad, which is Islam or grateful submission to God's will, is a religious ideal that both Muslims and Christians should seek. It is remarkable how similar the spiritual writings of both Muslim and Christian mystics are.⁵ The spiritual journey of both Muslims and Christians lead to the same goal and the same God.⁵

How then does one submit oneself to God's will? In a superficial "legalistic" sense, one can strictly act out a code of conduct or "law" based on a sacred scripture such as the Decalogue, Mosaic law, the 5 pillars of Islam, or even Shariah. Such laws are meant to guide, but blind obedience in acting out such religious laws is repeatedly condemned by Christ Himself and also the Spirit-inspired Paul in the New Testament, as exemplified by their severe criticism of Jews who thought themselves justified before God by strictly acting out the Mosaic law. Justification is by faith apart from the works of the (Mosaic) law (Rom 1:16-17, 3:21-30, 4:1-25, 7:4-6, 8:1-4, 10:1-13, Gal 2:15-21, 3:1-14, 4:4-5, 5:1-6, Eph 2:8-10, Phil 3:9, Heb 10:38-39, and so on).

Lest Christianity be accused of espousing licentious, isolationist, elitist, arrogant, or selfish behavior, it must be explained that the above statement is definitely not a prohibition on the Christian to do good works, as other New Testament passages abundantly make clear that we shall be judged by our deeds (Mt 7:21, 16:27, 25:31-46, Jn 5:29, Acts 24:15-17, Rom 2:6,10,16, 2 Cor 5:10, Eph 6:8, 2 Tim 4:14, Jam 2:14-26, Rev 2:23, 12:17, 14:12-13, 19:8, 20:12-13, 22:12, and so on). Nevertheless, for Christ, it is the "spirit" of the law that counts, not the letter. In Christian theology wherein God is love (1 Jn 4:16), this means that one has to act in love in order for one's actions or works to have any meaning before God (as 1 Cor 13:1-13 eloquently explains and 1 Cor 16:14 bluntly states) and even faith without love is nothing. (See 1 Cor 13:1-13 again; it's always worth re-reading.) Christ clearly subsumed the Decalogue and the Mosaic law under the law of love (Mt 22:36-40, Mk 12:28-34, Lk 10:25-28, Rom 13:8-10, Col 5:14, and so on); and in New Testament gradated lists of virtues and charisms, on top of all is love (Rom 5:1-5, 1 Cor 13:1-13, 2 Cor 6:6, Gal 5:5-6, Gal 5:22-23, Col 3:12-14, 2 Pet 1:5-7).

The New Testament is consistent in condemning blind obedience to and superficial acting out of strict religious laws. Below are some passages referred to in the paragraph above that we shall page-lift from the Bible in order to give you a flavor of the NT attitude toward strict religious laws. Originally, they referred to Jewish Mosaic religious law based on the Old Testament, but they can also be interpreted as general principles or guides applicable to any set of strict religious laws such as Shariah laws. "Which commandment in the law is greatest?... You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind... You shall love your neighbor as yourself. The whole law and the prophets depend on these two commandments (Mt 22:34-40, Mk 12:28-31, Lk 10:25-27, Rom 13:8-10, Gal 5:14)." In a single stroke, Christ has freed Christians from all the mind-boggling complexities of Jewish religious laws, and the possible authoritarian theocratic states that could have arisen from them. As long as we act in love, we shall be rightly guided.

Next, listen to the Holy Spirit speaking through Paul. "For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has freed you from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:2)." "By works of the law no one will be justified (Gal 2:16)." "You who are trying to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace (Gal 5:4)." Also take note of the following passage. "Do you not realize that everything that goes into a person from the outside cannot defile, since it enters not the heart but the stomach and passes out into the latrine? (Thus He declared all foods clean.) But what comes out of a person, that is what defiles. From within people, from their hearts, come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance, folly. All these evils come from within and they defile (Mk 7:17-23, Mt 15 10-20)." This eloquently emphatic teaching by Christ frees Christians from dogmatic Jewish religious food laws, such as the avoidance of pork, which the Koran accepts.

Finally, think through the following passages by Christ that are consistent with the New Testament critique on the blind obedience and superficial acting out of religious laws. "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath (Mk 2:23-28, Mt 12:1-8, Lk 6:1-5)." "When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites who love to stand and pray... so that others may see them... pray to your Father in secret (Mt 6:5-8)." "When you give alms, do not blow a trumpet before you... do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms-giving may be in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you (Mt 6:1-4)." "When you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites... anoint your head and wash your face, so that you may not appear to be fasting, except to your Father who is

hidden (Mt 6:16-18)." The last three passages are about pillars of Islam - prayer, alms giving, and fasting. These passages probably will elicit an emotional response from serious Muslims who get to know of them for the first time, and should be enough to give the Christian reader an idea of Christian freedom from strict religious laws.

Muslims are enjoined to follow the 5 pillars of Islam, and in stricter Islamic societies, Shariah. However, the Koran never mentions explicitly how exactly does one successfully submit oneself to God's will, and neither does the Bible. Communion with God is indescribable. [In both the Islamic and Christian sense, it may have something to do with gratefully acknowledging God's graciousness in causing the Creation and the gift of life to be, and one's relative nothingness, and in the process humbling, forgetting,⁴ or emptying⁵ oneself before the transcendent and compassionate Creator (see Philip 2:5-9). In addition, the New Testament in virtually every gospel and epistle strongly implies that a good way is by always acting in the spirit of love.]

According to New Testament logic, a Jew who strictly follows the external forms of Mosaic law for the purpose of showing off is not justified before God, just as a Muslim who strictly follows the external forms of Shariah and the 5 pillars just so in order to convince everyone how righteous he or she is has already strayed off the straight path. Blind legalism in Islam is especially dangerous because of the existence of angry passages in the Koran that seem to justify physical violence. A blindly legalistic fundamentalist might just conclude that literally fulfilling these passages is the way to Paradise. Recall how the Kharijites turned physical jihad into a pillar of Islam, and so killed, and killed, and killed.

Three, jihad as a purely mental struggle, called greater jihad, a pure jihad of the heart.² The Muslim struggles to get rid of the desires that tend to separate him from God. Many Sufi sects designated as "Amhadiya",² and also a modern Indian sect by the same name, adhere to this concept. Some Muslim theologians may classify some of these groups as heretical, especially in view of their disposition for esoteric interpretations ("tawil") of Koranic passages,⁴ but insofar as they regard Muhammad as a prophet, read the Koran, and do their best to do God's will, they certainly are Muslims. Generally, these Muslims are very peaceful. Their resolution of the jihad problem is admirable.

There is a passage from the Koran itself that praises those who

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follow its clearly defined passages and criticizes those who give meaning to its ambiguous passages. "It is He who has revealed to you the Koran. Some of its verses are precise in meaning - they are the foundation of the Book - and others are ambiguous. Those whose hearts are infected with disbelief follow the ambiguous part, so as to create dissension by seeking to explain it. But no one knows its meaning except God. Those who are well-grounded in knowledge say: 'We believe in it; it is all from our Lord.' But only the wise take heed." Sunni Muslim theologians (whose followers comprise about 90% of all Muslims) take this passage to mean that a Muslim should take the Koran as the literal Word of God (just as some Christian fundamentalists take the Bible literally).⁴ Consequently, Sufi mystics are often seen as mildly heretical because of their tendency to give esoteric meanings to Koranic passages.

As a first time reader of the Koran who is used to the Christian New Testament emphasis on love as a standard for sacred writings, I can empathize with the Sufi viewpoint. The Koran hardly ever mentions love, rarely mentions peace outright, and is littered with references to hellfire and jihad. A strong impression that I got is that there is much anger in the Koran. The transcendence of God is also more emphasized than His immanence, an experience that a Christian used to the New Testament would find relatively unfamiliar. The Bible in general tells much of both the transcendence and immanence of God, and Christian theology in particular tends to elaborate on God's immanence. In the New Testament, Jesus is also called Immanuel - "God is with us" (Mt 1:23; also see Mt 28:19-20, Jn 14:26, Acts 2:4, and so on), and it is not surprising that so many Christians (Protestant, Catholic and Eastern Orthodox) consciously try to develop a "personal relationship" or seek a "communion" with the immanent God. (The individual gods of the Hindu pantheon also walk the earth in human incarnations called avatars, but it is not clear if they are the same monotheistic God of Judaism-Christianity-Islam. On the other hand, the Bhagavad Gita seems to portray Krishna as the immanent incarnation of the one monotheistic God.¹³)

Moreover, much of the jihad of the Koran refers to physical fighting, and indeed recalls actual fighting with Arabic tribes who still have not yet embraced Islam during Muhammad's lifetime. These theological tendencies of Islam pose problems for the Muslim Sufi mystic who yearns for communion with God. Historical accounts of mystics (from all religious traditions) consistently describe them as shedding off physical violence and anger in attaining communion with the immanent God. Taking the physical fighting (jihad) described so often in the Koran

literally just won't do for a mystic. The only option left for the Muslim mystic who believes in the sacredness and preeminence of the Koran among sacred writings, and who is simultaneously walking the straight path ("tariqa") of non-injury ("ahimsa" in Hindu and Buddhist writings), is to interpret jihad as a purely mental struggle, a jihad of the heart.

Knowledgeable Christian theologians who are sympathetic to Islam never fail to extol Sufism.^{4,5,6} The obvious reason is that they understandably project into Islam their own Christian bias for the immanent and loving God. Yet it is a fact that the Koran, which is full of wonderful passages of God's transcendence, speaks little of God's immanence. Listen to this Koranic passage called the throne verse:⁴ "God - there is no deity but God, the Living, the Eternal One. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him. His is what the heavens and the earth contain. Who can intercede with Him except by His permission? He knows what is before and behind men. They can grasp only that part of His knowledge which He wills. His throne is as vast as the heavens and the earth, and the preservation of both does not weary Him. He is the Exalted, the Immense One." There can hardly be a more magnificent and powerful description of God's transcendence! Inferring from the Koran's dearth of statements on God's immanence, it was not revealed to Muhammad that the transcendent God, who can do anything, could also have become human like the rest of us by His own will. A Christian theologian might even try to recall Sufi teachings on God's love and project it to the rest of Islamic theology,⁵ and yet it is a fact that the Koran hardly ever mentions the word love.

After almost 1400 years of Islam, there are in fact relatively few Sufis around, and many of the movers of the Islamic world tend toward fundamentalism, with its jihad that can cause shudders to run up the spines of Christians who have been affected by the real thing. The Christian theologian's love affair with Islamic Sufism clearly reflects an unrealized ideal that Christians who empathize with Islam pray for. We pray O Lord, that the light of love illuminates our Muslim brothers and sisters who yearn to embrace You, who are the light of the heavens and the earth! Grant us the grace that we may be one in peace in doing Your will on earth as it is in heaven, to love one another as You have loved us!

Part 3 >>

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A Critique of Islamic Jihad

by jed pensar

PART 3

Four, no concept of jihad at all, which for me is the best solution of all. Jihad as a word-concept seems to have fallen in disuse among the Bahais, who came out of Iran in the middle of the 19th century CE,² ironically as an offshoot of the Shiite Muslims who are generally more radical than the Sunnis. Superficially, the Bahais are to the Muslims as the Christians are to the Jews. The mother religions in both cases, Islam and Judaism respectively, accept theological violence in their sacred scriptures, the Koran and the Tanakh (Old Testament). The daughter religions, the Bahai Faith and Christianity, are theologically remarkably peaceful, and both historically start with new prophets proclaiming new Teachings based on the old ones, as epitomized by the Bab and Baha Ullah for the Bahai Faith and John the Baptist and Jesus Christ for Christianity. The new religions are instantly met with hostility, persecutions, and even executions, and both initially spread not through theocracies and theocratic laws but through slow proselytizing of individual converts.

The Bahais seem to be the ultimately peaceful Muslims. If the concept of jihad does not exist, it cannot be used. Although Muslim theologians in general consider them as heretics or even as non-Muslims, especially since the Bahais read the Scriptures of other religions in their services and believe in prophets that came after Muhammad, they are Muslims insofar as they regard Muhammad as a prophet, read the Koran, and do God's will.

The Bahai practice of reading the Scriptures of the various world religions in a religious service is a sublimely wonderful idea. It must lead to tolerance as the listeners learn about the viewpoint of various religions and learn that they are not much different in their basic beliefs from each other. The Faith of Abraham in an omniscient Creator God is so obviously the same faith of Jews, Christians, and Muslims.^{1,4,6} To a lesser extent, we can apply the same to the Hindu Trimurti (the single Godhead manifested in Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver and Shiva the Destroyer),² and the Bhagavad Gita, in my opinion, portrays Krishna as an incarnation of the same monotheistic God.¹³ Although Buddhism does not explicitly mention the word "God," the Buddhist Greater Journey seems to describe the journey to Him.⁷ It is a wonder those who have faith in the same God fight

over the specific and differing theologies that surround this same Faith. The basic Faith teaches similar truths in all the major world religions. In a detached manner, one may consider a person converting from one world religion to another as changing his or her allegiance from one theology to another while retaining or rediscovering the same basic faith.

As discussed above, the existence of a disruptive theological concept such as "jihad" can seriously strain the relationships of these world religions. Society should allow the individual freedom in choosing which, if any, theological doctrines to follow - in other words freedom of religion. In spite of its exhortations on behalf of Islam and its virtual demonizing of Jews and Christians in innumerable passages, the Koran also says: "There is no compulsion in religion," and that believers among the People of the Book (Jews and Christians) can be saved. These passages on religious tolerance are about as forthcoming as a sacred scripture can get. There are no real theological counterparts to these passages in the Bible.

For instance listen to these two passages: "Believers, Jews, Christians, and Sabaeans - whoever believes in God and the Last Day and does what is right - shall be rewarded by their Lord; they have nothing to fear or regret." "There are among the People of the Book some upright men who all night long recite the revelations of God and worship Him; who believe in God and the Last Day; who enjoin justice and forbid evil and vie with each other in good works; these are righteous men: whatever good they do, its rewards shall not be denied them." Two more passages (and ones similar to them) that can, with a little stretching of the imagination, be taken as supporting religious tolerance announce: "Your mission is only to give warning; it is for Us (God) to do the reckoning." "We have ordained a law and assigned path for each of you. Had God pleased, He could have made you one nation; but it is His wish to test you according to what He has bestowed upon you. Therefore vie with each other in good works, for to God you shall all return and He will clarify for you those things which you now disagree about."

In some private Catholic schools in Mindanao, Muslim students are not required to attend classes about Christianity. On the contrary, I believe that Muslims should attend Christian classes and that Christians should attend Islamic classes, starting at an early age before the bigotry of adulthood sets in, and on the condition that teaching religious love, peace, and freedom is given priority.

In the hypothetical Philippine Federation mentioned above, there

should be Federal laws requiring the teaching of various theological ideas in a philosophy-class setting, with a straightforward and objective exposition of theological doctrines, and without any attempt at conversion. Violent and coercive religious doctrines should be deliberately debunked, and religious love, peace, and freedom be taught. In such matters, do not think of such laws as infringing on freedom of religion; rather think of them as purging freedom of violence. All other solutions, including political autonomy or economic development are half-baked; you can still have a society that is largely politically autonomous and mostly free from economic dependencies, but is simultaneously violent, repressive, and totalitarian. The reverse is also true. The educational curriculum can teach all about religious love, peace, and freedom to the individual citizen, but with a sinking economy people will always think of their stomachs first. Try as you might, you will never be able to fool empty stomachs with heavenly thoughts and religious ideals, and people who think that they can erase unjust social structures with personal religious enlightenment must have misread their scriptures somewhere.

The Marxists use a very harsh hyperbole in paraphrasing this: "Religion is the opium of the people." Good political and economic solutions should always be accompanied with the light of personal learning, and vice versa. You do not have to delve deeply into literature in order to come to this commonsensical conclusion; you only need to use your brains. Each regional state should have a large degree of political and economic autonomy, as implemented by autonomous executive, legislative, and judicial bodies, as in present-day Federal countries such as the U. S.A. The local languages and histories should be officially taught in local schools, as in present-day Federations with a plurality of native ethnic groups, such as Switzerland. Almost all of the taxes raised from local economic activity should be retained by the regional state. Each regional state might roughly correspond to a present-day "province" with proper boundary modifications, preferably ones that further decrease its size in order to approximate the ideal of a participative democracy.

Interestingly, Marxists seem to have the same social goal when they say that at the end of Communism, "the state will wither away." But their doctrines of state socialism and democratic centralism always concentrate all economic and political power in a totalitarian state, and so in the end they arrive at a situation completely opposite their given ideal. The philosophy of the anarchists (not the bomb throwers and chaos makers of urban legends), which overtly tries to dismantle huge social structures in favor of smaller ones, is more consistent with the ideal of

participative democracy. Small is beautiful. All these will guarantee the preservation of the identities of the various Filipino ethnic culture groups (both Muslim and Christian), respect regional political freedom, and allow each small regional state to chart its economic progress with a large degree of autonomy from the Federal center. Political and cultural oppression and economic poverty, which encourage violent social movements such as "jihad of the sword" as mentioned above, thus can be addressed in a satisfactory manner by the local peoples themselves.

Again, there should be laws requiring the teaching of various theological ideas in a philosophy-class setting, with a straightforward and objective exposition of theological doctrines, and without any attempt at conversion. Violent and coercive religious doctrines should be deliberately debunked, and religious love, peace, and freedom be taught. The importance of this becomes apparent when we examine how the Koran itself sees Christianity and Judaism.

Reading the Koran will give an unexposed and disinterested reader a strong bias against Christianity and Judaism. Time and time again, the Koran warns against Christians and Jews and their beliefs (or unbelief). There is even a Koranic passage that tells Muslims not to befriend Christians and Jews because of the danger of becoming one of them! "Believers, take neither Jews nor Christians for your friends. They are friends with one another. Whoever seeks their friendship shall become one of their number." Here is a similar one. "You will please neither the Christian nor the Jew unless you follow their faith. Say 'the guidance of God is the only guidance.' And after all the knowledge you have been given you yield to their desires, there shall be none to help or protect you from the wrath of God. Those to whom We have given the Book, and who read it as it ought to be read truly believe in it; those that deny it shall assuredly be lost."

Naturally, a Christian who knows of these passages will tend to see them as outright bigotry and tell the Muslim not to follow them. Unfortunately for the Christian, there are many other Koranic passages that in so many ways proclaim the Koran's own infallibility. The second passage above, aside from warning Muslims not to please Christians and Jews and threatening Muslims who do so (for "lost" can be theologically interpreted as damned), also refers to the Koran's infallibility. The second chapter of the Koran, right after the Exordium, starts with the statement: "This Book is not to be doubted." Here is a particularly jolting passage: "God has instructed you in the Book

that when you hear His revelations being denied or ridiculed, you must not sit and listen to them unless they engage in other talks, or else you shall become like them." Passages such as these, that dogmatically insulate the Muslim from the beliefs of Christians and Jews, would make it extremely difficult to hold dialogue with an extremely fundamentalist Muslim. How can you hold dialogue with someone who believes you should not be friends with each other or who is not really listening to you because he believes that you are 'denying' or 'ridiculing' God's revelations? A cunning extremist can also pretend to be listening and holding dialogue, while all the time adhering to physical jihad of the sword.

A good way to correct this built-in bias in the Koran is to show Muslims how Christianity or Judaism truly sees itself, ideally to hear the teachings of Christ out of the mouths of Christians, or the teachings of Moses out of the mouths of Jews. Here is a Koranic passage that most Christians will think as peculiar, if not downright heretical. "They (Jews) declared: We have put to death the Messiah Jesus the son of Mary, the apostle of God.' They did not kill him, nor did they crucify him, but he was made to resemble another for them." Now, pay close attention to this Koranic accusation and condemnation. "Do not say 'three.' God is but one. God forbid that He should have a son!" This passage apparently accuses Christians of worshiping three separate gods. The statement "God forbid that He should have a son!" is also repeated again and again in various forms throughout the Koran, leading the reader to believe that Christians practice idolatry by worshiping Jesus as a separate god.

The Koran repeatedly and consistently condemns the Christian belief in Jesus' divinity, denoted by passages referring to him as the son of God. Because of such Koranic passages, Muslims who are raised in a strict Koranic culture and are completely ignorant of the doctrines of other religions probably will always tend to believe that Christianity is a polytheistic religion that practices idolatry by worshiping three gods. Such Muslims might be surprised to hear from a learned Christian's mouth that monotheistic Christianity is all about the transcendent but at the same time immanent God who can become a man and walk the earth like us by His own will; whom people could touch in the flesh; who teaches grace and peace, truth and freedom, faith, hope, and love, and the basic equality of all people irrespective of nationality and gender; who gives life to all creatures, who can speak through people like us, and who is ever present all the time in all of us. The transcendent, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent God, the creator of heaven and earth and of all that is seen and unseen, is also the immanent and loving God. This paragraph describes the persons of the Father, Son, and Holy

Spirit united in one God in accordance with the Bible and the Nicene Creed, professed as authoritative by most of Christendom. Unfortunately, some Koranic passages can be interpreted as accusing Christianity of polytheism and idolatry, deeming Christianity's Triune God as two or three separate gods.

Again, there should be laws requiring the teaching of various theological ideas in a philosophy-class setting, with a straightforward and objective exposition of theological doctrines, and without any attempt at conversion. Violent and coercive religious doctrines should be deliberately debunked, and religious love, peace, and freedom be taught. If this is not done, the only picture that Muslims will see of Christianity and Judaism is that found in the Koran, which is the Muslims' starting point, and the Koran unfortunately pictures Christians and Jews as heretics and falsifiers of the Faith of Abraham, which Jews, Christians, and Muslims all openly share. Without such laws, this ugly view of Christianity and Judaism will tend to spread unchecked and uncorrected.

A Muslim whose starting point is the Koran and who is ignorant of how Christians and Jews see themselves will always look upon Christianity and Judaism unfavorably. The Christian reader should be familiar with such built-in Scriptural biases because the New Testament itself has many passages that severely criticize Jews, which in the past have contributed to horrific evil done by Christians on Jews. Fortunately, Christians share the same Old Testament ("Tanakh") with Jews, allowing easy dialogue on common grounds, and in fact, many Christians believe that the Jews are God's chosen people as described in the Old Testament. Unfortunately, this sharing of a common sacred Scripture in Christianity and Judaism is not true in Islam.

The Koran claims that the Torah, the Psalms of David, and the Gospels are genuine revelations from God, but relates Biblical stories and characters differently from the Jewish and Christian Scriptures. As a prime example, the Koran regards Jesus as a prophet and apostle, and condemns the Christian belief in his divinity. Thus, serious Muslims, whose starting point is the Koran, tend to believe that the Jews and Christians have falsified the original Scriptures given to them by God.⁶ The Koran in fact explicitly accuses the Jews: "They have perverted the words of the Scriptures." This belief is further reinforced by a passage in the Koran that claims that Jesus predicted the coming of Muhammad, a prediction that is nowhere found in any copy of the New Testament. "Tell of Jesus, who said to the Israelites: I am sent forth to you by God to confirm the Torah already revealed and to give news of an apostle that will come after me

whose name is Ahmed ('the praised one,' another name of Muhammad)."

Although the conclusion that Jews and Christians have falsified the Scriptures sounds weird to a Christian or a Jew, it is entirely consistent from a Koranic point of view. Discrimination by Christians and Jews against Muslims is not automatic and depends on specific cultures and situations, but Muslim discrimination against Christians and Jews is more intrinsic, dogmatic, and permanent because they are specifically identified and their religious beliefs condemned in the Koran. Even if a super extremist and fundamentalist Islamic movement totally obliterates Christianity and Judaism from the face of the earth, in accordance with such passages as "Make war on them until idolatry is no more and God's religion reigns supreme," Muslims will still discriminate against the very memory of Christianity and Judaism and will make sure that these religions will never see the light again, because of Koranic condemnation of the People of the Book. This paragraph will surely strike many people on one end as offensive and on the other end as quaint (much shaking of heads will ensue), but let us be honest and frank in pointing out one of the root causes of evil, which is ignorance, and a way to remedy this with corrective laws that spread the light of learning. Ignorance often gives birth to and nurtures intolerance. (The Koran itself speaks of the "bigotry of ignorance," and in Buddhism the root of all evil is ignorance.)

At this point, let us pause and you the reader should think through possible solutions to the intrinsic scriptural bias of the Koran against Christianity and Judaism. There are several solutions, but the particular solution proposed above, and at the end of this paragraph, is based on the logic that since the Koran in effect dogmatically and permanently legalizes discrimination against Christians and Jews through passages that portray them as heretics and falsifiers of the Faith of Abraham, or explicitly condemns their beliefs, society should also permanently legalize ways by which Christians and Jews can explain their side to Muslims via an enlightened educational curriculum formally supported by state laws. Without such permanent laws that allow Christians and Jews to permanently air their side to Muslims, there will never be permanent peace between the Muslims and the Christians and Jews, for the Koran specifically identifies Christians and Jews and permanently and dogmatically discriminates against them. Again, there should be laws requiring the teaching of various theological ideas in a philosophy-class setting, with a straightforward and objective exposition of theological doctrines, and without any attempt at conversion. Violent and coercive religious doctrines should be deliberately

debunked, and religious love, peace, and freedom be taught.

On the other hand, the Federation must not tolerate individuals and organizations that advocate violence in the name of religion, and these should be outlawed and sequestered away from society as soon as detected. There is no violence like religious violence, when violence becomes sacred. Given freedom to propagate, these groups quickly attract like-minded followers and coerce weak-minded fools to join in, and civil war soon follows. They become the medium for the most abominable and horrific kind of evil. Tolerating their intolerance is the folly of follies.

As a corollary, Federal laws must allow the individual freedom to choose his or her religion. Religion and state must be strictly separate and individual freedom of religion guaranteed. Laws that are based solely on a particular theological doctrine without the use of plain reason (which the Creator has so obviously given to us humans in gracious abundance) should be held with suspicion. For example, a law requiring all Muslim women to wear a veil over their faces should be considered unconstitutional, but an individual Muslim woman by all means should be allowed to wear a veil if she wants to, respecting her freedom of religion.

A more extreme hypothetical example is that of a Sunni Tausug Muslim who wants to convert to the Bahai faith. The traditional Shariah penalty for this is death for apostasy. This "death for apostasy" rule cannot be constitutionally condoned. The individual has freedom of religion. It is always worthwhile repeating the Koranic passage that states "there is no compulsion in religion." On the other hand, by all means teach Tausug as an official language in Basilan and Sulu. This will guarantee the survival of the Tausugs as a unique ethnic Filipino culture group. The same thing applies to other Filipino ethnic culture groups, such as Visayans (the Cebuanos, Ilonggos, and Warays whose ethnic identity is the direct legacy of the first great Malay empire - the Sri-Visaya), Ilocanos, Bicolanos, Kapampangans, Pangasinenses, the Cordillera peoples, and the various Muslim, Christian, and even polytheistic Mindanao tribes.

The Unitarian system of government in the Philippines is an unjust legacy of the Spanish and American colonial period, when political control was centralized in Manila for the sake of easy control of the whole Philippines by the colonial masters. The more political power was centralized in Manila, the better the colonial masters could keep things under control. It might surprise many Filipinos to learn that many Third World countries, especially in Africa, South America, and Asia, newly emerging in

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independence from European colonial rule (to the extent that their economies, still heavily dependent on European or American economy, allowed them), have encountered the same problem.³ External colonialism by Europeans and Americans, mediated by a colonial center within the territory of the colony, was replaced by internal colonialism, wherein the colonial center was largely left behind usually to be run by a distinct culture group that now functioned as the new colonial master.³

We should adopt a political system such as a Federation to replace the Unitarian system. The basic principle is: What can be done by a smaller unit is done by the smaller unit, while cooperating with other units, promoting peace for all and the land. The Hebrew "shalom" often translated as "peace" is a positive term, referring not only to an absence of war but also to a generally prosperous and just "land," to use Old Testament parlance.⁹ In my opinion, the combined modern concepts of both human society and the ecosystem can be roughly translated as "the land" (read through Ex 29:45-46, Lev 19:29-30, 33-34, Lev 25:1-55, Nu 35:31-34, Dt 21:22-23 to get a flavor of what the land meant to the Israelites). God delivered the Israelites to the promised land, but the land, or ecosystem, had belonged and still belongs to Creator (see Lv 25:23, Nu 35:34). Any religious concept of "peace on earth" has to take into account a sound ecosystem and a just human society.

The Federal system works out very well in many countries all over the world and those who fear it (mostly those based in Manila) are only being misled by their own culturally chauvinistic attitudes or partisan interests. By land area, half of the world is Federal, including the following countries: Russia, Germany, Switzerland, Ethiopia, United Arab Emirates, India, Canada, U.S. A., Mexico, Brazil, Venezuela, Australia, and our nearest neighbor and fellow Malay country Malaysia. The whole continents of North America and Australia, the subcontinent of India, half of South America, and a large chunk of Europe and Asia is Federal.

In the hypothetical system proposed above, children learn the truths about other religions early on and thus learn to appreciate and tolerate them. The Bahais, known worldwide for their religious tolerance, are in effect doing this very thing in their religious services. Rigidly dogmatic theologians will fear this system, but then again, we should teach about the similar truths of the various world religions for many of them are derived from the same Truth, and the Truth shall set you free.

Listen to this passage of the Koran called the verse of light,⁴ which surely reveals a truth. "God is the light of the heavens and

the earth. His light may be compared to a niche that enshrines a lamp, the lamp within a crystal of star-like brilliance. It is lit from a blessed olive tree, neither eastern nor western. Its very oil would almost shine forth though no fire touched it. Light upon light, God guides to His light whom He wills." Such a beautiful passage to Christian ears! There are many more similar passages from the Koran. Alas, much of the Koran also talks about hellfire and jihad, and anger freely flows out of its pages without the Christian corrective of love.

The Bahai faith is derived from an earlier religion called Babism founded in 1844 by Mirza Ali Muhammad, also called the Bab or "gateway". An earlier Iranian persecution killed the Bab in 1850 and 20,000 Babists shortly after. One of the Bab's disciples, Mirza Hoseyn Ali Nuri also called Baha Ullah or "Glory to God" founded the Bahai faith in 1863, after which he was exiled by the Otoman Turks upon instigation by the Iranian government to Acre, Palestine (which was part of the Ottoman Empire then), now Akko, Israel. Like Judaism, the Bahai faith has its spiritual center in Israel.²

The Bahais are presently under persecution by the Islamic fundamentalist government in Iran, their country of origin, where they are considered as heretics, and so their ultimate survival in that country is questionable. Ironically, it is Iran that also produced the medieval Assassins and the first successful modern Islamic revolution in 1979.² Interestingly, some Muslim fundamentalist groups in Mindanao are heavily influenced by Iranian fundamentalists. If they had allowed themselves to be influenced by Iranian Bahais instead, then Mindanao would be a much more peaceful place today. In many Muslim fundamentalists, the Assassin sect still lives on.

I consider the Bahais as very Islamic in the sense that they do the will of God by being so compassionate, merciful, and peaceful. So it says in the beginning of every chapter in the Koran.

End.

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