

# Towards an Understanding of Jihad in Muslim Thought and a Christian Response

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September 11, 2001 was the bloodiest day in U.S. history on American soil. Two of the largest office towers in the world, The World Trade Center Twin Towers, were destroyed. In addition, the Pentagon, the center of American military might, sustained heavy damages and casualties. As a result, American complacency has been shattered to its core. In recent months we have seen terrorist acts in many places: A bomb in a crowded marketplace in Jerusalem, a suicide bomber blows up a bus of women and children in Tel Aviv, and villages annihilated in Algeria. The list of events worldwide, which have come to symbolize this kind of “Islamic terrorism,” is endless.

Recently, the British government identified 21 organizations as notorious terrorist organizations. A majority of them are Islamic terrorist organizations. The 21 groups are: *Al-Qaida* (bin Laden), Armed Islamic Group (Algeria), *Salafist* Group for Call and Combat (Algeria), Islamic *Jihad* (Egypt), *Al-Gamaat al-Islamiya* (Egypt), November 17 (Greece), *Mujahideen Khalq* (Iranian dissidents/Iraq), *Hamas* (Israel/PA), Islamic *Jihad* (Israel/PA), *Harkat-ul-Mujahideen* (Kashmir), *Jaish Mohammed* (Kashmir), *Lashkar e-Toiba* (Kashmir), Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (Sri Lanka), *Hizballah* (Lebanon), *Babbar Khalsa* (Sikh/India), International Sikh Youth Federation (Sikh/India), *Abu Nidal* (Palestinian), ETA (Basque separatists/Spain), Kurdistan Workers’ Party (Turkey), Revolutionary Peoples’ Liberation Party - Front (Turkey), and Islamic Army of Aden (Yemen).<sup>1</sup> The U.S. State Department has designated 15 of these organizations as Islamic terrorist groups.

Some of these organizations in the name of Islam spread hate, recruit and raise funds in the name of *Jihad*. Here is an example of a banner in their own words showing how a Jihadi group lures Muslims for their cause:

DEAR BELIEVERS: ISN'T IT ABOUT TIME TO PERFORM THE FORGOTTEN ISLAMIC DUTY OF *JIHAD*??... DO YOU HAVE PLANS TO GO TO *JIHAD* LAND BUT UNSUCCESSFULLY UNABLE TO REACH... ARE YOU LOOKING FOR A WORTH TRUSTY PARTY/ORGANIZATION TO DELIVER YOUR DONATIONS TO SUPPORT *JIHAD*, *MUJAHIDEEN* AND THE VICTIMS OF OPPRESSION??... FINALLY!!!... THROUGH OUR HOME PAGE ... YOU WILL BE ABLE TO REACH YOUR DESTINATION *INSHA`ALLAH*... HERE YOU WILL FIND THE ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS AND NECESSARY INFORMATION.”<sup>2</sup> [sic]

We find many references to this understanding of “*Jihad*” against the West, and America in particular, in the news today. This raises serious questions: Is Islam a religion of terror? Do these cases represent true Islam? To find the truth we must examine the very source of the concept of *Jihad*.

*Jihad* is an Islamic ideology, which is revealed in the Qur’an, the Islamic Holy Book. Throughout history, Islamic and non-Islamic scholars have debated the concept of *Jihad*. Even among Islamic

scholars there are various interpretations of this principle.<sup>3</sup> Some Islamic scholars consider *Jihad* as the sixth pillar of Islam. According to the Qur'an, *Jihad* assures various rewards, even paradise itself. Muslims believe that *Jihad* is the best thing that a Muslim can voluntarily offer. Some Islamic scholars consider *Jihad* superior to the obligatory acts of *salat* (prayers), *sawm* (fasting), *Zakat* (almsgiving), and *Hajj* (pilgrimage). Clearly, the concept of *Jihad* is worth examining in view of its crucial place in Islamic doctrine.

## **What is *Jihad*?**

The term *Jihad* is derived from the Arabic verb “*Jahada*” which means, “to endeavor, to strive, to struggle.” It is sometimes translated as “holy war.” The closest Arabic words for “war” are “*harb*” or “*qital*” which are found in the Qur'an and its companion commentary the *Hadith*. In religious contexts *Jihad* means to struggle against one's evil inclinations, or to strive for the moral uplift of society or to promote the spread of Islam.<sup>4</sup> However, in many circles *Jihad* is understood in a military sense rather than its universal meaning in the Qur'an and *Hadith*.

## **Muslims Must Make *Jihad***

According to Islamic teachings *Jihad* is *fard* (an obligation) for every individual Muslim. The Qur'an says: “*Jihad* (fighting) is prescribed for you (Muslims), and ye dislike it. But it is possible that ye dislike a thing which is good for you, and that ye love a thing, which is bad for you. But God knouted [sic] (knoweth), and ye know not” *surah, al-Baqarah* 2:216 (Y). The Qur'an says that believers who participate in *Jihad* will be rewarded. “Let those fight in the way of *Allah* who sell the life of this world for the other. Whoso fighteth in the way of *Allah*, be he slain or be he victorious, on him we shall bestow a vast reward.” *surah, an-Nisa* ' 4:74.

In Islam, the world is divided into two spheres: 1) *al-Jahiliyyah* (the way of ignorance) and 2) *al-Islam* (the way of submission to God). Human beings have a choice to live in ignorance or to submit and be obedient to God. Those who live in ignorance and disobey God live in a land called “*dar al harb*”(lit. the abode of war). Those who submit and are obedient to God live in a land called “*dar al Islam*”(lit. the abode of peace).<sup>5</sup> According to Islam, non-Muslims are divided into two types. The *Kafir* are those who refuse to see the truth, infidels who worship idols, unbelievers, or the enemies of God. The *ahl-al-kitab* (the *dhimmi*, the people of the book) are protected non-Muslims — Christians and Jews.

## **The Purpose of *Jihad***

Muslims contend that the main purpose of *Jihad* is to protect and preserve the *haqq* (truth). Some believe that the way to deal with those who pose obstacles to the propagation of Islam is to declare *Jihad* against them. They find support for this position in the Qur'an. “We shall show them our portents on the horizons and within themselves until it will be manifest unto them that it is the Truth. Doth not thy Lord suffice, since He is Witness over all things?” *surah, Ha Mim Sajdah* 41:53.

Islam teaches that Muslims have a twofold responsibility. The first responsibility is to bring those who are in *al-Jhiliyyah* (way of ignorance) to *al-Islam* (way of submission) by various means. The second obligation is to put *Allah* ahead of loved ones, wealth, or worldly ambitions, and to strive to maintain dedication to *Allah* by a range of means, including inner spiritual struggle. The Qur'an states, “And strive for *Allah* with the endeavor which is His right. He hath chosen you and hath not laid upon you in religion any hardship; the faith of your father Abraham (is yours). He hath named you Muslims of old time and in this (scripture), that the messenger may be a

witness against you, and that ye may be witnesses against mankind. So establish worship, pay the poor-due, and hold fast to *Allah*.” The *Qur’an* also states, “The (true) believers are those only who believe in *Allah* and His messenger and afterward doubt not, but strive with their wealth and their lives for the cause of *Allah*. Such are the sincere.” *surah, al-Hujurat* 49:15 *Jihad* is personal and community commitment to spread and defend the faith of Islam.

### ***Jihad* Through Peaceful Means**

For many Muslims, *Jihad* is a holy campaign to bring about a spiritual revolution in the world. This struggle can be both defensive and offensive. The spread of Islam is encouraged through peaceful means and by force. Muslims believe that peaceful *Jihad* can be achieved in three ways:

***Jihad* with tongue (speaking the truth).** The *Qur’an* states, “Call unto the way of thy Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way. Lo! thy Lord is Best Aware of him who strayeth [sic] from His way, and He is Best Aware of those who go aright.” *surah, An-Nahl* 16:125. The *Qur’an* says even if parents encourage their children to follow a religion other than Islam they need to disobey them. “We have enjoined on man kindness to parents: [We have enjoyed on man goodness to his parents (Shakir translation)] but if they (either of them) strive (jahadaka) thee to join with Me (in worship) anything of which thou hast no knowledge, obey them not. Ye have (all) to return to me, and I will tell you (the truth) of all that ye did.” al-‘Ankabut 29:8 (Y).

***Jihad* with heart (feeling and intentions).** The *Qur’an* states, “And strive (*jadihu*) for *Allah* with the endeavor (*jihad*) which is His right. He hath chosen you and hath not laid upon you in religion any hardship; the faith of your father Abraham (is yours) . . .” *surah, al-Hajj* 22:78. Al-‘Ankabut 29:6 says, “And whosoever striveth (*jahada*), striveth (*yujahida*) only for himself, for lo! *Allah* is altogether Independent of (His) creatures.”

3) ***Jihad* with hand (good works).** The *Qur’an* encourages good works: “As for those who strive (*jahad*) in Us, We surely guide them to Our paths, and lo! *Allah* is with the good.” *surah, al-‘Ankabut* 29:69.

### ***Jihad* Through Offensive Means**

However, the *Qur’an* also encourages *Jihad* with a sword, which includes not only defensive but offensive measures. In a defensive posture *Jihad* is often taken to mean merely war, which is caused by conflicting national interests. However, in Islam, war (*Qital*) can be undertaken in an offensive posture for the sake of *Allah* and carried out according to the instructions of the *Qur’an*. *Qital* is one form of struggle to achieve the establishment of Islam. Here, *Jihad* has a broader sense. *Qital* should occur when there is an Islamic state to carry it out.<sup>6</sup>

***Jihad* can be against disbelievers.** The *Qur’an* says “O Prophet! Strive against the disbelievers and the hypocrites! Be harsh with them. Their ultimate abode is hell, a hapless journey’s end.” *surah, at-Taubah* 9:73 (P). *Surah, Al-Furqan* 25:52 says, “So obey not the disbelievers, but strive against them herewith with a great endeavor.”

***Jihad* is God’s cause.** The *Qur’an* says, “Lo! those who believe, and those who emigrate (to escape persecution) and strive in the way of *Allah*, these have hope of *Allah’s* mercy. *Allah* is Forgiving, Merciful.” *surah, al-Baqarah* 2:218.

***Jihad* is against idolaters.** It says, “Then, when the sacred months have passed, slay the idolaters wherever ye find them, and take them (captive), and besiege them, and prepare for them each

ambush. But if they repent and establish worship and pay the poor-due, then leave their way free. Lo! *Allah* is Forgiving, Merciful.” *Surah, at-Taubah* 9:5.

***Jihad* may be against the People of the Book.** According to the *Qur’an*, *Jihad* can be implemented even against the People of the Book – Christians and Jews. In *surah, at-Taubah* 9:29 the *Qur’an* states, “Fight against such of those who have been given the Scripture as believe not in *Allah* nor the Last Day, and forbid not that which *Allah* hath forbidden by His messenger, and follow not the Religion of Truth, until they pay the tribute readily, being brought low.”

***Jihad* is allowed against oppression and aggression.** The *Qur’an* says, “Fight in the cause of *Allah*, those who fight you, but do not transgress limits; for *Allah* loves not transgressors, And slay them wherever you catch them, and turn them out from where they have turned you out; For tumult and oppression are worse than slaughter; . . . And fight them on until there is no more tumult and oppression and there prevails justice and faith in *Allah*. But if they cease, let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression.” *Surah, al-Baqarah* 2:190-193)

### **Rewards of *Jihad***

Islam says that those who participate in *Jihad* will receive rewards. However, only martyrs are assured paradise.<sup>7</sup> According to *Sahih Bukhari* 1.35, “The person who participates in (Holy battles) in *Allah’s* cause and nothing compels him to do so except belief in *Allah* and His Apostles, will be recompensed by *Allah* either with a reward, or booty (if he survives) or will be admitted to Paradise (if he is killed in the battle as a martyr). Had I not found it difficult for my followers, then I would not remain behind any sariya going for *Jihad* and I would have loved to be martyred in *Allah’s* cause and then made alive, and then martyred and then made alive, and then again martyred in His cause.” Volume 1, Book 2, Number 35: Narrated *Abu Huraira*, *Sahih Bukhari* 1.35.<sup>8</sup>

### **How Should Christians Respond?**

This brief study reveals that Islam does not offer paradise to all Muslims. It only assures paradise those who die in *Jihad*. No wonder some extremist Muslims are willing to die in the name of *Jihad*. They believe that as long as they are fighting *Allah’s* cause and they die for it, they go to paradise. However, Christians would contend that acts of terrorism do not assure anyone of paradise, because those who do them are not fighting for God’s cause, rather they are committing a great sin. Jesus said: “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3).

Jesus reaffirmed the Old Testament teaching that murder would bring God’s judgment. “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment’” (Matt. 5:21, NIV). Jesus also warned that many people who believe they are doing God’s will are self-deluded, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matt. 7:21-23).

Islam does not promise heaven to all of its followers. It is only in Christianity that a repentant sinner is given absolute assurance of salvation. 1 John 5:13 says. “These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life.” Heaven is a free gift for those who believe in Jesus. “For it is by grace you have been saved,

through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast” (Eph. 2:8-9, NIV).

## CONCLUSION

America is a land of immigrants. Here we find people from around the globe. America is committed to religious freedom and has thus opened its doors to adherents of many divergent faiths. The majority of Americans say that they are religious.<sup>9</sup> America is not only a mostly religious land but it is also a land of most religions. America’s religious freedom is reducing the geographical distance between religions. It has given sanctuary to nearly every religion in the world. When we look in any local telephone directory or newspaper we find ads for various religious groups.

In our neighborhoods we see people from various religious backgrounds. They may look different, dress different, and eat their customary foods, yet they are our neighbors. They shop in the same stores we do, work in the same offices where we work, and their children attend the same schools as ours. A majority of them hold the same family values as Christians and their ethical and moral beliefs are similar.

Many of these non-Christian people appear to be happy and satisfied with their religious practices. Many believe that they may go to heaven or even become gods themselves. This creates a dilemma for many religious people in North America. However, the Christian message is unique, and the people of these divergent faiths must be given an opportunity to hear it. The problem is that most of these people have never had a chance to respond to the love of Jesus Christ. Few immigrants are exposed to the love of Christ and His Word.

This raises a few troubling questions for Christians. Why have Christians failed in their responsibility to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to those who have never had a chance to hear it? Also, what is the role of those who are saved by His grace in communicating the good news (see Rom. 10:13-15)? Where and when do obedient Christians start proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ (see Acts 1:8)?

North American Christians should realize the implications and responsibilities that come with living in a pluralistic society. We are called to share the love of Jesus Christ with followers of these divergent religious groups.

Christians should follow a few practical principles to effectively communicate the gospel.

Respect the religious freedom that the United States and Canadian constitutions guarantee to followers of Islam and other religions.

Be aware of Islam and other religious groups and their followers who live among us.

Study the beliefs and practices of Islam and other faiths in order to understand what and why they believe.

Realize that only Christ can fulfill the spiritual hunger experienced by all people.

Build bridges of friendship to communicate the gospel, in Christ’s love, to Muslims and other religious adherents.

Share the unique message of Jesus Christ with non-Christian religious people in ways that are appropriate for their cultural backgrounds.

Cooperate with other religious people in matters of social needs, societal ethics, and personal morals in ways that do not compromise the gospel or the unique lordship of Jesus Christ.

Note: This study used Pickthall Translation of The Qur'an. (Y) Yusufali translation of The Qur'an

For more information about this topic, please visit our Web site: [www.namb.net/evangelism/iev](http://www.namb.net/evangelism/iev)

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.townhall.com/news/politics/200103/For20010301a.html>

<sup>2</sup> The Road to *Jihad*, [http://members.nbc.com/\\_X/MCM/jihadroad/index.html](http://members.nbc.com/_X/MCM/jihadroad/index.html)

<sup>3</sup> Example of various interpretations: Sayyid Abul Ala Maudoodi, said: "To change people's views by means of the pen and the tongue, and to bring about a revolution in their minds, is also *jihad*. And to spend money for this end, and to exert oneself physically, is *jihad* too." *Tafhimat* — I, p. 69; Allama al-Qastalani, classical scholar stated: "*Jihad* against one's desires and against the devil to be the greatest *jihad*." *Irshad as-Sari fi Sharh al-Bukhari*, vol. v, p. 37; and, in the view of King Faisal of Saudi Arabia: "*Jihad* is not just taking up the gun or raising the sword. *Jihad* is to invite to the Book of God and the Example of the Prophet, to hold fast to them, and to stick to them despite difficulties, distresses and afflictions of all kinds." *Umm al-Qura*, Makka, 24 April 1965 <http://tariq.bitshop.com/misconceptions/jihad/jleaders.html>

<sup>4</sup> Cyril Glasse, *The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam*, San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989, pp. 209-10; and Mircea Eliade, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, Vol, 7, New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987, pp.88-89.

<sup>5</sup> Cyril Glasse, pp. 93, 204; See, George W. Braswell Jr., *What You Need to Know About Islam and Muslims*, Nashville: Broadman and Holma Publishers, 2000, pp. 37-38.

<sup>6</sup> For detailed study see *Behind the Veil: Unmasking Islam*. Pp. 31-73; and see, Steven Emerson, Executive Producer and correspondent, *Jihad in America* PBS Documentary, Washington: SAE Productions, 1994.

<sup>7</sup> The *Qur'an* describes Paradise a place where there will be fruit, delightful gardens, great food, maidens, immortal youth, no heat, no cold, spring water, silk attire, honey, milk and honey. See, 2:2; 2:2; 37:43; 38:50-51; 47:15; 47:15; 76:12-13, 18-20.

<sup>8</sup> <http://answering-islam.org.uk/Index/index.html>

<sup>9</sup> Jacob Neusner, ed., *World Religions in America*, Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994, pg. 1.