

How might Christ respond to religious violence?

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As religious violence continues to make headlines, it is tempting for both the media and its audience to lump devout worshipers into the same camp as violent extremists. It is also tempting for people of one faith to regard members of other religious groups as the ones most likely to commit heinous crimes in the name of religion.

Mark Juergensmeyer in his book *Global Rebellion* addresses the ideological motivators behind religious violence and demonstrates that no one religious organization has a monopoly on terroristic extremism. Juergensmeyer positions secularism and religious activism into two opposing categories of what he calls "ideologies of order."

With the premise of seeing ideological rivalry between state and church in [a Hegelian dialectic](#), he compares the similar ways major world religions tend to resist secular globalization. Specifically, he groups Western politics and economics into one category of secular nationalism. The antithesis, then, would be any religious movement that perceives its ideals to be attacked or oppressed by secularism.

With these two broad categories in mind, Juergensmeyer offers compelling accounts of events and figures in Middle Eastern Islam, militant Zionism, Asian Islam, Hindu nationalism, Sikhism, Buddhism, and Christianity. In the United States, [Eric Rudolph and Robert Dear's attacks on abortion clinics](#), the Tsarnaevs' bombing at the Boston Marathon, the events of September 11, and [Timothy McVeigh's attack on the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building](#) in Oklahoma City all serve as sobering reminders of the violence that sometimes accompanies religious convictions.

According to Juergensmeyer, religious extremists share a common interest in resisting secular control of their communities and ways of life. In each case, secularism and Western politics are regarded as the enemy to religious control over one's homeland. Violence is then seen as the best way to push back against the evil secularization.

Christians who see their religion as one of peace and reconciliation can explore Christlike responses to religious violence that attempt to defuse or at least diminish it.

Christians can maintain a clear separation between Western politics and the gospel. Although Christianity as a cultural and historical phenomenon in the United States has a strong connection with politics, Christ followers must acknowledge that neither Jesus nor the early church imposed the movement onto Roman or Jewish law. Jesus had the ears of the highest offices in Palestine while on trial before Pilate and Herod, yet he never claimed any political power.

Christian leaders can reflect critically on the effects of demonizing religious others and fringe movements. Though pointing fingers and naming enemies tends to be popular in the media, Christian leaders must remember that this kind of venom leads to polarization. Rather, the church must recognize that all people were made in the image of God, even violent ones. The love of Christ extends to all, and no one stands in a position to create a hierarchy of those who deserve Christ's love.

Christian leaders can revisit their use of warrior motifs in their rhetoric. Though the Bible provides plenty of battle imagery, people must be cautious in how these images are applied to the American context. Jesus' followers, for example, showed no signs of being a militant in the literature or in historical accounts. The military motifs in the Bible serve well as metaphors for encouraging Christians to abstain from immorality, but the "armor of God" is always used defensively and in spiritual contexts. A misapplication of these texts can generate militant attitudes with biblical justification.

Christians can create moral alliances with members of other religious groups. A moral alliance honors religious distinctions while at the same time finds common ground for a common voice in a democratic society. Perhaps Paul's willingness to understand and function within the Roman economic and social systems (e.g., Acts 14 and 17, and 1 Cor. 9:22), illustrates ways that Christians today could be salt and light in the public sector. Paul's example allows for some dialogical latitude when working in multireligious contexts.

Contemplating commonalities and peaceful relations between religious groups when interacting with people of other religions often leads to meaningful relationships. By

pursuing sincere interreligious dialogue, Christians also remain true to their calling, and to the life and teachings of Jesus.

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