

## WHY RADICAL MUSLIMS HATE YOU

BY RUSTY WRIGHT

**D**o you remember how you felt on September 11, 2001? You saw images of jets crashing into buildings, people jumping from skyscrapers, the towers collapsing. What feelings did you experience? Confusion? Anger? Depression?

T.V. showed some Palestinians celebrating. One Hamas publication wrote, "Allah has answered our prayers."<sup>1</sup> In London, one Muslim group circulated posters praising the "magnificent 19," the hijackers.<sup>2</sup>

Chances are, you are a target of this hatred. If you are a Westerner, an American, a non-Muslim or a Muslim of a different stripe than they, then some radical Muslims hate you. Why? The complex answer involves history, culture, politics, religion and psychology.

Of course, many—some would say most—Muslims are peace loving

and deplore terrorism. Islam is quite diverse.<sup>3</sup> Extremist Muslims do not represent all Muslims any more than white supremacists represent all Christians. Not all "radical" Muslims are violent and hateful. But understanding extremist Muslim hatred is essential to interpreting our post-9/11 world. This article examines that hatred and offers a biblical response.

In his October 2001 video, Osama bin Laden mentioned the "disgrace and humiliation" tormenting Islam for "more than eighty years." Princeton Near Eastern scholar Bernard Lewis says the reference likely puzzled many Westerners. Many Muslims—for whom Islamic history carries divine significance—understood. Bin Ladin referred to the 1918 defeat

of the once-mighty Ottoman Empire and to British and French partitioning of Ottoman territory. Secular Turks soon also abolished the caliphate, or succession of rulers of all Sunni Islam. Desecration of this symbol of Muslim unity has pained many Muslims ever since.<sup>4</sup>

For centuries, the Islamic world had displayed military, economic

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and scientific superiority. But European development eventually overtook Islam.<sup>5</sup> Today, U.S. ties with Israel and involvement in Saudi Arabia kindle ire.

Bin Ladin calls on Muslims to "obey God's command to kill the

Americans and plunder their possessions...to kill Americans and their allies, both civil and military....”<sup>6</sup> He and his sympathizers want to eliminate Western influence and restore their version of Islam to the world.<sup>7</sup>

*Social and cultural differences—as well as history—underlie some radical Muslim hatred of the West. Consider one example.*

### Socio-cultural Roots

In 1948, Sayyid Qutb visited the United States for Egypt’s Ministry of Education. His stay left him shocked with what he perceived as moral degeneracy and sexual promiscuity.

He wrote that even American religion was tainted by materialism and consumerism. Churches marketed their services to the public like merchants and entertainers, emphasizing success, big numbers, “fun” and having “a good time.”<sup>8</sup>

He especially deplored clergy-sanctioned dances at church recreation halls. When the ministers lowered the lights, the dances became hot. Qutb’s PG description: “The dance is inflamed by the notes of the gramophone...the dance-hall becomes a whirl of heels and thighs, arms enfold hips, lips and breasts meet and the air is full of lust.” He cited the famous Kinsey Reports as evidence of American sexual debauchery.<sup>9</sup>

Poster celebrating the 2003 anniversary of September 11 by the Islamic group, Al Muhajiroun, operating openly in the U.K. Along with photos honoring the 19 hijackers is a picture of Osama bin Laden superimposed over an image of the World Trade Towers in flames.



Kuwaiti Muslim Brother, Khalid Sheikh Muhammad, became a bin Ladin terror chief.<sup>15</sup>

*Secularization, consumerism, materialism, the status of women, sexual mores...all concern radical Muslims.*<sup>16</sup> Princeton’s Lewis notes that Sayyid Qutb’s denunciation of American moral flaws became incorporated into radical Islamic ideology. For instance, he

Qutb, who was dark-skinned, also experienced racism in America.<sup>10</sup>

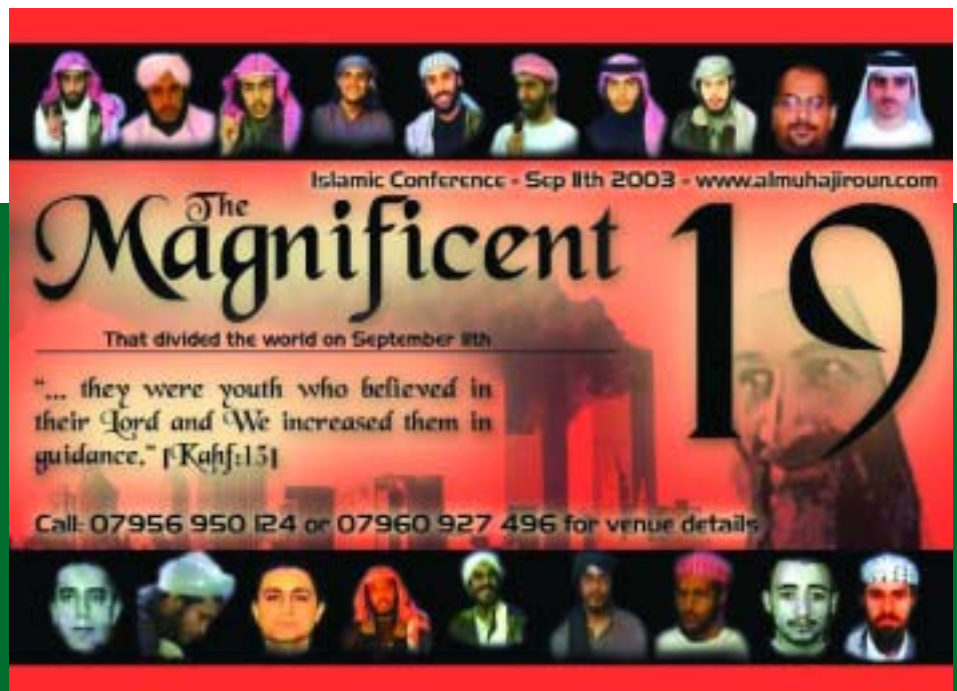
Back in Egypt, Qutb joined the Muslim Brothers organization.<sup>11</sup> Imprisonment and torture made his writings more militant. Qutb became what Georgetown University religion and international affairs professor John Esposito calls “the architect of radical Islam.”<sup>12</sup>

Some Muslim Brotherhood groups, offshoots and alumni are mainstream and nonviolent. Others have a violent legacy. A militant offshoot,<sup>13</sup> Islamic Jihad, assassinated Egyptian president Anwar Sadat. Esposito notes that a radicalized former Muslim Brother, Abdullah Azzam, significantly influenced Osama bin Laden.<sup>14</sup> Former CIA Middle East case officer Robert Baer observes that a

says Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini, in calling the U.S. the “Great Satan,” was being consistent with the Koranic depiction of Satan not as an “imperialist” or “exploiter” but as a seducer, “the insidious tempter who whispers in the hearts of men.”<sup>17</sup>

Lewis—who has his critics<sup>18</sup>—notes an essential difference between Christianity and Islam regarding government and religion. Jesus of Nazareth, the founder of the Christian faith, said, “Give to Caesar what belongs to him. But everything that belongs to God must be given to God” (Matthew 22:21 NLT). For much of history, this has been understood as recognizing two distinct authorities, spiritual and political.<sup>19</sup>

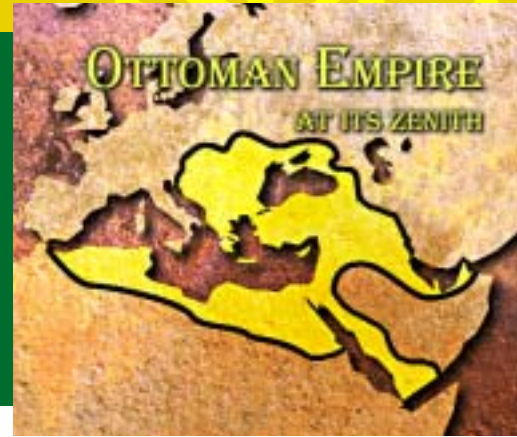
But much of Islam knows no such distinction. Muhammad was





## Bygone Glory:

- ◀ Suleyman the Magnificent, ruler of the Ottoman Empire receives a groveling Austrian delegation seeking peace terms in 1532. For many centuries this Muslim empire was a dominant world power that the west could ignore at its own peril.



both a religious and political leader, the Prophet and the head of state. Under his successors, the caliphs, Islam grew into a huge empire and world religion. Islamic shari'a, or Holy Law, deals with power, authority and political philosophy. Specific national applications differ. In an extreme example of this spiritual/political blend, Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini once said, "Islam is politics or it is nothing."<sup>20</sup>

Thus, the Western world and the United States as superpower became to many Muslims the infidel invaders, imperialist bullies who forcibly desecrate Islamic states. European colonialism, Western imperialism and U.S. policies are frequent Muslim complaints.<sup>21</sup>

Another perceived offense is Western involvement with corrupt rulers of Islamic states.<sup>22</sup> Especially galling to many radicals is Western complicity with rulers of Saudi Arabia—Islam's Holy Land—whom they see as warped by greed, graft and moral corruption. One Saudi diplomat noted after 9/11, "What shocks me most is why they hit America and not us."<sup>23</sup>

### Religious Roots

Wahhabism, an often-cited movement, [Editor's Note: See *Plain Truth*, Jan/Feb, 2002, page 14] was founded by an eighteenth century theologian, Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab. Wahhab wanted to purify Islam. He condemned and burned books contradicting his views. Wahhab's followers' principal focus was not outsiders but insiders,

Muslims whom they felt had practiced a "less-pure" form of Islam. They could be vicious, desecrating holy places and slaughtering Muslims who differed.<sup>24</sup>

Wahhabism's ongoing Saudi links brought international influence. When Saudi forces conquered Arabia in 1925, they controlled Islam's two most holy cities, Mecca and Medina. When Saudi Arabia became oil-rich, the stage was set. Wahhabism became the "official, state-enforced doctrine of one of the most influential governments in all Islam,"<sup>25</sup> which hosts annual pilgrimages to Mecca involving millions of Muslims. Saudi oil wealth funded Wahhabi education at home and abroad.<sup>26</sup> Wahhabism affected both Osama bin Ladin and the Taliban.<sup>27</sup>

Wahhabism's pervasive influence troubles Lewis. *Imagine, he says, that the Ku Klux Klan or a similar group took control of Texas and its oil and could widely propagate its version of "Christianity" through heavily endowed schools and col-*

*leges.*<sup>28</sup> Esposito distinguishes puritanical, politically conservative Wahhabism from radical, militant Wahhabism.<sup>29</sup>

Former CIA agent Robert Baer notes that Wahhabi soldiers fought the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s, with U.S. support. There, Wahhabis linked with radical Qutb followers, an alliance Baer likens to "mixing nitroglycerin in a blender."<sup>30</sup> A new, more militant strain of Wahhabism developed in addition to mainstream Wahabbism, with a new emphasis on taking the fight to outsiders: the infidels and the West.<sup>31</sup>

### Psychological Roots

Psychological factors influence radical Islam.

Lewis writes, "Almost the entire Muslim world is affected by poverty...."<sup>32</sup> Georgetown's Esposito sees "weak economies, illiteracy and high unemployment"<sup>33</sup> in many Muslim nations. *Relative deprivation* can be psychologically debilitating. If you are poor, some theories argue, and you see others



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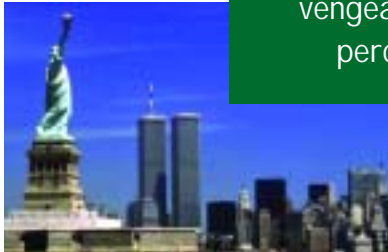


more prosperous, you may feel inferior, trapped or depressed.

Reports from the United Nations and the World Bank note that Arab nations fall far behind the West in "job creation, education, technology and productivity."<sup>34</sup> (There are, of course, exceptions.) *When global media bring pictures of lavish Western life, frustration burns and some extremists lash out.* One Egyptian playwright described these extremists as "pathologically jealous." He said, "They feel like dwarfs, which is why they search for towers and all those who tower mightily."<sup>35</sup>

*Feelings of rejection* play a part. Many Western societies have been slow to accept Muslims. The father of shoe bomber Richard Reid said of his son, "He was born here in Britain, like I was. It was distressing to be told things like 'Go home, nigger.'"<sup>36</sup>

*New York Times* foreign affairs columnist, Thomas Friedman, speaks of a "poverty of dignity" affecting even privileged Muslims. *Belief in Islam's moral superiority contrasted with economic and military disparity in the context of a repressive regime can engender feelings of humiliation and powerlessness, prompting vengeance against the perceived cause.*<sup>37</sup>



the principle of defending against attack is biblical.

• If you are not a Muslim, *learn about Islam*. One writer remarked of some of Israeli King David's supporters that they "understood the times (1 Chronicles 12:32 NASB). Paul sought to understand cultural and religious views of his day (Acts 17:16-34).

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• *Befriend some Muslims*, perhaps from your neighborhood or workplace. In humility, learn

about their families, their hopes and dreams. If appropriate, discuss your respective faiths. You may be surprised at the similarities. And your kindness may generate warmth toward the spirit that drives your kind behavior and speech (Colossians 4:5-6). □

1 Al-Risāla, issue of September 13, 2001; in Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror* (New York: The Modern Library, 2003), pp. 156-7.

2 Helen Gibson, "Islam's Other Hot Spots: Britain: No Pause in the Recruiting," *TIME.com*, posted September 7, 2003 at <http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101030915/wpakistan.html>; from *TIME* magazine issue cover date September 15, 2003.

3 John L. Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality? Third Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. xiii, xx, 225-226, 239.

4 Lewis 2003, op. cit., pp. xv-xviii. Bin Laden is not alone in his concern. For example, the founding leader of Ansar al-Islam, a fundamentalist militia in northern Iraq with suspected Al-Qaeda ties, sees his work as part of a lengthy Islamic struggle to restore the caliphate. See Neil MacFarquhar, "Islamic Militants Said to Infiltrate Iraq to Battle the U.S. Occupiers," *New York Times* (AOL edition), August 13, 2003.

5 Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong? The Clash Between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* (New York: Perennial/HarperCollins Publishers, 2002), pp. 6-7 ff., especially pp. 18-63.

6 Lewis 2003, op. cit., p. xxvii.

7 Lewis 2002, op. cit., pp. 164-65.

8 Lewis 2003, op. cit., pp. 76-79.

9 Sayyid Qutb, *Al-Islam wa-mushkilat al-hadara* (n.p., 1967), pp. 80ff; in Lewis 2003, op. cit., pp. 78-79.

10 John L. Esposito, *Unholy War: Terror in the Name of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 57.

11 Lewis 2003, op. cit., pp. 79, 76.

12 Esposito 1999, op. cit., p. 135, and personal interview, November 19, 2003.

13 Esposito 1999, op. cit., p. 272, also calls it a "splinter group."

14 Esposito, personal interview, November 19, 2003; Esposito 2003, op. cit., pp. 7, 19.

15 Robert Baer, *Sleeping with the Devil: How Washington Sold Our Soul for Saudi Crude* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2003), pp. 91-128, 195 ff.

16 See Lewis 2002, op. cit., pp. 64-81 for historical perspective on socio-cultural differences between Islam and the West. See Esposito 1999, op. cit., for additional perspective that differs from Lewis' on certain key points. See Thomas A. Friedman, *Longitudes and Attitudes: The World in the Age of Terrorism* (New York: Anchor Books/Random House, 2002/2003), pp. 334, 357, ff., for a contemporary journalist's perspective.

17 Lewis 2003, op. cit., p. 81. The final quotation in the paragraph to which this note refers, "the insidious tempter...", is from Qur'an CXIV, 4, 5.

18 For example, Esposito 1999, op. cit., pp. 219 ff.

19 Lewis 2002, op. cit., p. 97.

20 Lewis 2003, op. cit., pp. 5-8; see also Lewis 2002 op. cit., pp. 965-116, and Esposito 2003, op. cit., pp. 67-68.

21 Esposito 1999, op. cit., pp. 45-73, 222.

22 Lewis 2003, op. cit., pp. 103-112.

23 Baer, op. cit., p. 166.

24 Lewis 2003, op. cit., pp. 120-124 ff.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 128.

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 123-128.

27 Esposito 2003, op. cit., pp. 5, 7, 16, 48, 108-109.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 129.

29 Esposito 2003, op. cit., pp. 49, 111, 115.

30 Baer, op. cit., pp. 89-90. Baer here refers to Wahhabis in Afghanistan mixing with Muslim Brothers. Esposito, personal interview, November 19, 2003, feels it is more precise to say that the Wahhabis there mixed with radical followers of Sayyid Qutb.

31 David Van Biema, "Wahhabism: Toxic Faith?", *TIME.com*, posted September 7, 2003, at <http://www.time.com/time/covers/1101030915/wwahhabism.html>; from *TIME* magazine issue cover date September 15, 2003.

32 Lewis 2003, op. cit., p. 113.

33 Esposito 1999, op. cit., p. 241.

34 Lewis 2003, op. cit., p. 114.

35 Friedman, op. cit., p. 216. Friedman takes the quote from an unidentified issue of *TIME*.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 354-355. Friedman cites *TIME* of February 25, 2002.

37 *Ibid.*, pp. 242-243; 355 ff. The argument is not that all Muslims live in abject poverty. Many Muslim nations are oil-rich. But oil wealth does not always filter throughout society. Beyond finances, feelings of relative lack of power, influence and respect on the world stage contribute to the poverty of dignity, Friedman holds.

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