

## **Jesus, Muhammad, and the Relentless War for Peace.**

Religion has always been a part of who we are as humans. For thousands and thousands of years societies have struggled to understand and connect with their God. It is the one discipline that attempts to provide an answer to the most difficult and pressing question: “what is the meaning of life?” Religion has always intrigued me because it gets right to the heart of every person. It touches them to the core, transforming their lives and providing them with purpose and direction. Religion is a beautiful thing.

But at the same time it can be horribly destructive. Different religions have fought against each other, killing in the name of God. They have twisted God’s word and used Him to defend their horrendous actions, which undermines God’s role in the world and in our lives. I have struggled with the idea that different faithful believers, each trying to connect with God, each trying to live and love, have both come to the same conclusion that it is necessary to kill the other in the name of God. I don’t understand how this could happen, and have since become determined to find out.

I have been a Christian my whole life and am very strong in my faith and my beliefs. I consider myself to be a “liberal Christian”, one who views other religions as equally valid interpretations of God. This isn’t the typical Christian belief, and as such I constantly struggle in my faith to understand God and my place in the world. That is why I have lots of books dealing with Christianity, the Bible, and my faith. They help me explore issues and concerns, and through study and prayer I have begun to get a clearer picture of what I believe.

While exploring my faith more in-depth, I have also spent much of my time learning about other religions, specifically Islam. I originally decided to study Islam and the Qur'an because I figured it was a religion that was most different from mine, but the more I have learned the more I realize that Islam and Christianity are actually very similar. Both are attempting to radically transform the lives of their believers, and both are struggling to understand God. The details concerning how God communicates to us are different, but both believe that in order to be one with God you need to be disciplined and you need to love. Both religions provide two great examples of how we should live our lives today – Jesus and Muhammad.

Unfortunately, there has been a long and bloody history of war and violence between Christianity and Islam. Whether it's the Crusades or the Jihad, both religions have its ugly side. There are militant Christians who wage terror, as is the case with the Oklahoma City Bombing. And there are militant Muslims who wage terror, as is the case with Al-Qaeda, Hamas, and Islamic Jihad, all organizations that encourage the use of suicide bombing. Religious violence has pervaded every part of the globe, influencing political affairs and affecting the interactions of humans across all different cultures and beliefs. It is a disease that needs to be stopped.

My passion for understanding and preventing religious violence has led me to collect and read lots of books on this topic. Every birthday and Christmas most of my gifts are books. And there are so many more that I want to buy and read that I even created a list titled "Books I Want or Need to Read." But part of the problem with collecting books on this subject is the fact that it is currently a sensitive issue in the United States. In the post-9/11 world the issue of religion, politics, and violence is a controversial one, and many of the opposing ideas are either suppressed in the U.S. or

extremely hard to find. So when I was in London this summer I was determined to find books written by Middle Eastern or Arab authors who did not see the world the same way I did. I wanted to know how other people viewed the West and Christianity. I have always believed that the only way to truly find peace is to understand those that are different from you. And I succeeded – returning home with over ten books that are hard to find in the U.S.

I have collected all of these books on Christianity, Islam, and Religious Terrorism and Violence because I want to better understand this phenomenon. With the knowledge of how all of this started I believe I can begin to figure out how it all can end. I believe that a world can exist where different religious believers can live in harmony, each enjoying and respecting the diversity and uniqueness of other religions. And I am determined to fight for such a world

After I graduate, I can see my life heading in several directions, but no matter where it goes I know I want to spend my life working for religious peace. I can see myself being involved with the church's relationship to the Muslim community, or I can also see myself becoming a college professor. I am even taking Arabic right now because I plan on spending a year in Palestine after I graduate where I will help figure out the church's role in the Arab world.

But no matter what I do I know that my book collection will continue to grow and expand. I want my walls to be lined with books because in them I gain more knowledge and I get a better understanding of our world. One day, when I'm considered an expert on this issue, I even hope to have my own book up there. But for right now it is clear that my book collection centers on a simple idea – the attempt to understand and thereby prevent religious violence.

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