

# Christianity and ISIS: Toward a Better World

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This was originally a series of five blog posts in April 2015. After the Islamic terrorist attack on Paris on November 13th, 2015, I collected the posts to form a single article. The article is available for download at <http://ifwewilllive.com/christianity-and-isis-toward-a-better-world/>.

## Part 1

**It devastates me and I look away. But each day the murder toll of ISIS rises.**

The world affords constant cause for outrage, such that I would not fault you for looking away and putting it out of mind. But is there a better world? Can we give a better world to our sons?

Notably, ISIS has used the ancient practice of beheading, and this has led to special moral outrage. Barbarism, we cry. But it makes little difference to the murdered or their families whether death came by blade or bullet.

**Why have conditions so deteriorated in the Middle East?**

The Middle East did not suddenly begin to hate the “Christian” west. Militant Islam is the original Islam; it has not changed its ideological essence for fourteen hundred years. But in modern international affairs it is only within the past 70 years that militant Islam has come to prominence.

Why this change? Islam’s essential goals have not changed. The *Western response* to these goals has changed. I submit that it is the moral default of the West that has made possible the

ascendency of Islam. I do not mean that we have treated militant Islamic nations unfairly. Quite the contrary, our mistake was that we were willing in the first place to negotiate with instigators of violence.

### **ISIS is not the first Islamic organization to gain prominence by acts of murder.**

Notable in the historic deterioration was the PLO, led by the late Yasser Arafat. Though it was known that he had organized attacks upon hundreds of civilians, President Bill Clinton invited Arafat to the White House more often than any other foreign leader. Today we continue to see the White House's pattern of deference and negotiation toward militant Islam. President Obama refused to speak with the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. At the same time he classified Iran—the very heart of militant Islam—as an ally.

### **Why is it this way? And what can be done about it?**

There is a solution. But it is not an easy one. Americans, and especially Christians, must be willing to ask soul-searching questions about what we believe. We must learn to fully articulate the morality behind a better foreign policy. We need a better ideology.

How do we get it? We start with some important questions: “By what right do we judge ISIS? Aren't they doing what they think is right? Can we say our worldview is right and the worldview of ISIS is wrong?”

Such questions lead us to examine our very moral code.

## **Part 2**

In light of the outrage of ISIS and our own leaders' moral inability to fight back, Americans face

a fundamental alternative.

One choice: To unplug the television and continue to “hope” for “change.” Another choice: To identify the proper moral code and to defend that code with all vigor.

**A defense of America starts with a moral self-examination:**

“By what right do we judge ISIS? Aren’t they doing what they think is right? Can we say our worldview is right and the worldview of ISIS is wrong? Would it be wrong for America to go to war? What degree of war is acceptable?”

Christians have failed to give a compelling answer. Even neo-conservatives cannot stomach the idea of a fully self-interested attack upon America's enemies. So America would rather negotiate itself toward a slow demise.

**There is a proper response to ISIS and to the nations which stand behind it.**

But this answer is not available to America’s leaders—even the Christian ones. The answer is, as Leonard Peikoff so eloquently argued, to “end states that sponsor terrorism.”

We hide behind the misconception that, since terrorists function as individuals, we can only fight them individually. But the actions of terrorists are the moral responsibility of those nations which harbor them. Those nations have the resources to stop the executions and the bombings. That they do not stop them, is evidence of either collaboration or consent. Or else these ruling powers are indeed unable to contain the violence of their citizens, in which case they have no business being in power.

**The end of terrorism in the Middle East is not complicated.**

The United States must commit to ending the governments which abet it. We must send a

message to the leaders of every country in the world: If you do not stop your people from attacking our people, we will. And you will not be around to see it, because you will no longer be in power.

If such a message were received and believed, it would not take a single week for the tin-can dictators of the world to put an end to the terrorist activities within their borders. But how can the United States send such a message with credibility? Again and again we have demonstrated that we want a solution without a display of force. We want “peace-talks.”

**With a man or a nation of violence, there is no such thing as a peace-talk.**

Here is what the end of ISIS looks like: An overwhelming display of force by the United States against any nation known to have supported ISIS and a commitment to do the same until the message is believed.

But we will not do this. Why? To understand the issue we must look further at the concept holding back both the liberals and the neoconservatives: the moral code of self-sacrifice.

### **Part 3**

**Liberals and neoconservatives do not end ISIS because they have accepted the moral code of self-sacrifice.**

As demonstrated in The Iraq War, American leadership has accepted the idea that, since in modern war zones it is impossible to tell enemies apart from civilians, American soldiers must be sacrificed in order to spare the killing of civilians. What does this policy of “just war” represent, but a denial of reality?

In a war zone those people who do not flee must be considered as opposition. While, certainly, we should avoid the unnecessary killing of civilians, we should not sacrifice American lives in order to do so. Civilian deaths are the moral responsibility of the aggressor nation. Our own self-interest demands that we act decisively to put an end to the threat which the people of the aggressor nation themselves failed to nullify.

**The point of a war is to end the enemy's will to fight.**

For the duration of a war, it is immoral to sacrifice the lives of Americans in order to save the lives of foreign conspirators and potential collaborators. The United States went to Iraq with the idea that our war would only be justified if it was fought for the sake of the Iraqis. Hence "Operation: Iraqi Freedom."

That is not the right reason a country should send its own citizens to die. If a man would not be willing to die or to send his own son to die for a given cause, then he should not be sending anyone else to die for it. Such is the foundation for a theory of truly "just war."

But we reject justice. America thinks it has no place for such "self-interest" in its moral code. Significantly, America's Christian leaders have [not spoken out in favor of a war](#) against the enablers of ISIS. Why? Is it not the place of God's people, the church, to know the times and what should be done?

**Part 4**

To answer the question of ISIS and the baffling reaction of America's leaders, we must address: Why does the American moral code reject self-interest in favor of self-sacrifice? The answer only becomes clear after a deep search of the American soul. So let's look at the moral

foundations of the most moral of Americans: the Christians.

### **How do intellectually astute Christians typically respond to the evil of ISIS?**

More fundamentally, how do they defend the very idea of their own moral code? If asked about moral foundations, this is the typical answer: "Morality can only be found in God's Word.

Unless there is a divine law-giver, no one can really tell right from wrong, and morality has no basis. But we all know there is such thing as right and wrong. There is indeed a divine law-giver: God."

### **This view is common. It is full of problems.**

First, how exactly is a Christian different from the members of ISIS who claim the word of Allah? "But our Word from God is the real one." Fair enough, but with that claim how will American Christians be able to convince their secular countrymen to fight against militant Islam?

### **Is the moral absolute of divine revelation the only possible defense against subjectivism and moral compromise?**

Or is there a way to appeal to all Americans right now and to point them to the just and proper response to a foreign attacker? We see in Romans 2:14 that morality is available to all people, whether or not they have God's law: *Indeed, when Gentiles, who do not have the law, do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves, even though they do not have the law.* Thus God's Word itself shows that it should not be appealed to as "the only possible escape" from subjectivism and moral doubt. Moral facts are grounded in reality itself, as observable by all men.

### **Even God's own judgments are based on reality.**

Romans 2:2 says: *Now we know that God's judgment against those who do such things is based on truth.* What is the truth here referred to? The factual needs of human life. God's moral judgments are a means to the end of human life (Deuteronomy 30:15). But even without access to God's moral judgments, secular man is equipped to understand that criminals and aggressors are evil and must be stopped. Thus American Christians should publicly advocate for war against aggressor nations by appealing to the principle of justice, as understandable by all men. To support such a policy we need only recognize the *objectivity* of morality.

## **Part 5**

### **America has not responded to ISIS.**

This moral failure proceeds from America's inability to recognize the objectivity of morality. Our response amounts to the conclusion: there is no right response, or if there be a right response, there is no way to know it.

It is the reaction of a nation lacking a standard of values. That is to be expected, for once self-preservation is denounced, what could be the standard? It is only from the goal of self-preservation that there rises a need for a code of behavior or values. If America would once accept (or even consider) self-interest as the foundation of values and morality, the irrationality of her policy of self-sacrifice would become obvious.

What is the standard for all values? *One's own life.* Why should a man follow a moral code? In order to preserve and benefit his own individual life. A proper moral code does not condemn men or nations as morally evil for seeking to stop an attacker.

**In our age there is great ignorance about moral concepts.**

We do not even know how to speak of good or evil; or righteous self-interest. But in light of the slaughter committed by ISIS we see both the necessity of moral judgment and the cowardice of inaction.

Why doesn't the United States impose its overwhelming military might upon those nations, groups, and individuals that systematically seek to kill Americans? We are paralyzed by our acceptance of the moral code of self-sacrifice. As a nation, we would rather see Americans killed daily than commit the sin of self-assertion.

So indeed we will watch as Americans are killed. And the dictators of the world will watch and feel empowered as they see the world's mightiest nation cower before mere outlaws, for fear of self-assertion.

**A nation cannot defend itself by a partial commitment.**

As the late John David Lewis argued in *Nothing Less than Victory*, when attacked, a nation must take the war to the aggressor and end its willingness to fight. The solution to ISIS is a righteous and wholehearted war, leading to the termination of those individuals, groups—and yes, nations—that enable attacks on America and her allies.

But the prerequisite of such a war is a code of values based on individual self-interest. That is what America lacks, and that is what she desperately needs. Do we seek a future for the United States? We must recognize that *value is individual and self-interest is proper*. And we must start talking about it.

*\*For a more thorough treatment of the concepts behind this series and the political and historical facts of the case, you can do no better than John David Lewis' article: ["No Substitute for Victory."](#)*