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Radical Islamism, Secular Fundamentalism and the Clash

Interview With Javier Jordán, a Specialist on Terrorism and Defense

GRANADA, Spain, MAY 17, 2004 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- The "clash of civilizations" is fueled not only by radical Islamism but also by secular fundamentalism, says an expert on terrorism.

Javier Jordán, author of the book "Prophets of Fear," holds a doctorate in political science and is a professor at the University of Granada.

In this interview with ZENIT, Jordán says that "radical Islamism wants all of society to be governed by the parameters of its religion, and secular fundamentalism tries to erase all traces of God in the public sphere."

"They are two extremes which fuel the so-called clash of civilizations," says Jordán, who has been the recipient of a NATO fellowship and is a collaborator with Spain's National Defense Center of Higher Studies. He has been a researcher at Oxford University, the London School of Economics, London's King's College, and the Institute of Political Studies of Bordeaux.

Q: Who are the prophets of fear?

Jordán: I refer with that name to the ideological leaders of Muslim terrorism. The best-known is Osama bin Laden, but there are others also related to the al-Qaida network, such as Omar Abdel Rahman, Abu Qatada and Ayman Al-Zawahiri.

All of them have justified what has come to be called "global jihadism": the global holy war against those they consider false Muslims and infidel enemies of Islam.

For years these people have threatened the West and the rulers of the majority of the Arab regimes with carrying out terrorist attacks like those executed in the United States and Spain, as well as in other countries, such as the Philippines, Indonesia, Turkey, Morocco ... et cetera.

Through armed actions, their propaganda, much of it distributed on Internet, and individual recruitment, they want to start a global resistance which will end by destabilizing and undermining their opponents.

This is why the very delicate situation in Iraq gives them great expectations. They are sure that they will defeat the United States in a similar way as they defeated the Soviets in Afghanistan.

Q: Why do you speak of Islamist and not Islamic terrorism?

Jordán: This type of terrorism arises in Islamist surroundings, also called Islamic fundamentalists by the media.

Islamism is a political-religious ideology, which not all Muslims share, and which hopes to re-Islamize the countries of Muslim majority through social activities, but also to Islamize the state itself. They do not even conceive of a non-confessional state.

Ultimately, Islamists also aspire to Islamize the whole planet, but for the time being they are aiming at the countries where Islam is already in the majority.

The majority of these groups do not allow the use of violence for religious ends, but it is from them that minority divisions arise that do accept it as an instrument to speed up the Islamization of society.

It is a violence that they exercise against those who publicly violate the religious law, against those who govern without applying Islamic law, and against those they consider as enemies of Islam: the West in general and the United States and Israel in particular.

Q: You say that "religion as such is not the origin of violence, but it can become a multiplier of barbarities." How is this possible?

Jordán: Among the causes of Islamist terrorism is the ideological motivation based on a radicalized reading of Islam.

For those who share such a minority view -- even if in absolute terms they are thousands of persons -- religion does constitute the explanation and justification of their armed actions. Moreover, other factors tend to coincide: humiliation, frustration, desire for revenge. The religious argument provides ideological coherence to all these feelings.

Recourse to religion is not always an excuse or a manipulation. Many of those people are sincerely religious before entering the jihadist groups.

How can one explain that perversion of religion? In addition to the coincidence with those feelings of anger and hatred, the radical reading can be understood in some cases by a conception of religion that excludes charity.

If we analyze the speeches of the jihadist leaders and the farewell messages of some of the suicide attackers, we see that, what in Christian terms would be faith and hope are present, but what is lacking is charity, which is replaced by hatred of those they consider to be enemies of their religion. So they become implacable, because they consider themselves to be instruments of divine justice.

Q: You propose an intermediate line between religious radicalism and secular fundamentalism. How can it be achieved?

Jordán: Both positions agree in not respecting the religious freedom of others.

Radical Islamism aspires to having the whole of society governed by parameters of their religion, and secular fundamentalism tries to erase all traces of God in the public sphere. They are two extremes that foster the so-called clash of civilizations, which can happen at the local or global level.

The intermediate way consists in the a-confessionality of the state, and in the coexistence of the different creeds that exist within each society, allowing their public expression in education, social activities and cultural manifestations. And all in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

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