

The violence of Islamic extremists is evil and can cause us to fear all Muslims. Such fear wants laws passed preventing Muslims from entering our country, and the removal of those thought to be terrorists who are already here. But as Christians, what about Jesus' command for us to love our neighbour? Are not Muslims our neighbours?

We need to ask ourselves, are we letting fear control us or God's love? In 1 John 4:18 we read, "perfect love casts out fear". To change from fear and hate to love and compassion can seem an idealistic or impossible goal. How do we feel when someone we know is killed by terrorists? We need the help of the indwelling Spirit of Christ and of each other.

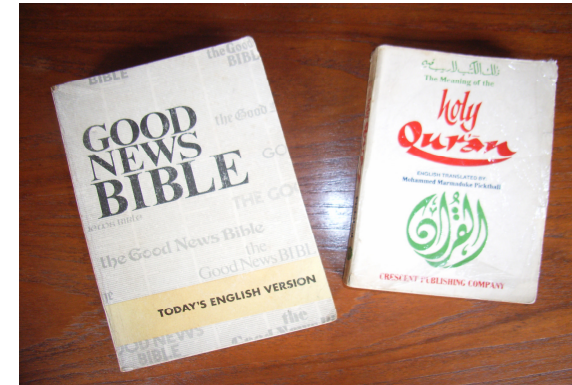
In the gospel accounts, Jesus lovingly related to Jews and Gentiles. A Roman centurion's faith was praised and his servant healed, a Gentile woman who pestered Jesus was treated with respect and received what she desired. At his crucifixion Jesus prayed to his Father to forgive the soldiers hammering in the nails.

Following Christ calls us to witness to God's love for all. We shall at times struggle and fail, but we believe that in the end God's love which holds and permeates all creation, human and non-human, will triumph.

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A Christian Response to Islamic Terrorism



Some years ago Australians didn't often think about Muslims, but today the horrific actions of Islamic State terrorists overseas and the violent behaviour of a few in Australia have changed things. The random killing of civilians in Paris, the Lindt café episode and the killing of a man working at the Parramatta police station by a school boy are worrying, to say the least! These acts are claimed by the perpetrators as being done in the name of Allah or God, but many Muslims would disagree.

As Christians, we might respond by suspecting all Muslims of being terrorists or potential terrorists who want to convert Australians to the Islamic faith, and take over our country.

If we go back into history, we can find examples of Christians in the Crusades going to war against Muslims. During the late 20th century 'troubles' in Northern Ireland, Christians killed and injured thousands of other Christians.

The customs of Muslims and their faith are often seen by Christians as different and we complain that they are not 'Australian' .

Muslim men who prostrate themselves in prayer, and women who often, but not always, cover their heads and wear long dresses look alien to us. Actually these acts are also found among some Christians. I have worshipped in India with Christian Syrian Orthodox sisters who when praying, at least in Lent, prostrated themselves each day in their chapel. If we go back thirty years or so, sisters/nuns in the Anglican and Roman Catholic Orders usually wore long black habits, and veils covering their heads. Some still do.

And what about the faith of Muslims? Some Muslims and Christians would agree that Allah is not another God but the same God Jews and Christians worship. Many Christians and Muslims would disagree, or believe that their views of God are quite different. The Qur'an contains some rather violent and odd stories. If you have read the whole of the Bible, that too directs the violent and seemingly unjust killing of certain people. Muslims respect Jesus, not as God

but as an important prophet of God. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is also respected and honoured. The Qur'an opens with the words (this is an English translation), "Praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds, The Beneficent, the Merciful. Owner of the Day of Judgment, Thee (alone) we worship; Thee (alone) we ask for help. Show us the straight path. The path of those whom Thou hast favoured; Not (the path) of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray."

In the *Hadith*, a holy book for Muslims, Mohammed writes, "None of you has faith until you love for your neighbour what you love for yourself." (67-1, Hadith no. 45.)

It is difficult to connect these descriptions of God and the instruction of how to love our neighbour to the behaviour of Islamic State followers. Instead, they sound to me more like Jesus' words in Matthew 22:37-39: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind...You shall love your neighbour as yourself".

The clothing, worship and faith of Muslims have some similarities with that of Christians, but there are also differences. As Christians, we might wish to remove differences, but differences need respect and can sometimes enrich our own faith. For example, the reverent way Muslims follow the name of Jesus with 'peace be upon him', rather than say it carelessly or use it as a swear word.