

Just Say No to Anti-Muslim Bigotry

Terry Jones, the Florida pastor who plans to burn copies of the Quran on 9/11, does not speak for charismatic Christians.

Most of us reacted with a collective groan when we learned that the pastor of a small charismatic church in Gainesville, Fla., said he plans to burn copies of the Quran on Sept. 11. I was especially disappointed because I lived in Gainesville in my 20s. This man's irresponsible plot has put a bustling college town in the crosshairs of a possible terrorist attack—and has made evangelical Christians look like intolerant goons.

I'd like to go on the record to say this: Rev. Terry Jones does not speak for charismatic Christians, and his brand of fire-breathing judgmentalism doesn't even remotely resemble the message of Jesus Christ. I am praying that he will repent and renounce his outrageous intentions before the time arrives to strike the first match.

"I'd like to go on the record to say this: Rev. Terry Jones does not speak for charismatic Christians, and his brand of fire-breathing judgmentalism doesn't even remotely resemble the message of Jesus Christ."

While moderate Muslims in the United States view this as a woeful hate crime (think how you would feel if Muslims planned to burn Bibles on Christmas Day), some radical Islamic jihadists in other parts of the world have anonymously threatened to bomb Jones' church (which has shrunk to 30 members since he unveiled his plan.)

Most people, including the majority of Christians in Gainesville, view Jones as a misguided religious zealot. After all, members of his church wear "ISLAM IS OF THE DEVIL" T-

shirts—and they even have coffee mugs bearing the phrase. *The New York Times* reported last week that Jones packs a pistol because he receives death threats.

He also told the newspaper that he plans to go through with his plan to incinerate copies of the Quran even though the local fire department has denied him a burning permit.

The National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), which represents numerous Pentecostal denominations and charismatic fellowships, denounced Jones' actions in a recent statement. "The NAE calls on its members to cultivate relationships of trust and respect with our neighbors of other faiths. God created human beings in His image, and therefore all should be treated with dignity and respect," the statement said.

Contrary to what Jones and his followers believe, Jesus Christ condemned hateful religious intolerance. When He and His disciples entered a Samaritan village, and the Samaritans were less than hospitable, James and John told Jesus they wanted to call down fire from heaven on the whole place (see Luke 9:54).

Jesus flatly rebuked them, saying: "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them" (v. 55-56, NASB).

Notice that James and John were eager to strike a match and conduct their own vengeful bonfire. In their immaturity they thought they could advance Christ's kingdom by fighting fire with fire. But Jesus contradicted their misdirected zeal and showed them that when we are opposed, the only way to win is through patience, compassion and forgiveness.

When Jesus was about to be arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane, an impetuous Peter came to His rescue and sliced off a slave's right ear. Jesus immediately healed the poor guy (don't you love the fact that Jesus can fix our stupid blunders?) and then rebuked Peter's crazed militarism by saying: "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who

take up the sword shall perish by the sword" (Matthew 26:52).

Jesus never carried protest signs or staged book-burnings. If that had been His strategy, His disciples would have marched through Jerusalem with placards that said: "PROSTITUTION IS OF THE DEVIL," "UNFAIR TAXATION IS OF THE DEVIL" or "CAESAR WORSHIP IS OF THE DEVIL." All those sins are truly devilish, but you can't change people's behavior by condemning their actions. The only way anyone can ever find freedom from sin or satanic strongholds is by having a personal encounter with Christ.

The apostle Paul, whom we are called to imitate, didn't rattle swords or organize protests either. And even though he was inwardly irritated by the idolatry in Athens (see Acts 17:16), he preached to the men on Mars Hill about an unknown God who loved them. He did not insult them, call down fire on them or pull out a weapon. He knew that our Christian "warfare"—our invisible struggle with sin, deception and false gods—is not "according to the flesh" (2 Cor. 10:4). Rather, it involves humble acts like prayer and friendship evangelism.

Perhaps this embarrassing fiasco in Gainesville will help remind us how we are supposed to share the gospel with an unbelieving world: We do it with the same kind of unconditional love Jesus showed to the sinners, tax-collectors, prostitutes, lepers, Roman soldiers, pagans, homeless beggars and religious hypocrites He transformed.

J. Lee Grady is contributing editor of *Charisma* and author of the new book *The Holy Spirit Is Not for Sale*. You can follow him on Twitter at [leegrady](#). He urges you to pray on 9/11 for the worldwide Muslim community.