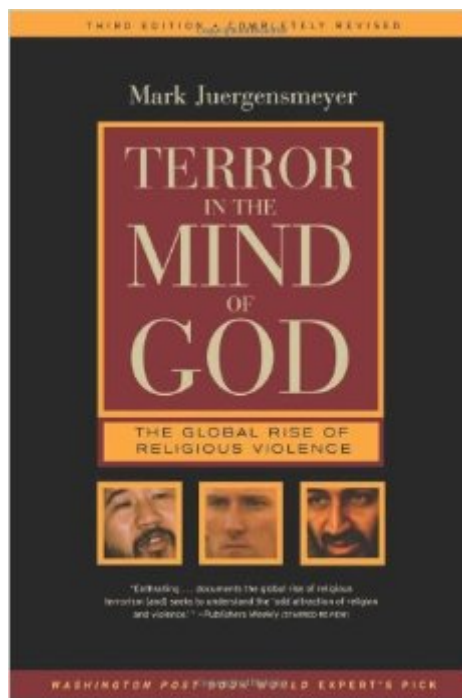


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# Terror In The Mind Of God: The Global Rise Of Religious Violence (Comparative Studies In Religion And Society)



## Synopsis

Completely revised and updated, this new edition of *Terror in the Mind of God* incorporates the events of September 11, 2001 into Mark Juergensmeyer's landmark study of religious terrorism. Juergensmeyer explores the 1993 World Trade Center explosion, Hamas suicide bombings, the Tokyo subway nerve gas attack, and the killing of abortion clinic doctors in the United States. His personal interviews with 1993 World Trade Center bomber Mahmud Abouhalima, Christian Right activist Mike Bray, Hamas leaders Sheik Yassin and Abdul Azis Rantisi, and Sikh political leader Simranjit Singh Mann, among others, take us into the mindset of those who perpetrate and support violence in the name of religion.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This compelling and deeply insightful book, obviously misread by the previous reviewer, does not attempt to advance a hypothesis about the causal origins of religious activism. It does, however, place the rise of religious activism within the context of globalization. Since nearly all of the spokespersons of the movements themselves rail against the global forces of secularism, this seems a reasonable context indeed. This is an excellent piece of work.

When the tragic events of September 11th occurred, the onslaught of media coverage made me want to search for an objective discussion of these terrorist acts. This book certainly met my

expectations. The author studies not just Islamic groups but Christian, Buddhist and Sikh as well. It is eerie when you read descriptions of the 1993 bombing of the WTC and the authors analysis as to why this structure was picked. In fact, the author clearly describes the terrorist goal of complete destruction of the towers and its impact on the American population. All this two years before the actual event. Its a rational discussion without the hysteria and flag waving of the media. It allows the reader to read and let the meaning of the last few weeks sink in. I highly recommend this book.

"I will send my terror before you, and will throw into confusion all the people..." (Exodus 23:27). This book sets out to explore why, in a few extreme instances, religion is used to justify terrorism. "Terror in the Mind of God" was published in 2000, before the destruction of the World Trade Center towers, but it is extremely relevant to today's headlines. The psyche of suicide bombers is explored, and the men who send them to their deaths are interviewed. The author also interviews actual terrorists (and/or their close associates) who perpetrated many acts of murder and destruction within the last two decades. The cultures of violence that the author treats in depth are: "Soldiers for Christ;" "Zion Betrayed (Judaism);" "Islam's `Neglected Duty';" "The Sword of Sikhism;" and "Armageddon in a Tokyo Subway (Buddhism)." In the last five chapters of this book, the author attempts to explain the logic of religious violence. He maintains a very non-judgmental, even tone even when explaining the reasons behind the grisliest acts of terror. It was spooky to find myself nodding my head at Juergensmeyer's explanations of the terrorists' logic; `okay, so that's why they did it.' Taking a teen-ager who feels he has nothing to live for and everything to die for, and turning him into a human bomb seems like a relatively simple task for a religious zealot, now that I've read this book. Fascinating and extremely frightening. In one of the most interesting and hopeful parts of the book, Juergensmeyer turns his thesis on its head, and suggests that, "the entrance of religion into public life would help to leaven these negative influences [the use of terror to promote a religion]. Several thoughtful observers of Western society have suggested that indeed it might---if religion could enter the public arena in an undogmatic and unobtrusive way....what religion provides society is not just high-mindedness, but also a concern with the quality of life---a goal more ennobling than the simple accretion of power and possessions." This book could change all of our lives, if we let it.

Terror in the mind of God is a remarkable work made all the more remarkable by the author's dispassionate portrayal of people who, in every other facet (except that facet, religious belief, which has consumed and overwhelmed all the other elements of their humanity) of their lives seem to be no different from the reasonable and decent "normal" people who espouse Christian, Muslim, Sikh,

Hindu, Buddhist, or Jewish beliefs. Perhaps a major difference which sets apart those who kill, and in some cases die, for their religious beliefs is that there is never the slightest element of doubt in the minds of the true believer, and this total belief by religious fundamentalists of any faith in a cosmology which unbelievers find incredible, is always dangerous. (Didn't someone smart once say, "I don't care what you believe about God so long as you don't believe it totally.") Juergensmeyer has managed to elicit and portray their fanaticism in such a way that the reader is never tempted to laugh uproarously at even the most fantastic, unbelievable and outrageous claims of these "true believers". I've no experience with Jewish, Islamic, Sikh, Hindu or Buddhist true believers, but having lived all of my adult life in Northwest Arkansas and provided abortions in my medical practice in an area surrounded by "true believers" from the furthest fringes of the Christian Right and having been the target of Christian antiabortion fundamentalists on numerous occasions in the past, I can testify that Juergensmeyer knows his terrorists. The folks who have targeted me and my practice seem on first glance to be concerned and reasonable people, at least until the subject turns to abortion or gays, evolution or prayer in the schools. Then their eyes literally glaze and they begin to spout utter nonsense as though reading from a text. I have been on talk shows, debates and public forums with them, sitting in a chair next to them, and were I a fearful man, easily intimidated, it would have been a most frightening experience. Of course, terror is what they want and intend to inspire in both their victims and in those observing, just as Juergensmeyer said. But if their actions cannot terrify those of us at whom they are aimed, what is the point? Unfortunately, the terrorists who confront us today have certainly managed to terrify a significant portion of the American citizenry. We can only hope that fear doesn't rob us of our collective wits, although the performance of the current military and political leadership in this country (with the glaring exception of Colin Powell and the California congresswoman - I wish I could remember her name - who cast the lone vote against our current Asian adventure) does not inspire confidence. This book, coupled with Ahmed Rashid's book, *Taliban*, should be required reading for anyone who aspires to a position of leadership in this country over the next fifty years or so, and should certainly be on the curriculum of any religious institution which purports to instruct as opposed to indoctrinate religious leaders. Religious belief in the service of peace and justice, of solace and relief, has been one of the great blessings of mankind. I am just not sure that this benign aspect of religion has ever been enough to compensate for its more malignant faces.

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