



## Is Religion Killing Us? Violence in the Bible And the Quran

By Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer



**Is Religion Killing Us? Violence in the Bible And the Quran** By Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer

Coverage of recent world events has focused on violence associated with Islam. In this courageous and controversial book, Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer claims that this narrow view ignores the broader and unfortunate relationship between human violence and the sacred texts of Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Both the Bible and the Quran, he believes, are riddled with violent images of God and with passages that can be reasonably interpreted to justify violence against enemies in service to God's will.

According to Nelson-Pallmeyer, many wondered how Muslims could in God's name kill innocent civilians by flying airplanes into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Few, however, questioned U.S. leaders and citizens invoking God's name, or assuming God's favor, to fight the responsive "war against terrorism." And in the Middle East, the roots of the continuing and seemingly unsolvable conflict and violence are to be found in both the Torah and the Quran.

Nelson-Pallmeyer challenges the understanding of power that lies at the heart of the sacred texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. He argues that nonviolence is powerful and necessary and that a viable future for human beings and the planet depends on challenging the ways in which sacred texts reinforce visions of power that are largely abusive. A viable future, he says, depends on re-visioning God's power.

Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer is Assistant Professor of Justice and Peace Studies at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota. For more than twenty years he has studied and written about the relationship of religion, violence, and peace, and his books include *Jesus Against Christianity: Reclaiming the Missing Jesus* (Trinity Press International) and *School of Assassins: Guns, Greed, and Globalization*.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This hard-hitting, cogent book by Nelson-Pallmeyer, an assistant professor of peace and justice studies at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minn., explores the relationship between religion and violence in Christianity, Judaism and Islam. "I accept that there are positive streams within the Bible and the Quran," he writes. "The problem that has been ignored for too long, however, is that these streams flow from and are flooded by an enormous reservoir of God's abusive violence." Nelson-Pallmeyer cites Old Testament/Hebrew Bible passages that point to God as a "determined and powerful land thief" and a "relentless" and bloodthirsty warrior. And while the New Testament is often perceived as a softer, gentler statement about God's goodness, Nelson-Pallmeyer claims that this more mild ethos is shored up by a system in which Jesus' sacrificial death appeases "a violent God who punishes sin." Likewise the Quran, which is informed by the Old and New Testaments, not surprisingly has a strong orientation toward religious violence (though Nelson-Pallmeyer overstates his case when he maintains that "almost every sura presents fear of God's wrath as the foundation for belief and action"). Nelson-Pallmeyer's sometimes harsh rhetoric is balanced by his extensive knowledge of the three religions' sacred texts and by a writing style which, for an academic, is refreshingly free of jargon. Chapters are short, accessible, and persuasive. While this book's perspective may be one-sided, it is a side that needs to be heard.

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From [Booklist](#)

There is an unacknowledged elephant in the room of the world's great monotheisms, Nelson-Pallmeyer says, consisting of the fact that, in the Bible and the Qur'an, God attacks and incites to violence far more than he blesses. When not punishing his people's enemies or backsliders among the faithful, he kills innocents, such as the couple he offs for donating only most of the proceeds from a voluntary real-estate sale (Acts 5:1-11). So God's own behavior and injunctions justify atrocities such as 9/11--"The Bible/Qur'an tells me so," the religious terrorist can reasonably say. Of course, Nelson-Pallmeyer doesn't accept the cruel God predominant in the Scriptures. He prefers the God concerned for compassion, justice, and ethical conduct that the sacred books also record, and he counsels that the salvation believers seek will come from being healed by one's enemies (e.g., the West by the Middle East), and by doubting, from the record of human history, that the good society can be realized by violence. A small book conveying a large argument calmly but forcibly. *Ray Olson*

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Review

'A book guaranteed to send sparks flying, yet it is both topical and relevant to today's key global issues, while arguing strongly against the use of violence in any circumstances.' *Publishing News*

"In the present work he argues that violent depictions of God in the Scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam have contributed to tragic events such as the September 11 disaster, the misguided U.S. "war against terror," and ongoing violent conflict in the Middle East. In sum, N.-P. does a service by pointing out troublingly violent biblical and Quranic passages..."- Harold C. Washington, *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, Vol. 68, 2006

*(Catholic Biblical Quarterly)*

"This is an interesting and controversial book that deserves to be read and debated widely and would be recommended for undergraduate students on introductory religion courses or more specialist courses in religion and violence."

*(Theological Book Review)*

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(Sanford Lakoff)

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