

# We have a duty to ask the tough questions



**T**HE World Trade Centre 2001, the Bali bombings 2002, the Australian embassy in Jakarta 2004, Madrid railway station 2004, the London Underground 2005, the Taj Mahal Hotel Mumbai 2008, *Charlie Hebdo*, the Parramatta police station, the Bataclan Theatre in Paris — I could go on but you get the picture.

And the picture is not that all this is the work of Islamic State. Most of those jihadi attacks preceded IS. They were organised by different groups — al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, Lashkar-e-Taiba in India, Jemaah Islamiyah in Indonesia — but they all had one thing in common. Last Friday in the West African country of Mali, it was an affiliate of al-Qaeda, that stormed the Radisson Hotel shouting Allahu Akbar (God is great) before taking 170 hostages and killing 19.

Nor is the killing entirely indiscriminate. The gunmen holding the hostages in Mali's Radisson Hotel were prepared to release some who could recite



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verses from the Koran. It was similar in the Westgate Shopping Mall attack in Nairobi, Kenya (September 2013) where 67 hostages were killed. Some care was taken not to kill Muslims. Those who could recite the Shahadah, the statement of Islamic faith, were released and spared.

In Africa there is a front line between Muslim states and secular ones so it might be necessary to take care that you are killing the right people.

In Europe, in the Bataclan Theatre, or in the Sari Club at Kuta beach in Bali, you can presume that the patrons are nonbelievers or "kuffar" who, as such, deserve to be killed. And that is the point to these

extremists. Those who refuse to submit to Islam deserve to be killed. In fact, there are special rewards in the afterlife for fighters who "martyr" themselves while doing it.

After each atrocity, complacent political leaders trot out the same platitudes. They tell us: "This has nothing to do with Islam ...". It is wearing thin with the public. All these attacks are coming from people who subscribe to one religion, which is not Catholic or Protestant or Jewish or Buddhist or Yazidi. Plainly it has something to do with Islam. And the people who are doing it think it has everything to do with Islam. That is why they shout "Allahu Akbar" while firing their guns and detonating their explosives.

Now, it may be they have got Islam all wrong and the good thing is that their interpretation seems to be a tiny, minority one. But the fact is that this interpretation has followers from different continents and different cultures, which tells us there is something in the source documents and history of Islam

that gives them a peg to hang their hat on. If there were an easy demolition of this school of theology, why hasn't it been done by now?

These are difficult questions to ask, but after the level of death in recent years we have to be honest and ask them.

One great illusion that Western liberals use to console themselves is that all religions are more or less the same. They know little of religion but find that belief to be comforting. It means there is no need to worry that Muslim immigration is bringing special and unique problems to Western cities. Everyone just believes the same thing anyway.

On the weekend, Anthony Albanese, Labor's leader-in-waiting, declared on television: "No religion gives sanctity to death." That is obviously untrue. For example, Christianity regards the death of Christ on the cross as a great act of love and sacrifice. What Albanese probably meant to say was that "No religion sanctifies killing innocent people". But is that

true? It may depend on who you regard as innocent. We know, for example, that fundamentalist Muslims think adulterers should be stoned to death.

Dr Mark Durie is a Christian and academic who has spent years of his life living among Muslims. Writing in *The Australian* on the weekend he referred to Muhammad's instructions to his followers on how to deal with the infidel. There are three choices: conversion, surrender, or the sword.

Religions are not all the same. Christ never sought to establish an earthly kingdom — "My kingdom is not of this world," he said — but Muhammad did. He led an army in the conquest of Mecca. As an earthly ruler he had quite a lot to say about how to wage war and make peace. These are the teachings that radical Islamists rely on to justify their conduct.

So what we need from the Islamic scholars is to tell us, and more importantly to tell would-be jihadis, why these difficult sections of the Koran and the Hadiths are

not to be taken literally and not to be followed today. They should explain why "jihad", which once did include actual warfare, no longer means that and why what might have been acceptable in the seventh century cannot, under any circumstances, be justified now.

Like the rest of us, it is not in their interest to let one extremist use the Koran to justify mass murder.

There is no reason we should place any weight on what political leaders tell us about what Islam does or doesn't stand for. Most of those leaders have dispensed with their own religious beliefs. They don't understand the religious underpinnings of their own society — let alone the kind of society that a pious Muslim would aspire to.

Our leaders are right to wish for a peaceful Islam. But wishing something does not make it true. There's a lot more that has to be done if we want that to be the outcome.

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