

# Grace for the Day

www.gracefortheday.org  
Incorporated non-profit in New Jersey, USA

## Quran Shooting

By Rev. Peter Eng

### Quran Shooting

A US soldier in Iraq used the Quran for target practice. This resulted in the local US commander having to apologize to the Muslim tribal leaders and to present them a new copy of the Quran, kissing it, and touching his forehead with it. This was followed by apologies from the top brass and from the White House.

I believe without reservation that the Bible alone is the true Word of God. At the same time, it is entirely inappropriate for a person to desecrate what is holy to another person. I would not want a non-Christian to desecrate what I hold sacred. This in itself requires me to protect the religious sensibilities of the Muslims – in this regard.

More than 30 years ago, a well known conservative professor of theology said that he will not hesitate to stack up Bibles for use as a step-stool. Until today, those words generate protest and horror in me.

Christians should not idolize the physical book of the Bible as though it has magical properties or as though it were too holy for handling. The Bible is the content and not the document. At the same time, the content is conveyed through the document. Our attitude towards the content causes us to treat the document in a certain way, and the way we treat the document reinforces our attitude towards the content.

### Muslim Regard for the Bible

Muslims have been consistent in their regard for the Quran and to the Bible. Muslims believe that the Torah (first five books of the Bible), the Psalms, and the Gospels, which they call the Taurat, Zabur and Injil, are divinely inspired by God, and that the Quran is the fourth and final revelation from God. As such they have no use for the Bible (which they claim is corrupted). But they retain a theoretical recognition that the Taurat, Zabur and Injil are the revelations from God.

Many Muslims would kiss not only the Quran, but also the Bible when they handle it. As far as they are concerned, these are the imperfect, but still divinely inspired word of God. Missionaries in Muslim countries need to give special regard to the Bible. They may place the Bible on a special stand and go through the ritual of washing themselves and kissing the Bible before opening it and upon closing it. These motions are all necessary because to treat the Bible less would signal to the Muslims that we do not regard the Bible as highly as they regard the Quran.

While jihadist Muslims may not hesitate to commit acts of terrorism against those who disagree with them, it is highly unlikely that they would desecrate the Bible.

There is no cause to think that the soldier who desecrated the Quran is a Christian. Christians have no control over what others do. But by our approval or disapproval we can influence the action of some.

Our theology of the Quran is different from the Muslim theology of the Taurat, Zabur and Injil. We do not believe that the Quran is the Word

of God at any point. This, however, does not allow us to approve or delight in the desecration of the Quran.

Does not Jesus call us to do to others what we would have them do to us? (Matt 7:12 *"So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets."*)

Courtesy extended to Muslims concerning the Quran does not suggest acceptance of the Quran's veracity. It suggests fundamental human decency. Truth is not determined by mutual recognition. But having the truth does not give us the right to despise others even when we consider them misguided. The least we can do is not to return evil for good.

### Desecration of Sites

Historically, the Muslims have desecrated the holy sites of other religions by imposing their own religious structures on the sites of other religious sites. The Al-Aqsa Mosque is built on what was probably the site of the Jewish temple.

Another example of Muslim hegemony over religious sites is Ayodhya. The site is sacred to the Hindus, but the Muslims have built a mosque over it.

Christians, in the form of the Roman Catholic Church, did the same things *in the past*. While the Roman Catholic no longer does this, it used to convert conquered pagan and Muslim religious sites into Catholic religious buildings.

We need to understand that it is only in recent history that the concept of separation of religion and politics has come into play. For the longest time, to the victor belongs the spoil. The triumphalism behind such actions is probably a consequence of seeing politics and religion as one.

We need to recognize that there may be other motivations behind the destruction of a site or its re-consecration for the religion of the victors of war. The motivations could be as mundane as the desirability of the location, or the practical consideration of cost savings. While these motivations do not justify the

actions of spoiling another religion, it does ameliorate the issue because the desecration of one was for the consecration of another.

### Comparisons

In relation to the issue of the shooting of the Quran, we note that this desecration was not motivated by religious competition or for any remotely justifiable or cultural blind spot. It holds in contempt what another holds sacred. At the material level, the destruction of a book seems small compared to the destruction of a building. But in principle, it may be even more severe.

The issue I have is not that Muslim overreacted to the desecration of their holy book. The issue I have is that Christians fail to honor the Bible. We need to esteem the Bible no less than the Muslims regard for the Quran. But we are not in competition with the Muslims in how the Bible should be honored. We find our own way.

Christians regard the *content* of the Bible as the word of God. But not many Christians realize the Bible has something to say about the physical media that conveys the content. That is to say, the physical book of the Bible in addition to the content of the Bible.

### Not Bibliolatry

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the ten commandments and found the people wantonly given to idolatrous worship, he threw down the tablets, breaking them into pieces (Exod 32:19). This act had the powerful symbol that the people had broken the law of God.

The tablets on which God wrote the ten commandments was the vehicle and not the content. When they were smashed, God asked Moses to prepare two more tablets for him to rewrite the commandments (Exod 34:1). Moses did not receive a reprimand for destroying the first set of tablets. This suggests to us that God is concerned primarily with the content and not the vehicle. We should remember that Moses smashing of the first set was a physical representation of what the people were doing. He conveyed the

message at the expense of the means of conveyance: the tablets.

The consideration is significantly different when the destruction of the document was an expression of contempt for God’s revelation.

Jeremiah the prophet received revelation from God and conveyed it to Jehoiakim, the reigning king of Judah. *“Whenever Jehudi (the reader) had read three or four columns of the scroll, the king cut them off with a scribe’s knife and threw them into the firepot, until the entire scroll was burned in the fire” (Jer 36:23).*

Jehoiakim’s contempt for God’s word was reflected in what he did to the document. God responded to Jehoiakim’s action with the pronouncement, *“You burned the scroll ... Therefore, this is what the Lord says about Jehoiakim king of Judah: He will have no one to sit on the throne of David; his body will be thrown out and exposed to the heat by day and the frost by night” (Jer 36:29-30).*

The tenor of Scripture is a beautiful balance. There is no worship of the Bible (bibliolatry). We worship God alone. The Word of God is the content and not the means of communication (the written text). This is seen in the smashing of the tablets to signify the people breaking God’s law. At the same time, when Jehoiakim burnt the text of the word out of contempt for God and his prophet Jeremiah, he was cursed. We are aware Jehoiakim’s problem was not limited to burning the text. His action was an expression of his core value system that held the word of God in contempt.

I would not suggest that the professor who would use Bibles as a step-stool is contemptuous of the Bible. I know him personally and know that he holds the Bible to be the inspired and inerrant word of God. At the same time, stepping on the Bible thus is not consistent with a high regard for the Bible.

One can hardly say that he loves his country but thinks nothing of stepping on his country’s flag. The flag is not the country, but the flag represents the country. Can we really love our country but treat the flag with dishonor?

**Conclusion**

Strangely, the Muslims attitude towards the Quran is built on the attitude of the Jews and early Christians towards the Old and New Testament. Muslims regarded the Jews and the Christians as “people of the book.” This set the tone for the Quran. But too many Christians today fail to love God or his Word and fail to show honor for the written text.

Our priority is to know the Word of God and to love its content. But it may not be too much for me to suggest too that Christians should also consider giving due regard to the printed page that conveys the message.

20080526



Please pass this on so that many more can be blessed.

Want a **FREE** subscription? Send an email to [subscribe@gracefortheword.org](mailto:subscribe@gracefortheword.org) with Subject: SUBSCRIBE

Listen to Rev. Peter’s **sermons** and find **other articles** in [www.gracefortheword.org](http://www.gracefortheword.org)

Wish to support this ministry? Have any questions? Write to: [admin@gracefortheword.org](mailto:admin@gracefortheword.org)

**Rev. Peter Eng** is an ordained minister from the Reformed Tradition, but he is truly global in perspective. He served the Lord in various capacities starting from his teenage years in the 70s. His undergrad studies were done in Singapore, his grad studies in the USA, and post-grad studies in the United Kingdom, with additional post-grad research in Germany.