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What He Wanted All Along: The Real Scandal of Pastor Terry Jones

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The case of Florida pastor Terry Jones presents Christians with an easy judgment but a difficult dilemma. This publicity-seeking pastor of a tiny congregation deserves to be condemned in every way for his act of putting the Qur'an "on trial" and for then burning a copy in a staged act of inflammatory showmanship. The judgment is the easy part. The difficult dimension of this is the fact that even our condemnation gives this pastor what he most desires — public attention.

The murderous gangs of Muslims who responded days later by murdering United Nations personnel and sending death and fear into the streets in Afghanistan were sadly predictable, as was the fact that Pastor Jones' actions would have international repercussions. The condemnation of his actions by Gen. David Petraeus was swift and appropriate. We can only wish that the general had condemned the violence in Afghanistan with even greater urgency.

Pastor Jones and his church incited a riot and put human lives in jeopardy. There is no excuse for theatrics as a substitute for Gospel ministry.

That is the main issue here from a Christian perspective. Pastor Jones is not wrong to see Islam as a way that leads millions of people away from the message of the Gospel and thus to spiritual death. But he did not reach out with the Gospel message; he simply staged a theatrical stunt intended to draw attention to himself and his church. The way he toyed with the media and major public figures earlier this year was an indication of the game he intended to play — and now he has played it out.

He put human lives at jeopardy for a publicity stunt. Those who responded to his actions with murder have blood on their hands, and they demonstrated a key distinction between Islam and Christianity. Christians are not called to defend the honor of our Savior or of the Bible. The Islamic sense of honor leads to what are even called honor killings. Those who would kill for honor thus dishonor their cause. What belief system would justify murder in response to being offended?

There is a crucial distinction between being willing to die for a cause, as Christians are called to do, and being willing to kill for a cause. That distinction is rooted in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, who did not kill his enemies, but died for them.

Christians are not called to burn the books of other religions. We are not called to publicity stunts that put lives at risk and subvert the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. Such actions deserve only the most severe condemnation. But even the condemnation serves its purpose — to gain publicity.

This is a pastor of a tiny congregation who is now known all across the globe for his actions performed in front of thirty people in a small room in Florida. Welcome to the age of the Internet. Publicity is a dangerous fuel and a lethal



intoxicant. We must condemn Pastor Jones for his publicity stunt. But, in so doing, we give him what he wanted all along.

This article was originally written for *The Washington Post* "On Faith" column, where it will appear today.

I am always glad to hear from readers. Write me at mail@albertmohler.com. Follow regular updates on Twitter at www.twitter.com/AlbertMohler.

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