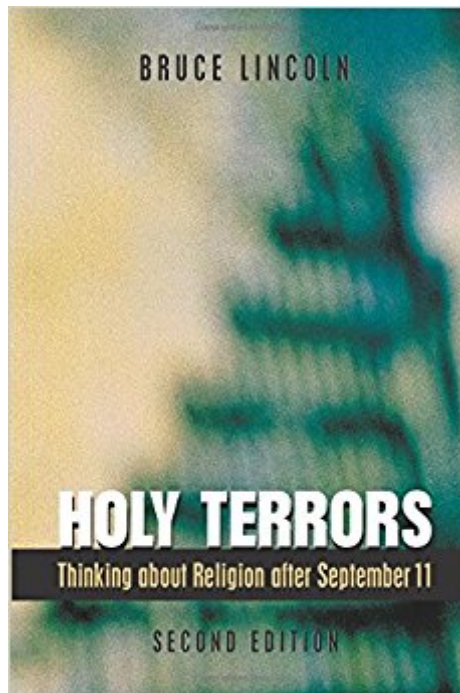




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# Holy Terrors: Thinking About Religion After September 11, 2nd Edition



## Synopsis

It is tempting to regard the perpetrators of the September 11th terrorist attacks as evil incarnate. But their motives, as Bruce Lincoln's acclaimed *Holy Terrors* makes clear, were profoundly and intensely religious. Thus what we need after the events of 9/11, Lincoln argues, is greater clarity about what we take religion to be. *Holy Terrors* begins with a gripping dissection of the instruction manual given to each of the 9/11 hijackers. In their evocation of passages from the Quran, we learn how the terrorists justified acts of destruction and mass murder "in the name of God, the most merciful, the most compassionate." Lincoln then offers a provocative comparison of President Bush's October 7, 2001 speech announcing U.S. military action in Afghanistan alongside the videotaped speech released by Osama bin Laden just a few hours later. As Lincoln authoritatively demonstrates, a close analysis of the rhetoric used by leaders as different as George W. Bush and Osama bin Laden "as well as Mohamed Atta and even Jerry Falwell" betrays startling similarities. These commonalities have considerable implications for our understanding of religion and its interrelationships with politics and culture in a postcolonial world, implications that Lincoln draws out with skill and sensitivity. With a chapter new to this edition, "Theses on Religion and Violence," *Holy Terrors* remains one of the essential books on September 11 and a classic study on the character of religion. "Modernity has ended twice: in its Marxist form in 1989 Berlin, and in its liberal form on September 11, 2001. In order to understand such major historical changes we need both large-scale and focused analyses—a combination seldom to be found in one volume. But here Bruce Lincoln . . . has given us just such a mix of discrete and large-picture analysis." "Stephen Healey, *Christian Century* "From time to time there appears a work . . . that serves to focus the wide-ranging, often contentious discussion of religion's significance within broader cultural dynamics. Bruce Lincoln's *Holy Terrors* is one such text. . . . Anyone still struggling toward a more nuanced comprehension of 9/11 would do well to spend time with this book." "Theodore Pulcini, *Middle East Journal*

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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It is tempting to view the perpetrators of the September 11 terrorist attacks as evil incarnate. But their motives, as Bruce Lincoln reveals in this insightful offering, were profoundly and intensely religious. What we need now, he argues, is greater clarity about what we take religion to be. With great rigor and incisiveness, *Holy Terrors* sorts through the details and the religious rhetoric of September 11--in the hijackers' instructions, George W. Bush's national address, Osama bin Laden's videotaped reply, and Pat Robertson's notorious interview with Jerry Falwell--and examines their implications for our understanding of religion and its interrelationships with politics and culture. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Bruce Lincoln successfully distinguishes between the important aspects of religion, and applies them succinctly. In particular, the first and last chapters, the first detailing religion more generally and the last detailing religion's role in violence, were the most interesting.

This is a difficult book to read because it is suffused with academic references and needlessly complex phrases and jargon. For example, "... a more lattitudinarian position verging even upon antinomianism." (p.84), "... the Manchester school of social anthropolgy, and such French

semiologists Roland Barthes." (p.78), "These are meant as Weberian ideal-types ..." (p.59). In short, the book targets an academic audience, IMO - not a lay audience. The author deconstructs speeches of George Bush and Osama bin Laden. The author tries to show that both Bush and bin Laden use the same essential religious themes and rhetorical devices to motivate and sway their target audiences ("Symmetric Dualisms"). IMO, this is sophistry; the same analytical technique could be applied to, say, Churchill and Hitler or Lincoln and Jefferson Davis. The primary redeeming qualities of the book are brief treatments of Sayyid Qutb and Mohammad Atta, and an even briefer treatment of the insanity following the French Revolution (e.g., "The Cult of Reason"). For the layperson, instead of this book I recommend *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 3rd Edition (Comparative Studies in Religion and Society, Vol. 13) by Mark Juergensmeyer. It is far more accessible, and IMO, it provides a much more useful analysis and a broader survey. If you're looking to learn more about Sayyid Qutb and his influence on Islamic radicals, turn to *Terror and Liberalism* by Paul Berman.

A great deal of the book requires a university education in theology to understand it. Otherwise a thoughtful presentation. I recommend it

This is a wonderful little book that presents a thoughtful and provocative analysis of religion in the contemporary world. One of the writers who posted a review of this book on the site asserted that Lincoln argues that the rhetoric used by the leaders of Al-Qaeda and the leaders of the United States of America is quite similar. It seems to me that Lincoln actually takes great pains to point out the differences between the rhetoric used by the leaders of Al-Qaeda and the rhetoric used by the leaders of the United States of America.

Lincoln's work is an attempt to formulate a theory of religion. While his success on that front is open to criticism, he gives an impeccable presentation of the religious dimensions of the American/Arab/Christian/Muslim/politics debate. Anyone who wants to hone their understanding of 80% of front page news should read this. Besides it gives documented proof of why Falwell and Robertson should not be listened to...ever...about anything.

I noticed Lincoln's book only because of the similarity of its title to that of a biography of Andy Warhol that I read some time ago. Sadly, the book is the perfect example of the contemporary academic practice of working backward from a socio-anthropological conclusion to a tendentious

definition that can only lead the innocent reader to buy into the author's political prejudices. Readers wishing an objective analysis of the comparative social functionality of Islam and Christianity should read the Epilog to Anthony Pagden's Peoples and Empires.

The book provides many historical inaccuracies about some religions, and the author seems very unscrupulous about the source of information he uses. I have been a fool to buy the book, and I hope you would not follow my suit.

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