

9/11 and OKC

September 9, 2011

Thanks to a professional conference followed by my father's [heart-bypass](#) surgery, I've spent most of the past two weeks in downtown [Oklahoma City](#). Day by day, the commemorative coverage of the [Sept. 11, 2001](#), terrorist attacks multiply on television, in newspapers and on the Internet. Meanwhile, I look out the window over my right shoulder, and I see the site where an earlier [bombing](#) claimed the lives of 168 innocent Americans—including 19 preschool children—and injured almost 700 others.

Terror in the heartland

On April 19, 1995, [Timothy McVeigh](#) parked a rented truck filled with ammonium nitrate directly in front of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building on Fifth Street in Oklahoma City. At 9:02 a.m., the homemade bomb ignited, blowing away most of the building and shattering our national innocence, not to mention our sense of security.

Less than 90 minutes later, an Oklahoma state trooper pulled McVeigh over for driving without a license and arrested him on a weapons charge. Investigators quickly connected McVeigh and [Terry Nichols](#)—Americans and self-proclaimed Christians—to the bombing.

For slightly more than six years, the Oklahoma City bombing stood as the most destructive terror attack in U.S. history. Of course, 9/11 obliterated that feat, taking the lives of nearly 3,000 people.

Terror & religion

Because of 9/11, Americans tend to connect terrorism to Islamist extremism. That's natural, and we can point to abundant evidence that

some fanatical proponents of a deviant version of Islam do desire to harm others, particularly Westerners and Christians.

But the Oklahoma City bombing reminds us that Islam is not the source of terror. Throughout history, and in Oklahoma City, terror has been no respecter of religion, as well as irreligion. People have done horrible things to others in the names of their gods. And others have done horrible things in defiance of any god.

Sources of terror ... & an antidote

Hatred breeds terror. McVeigh embodied the pathology of hatred for the federal government. Irrational hatred snuffed out almost 170 lives, including children.

Perverse, aberrant religion fuels terror. While in no way reflecting the faith and beliefs of many millions of peace-loving Muslims, a violent, active minority twist their scriptures to justify their evil actions.

The 10th anniversary of 9/11 reminds us we must remain vigilant to guard ourselves and others against terror. But Christians also must defeat terror with love. John the Evangelist promised, "There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear ..." (1 John 4:18).

That seems to work on at least two levels: (A) Inspired and powered by God's love, we ultimately prevail, because (B) love transforms the fear that produces and fuels terror.

This seems too simplistic. Yet in a violent, terror-filled world, the simplicity of love is our most powerful weapon.