

Transcript: ABC News' Terry Moran Interviews Pastor Terry Jones

Pastor Talks About Why He's Burning the Koran on the 9/11 Anniversary

Sept. 9, 2010—

The following is a transcript from ABC News' Terry Moran's interview with Pastor Terry Jones on why he decided to hold an International Burn a Koran day for "Nightline" in Gainesville, Fl., on Sept. 7, 2010.

Terry Moran: Let's begin at the beginning. how did this start? when did you come up with this idea International Burn a Koran day.

Pastor Terry Jones: Well actually one of my associates actually came up with the idea . we also last September 11th, we also did a demonstration in remembrance of the men and women that were murdered and also a demonstration against Islam and Sharia law. So we did this last year so this year we thought what can we do and we came up with the idea of the international burn a Koran day. Actually for two reasons, the same as last year, to remember those who were killed, murdered on September the 11th and then this year through the whole year we have, we have become more and more aware of the dangers of sharia law and the dangers of radical Islam and that's what this message is geared towards. It is not geared towards the so-called moderate Moslem but its geared towards that radical element to really send a clear message to them that radical Islam, sharia law, sharia courts, what they seem to try to institute after a period of time is not wished in America.

Moran: Let me follow up on that. Just to put it in a nutshell, why do you want to do this?

Jones: Well, basically like I said we feel we feel that a radical message is necessary. We also want to send a message to the moderate Moslem to stay peaceful and moderate. We live in America, we have freedom of speech, freedom of religion, they are more than welcome to be here, worship, build mosques, but we do not want as it appears to be in parts of the world after they gain in numbers in population they begin to push sharia law, that type of government. We expect the Moslems that are here in America to respect honor, obey submit to our constitution.

Moran: As a man of faith don't you see how horrible burning someone else's holy book is?

Jones: Well, no. We see that the message that we are trying to send is actually that important. And what we are doing, you actually find in the Bible. In Acts 19. As the people converted to Christianity, they brought books, books of magic they brought books that they felt were damaging, dangerous and they burnt those books. Even now days in our society we do not burn books and we are not promoting the burning of books, but in some countries like Germany like Holland the book from Adolf Hitler is banned because they feel it is such a dangerous book . even in Holland they are trying to ban the Koran. We are not sending that type of message. Our message is clearly to the radical element of Islam.

Moran: But there are a billion and a half Muslims in the world. Most of whom aren't radical and you are going to burn their holy book.

Jones: Right.

Moran: You think that will persuade them of anything but the fact that they feel you hate them?

Jones: No, I think that they probably will be hurt and insulted by it.

Moran: So why do it?

Jones: Well when people burn the flag when they burn the bible when they burn down churches I'm also hurt and insulted. But we feel that this message to that radical element is that important. In fact to a certain extent we would expect moderate Moslems to agree with us. We would expect for them to say the burning of the Koran we don't agree with that's not a message that we agree with. We do not believe that this man this church this society should burn our holy book, there is no problem with that. But the message we are trying to send with that even Moslems should agree with. We are trying to send a message to the radical element of Islam. They should also be against that. Because it makes their religion look very, very bad. They should also stand to that and say yes that we agree with. We do not want sharia law. We do not want radical fanaticism Islam.

Moran: You are in the tradition in burning books of the Nazis who burnt the Talmud and the torah. Of a long line of haters. Why shouldn't people assume that you are the same?

Jones: Well I think it is very easy to see a difference. We have tried to make it very clear that even though this is a very radical message, a radical way of doing something we are not against Moslems. We do not hate them. And plus the Nazis, what the Nazis did was the Nazis gathered up all the books that were against their ideology and burned them. That's not what we are doing. We are not by any means promoting the burning of books.

Moran: But you are burning the holy book of Islam.

Jones: Right. We are burning one book for one particular reason to warn radical Islam. We see all around the world right now with Afghanistan, with the other places, we see how dangerous and how radical this element can be. They are even calling for the death of the president. And I think we think that it is time to stand up. Its time for America to stand up and say no.

Moran: Millions of devout Christians in this country look at you and what you plan to do and are revolted by it. they don't think this is a Christian thing to do at all they think it's an act of hatred, of holy war.

Jones: Well there are also millions of people who agree with us.

Moran: Millions of people agree with you?

Jones: Well we have done many interviews and some of those interviews there is attached a poll and we are running somewhere between 40 and 60 percent of the population agree with us. And to a certain extent i think in Christianity that is the problem. We've lost our guts, the church has become weak. The church has become afraid, the church is hiding behind their walls they no longer stand up on issues. We've had several times pastors come here saying we are in agreement with you, what you are doing is right, or anyway the message that you are wanting to send is right. But we can't say anything. If we do we will lose our congregation. We have people who work for large companies have stopped out front and said we are in agreement with you but if we say anything we will be fired. That is in a country where we supposedly have free speech.

Moran: So you want Christians to join you in this burning of the holy book of Islam. Isn't that holy war?

Jones: If they have a problem with the burning of the Koran that's fine. I realize the actual burning of the Koran is a radical statement we feel very convinced about it, we plan on doing it, we feel its very necessary. But if Christians were to say that's too much for us or just normal people, they say the actual burning of the Koran is too much for us, that's fine. I can absolutely understand that. That is no problem. But they should, all Christians should agree with our message. Our message is that radical Islam is dangerous, let's keep an eye on it, let's say no to it. and from a Christian stand point they have to agree with us. Because according to Christianity, Jesus Christ is the only way. And the Koran does not recognize the resurrection, the virgin birth, that Jesus died for our sins, that he's the son of god, that he's god,. So from the Christian standpoint they must agree with us.

Moran: Christians sometime ask what would Jesus do. Do you really think that Jesus Christ if he were here today he would say pastor go burn that holy book?

Jones:Absolutely.

Moran: Jesus Christ would say that.

Jones: Absolutely. If you look at Jesus' life most of the time Jesus was as people imagine him. He was very nice, and very patient and very loving but there were also times when esus did radical things. He threw the money changers out of the temple he looked right at Peter and called him the devil. He went into the synagogues - that would be like me going into the churches today -went into the synagagoes and called those pastors, those pharases, he called them snakes, he called them vipers. And in fact the Bible says itself that even if an angel of light should appear to you - which is supposedly what happened to Mohammed even if an angel of light should appear to you and give you a different gospel to this one, let him be accursed. So I think Jesus would not run around burning books but i think he would burn this one.

Moran: You think he would burn this one.

Jones: Yes.

Moran: It just seems like such a hateful thing to do. Is there no other way? To get your message across. That you don't like radical Islam then to burn the holy book of a million and a half people?

Jones: I think there are many ways.

Moran: So why do this one?

Jones: I think this the example way. I think the better way is diplomacy, talk, discussion. I think those things are valid and I think most of the time those things are better. But we have chosen this way because, because of the seriousness of it. We feel that we are dealing with radical Islam in other words we are dealing with a religion or let's say a sharia law that they have nothing against stoning people. They have nothing against hanging homosexuals, they tie bombs around themselves and go into buildings, they fly planes into buildings, they teach their kids there's nothing better than to die as a martyr. We are dealing with an element that we believe you can't really, can't always reason with. Sometimes you have to show them, this far and no further. And that is what we are trying to say. You have to remember we are not harming people, we are burning a book to send a very very radical message. A very radical stop to Islam.

Moran: Once again though, a billion and a half Muslims in the world, most of them do not approve of al Qaeda and of the terrorism associated with it. The message you are sending to moderate Muslims is one of hate.

Jones: Well we have tried to make that very clear. Obviously this is not a message of love and it is obviously not intended to be a message of love. It is intended to be a clear clear warning. But we have also made it very clear that here in the United States we have a constitution, we have freedom of religion they are more than welcome to be here and worship and build mosques. This is not an evangelistic tool, this is not going door to door saying Jesus loves you which is just fine. This is actually meant to be a warning to the radical element.

Moran: How would you feel if Muslims burned the gospels?

Jones: I would not like it. I don't like it when they burn the Bible. I don't like it when in Afghanistan when they burn the flag but I also do not serve a god of violence. It doesn't make me want to kill people. It doesn't make me want to storm an embassy. It doesn't make me want to call for the death of the president and that is what we are trying to reveal. Of course it's insulting. Of course it's not a nice thing to do. But what we are trying to show is that this is a very dangerous radical element and here in America we need to wake up. And it could be that even that it's larger than our politicians and news media would like us to believe. That maybe America should wake up that maybe even our president should wake up and we should take a real close look at Islam.

Moran: Pastor, don't you even have a twinge of conscience about doing something like this.

Jones: Of course. Of course we have thought very much about it. We have prayed a lot about it. Yes it's one of the things that we think about all of the time. Even has been mentioned here in the

news media what possible consequences could happen. What could possibly happen. Of course we don't feel responsible for that. If something happens, we did not do it. It happened because this is a violent religion and as I said if somebody burned the bible I would feel sorry for them. I would pray for them. I would think that they are ignorant. But I would not want to shoot them. So what our actions do is actually just reveals the violence of Islam and yes we are taking that very seriously and we are still constantly in prayer about our plans that we have on September 11th.

Moran: You're going to go through with this?

Jones: As of right now we have every intention of going through with it.

Moran: What would change your mind?

Jones: I guess the same thing that caused us to do it um, just a deep conviction from God that something has to happen. That there has to be - this is we hope our type of wake up call. Our wake up call to America to look at Islam, hopefully a wake up call to the radical element of Islam that we would let them know that we are clearly not going to back down. we are clearly against radical islam. Maybe even a wake up call to the Moslems maybe they should look and see something wrong with their religion or something wrong with an element of their religion that causes that type of violence.

Moran: The way you describe it, it's Christians against Muslims, it's holy war and this is an act of holy war.

Jones: That is not our intention. Our intention, like i said is to send a warning to radical Islam. Yes that is our intention.

Moran: General David Petraeus in Afghanistan said today we are very concerned about a possible koran burning in the US, it puts our soldiers in jeopardy very likely and this event could very well be used by extremists here and around the world in the same way they used images from Abu Ghraib -- they would use them to inflame public opinion and to incite violence against our soldiers. What you are planning to do General David Petraeus said puts American lives, American soldiers at risk. What are you going to do about that? **Jones:** Well, we understand his concerns and we share those concerns and we understand those concerns are valid. we just had, the question is, the questions that we have is if we don't do it when do we stop backing down. when do we stop giving in to Islam, or radical Islam, when they burn flag, when they kill Christians, when they burn churches, when they threaten to kill the president of the United States. if we back down now fine but how much can we back down until we actually stand up and say enough is enough. Actually I think instead of sending a message to us, that they should send a message to them. and Say look, no matter what that church does, they have freedom of speech, they have freedom of religion, that is America, no matter what that church does right or wrong, in your eyes, in my eyes no matter what that church does, if you retaliate, then we will retaliate. i believe we need to send a message to them, not try to blame us or send us a message. we need to send a message to radical Islams

Moran: Didn't Jesus say love your enemy and if you're struck on one cheek, turn the other cheek

Jones: Yes he did.

Moran: What happened to that.

Jones: In my opinion, that is very valid.

Moran: Why not live it?

Jones: In my opinion, that's what you usually should do. In my opinion you should probably do that 90 percent of the time, 95 percent, 99 percent of the time. But there is a time as Jesus threw them out of temple, and Jesus called the religious leaders snakes, there is a time, it's a minority, a very very small minority but there is a time to stand up to hold ground and say no, now is not the time to turn the other cheek, now is the time to face challenge.

Moran: So in this instance, it's an exception to teaching of Jesus Christ

Jones: Well I believe Jesus at times acted very radically. But of course I would not consider this to be the normal mainstream way of responding. But we feel at this particular time it's that important.

Moran: Your fellow Christians here in the Gainesville community are responding in part, some of them, by reading koran at their worship services to announce a different way of practicing Christianity and of encountering and engaging Islam, what do you think of that?

Jones: I think that is an abomination. A Christian church the bible condemns all other so called holybooks and for a Christian church to read the koran, a book that denies Jesus, a book that denies his deity, resurrection from the dead, crucified savior, for us to read that book from pulpits, that, that is absolutely terrible.

Moran: What does that tell you about the way many of your fellow Christians here in the Gainesville community feel about you and look at what you're planning to do.

Jones: Well to me, it tells me we've lost, that we've lost the battle. Christianity has lost their guts, they're not willing to stand up. Jesus himself said i am the only way, Jesus was not some kind of a liberal hippie that roamed around, roamed around on the earth, Christianity is not open minded. Jesus said i am the only way. And when we do acts like that we have left the bible, those people are not Christians, those men of God do not represent Jesus Christ. the bible is very very clear and with those actions we have completely watered down the gospel. We have tried to make the gospel acceptable to mankind, we have tried to fit the Gospel into our society, make it look attractive, make it look good, that's why we have so much become a better me and we have god wants you to have a better car and a bigger house. there's nothing wrong with prosperity but we have watered down the Gospel. that is not the only Gospel . the Gospel is Jesus Christ is the only way. that is it. he is the risen crucified savour and the church has even lost that. i was

shocked as we even preached the gospel just that. Jesus is the only way. people are mad. people are upset. that's just the very basic of Christianity.

Moran: Isn't Christianity stronger than stooping to this kind of publicity stunt

Jones: Like I said, for us it is definitely not a publicity stunt. Because it could possibly cost us our lives. We have had over a hundred death threats. Some of them have been very graphic. Saying they will definitely kill us on 9-11. A letter was sent to the local newspaper here, saying that three people on way here, they were armed with automatic weapons and explosives and they were going to blow us up and they were going to burn me alive. we have put ourselves in danger. of course our families in danger. whether people agree with us or not we are convinced this is the right thing to do. We're definitely convinced this message needs to be this strong for this time.

Moran: You've put neighbors here in danger as well in the Gainesville community. how do you feel about that?

Jones: I think that is a possibility. of course, it's just like the comments that the general made or a comment there. we are very concerned about that we are very moved by that. we hope and pray nothing happens to them and nothing happens to us. but then again we feel we cannot back off of the truth because i could get hurt. because they could get hurt. we feel that strongly about it. We feel this message needs to be spoken and has to spoken. people have throughout history given their life for the truth.

Moran: Now, authorities have tried to stop you from doing this, they've denied you a permit to have an open fire and have you had conversations with local and national authorities about this.

Jones: like you said, the city of Gainesville has denied our burn permit. we requested it again, they denied it again, we have consulted a 1st amendment lawyer, he is of the opinion they have violated our first amendment rights, the example he used was the same, the same rights that were violated in the civil rights movement, when Martin Luther King tried to get permit to protest and they denied him. so we will still continue on. as you mentioned, we have met with the FBI, we have met with the police department and on September 11 the FBI and the police will be here.

Moran: And what do they tell you? they tell you don't do this?

Jones: They urged us not to do it. yes that's correct

Moran: The FBI and the local police say this is not a good idea.

Jones: Yes that's true.

Moran: And you say you're going to do anyway

Jones: Yes that's true. yes we take it into consideration. We've prayed about it. We've talked to them, hours. we've talked to them a lot We just at this time we can't get away from that strong

conviction that we should do it, that this is the time to do it, that possibly there is divine intervention that we are supposed to do this.

Moran: What do you say to people who say you are crazy. you are on the lunatic fringe of Christianity and you don't represent anybody but yourself and a couple of other people and this is a crazy thing to do

Jones: I agree that the burning of the koran is pretty radical. i think there are scripture for that. i think there are reasons that are very valid why we are doing that, but actually except for the burning of the koran every Christian should be on our side. the fact that they're not on our side it shows their own ignorance, a lack of bible knowledge and more than that, lack of guts. in America we have lost our guts. We are too involved in the American lifestyle. I think Billy Graham said the American dream has become America's god. i think we are too involved in that to really pay the price. because basically All it boils down to is spiritually is that we are saying Jesus is the only way. That's true and all it boils down to in the natural or the American sense is that Islam, Moslems -build your mosques, worship all you want, stay peaceful but don't try to push your agenda upon us

Moran: What evidence is there that Muslims in America as a whole haven't abided by the laws, supported the county in it's wars and it's national struggle, that they're good Americans. what evidence is there otherwise?

Jones: I think in America right now because they are still very small in size, i think that in America right now as a whole they are peaceful. we do see pockets of that also around the world. If you look at Europe there does seem to be a tendency there that as they grow in numbers, as long as they are small they remain peaceful, as they grow in numbers they begin to demand sharia law and sharia courts, that is actually a pretty proven fact in Europe. Europe is beginning to wake up. Even In Holland they are calling for banning of Koran. Here in the US the Moslems just had a large rally i guess several months ago in Washington dc and there were some pretty radical things said there. I heard very clearly several of the Moslems that were interviewed, they were calling for sharia law, they definitely want that to be instituted here in America. So now is the time to yell, it's not time to yell when it's too late or almost too late. Now is the time to yell when the danger is not so great.

Moran: Final question what kind of response have you got from people, how's your mail running, your email, what do you hear from people?

Jones: We definitely are getting some support. I mean it is quite obvious that as far as our emails here there appears to be definitely more people who do not want us to do it. but we do get quite a bit of support. the people that do not want us to do it, They're like a lot of our neighbors here, they don't necessarily not agree with us -- they are afraid. We've had neighbors stop here and say and try to talk to us or argue with us, and we'd say yes, but what we are saying is true and they'd say yes we know that, we don't care if its' true. we are afraid. so i think a lot of people respond out of fear. i think that if you look at what we are saying then of course as an American we do not want another form of government or a constitution. i think that's very logical and i think people can understand that. but i think there's a lot of fear involved with Islam.

Moran: And as of right now you're going to go forward and burn Korans on Sept 11th.

Jones: As of right now our plans are to still burn the Koran on Sept 11th. Yes.

Moran: Such a hurtful thing to do to somebody,

Jones: It's an insult. but we feel that the end message is more important than the insult. of course it's not a compliment when you burn the bible or the flag or the Moslems' Koran, obviously not.

Moran: It's sacrireligious, it's a desecration of what they hold sacred and precious.

Jones: To them. Of course to us, the Koran is an evil book, an evil deceptive book.

Copyright © 2010 ABC News Internet Ventures