And what could anyone add to the ocean of comment and opinion and conclusion and musings and snarling and vengeful remarks published and shouted about the recent death of Mr. O. bin Laden, late of Abbottabad, Pakistan, shot to death in his bedroom, perhaps with his television remote in his hand, perhaps moments after he finished coloring his beard black again for a video production scheduled for the morning? Not much, especially in my case, after nearly ten years of quiet rage that he murdered three of my friends on September 11, cackling over their deaths, a cackle I will never forget as long as I live. And yet, and yet, I find myself thinking how very sad; not his death, in which the bullets he had so often assigned to others found him at last, but his life, wasted on a foolish and murderous idea, causing such epic wreckage, and perhaps in the end doing far more damage to his beloved religion than anyone else in its long and often admirable history.

I say this as a Catholic man, well aware that my religion tried bin Laden's idea, and found it a roaring failure, responsible for uncountable deaths of innocent souls; we call our collective campaign of savagery the Crusades, and even the most rabid among Catholics today cannot say with a straight face that our attacks on the infidel succeeded in anything except gaining the Church a well-deserved reputation for militant murder; and from those bloody years the Church sensibly retreated back mostly to a business model, spending the next seven hundred years as one of the largest, richest, most influential, riveting, and troubled corporations in human history. Entrepreneurial Catholic individuals murdered and robbed the pagans of the New World, certainly, but as a religion, rather than murder other established religions we sought to out-populate them, ignore them, negotiate complex truces, or, as we did recently with the Anglicans, offer them readmission to the mother ship from which years ago they disembarked, in their case because of the sexual politics of kings, one of the great human spectator sports. In a real sense, after the Crusades finally petered to their ignominious end, we matured as a religion, we realized that the sword was the worst of persuasive devices, and we turned to other hinges of history, some brilliant, like the public relations geniuses Mother Teresa of India, Karol Wojtyla of Poland, Dorothy Day of Brooklyn, and the elementary school system on which much of modern Catholicism was built. Today, long centuries after we waged holy war against people who called God other names than we did, there are a billion Catholics in the world, and two billion followers of the devout Jew Jesus ben Joseph.

It was the fervent dream of the late Mr. bin Laden that an epic war arise between the nearly two billion followers of Muhammad ibn Abdullah, bless he his name, and the followers of Jesus ben Joseph, bless he his name, and this fiery dream, born in 1998 with the murder of Kenyan and Tanzanian innocents, consumed twenty years of what must have been a very bright intellect, an often-attested-to personal charisma, and a mountaneous personal fortune, and again I find myself thinking how sad this was, how misguided, how twisted. What a waste of gifts given to that man by the Creator! Imagine, for a moment, the same man alert to humor, perhaps the greatest weapon of all. Imagine the same man, humorless in this life, infused by the holy merriment of a John XXIII, a Dalai Lama, a Desmond Tutu. Imagine that same poor soul, consumed day and night by smoldering hate and worries about rehearsing his lines for his video performances, alert to the power of mercy, apology, simplicity, conversation, common ground. Imagine what he might have done for the religion he loved, had he bent his capacious talents to witty connection rather than wanton destruction. Imagine, for a moment, that he might have become a great man, rather than the preening thug he was, wrapped in a shawl, obsessed with himself, hiding in a dark room, waiting for the explosive death he must have known would someday be his fate. What a waste.

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