

Q&A: Terrorism takes life. Christian martyr gives life... how can this be better worded?

Anonymous asks: Coming up 9/11-“Terrorism takes life. Christian martyr gives life”. My question is how this can be better worded or used at that time?

First of all, I'll take your quote as as a notion rather than a direct quote (a quick google didn't find anything). If it is a direct quote – let me know, for it's provenance may set some context that I'm not aware of.

Some quick thoughts.

It is helpful because

1. There is truth to it – a terrorist is the bringer of violence, a Christian martyr (in the ilk of Polycarp and many others across history and in recent times) reflect Christ by demonstrating the victory of God in with and through being the recipient of violence.
2. The word “martyr” literally means “witness.” A Christian martyr bore witness to Jesus by trusting in him even unto death. This witness is a proclamation that brings life, encourages others to turn to God who redeems and empowers to stand against sin and oppression. I think it was Tertullian who said “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church” for the witness of faith in those who lost their life inspired faith in those who saw that witness. So yes, the martyr – the witness, brings life.

It is an unhelpful wording because

1. The word "martyr" has become semantically impoverished and, with images of face-covered machine-gun wielding suicide bombers on TV, I would think it has become almost synonymous with "religious fanatic." And so the average person would not see the distinction in the quote between "terrorist" and "martyr" but between "muslim fanatic" and "christian fanatic" and would take the phrase to simply be a "my religion is better than yours" polemic.
2. One persons terrorist is another persons martyr. Those who have perpetrated acts of terrorism are often described by this term by their followers. They would argue that it has furthered "life" – by some definition – in that it has furthered truth or justice as they see it.

Given all this I think a better phrasing would more clearly draw this contrast, and would emphasise Jesus – him which is being witnessed about, not the one doing the witness.

So perhaps:

"Terrorism: Death from violence. Jesus Christ: Life from death"

I'm sure someone could come up with something better though.