

SALAFISM, JIHAD AND MOHAMMED

When the New York Times published Ed Hussain's piece on the Saudi export of extremism (**Saudis Must Stop Exporting Extremism: ISIS Atrocities Started With Saudi Support for Salafi Hate**, New York Times, Op-ed, Aug. 22, 2014), I thought that while the author came across as a nice and concerned individual, he also came across as either rather naive or intellectually dishonest. To attribute the Islamic terrorist phenomenon to a small Salafist minority supported by the Saudi elite is to ignore the role of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its allies, mostly Shia. It seems quite clear that the Iranians were involved in the bombing of a Jewish community center in as far away as Buenos Aires, Argentina. It is telling I think that the origins of the word assassin is Arabic. There are other reasons as I argue below for rejecting the idea of a small Salafist minority being the source of the problem rather than something more fundamental to Islam.

If one were to ask most Muslims whom they should most emulate surely their answer would be Mohammed, their prophet. That being the case it clearly is fair to ask what sort of emulation is involved.

In giving an answer to this question, I would quote from a passage from Ayaan Hirsi Ali's book "The Caged Virgin" which is as follows:

To spread his visions and teachings, which he believed to be from God, and to consolidate his secular power, Muhammad build the House of Islam using military tactics that included mass killings, torture, targeted assassination, lying and the indiscriminate destruction of productive goods. This may be embarrassing, and even painful, for moderate Muslims to admit and to consider, but it is historical fact. And a close look at the propaganda produced by the terrorists reveals constant quotation of Muhammad's deeds and edicts to justify their actions and to call on other Muslims to support their cause.

In their thinking about radical Muslim terrorism, most politicians, journalists, intellectuals, and other commentators have avoided the core issue of the debate, which is Muhammad's example. (Page 173)

Many Muslims and those sympathetic to a different interpretation of the man would argue that Ayaan Hirsi Ali is a radical islamophobe. But that is not the relevant point. Islamophobe or not, is her description accurate or does she traduce Mohammed?

Based on my reading, I cannot see how her description can be considered inaccurate with one caveat that I make below. I have in my book collection the book titled "Muhammad: his life based on the earliest sources" by Martin Lings, a 20th Century European convert to Islam who was for twelve years a lecturer at Cairo University. The description of the book on the back cover says: **Martin Lings' biography of Muhammad, unlike any other, is based on Arabic sources of the eighth and ninth centuries (of which some important passages are translated here for the first time).** The book has apparently been highly praised by many in the Islamic world and our own specialists. But having

read it, I cannot see how one could disagree with Ayaan Hirsi Ali's description at least, and that is my caveat, in terms of the historical records the Muslims have about Mohammed. If that description is correct, I don't see how an intellectually honest person could describe the "historic" Mohammed as other than a thug in a descriptive, as opposed to a pejorative, sense. To what degree then does such an example inform the behavior that is characteristic of majority Muslim societies and to what degree is that different from other societies?

The image that Muslims have of what is a prophet is as far as I can see very much informed by the description they have of the man. On this score, I would like to quote two passages from the Jewish and Christian traditions which illustrates an important contrast that I see between these two important traditions which contributed so much to Western Civilization and Islam.

That which is hateful unto you, do not do unto your neighbor. This is the whole Torah, all the rest is commentary. Hillel, 30 B.C. - 10 A.D.

So whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them; for this is the law and the prophets. Jesus, Matthew 7:12.

I bought the book "Zealot: the Life and Times of Jesus of Nazareth" by Reza Aslan an Islamic scholar. I bought it for two reasons. I thought it would give me some insight into where modern, so-called, critical scholarship had gone since I studied it as an undergraduate. In addition, the book was a best seller which peaked my curiosity. I have not read the book since it is one of over some forty books I have on a table yet to read. But I did look at the index and did not find a single reference to Hillel. One cannot look at the two quotes and not understand as many Jews have often pointed out that it was Hillel who greatly influenced Jesus's thinking as a human being. From the reviews I have read of Aslan's book, it is clear to me that his image of a prophet is very much in the Islamic mold and his book might be best characterized as the Mohammedization of Jesus. I have read an English translation of the Koran which is fairly well respected. In no place do I recall finding any quote like those above. That is in my judgment a significant difference between Islam and the Judeo-Christian traditions. And when it comes to the concept of jihad, I think a troubling difference.

For a millennium following the rise of Islam the world witnessed the expansion of the religion frequently under the rubric of jihad. In the case of the Christian West, it was not turned back until the siege of Vienna in 1683 thanks to the Poles. By then European powers such as the Dutch and the Portuguese had begun expanding into Islamic lands which accelerated with the French Revolution a little over a century later and then after the First World War even more. With decolonization and the fall of the Soviet Union, we have seen in my judgment a definite return in Islamic societies to the concept of jihad which is much more than just "a striving for spiritual self-perfection" as apologists for Islam frequently label it.

The relevant context for explaining jihad as we are experiencing it is found in the Koran's Surah 47. As I read the text, and I have compared a number of translations, it says that Allah can take care of His enemies Himself but leaves it up to the faithful to struggle on His behalf as a test of their faithfulness with the promise of Paradise for those who parish in such jihads. That passage clearly greatly influenced what the Tripoli Ambassador told Adams and Jefferson in London in 1786 which they reported to John Jay (see that text in the companion article in this issue on "Islam, Islamophobia and

Political Correctness”). Although I understand that Bridgitt Gabriel is controversial, I cannot argue against a point that she made in a video available on the internet* concerning the 15 to 25% of Muslims who believe in jihad and their danger to us.

Because of a number of factors such as political correctness and political and social cowardiness we seem unable to discuss some vital issues here which need to be candidly discussed so that we can inform our policies to protect and maintain our liberal societies in the positive sense.

* www.elderstatement.com/2014/06/brigitte-gabriel-gives-fantastic-answer.html?spref=tw