

WISHFUL THINKING

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"If wishes were horses, ... mendicants would be kings..." - Anonymous.

Several years ago I participated in a discussion with the major networks and movie studios regarding advocacy groups. We were the only registered Christian advocacy group, and there were other groups representing homosexuals, Jews, African-Americans, and Arab-Americans, as well as many other racial and religious affinity groups. The mass media of entertainment senior executives from Hollywood went out of their way to be tolerant, clearly scared that they would offend somebody.

It is understandable why the mass media places a premium on tolerance, given the increasingly diverse culture in which we live. Of course, some of this tolerance is aimed at diluting the influence of Christians in our culture, but most is born out of trying to reach the entire demographic range in the United States.

However, in stark contrast to the media's obeisance to tolerance, several years before this UCLA-organized event, the late intellectual and humorist Steve Allen spoke on this important topic at the National Religious Broadcasters at my invitation. Steve tackled this very difficult topic even though his wife was a very committed Christian and even though he himself claimed to be an atheist although he also pointed out that he read the Bible every day.

Steve waxed eloquent on the subject of tolerance and explained why intolerance was sometimes the only option. He asked the audience, if you were a Jew and came upon a burning bush where it was clear that God Himself was speaking to you, and the event was so frightening that you fell on your face before Him, and God told you He is a jealous God who would have no other Gods before him and told you exactly what judgment you faced if you refused to obey him, What would you do? Steve concluded that you would obey the awesome Almighty, Creator God whom you just met in person, and you would forever after be intolerant of other gods. In other words, the divine distinctives of Judaism, as well as Christianity and Islam, often compel intolerance, if you believe that your faith comes directly from the Almighty.

It is in this regard that all the mumbling in the press about tolerance is wishful thinking. Islam has been on the march for centuries, believing rightly or wrongly that it is the Truth. Wishing otherwise will not make it so.

In the Ivy League, many years ago, classes on comparative religion used a text by Walter Kaufmann, *RELIGIONS IN FOUR DIMENSIONS: EXISTENTIAL, AESTHETIC, HISTORICAL, COMPARATIVE* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1976). On page 186, Mr. Kaufman notes:

"When Muhammad came to Medina and found that the many well-to-do Jews there rejected his religion, his doctrines changed. Henceforth the *kibla*, the direction taken during prayer, was changed from Jerusalem to Mecca, the old Arab sanctuary that Muhammad hoped to conquer one day. (When he did conquer it, he smashed the idols but kept much of the old ritual.) The day of prayer was changed from the Jewish Sabbath to Friday. Yom Kippur ceased to be a holiday, and Ramadan, the month of fasting, was introduced. Of the Jewish dietary laws, he kept only a few, notably the prohibition against pork and blood. In

the process Islam was transformed. In the Koran Jerusalem is never named expressly, but the change of the *kibla* is discussed in the second sura (142ff.): “The fools among men will ask: What has turned them from the *kibla* they used to observe? Reply: To Allah belong east and west...” Formerly, Muhammad explained, he had wanted to see who followed him and who did not; for no Arab adopted the first *kibla* when he prayed, except his followers. But henceforth everyone should turn in the direction of Mecca. Tradition has it, and scholars agree, that the first *kibla* was to Jerusalem, the second to Mecca. At that point Islam began to appeal to Arab feelings and traditions. Instead of simply deriding the Arabs’ old religion, the Prophet now could claim some continuity with it; it only needed to be purified. The relationship to Judaism and Christianity was undeniable; but the revelations granted to Muhammad surpassed those of all previous prophets, **and Islam now claimed to supersede both Judaism and Christianity, as Christianity had claimed earlier that it superseded Judaism.**

“If all this seems reasonable enough and one recalls further that after his arrival in Medina, **Muhammad found work for his followers by raiding caravans and blockading Mecca, prompted in part by his own desire for revenge against those who had not accepted his religion, it is hardly astonishing that Muhammad also attacked the Jews, dispossessed them, drove them from Medina, waged war against them elsewhere, killed large numbers of them, and—in the long run this proved even more unfortunate—said some very unkind things about them that became part of the Holy Scripture of Islam.** Perhaps, they had said some very unkind things about him first without foreseeing that his retorts would soon be accepted as divine revelation by people from Spain in the West to the borders of India in the East, and eventually even much further east than that. **And when he killed Jews, that also was recorded in the Koran.** *If the giving of the Koran to Muhammad, bit by bit, was a miracle, it seems no less a miracle that although the Koran was accepted as divine revelation by the Muslims they did not treat the Jews far worse than they did.*”

In spite of claims that Islam is peaceful, the newspapers report almost every day that Islamic fundamentalists are killing Christians in Nigeria, Indonesia, Bosnia, the Philippines, Africa, etc. Why? Because they have a goal, and the goal is the whole world becoming Muslim.

Christians too have a goal, bringing the Good News of Jesus Christ, but those Christians who are wise realize that we are not fighting against men of “flesh and blood, but powers and principalities” and that the answer is evangelism, not conquest.

In spite of our tolerant revisionist history of recent years, most Americans supported the Gulf War as a liberation of occupied Kuwait from a conquering power, Iraq. Similarly, it should be noted, that when the Crusaders went to the Middle East in 1095, they thought they were liberating Christian lands from the conquering Turks, a nation of Muslims who came from Central Asia. These Middle Eastern and North African lands had been the birthplace of Christianity, and had been Christian for centuries, even producing Christianity’s best and brightest theologians. Many of the towns were still over 90 percent Christian when the Crusaders arrived. Thus, the Christians who had been conquered and oppressed by the Turks in these towns welcomed the liberating Christian Crusaders from Europe. Thus, from one point of view, the battle of the Christian Crusaders was actually very similar to the action to expel Iraq from Kuwait. The Crusaders were not trying to drive Islam out of its homeland. They were trying to protect and rescue Christian countries from invading Turks who had adopted Islamic beliefs. Historian Hilaire Belloc clearly documents these facts in his book, THE CRUSADES.

Even so, the Crusades were a tremendous mistake, mainly because they failed. They failed not only because the leaders could not work together, but also because the leaders did not rely on the power of God's Grace. They would have been better off sending missionaries instead of soldiers.

So, there we have it in a nutshell. The media is trying to portray the current trouble with the Islamic terrorists as a fanatical few when in fact those who are attacking are participating in the long Muslim march through history. The media is trying to tell us that we're all the same, when in fact the believers in each of the religions in question, especially the Muslims, understand that they possess a unique charge from their particular god. This issue will not disappear even if much of Christendom retreats.

As the Koran points out so clearly:

"The Family of Imran, 3.67: Ibrahim was not a Jew nor a Christian but he was (an) upright (man), a Muslim, and he was not one of the polytheists.

"The Dinner Table, 5.14: And with those who say, We are Christians, We made a covenant, but they neglected a portion of what they were reminded of, therefore, we excited among them enmity and hatred to the day of resurrection; and Allah will inform them of what they did.

"5.51: O you who believe! do not take the Jews and the Christians for friends; they are friends of each other; and whoever amongst you takes them for a friend, then surely he is one of them; surely Allah does not guide the unjust people.

"The Immunity, 9.30: And the Jews say: Uzair (or Ezra) is the son of Allah; and the Christians say: The Messiah is the son of Allah; these are the words of their mouths; they imitate the saying of those who disbelieved before; **may Allah destroy them**; how they are turned away!

The answer is not to lay down our lives killing men, but to lay down our lives to proclaim the Good News, a Good News based on a personal encounter with the living God who so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that all may be forgiven and no man may perish.

After all, the Truth, not wishful thinking, shall set them free.