

ISLAM AND TERRORISM: IS THERE A MIDDLE GROUND?

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"It is remarkable how educated, adult politicians keep offering trivial, simplistic solutions to our most vexing complex problems".

Ali Velshi on Al-Jazeera America,
commenting on the Republican debate

When calamity struck the Twin Towers on September 11th, I was on my way from the ranch in Ignacio, CO, back to my day-job in Oregon, listening to the unfolding horror on the fading KSUT-FM somewhere this side of Cortez. What struck me most about the early reports was their muted, matter-of-fact ring: *Them guys* didn't hit New York, they hit *us*. *All* of us, Indian, Spanish, Anglo. We were in their gun-sights now, together. We needed to wake up, get real, get things done. Together.

For the next three weeks, I listened to the loose talk on the University circuit, I listened to three incoherent creeds whose divorce from reality was truly astounding:

- "Blame America" (this one from my hectoring ex-teacher N. Chomsky): Yes, 9/11 was a real atrocity, but we deserve it, our karma is Catching up with us--Nam, Cambodia, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Clinton's bombing of Khartum, Israel's abuse of the Palestinians.
- "Maintain all civil liberties at all costs": Nevermind that liberty on occasion must be defended by force. Nevermind that the dead at Ground Zero have been deprived of *all* liberties.
- "Discuss all available options in public": *ad nauseam*, a national teach-in, before we dare take any action. Let Bin-Laden, al Qaeda and the Taliban get our drift on CNN.

What disturbed me most about those three reflexive mantras was how profoundly detached they were from who the murderous culprits were (14 of the 19 were affluent Saudis) and what really ailed them. So I lost my patience and went public, reminding my colleagues what really drives all Fundamentalists bonkers, be they Christian, Jewish, Hindu or Moslem--not what we do but what we *are*, what we *stand for*: Our addictive, anarchic freedoms; our confusing diversity; our humanist Renaissance and the Enlightenment; our secularism and separation of Church and State that guarantee *both* religious freedom and the right to disbelieve; our doubting, skeptic Science; and last but not least, our liberated women, free to work, free to choose--and yes, free to flaunt their beauty in public.

The ills of fundamentalist Islam are all too easy to diagnose. Stuck in the Middle Ages, they have missed on the Renaissance and the Enlightenment and Adam Smith's *Moral Sentiment*, where empathy for "the other" is enshrined in prophetic Darwinian natural morality. But as Christ reminded us: "...Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?..." (Matthew, 7:3).

The scriptures of all three Abrahamic religions are loaded to the gill with ugly, harsh prose. From the Qur'an: "...Woeful punishment awaits the unbelievers..." (Cow, 2:104); "...The unbelievers are like beasts...deaf, dumb and blind, they understand nothing..." (Cow, 2:170); "...As for the unbelievers...they shall become the fuel of the fire..." (Cow, 3:9)

From the Old Testament: "...for you are a sacred people to Jehovah your God...his chosen people above all the peoples on the face of the earth..." (Deut. 7:6); "...and God shall give them to you, and you shall beat them and destroy them, and you shall not make peace with them or pity them; you shall not give your daughters to their sons nor your sons to their daughters..." (Deut. 7:2-3); "...and they wiped out everybody in the city, from man to woman, from young to old and oxen and donkeys all put to the sword...and Joshua swore to Jehovah: Cursed be he who ever rises to rebuild Jericho..." (Josh. 6:21-26)

From the gospels of our Prince of Peace: "...I am the way, the truth, the life. No one comes to the Father except through me..." (John 14:6); "...He who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is subject to eternal damnation..." (Mark 3:28-29); "...He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me is cast abroad..." (Matthew 12:30)

So, after Paris and San Bernardino, we had better find out: Are our Fundamentalists scriptures superior to theirs? Better still, is there a middle ground between Barack Obama's bland benevolence and Donald Trump's blunt racism?

Islamic terror is the global outgrowth of a well-known, entrenched interpretation of Islam--Wahabi Salafism. It has been sponsored by our Saudi oil allies over a century now and relentlessly exported to the rest of the Islamic world through Saudi-funded Madrassas and 'Charities'. Both Al-Qa'eda and ISIS are the dragon seeds of this lavishly-funded, extremist, hate-filled interpretation of the Qur'an.

What makes Islam's exclusionist, exterminatory scriptures different than *ours*, it turns out, is our *political* history since the 1400s: The Renaissance, the Enlightenment, secularism, separation of church and state, pluralism. But this is the very same history that our home-grown Fundamentalist--be they Christians or Jews--hate and reject but are still bound to abide by--kicking and screaming--as citizens of this great Republic.

Our domestic immigrant experience is replete with isolationist experiments: The Russian Dukhovors, the German Hutterites, the Amish, the Ultra-Orthodox Jews, the Mormons, the home schoolers. Funny thing, tho--none of those have ever been implicated in terrorism. But non-Islamic violence still kills the bulk of our yearly crop of innocent victims: Our gun-craving right-wing nuts, our gun-mad anti-abortion fanatics, our gun-happy crazies, our gun-loving gangs. Mechanized violence is as American as God and Mom and Apple Pie. Or so it seems.

Multiple generations of immigrants have washed on our shores. First they cloister themselves in ethnic ghettos. Then, mysteriously, they vanish into the surrounding culture, adopting our Renaissance-cum-Enlightenment political values. Are our Moslem immigrants different? The vast majority are surely not. But a significant small minority is, and those are the ones who isolate themselves, burrow back into Medieval scriptures and resonate to the deadly rhetoric of Salafist, Wahabi, Jihadist Islam.

Is there a sane middle ground in our current predicament with Islam? There is, but it depends largely on Islam itself, both our Moslem communities right here at home and the global instigators of Wahabi-Salafist Islam abroad. Our anti-terror crusade, if it is ever to succeed, is really up to *them*. We can be sympathetic partners and facilitators. But if Islam is ever to bid final goodbye to the Middle Ages, it is *their* load to bear.