

Humanitarian Impulses and Hard Realities

by William B. Dickinson

Writing from Barcelona, Spain, I discover Western Europe is again under siege. Like other times over the centuries, the invading force comes from the African continent and is Muslim. Unlike those times, the current wave arrives unarmed and unannounced, a surge propelled by destitution at home and the prospect of a better life on the continent. The Mediterranean Sea has become an escape route for this rising tide of humanity, with Spain and Italy as principal destinations. A great political debate will determine what, if anything can be done to preserve Western culture against this seemingly irresistible force.

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Barcelona, Spain provides an historic window into the Islamic blitzkriegs of the past. After the death of the prophet Mohammed in 632 A.D., Muslim armies swept across Asia Minor and all of North Africa. In 711, the Muslim general Tariq landed in present-day Gibraltar. He marched across the Iberian Peninsula all the way into France, scattering the Visigoths as he went. Tariq and his army were defeated in 732 by the Franks at Poitiers, and Christian Europe was preserved. A final Muslim assault came in 985 when Al-Mansur raided Barcelona, torching the city and enslaving those citizens who survived.

A fall cruise to Mediterranean ports in Spain, Sardinia, Corsica, France, Italy and Tunisia offered a somber view of the region's demographic destiny. European birthrates have fallen below replacement level (2.1 children per family). Muslim immigrants fill this void and reshape cultures, with long-term consequences no one can foresee. As history professor Niall Ferguson puts it: "A youthful Muslim society to the south and east of the Mediterranean is poised to colonize – the term is not too strong – a senescent Europe."

In addition to the continuing flood of immigrants from Turkey

and North Africa, thousands of young people try to flee sub-Saharan Africa. That region has one of the highest birthrates in the world, creating a behavioral sink from which new generations can only escape by emigrating. A new route to Europe for illegals goes through Spain's Canary Islands and involves a dangerous 100-mile ocean voyage in rickety boats from the west coast of the Sahara to the island of Fuerteventura. It is a confirmation of sorts of Kenyan intellectual Ali Mazrai's old insight: "Where Africa is concerned, there is a constant search for tragedy with a new fact."

Italy's proximity to the African continent has caused the greatest influx. Italy and Germany now want the establishment of processing centers in Libya, Tunisia and Morocco to screen prospective refugees, but France and Spain have objected. Whatever the solution, a permissive attitude toward illegal immigrants in Western Europe now faces a rising populist backlash. The slaying of a Dutch filmmaker by a Muslim extremist caused even the easy-going people of the Netherlands to confront limitations on their tolerance. Some 900,000 Muslims live in the Netherlands. One-third is of Moroccan descent and forms the

most radical members of the Muslim community. Europe's dilemma is what to do with an unassimilated (and perhaps unassimilable) minority whose numbers have been allowed to multiply, without thought to long-term political and cultural consequences.

Meantime, the flight from Africa across the water continues unabated. What's happening in the Mediterranean was foreshadowed 30 years ago in an eerily prophetic novel, *The Camp of the Saints*. In Jean Raspail's apocalyptic story, a flotilla of 100 rusty ships heads north from the Ganges, carrying hundreds of thousands of impoverished people so desperate that they are willing to risk everything in the hope of reaching the south coast of France and a better life. Five more fleets from Africa, Asia and India join them. Sheer numbers threaten to overwhelm France's resources and culture.

But politicians dither, torn between their humanitarian instincts and the knowledge that the country itself is at risk. Who will give the order to sink the boats? In the end, the ships disgorge their human cargo. In time, all of Western Europe is overrun. Raspail's politically incorrect book caused a sensation, and he became a literary pariah. In an afterword to a new edition published in 1985, Raspail described the vision he had that led to the novel:

They were there! A million poor wretches, armed only with their weakness and their

"...too much compassion to enforce our immigration laws..."

numbers, overwhelmed by misery, encumbered with starving brown and black children, ready to disembark on our soil, the vanguard of the multitudes pressing hard against every part of the tired and overfed West. I literally saw them, saw the major problem they presented, a problem absolutely insoluble by our present moral standards. To let them in would destroy us. To reject them would destroy them ... So-called Christian charity will prove itself powerless. The times will be cruel.

Humanitarian impulses war against hard reality. The compromise seems to be that governments, including our own, will make some effort to prevent illegal entry. But if someone succeeds in getting here, even in the dark of night, we will let him or her stay. Consider the views of Asa Hutchinson, Undersecretary of Homeland Security in charge of border and transportation security. He told reporters that it is "not realistic to say that we're going to reduce" the estimated 8 million to 12 million illegal aliens (half of them Mexicans) living in the United States. Indeed, he said it was "probably accurate" to say that his department is not even looking for

the millions of illegals who have settled in this country.

But Hutchinson's most telling statement came in his advocacy of President Bush's proposal to turn millions of illegal aliens into

"guest workers." Hutchinson argued that the American public "has too much compassion" to enforce our immigration laws and does not have "the will" to require illegal aliens to leave the country. The backdoor amnesty that Hutchinson is trying to sell to Congress may well have increased the number of people trying to get into the United States before the door closes. And with the election behind him, President Bush has been challenged by Mexico to deliver on his stalled migrant plan. Mexican president Vicente Fox sees "a window of opportunity" for Bush to get his migration talks back on track.

Rich nations become an obvious destination for the 45 percent of the world's 6.3 billion people who live on less than \$2 a day. It is one thing to agree that we ought to share our wealth; it is another to accept that this means sharing *their* poverty. Humanitarian instincts compete with the world's demographic trajectory. It projects a population of nearly 9 billion only 45 years from now – within the lifetimes of our grandchildren. Worse still, 90 percent of the increased population is expected to come from poor countries. The ancient port cities on the Mediterranean coast stand as mute testimony to the fact that Western civilization is fragile and can be preserved only with the exercise of a common will. •