

Beware the 'Lesser' Jihad

Book Review by Dave Gorak

I would like to begin – and end – this review on a personal note. Like most Americans, my knowledge of Islam was pretty limited prior to 9/11. But my ignorance of this issue slowly began to diminish about a month after the attacks when, while attending my first Social Contract Press Writers Workshop in Washington, I listened as guest speaker and syndicated columnist Georgie Anne Geyer said, “We have to question why this country is allowing so many people who vow never to fight against other Muslim nations, and who oppose the separation of church and state, to enter this country.”

Robert Spencer, the author of *Islam Unveiled*, doesn't address this question directly, but it must be kept foremost in our minds as we listen to his warning that Western society faces a dangerous and inflexible religion that, unlike Christianity and Judaism, has not progressed past the Middle Ages. Further, he cautions, world leaders like President George W. Bush, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, and a politically correct media paralyzed by the “culture of tolerance,” are kidding themselves if they believe that “*jihads*” are like traditional wars that end with one side surrendering:

“Whether or not Islam ever becomes dominant in Western Europe or elsewhere in the former lands of Christendom, the wars will not end. Militant Islam will not go away with the death of bin Laden, or Arafat, or Saddam Hussein...” In other words, as long as there are *dhimmi*s (non-Muslims), there will be conflict because Islam is programmed to settle for nothing less than total

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victory throughout the world. The only other event capable of ending jihads would be the end of the world.

Apologists for the Koran, the “perfect” holy book that governs all aspects of a Muslim's daily life and from which one can never deviate, argue that the jihad is “misunderstood” by the West. The “Great Jihad,” they say correctly, refers to the inner personal struggle to improve one's character. But there also is a “Lesser Jihad” and that, Spencer says, “is where the AK-47s come in.”

This “lesser” jihad, which is readily acknowledged by Muslim clerics, permits taking up arms in “self-defense” against would be “oppressors.” But who defines “self-defense” or “oppressors”? Spencer argues that this line of thinking also can apply to those who resist Islamization. (History is full of examples of what happened to Eastern Christianity that existed in the Middle East centuries before Islam's 7th century birth in Arabia.)

Equally important to fully appreciating the threat faced by the West, says Spencer, is a rejection of the idea that Islam has been “hijacked by fundamentalists.” Throughout his book, the author emphasizes that the violence we are witnessing in the Muslim world today reflects the teachings of the Koran.

Other passages of the Koran are open to interpretation, Spencer says, including the prohibition against the “killing of innocents.” Although some Muslim clerics condemned the 9/11 attacks because they violated this tenet, in Osama bin Laden's eyes, for example, those who died in the World Trade Center were not “innocents.”

Spencer is even-handed when criticizing the unpleasant histories of both Christianity and Judaism during Ancient Times, and he even goes to great lengths to acknowledge Islam's many contributions to human development in the arts, literature, science, architecture,

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medicine and philosophy made between the 7th and 12th centuries. But this astounding creativity that came from a willingness to learn from outsiders stopped when Islam, in the words of one author, embarked on “civilizational suicide” in the 12th century. Some argue that this turning inward was the result of Islam’s defeat during the First Crusade in Spain and France. Keeping with the ingrained belief that when things go wrong it’s because Muslims have strayed too far from Islam, religious leaders opted for “more Islam.” (The growing number of major terrorist attacks in recent years, Spencer says, reflects The House of Islam’s frustration with an increasingly modern world that is leaving Muslims behind. Therefore, a return to “pure” Islam is in order.)

The Crusades, incidentally, are considered a failure – a fact made obvious by Islam’s rapid spread around the world. Spencer is no more forgiving of the atrocities committed by Christians during these wars than he is of those inflicted upon Christendom by Muslim armies. But, says the author, Muslims today haven’t a leg to stand on when they whine that “crusade” is the Christian word for jihad:

“The circumstances of the First Crusade (1095) were these: Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land were being molested by Muslims and prevented from reaching the holy places. Some were killed. This was the impetus that finally moved Western Christianity to try to recover just one small portion of the Christian lands that had fallen to the Muslim sword over the previous centuries.” The 500-year delay in seeking to regain what Western Christianity had lost was the result of internal squabbles that had distracted church leaders.

Spencer concludes that although many Muslims living in European societies will feel the influences of liberal democracy and secular government and eventually become productive citizens, the fact is that because “fanaticism and rage dominate so much of contemporary Islamic discourse it would be naive to assume that all of the Muslims streaming into Europe are likely to assimilate peacefully into Western culture. The ideology of multiculturalism, in fact, dictates that they not assimilate...” And Europe’s concerns about its exploding Muslim population could very well become America’s concerns in the not too distant future.

The author reminds that us that among the 56 Islamic states, only Turkey has a secular government, but it is one that still faces enormous pressure from Islamic

leaders. In short, don’t expect the Muslim world to jump on the liberal democracy bandwagon anytime soon. Is there any wonder, then, that Europe is not overly enthused about Turkey’s proposed admission to the European Union?

Remember that major segments of both Christianity and Judaism have long since abandoned the literal acceptance of certain passages of the Bible and Talmud that espoused superiority over others and encouraged acts of violence against “non-believers.” Today both religions are unanimous in teaching that each of us is equal in God’s eyes. Not so in the Muslim world, where “infidels” to this day are treated with disdain and, in many cases, physically assaulted and even murdered for their refusal to accept Islam’s world view. Muslim women, in particular, continue to reflect Islam’s rigid adherence to the belief that some are far better and more worthy of God’s affection than others.

Which brings me to my second personal reflection:

During a discussion about immigration and multiculturalism several years ago with a family member, who is an educator, married and the mother of two small children, I asked why this country’s women’s movement has remained silent about an immigration policy that welcomes to our society men from countries where women are treated as second-class citizens. Never answering the question, she said, “I have more to fear from an American society dominated by white males than I do from the Ethiopian deli owner down the street.”

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Robert Spencer, director of Jihad Watch, is a writer and researcher who has studied Islam for more than twenty years. He is also the author of Onward Muslim Soldiers: How Jihad Still Threatens America and the West (Regnery), and co-author with Daniel Ali of Inside Islam: A Guide for Catholics (Ascension).