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## WITHOUT CHRISTIAN WITNESS AND CULTURE, THE WEST CANNOT RESIST ISLAM

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***A man walks past a flower next to new security barriers on Westminster Bridge in London June 6. (CNS photo/Clodagh Kilcoyne, Reuters)***

Back in 1991, while visiting a Roman museum, I got into a conversation with an employee, who expressed dismay that Pope John Paul II had called for support for the massive migration into Italy of disaffected Albanians. The woman exclaimed: “Pretty soon Italy will be a Muslim country.” Having noticed a wedding ring, I asked if she had any children, to which she replied: “We have a French poodle!” “Ah, Madam,” said I, “there’s your problem: Muslims have ten children, while Italians have French poodles.” I proceeded to predict that there would be no future version of the Battle of Lepanto or Battle of Vienna; the real war for Europe will be demographic – and the hand-writing has been on the wall for decades. God is always ready to forgive; Mother Nature never forgives.

In 2010, *The Catholic Response* sponsored a pilgrimage to England for the beatification of Cardinal Newman. We arrived in Birmingham the night before the event. As I assisted the concierge with room assignments for our group, I remarked that I was stunned at how visible was the Muslim presence in the city, at the time already more than 40% of the population. The young man (a Prince William look-alike, with the bulk of the genetic code going to the face and not much penetrating to the intellect) responded: "Well, I suppose we shall just have to be tolerant!" I pressed on: "I don't know how much history you have read, but 'tolerance' does not appear often in the Islamic lexicon. In point of fact, from the seventh century forward, there is a consistent trail of death and destruction." "Heavy talk for check-in, wouldn't you say?" came the reply. Ignorance of history and denial of reality.

Just a few months ago, a Catholic school teacher in the Diocese of Orlando was accused of "hate speech" because **he assigned his students a reading from St. John Bosco** on the nature of Islam. A very ill-informed, politically correct but theologically ignorant low-level diocesan bureaucrat called for his removal. She went so far as to suggest that the teacher was actually promoting heresy by sharing the insights of Don Bosco who, quite obviously, had not taken the same course in inter-religious dialogue as she! Fortunately, due to a nationwide public outcry and the direct intervention of the Bishop, the teacher has had his contract renewed.

What do these three scenarios have in common? A lack of understanding of the theology and history of Islam and an equal lack of appreciation for the truth and power of the Catholic Faith, when properly lived. Let's try to unravel some of this.

Seventy-nine years ago, the indomitable Hilaire Belloc wrote *The Great Heresies*. Within that category, to the amazement of many a reader, he named Islam. Most commentators tend to regard Islam as a new religion appearing in the seventh century. Belloc thought otherwise. He maintained – and demonstrated very convincingly – that Islam is a heretical spin-off of Christianity. In actuality, the principal doctrines of Islam are appropriations of Old Testament teachings assumed into Christianity: the unicity of God, His transcendence, human immortality, divine justice and mercy. It denies, with a passion, all the "distinctives" of Christianity because, it seems, the Christians Mohammed encountered were Nestorians – themselves Christian heretics. Islamic theology is very simple: easy to understand and easy to practice. That said, having traveled extensively throughout the Middle East and North Africa, I must say that the level of theological ignorance of the average Muslim is even greater than that of the average Catholic!

How did Islam expand so rapidly, especially in Christian strongholds like North Africa? Belloc puts it succinctly: "It won battles." Further, he prognosticated that Europe would become easy prey to Islamicization because "it has forgotten its nature in forgetting its religion." As the European Union was being finalized, Pope John Paul II pleaded with the leaders to acknowledge – even in a sentence or two – the Christian roots of Europe. He was roundly ignored. Belloc saw in this attitude (already in place in his time) a European death wish which would result in "the return of Islam." Belloc wasn't Madame Zelda on the boardwalk gazing into tea leaves or crystal ball; he was merely an astute student of history and human nature. I don't think he would take delight in saying to his European descendants, "I told you so!"

How else does Islam gain adherents, even suicide bombers? By highlighting the immorality of the secularized (pagan) West. Abortion, artificial contraception, same-sex "marriage", pornography and

gender theory are all abhorrent to “People of the Book” – or should be. Yet are those not the sacred cows of all liberal western democracies – constituting “the Great Satan”? As horrifying and despicable as the various ISIS-inspired attacks are, can we admit that much of what presents itself as “modern” culture is repugnant to the God of Revelation? Long before Charlie Hebdo in Paris made the fatal mistake of caricaturing Mohammed, it had been spewing blasphemies against Christ and His Church. Just before the massacre in the Paris concert hall, a Satanic song had been sung. Ariana Grande informed the tween girls at her concert about her sexploits with her latest boyfriend.

What I am saying is just this: If the Christian witness were strong, coherent and consistent, Islam would not gain a foothold.

There is still another matter to address, namely, whether or not violence is promoted or countenanced in the Koran. To be sure, Pope John Paul and President George W. Bush – let alone Pope Francis – constantly asserted that Islam is a “religion of peace.” Do the Koran and the historical record support that assertion? There are Koranic citations aplenty to encourage violence against “infidels,” and there are texts to counsel living at peace with Jews and Christians. In other words, there are contradictory teachings on a very critical topic. Now, a fair observer would note that there are also apparent contradictions in the Bible. Catholicism has a magisterium to deal with such situations; Islam does not. Even more importantly, the Judaeo-Christian Tradition holds up a God of Reason, indeed a God *bound* to Reason. The God of Islam is totally sovereign, which means that He can declare something good today and evil tomorrow. Not to understand that theological fact of life is to misunderstand in the most profound manner why Christian-Muslim dialogue is so fraught with difficulties.

Nothing short of a “reformation” of Islam can confront the problem of violence “in the name of God.” Islamic scholar, Wael Farouq, has made this very appeal. Someone may point to the recent (and welcome) condemnation of the jihadi attacks in the United Kingdom by nearly 200 imams, calling for the denial of religious burial rites for the jihadists. That is all well and good, however, 200 other imams can contradict them.

Where does all this leave us?

Eastern European countries like Hungary and Poland, castigated by the EU for supposed insensitivity to immigrants, has shown the way firstly by strengthening their Christian identity; interestingly, one does not find jihadist assaults there. Poland’s bishops – and national leaders! – even rededicated their nation to the Immaculate Heart of Mary.

First, Catholics cannot afford to be deluded about the nature of a religion that almost equals Catholicism in number of worldwide adherents. While the Second Vatican Council’s *Nostra Aetate* identifies points of commonality between Islam and Christianity (as it does likewise for Judaism and other religions), that irenic presentation does not pretend to be the full story. Indeed, contrary to the theologically naive diocesan employee in Florida, there has never been any “official” teaching of the Church on Islam (or on any other religion, for that matter). Pick up Belloc’s book for a solid analysis of Islam, so that you can make an intelligent, informed contribution to much-needed interreligious conversations; such conversations cannot be conducted in any worthwhile way when

we deal with fantasy, instead of reality. Another fine work is ***111 Questions on Islam: Samir Khalil Samir S.J. on Islam and the West.***

Second, and most importantly, we must do everything possible to return the secularized West to its Christian roots. That will happen one believer at a time. Our commitment to a biblical way of life will be the best response to Islamic extremism. After all, didn't Our Lord tell us: "When a strong man, fully arms, guards his own palace, his goods are in peace" (Lk 11:21)?



**About Peter M.J. Stravinskas** [25 Articles](#)

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