

MANCHESTER, LONDON, AND THE GOALS OF ISLAM

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A woman prays at a floral tribute near the London Bridge June 5, after attackers rammed a van into pedestrians on the bridge. Seven people were killed and dozens injured when three terrorists in a van mowed down pedestrians late June 3 on the bridge before stabbing a police officer and revelers around Borough Market. (CNS photo/Peter Nicholls, Reuters)

“In Islam and the Qur’an there is everything. Parts that actually speak of peace are mixed with outrageous claims that run in the opposite sense, especially with regard to those who have different beliefs. Therefore, a priori, it is not right to defend Islam as a ‘religion of peace’. In addition, it is wrong to say that we believe in the same god. For Christians, God is love. For Muslims, this is not always the case. We can say, correctly, that both faiths believe in one god, but this is something quite different from saying that we believe in the same god. I think, in many ways, the model of Islam is incompatible with Western values. Islam in fact is not only a religion, but unifies politics, economics, society and state.” — Samir Khalil Samir, S. J., Interview, April 2017.

I.

A friend was just in Paris waiting to visit Notre Dame. Suddenly sirens, police, and chaos were everywhere. Another young Muslim was shot trying to knife a guard. The place could not have been more symbolic. It fleetingly recalls what happened in Santa Sofia in **May 1453**. Years ago, the Archbishop of Mosul, after his church and city were destroyed, warned that the same thing would soon happen in Europe. It has begun. We now expect increasing “incidents”.

Indeed, the getting used to them follows the not being willing identify the cause. Armies and police are mostly useless in the present context. They can only react to an enemy who can act anywhere. If, under the rubric of compassion, humanitarianism, refugees, poverty, or desperation, we bring into a society masses of people whose understanding of God and man is not ours, we can expect trouble. The question then becomes: “Do they become like us, or do we become like them?” The incidents in London, then Manchester, then Paris, then London again are not isolated. We dare not ask: “Why are they not?”

Dealing with Islam is a function of understanding Islam. Islam is a book and a history. They belong together. It is a religion that is a politics. The billion and a quarter Muslims on this planet today are divided into some fifty separate, yet not so separate political entities. They now have no universal caliphate but would like one. Islam has no central authority. Muslims are also divided into Sunnis and Shiites, plus a few others. They often war against each other.

“What is Islam?” yields many opinions. What follows here is a “minority” opinion. It seeks to state the facts and theory that explain what is happening in our time. “Islam vs. the world” is a better summation than “Islam’s place in the world.” Briefly, Islam has no settled “place” in the world until the world is simply Islam with no other option available. Islam is in turmoil with itself as long as what is not Islam exists and flourishes.

In its own terms, Islam has a noble mission; namely, to submit the world to Allah. This goal has been on its horizon since its beginning in the seventh century, when such an accomplishment seemed impossible. It needs to be roused up from time to time. We live in an era of its renewed self-rousing. Yet, nothing can be found in philosophy, revelation, or natural religion that can justify it. We can only explain it. In an effort to justify its many internal contradictions before reality, Islam, at least from the eleventh century, developed a voluntarist understanding of Allah whereby anything can be justified, even the opposites of good and evil, truth and falsity. To uphold this option, no basic questioning is allowed. Force, in various forms, not reason, upholds the doctrine embodied in the Qur’an and the culture it inspires.

Voluntarism means that no objective order is found in human or natural things. Everything that we see could be otherwise. The cause of anything that happens is the ungrounded will of Allah. He is not ruled by *logos*, reason. Hence he is not and cannot be limited by the distinction of good and evil. If Allah were so limited, he would, in this view, not be all powerful and therefore not divine. Thus, in Muslim eyes, any effort to submit Allah to reason is a betrayal of his omnipotence. The notion that something is “contradictory” has no meaning in a voluntarist system. The planet is divided between a world of peace, that is, what is already controlled by Islam, and a world with which Islam is at war. Universal peace means nothing less than the elimination of a sphere of war; that is, the elimination of a place where Islam does not impose its law on all existing people and their cultures.

My view here is not intended to be polemic, but descriptive. It might well be wrong in various details. But it is a defense of Islam, in the sense that it is philosophically proper and necessary to state what it is; it is also a critique of why its continuing expansion is a judgment on the blindness and ineptness of those opposing it. Given a choice, no doubt, these latter would not decide to become Muslim, even if confronted with the famous Islamic alternative that so many have faced in the past twelve centuries: death or conversion. On the other hand, they evidently do not see what their future will be if Islam succeeds, as it well might, in expanding to other areas or to the whole of the world.

In the “beginning” in western thought, to recall both Aristotle and John’s Gospel, the world is as it is. It does not exist as the result of some human establishment. Knowing that the world exists not of ourselves, we seek to find a cause both of why it is and of why it is this way, not that way. In Islam, the beginning and the end could be otherwise with equal grandeur. Allah could make anything the opposite of what it is. There is no stability in things since, should Allah so will it, anything could be its opposite. Nature yields not order but arbitrariness. This realization paralyzes the Muslim mind. This is why, in Islam, submission is nobler than reason.

Reason supposes that God wanted rational beings also to know Him and freely to love him. Submission presupposes that we can know nothing. Our only alternative is to accept whatever happens and bow unquestioningly because no reasons are available or possible. We have here the grandeur of complete helplessness. Our only input is to accept it—whatever it is. The primary mission of Islam is, for its own good, to subject the rest of the world to this same view and practice. When this happens, there will be peace on earth.

II.

As each bombing, shooting, knifing, or truck crashing incident comes along—whether in Europe, Asia, Africa, or the Americas—much of the world comprehends it as they did the previous bombing, and the knifing before that, and the incident before that. That is, they officially treat it as an individual problem of some usually “fanatical” or otherwise confused youth acting on their own. Officials hope against hope that it was not the result of a plan, of a concerted and well-thought out invasion of their land. This fact would undermine the whole public order and the official explanation of what is happening, the nonsense of the “hate laws” that prevent people from speaking the truth about these events. Following this pattern, people basically learn very little about why what is happening. Nothing can be learned without facing two facts that the liberal ideology of the West in particular chooses not to include.

The first is that the West insists in seeing Islam through the lenses of its own modern, liberal theories about religion, freedom, and human motivation. Islam is just another “religion”; we are told that it acts like other religions, even when it doesn’t. (The alternate corollary of this view in much western thought is that all other religions, especially Christianity, are composed of fanatics just like Islam). Few will grasp that a singular purpose can be and in fact has been pursued in Islam for centuries. Such western theories have their own presuppositions and limitations that make it almost impossible for them to see clearly what is happening. When the so-called “terrorists” frankly explain what they are doing—namely, following what it says in their book—they are ignored because, while it fits in with the terrorists’ understanding of reality, it does not fit in with what most people in the West insist on holding.

The second element is that they cannot comprehend that the Qur'an, in the eyes of many Muslims, means just what it says it means. It is a religion that continually seeks, whether it be gradually or quickly, to conquer the world for Allah by whatever means are at hand in a given century or a given place. Islam does not disdain gradualism if it works, as it often does. Today, we are not witnessing something new, but something being renewed in the light of a shrewd estimation by many Muslim thinkers and activists about the weakness and lack of insight on the part of those who might naturally be expected to oppose this expansion. The much controverted statement of the 19th-century British Prime Minister, William Gladstone (1809-98), that we will have violence from Islam as long as the Qur'an is read, seems very close to the truth, both of the historical record and of the text itself. Many want to sanitize the text by eliminating or interpreting the many passages in the Qur'an that insist on this expansion. But to follow this procedure is to change the Qur'an so that it is not the same book that it was said to be revealed to Muhammad. We either have to say that the Qur'an does not say what it says or that it does not, contrary to centuries of faithful readers, mean what it says it means. The third alternative is to look at what many Muslims in fact did do in the light of this history: they accepted a theory of voluntarism that allows the changing of words and ideas at will so that there is no set intelligence in any revealed word.

President Trump came as close as any recent political leader in putting his finger on the problem. But even he did not state the fact that we are now witnessing moral aberrations on a regular basis in these sequential bombings. The "aberrations", if we must use that term, are on the side of those who cannot bring themselves to admit the facts, historical and contemporary, that the problem is within Islam itself—not just with "terrorists" who supposedly have little or nothing to do with Islam. No doubt some recent Muslim intellectuals have dallied with nationalist or Leninist thinking, but they did not need this to justify their efforts to continue the historic Muslim effort to conquer the world for Allah.

The President wants Muslims themselves to identify such "terrorists" within their own families and communities and to get them out of their countries. It will never happen. In one sense, if we read the statistics on the estimated numbers of jihadists already in foreign countries, they already are busy at this task of expanding Islam. This is the source of the continued bombings. The trouble is that such large numbers of young and mostly male Muslims in every western country are not there simply because they are poor or have been expelled as unwanted from Muslim states. They are there to expand Islam itself. This is why we have bombings. These young men and their shrewd leaders have judged that the best way to continue this expansion into hitherto difficult territory is to infiltrate it through a combination of violence and democratic/demographic use of existing laws. The massive invasion of refugees included many bent on expanding Islam to Europe in particular. We can add the demographic dynamic of frequent birth of Muslim children in contrast to a rapid decline of birth among Europeans.

The Muslim method of expansion begins with a refusal to integrate into any new society. They set up their own enclaves and quickly establish their own internal laws and enforcements. The purpose of Muslim expansion is not to assimilate into a new nation and culture but rather to change it so that it conforms to Muslim ways. This keeping apart does not mean that the laws and customs of other lands cannot be used for purposes of the expansion of Islam. No classic western laws have aided Muslim expansion more than those that guarantee freedom of speech and religion, as well as those fostering diversity in a manner that makes judging the real direction of Islamic presence almost impossible.

III.

The expansion of Islam into at least the western world is, as far as I can see, going quite well. Its would-be opponents (and victims) are confused by what it is and by their own ideological explanations of reality, particularly religious reality. This latter confusion could not be a more welcome thing for those Muslim thinkers and actors who are engaged in promoting this wide-spread expansion of Islam into areas of the world where it had not been previously found. India, of course, is the one country that is now formed by the refusal of its former northern Muslim provinces to stay in India. India still has, though a significant minority, one of the largest Muslim populations in the world. Muslim/Hindu struggles go back centuries. Muslim forces now regularly test the Philippine southern islands. China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam are largely future projects for Islam. Malaysia and Indonesia are Muslim nations. Islam is active and successful in Africa. It has footholds in North America and looks carefully at Latin America. Within all Muslim nations themselves we also find a struggle between a status quo establishment and the newly energized movements to return to the jihad, to the expansion of Islam.

The Saudis have been busy financing the construction of thousands of mosques and promoting other pro-Muslim academic and social entities all over Europe and the Americas. Many Christian churches have been torn down in Muslim lands. They have been closed or abandoned in Europe and America due to the decline in the number of believers; Muslims would like to take possession of some of these abandoned edifices. Mosques are now found almost everywhere. They are not simply built by local money or members. They are clearly part of a plan. We witness one of the most remarkable expansions of concrete Islamic presence in centuries. Meanwhile, the project of ridding the Muslim lands in the Middle East of Christian presence has been almost completed in recent years. Many known and unknown Christian martyrs can be counted in these areas. This attack on Christians has been, with few exceptions, little more than noted. There has been minimal success or even effort to insist that the freedom provided Muslims in western countries be reciprocated in the Muslim lands. Until this demand is made a central element in western thinking and policy, no Muslim government would worry too much about it.

Is there anything that might stop this dynamic Muslim expansion? Islamic thinkers recognize that, at bottom, much of the West is governed in principle by the same voluntarist philosophy that it has accepted to justify its own incoherence. The only thing voluntarist systems recognize as binding is force. But force is relatively useless until it is seen within a system that knows how and where to use it. Islamic leaders have every right to think that they can greatly extend the boundaries of Islam into Europe in the near future by using the democratic process made available to them in these lands. What it would take to deter it is a twofold effort that would itself not depend on relativist/liberal ideas about religion. Yet, Christianity seems itself to be no longer exempt from these same relativist tendencies to provide any effective counter force.

Still, what makes Islam vulnerable is what it says and believes about itself. It believes that the Qur'an is a final revelation of Allah and it does not hold itself to be bound by natural justice. These are very dubious premises. These two are the weakest and most in need of attention in dealing with Islam. While its rapid expansion in its early years was largely by military means, Islam is capable of using less violent methods for the same end. Today we see both of these approaches skillfully employed. The Qur'an is said to originate directly from its source in Allah. It claims to be the final revelation that corrects earlier revelations (Old and New Testaments). It

specifically denies the Trinity, the Incarnation, the Cross, and the Resurrection. If it is true, Christianity cannot be true. The Qur'an is said to have no human origin or input. Since this belief governs the thinking in Islam, a valid and critical edition of the Qur'an is needed. Though much reflection is found on the words and ideas of the Qur'an, it is astonishing that no critical edition exists either in the West or in Islam.

For some time now, a group of German scholars have been working on the **Corpus Coranicum**. This endeavor seeks to locate and publish all the earliest texts of the Qur'an, together with commentaries. The Qur'an contains within itself sources that are older than Islam, things from the Old Testament and the apocryphal gospels. The earliest texts of the Qur'an do not appear until a century after Mohammed. Insofar as this critical edition suggests that the Qur'an is not what it claims to be, its publication will be slow (some give the date of 2025) and dangerous, if it appears at all. Fear of retaliation is always present in dealing with a critical edition that finds anything suspicious in the origins of the Qur'an.

The effort to deal with Islam as having nothing to do with violence cannot be maintained either in the texts or in the historical record. However, the problem of natural justice can be used as a tool to confront the most visible objections to Islam today, namely the killings of innocent people. Of course, this approach is open to the objection that similar things are done in the West. It just depends on what one objects to. The numbers of those killed in jihadist type atrocities is large, but so is the record of abortion killings in the West. Islam is far more just on this score than most of the Western countries. What is to be noted is that both justifications—jihad and abortion—rest on voluntarist principles. This means, in essence, that the primary struggle with Islam is also a struggle with ourselves about the grounds of reason.

Both in the case of a critical edition of the Qur'an and in the dealing with arbitrary killings of innocents, we need a common standard of reason. This point, of course, is what Benedict XVI pointed out in his **Regensburg Lecture**. The reaction of some Muslims was one of violence, which proved his point; the western reaction was one of indifference. But the fact is that the disorders in Islam and in the West have a common origin. Until this source is recognized, the violence in both areas will continue and grow. Or to put it another way, violence as such is not the problem, only its external manifestation. The real issue is that *Deus Logos, non Voluntas, est*.