

The Speck in Your Brother's Eye - The Alleged War of Islam Against the West - The Speck In Your Brother's Eye



The title of this pamphlet contains words spoken by Jesus, admonishing us to take a good look at ourselves before we judge others. I believe that Wilders' and his party's discourse and ideology are not innovative or new at all, and that they fit seamlessly in the world's history of

religions and ideologies characterized by a strained relationship with violence, be it psychological or physical. I am not going to get into a discussion about what is a religion and what is an ideology. Both can mean a lot to people and both have a special vision or view of the world, the universe, and the questions of life. Both strive for ideal societies, religions all do so with regard to the afterlife and, if possible, here on earth as well; ideologies are restricted to the latter.

Wilders is very outspoken on Christianity, Islam and the ideas that fuelled the French Revolution. He praises the first and considers the second and third evil by nature. Still, the three of them have more in common than Wilders wants us to believe. In what follows I would like to draw a concise comparison between the three, formulating their respective goals, and subsequently discussing the ways in which the three aim to realize these goals. The discussion I present is in no way exhaustive.

Christianity is characterized by a strong sense of millenarianism. Christ clearly stated in his teachings that his kingdom is not of this earth. It is in heaven and Christians should live their lives in such a way that they deserve to get to heaven in the afterlife. To attain heaven they will have to adhere to the principles of Christianity, which basically entails no more than behaving in accordance with the commandment to love your neighbor as yourself, and do unto others as you would be done by. Love, one could say is the basic tenet of Christianity. Today

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Islam likewise cherishes an afterlife, maybe even more so than Christianity. In Islam, the basic tenet is solidarity. All Muslims are equal in the face of Allah and Muslims must take care of each other. They form one big family and the poor and the needy are to be taken care of. In the afterlife, Muslims too are judged on their behavior and accomplishments here on earth and God himself decides who can enter paradise and who cannot. Today there are over 1.5 billion Muslims in the world.

The principles of the French Revolution are threefold: liberty, equality and fraternity. It was the first time in history that politicians came up with the idea of 'the equality of all people'. The philosophy of the Revolution, as expressed in particular in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's work, formulated this principle of the equality of all people. With liberty of conscience and choice, and with fraternity and equality, mankind would be able to create a paradise on earth. It was a tempting and alluring perspective for mankind. A non-religious way of thinking (I am avoiding the word ideology) was presented to people and unlike religions it promised heaven on earth. The principles of the French revolution have resulted in present day liberalism and (Labor) socialism, which have the sympathy of billions of people in the world and which form the basis of many governments, especially in the West. It goes without saying that people can be Christians or Muslims and at the same time have liberal or socialist political views.

Taking them at face value, an innocent reader learning of these three views of the world would undoubtedly greet them with enthusiasm. Who would oppose such laudable ideals and not want to follow (one of) them? Unfortunately, their histories are not quite as uplifting. When we take a look at the history of Christianity, Islam and the French Revolution, we discover that all three of them are marked by very dark chapters indeed.

Many are the Christians that were inspired by the words of the last book of the New Testament, the Book of Revelation. Revelation contains a very outspoken millenarist view of the end of times, when the earth will suffer enormous waves of violence and blood will flow knee-high. This book in the past and present has been an inspiration to many Christians aiming to establish paradise on earth or to help God speed up the realization of paradise in the afterlife. The result of this was that minor and major Christian movements and sects have resorted to violence

aimed at the opponents of Christianity. The world had to be purified, cleansed of the elements of evil, and in this vein the Catholic Church, considering itself sacrosanct, in the Middle Ages set up the Inquisition, persecuting infidels like the Cathars and 'crypto' Jews. Influenced by Protestant orthodoxy, city courts burnt or hanged witches and homosexuals in seventeenth and eighteenth century Western Europe. Modern Christian movements, in particular those in the United States, stood and still stand up against the Federal Government, considering it the Antichrist, and even revert to violence, as evidenced by the Waco massacre in 1993 and the Oklahoma attack in 1995. Numerous are the groups that cherish violence to this day in order to realize a pure, Christian United States of America. The Anglican Church is bitterly divided on its position with regard to homosexuality. In particular in African countries like Uganda, the anti-homosexuality discourse is very strong indeed and gay people there face serious consequences, even death, if they dare to come out. And it goes without saying that the numerous child abuse scandals in the Catholic Church are outrageous.

Islam in its turn from its very beginning failed to stick to the principles of solidarity and mercy as preached in the Koran. The coming of the prophet Mohammed to the oasis of Yathrib, later Medina, was first followed by the expulsion of a Jewish tribe living in the oasis, and later by that of another tribe, after which the male members of the last remaining tribe were killed and their women and children were turned into slaves. When Islam had settled in the Middle East and North Africa and later in the Balkans, Jews and Christians were treated as second rate citizens, *dhimmis*. They had to pay extra taxes, were forced to wear certain clothing, were limited in their choice of professions, were hardly accepted in government positions and became the victims of Islamic rage in times of economic crisis. Today we are witnessing intensifying threats and terror aimed at Christians by Muslims in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Palestine. It is not an exaggeration to say that a veritable ethnic cleansing is going on in these countries. In theocratic Iran, gay young men are hanged, often under the pretext of ordinary crimes like theft. The Al Qaeda movement killed nearly 3,000 people in the September 11 attacks and many, many more in Islamic countries. The custom of marrying off really young girls and the sexual abuse of boys in a country like Afghanistan is as outrageous as the child abuse by Catholic clergymen.

More than once Wilders refers in his book to quotes from various American

presidents on Christianity and Islam, one of them being Thomas Jefferson, who 'waged war against the Islamic Barbary states of North Africa in order to stop the pillaging of ships and the enslavement of more than a million Christians' (p. 16). Jefferson is quoted several times by Wilders, stressing the former American president's perceived anti-Islamic points of view and his support for the Christian cause. The problem with quotes is that in most cases they can be countered by other quotes from the same person. It was also Thomas Jefferson who said:

'Millions of innocent men, women, and children, since the introduction of Christianity, have been burnt, tortured, fined, imprisoned; yet we have not advanced one inch towards uniformity. What has been the effect of coercion? To make one half the world fools, and the other half hypocrites. To support roguery and error all over the earth. Let us reflect that it is inhabited by a thousand millions of people. That these profess probably a thousand different systems of religion. That ours is but one of that thousand. That if there be but one right, and ours that one, we should wish to see the 999 wandering sects gathered into the fold of truth. But against such a majority we cannot effect this by force' (Jefferson, in Peden, 1954, p 160).

Jefferson clearly shows an attitude of cultural relativism, the very same cultural relativism that Wilders abhors so much. The quote does not need further elaboration. Mr. Jefferson knew how to judge the world's diversity of religions, knew about their dark sides and the impossibility of wiping them out and replacing them by only one. Mr. Jefferson was a wise man that Mr. Wilders could have taken as an example to follow.

It did not take long before the French revolution, which began so full of hope for a better future, resulted in terror. The revolutionary council that governed France under the leadership of Maximilien Robespierre in the period 1793-1794 had more than 40,000 people killed. Ideology turned into nightmare and left Napoleon Bonaparte later with nothing but loathing for the term and its disastrous consequences. The principles of the French revolution led to liberalism and peace-loving social democracy, but they led to Marxism and communism as well. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were inspired by its principles of equality and fraternity when they developed their views on world history and the ultimate realization of a workers' paradise. History has shown us and is still showing us today how devastating the effects of Marxism and communism have been. Stalin's communist terror led to the deaths of at least a million Soviet citizens. Chairman

Mao's Cultural Revolution killed half a million Chinese. Today we can still see the gruesome effects of communism in Cuba, and in North Korea in particular.

How in God's name can we explain all these aberrations? Why all this violence? What is it that turns people into such fanatics that they are willing to sacrifice everything and everybody to reach their goals? This pamphlet is not the proper place to answer this question; it would require a lot more paper. For the moment, it suffices to conclude that apparently there is something in man's nature that is inclined to fanaticism to realize certain goals, to secure heaven in the afterlife or create it here on earth. Any good religion or ideology should take this vile human inclination into account. But do they? Do Christianity, Islam and the French Revolution include (enough) safeguarding elements to promote an approach without violence? Regrettably, the historical records of all three show many instances of followers being incited implicitly or explicitly to use violence or lines of approach that can be interpreted as such. I would say that a good religion or ideology will always be unambiguous in its commandments to its followers. Any spoken or written text that could be interpreted as allowing violence should never be part of a religion or ideology.

The instances in the Bible, the Koran and the revolutionary writings that incite people to violence or that can be explained as allowing their followers to resort to violence in order to reach their goals are numerous. Reading in Exodus about the people of Israel travelling from Egypt to the Promised Land, one is stunned by the violence they are allowed to use against the peoples they encounter. Rock bottom is the killing of the Midianites. After a day of slaughtering people by the thousands, Moses is angry at the Israelites for not having killed adulterous Midianite women too, as he had ordered (Numbers 31:17). Earlier we saw that a modern killer like Anders Breivik interpreted the words of Jesus in such a way that he considered them a license to kill. Koran verse 5 from Sura 9 incites Muslims to kill infidels: 'Kill the polytheists (or infidels or unbelievers) wherever you find them' (9:5). Many Muslims, to this day, have taken these words literally and acted on them, believing they are following a divine command. Finally, the words of Enlightenment philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau were equally disastrous when he wrote in his *Contrat Social* that the citizen, who does not want to bow to the will of the people or the community, has a serious problem and will have to be killed:

'Again, every malefactor, by attacking social rights, becomes on forfeit a rebel

and a traitor to his country; by violating its laws he ceases to be a member of it; he even makes war upon it. In such a case the preservation of the State is inconsistent with his own, and one or the other must perish; in putting the guilty to death, we slay not so much the citizen as an enemy'.

This onerous concept of the will of the people, which Robespierre used as justification for the Terror, and which was later adopted by communism and fascism, has led to the deaths of millions.

One may pose the question if there are no differences in intensity and frequency with which the adherents of the three religions and ideologies used and still use violence. If we conducted a historical study, a possible conclusion might be that Islam records the lowest number of victims fallen at the hands of its followers, followed by Christianity, followed in turn by French-Revolution spin-offs like communism. This might be one of the findings. Are we then going to judge the French Revolution and similarly inspired movements as being the most evil, followed by either Christianity or Islam? But what would be the point of such an exercise? The three will not cease to exist. We can, of course, establish the fact that some -isms are absolutely evil - fascism and National Socialism come to mind, having brought nothing but evil to the world. This, incidentally, is also why I have left these two ideologies out of my comparisons. They are just utterly bad. And my personal judgment of Stalinist and Maoist communism is also clear: I condemn both of them. Present-day social democracy, on the other hand, has a strong peaceful tradition. I would certainly not condemn this branch of French Revolution-inspired thinking. By the same token, I would not reject liberalism either. This argument leads me to another consideration. We established the fact that French Revolution-inspired thinking also laid the foundations for non-violent movements like the ones I mentioned earlier. There are people and movements that seek to realize the paradise of the Enlightenment through peaceful means, without taking recourse to force or violence. Apparently, we cannot condemn the whole heritage of the Revolution. And what about Christianity and Islam? Do we not observe the same peace-loving convictions there as well? Are there not numerous Christians and Muslims that seek to realize their dreamed society in a peaceful manner? Are there not countless Christians and Muslims that independently and united in brotherhood seek the best interest of all people? Christianity is said to have gone through an enlightenment stage, as a result of which most Christians no longer take the violence in the Bible literally. There are

Muslims who have likewise reconsidered the contents and message of their Koran even though Islam as a whole still has a long way to go in this respect. What happened to Christianity can also happen to Islam.

We cannot change the fact that there are different religions and ideologies in this world. Trying to wipe them out by force or through persuasion is impossible as American President Thomas Jefferson rightly observed. And we do not need to either. We can very well live with a peaceful Christianity, a peaceful Islam and peaceful French Revolution-inspired movements. This will demand from each and every one of us a tolerant and open attitude, first of all from the believers and supporters of the religions and ideologies themselves. They have a special responsibility to respect other people's views, opinions and lifestyles. We will, obviously, never realize a paradise on earth. This at least is what history teaches us. The only option open to people therefore is to strive for it in a peaceful way, respecting each other's love (Christian), solidarity (Islam) and equality (French Revolution) commandments. In short, I would promote tolerance in the building of societies and I would expect the same from religious authorities, politicians and governments. I realize that this is another ideal than that of creating a heaven on earth, but it is quite a bit easier to accomplish than millenarist views of an earthly or heavenly paradise.

It goes without saying that the views expressed by Wilders in his book on Muslims and Islam form an ideology in themselves and I am sorry for Wilders, but unlike in Christianity, Islam and the French Revolution, I cannot see anything positive in his thinking. In following Wilders' analysis of Islam and his evaluation of religions and ideologies, we have repeatedly been confronted with the question what Wilders' ideal society actually looks like. In his last chapter, he tells us that he highly values the heritage of 'Rome, Athens and Jerusalem'. This gives us a clue. Rome and Athens stand for the classical heritage and Jerusalem for Judaism and Christianity. For obvious reasons he does not mention Paris. In a sense this is strange or at least surprising, when we realize that Wilders grew up as a politician in a free and open democracy, which is, after all, built on the principles of French Revolution. He mentions the word 'democratic' in relation to the West in the following quote, which I already cited earlier: 'When you compare the West to any other culture that exists today, it becomes clear that we are the most pluralistic, humane, democratic, and charitable culture on earth (p. 31).' But he labels this Western culture Judeo-Christian (p. 31) and rejects the

accomplishments of the French Revolution, one of which is the establishment of democracy. Where, then, does democracy come from, according to the Freedom Party leader? Does not the very mentioning of the word imply that secretly he acknowledges its vital value for the West? Is democracy part of his dreamed society? I would really like to know if Wilders is striving for a Christian society, a Liberal society, or a mix of both. It is important in this respect to stress (once again) that one of the things that he considers absolutely vital and which he mentions in his last chapter is the freedom of speech. It is this freedom in particular that is a basic part of the heritage of the French Revolution. Regrettably, we are forced to conclude that Wilders does not paint a clear picture of what his dreamed society looks like in detail and this should not come as a surprise to us either. His is basically a one-issue party, his one and only mission is to rid the world of 'the evil of Islam', to bring about a society, a world, without Islam, or one where Muslims have denounced their religion. Wilders' ideology is one of the thoroughly negative kind.

Wilders pretends to be presenting a peaceful solution to the problem of Islam and Muslims. But how can this be brought about peacefully? Are the 1.5 billion Muslims on earth going to listen to his 'compelling' advice and renounce the Koran, the Prophet and thus Islam? It is at all possible to imagine that, if Wilders' program were to be carried out, this would not lead to resistance, violence, terror and bloodshed? Why should it be impossible for Muslims to work on a peaceful interpretation of the Koran? Why does Wilders not mention this option? Does history not show us in the examples of Christianity and French Revolution spin-offs like social democracy and liberalism that this is a viable scenario?

The solution Wilders presents involves a high risk of invoking violence, even if he states repeatedly that his program should be realized by the word and the pen. Who will give me the assurance that this would indeed be the case? Who can guarantee us that there will not be people who, like so many Christians, Muslims and French revolutionaries, will take up the sword and 'help' to realize their goals that way? Wilders' book brings us nothing new. Not only that, it is also completely counter-productive. Wilders' message is not like that of religions and ideologies, which not only have a negative but also a positive side. It is exclusively negative. He focuses on the shortcomings of the other, accuses the other of being violent by nature, and uses words that can easily be interpreted as allowing violence to fight the enemy. He acts in exactly the same way as he perceives his opponent does.

He sees the speck in his brother's eye but fails to see the log in his own.

It may very well be the case that Geert Wilders will in due time give up his position as leader of the Freedom Party and leave the Dutch political arena. He might indeed, as was suggested, join an American think tank or travel the world spreading the message of the danger of Islam. Irrespective of where his career leads him, this will not mean that the anti Islam discourse will die out. On the contrary, it is supported by numerous others and in particular on the Internet it is very strong. Therefore countering this ideology by arguments, by pamphlets like this, remains necessary.

I hope the readers of Wilders' book in the English language will give my response to it some consideration as well. I am Dutch, like Wilders. His is my country too. I believe my solution to 'the Muslim problem' is a not only a different one but a better one as well: we should exercise tolerance, and respect each other in realizing our goals. The truth that lies in the middle, the truth that may be grey, the truth that is not extreme and therefore maybe not attractive to believers and followers, the truth that brings peace, that is my truth.

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Note

Verses I quote from the Bible are from the Revised Standard Version (RSV). It is the authorized revision (1946) of the American Standard Version (1901), which in turn was a revision of the King James Version, published in 1611. Verses from the Koran are from <http://www.clearquran.com/>. The Bible and Koran quotes of Wilders and the Bible quotes of Breivik stem from other translations.

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