

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



Marked for Death contains 217 pages and the words 'truth' or 'true' are mentioned in it at least eleven times. As an academic I am suspicious of the word 'truth'. I teach my students that undoubtedly, there is such a thing as the truth, but each one of us, including those

we see as great thinkers, has his own concept of what the truth is. It was Socrates who postulated that what we see around us is not the real world, that what we see is but an image of it and that we can in effect hardly see reality and if so only with a great deal of effort. Philosopher Immanuel Kant argues that basically we cannot know things, we can only guess at what 'reality', at what is 'real'.

Friedrich Hegel does not rule out man fully knowing things, but foresees perfect knowing as a result of a long development the end of which we have not reached as yet. The apostle Paul also claims that as yet we do not know things fully (1 Corinthians 13: 12): 'For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood'.

Knowing things, knowing reality is not only a subject that occupies the minds of academics, thinkers, philosophers and theologians. It concerns each one of us. If asked to describe an event they have witnessed, different people tend to give different versions of it and may disagree with each other's interpretations. This is not limited to daily events, but also goes for major events in people's countries or for things happening in the world. Some may blame the present economic crisis on the irresponsible behavior of banks, while others may claim with equal force that the crisis has been caused by mass immigration.

Man is aware that there is something like the truth, but cannot come to an agreement on what truth is, what it consists of. Never in the history of mankind have there been societies that were uniform in terms of what was considered the

truth. Sure, there were and are societies where regimes impose their truth on the people, but ultimately none of them have succeeded in convincing everyone. There will always be individuals who disagree, who have different views on things. It must be a blow to all those who believe in 'the truth', but the truth is that there is simply no such thing as the one and only truth.

Having said this, we should not object to people venting clear opinions. There is absolutely nothing against people expressing their interpretation of reality, their interpretation of the truth. All I would demand from people in this respect is that they take into consideration that when they express their views and opinions, they should realize that there are other people whose truths may be different from theirs. And here we have a problem. Because while wise people will indeed realize that other truths exist beside their own, there are also people who do not want to accept the truth of their fellow men, and will even want to impose their own truth on their brother. This can lead not only to arguments, but also to conflicts, and ultimately to war. History is full of examples of wars based on religion or ideology. The challenge for mankind is to respect the multiple interpretations of the truth in order to maintain peace.

Religious people and politicians have a strong inclination to embrace one and only one approach to the truth. This is understandable. If you believe in God or in Jesus, you simply cannot have any doubts about this, because if you do, you are not a believer any more. As a politician you do not make a very strong case if you promote your views and at the same time relativize them by putting them into perspective. It would render you incredible as a politician. The bottom line both for religious people and for politicians is that, yes, they are free to express their strong convictions with regard to their own truth, but they cross an ethical line if, when they have obtained or hold power, they impose their truth on others, threatening them with undesirable consequences if they do not obey. A good religious person and a good politician know this and act on the principle of tolerance.

This elaborate introduction makes clear where I stand. I acknowledge that each person is entitled to their own truth, but I do want to make myself heard to those who claim theirs it is the one and only truth and I would want to make myself heard even more if they wanted to impose their truth on others. In particular those holding power or wielding major religious or political influence in a given society should heed this warning. It is live and let live. Tolerance is the key word.

Now let us turn to the instances where Geert Wilders in his book talks about the truth. The first time he uses the word 'truth' in his first chapter, called The Axe Versus the Pen, he puts it in inverted commas: 'There is no better metaphor to illustrate the difference between Western values and the "true faith of Islam" than the difference between a pen and an axe' (p. 4). Wilders makes it quite clear that he has no intention of even so much as tolerating his opponent's truth being different from his: the faith of Islam is 'true' in inverted commas, in other words: It is not true. He confirms this statement by writing on the following page (p. 5): 'Armed only with our pens, we must defy Islam's axes and knives. We must continue to speak our minds, knowing there is nothing more powerful than the truth. That is why we write our books and speeches, draw our cartoons, and make our movies and documentaries. The truth will set us free. That is what we really believe.' Wilders does not juxtapose his truth with Islam's truth. He denies Islam's truth and states that there is only one truth, his own. The question obviously is what exactly his truth consists of. Let us therefore look at other instances where the truth is mentioned in *Marked for Death*.

In the same first chapter, Wilders deals with the speech on Islam that American President Obama gave in Cairo on June 4, 2009. In this speech, Obama declared that 'he consider[ed] it part of [his] responsibility to fight against negative stereotypes of Islam wherever they appear' (p. 13). Wilders' reaction to this statement is: 'But what if these so-called "negative stereotypes of Islam" are the truth - will you denounce people for telling the truth?' Here Wilders' truth comes out: The negative stereotypes of Islam are the truth. Its violent character, its wish to impose itself on others and conquer the world, as he points out later in the book, this is the truth about Islam. This truth is something negative, something evil, as Wilders declares in the last chapter of his book, called *How to Turn the Tide*: 'Islam is one of those evil empires and it too will collapse once people begin telling the truth' (p. 209). Wilders reminds us of the fact 'that Islam is not the truth and that we have no obligations to this ideology' (p. 126). Wilders is being very outspoken here. Because of the simple fact that Islam is not the truth, we do not owe it anything. And not only is Islam not the truth, it is evil.

Speaking the truth, he says, is not an easy task. 'Sometimes speaking the truth invites physical threats, persecution, or the loss of money or power' (p. 130). When you express yourself and receive hostile reactions; that can be the price you have to pay. For quite a while now, Wilders has been living under police

protection due to anonymous threats. This is a well-known fact in the Netherlands, but he never really spoke about it. In *Marked for Death*, he is no longer silent about it and in the last part of the book he even goes into the personal conditions he is forced to contend with. 'It is the price for speaking the truth about Islam' (p. 143).

Here Wilders touches on a subject I discussed earlier. Each person is entitled to their own truth, but crosses a line when they want to impose their truth on others, or physically fight others who cherish conflicting opinions. In being threatened and forced to surround himself with bodyguards, Wilders is experiencing his opponents' defying his truth. He expresses his views on Islam, gets threatened as a result and experiences what can happen if intolerance reigns. Faced with a situation like that, one would expect Wilders not to react in a fashion similar to that of his opponents. He knows from experience what can happen if people believe in their own truth one hundred percent, cannot accept opposition to it, and act violently based on this strong belief.

But Wilders, in his turn, does the exact same thing as his opponents. He denies Islam its claim to the truth. There is only one truth, and that is Wilders'. He could have opted for a less strict reaction to Islam. He could have chosen to attack the consequences of Islam's perceived evil nature and avoid the 'truth' discussion. Had he opted for combating the negative characteristics of Islam, and not its 'universal truth' claim, he might have won more support, as there are more voices in the world that criticize Islam and Muslims. But he chooses not to and instead adopts the same approach as that perceivably taken by his adversary. Both envy the light in each other's eye.

His personal, explicitly expressed interpretation of the truth has quite a number of consequences for the perceived evil character of Islam. To give an example, in his fourth chapter, called *In the Dark Doorways*, he goes into the concept of martyrdom in Christianity and Islam. Christian martyrdom, so he explains, 'refers to suffering unto death for the sake of faith' (p. 64). Islam's, he goes on to argue, is different: 'Islamic martyrs are not those who suffer and die for the truth, but those who are killed while making others suffer and die.' What it comes down to is that martyrdom in Islam consists of blowing oneself up, and taking with one as many infidels as possible.

In Christianity, the martyr surrenders to his enemy and allows him to slay him. The difference is clear. An Islamic martyr is basically egocentric; a Christian

martyr is unselfish. Closer inspection, however, soon reveals that 'the truth' is much more complex than this. The holy wars that Christian crusaders fought were considered legally permissible. They were called 'Just Wars', the Latin term being *Bellum Iustum*. Christian thinkers like Augustine of Hippo and later Thomas Aquinas ideologically underpinned the Just Wars. In Just Wars, attacking and killing the physical enemies of the Christians was permitted, and the Christians that fell in such wars were considered martyrs as they died as fighters in God's cause. Martyrdom in Islam, as perceived by Wilders, is thus found in Christianity as well. Similarly, the selfless martyrdom that Wilders relates exclusively to Christianity can be found in Islam as well. During Nasser's reign in Egypt many Muslim Brothers were put into Concentration Camps and died for the sake of their faith. They had killed nobody: they were killed. Now, I am well aware of the fact that the subject of martyrdom in both religions is a thorny issue. In both cases, martyrdom is not quite as selfless as it is supposed or made out to be. But Wilders' black-and-white interpretation of martyrdom for the two religions does not do either of them justice. His interpretation is a consequence of his own truth and his denial of the truth of Islam.

In his chapter three, bearing the title Islamofascism, which does not offer much hope for a respectful debate with Islam, Wilders discusses the rules of warfare: 'Ideological and theocratic regimes have made "the universal truth" (as they see it) into a political ideology, they do not obey rules of warfare. Prisoners are slaughtered and the concept of betrayal applies to those who renounce the side that pretends to be the vehicle of truth' (p. 38). The idea is that there are rules of honor in warfare but that Islamic regimes do not obey to them.

The implication obviously is that Western governments, who, according to Wilders, are the bearers of the best culture in the world, a point that he elaborates on in the next chapter, do respect the rules of warfare. Once again, his claim is easy to refute. In the First World War, both Germany and the Allies used poison gas against each other, as decade's later Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein did against his own population and against the Iranians in the Iran-Iraq war from 1980-1988. The Americans used chemical weapons in Vietnam. No belligerent nation ever stuck to the 'noble rules of warfare'.

In the example on warfare we touch on an important aspect of Wilders' truth that was already briefly mentioned at the beginning of this book: Islam is not a faith, Islam is an ideology. 'Islam is not just a religion ... but primarily a political

ideology in the guise of a religion' (p. 25). In Wilders' book, ideology is something reprehensible. Ideology implies tyranny. Ideology is not the truth. In Wilders' perception, ideology is evil, and nothing good can come out of it. He relates it, and this will be discussed more extensively in the Ideology chapter, to Nazi Germany, to the Soviet Union and also to France in the days of the Revolution. Islam should therefore not be treated 'more leniently than other political ideologies like communism and fascism just because it claims to be a religion' (p. 26). An approach like that has quite a number of consequences.

He puts it short and not so sweet: 'That is the crux of Islam: it is an ideology of global war' (p. 78). Surprisingly, he attenuates his view of Islam as a violent ideology by stating that 'I am talking about the ideology of Islam, not about individual Muslim people. There are many moderate Muslims, but that does not change the fact that the political ideology of Islam is not moderate - it is a totalitarian cult with global ambitions' (p. 26).

If I were a Muslim and intent on a dialogue with Wilders, I would lose all hope after reading such a statement. I may be moderate; I may be open to others, to other people's truths, but none of that changes the fact that my faith, my 'ideology' is violent and not the truth. It blocks all possible communication and therefore any hope of creating a *modus vivendi*.

In this chapter, we established what the truth is in Wilders' view: Islam and ideologies in general are evil and do not possess any truth. Having heard what Wilders considers evil, one wonders what he believes is good. In the next chapter, called Culture, I will try to find this out.

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