

Islamisation of Europe (2)

Why is Christianity in Europe viewed as peripheral, and largely irrelevant? Why has it taken so long to see Islamisation as a threat to its cultural heritage? The watershed event that heralded in traumatic spiritual, political, and religious change was the 1789 French Revolution. Its godless spirit was one of the powerful forces that led to the undermining of Europe's Christian culture. The fall of the Bastille in Paris was welcomed with joy by multitudes; now the hour of freedom for France and eventually for Europe had come. The slogan was: "No God, no master." Reason became the new god. The faith of the revolution spread and reached into every sphere of life. The French historian Jules Michelet wrote: "The Revolution did not adopt a church. Why? Because it was a church itself." The world has never been the same since the revolution raised its victory flag in France.

The French Revolution clearly illustrates the antithesis between heaven and hell, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. A revolution without a complete change of the human heart, means nothing more than taking one evil to replace it with another. The French Revolution devoured its own children. It tilled the soil, making it fertile for evolutionary idealism, social Darwinism, materialism, positivism, agnosticism, liberalism, secularism, Marxist-socialism, and a host of other "isms." Science and technology would be the pillars on which the future would be built. But the optimistic progressive ideology of the 19th century received a hard blow in the 20th century with its horrific World Wars, the Holocaust, Communism's Gulags, and the rise of Islamism. Harry Blamires rightly notes in his book *Where Do We Stand? An Examination of the Christian's Position in the Modern World* that "the man who cannot see the Devil's fingers at work in the network of movements that would erode the standards and values of our Western civilization is stark blind."

Christianity is one of the building blocks of modern Europe. One does not have to be a Christian to recognize Europe's Christian heritage. The nineteenth century liberalism and the 20th century national socialism were the last two great ideologies, which took notice of Christianity. But after the second world war there was no question of this anymore. In the beginning of the 21st century, declining proportions of Europeans profess religious beliefs, observe religious practices, and participate in religious activities. This trend reflects not so much hostility to religion as indifference to it. Christianity, which was once recognized for its vital role in the public square, lost its collective power and became a private matter. Many now blithely speak of someone's or their own *religious preference* - as if it were something like a taste in food and sport. But for the loss of her influence, the Church must put her hand into her own bosom. The greatest danger facing her is the erosion of orthodox faith and practice from within. We see this in the failure of the churches of the Reformation to remain faithful to their confessions and creeds. The internally divided churches in the West tried to unite with others to regain their voice and influence. The 20th century witnessed the spectacle of

the World Council of Churches' leaders eagerly striving to accommodate Christian beliefs and prescriptions to the needs and tastes of modern society. But they were not able to move the culture from its secular-scientific basis. Harry Blamires observes that "it is folly for the Church to imagine that its main enemy is open atheism when its creeds, its otherworldliness, and its essential forms and practices, public and private, are being undermined from within."

One of the most important developments in European history, no doubt, is the process of secularization and de-Christianization. T. S. Eliot (1888-1965), who had become a member of the Church of England in 1927, believed that the West was dying because it had forgotten its own tradition. It was a civilization that rejected moorings of any sort. He argued that Western civilization needed both the church and the literary tradition of antiquity. In his writings, he chillingly described the secularized world divorced from religion. The post World War I cultural decline gave him the sense that one was living through an irreversible fall from civilization, law, literacy, gentility, and sophistication into a rude age of insecurity, violence, and ignorance. In 1922 he published *The Waste Land*, which at one level suggested that the contemporary West, like late antiquity was "A heap of broken images, where the sun beats and the dead tree gives no shelter."

In the past forty years the victory of secularism over Christianity became an accepted fact. Bible reading disappeared among the majority, and with it the background of ideas and references common to all. Ignorance of the Christian roots and the impact of Christian thought upon Europe seriously handicapped the learning of such disciplines as history, literature, or philosophy. C.S. Lewis lamented about the way in which rapidly changing technology was cutting people off from the accumulated wisdom of the past. And there is every reason to lament. If one wants to understand the Reformation of the 16th century but ignores the words sin, the priesthood of all believers and indulgences, he or she will never be able to grasp the deep cultural and theological implications of that movement. The Dutch missiologist J.C. Hoekendyk (1912-75), described consequences of the secularization of the modern European: "His great-grand father had drifted away from the church. His grandfather had not even requested the baptism of his children. Consequently, his father shrugged his shoulders whenever the lad asked embarrassing questions about God."

Post World War II Europe became increasingly decadent. In the 1960s and thereafter, "the cult of the sacred self" became the prominent faith of many. Postmodernism thinkers spread their ideas. They recognized no enforced norms and rules. As to history, objective truths, transcendent values, confessions of faith; they are no longer fashionable. Human beings are the only source of truth. Moral absolutes derived from the Bible are scorned. The Dutch philosopher Paul Cliteur argues that we need "a universal secular morality." He believes that only when we adopt a secular ethic as a standard is peace and equality of the individual possible. He is committed to the proposition that there can be politics without God. He thinks that a Europe free, tolerant, civil, and pluralistic can only be built as a public space from which the God of the Bible has been excluded. The question now is whether Europe, without recognizing its public

Christian heritage, can long survive as a secular civilization.

The Western European left did not want their culture to have a future, or at least not until it had radically transformed itself according to a particular agenda. Never before the 20th century had any civilizations produced within itself as powerful, as varied, or as wide-ranging a tradition of self-criticism as that of the West. Feminists, multi-culturalists, environmentalists, and others argued that the West carried a heavy burden of historical guilt, and could redeem itself only by shedding all its historical identity. It became an age of profound self-doubt. The new trend now is that there is nothing to believe. Life is an aimless journey, it has no meaning in itself. In 1998 Ice-T, internationally renowned rappers summed up this new nihilism with these telling words: "It's very exciting to violate the law, though it can also lead to a kind of madness" (1998). A June 17, 1999 news item shows how this philosophy even influenced lawmakers. It reports that the Italian parliament passed a bill decriminalizing some 100 offenses, such as insulting a public official, drunken behaviour in public, begging aggressively, and desecrating the flag. And George Weigel wonders why so many of the French preferred to continue their summer vacations during the European heat wave of 2003, leaving their parents unburied and warehoused in refrigerated lockers (which were soon overflowing).

One country which has notably advanced Islamisation is France. For many years France has been hostile to America and obstructed its influence in the Middle East. France was the first to play the Arab card against Great Britain in the 19th and 20th centuries. The French historian Alain Boyer recalls that "France with its colonial empire declared itself a Muslim power, the protector of Islam, but with a paternalistic attitude." It even gave asylum to Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini.

This brief overview of historical developments in Europe reveals that it became ripe for Islamisation. The church rapidly declined; Islam advanced. European intellectuals and political leaders airbrushed fifteen hundred years of Christian history from Europe's political memory in the process of devising a new constitution for the new Europe - an exercise in self-inflicted amnesia. Any reference to Europe's Christian sources - not to mention its Judeo-Christian roots - has been omitted from the EU Constitution on 'secular' grounds, but mainly so as not to offend Muslim immigrants. It pacified Islam; it infuriated the Vatican. In *How Islam Plans to Change the World*, William Wagner observes that of all the continents in the world, Europe is probably the number one target by the Muslims strategists who are seeking world dominance - Eastern Europe, because of the fall of Communism and the vacuum left in the spirits of the people; Western Europe, because they perceive it as being decadent. They feel that it will collapse from the inside, leaving its population desperately seeking for an answer to life's questions to which they believe only Islam has the answers.

The challenge of Islam for us as Westerners is to reconsider why we've abandoned our Christian heritage - not only in the social sense, but also personally. Because in abandoning it we find ourselves in a terrible mess - religiously, intellectually, morally, and politically.

(to be continued)

Johan D. Tangelder
April, 2006