

Islamisation of Europe (4)

The effects of Europe's self-inflicted indigenous population decline created a vacuum into which Islamic immigrants are flowing in increasing numbers from North Africa, Turkey, and other parts of the Islamic world. Arab states were eager to keep Europe as an outlet for their rapid demographic growth, viewing it as a chance of providing employment for their young men. Until the 1970s European countries generally were favourably disposed toward immigration, and, in some cases, even welcomed guest workers to remedy labour shortages. Since 1970, some 20 million (legal) Islamic immigrants - the equivalents of three European Union countries, Ireland, Belgium, and Denmark - settled in Europe. The German Federal Republic attracted many Turks. Great Britain already had substantial Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. Italy, Spain, and France attracted immigrants from North Africa for reasons of geographical proximity and (especially in the case of France) former colonial ties. By the late 1980s the economic weather in Europe turned chilly. High unemployment rates, increased number of immigrants, and their overwhelming "non-European" character produced sharp changes in attitudes and policies. The unemployment factor combined with the lack of understanding of the customs and habits of their new neighbours, fueled resentment towards immigrants by Europeans who wanted jobs themselves. During the last 40 years Europe has become multicultural. Immigration is changing the face of many countries. The presence of millions of immigrants is a new challenge for the future of Europe. Uncontrolled immigration threatens to change the West at its very core. In France it has been noted that more Muslims participate in weekly religious services than do Roman Catholics and Protestants combined. This change in population dynamics in Europe has become fertile ground for culture clashes. In the name of multiculturalism a small but influential number of intellectuals and publicists argue that Europe needs to discard its historic identity to accommodate other cultures; in effect they believe that its fate is to be multicultural. They promote the idea that no culture is better than any other, and that no culture should enjoy the preferential support of public opinion or government. They oppose integration and assimilation of immigrants. Each immigrant group should keep its own identity. But European multiculturalists have too long been satisfied with cultural foods and folklore, while no attention has been paid to what was going on beneath the surface regarding attitudes toward society. They seem to be unaware of the world and life view of Muslim immigrants and their view of democracy. The countries, from which Muslim immigrants came, expected the European host countries to adapt themselves to the immigrants' religious and cultural customs. They were encouraged to bring with them their own morals and culture. In fact, they stressed the superiority of their cultures to Western culture. Consequently, Muslim immigrants do not always have the intention to become a part of their new chosen land. Instead they desire to impose their own culture. They have no desire to integrate into European society. They reject Europe's secular institutions as inferior to those of the shari'a, which they believe have been revealed through the Koran to the umma, the universal Muslim community. It is ironic that those from the Islamic cultures who want to come to Western Europe because of the failure of their own system, at the same time seek to impose

their failed system upon their host country.

Beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, the Islamic communities of Europe began to find their own identity and even realized that they had an obligation to their religion to try to encourage other Muslims to live their faith in the foreign land. They have built hundreds of mosques and powerful Islamic centres. In these mosques and cultural centres, they strongly influence both religious and political developments, without hindrance. Arab and Muslim newspapers, propaganda books, and leaflets are widely distributed in every European capital.

Muslim communities, whether Turkish in Germany or Algerian in France, remain aliens in their host cultures. Simply said, to remain a Muslim often means a rejection of Western cultural norms, values and backgrounds and the taking on of a foreign way of life. When you walk down the streets in major European cities, you can readily identify women who are Muslim. These women wear a semblance of the same type of dress as in the Middle East. But the lack of integration has brought great social costs. For example, in France foreign workers constitute a segregated and almost unassimilable minority. They usually work in poorly paid or menial jobs, or have become unemployed. They often only speak their native language. Many live separately in "ghetto" like slum enclaves.

Some Muslims refuse to assimilate because they believe they have the religious duty *not* to integrate. They reject assimilation and continue to adhere to and to propagate the values, customs, and cultures of their home societies. Islam is an absolutist faith. It merges religion and politics. In Arab Islamic nations, Muslims are unwilling to grant the rights to Western societies they have claimed for themselves, namely the right to assert and defend a cultural national identity. "A Muslim has no nationality except his belief," wrote an intellectual godfather of radical Islamism, the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb, who was executed by Nasser in 1966. And while, in the most optimistic of scenarios, Muslim immigrants may become good European citizens, believing in democracy, practicing civility and tolerance and committed to freedom for all, there is another and far grimmer alternative, sketched in Fouad Ajami's portrait of the new "geography" of Islam. "The geography of Islam - and of the Islamic imagination - has shifted in recent years. The faith has become portable. Muslims who fled their countries brought Islam with them. Men came into *bilad al kufr* [the land of unbelief], but a new breed of Islamists radicalized the faith there, in the midst of the *kafir* [unbeliever]."

Many Muslims living in Western countries face major identity crises. Are they German or Turk, French or Algerian? They are not sure what their real language is or where they belong. The isolation of young Muslims, particularly those of the second-and third-generations, indicates they are no longer strongly connected to their family's country of origin, nor do they intend to become part of their adopted country. These young Muslims, who do not feel part of their European environment, often tend to reaffirm Islam, whatever its specific sectarian aspect it may take. They form their own Muslim conscience from the internet, books, videotapes and audio tapes as well as from radical "experts" and local Imams. This reaffirmation of Islam has a strong influence upon local

society, politics, and morals. It is a rejection of the West as these young Muslims see it, and the secular, relativistic, degenerate culture associated with the West.

The influx of Muslims makes it difficult for Christians who seek to practice understanding for other opinions and expressions of faiths in a multicultural society. And any reluctance or hesitation from European Christians about immigration is labelled racism, religious intolerance, or bigotry. On the one hand Islamic extremists seek to intimidate and threaten with violence; on the other hand liberal-secular fundamentalists claim that they are the only "normal" ones and believe that the rest of society is backward in its thinking and beliefs. They don't seem to realize that their view is only one among the many current worldviews. The only way Europe can accommodate to Islamic culture is a Europe that knows its Christian heritage and, on the strength of that understanding, encounters Islam. As David Gress observed in *From Plato To Nato: The Idea of the West and its Opponents*: "An empty vessel, a historically illiterate people, cannot give to others the respect it does not give itself ... Western civilization owes it to the world not to abandon its identity."

(To be continued)

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