

Islamisation of Europe (5)

During the last thirty years, of all West European countries, Holland's religious, social, and political landscape has changed the most. Until quite recently it had a very liberal immigration policy, which applied to former colonial subjects (mostly Surinamese and some Indonesians), but also to others who lacked historic and cultural claims to residence. Among them were Moroccans (some 300,000 out of Holland's total Muslim population of about 900,000) and Turks. Unlike other European countries, there are few, if any, ethnic/religious ghettos in Holland. The welfare state works massively to the benefit of immigrants. The massive influx of Muslim immigrants has brought its own dynamics and untold challenges. How will the Dutch interact with a social order that is becoming increasingly Islamic? George Weigel believes that within a few decades, the majority of teenagers in the Netherlands will be Muslims. He wonders what will happen to the politics of the Netherlands when those teenagers become voting adults?

The Failure of the Churches

What happened in Holland to make it even possible for Islamisation to become such a divisive issue? In the 1960s it experienced rapid secularization. It witnessed the sexual revolution, the youth revolt, and protests against the authority of church and universities. After 1970 increasing secularization and dechristianisation led many to turn their backs on the church. Church affiliation and attendance took a free fall. Christians actively participating in church life in 2004 constitute a small minority, in the midst of a greater number of people who seldom or never, show their faces inside a church. And humanly speaking, there won't be a reversal of the decline in active church membership any time soon. According to a survey highlighted in the Liberal Protestant newspaper *Trouw* (Oct.2004), the drift from the Christian denominations in the Netherlands continues to increase and now only 33 percent of the 16 million-strong population consider themselves part of a Christian Church. How can such weak Christianity engage Islam? Dr Peter Van der Veer observed that the "formal" denominations give an impression of being lifeless. He asserts that in the Islam-discussion the Dutch should expect a much stronger and interesting sound from the churches. He asks: "Why expect the Muslim to integrate in our world? Is our philosophy of life such an inspiration? Is consumerism the only thing that counts?" These are soul-searching questions indeed.

Islamisation of Holland

When we left for Canada in 1954 Islam was not an issue. Now there are 500 mosques to accommodate Muslim immigrants. These Mosques intend to emphasize the dominance of Islam. Visibility is very important in Islam. That's why the more monumental the Mosque the better. Sylvain Ephimenco, born in Algeria, married a Dutch girl and migrated to Rotterdam, was asked whether mosques were a good means for better integration in Holland. He states, "Absolutely not." He claims that the "sermons" of the imams promote segregation. Some of them argue that Muslims should

not have a relationship with the Dutch, not to adopt their customs, even if it means the inability to work for a Dutch employer. But not all Muslims share the beliefs of the Islamists. Yasmine Allas, born in Somalia in 1967, came to Holland in 1987. She eventually married a Dutch atheist. She writes that when she arrived in Holland the Dutch went out of their way to make the newcomers feel welcome. No one asked you to learn the language or to get to know something about the Dutch culture. According to some, it was non-existent. Some even told Yasmine that learning the language was not necessary because everyone spoke English. But she was determined to learn Dutch, believing that integration without the knowledge of the language is impossible. She is now an author and actress. She raises many questions about Islam. She is opposed to Islamic school and girls wearing scarves. She states that the Muslim children who graduate from these schools don't know the Dutch culture. They get to know only other Muslims. Instead of fostering integration these Muslim schools further segregation.

Arts and Politics

Islamists are vocal in what can or cannot be done in the arts. In 2000, protests by local Muslim groups forced a Dutch theatre to withdraw an opera about Aisha, wife of the Prophet Muhammad. Politically they also try to make their influence felt. In 2003 the local branch of the Wahabi-dominated World Muslim League spent \$50,000 to offer courses on Islamic law and beliefs in Rotterdam and Amsterdam, among other activities in the Netherlands. Dr. Marzouk, the president of the Islamic University in Holland went so far as to state: "The Muslims in this country must be ready to govern Holland because of the increasing number of Muslims and the decreasing number of the original people of Holland." The prominent scholar of Islam, Bernard Lewis, points out that Islam has double standards in politics. He notes that the democrats are at a disadvantage. Their ideology requires them, even when in power, to give freedom and rights to the Islamist opposition. When in power, the Islamists, are under no such obligation. Lewis comments that on the contrary, their principles require them to suppress what they see as impious and subversive activities. He argues, "For Islamists, democracy, expressing the will of the people, is the road to power, but it is a one-way road, on which there is no return, no rejection of the sovereignty of God, as exercised through His chosen representatives. Their electoral policy has been classically summarized as 'One man (men only), one vote, once.'"

Assassinations

When Pim Fortuyn, a homosexual, environmentalist, and libertine populist politician came on the scene, the attitude of many Dutch people toward immigrants was no longer welcoming. Fortuyn said, "You are Dutch or you are not. Why don't you know our language?" This controversial politician was brutally assassinated by an "animal rights" militant claiming to "protect" Muslims. It shocked the nation. There had been no political murder in Holland since the 1584 assassination of William of Orange, the nation's founder. In November 2004 Theo van Gogh, an avant-garde Dutch filmmaker whose controversial work, *Submission*, had given great offense to Muslims, was shot down by a twenty-six year old Dutch Moroccan man. Mohammed Bouyeri cut van Gogh's throat

with a butcher knife before using that weapon to affix a note to the victim's chest; the note threatened further mayhem against "infidels." The brutal murder of van Gogh graphically illustrated the merging threat of radical Islamists within Europe -and the fragility of European society in the face of such threats. His murderer was seemingly a well-integrated member of contemporary Dutch society. He had grown up in Holland and his Dutch was much more fluent than his Arabic. He had graduated from a local high school and worked as a volunteer with young people. He was not one of the "wretched of the earth," but was from the middle-class. Bouyeri was recruited by a radical imam, Mahmud El-Shershaby, in the Baarsje neighbourhood in Amsterdam, a known centre of Islamic radicalism. He was also influenced by a high school buddy, Samir Azzouz, a failed would-be martyr arrested in the Ukraine in 2002 while en route to Chechnya. The van Gogh murder precipitated a series of attacks on Dutch Mosques. Across most of the political spectrum, demands were made for a crackdown on (especially Muslim immigration), an increase in the intelligence budget, the expulsion of radical imams, and the requirement of all citizens, imams included, to learn Dutch. *The Telegraaf*, a leading Dutch newspaper, editorialized that "magazines and papers which include inducement should be suppressed, unsuitable mosques should be shut down, and imams who encourage illegal acts should be thrown out of the country."

The murder of Pim Fortuyn and afterwards of Theo van Gogh changed attitudes toward Muslim immigrants. It became "Us over against them." From the perspective of these dramatic events we can begin to understand why Fortuyn's and van Gogh's murders may have an even more profound impact on Dutch culture and behaviour than 3,000 deaths in America on 9/11. After the murders, Yasmine Allas still feels at home in Holland, yet a stranger. She says many immigrants feel no longer wanted. Her sister became a strict Muslim, married a man from Somalia, and left for Kenya. Allas believes Islam can only modernize within. Furthermore, she argues that many Muslims don't identify with the terrorist tactics of the radicals.

For many Europeans, the murder of the outspoken Van Gogh underscored the importance of protecting the freedom of expression. But many also claim the need to curb freedom of expression out of respect for Muslim sensitivities. The latter view was expressed succinctly by Copenhagen imam Ahmed Abu Laban, who charged that *Submission* had "crossed the limits of freedom of speech" and demanded "an open debate on these limits." After being "warned by Muslim friends" shortly after van Gogh's murder, Dutch movie director Albert Ter Heerdt decided to "postpone" a sequel to his "multicultural comedy" *Shouf Shouf Habibi!* And in January, producer Gijs van de Westelaken cancelled the screening of *Submission* at the Rotterdam Film Festival. The theme at this festival was "censored films" (instead, the audience saw two pictures sympathetic to suicide bombers).

But have Muslims changed their attitude to Christians in their host country? Unfortunately, the Muslim community still does not respect the religious feelings of Christians. Rev. Martin de Vries, Reformed (liberated) minister in Rotterdam, who is regularly engaged in conversations with Muslims, observes that Muslims frequently slander the content of the Christian religion. The Bible, the Old and the New Testament,

is often the object of bitter abuse, while the Koran is set above criticism. Rev. De Vries notes that biting criticism of the Koran, which is holy for them would not be tolerated of course. In the meantime, not only in obscure mosques, but also in the busy shopping streets, books are for sale in Holland in which the most terrible things about the Bible are told. Examples? The book of the church is corrupt; it contains pornographic passages. Incest and rape are recommended in biblical histories. But it does not stop Muslims from referring to Bible texts, which are useful for them to confirm that Islam is right. They can say anything about the Bible and get away with it. Imagine the uproar if somebody started using the Koran like this!

(To be concluded)

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