



TERRORISM REDUCES RELIGIOSITY TO DEATHBED

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The terrorist acts carried out by small-minded perpetrators reveal that propensity for religious extremism penetrates into various human cultures, reducing religions and beliefs to deathbeds, hence lifeless. This phenomenon is closely related to misconceptions about the conflict of willpowers. Bitterly fueled, internecine wars consequently ensue while means of understanding and coexistence are completely brushed aside. Reality reveals that dialogue and tolerance dwindle as more people are infuriated and enraged at what is going on around.

In fact, this phenomenon is not a nascent labyrinth of the times; rather, it is as old as religious conflict itself, as the wars of the Middle Ages (the Crusades in the East and the Restoration Wars in Andalusia) bear witness to such a fact. Such wars were a model of the propensity for the denial and exclusion of the other who is religiously and culturally different. As regards what is allegedly claimed about Islam, especially about its "assumed" relationship with violence and terrorism, we can raise this mooted issue for discussion, through these leading and probing questions: Does religious faith fuel violence and intimidate people? Does this depend on some misinterpretations of religious faith? If this is the case, what are the implications that can be deduced about the exploitation of religion through misinterpretations to practice violence cloaked in religious faiths and beliefs? Could the baseless and groundless misinterpretations of religious faith explain the contemporary phenomenon of terrorism?

If violence by nature is merely an aggressive instinct deeply ingrained in a person, then this means that transgression against the other does not go beyond the innate motives: competition, fear, and pride, as Thomas Hobbs argues. Given this and inherent innate motive, human beings enjoy aggression against each other as if it were a compensatory force for their glaring weakness. However, when violence metamorphoses from a mere natural impulse to a symbolic sacred duty, only then does it snowball and balloon into a dangerous cultural phenomenon, with profound symbolic interpretative dimensions that do not count the consequences. Does this hold true for the phenomenon of terrorism?

Violence has therefore various sources other than instinct, including culture, religious beliefs, ideologies, political struggles, etc. These backgrounds can be effective and justifiable elements of violence. Consequently, the symbolic cultural element is a major cause of rampant violence. Therefore, if we turn away from the instinctive dimension of violence, we find that the symbolic-cultural factor is the most influential in violence.

If we deepen the research further on how the cultural component of violence contributes, we will find that sacred symbolic aspects are the most influencing factors to the gravity and seriousness of the phenomenon, given its unconscious specificity and its sacred nature, which adheres to people's interpretations of their cultural and social life. The cultural-symbolic factor is an important component in understanding the violence of some religious fundamentalist groups, especially those related to religious legitimacy for its practice and legislation. In view of the spiritual momentum provided by this symbolic legitimacy to stigmatize the other (culturally and religiously different), some people produce strict fundamentalist interpretations that legalize the permissibility of the bloodshed and violating the private lives of the religiously different people in the name of a specific interpretive symbolism that is easily drummed up among the simple-minded people.

The danger of contemporary religious terrorism lies in the fact that it feeds on the propensity of exclusion, stigmatization and ostracism of the other based on symbolic justifiable beliefs that have been interpreted to give theological legitimacy to an irrational destructive propensity. The danger of religious terrorism across communities lies in its propensity to separate people into good and bad, surviving and misguided groups, etc. It is a propensity towards the demonization of culturally different, excluding the other from existence entirely. According to the misinterpretation of religious beliefs, a dirty and simple cloth becomes more noble and more scared than a religiously different human being, just because this piece, in the belief of those with extremist interpretation, is a sacred symbol for their community and its religious symbol. Under this poor interpretation of religious faith, violence turns into terrorism for safe people, and it becomes permissible to exclude, ostracize and stigmatize disbelievers and the confiscation or seizure of their rights to life is common among people with reductive interpretations of religious scripts.

Religious enthusiasm, in such cases, adds a powerful charge to imagination and conscience; religious emotions transform violence and terrorism from their social and political reality into inspiration, illusion and imagination of the sacred heroism against the alleged evil. The terrorist mentality cannot think outside the sphere of the duality of good and evil, and belief and disbelief, etc. Here, all restrictions and prohibitions are negated, so killing others turns into a holy act that brings such people closer to Allah (the case of the terrorist who killed worshipers in the mosque). As such, the conflict

turns from a mere conflict of interests to the idea of a struggle between good and bad, and then the legitimacy of extermination of others in the most horrific fashions, so violence in the name of religious faith demonstrates a great deal of bloodshed to purify the world from the evil of the violators. Sectarian wars are the most prominent examples of terrorism of people with misinterpretations of religions; that is why we find proponents of religions immortalizing their history with the great holy battles, which in their minds turned into a model of the eternal struggle between true and false.

Terrorists justify their ferocious violence by using symbolic sanctities that they interpret according to their strict whims and propensities. They transfer their bad interpretations of religious beliefs to the level of political-ideological beliefs that urge adherents to commit heinous crimes shrouded in ideological interpretations of justification. Given the rapid response of individuals to such recklessness, some sectarian warlords do not refrain from using religious justifications to ignite conflicts and make the largest possible number of people engage in such wars enthusiastically.

In this sense, terrorist interpretation works to make religion an effective fuel to trigger conflict and violence, and thus to fall into the clutches of extremism and religious fanaticism by injecting people's faith in sectarian conflicts, here and there. It is glaringly obvious that the justification of violence by using religious faith is widely spread; therefore, it is necessary to liberate religious cultures from these strict, close-minded and misinterpretations to block the way for terrorists who reduce religious faith to deathbeds, making it lifeless. Without taking this critical action, the fate of this faith will be doomed to degradation and total loss, hence the fate of its view of human probity will be a terrible downfall. Therefore, what we need today is not condemning terrorists and the demonization of their heroic suicidal myths; rather, exposing and refuting this malicious ideology.

The lesson learned from violent, sectarian-oriented realities is that, whatever the causes of the conflict be, the religious component should always surpass and rise above them all, especially in Islam marked by much misunderstanding. Whatever the political differences, contradictions and causes of the conflict be, it is not permissible to involve the religious-sectarian element, simply because this is considered as a form of tampering with the religious faith, as long as the essence of religion is to have mercy on all people.

The bottom line is that resorting to violence, in the name of religious faith, is a moral vice that will trigger and fuel the most dangerous forms of violence, such as terrorism, which glorifies bloodshed in the name of the religious sacredness. This is a real danger for contemporary communities characterized by diversity and pluralism. Religious terrorism also threatens the pillars of human communities, and this would

lead up to their disintegration into closed sects and identities, in clear contradiction to what represents the core of the religious faith itself, namely tolerance and freedom.

Based on the foregoing, we can now consider every religious practice of violence to be a poor, religious, degenerate culture that lacks its moral authenticity. Therefore, the transformation of fundamentalist Islam now reiterates and emphasizes what Walter Benjamin remarks: Every rise of fascism is a witness to a failed revolution. The rise of fascism in Europe was a failure of the left, and at the same time it was evidence that there was possibly a revolution and anger, but the left failed to develop them. Does this not apply to what might be termed "extremist religious movements"? In a clear sense, does not the rise of radical Islam have a relationship with the disappearance of the secular left in our Islamic communities?