

Apocalypse Soon? St Sepulchre's Festival Lecture June 2006

A few years ago – certainly before 9/11 – I was at a political symposium and we were discussing the Cold War. In the final session someone tried to bring together the various strands of our conversation and said, “Well at least we can be grateful that the longest confrontation in modern times is over”. Whereupon one of the most senior academic members of the conference replied ever so softly, “The longest confrontation in modern times has been going on for 1400 years. 300 years ago the enemy were at the gates of Vienna, and if they get the chance they’ll be there again”.

The enemy he referred to is Muslim imperialism. Not all Muslims are aggressive imperialists. Melanie Phillips was surely right to say in *The Times* recently, “In Britain hundreds of thousands of Muslims lead law-abiding lives and merely want to prosper and raise their families in peace”. There are many so called moderate Muslims who want peaceful co-existence and co-operation. But there is a predominance of the other sort – of the ideologically-driven certainty which regards the followers of Islam as servants of the truth and the rest of the world as infidel rubbish. These sponsor the policy of “Convert or die”. The world for them is conveniently divided into two halves: the Muslim orthodox and the unbelieving and inferior rest: that’s us.

I should say at the start that I hope I am neither so foolish nor so arrogant as to dismiss one of the great world religions. There are versions and interpretations of Islam which are benign and enlightened. But these are not what are in the ascendancy now. There were and are disgraceful acts perpetrated in the name of Judaism and Christianity too. But with Islam at present it is as if the whole of it were contained and expressed on the pattern, for instance, of the Jews’ cursing Babylon – “Blessed shall he be that taketh thy children and throweth them against the stones” – or the extremes of the Puritan witch-burners.

I’ve just got back from a holiday in Malta where in 1565 there was a notable confrontation. The Muslims were besieging the island and they captured and killed some of the Christian Knights of St John. Suleyman the Magnificent beheaded them and floated them across the harbour on crosses. The Grand Master of the Knights of St John, Jean Parisot de la Valette, cut off the heads of many Turkish prisoners and fired them back at the enemy like cannon balls. Gosh – whatever would the General Synod say! Six years after this, 197 ships of the Muslim fleet were destroyed by Don John of Austria at Lepanto and the Muslim insurgency was diminished. It was at the height of the Reformation, yet Catholics and Protestants were briefly united in thanksgiving for what was definitely seen as a marvellous deliverance.

Islam is a militant faith. From the start, Muslims believed in expansion by conquest. Efraim Karsh’s recent book *Islamic Imperialism* describes this policy in detail and he quotes the Founder Mohammad: “Fight all men until they say there is no God but Allah”. As Charles Moore has pointed out, Osama bin Laden quoted those words immediately after the attacks on the twin towers.

The British press and the BBC continually upbraid European nations for their history of conquest and “imperialism” but make no criticism of Islamic imperialism. And while the slave trade, along with “Hitler”, is a favourite topic in schools’ history

syllabus, there is rarely mentioned the fact that the biggest slave traders of all were in fact the Muslims and that their operations were brought to an end by the British navy. Heathen Africans counted as less than human for the Muslims. British colonial rule actually replaced the Muslim slave trade in Africa. Muslims are bad minorities in any country, continuing their violence against Hindus in India and Buddhists in Thailand.

We are however constantly being told that the Muslim civilisation of the Middle Ages was a superior thing – an influence so benign that it actually helped Christian thought to prosper. The Islamists claim the medieval philosopher Averroes as one of the bright lights of Islamic history, and indeed he was – a man who understood Aristotle and rescued him for modernity. But Islam persecuted Averroes for his thought, his writing, his deeds; so it is ironic that the successors of his persecutors now claim him as their pride and joy. Maimonides was a Jewish contemporary of Averroes and as great a man, a philosopher and doctor. He was given the choice of death or exile by the Islamic rulers of Spain - those Muslim conquerors of Spain who, pro-Islamist writers like to say, were so extraordinarily tolerant!

As Moore says in his review of Karsh's book, "Islam provided Muslim leaders not only with a justification for violence, but also with a permanent excuse. They can always blame things on the infidels. Arab nations have again and again avoided helping the Palestinians or coming to terms with Israel, because the settlement of that issue would turn the focus on their own failings. Hamas explicitly rejects a Palestinian state, preferring the pan-Arab state that can never be"

In his book *What Went Wrong? The Clash between Islam and Modernity in the Middle East* Bernard Lewis sums up the impediments to peaceful co-existence and says that these derive from the fact that Muslim states never developed industrially, so they have for three hundred years pathologically envied the West. They have no science; no democracy; no women's rights and, apart from oil, no exports. So they do not enjoy the ameliorative and co-operative effects of lively free trade.

Lewis also cites what he calls "the blame game" – blaming the West for all the ills of contemporary Muslim states: "For the governments, at once oppressive and ineffectual, that rule much of the Middle East, this game serves a useful, indeed an essential purpose – to explain the poverty they have failed to alleviate and to justify the tyranny they have intensified".

Lewis concludes: "If the peoples of the Middle East continue on their present path, the suicide bomber may become a metaphor for the whole region and there will be no escape from the downward spiral of hate and spite, rage and self-pity, poverty and oppression".

The Bishop of London looks out over the same scene and remarks: "Islam's sense of its own superiority is in terrible full-frontal collision with the evident inferiority of Muslim societies, technically, politically, economically and militarily".

The standoff between Islam and the West has been intensified mightily by President Ahmadinejad of Iran. This man is not an ordinarily ambitious politician. He is a sincere religious fanatic who believes that it is his duty to provoke a conflict with the enemies of Islam – us – so that the supernatural figure the Hidden Twelfth Imam will

return to earth as the Mahdi for a final decisive showdown with the forces of evil. Again that's us. Nothing short of Armageddon. When Ahmadinejad addressed the United Nations last September, these were his closing words, "O mighty Lord, I pray to you to hasten the emergence of your last repository, the Promised One, that perfect and pure human being, the one that will fill this world with justice and peace".

Niall Ferguson, writing last month, implores us: "Are we doomed to grasp the consequences of all this only when the mushroom clouds are rising over Tel Aviv and Teheran?"

I wonder if even that would be enough to rouse the West from its torpor. I was in Oxford at a church conference on 9/11. Twenty or thirty clergy, we all gathered in the common room and watched the atrocity unfolding on the big screen. Over in a corner one priest was orchestrating pacifism. Another said in my ear, "I hope Bush doesn't retaliate". I said, "I hope and pray he does!"

I got straight on a train back to London. Your head is full of terrible thoughts and apprehensions at such a time. And I recall the banner headline in *The Daily Telegraph*: AMERICA AT WAR. And I thought there might be just one consolation for the appalling events in New York. I almost said aloud to myself: "Well, at least that's the end of political-correctness". I thought at last spades would be called spades and there would be an awakening to reality.

And for a few days it seemed like it. People were strangely quiet in the City as they went about their business. There were no airliners over London. There were more people at the weekday Masses and more coming into church to pray by themselves. I put on at two days' notice a Requiem in St Sepulchre's and more than two hundred turned up: City workers, silent, awe-struck – not a mobile phone went off in the whole hour. I made no concession to sentimentality and gush, but made the service out of the Latin rite and *The Book of Common Prayer*. When they left church many were in tears. A week later and all this had worn off. The atmosphere reverted to its usual unconcern and studied triviality.

So, Professor Ferguson, even mushroom clouds over Teheran and Tel Aviv might not be enough. There would be more than a few in the usual quarters of the media rather pleased to see Israel obliterated.

Irshad Manji, Fellow of Yale and author of *The Trouble with Islam Today* writes, "The weapons of mass destruction have been found. They are people with unshakeable faith in the coming showdown between good and evil. Left in their hands, the world is heading for the clash of Armageddon".

At the time of the Siege of Malta and the Battle of Lepanto, the West was not blind to the Muslim threat. Clear-sighted people have always acknowledged it. In *Church and State*, published in 1830, Samuel Coleridge was quite explicit. Reading it again in 2006, the mind is startled by what might seem to be an example of extraordinary prescience:

"That erection of a temporal monarch under the pretence of a spiritual authority, which was not possible in Christendom but by the extinction or entrancement of the

spirit of Christianity, and which has therefore been only partially attained by the Papacy – this was effected in full by Mahomet, to the establishment of the most extensive and complete despotism that ever warred against civilisation and the interests of humanity”.

It is a barbarous despotism in which honour is more important than truth – though how one can claim to acting honourably while lying through one’s teeth is something of a conundrum. The father of a Muslim household will kill the daughter he loves rather than lose honour through her fornication. Many women and girls have been killed for trivial offences such as speaking to an unrelated man. Truth-telling is not an obligation for Muslims in their dealings with non-Muslims. For example, Hamid Ali, head of the Al-Madina Masjid mosque in Beeston, Leeds, publicly condemned the London bombing of 7th July 2005. But later, speaking to a Bangladeshi reporter he said that the bombings were “a good act” and praised the bombers as “children” of the militant cleric Abdullah-al-Faisal who had already taught young Muslims to believe, “The only way forward is for you, the Muslims, to kill the *kufirs*” (that is the non-believers).

Certainly non-Muslims are regularly cursed in public as part of the Islamic prayer sequence, especially in the night prayers prescribed to be said during Ramadan:

“O Allah, destroy the *kuffar* who are trying to prevent people following your path, who deny your messengers and who do not believe in your Day of Judgement. Make them disunited, fill their hearts with terror and send your wrath and punishment against them, O God of truth”.

The grand mosque in Yemen has issued this prayer: “O God, destroy the Jews and their supporters and followers. O God, destroy the ground under their feet; instil fear in their hearts and freeze the blood in their veins”.

1600 years ago the Roman Emperor summoned the philosopher Sidonius and told him that he was going to shut the gates of Rome against the enemy. Sidonius replied, “But it’s too late, Sir. The enemy is within”. There are about 2000 mosques in Britain today and more than twice as many Muslims as Methodists. Philip Bobbitt reminded us recently, “We must accept that the global centre of Islamic terror is in Europe, not in Pakistan or Afghanistan or Saudi Arabia. The most important cell for 9/11 wasn’t in Jeddah, it was in Hamburg. And I think this will only increase.

“Al Qaeda is not”, says Bobbitt “the mature threat that I worry about. It may sound absurd to say this, but I think these are our salad days”. Melanie Philipps makes the same points in her new book, out this month, *Londonistan*.

Speaking last week at the Royal United Services Institute in London, the senior military strategist Admiral Chris Parry said, “Western civilisation faces a threat on a par with the barbarian invasions that destroyed the Roman Empire. At some time in the next ten years it may not be safe to sail a yacht between Gibraltar and Malta as pirates attack holidaymakers from fast boats.

“Globalisation makes assimilation seem redundant and old fashioned. There will be instead a sort of reverse colonisation where groups of people are self-contained, going

back and forth between their countries exploiting sophisticated networks and using instant communication on phones and the Internet.

“Large groups that become established in Britain and Europe after mass migration may develop communities of interest – unstable, anti-western regions. There are already more than seventy diasporas in Britain”.

In his book *Islam: The Challenge to the Church*, Patrick Sookhdeo. A Christian convert from Islam, indicates important aspects of Muslim faith and practice and the threat which militant Islam poses to western civilisation – or indeed to any civilisation. He begins by quoting the Iranian liberal Muslim writer Amir Taheri:

“God is hardly mentioned in sermons. The UK’s 2000 or so mosques are basically a cover for a political movement masquerading as a religion”

Muslim expansionism and imperialism is becoming very successful: “There are sections of the church which have disappeared completely in the face of the challenge of Islam – for example, North Africa which was once a major centre of Christianity”.

Nor is this expansionism confined to a spiritualising mission: “*Al-jihad* (holy fighting) in Allah’s cause with the full force of numbers and weaponry is given the utmost importance and is one of the pillars on which Islam stands. The only sure way to go straight to paradise is to die as a martyr in jihad. And loyalty to the *Umma*, the global Muslim community, overrides loyalty to any nation state”.

This loyalty is hugely strengthened by the severity of the punishment for denying it: “Leaving Islam is seen as treachery against Allah and against society and therefore the penalty is death”.

Sookhdeo adds: “The more radical sections of Islam are in turn joining forces with traditionally atheistic movements such as the hard Left who share their anti-globalism, anti-capitalist sentiments and their deep-seated animosity towards western liberal democracies. A third ally for the Islamism-Extreme Left partnership is found in liberal Christianity”.

Meanwhile, we are dying of political correctness and the suicidal politics of appeasement. Osama bin Laden must laugh at the way many in the west accept the Muslims’ paranoid explanation for their present discontents: that it’s all our fault. That’s what the Foreign office puts out. It’s what they believe at the BBC and at *The Guardian* and *The Independent*. The left-wing press and the BBC must hate the British way of life very much indeed to have preferred Arafat and now to prefer Hamas. Gaza is Lord of the Flies with Kytusha rocket launchers.

You wonder how these sections of the British media restrain their usual zeal for human rights and the rights of women in particular in the face of well-documented truths about the public morality of Islam where a woman’s testimony in court is explicitly regarded as worth less than that of a man, when a woman gets less compensation than a man for a similar injury, when there are child marriages, forced marriages, female genital mutilation, rape, honour killings and violent abuse by husbands. The Sharia Council of Darul Uloom in London has issued a set of rules on

divorce and remarriage which clearly envisage the possibility of pre-pubescent girls being married. What would our famous champions of liberal enlightenment say if Christian British people were to behave anything like so disgracefully?

And it's the same with the Church of England, guided by the Archbishop of Canterbury. In his book *Writing in the Dust*, Williams says this: "Bombast about evil individuals doesn't help in understanding anything".

Well, of course, bombast about *anything* is pretty futile; but there is a world of difference between bombast and the true judgement that lets us see evil for what it is. The Archbishop wants to "understand" the terrorists' motivation. He reckons they had no choice. He says: "*We* have something of the freedom to consider whether or not we turn to violence and so, in virtue of that very fact, are rather different from those who experience their world as leaving no other option". This is a high-grade sample of the drivel we have heard these last few years from those in the west who despise the civilisation which is their inheritance. Of course the suicide bombers had "other options": not every impoverished Muslim thinks that the only answer to his problems is to destroy New York.

Dr Williams' conclusion is the complete inversion of the truth: "It is hard to start any sort of conversation when your conversation partner believes, in all sincerity, that your aim is to silence them". So Muslim terrorists are our conversation partners are they! But it was these "conversation partners" who successfully silenced more than 3000 of *us* in New York on 11th September.

The Catholic Knights of Malta repelled the Muslim invaders. Unfortunately, nowadays the church militant has become the church decadent and, lacking all conviction, hasn't the stomach for even a theological argument let alone the physical courage for a battle. No wonder Muslims despise the *kufirs*.

Muslim imperialism is not deterred by reasoned debate or any attempt at détente. Sookhdeo says: "Muslims usually interpret confession as a sign of despicable weakness. Likewise humility and forgiveness are not seen as virtues but as weaknesses. What Charles Moore has termed *pre-emptive self-abasement* – the western and perhaps especially British penchant for offering profuse apologies for all faults, past and present, real and imagined – is at best useless and more likely to be counter-productive.

"The West is now at a crossroads in its relationship with Islam. Threats and intimidation have resulted in pusillanimous governments, compliant media and an insipid church"

Meanwhile, you can tell that Doomsday is just round the corner when the drowsy sophisticates at *The Spectator* use an editorial to speak of "western Christian nations". And to urge, "We must defend our own traditions and our own religion". There are only two possible comments on this: there are no western Christian nations – not in Europe anyhow - and consequently we have no Christian traditions. The reality is as follows:

Muslims in Britain desire to promote their moral and religious standards among us. We say, “It’s kind of you, but actually we have our own standards”

And the Muslim asks, “What are they?”

And we reply, “Take a look for yourself. Practical atheism in our schools where teachers are bound to teach that any god is as good as any other – or none. Anarchy in personal and sexual morality, as any coupling between any two (or more) pieces of flesh is celebrated. The consequent near abolition of marriage and the family.

“Abortion used as a form of contraception and amounting to 200,000 every year. A mass media which sexualises young children. An absurd and offensive proselytising “Gay” culture in which the love that once dare not speak its name now shrieks at us in high camp from coloured floats in the high street. A debauched consumer culture of mingled celebs, Big Brother – who would have thought Orwell so right and yet so wrong? - cocaine, clubbing, TV nuts ‘n’ sluts shows wall-to-wall and hyper-shopping.

“All this uneasily hitched to a totalitarianism-lite and bullying political correctness which everywhere seeks to curtail our natural freedoms – from foxhunting to smoking, from the sorts of games allowed in the playground to what’s written on packets of sweeties.

“Yes, Britain has standards all right. And if your Muslim hordes attack our way of life, be certain we shall fight back. We intend to fire salvos of condoms and identity cards at you”.

The decadent godlessness we now inhabit is generally agreed to have begun with the permissiveness of the 1960s when we sang “All you need is love” and let it all hang out, debauching our institutions in the process. There is some truth in this and certainly the 1960s was the decade in which the Church of England effectually resigned – throwing out the real Bible and the real Prayer Book and replacing them with unspeakable modern parodies which obscured the fact of sin and so rendered all the promises of redemption worthless.

Sin is not something mystical and so old fashioned you couldn’t believe: it is just the old religious word for a constant human characteristic – that we have a capacity to foul things up, to act against our own best interests. If anyone doubts that the notion of progress is just plain stupid, let him look at Nazi Germany, Soviet Russia, Vietnam, Rwanda, Sudan, Somalia – take your pick from the repertoire of genocides. The mass media loves to derogate the middle ages and everything in the past as *medieval*: but the middle ages were a paradise compared with the slaughter perpetrated in modern times

But the rot started at the so called Enlightenment, for the Enlightenment philosophers believed it impossible that any modern, reasonable person would ever wish to perpetrate evil. Rousseau is very explicit about this:

“Man is naturally good, loving justice and order. There is absolutely no original perversity in the human heart, and the first movements of nature are always right”.

It is astonishing that anyone with half an eye on the course of human history – or even with the occasional inward glance – could have written such rubbish. No perversity in the human heart? What planet was Rousseau living on? It is the denial of the reality of Original Sin. And this was the message of the Enlightenment philosophers who made it plain that there was no use for religion in the modern world – that, in fact, religion is precisely the thing which always holds back human *progress*.

Voltaire said,

“Religion must be destroyed among respectable people and left to the mob for whom it was made”.

The great evils of our time have come about through the misplaced attempt to explain the world on the basis of Descartes’ mistaken substitution of epistemology for metaphysics and the other mistake which was the Enlightenment philosophers’ assertion of humankind’s innate goodness. Once people abandon their fundamental belief in the being of God and the metaphysical and moral perspective which that belief gives, then disastrous consequences are bound to follow. This is simply because false perspectives cannot produce truth and goodness. Here is the brutal working out of all those biblical sayings about a house being built on sand not being able to stand and the Devil as the Father of Lies.

The truth is that the totalitarian tyrannies of the 20th century, their gulags and their genocides, were built on the very notion of Enlightenment and Progress. They were based on the false belief that man is the origin of his own being and the arbiter of his own morality. The godlessness of these tyrannies was not accidental: their crimes were perpetrated in the name of atheism.

We are flawed creatures, but we are not totally depraved. In our better moments we recognise our weakness and we create institutions in order to defend us from our worst failings. Institutions are above politics. You might say that we have institutions so that we don’t die of politics. But as we look around at our institutions today – as I did in an earlier booklet I produced for the Freedom Association, *The Twilight of Our Institutions*, we see that like Sidonius’ Rome, they have all been undermined from the inside: the law, education, the established church, the monarchy. Our neglect, or worse our destruction, of our institutions reveals our self-contempt.

Is it possible that even at this late stage we can recover our sense of what really matters, recover our lost Christianity, reconstruct our national identity, revive our institutions and summon the courage to defend ourselves? Professor Paul Helm, one of the patrons of St Michael’s Foundation, wrote to me last week to say he fears that it will take more and worse atrocities before what’s left of Christian civilisation rouses itself. It is possible. All things are possible. But I confess I do not think it likely. Even if we had the will, we perhaps do not have the time. It’s later than you think.

If I may be permitted to end with a personal reflection, I feel like using the words of the Psalm of lament – Psalm 43 – “Why art thou so heavy O my soul: and why art thou so disquieted within me?” I cannot escape a sense of anxiety, a central disturbance, something gnawing inwardly all the time. And remorse, guilt, anger and frustration. Here is western civilisation, grown out of Christianity, and it is passing

away before our eyes. We are going the way of the Romans: plagued by external forces and dying within, suicidally of our own dissipation which does what dissipation always does - renders us impotent.

Be careful before you take the part of the prophet. I want to repeat the words of Jeremiah: "Ah Lord God! Behold I cannot speak, for I am only a lad" (Jeremiah 1:6). And at the same time I feel a transcendent joy and privilege to be ordained to celebrate Mass. It is not merely a coincidence that I'm giving this talk on Corpus Christi. And I am evermore aware of a strong and intensifying affection and attachment to my friends in this place and with all those from afar who have come to know and love our parishes. And as the great and terrible day draws nearer, this love is almost unbearable while being the one thing that can bear us.

I seem to hear Our Lord's words in the Gospel for the Second Sunday in Advent: "...upon the earth distress of nations with perplexity; men's hearts failing them for fear and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth". Looking after those things. Don't look now. It is like Donald Sutherland scouring glorious Venice looking for the little girl he loves - a little girl in a red coat. But the little girl is only a ghost. And when the flash of red appears it is a hideous dwarf who happens also to be a psychopathic killer with a knife.

But you say, what of Our Lord's promise concerning his church - that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it? And they will not prevail. We have Our Lord's guarantee. But he never promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against our apostate civilisation, against the secular Manicheism of modern Europe.

I return to the Psalm of lament, Psalm 43: "O send out thy light and thy truth that they may lead me: and bring me unto thy holy hill". And there is light. And there is truth. And when we come to God's holy hill, we find it is the place of a skull.