

FIGHTING WORDS: THE ORIGINS OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE BY PROFESSOR HECTOR AVALOS - A REVIEW

To say that bad Messiahs, bad holy books and bad religions provide insight and deserve spiritual reverence and to be central in your religious and social and spiritual life is to indoctrinate yourself with their character flaws. Even if you adore Jesus and don't wreck temples or shout at religious leaders in the street like him you are still as much character flawed as if you do! In what way? It is that you would do it but don't have the guts or the opportunity. Agreement with what he did is the character flaw we should really worry about. Doing what he does is like a symptom while that is the illness.

Maybe if Hector Avalos had to condense his book, *Fighting Words, The Origins of Religious Violence*, in a few lines that is what he would write!

QUOTE: One example of a clear attribution of violence to religious reasons can be seen in the following Hadith reported by Al-Bukhari, perhaps the most authoritative collector of traditions about Muhammad. Al-Bukhari tells us: The prophet said, "Allah ... assigns for a person who participates in (holy battles) in Allah's Cause and nothing causes him to do so except belief in Allah and in His Messenger, that he will be recompensed by Allah with a reward, or booty (if he survives) or will be admitted to Paradise (if he is killed in the battle as a martyr)."

Here is a clear attribution of the reason for violence from a Muslim himself. This sort of self-attribution by practitioners of a religion certainly would count as strong evidence that violence that is just the result of religious beliefs does happen. Moses, Jesus and Muhammad and others said it too. The Bible blames bad religion for burning children as sacrifices to Molech. The Book of Mormon has Nephi being helped by the Holy Spirit to murder the brother of Laban to burgle and steal from him.

COMMENT: Speaks for itself. Islam cannot call itself a religion of peace for distributing and accepting and allowing acceptance of such a text. It seems to think that peace is the absence of war! It is more than that and deeper. It means getting rid of anything that sanctions the blessing of violence or commands violence.

QUOTE FROM 9/11 BOMBER: Dated 1996, the Last Will and Testament of Mohamed Atta gives a glimpse into his mindset.

"This is what I want to happen after my death, I **ani** Mohamed the son of Mohanied Elamir awad Elsayed: I believe that prophet **Mohamed** is God's messenger and time will come no doubt about that and God will resurrect people who are in their graves. I wanted my family and everyone who reads this will to fear the Almighty God and don't get deceived by what is in life and to fear God and to follow God and his prophets if they are real believers. In my memory, I want them to do what Ibrahim (a prophet) told his son to do, to die as a good Muslim."

As near as we can tell from such statements, Atta crashed into the World Trade Center because he believed in Islam. He adds toward the end of his testament: "I wanted the people who look at my will to be one of the heads of the Sunna religion. Whoever it is, I want that person to be from where I grew up or any person I used to follow in prayer. People will be held responsible for not following the Muslim religion. I wanted the people who I left behind to hear God and not to be deceived by what life has to offer and to pray more to God and to be good believers. Whoever neglects this will or does not follow the religion, that person will be held responsible in the end."

COMMENT: As Avalos says there are few statements as conclusive as that! It is true that a person is responsible for being in whatever religion they are in and by implication not being in whatever religion they are not in.

QUOTE: Even some scholars (e.g, Kister, "The Massacre of the Banu Qurayza") who otherwise present a frank discussion of this episode seem to omit or downplay the tradition that Muhammad himself (did the beheading. However, Ibn Ilisham (al-Slrat, 3:218) leaves little doubt that Muhammad is meant because the verb (daraba="strike off [heads]") is singular, and no other grammatical subject is seen as an antecedent but Muhammad. 74. Guillaume, *Life of Muhammad*.

COMMENT: Muhammad was a murderer. Jack the Ripper is demonised and why not Muhammad?

QUOTE IN RESPONSE TO THE NOTION THAT A RELIGION'S DOCTRINE CONSISTS OF WHATEVER IT'S MAJORITY THINKS TODAY : It is likewise fatuous to argue that "consensus" determines what is essential in a religion. By this standard, a bin Laden may indeed not represent the true Islam. However, were we to apply this standard consistently, then anyone could be classified as "deviant" at the inception of any new religion. This would mean, for example, that Jesus' teachings would be deemed illegitimate since at the time these were introduced, they did not represent

the consensus of Judaism.

Why can we not claim that a near majority of Saudis support a violent form of Islam, or at least a violent rhetoric? If what the majority of Muslims believe or practice is what counts as "essential" or "predominant," then certainly such empirical findings contradict an "essentially" peaceful Islam in Saudi Arabia.

COMMENT: Good! Anyway to say Islam is good for Muslims today are mostly believers in peace is to say religion is just about opinion. If it is then it is okay for it to opine that violence is good!

Christians, Muslims and Mormons have violent scriptures. Other groups too.

Each one is his own interpreter of the scripture. That happens in two ways.

By default – even if you are commanded or expected to accept an interpretation you interpret that you should so self-interpreting has to happen before you can interpret as somebody else wants. Jehovah's Witnesses cannot accept their sects peculiar interpretation of the Bible without some personal interpreting going on first. They make the sects interpretation their own.

By command of the scripture. For example, Islam and Christianity compel no particular interpretation of the Bible. Catholicism says it interprets the Bible but this amounts to a handful of texts!

QUOTE: Most traditionalist Muslim interpreters admit that jihad can be violent, even if justified. Both Muslim and non-Muslim scholars who support a pacificistic or defensive notion of jihad focus on one or more of the following issues: (1) misunderstanding understanding the meaning of the root j-h-d; (2) inattention to the chronology and abrogation of Qur'anic passages; (3) not understanding that when jihad does refer to fighting, it is defensive fighting; (4) generalizing what the Qur'an restricts; and (5) the forbidding in the Qur'an of coercion in religion. In regard to the word "jihad," these authors would rightly note that the root j-h-d does not necessarily involve the infliction of physical injury to another person. The root meaning is "struggle," and this need not involve violence. However, the fact that jihad does not always involve violence does not mean that jihad never involves violence. Indeed, even some of the defensive interpretations of jihad concede that violence is at least sometimes what jihad means.

COMMENT: Good!

QUOTE SEEMING TO ADVOCATE RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE: Sura 10:99: "If it had been thy Lord's Will, They all would have believed,-All who are on earth! Wilt thou then compel mankind, against their will to believe?"

AND

The expression "let there be no compulsion in religion (Id ikraha fi al-din) is open to interpretations that are no less verifiable than the ones for an offensive jihad. Linguistically, the verse can also be understood as a simple description of a current state of affairs (e.g., "it is not feasible to enforce conversion at the moment") rather than as a command that prohibits coercion at any time (see also Sura 10:99). Rudi Paret, though acknowledging that it is possible to translate it as an expression of tolerance, regards as more likely the understanding that the Qur'an is not proclaiming tolerance, but rather expressing resignation.

COMMENT: Good!

SUMMARY BY AVALOS: Islamic violence is neither solely a modern reaction against colonialism nor some aberrant feature of the religion. Rather, violence forms the initial premises of Islam, be it in the Qur'an or in the life of Muhammad, who continues to be a model for Muslim behavior. At the very least, violence was permitted to carry out the agenda of Muhammad, it is an allowable interpretation of certain passages in the Qur'an and the Hadith, and it is believed to be so by those who carry out violent acts today.

Alternatively phrased, no Islamic religious claim, peaceful or violent, can be deemed justified unless evaluated on empirico-rationalist grounds. And it is that lack of verifiability for any Islamic religious claim that ultimately allows the violent side to exert itself repeatedly and gain legitimacy within Muslim communities.

COMMENT: Good!

QUOTE: Another group of researchers sees religion as a major factor in Nazi policies. Here we can identify at least two positions. One position sees Nazi religion as pagan rather than as a form of Christianity. As such, this link to paganism has served to shift responsibility away from Christianity and toward non-Christian origins. In this regard, the work of Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke has been seminal. In at least two tomes, he has tried to uncover the pagan roots of Nazi ideology in the

works of Guido von List and Jorg Lanz von Liebenfels, and in organizations such as the Order of the New Templars and the "Thule Society." Yet even he concedes, "The Nazi crusade was indeed essentially religious in its adoption of apocalyptic beliefs and fantasies including a New Jerusalem." A second position lays responsibility much more squarely in the lap of Christianity.

COMMENT: It is clear that religion is to blame even if it is pagan. One religion being bad raises the question if other religions are good and they must be willing to prove their goodness. If they do not and cannot then they are not to be assumed to be good. Religions borrow from each other so if paganism is bad then the pagan ingredient of Christianity turns it into something with an infection that is going to erupt or grow.

COMMENT FROM AVALOS SAYING THAT THE LANDS WHERE THE BIBLE EMERGED WERE NOT RACIST UNTIL THE BIBLE CAME ALONG PROMOTING HEBREW RACISM: It is not until the Bible comes on the scene, therefore, that we truly have a consistent and persistent authority for racism in Western civilization. Alfred Rosenberg, regarded as a premier theorist of race in Nazi Germany, many, also used parts of the Bible as support in the *Myth of the Twentieth Century: An Assessment of the Political-Spiritual Struggle of our Time*, first published in 1930.

The subtitle alone shows that Rosenberg was no atheist, but rather followed a religious outlook on life. Rosenberg's book, which was his main opus, sold an estimated half million copies by the end of 1936, and about 1 million copies were in print in 1944. It was second only to Hitler's *Mein Kampf* in sales and reputation.

Rosenberg does not represent so much an anti-Christian movement as a recontextualization of Christianity. In fact, he called it "positive Christianity" (positive Christentum), as opposed to the one represented by the Asiatic clergy.

We can argue that at least parts of the Hebrew Bible constitute the principal exponents of the most systematic ideology of genealogical purity inherited by Western civilization. One example is found in the story of Ezra's shock at the Jews having mixed with foreigners while in Babylon: After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, "The people of Israel, the priests, and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons. Thus the holy seed has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands, and in this faithlessness the officials and leaders have led the way." (Ezra 9:1-2) Even if the Hebrew author did not understand modern genetics, it is clear that the author understands that the mixing of "seed" is a physical process. Likewise, the author seems to think of "pollution" in material terms in prohibiting miscegenation...

COMMENT: Excellent point! And the racism has been sort of normalised which alone is enough to inspire and enable people to create new forms. And so the problems created by it are still in force today. The book selling so well in a Christian country says it all! And even the nicest Christian is a disgrace for helping ensure that the evil Bible is the most distributed book in existence!! It is not just for reading - it is presented as something to be followed.

It is not true that Ezra seems to think in terms of bad breeding. He definitely thinks it. Had he not done so he would have recommended such unions as long as they involved converts or civilised pagans. He makes no comment on their personal qualities.

QUOTE: *Mein Kampf* provides clear evidence that Hitler was not an atheist. For example, Hitler says: "Hence today I believe that I am acting in accordance with the will of the Almighty Creator; by defending myself against the Jew, I am fighting for the work of the Lord."

Hitler also states that he sees Protestantism as a great ally of German nationalism: "Protestantism as such is a better defender of the interests of Germanism, insofar as this is grounded in its genesis and later tradition." Hitler claims Martin Luther as one of his heroes.

COMMENT: Nobody has the right to claim that the Nazi activities had nothing to do with Christianity and thus its founder Jesus who bears the ultimate responsibility.

QUOTE: We may argue that Hitler hated Judaism not so much because he perceived Judaism to have a racist ideology, but because he saw it as a racist ideology that was successful. This is most clear in the following passage, in which Hitler comments on the amorphous idea of a Jewish "state": "It is one of the most ingenious tricks that was ever devised, to make this state sail under the flag of 'religion,' thus assuring it of the tolerance which the Aryan is always ready to accord a religious creed. For actually, the Mosaic religion is nothing other than a doctrine for the preservation of the Jewish race."

COMMENT: Where did he learn about its racism? From Christianity! From the Bible! Where did he learn how to become a racist himself in response? From Christianity! From the Bible! Christianity by presenting itself as non-racist and universal is being passive aggressive towards Judaism. The openness of Christianity to the world was tactical and meant to

make the Jews look bad and itself as an improvement of Judaism. Remember the split between both faiths was extremely bitter.

QUOTE: Many of the anti-Christian statements that have been attributed to him have been disputed by respectable historians. If Hitler was guilty of anything, he was not scientific enough in his view of humanity.

COMMENT: Christianity must know it shares the blame when it has to lie so much to smell of innocence.

QUOTE ON MORAL RELATIVISM: There is "meta-ethical relativism," which mainly focuses on analyzing the meaning of moral statements. For example, what does it mean to say "Murder is wrong"? Once analyzed, one may see that "murder" simply refers to a killing not authorized by a particular group. Thus, capital punishment may not be considered "murder" in some societies, but abortion may be.

COMMENT: If that is really what bans on murder are really worried about then we have to accept that moralists and religionists and politicians are just lying about their love for human life. They love selectively which is not the same as loving all human life. They are hiding their fascism in a cloak of sanctimonious bliss. Is it any wonder that human nature when it gets the chance goes out of its way to kill those considered outside the boundaries of acceptability. If we hate out-individuals that subliminally then imagine how much we hate out-groups.

QUOTE: As in all versions of Kantian ethics, the initial premise is always relative. Thus, we can ask why we should think it an absolute moral right for purposive agents to have "freedom and well-being."

AND

It is just as relativistic to hold that "rational" principles should be the mark of any morality, even as we hold that empirico-rationalism does and should guide our moral judgments to one extent or another in order to best fulfill our interests.

COMMENT: He assumes there is no answer to the why. But we cannot deny it is right so we don't need an answer.

QUOTE: Basically, any statement of the type "X is good because God says so" is still a human judgment.

COMMENT: If I judge anyway then by bringing God into it and saying he does the judging is just me trying to be lazy and irresponsible.

QUOTE: In reality there are only two choices in a world in which ethics involve a deity. To understand this dilemma, we need to consider a variant of Euthyphro's Dilemma as found in Plato's Euthyphro. We can briefly summarize the argument here: Things are either good in themselves; or They are good because God says so.

COMMENT: If kindness to a helpless baby is not good in itself then God is bad for saying it is good in itself. He cannot say sincerely that it is good - he can only pretend that it is.

QUOTE: There also degrees of moral relativity. Moral rules based on verifiable premises are less relativistic and arbitrary than moral systems wherein verifiability comes into play to the extent that it can influence value judgments. For example, we can verify that we cannot verify that demons possess people we would otherwise consider mentally ill. Therefore, we do not consider demons when making any value judgments about mentally ill people. Having a god in a moral system does not inherently change it, except to add another scarce resource and bureaucratic layer to our moral decision making, rendering morality even more relativistic. The foregoing should not be construed to mean that we do not believe in any system of moral rules. We simply affirm that all moralities must recognize the self-interest involved in their construction.

COMMENT: Good!

QUOTE: 1. What exists is worth more than what does not exist. 2. Life exists. 3. Therefore, life is worth more than what does not exist. Accordingly, we may deem immoral any action that places the value of life as equal to or below the value of nothing. Therefore, it is always immoral to kill for something that has no actual value.

COMMENT: Good. If God does not exist then he has no actual value. The more importance you give to a fiction the less you should value it. Thus hating the concept of God would be a duty if atheism is true.

Avalos here shows why morality as in respect for human life is objectively true. If it is not then at least it cannot be wrong.

For Avalos killing for a fiction God "is equivalent to killing for no reason or to killing for nothing, even if the person doing the killing believes herself to have a just reason."

QUOTE: We can argue that killing because undetectable Martians just as we should reject all of Mein Kampf because of its racist and genocidal policies, we should reject the Bible for any genocidal policies it ever endorsed. We should reject other scriptures if they also ever advocate any sort of violence. In fact, Mein Kampf does not contain a single explicit command for genocide equivalent to those found in the Hebrew Bible. Yes, Mein Kampf describes the Jews as an evil to be expelled from Germany, but nowhere in Mein Kampf is there anything as explicit as the policy of killing Canaanites in Deuteronomy 7 and 20 or 1 Samuel 15. Thus, if all of Mein Kampf is to be rejected simply for its implied genocidal policies, we should certainly reject all of the Bible for some of its explicit and blatant genocidal policies.

Endorsing is one thing but what About simply making sure there is no obstacle to becoming violent.

QUOTE: We have shown that some portions of the Bible advocate genocidal policies. Whether they were carried out historically or not is not as important as the fact that they are endorsed as a good thing.

COMMENT: It means it is luck not the rules that kept obedience to them at bay. People were spared in spite of the rules and that alone makes them bad and degrading.

QUOTE: Christianity, for example, has been alive for two thousand years or so, and religious hierarchies and privileges have not brought us any closer to peace, which is usually defined as a set of conditions for the privileged group in the first place. If any hierarchy is undesirable, then hierarchies based on unverifiable premises have to be worse.

COMMENT: Should we assume the Christian faith has made it worse? Yes if you think you should love the murderer but hate his or her murdering. You can say, "Poor Henry VIII would have probably killed nobody had it not been for his faith."

we would not continue to espouse the Santa Claus myth for the sake of enhancing the child's behavior. It is unethical because we are asking the child to give us a tangible service in return for a nonexistent reward (Santa Claus's existence and his benefits). In other words, the child is working on the basis of false premises. Second, when the child learns that Santa Claus does not exist, it may have a deleterious effect on why she behaves well, which would not serve our self-interest. Compelling or encouraging good behavior should be based on appreciation of the value of verifiable causes and consequences to behavior. We hold that any beneficial acts of religion.

And approval

QUOTE: We hold that the potential acts of good caused by religion can never exceed those that cause violence. This is particularly the case if one assumes that religion encourages altruistic behavior (as Michael Shermer does, for example). In fact, there is no such thing as altruistic behavior in some absolute sense, because all actions are performed for some perceived benefit to the agent. This is the case even if the effect is, by our judgment, counterproductive to the agent. For example, those slamming into the World Trade Center lost the opportunity to further propagate their genes if they were childless. This might seem to be altruistic from the perspective of someone that shared their religious beliefs.

COMMENT: Religion is often assumed to be about the meaning of life. What if in fact it is about the meaning of death? If you have the meaning of life and the meaning of death to worry about which will come first? The meaning of death. A valued life will be a torment if you have to face death and see it as useless degrading extinction.

Even if the benefit is for what u want to think of god. Its for the idol

QUOTE: If Machiavelli had any insight at all perhaps it is best paraphrased by this question: It is better to be feared than loved if it deters our destruction, or are sacred spaces more valuable than human lives? This is the type of new question that emerges from the rethinking of the value of sacred space in foreign policy.

COMMENT: Religionists think Jerusalem is worth any innocent blood spilt over it for it is the Holy City.

QUOTE: The attacks of September 11, he observes, have failed to mobilize the Islamic world in the manner Osama bin Laden expected.

COMMENT: Bin Laden simply assumed that the attacks would teach Muslims that such terrorism is indeed part of their religion and part of what their prophet is about. He thought they would respond by joining in his jihad. A lot did but not all but many more approve of the 9/11 atrocities.