

“The wonderful faith of Islam”

RECENTLY Jeremy Corbyn accused Salman Abedi of discrediting “the wonderful faith of Islam” by bombing the Ariana Grande concert in Manchester”. In this Corbyn was doing no more than any number of politicians who seek to head off communalist violence aimed at regular, everyday, Muslims. Anodyne statements about Islam being “a religion of peace” routinely follow Islamist attacks as if to suggest that the violence has nothing at all to do with Muslim communities in general, or with Islam in particular.

In the wake of the killings on London Bridge and at Borough Market expressions of horror and condemnation are heard from every quarter, including from Muslim organisations and communities. However, these condemnations, which seek to distance wider Muslim populations from the terrorists, will not be effective until it is squarely acknowledged that the problem of Islamism arises within Muslim communities. To do anything else is to do a disservice to ordinary Muslim men and women whose most important commitment is raising their kids and getting along with the rest of us as best they can.

Islamism, the belief that society should be governed by scholarly interpretation of the *Quran* and the *Hadith*, and by the decisions of Sharia courts, is widely canvased in mosques and madrassas throughout Britain. These scholars are opposed to freedom of religious conscience and belief, they are opposed to freedom of speech, they are opposed to democracy and believe, just like Bible Christians, that the word of God revealed in ancient texts should govern society, and the lives of everybody in the world. The difference between Islamists and Bible Christians is, however, that Jehovah’s Witnesses, Southern Baptists, and a

host of others, do not as a rule practice murder suicide as a means of expediting their arrival in paradise. Although, often prepared to simply ignore the state, Bible Christians, unlike Islamists, do not seek the dissolution of democratic government.

It has become common over the last thirty or forty years for many people on the left to seek alliances with Muslim insurgencies against Jewish nationalism, and imperialism. Consequently, the cosyng up of Jeremy Corbyn, George Galloway, Tariq Ali, Ken Livingstone, and many ersatz socialists, to Hamas, and Hezbollah, has blurred the edges between engagement with, and support for, Islamism. The laying of wreaths at commemorations for Islamist martyrs, the solidarity speeches, and the sporting of Fedayeen scarves, are not merely ornamental symbols of support for the oppressed, but carry an implicit endorsement of the Islamists' view that the Nato powers are engaged in a war against Muslims.

The result is that many on the left cannot grasp the nature of Islamism at all. By attempting to understand it simply as a political response to Western violence and interventions around the world, they fail to see Islamism's authentically religious nature. There is, of course, no doubt at all that religious enthusiasm has always been tied up with massive social disruptions, revolutions, and political strife. When Oliver Cromwell was murdering Irish men, women, and children, at Drogheda in September 1649 he undoubtedly believed that he was both the Hammer of God and the commander of Parliament's new model army:

“I am persuaded that this is a righteous judgment of God upon these barbarous wretches, who have imbrued their hands in so much innocent blood and that it will tend to prevent the effusion of blood for the future, which are satisfactory grounds for such actions, which otherwise cannot but work remorse and regret.”

For many centuries politics have, more often than not, been inseparably tangled with faithful revelations, with religious certainty and commitment.

It is worth remembering this because such associations and bloody dogmatism seem so bizarre to most of us today, that attempts to displace the religious element into ulterior political motives or explanations, appear to offer the only route to a rational explanation. This is because it is difficult to understand why perfectly fit and healthy young men should kill themselves in the course of randomly murdering people in the name of Allah.

These events remind me of my husband's amused riposte to my bewilderment when confronted by ideas I found inexplicable:

“. . . Yes, Don, but people can believe anything!”

he would patiently explain.

As a philosopher he was inured in the rigours of argument and he was always able to spot the rational nature of much religious thought. Once the revelation, the metaphysical account, or mystical experience, is taken on board it is perfectly possible to engage in a thoroughly rational discourse, albeit one that might have been raised on the most tenuous of foundations.

These Islamist lads, for they are mostly lads, who kill themselves in the course of murdering their fellow citizens believe that their sacrifice will be redeemed by God as they strike a blow for Him and for all his obedient followers under attack by the Infidel. They don't need to be especially observant or orthodox Muslims, but they do need to believe that they strike a blow for the emancipation of their co-religionists, and that Allah will gratefully receive them to His bosom.

We have to take them at their word:

– “This is for Allah!” –

They shout as they plunge the knife into hapless people on the street and in bars at Borough Market.

There is nothing to negotiate with here. There are political fictions and religious delusions which must be defeated, but no points of common interest, around which to negotiate with the potential perpetrators of such attacks. The political fiction is that the West is conducting a global war against Muslims, and the religious delusion, is that the tale told by the Angel Gabriel to Mohammad from 609 to 632 CE should govern society and proscribe how we should all live to this day.

This struggle will inevitably involve Muslims having to demand an end to Islamist preaching in mosques and madrasahs throughout Britain. Imams must not be allowed to routinely attack secular democracy in the course of arguing for government by religious authority. Muslims, who believe in the separation between 'Church and State', so to speak, must canvas their religious communities and argue for a separation between Quranic injunctions and our civil law. Islamic scholars must not be allowed to use mosques and madrasahs as arenas for the perpetuation of myths concerning the literal truth of God's word in the Quran, or the dissemination of concocted conspiracies concerning the victimhood of Muslims throughout the world.

Let me be clear. I am not advocating banning Islamic scholars or the prevention by law of Islamist preaching, but I think that we should call upon Muslims to drive the Islamists out of their mosques and madrasahs by raising argument, and debate against Islamism throughout their communities. The involvement of legislation, the police, or the state, in this process would be counter productive – and drive many Muslims to line up in defence of the autonomy and independence of their communities.

Haras Rafiq, the Chief Executive of Quilliam, the pluralist Muslim think tank has it about right:

“Enough is enough – we need action now and not tip-toeing around the issue. The only way to defeat this type of extremism and terrorism is for

Government and all British communities to unashamedly name, shame and challenge the threat. That includes the ideology that is underpinning it. The ideology has its roots in Islamist inspired Salafi Jihadism and we must all admit the problem before we can attempt to challenge it.”

Whether Islamists are violent or not, their insistence that God demands that government and law should be regulated with reference to the interpretations of the *Quran*, the sayings of Mohammad, and Islamic scholars in Sharia courts, is the seat of the problem. So too is their promotion of the mythological “War against the Muslims”. These venerable scholars, these bearded sages, inspire the youngsters intent on murder-suicide – they provoke the bombs and knives of the jihadis transfixed by the prospect of Heaven.