

## **To Win We Must Know our Enemies and Know Ourselves\***

By: Prof. Paul Eidelberg

Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, the leader of Hezbollah, once declared: "We are going to win because they love life and we love death." Let's translate this into an Islamic meaning horizon: "We are going to win because infidels love life, something transient, whereas we Muslims love death, something eternal."

Another rendering: "We Muslims are going to win because unlike westerners we do not fear violent death." This rendering would disturb the English philosopher Thomas Hobbes. He thought Englishman, like mankind in general, regarded violent death as the greatest evil. Hobbes, the unknown founder of modern psychology, seems to have been ignorant of Islam.

Be this as it may, fear of violent death has permeated liberal-leftists in America and Europe. This fear, no less than their secular humanism, explains why they abhor war and seek peace. Recall the Cold War, when a leftwing American academic coined the phrase "Better Red than Dead." This servile attitude cannot but encourage Muslims like Nasrallah, who are more cunning than wise. Know this: underlying Islam's love of death is fear of life!

Islam's fear of life is rooted in pre-Islamic times, in Arab culture, which was tribal, polytheistic, and shaped by a desert environment where life was "nasty, brutish, and short." One hardly dared sleep in that uncivilized environment. If your throat wasn't slit, your camel, on which your survival depended, was stolen by a rival tribe. Here is where Hobbes' fear of violent death seems to apply. Not so, because Arab culture bred warriors. As in Sparta, manliness or courage was deemed the highest virtue. Fear of violent death would be shameful.

An Arab tribe's survival obviously required tribal loyalty, a strict code of conduct, a suspicious attitude toward strangers. Your tribe was essential to your safety and sense of identity. Arab culture therefore suppressed individuality, discouraged change, novelty, creativity—ingredients distinctive of human life and which enabled the West to excel Arab culture.

I have omitted the most important thing: monotheism. Monotheism generated the idea of a rational universe, the presupposition of science, which launched the West's modern project: to conquer nature, to alleviate the human condition, to extend human longevity and, to this extent, to conquer death. Nasrallah is correct in saying we infidels love life, but he sees only the materialistic conception of life fostered by Hobbes and the Enlightenment, which undermined the highest conception of life rooted in monotheism.

Thanks to the influence of Judaism and Christianity, monotheism was superimposed on Arab polytheism. The trouble is that Islam has never fully transcended its pagan substratum.

From a behavioral perspective, Islam should be regarded as a semi-pagan religion despite its monotheism. This is why scholars have trouble classifying Islamic terrorists. Some call them "Islamofascists," and attribute suicidal terrorism to "political" Islam or "militant" or "radical" Islam—adjectives indicative of paganism. Few see, and hardly anyone dares say, that Islam is a syncretistic religion—ostensibly monotheistic, but culturally pagan vis-à-vis the non-Islamic world. Islam's attitude toward life and death is not quite what Nasrallah believes.

True, Islam does not love life; indeed, it fears life. But fear of life is not unique to Islam because human life is inherently fearful. We know that life may be snuffed out in a moment, and by accident. That you are mortal means that in this vast and seemingly timeless universe you have no necessary existence, no essential purpose, which suggests that your life is meaningless. This is the exoteric teaching of Ecclesiastes: "Futility of futilities ... all is futile" (12:8).

This impression of Ecclesiastes cannot but engender a more or less vague sense of psychological and metaphysical insecurity. One sees this in Albert Camus, *The Stranger*—a man condemned to be free in a meaningless universe. Freedom makes human life insecure. You are free to make choices, hence to err. This freedom is intolerable in Islam, from a political and theological perspective. Allah is not the God of freedom.

The awareness that your thoughts, feelings, and actions are ultimately meaningless can make one hate and fear life. The poet Heinrich von Kleist (1777–1811) is said to have committed suicide upon learning from Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* that metaphysical truth is not knowable.

Be this as it may, belief in the accidental and futile nature of life might make one more fearful of life than of death. Notice, however, that the Quran is permeated with references to hell. This can arouse fear of life as well as of death. (By the way, the Quran's obsession with hell suggests the influence of Christianity. There is no reference to hell in the Hebrew Bible, which is an apotheosis of life. *L'chaim*—to life—is said whenever Jews meet and drink wine or any distilled alcoholic beverage.)

Nothing can be more opposed to each other than Judaism and Islam. The Quran's dismal view of life is the polar opposite of the Jew's love of life. The Quran, which "exalts the Muslim who slays and is slain for Allah" (Sura 9:111), expresses Nasrallah's love of death. Hence, the Muslim must destroy the Jew whose love of life contradicts Islam's fear of life.

Islam's holy book is described by an influential Egyptian Islamic activist in these terms: "The Quran for mankind is like a manual for a machine."

Islamic fatalism contradicts the free will implied in the Book of Genesis. Allah is not the God Who created man in His own image. Alain Bosançon puts it this way:

Although Muslims like to enumerate the 99 names of God, missing from the list, but central to the Jewish and Christian concept of God, is "father"—i.e., a personal God capable of a reciprocal and loving relationship with men. The God of the Quran, the God who demands submission, is a distant God; to call him "Father" would be an anthropomorphic sacrilege.

But if God is not "Father," then, as theologian George Weigel observes, it's difficult to imagine the human person as having been "created in the image of God." This not only precludes human freedom, but also reason. In fact, the Taliban religious police posted placards bearing the words "Throw reason to the dogs—it stinks of corruption." Imagine how a devout Muslim might react to the philosopher-mathematician Alfred North Whitehead who defined reason as "the organ of emphasis on novelty." Novelty is of the essence of life.

Alas, there was a time in the Middle Ages when Reason competed with unreason for the Moslem's soul. Suffice to mention al-Farrabi (872-950), one of the greatest philosophers and scientists of the Islamic world. However, al-Farrabi was really a Greek in Muslim dress. To avoid persecution and death, he concealed his philosophic kinship with Aristotle and Plato by means of an esoteric form of writing.

The rationalism of the Greek philosophers bore fruit in Christian Europe, not in the Muslim Middle East, where Reason succumbed to irrationalism. The primacy of intimidation, so evident in Islamic scriptures, supplanted the primacy of logical persuasion in Plato and Aristotle.

Reason, which is inseparable from the Biblical concept of man's creation in the image of God, is also inseparable from the idea of the human community. Islam's negation of the idea of human community was made quite clear in 1985, when Iran's permanent delegate to the United Nations, Raja Khorassani, declared that "the very concept of human rights was 'a Judeo-Christian invention' and inadmissible in Islam." I therefore see in Islam's denial of the human community the dubious nature of Islamic monotheism on the one hand, and an atavistic stratum of Arab paganism and polytheism on the other.

Israel's ruling elites will hint nothing of this. They shun the truth, lest they antagonize Muslims and expose themselves to the canard of "racism." But shunning the truth about Islam—the most dangerous enemy of Western civilization—has not spared Israel from demonic anti-Semitism. Shunning the truth has made Israel the constant victim of unmitigated lies.

Israeli governments are typically on the defensive—obsessed with futile information programs called "hasbara." Israel's most powerful weapon is truth, but it has yet to have a prime minister with enough wisdom and courage to employ truth to distract and disarm Israel's enemies. For example, Israel's UN ambassador could submit a resolution calling for Iran's eviction from the General Assembly for having repeatedly violated the UN's anti-genocide convention and Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Having failed to do this, Israel has itself been denounced for such crimes.

More important, however, is this: Israel must forge ahead in science and technology, for therein is the key to decodifying the Torah, the key to Israel's knowing itself and being recognized as a wise and understanding nation (Deut. 4:6).