

Eurocentric Thought and Islamophobia: A Perfect Combination

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

Muslims in France are running out of mosques. Their mosques are overcrowded and, in some cases, many Muslims have to pray *outside* their mosques because there are too many other Muslims inside.

Some French Muslims have come up with what seems to many like a sensible answer to the problem. They have suggested that, because there are so many empty churches in France, they could be converted into mosques.

Indeed, Dalil Boubakeur, who leads Paris' Grand Mosque, said that Christians and Muslims worship "the same God," and that they have similar religious practices. So, what's the big deal?

Many White French citizens are arguing that the "French," (i.e. White French people) must not allow their churches to fall into the hands of Muslims. Sixty-seven percent of French citizens are against Boubakeur's idea, according to recent polls.

Such opposition moved Boubakeur to withdraw his plan and say that he would not undermine "the sanctity of churches." Still, Frenchman Denis Tillinac saw fit to bring forth a "Hands Off Our Churches" petition for which he received over 40,000 signatures. (This despite the fact that a mere four churches have ever been turned into mosques in the history of France.)

All of this overblown, highly irrational, bigoted behavior brings to mind the idiotic controversy over the so-called Ground Zero Mosque (which was actually an Islamic community center to have been shared by Muslims and non-Muslims alike) a couple of blocks away from the World Trade Center in New York City. It was a classic example of anti-Muslim bigotry disguised as patriotism.

It is this bigoted mindset in France to which members of Charlie Hebdo played before they decided not to create any more images of Muhammad that would offend Muslims. Too often, in the name of liberty, people have chosen to make statements at the wrong time, in the wrong way, and for the wrong reasons,

while in many cases, appealing to the wrong people. Giving fuel to bigots – intentionally or unintentionally – is simply not the right thing to do.

Some people claim that many Muslims do themselves no favor by only associating among themselves, i.e. being “clannish.” After all, among Black people, for better or worse, the Nation of Islam (NOI) has never been rejected by the Black masses. This is largely because the NOI has always identified and associated with the Black masses.

However, people have the right to be clannish – freedom of assembly, freedom of association and all that good ol’ American stuff. The fact of the matter is that, like their fellow citizens, most Muslims are peaceful and law-abiding citizens and have the right to be only among themselves if they so desire.

In Black communities in the U.S., Muslim immigrants are sometimes viewed with suspicion. For example, on the East Side of Buffalo, many Muslim immigrants are moving in, buying property, and even living on streets with Arabic names. This worries some African American East Side residents, and some even talk of alleged terrorist cells on the East Side, even though the vast majority of the Muslim immigrants do not bother anyone.

Some Christians are very adept at pointing out passages of the Qur’an that condone violence, sexism, intolerance, etc. However, when it comes to examining their own Bible, amazingly, they cannot seem to identify the same kinds of passages. (Likewise, many Muslims can identify obvious problems in the Bible but not in the Qur’an.) This kind of bias will only lead to more bigotry and increased misunderstanding between Muslims and Christians.

Eurocentric arrogance has long been a major cause of human oppression. Today, the tendency is to demonize Arabs and Muslims and to talk of an alleged clash of civilizations between East and West. However, the real clash might be between secularists and theocrats, progressives and reactionaries, etc. After all, it is not as though the U.S. has nothing to worry about from the Religious Right and other reactionary forces in America. Yet, some Eurocentric Whites identify more with reactionary White Westerners than they do with progressives from the Arab world.

Europe is struggling mightily with immigration from non-Whites. Sadly, the Eurocentric mindset often predominates in this struggle, and racism comes to the fore. However, the U.S. and Europe are changing demographically. Eurocentrists are simply going to have to deal with that fact. As for those Muslims in France who simply need more mosques, Pierre Daum writing in *Le Monde* should have the last word:

France desperately needs more mosques. Of the 2,500 mosques that serve our 5 million citizens, most are just prayer rooms tucked away in commercial buildings. Every Friday night, they overflow with worshippers, many of whom end up praying on the sidewalks and in the street. Meanwhile, the churches that stand empty are maintained at state expense, thanks to a law saying religious structures built before 1905 are state property, while those built after must be paid for by the congregation. France is supposed to guarantee freedom of worship, yet it is subsidizing French Catholics and forcing French Muslims to pray outdoors. If we wish to “treat our citizens equally,” we must offer unused churches to our Muslim compatriots. (excerpt from *This Week*, July 31, 2015, p. 12)