

ABDAL HAKIM MURAD
TRAVELLING
HOME

ESSAYS ON ISLAM IN EUROPE



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The Quilliam Press Ltd
14 St Paul's Road
Cambridge CB1 2EF

ISBN 978-1-872038-20-9
ePUB ISBN 978-1-872038-21-6
Mobi ISBN 978-1-872038-22-3

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CHAPTER 1

Can liberalism tolerate Islam?

MUST ONE BE liberal to belong to Europe? For all the polite multiculturalist denials, this question is being put to us more and more insistently. The European Union, as it struggles to articulate a common civilisational as well as economic vision, regularly toys with grand statements about Europe as a vision of free human community whose success validates the universal model now being urged upon the rest of the world. European liberals, with their Enlightenment, civil society, democratic institutions and human rights codes, sometimes seem to self-define as a collective secular Messiah, willing and ready to save the infidel. To resist is, by implication, to align oneself with an unregenerate, sinful humanity, an abrogated covenant, an Old Testament. This liberal religion of progress often finds it difficult to respect dissidents, although in theory they are proudly tolerated in a European Union whose official motto is 'United in Diversity'.

Yet we Europeans exist in fact in the middle of a difficult argument. We are constantly quarrelling with ourselves over definitions of belonging. We can unite to build an Airbus, but will we really unite around a moral or cultural ideal? What, after all, are

the exact historic and intellectual criteria for European civilisational cohesion? Moreover—and this now looks like the continent's greatest concern—how might Ishmael fit in?

Possibly it helps to consider Europe's furthest roots. Homer tells us how Europa, the daughter of the King of Phoenicia, was abducted by Zeus, duly ravished, and borne off to the island of Crete, where she gave birth to the Europeans. There is something interestingly emblematic and transgressive about this myth of origin: a Lebanese maiden torn from the breast of Asia and deposited in a corner of the continent which eventually bore her name. The beginning of our story is a violent European colonial raid upon Asia, an unhappy migration, and a confiscation of identity.

Perhaps we can trace back this far—and Europe's literature begins with Homer's stories—the continent's ambiguity about its self and its values. But Europe only finds herself, and discovers the boundaries of her soul and body, long after this classical prologue ends. For the Romans it was the Mediterranean which defined the core of their terrain and their commercial and religious life. Rome embraced equally the European, African and Asian shores of the Middle Sea. But while it saw its culture as superior, it rarely sought to impose its philosophies on others. So we will hesitate to accept the tempting thought that in our time, ancient history has been reborn: America is Rome, Europe is Athens, while Islam is an endlessly troublesome Judea. Ancient Rome had no systematic programme of universalizing its values, even within the bounds of

its political sway, and still less did it encourage other nations to accept its pieties or its social beliefs.

When Islam appeared in the seventh century the African and Asian shores were suddenly lost. Thrown back on its own resources, 'Europe' sought to define itself, then as it does now, as the rather small remnant of antique soil that the Saracens had missed. From this defensive beginning Europe came to nurse ideas of its unique and universal rightness.

In 1939 Henri Pirenne launched the famous thesis which claims that it was when the Arab, Berber and convert advance into France was finally stemmed that the Franks and hence the Europeans gained their first intimation of a sense of self.¹ The first use of the term *Europenses* comes in 754 in a chronicle describing Roland's defeat of the invading Saracens at Poitiers.² Charlemagne's capital at Aachen seemed symbolically to straddle both banks of the Rhine, making a nonsense of the old Roman frontier; Europe was starting to form a reality as a counter to Islam. The Teutonic barbarians who had brought down Rome and who now ruled in Gaul and Germania as they had ruled in Italy and Spain, now claimed to be heirs to the imperium. The almost obsessive cult of the Latin language and classical mythology which characterised European education from that time until well into the twentieth century shows how anxious the Germanic and other 'European' peoples were to see themselves, rather than the Saracens who controlled most of the old Roman world, as the true heirs of antiquity. When the Ottomans conquered Constantinople in 1453 Sultan Mehmet II adopted the title of

Roman emperor, but Christian Europe rejected this out of hand. Rather as Genesis momentarily rejects Abraham's first son in favour of the 'laughing one', so Europe's self-understanding seemed to have been united in nothing so much as its fearful repudiation of Islam's claims to legitimate participation in the blessings bestowed by antiquity, and by those gentile patriarchs, Plato and Aristotle.

As a matter of fact—and this is not widely noticed by advocates of European exceptionalism—Islam was for much of its history the principal heir of the Greek world, intellectually as well as geographically. Avicenna was a more distinguished Hellenising philosopher than was any Christian. Yet traditional Europe will no more see Islam as a rightful inheritor of Athens than it will allow Ishmael legitimate authority over Jerusalem. The reason has been the concept of Christendom. Christian monks contrived to see themselves as the true interpreters of Hellenism, for all their borrowings from Ibn Rushd and Ghazālī. Rome, the major remaining Christian metropolis of the classical world in the Occident, was assumed to be the inheritor of that world's riches, which had somehow migrated West, rather than remaining in their places of origin in Antioch, Ephesus, Cyrene and Alexandria. Even though he was Aristotle's master-interpreter, the Saracen remained an interloper and an up-start. Thanks to the same *furor Teutonicus* which had baffled and brought down Rome, the Franks kept the false inheritors at bay, and even, during the Crusades, found themselves united as Europeans in a counter-attack that brought Jerusalem again into Christian hands. From that time until the

present, most Europeans, followed by their children in the ethnically-cleansed Americas, have been sure of their sole proper possession not only of ancient Semitic prophecy but also of the legacy of Athens, with which it cohabited in a series of complex though often unstable liaisons.

An older Orientalism once claimed that Islam, the larger Semitism, sniffed briefly at Greece but then turned away from it. This is the persistent legend of al-Ghazālī sounding the death-knell of Greek philosophy in the world of Islam, which survives among some polemicists even today. Hellenism, according to the likes of Ernest Rénan and Leo Strauss, could find room only in the European inn; Islam, with its burden of scriptural literalism, treated it as a resident alien at best. This applied not only to metaphysics but also to ethics and the art of politics, notably Plato's brief Muslim apotheosis on the pages of al-Fārābī. Strauss has had many admirers: significantly, Donald Rumsfeld and Paul Wolfowitz were among them, together with various essayists inhabiting Europe's new Islamophobic right. Even Pope Benedict's unhappy 2006 lecture at Regensburg seemed geared to presenting the Muslims as improper partakers in the classical legacy of rationality and rights which, according to this Europhile heir to the Holy Office, is Europe's alone. Yet the best recent scholarship, such as the work of Robert Wisnovsky, has belied this political and papal confiscation: we are now very likely to see Juwaynī, Ghazālī and Rāzī as great advocates of a critical but profound instrumentalising of Greek dialectics.³ Greek ethics, too, lived on powerfully on the pages of

Miskawayh, al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, and al-Ghazālī. In political thought the old themes also enriched Muslim discussions in manuals of statecraft studied carefully by Ottoman, Safavid and Moghul emperors and their viziers. And if Plato was modified drastically by the *Sīra*, that was no bad thing, given what Popper had to say about his vision of society. Plato offered a rigid and stratified political ideology, whereas the *Sīra* opened the door to a legal tradition largely indifferent to social class, which proved pragmatic and highly responsive to context and human variety.

The recruitment of ancient philosophy, including those strands in which modern liberal thinking claims its remote beginnings, did happen differently in Muslim lands and in the Western world. That may be one reason why Athens, in Europe, finally defeated Jerusalem, and philosophy of an increasingly secular bent overcame theology. Aquinas, whose *Summa Contra Gentiles* was written to help secure Christian theology in lands conquered from Muslims, proposed a symbiosis of philosophy and scripture which has, for most Europeans, now outlived its credibility: the permanent balance which was successfully achieved in Islamic thought proved difficult for Europe. The same Christian interval in Europe which laid claim to the classical age, a claim which seemed to be supported by the Pauline and Johannine Hellenizing of Christ and by the antique culture of the patristic authors, eventually faltered, to be replaced by the whirl of post-Enlightenment European history and crisis, succeeded more recently by vibrant paganisms, polemical scientism, or an often militantly secular republicanism. Hence the remarkable

decision by the drafters of the European Constitution to include a quotation from Thucydides, and to pass over the Christian centuries in silence.

In this newly post-Christian continent, which seems to have embraced Gibbonesque views of the decline of antiquity as a triumph of barbarism and religion, a new class of crusading atheists (Richard Dawkins, Anthony Grayling *et alii*) now assails faith for its supposed unreason and an inability to deliver a peaceful and just society. The past contained violence and religion, and therefore, we are told, a secular future is likely to be peaceful. Ethical liberal arguments against religion are now much more commonly heard than older objections to faith grounded in the problem of evil or the implausibility of Leviticus. This was energised in the late nineteenth century, when all reasonable people seemed to abhor Pope Pius the Ninth's *Syllabus of Errors*, which anathematised the Enlightenment notions of religious freedom and of the separation of church from state. As article 80 of the *Syllabus* proclaimed, one could be excommunicated for holding that 'the Roman Pontiff can, and ought to, reconcile himself, and come to terms with, progress, liberalism, and modern civilization'.⁴

Since the Second Vatican Council of the early 1960s (frankly described by Ratzinger as an 'anti-Syllabus') Pius IX's anathemas have been hard to remember, and even the Vatican is reinventing itself as an advocate of precisely the modernist opinions—or many of them—that a century ago might have resulted in the withholding of the sacraments and hence a sentence of eternal damnation. Its

support for Darwinism, for the separation of religion and state, and for religious freedom, are three iconic examples of this seeming conversion to the idea of Progress.⁵ Modern democracy's triumph is so complete that many Christians today can hardly appreciate the old and fierce Christian opposition to it. However the turn has provided ammunition for the secular polemic against traditional faith: religion seems to have disavowed its former code.

Thanks to assorted *voltefaccia* the Europe that historically made itself a unit by keeping Muslims at bay, or by eliminating them (in Spain, Portugal, Provence, Sicily, the Balkans, Crete, Circassia and the Volga), has now substantially let go of the distinctiveness of the religious vision of society that allowed that to happen. Liberalism, whose crooked genealogy entails a reading of distant concerns in ancient Athens, and whose Lutheran tributaries, claimed by some Americans, may be only imaginary,⁶ has replaced the older theocratic thinking, which lingers on only in fringe ultramontane and royalist circles. Secularity is largely the invention of the continent which was the cradle of Christian monarchism; today, indeed, in a world of faith in which there may be secularism abroad, but not secularity, it almost seems to be a European monopoly. 'God's continent' has been transformed into the global crucible of an increasingly fierce materialism.

Partly due to this anti-theistic culture, as the desk pilots in Brussels look ahead they know that the future expansion of their Union must always be to the East, not the South. The *drang nach Osten* of Euroland may within thirty years bring Europe, intelligibly

enough, to Minsk; but Tangiers, barely twenty miles across the sea which in classical times was a thoroughfare and not a barrier, is generally admitted to be psychologically a far foreign land. Ishmael may be Abrahamic and also Hellenistic in his theology, but his recognition of Isaac as a brother is less reciprocated than ever. Hence we find that today, as regularly in the Christian past, Europe's arguments about itself, whether right-wing or left, often end in terms of its relationship with its significant and negated Other: the Saracenic and Turkish realms, now identified with the problematic principle of religion itself. Experiencing a crisis of identity Europe recreates its own solidity by again self-defining against Islam, now seen as the very type of conservative piety, or, as Meyda Yeğenoğlu sees it, treating the Muslim Other as 'a categorical opposite, a radical denial or negation of itself.'⁷

Following the great geographical discoveries Europe broke the bounds a triumphant Islam had imposed upon it, and the out-flanked Islamic world was, to its chagrin and confusion, progressively summoned to submit to European patterns of government and economic life. Today most elites in the postcolonial Muslim world are, substantially, Europeans themselves, and are no longer recognisable adherents of local specificities. Publicly or discreetly they take upon their shoulders the mantle of Progress and the battle against substantive faith; their ancestors become the Others against whom they primarily self-define. Sometimes their fervent dislike of the indigenous makes them seem even more royal than the foreign king.

With such converts Brussels has no significant quarrel, although it regularly puzzles over the deep corruption and often the cruelty of the westernised classes in the former colonies. But dealing with those *Animal Farm* regimes raises no more than a human rights issue. The elites are called to adhere to the constitutional and humanitarian norms, as well as the secular protocols, of post-monotheistic Europe. Yet as the Eurocrat is nervously aware, and as early twenty-first century events showed, those elite converts can resemble a fragile membrane stretched over a mass of cultural difference. The ‘Arab Spring’ demonstrated that the Muslim world, and perhaps the larger non-Western world, is reminiscent of the polar seas. The ocean, at no great depth, is alive and moving, a mass of liquid; while on the surface plates of congealed ice uneasily coexist. Tensions between, say, Morocco and Algeria, are disputes between cold, empirical, Europeanised classes, not between the often devoutly religious populations beneath them, for whom the boundaries drawn by past generations of colonial cartographers are usually experienced as painfully discrepant with local linguistic and ethnic reality. Secular elites, tactically invoking selected liberal values, hold down a mass of holy and civilisational sentiment. This subaltern secularity is as carceral as that of the Islamist utopias: the nation-state simply becomes a prison. The holding-down can be so violent that on occasion traumatised terrorists emerge to horrify the world, and to confirm, in turn, Western policymakers in their uneasy support for the regimes.

This tension, between the highly autocratic elites which enjoy this paradoxical support from European liberal governments, and the still substantially religious masses with their desire to enter the public square, to shape decision-making and to hear accurate news, has now become so kinetic that the ice is melting and the sea breaking through in very many of the Muslim states which look over the sea to Europe. The Arab Spring is a social and political equivalent of climate change. The outcome is often a type of crisis for the liberal conscience, or a sudden and carefully-timed *volte face*: as we saw when on January 14 of 2011 the French president offered President Ben Ali of Tunisia a contingent of riot police to shore up his rule, while the next day, when it became clear that the popular uprising had triumphed, France refused Ben Ali the right even to enter its airspace. *Dès qu'on a des ennuis, elle n'est plus votre amie ...*

As they fret over birthrates and immigration, Europe's theorists are well aware of this. Hence the fractiousness of, for instance, the recurrent European debate over Turkish membership of the European Union. When it came to power the Erdoğan government presented liberals with a paradox. Less fiercely secular than its predecessors, it was keen to curb the military's projection in the political realm. The generals, with their tight-lipped laicism, had claimed for decades to be the guardians of Atatürk's project to recreate Turkey in Europe's image; yet Europe is no longer the fascistic continent it was becoming in the 1920s and 1930s when Kemalism looked to it for inspiration. Hence the teasing conundrum for the Eurocrats. Many European liberal statesmen, particularly in

the core ‘Charlemagne’ states of France and Germany, oppose Turkish membership on grounds that are clearly to do with Europe’s ancient habit of self-definition as something that, ultimately, is not Muslim. On this view, Europe may be economically inclusive, and passionately liberal and libertarian, but ultimately, to be itself, it must be exclusive of outsiders, and of Muslims above all. The old Crusading cry of ‘*Chrétiens ont droit et païens ont tort*’ has simply been modified by replacing the Christians with gender activists, usurious bankers, and human rights commissioners. In 2004 Frits Bolkestein, EU internal market commissioner, was voicing a very widespread sentiment when he cried that if Turkey joined the EU, ‘the liberation of Vienna [from an Ottoman siege] in 1683 would have been in vain’.⁸ The UK’s 2016 Brexit convulsion was energized by claims that Turkey would join the EU, prompting fears that a tsunami of migrants would overwhelm British health and social services.⁹

It is not impossible that Turkey will be admitted, perhaps after two or more decades. Yet the current proposals envisage Turkey’s exclusion from the Amsterdam Treaty in respect of the country’s Muslim population. Citizens of historically Christian EU countries will be able to live in Turkey, but to allow Turks to emigrate freely to Europe would be too much for electorates to contemplate. This, currently, seems to be the kind of compromise that Ankara will be compelled to accept: again, Ishmael accepts Isaac, but not *vice versa*. Other arrangements with Muslim nations such as Albania, Bosnia, and perhaps Azerbaijan, may well impose the same condition. A

Europe increasingly at ease with minaret and *niqāb* bans, and which has not forgotten its ancient and deepest definition as non-Saracenic, is very apt to be comfortable with structural discrimination on this scale.

Having thus charted our odd situation, let us deal with the question. To be Europeans, must we be liberals? Does liberal Europe's implicit insistence when drawing its outer borders on the partial or total exclusion of Islam have implications for internal definitions of belonging? If we inspect the bland Euro banknotes, the product of extended and somewhat desperate searches in the 1990s for a shared European symbol, we find that the key image that was finally agreed is the outline of the continent itself, which blurs into nothingness wherever it reaches places inhabited by Muslims. The vague bridge drawings were inspired by 'seven ages' of European culture and design, but naturally there was no risk of annoying real Europeans with any trace of a Moorish arch to recall the 'first Renaissance' in Cordoba. For Brussels officialdom there is implicitly no more appropriate symbol of Europe than one which indicates non-Muslimness. What, therefore, should a European Muslim think of himself or herself when using this currency? Does a conscious exclusion at the frontiers on religious grounds have implications for internal solidarity and belonging? Must liberal Europe, to be ironically faithful to its liberal beliefs, create a subtle internal firewall against Muslim converts and migrants and their bafflingly religious progeny?

For all the brave talk of European unity, the reassuring reality on the ground is that there is no consensus at all. The French model, grounded in Enlightenment anticlericalism, claims a fierce exclusion of religious affiliation of any kind from its concept of belonging. This does not concern Islam alone, but was made clear more than a century ago in the Republic's response to the *Syllabus of Errors*: a law was passed preventing priests from mentioning the papal document from the pulpits. Thus was a process established whereby secularity could win important victories over freedom of speech.¹⁰ And Catholicism, though the victim of a deep anticlericalism, was at least seen as indigenous. In the republic's more recent travails with Islam, a empathy with Maronites, the dirty war in Algeria and a general official disdain for religion have made the exclusion of Muslimness in the name of Republican laicity particularly natural and emphatic, and Jim Wolfreys' book *Republic of Islamophobia* offers an impeccable and troubling study of this ideology.¹¹ Hence the constant susurrations of French media rage against Muslim difference, and the broad-based consensus among liberals that women who wear the *niqāb*, or Parisian Muslims caught praying together in public places, should be detained by the police.

The United Kingdom is generally more reserved in its willingness to irk and coerce its minorities, and Boris Johnson, on assuming the mayorship of London, retreated from his earlier pungent discoursing on Islam and found it politic to recall that his Turkish great-grandfather had memorised the entire Qur'an. But the recent British Ofsted assessment of the poor quality of 'citizenship'

training in faith-based secondary schools may indicate the shape of things to come. Even without the troublesome Muslims, Ofsted confronts a hard uphill struggle. 'Citizenship' has formed part of the National Curriculum only since 2001, and Ofsted confirms that instruction in this rather nebulous subject has been extremely patchy across the board; in fact, it is said to be the worst-taught subject in the nation's schools.¹² So bad is the situation that one in ten pupils in Britain apparently do not even know what citizenship classes are, even though they have attended them. Few engage actively with the liberal issues and body beliefs raised in citizenship training. The reason seems to be the general apathy towards politics and ideology current among many teenagers, the result, perhaps, of the escapist content of commercial youth entertainment, together with larger public perceptions that old definitions of sovereignty and national selfhood are being inexorably eroded by globalisation and the Internet. Only sixty-four percent of British pupils identify themselves as 'British', and even fewer as 'European'. Reflecting the crisis in this subject area a revised curriculum was promulgated in 2014; however the problems remain.

With his basilisk gaze directed evidently at the Muslim schools, where citizenship training is allegedly also in disarray, the Chief Inspector of Schools says: 'We must not allow recognition of diversity to become apathy in the face of any challenge to our coherence as a nation. We must be intolerant of intolerance.'¹³ By coherence here is meant doctrinal uniformity, or what the Chinese leadership calls 'harmonization', the suggestion being that failure to

convert to the elite's current raft of social beliefs, and to adhere to beliefs current, say, thirty years ago, is a sort of treason. The older British constitutional principle, dating back at least as far as John Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration*, which held that the state's certainties should not be imposed on the population, which should be allowed the right of difference and dissent, has been overruled in a quite remarkable and very un-British way.

Here the official finger seems unconsciously to rest on the Achilles heel of secular liberal ethics. If we must be intolerant of intolerance, then can liberalism tolerate anything other than itself? Gilis observes that the rhetoric of integration rests on a claim of 'openness to the Other', yet liberalism 'has never been able or wished to integrate with anything which did not resemble itself.'¹⁴ If Europe defines citizenship in terms of adherence to a set moral template, with all else defined as intolerable, how can Europe ever positively experience real difference, which more often than not is bound up with good (or bad) religion? Lévi-Strauss includes in his list of factors which ensure the entropy of the secular West a theory of 'coalition of cultures': globalisation confiscates the energising presence of the substantively different Other.¹⁵ Herbert Marcuse takes a similar view of the vitally galvanic role of minorities in consumer society. However Ishmael has not been welcomed as such an Other, but is instructed constantly to adopt the social beliefs of the dominant mass culture; and this seems to be the real meaning of 'integration.'

Of particular concern to British Muslims has been the government insistence that the 'values' of citizenship are simply to be handed down by the state rather than justified in universally-accessible rational terms. The National Curriculum for citizenship requires that as well as learning about the British constitutional, legal and economic system, pupils must be invited to embrace a certain set of social beliefs, but at no point are they to be exposed to the reasons for professing those beliefs.¹⁶ There is an Association for Citizenship Teaching, but again this seems to regard the social beliefs to be inculcated as so self-evident as not to require any analysis. Pupils are 'partners', but only in the shared compulsory journey towards entirely unexamined conclusions.¹⁷

Muslims are not the only religionists to fall victim to this coercive-liberal definition of European authenticity. A memorably iconic test was applied in 2004 when the Italian jurist Rocco Buttiglione was forced from his candidacy to be a European commissioner when it emerged that he supported the Vatican's teachings on homosexuality. Despite his insistence that his belief in the sinfulness of homosexual practice would not affect the decisions he took in public life, the tight consensus of European officialdom obliged him to resign. The Italian Justice Minister, Roberto Castelli, objected in a futile way, by calling the ban 'a decision which reveals the true face of Europe, a face which we do not like. It is fundamentalist, and this is entirely wrong.' But his suggestion that an intolerant secular religion was now becoming a European

orthodoxy elicited only frowns. Liberalism, in the new Europe, increasingly seems only to be itself if it is intolerant of dissent.¹⁸

In the UK, a series of laws including the 2010 Equality Act have underlined the state's growing assurance in continuing to tolerate private religious belief while regulating some forms of religious expression where these are deemed to clash, for instance, with the 'protected category' of sexual orientation. Following the 2009 case of a Christian marriage registrar in Islington who was refused exemption from performing same-sex civil partnership registrations, and who consequently lost her job, it became clear that liberal legal culture, in its current stage of evolution, establishes

the willingness of courts to prefer sexual-orientation equality as a state aim even if this interferes with religious freedom. If a religious individual or association cannot, in good conscience, provide the public service without sexual-orientation discrimination then the solution is that they should withdraw from the public activity.¹⁹

There is no reason to suppose that the same 'othering' and hence 'de-Europeanising' of ethically-dissident religious adherents will not be applied to ensure that the conservatively religious, and others who hold traditional social beliefs, will be excluded from serving not only as marriage registrars, but as teachers, diplomats, and practitioners of other vocations in which the expression of the state's body beliefs is required as a contractual obligation. The Western polity has now found a comprehensive doctrine again,

which progressively excludes conservatives and other dissidents from the tolerated ‘overlapping consensus’, thanks to what Guénon sees as the ‘equalitarian passion for uniformity.’²⁰ The same culture of censorship and exclusion is growing in multinational corporations also.²¹ Few liberal theorists have properly considered the longer-term implications of such an exclusion for social cohesion and for the public perception of already-disliked faith communities; or if they have, they have not shared their thoughts.²²

Despite an ongoing awareness of an older history of ecclesial chauvinism and the alarming spectacle of church collaboration during the Bosnian *klaonica*, Muslims have watched with concern this striking proof of how categorically Europe has walked away from its traditional Christian moral compass and identity. It is concerning that European citizenship today is becoming a matter of conformity to sacrosanct social beliefs (in the Buttiglione case the historically very un-Christian notion that conscientious non-acceptance of homosexual practice is so wicked that those who hold such beliefs must be excluded from public office). As Buttiglione himself remarked, ‘The new soft totalitarianism which is advancing wants to be a state religion. It is an atheistic, nihilistic religion, but it is a religion that is obligatory for all.’

It is possible that this enforcement of ‘shared’ social beliefs through legislation, social engineering in schools and a convergent media culture will become more intense, despite its evident clash with principles of freedom of conscience. In 2009, Nick Clegg (later the British Deputy Prime Minister) said that children attending faith

schools must be taught that alternative sexualities are ‘normal and harmless’. Special lessons, he opined, should be required of such schools to encourage this belief.²³ Many will recognise in this pattern a reversion to historic European norms, alien to Islam, of imposing a uniform doctrinal system on the king’s subjects: *cuius regio, eius religio*. Liberalism of a particular socially-prescriptive kind seems to be filling the void left by religion, and Europe being the historic land of the divine right of kings, creed here has often been more closely bound up with politics than it was in traditional Muslim polities. In this case, the critique of a particular expression of *eros* now functions as a blasphemy, or, in the argot of campus codes, a ‘speech violation’. Other blasphemies include, for instance, the idea that men and women are suited to different tasks, that the death penalty is a just punishment for murder, that parents have the right to use corporal punishment to discipline their children, and that unbelievers are less pleasing to God than believers. The list is quite a long one, and it seems to be growing. George Steiner’s well-known *Nostalgia for the Absolute*, in which he proposes that Europe’s major modernist ideologies (Freudianism, Marxism, Nazism) functioned as ersatz religions to fill the space vacated by Christianity, now needs to add the twenty-first century system of social and body beliefs to its catalogue of new secular faiths.²⁴

Society abhors a belief-vacuum. After the Second World War, Europe and America went very different ways regarding truth: Europe lapsed into what Heidegger called *gelassenheit*, just letting things be, a mood which eased the otherwise outrageous collapse

into postmodernism. America, whose heartland did not suffer Allied area bombing or Nazi death camps, remained confident about God and family values, allowing a continuing religious alternative to the secular monoculture and an ongoing tolerance of variant social beliefs. But as the European continent increasingly defines itself not as a traumatised convalescent from war but as a potentially mighty unit, it needs shared religious or para-religious beliefs. Like America it tends to fix on Islam as its significant Other, but while America launches religiously-driven foreign wars,²⁵ Europe is preoccupied with *internal* cohesion, framing laws that in the United States would be strange: to shut the *ḥijāb* out of sight, to ban minarets, to bully or arrest those who pray on the streets, to criminalise the religious slaughter of animals, and to penalise in general the public expression or teaching of conservative morality and faith. In other words, the federal and cross-racial unity which in America is bought by external wars against Muslim opponents is possible in a less imperial Europe only by putting Muslims at the centre of an *internal* war of values. Liberal beliefs are often referenced very explicitly as a means of defending Europe's purity from Islam: in 2019, Hungary's Victor Orbán was commended by visiting Myanmar premier and 'Asia's best-known feminist' Aung San Suu Kyi for his country's policy of opposing Muslim immigration.²⁶

The 2020 Coronacrisis is likely to increase Europe's sense of unease over demographics and difference, as nations retreat into themselves and conspiracy theories bloom. If Léon de Pas' 1997 'Europa and the Bull' statue, which stands outside the European

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