

A EUROPEAN RESPONSE TO 'RADICALIZATION OR ASSIMILATION?'

By Bert de Ruiter

Bert works with OM as Champion of Muslim Ministries in Europe. Bert has an MA in World Evangelization and a D.Min in Muslim-Christian Relations. During the past 25 years Bert has been ministering in almost 50 countries around the world to help Christians share their lives with Muslims. Bert and his wife Jenny live in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, and have two children and one grandchild.

In this interesting article, Martin encourages the establishment of authentically multicultural Christian communities to provide a viable entryway into the host culture in the West. He finds the need for such multicultural communities because Muslims in North America and Europe are often marginalized. I fully agree with his recommendation and believe that the Church of Jesus Christ should reflect the love and grace of its Head, Jesus Christ, in the way they speak of and relate to their Muslim neighbors.

In comparing the situation of Muslims in Europe with those in North America, the author might be right in stating that Muslims in Europe are more marginalized than their counterparts in North America and therefore more vulnerable to being recruited by Islamic fundamentalists. I am not familiar with the situation of Islam in North America, so I will not comment on this. But I am familiar with Islam in Europe, having taught in several European countries and having studied Islam in Europe for the past fifteen years.

I do not deny that in Europe we find extreme Islamists who have come to Europe to use the freedom here to fight against what they see as violations of the Islamic truth.¹ Some believe they can't participate in Western societies and seek to establish a *Khalifat* in Europe.² Although they are fringe groups at the moment, it is true that the lack of integration of Muslims has the potential of fostering social and political instability and conflict.³ Failure to help Muslims integrate into society leads to alienated and marginalized Muslims who are vulnerable to extreme Islamists. Leiken states that 'the social malaise felt by Muslims in the suburbs of major cities can turn into extremism and terrorism.'⁴

But it is important to distinguish between radical Islamists⁵ and conservative Muslims, because conservative Muslims interpret the Qur'an conservatively without becoming jihadi warriors.⁶ One example of this last group is the Muslim Brothers who are an activist movement with an enlightened conservatism and a devoutly religious outlook that continues to attract young educated Muslims. Jocelyne Cesari points out that this movement 'wants to reconcile the exigencies of Islam with secular life without losing their soul.'⁷

Also, it is important to realize that we are not the only ones that are concerned about radical Islamists. Muslims share our concern. Several of my Muslim friends have pointed out that the victims of Islamic terrorism are often other Muslims. Recently, two Muslim friends wanted to meet with me. One of them is a director, and the other is a board member of an Islamic broadcasting company that airs programs on national radio and television in the Netherlands. They expressed their concern about the attempt of radical Muslim to infiltrate their organization and use it as a medium to broadcast their radical views. They asked whether I could use some of my contacts in the government to point them to the activities of these extremists and prevent them from operating in our country.

Tariq Ramadan believes that Europe is currently living through a silent revolution in Muslim communities in the West in which more and more young people and intellectuals are actively looking for a way to live in harmony with their faith while participating in the societies that are their societies, whether they like it or not.

In reading Martin's article, I found a lot that is valuable, but I found it lacking in balance. From the outset it puts the spotlight on the dark spot of radical Islam, a small minority of the 50 million Muslims in Europe. In doing this, Dale appears to join the many Evangelicals who, when talking or writing about Islam, often look for the dark spots and seem to ignore the bright spots. Dale refers to a rising discontent and marginalization of Muslims in Europe, but ignores the many indications that Islam is also establishing itself in the democratic and secularized context of Europe. Tariq Ramadan believes that Europe is currently living through a silent revolution in Muslim communities in the West in which more and more young people and intellectuals are actively looking for a way to live in harmony with their faith while participating in the societies that are their societies, whether they like it or not.⁸

The fact that Islam is beginning to adapt to the European context can particularly be noticed in: (1) the emergence of Muslim leaders who indicate their acceptance of European norms and institutions by engaging in civic and political life; (2) democratization of religious authority; (3) changes in describing Islam's status as a minority culture; (4) a desire for gender equality, and (5) changes in interpreting the meaning of shari'a. Cesari also mentions other encouraging signs: the growth of interfaith dialogue, the concept of democracy, the status of the apostate and the application of human rights.⁹

With the author, I hope that the Christian churches both in North America and in Europe would be welcoming communities, where Muslims find acceptance and love, and through this the author of salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ. but if we want to be taken seriously as a channel of God's love, we should begin to learn to see Muslims as they see themselves, to identify with their struggles and concerns, their hopes and dreams. As John Chrysostom, the Archbishop of Constantinople in the 4th century said: 'People who love interpret the facts about the one they love much more accurately than those who do not love. Because our eyes have seen badly we have only noticed the darker aspects.'

- 1 Robert Leiken, 'Europe's Angry Muslims,' *Foreign Affairs* 84, no. 4 (July/August 2005). Leiken warns of first-generation jihadists who have migrated to Europe expressly to carry out jihad. He describes them as aliens, typically asylum seekers or students, who gained refuge in liberal Europe from crackdowns against Islamists in the Middle East. Among them are radical imams, often on stipends from Saudi Arabia, who open their mosques to terrorist recruiters and serve as messengers for or spiritual fathers to jihadist networks.
- 2 Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 24-27. Ramadan discusses six trends of thought within Islam and he admits that some of these streams cannot conceive of participating in Western societies (e.g. the scholastic traditionalism of the *Taliban* and *Tabligh- I Jamaat*) or refuse any kind of involvement in a space that is considered non-Islamic (e.g. *Salafi Literalism*). Others, like political literalist *salafism*, which in Europe is found among the *Hizb al-Tabrir* and *Al-Mubajirun* wed a literal reading of the Texts with a political connotation concerning the management of power, the caliphate, authority and law. He also points out that *Salafi* reformist thought, that adopts a reading of the sources that is based on the purpose and intentions of the law and jurisprudence, is very widespread in the West.
- 3 Robert J. Pauly, *Islam in Europe: Integration or Marginalization?* Pauly gives three examples in which such conflicts are manifested in contemporary Western Europe: a) the above-average crime rates in urban districts in which Islamic communities are situated; b) the confrontations between younger generations of Muslims and the police that periodically escalate into large-scale riots; c) the rising support for far-right political parties.
- 4 Leiken, 'Europe's Angry Muslims'
- 5 Jytte Klausen finds that the new radical Islamist groups combine a global utopianism with a paranoid conception of power. See Klausen, *The Islamic Challenge: politics and religion in Western Europe*, 46.
- 6 Klausen suggests that these people should be described as neo-orthodox. Klausen, 45.
- 7 Jocelyne Cesari, *When Islam and Democracy meet*, 143.
- 8 Ramadan, *Western Muslims*, 9. Ramadan encourages Western Muslims to go back to their sources and distinguish between what in their religion is unchangeable (*thabit*) from what is subject to change (*mutaghay-yir*).
- 9 Cesari, *When Islam and Democracy meet*, chapter 9.