Islamic Extremism and Religious Freedom

With the escalation of terrorism running rampant across the West, Britain suffered its third major attack in the past three months, Bastille recuperating from the eighty-six massacred, Paris, Normandy, Stockholm, Brussels and Berlin all under surveillance from terror attacks and civil unrest – just to name a few – the atrocities committed by such extremism seem to be snowballing by the day. It is easy for us to forget what Jesus Christ said when attacked: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you?" (NKJ Matthew 5:43-46) Summarized on the cross, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (NKJ Luke 23:34). I'm sure at times we wish that claim were circumstantial at best, yet it remains an important reminder that there is something greater than this world, and the actions we take here affect there (John 18:36). This does not suggest however we wait around and twiddle our thumbs. Far from it! It means given the situation at large, act in the way that will substantiate the greater testimony to the unbeliever – since it is their soul at stake, and not the believer – this is the Great Commission after all!

In all openness, my heart goes out to any and all the victims of these radical acts of violence. It's rather inconceivable to lose someone you care for in such a way. It does however bring to mind having a full family of parents, cousins, children, siblings and friends is something we take for granted in Western society. And more than just being alive, I mean *living freely*. Given that this is a blog and a sensitive topic, I lack the space to fully and sufficiently render this discussion what it respectively deserves, so I suppose a portion will have to due. There are only two directions I intend to pursue: 1) the qualifications for terrorism compared to other forms of severe violence and 2) what are the alleged and potential solutions for extremism offered by the State.

What we typically classify as terrorism are normal risks and conditions many people face over the world everyday, albeit by a different method. What is socially ordinary and state mandated in other societies is what takes us by surprise. For instance, Christianity is not only forbidden in over 50 countries[1], the seemingly genocidal conditions set by Islamic nation-states and Communist regimes against Christianity are staggering, approximately 215 million Christians experience high, very high, or extreme persecution every year and thousands of those Christians are murdered for refusing to renounce their faith. Open Doors documents "Christians throughout the world continue to risk imprisonment, loss of home and assets, torture, beheadings, rape and even death as a result of their faith." Islamic extremism continues to be the dominant force of global persecution, and North Korea remains the most dangerous place to be a Christian for fourteen straight years. Terrorism, in a sense, is the rest of the world coming to us. I'm not playing the "we're so persecuted card" in light of the horrific acts against humanity, nor am I claiming Christians are the most victimized, I'm simply making a statement[2]. Despite how the crime was

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[1] Christianity Today. Jeremy Weber, 'Worst Year Yet': The Top 50 Countries Where It's Hardest to Be a Christian – Islamic extremism now has a rival, according to 2017 World Watch List. January 11, 2017 9:00 AM. Infographics

[2] The Guardian. Kate Lyons and Garry Blight, Where in the world is the worst place to be a Christian? Monday 27 July 2015 14.24 BST. Persecution of Christians has increased dramatically in parts of the world. Here we list the top 25 most anti-Christian countries. Infographics provided by Open Doors. https://www.theguardian.com/world/ng-interactive/2015/jul/27/where-in-the-world-is-it-worst-place-to-be-a-christian

committed, what is the primary difference between terrorism in the West and Christians slaughtered for their faith in the East? Beyond home turf, citizenship and profit margins[3], when it comes to defining murder you'd be hard-pressed to split a hair!

But that is the problem isn't it? – We split hairs. Especially when the crime committed doesn't affect us. We allow superficial things like 'where they're from' and 'how much will that cost' get in the way of our conscience daily, despite such an attitude being explicitly and routinely countered in the Scriptures. The words of the apostle Paul come to mind, "Remember the prisoners as if chained with them—those who are mistreated—since you yourselves are in the body also." (NKJ Hebrews 13:3) Yet many, if not most, lie and wait as if the atrocities elsewhere are 'their' problem and that their government ought to figure it out for themselves. It is our moral duty as followers of Jesus Christ not to fall into Statist ways of thinking! The State does not create right from wrong – it just states it! And it can be wrong.

In lieu of the recent terror attacks in London and Manchester, U.K. Prime Minister Theresa May finally said, "enough is enough" — and tougher measures are needed, "They are bound together by the single evil ideology of Islamist extremism that preaches hatred, sows division, and promotes sectarianism. It is an ideology that claims our Western values and freedom, democracy and human rights are incompatible with the religion of Islam," she continues, "Defeating this ideology is one of the great challenges of our time, but it cannot be defeated by military intervention alone. It will not be defeated through the maintenance of a permanent defensive counter terrorism operation, however skillful its leaders and practitioners. It will *only* be defeated when we turn people's minds away from this violence and make them understand that our values, *pluralistic British values*, are superior to anything offered by the preachers and supporters of hate"[4]

I mention this carefully, not to highlight Islamophobia or the like, but instead to isolate May's use of language about the State taking action. It goes without saying, as a leading political figure, that addressing the nation about matters of security is her duty, but May pedestals "pluralistic British [state] values" as above all else.

It is my opinion that with the severe criminal acts and vehement corruptions caused by one religion comes the reckoning of all religion, and more conceivably the Abrahamic religions. It is reasonable, nay foreseeable, that there will come a point when the State will pick and choose which religion is legal and which religion is prohibited in the name of security, peace and progress. Of course, some people may just want a solution for radical Islam now, but given that not all Muslims commit these crimes of zealotry, why would the State ban 'radical' Islam since violence is prohibited already? If a ban were to occur, there seems to be four potential actions the State may take into affect to counteract Islamic extremism: 1) prohibit Islam as a whole, 2) prohibit all three Abrahamic religions, 3) prohibit all religion, or 4) prohibit all religion except for one state-religion.

Perhaps that is too bold of a claim, why would one kind of assault, heralded as virtuous by one religion, affect another if not all religious freedom? There are several reasons that quickly

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[3] Major news media coverage typically broadcasts or reports on content that is going to sell or turn a profit, which means those topics are the most relatable to the greater sum of target viewership using a how-does-this-affect-me business model. The more people watch, the more money earned – simple. But the viewer must find some sort of relatable point of reference to the subject at large because just being a human isn't enough. If the subject is from somewhere else it can reduce numbers and thus income. If you're not of the same society type, you're just a detail.

[4] Emphasis added. "'Enough is enough': Theresa May says tougher measures needed to clamp down on Islamic extremism" National Post, Bloomberg News and The Associated Press. June 4, 6:04 PM ET 2017

come to mind: a) the secular State views all religion as equal concepts; b) the history of world religions all showcase intimacy with a state and culture and as a result contain prior "criminal" history; c) there has never been a documented secular age free from religion and its affects on culture (even the twentieth century atheistic regimes of Hitler, Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot and so on are often labeled in secular scholarship as religiously motivated from peripheral belief – though I personally do not believe a religion free world is possible); d) Abrahamic religions seem to elicit the most resistance to state authority given that all three prioritize God over government, howbeit in different contexts and varying magnitudes.

Again, how would the State resolve extremism? Keep in mind; the State lumps all religion under one roof as equally make-believe, but there are more people who believe in 'something beyond' than not. So how to handle it? It would most certainly cause mayhem! After all, humanity has never experienced a day without it, and it doesn't seem like it's going anywhere anytime soon. Certainly the measures taken by the State would need to scratch that itch or treat the symptom as it were. In short, religion would need to be supplemented and regulated, and therefore universal in its meaning and socio-moral codes by order of the State. More bluntly put, the State would choose a sole religious outlet or they would make one up.

If the State were to ban all religion equally, there would need to be a middle course solution as a socially counteractive measure to relegate violence in its place, perhaps by merging the most favorable and least offensive aspects of all the major religions together, and then offer the new one world religion as the solution to the violence. By deduction, the Abrahamic religions would add the most resistance to such an ideological action, 'standing in the way of peace and progress', and would be labeled radicals, fanatics, zealots, extremists, terrorists and so on. What is now called "Islamophobia" would become "Religiophobia".

Beyond this being an exercise of thought, I say all of this for one reason: Despite the fact terrorism is occurring more frequently in the West, it happens everywhere to more a extreme extent, and the State can equally terrorize our faith as Christians even though we so often rely on the State to do our work for us. Extremism is the symptom of a deeper issue. There can come a time when the State will claim they can predict how extremist tendencies develop and take preventative actions.

Lest we forget that before Abraham was Adam and his son Cain, a man unadulterated by political beliefs and personalized religion, and yet he most notably was still corrupt. In essence, the point is clear: We are all human and like everyone else we are bound by sin – the great catalyst of corruption. Certain beliefs will amplify specific proclivities and vice versa, and some people fortunately have a stronger resistance to act upon their violent proclivities and others not so much. So the problem is not just belief, it's what beliefs we permit to hold the most value; we as Christians are called to offer the solution for that sin-belief problem. Ultimately, and in all honesty, there is only one-way to do it: By giving a good testimony to exemplify the reality of the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ through you.

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