

## A New Christian Fundamentalism?

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**Abstract:** *One of the most used terms in the last decade is "fundamentalism", permanently associated with Islamic religion and terrorism. Encyclopedia Britannica defines fundamentalism as a type of militant-conservative religious movement, characterized by promoting strict conformation to the holy gospel. Initially used exclusively connected to American protestants who, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century insisted over Bible's infallibility, as a reaction to theological modernism, which was aiming to reshape traditional Christian beliefs in order to accept the new facts that social and natural sciences had discover, especially the evolutionist theory, the term "fundamentalism" was mostly used starting the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, referring to a large variety of religious movements.*

**Key-words:** *fundamentalism, religion, Christianity*

In the United States, Christian fundamentalism is an ongoing movement, but the goals are the same: promoting the biblical vision over Creation and the rejection of evolutionism. The movement is so powerful that in some states, such as Louisiana, there are laws which allow school boards to approve teaching lessons with the purpose of criticizing scientific theories like evolutionism or global warming. But in USA, Christian fundamentalism never developed against other confessions.

September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001 represented, no doubt, an important turn in political history of the post-war world and in inter-confessional relations. It was the extremely painful step that marked the end of a world, that of military and political confrontation between two poles of power, east and west, and the beginning of a new era, which officially stated the new opponent of the democratic world: terrorism. It took the World Trade Center attack to make a lot of people realize that the cold war was over and that the number one enemy is common to the old opponents.

Terrorism was defined in many ways, but vital, through the definition itself, is the fact that it appeals to fear, to paralyzing crowds and people. Terrorists do not think to a certain purpose, to make as much victims as possible, there only goal is that their acts to be famous. And media, many times, do their game and the citizen stars to feel afraid to leave his home, to frequent crowd places, terrorists' favorite target. An individual terrorist attack will not be treated at a large scale by the press. It is a different situation when a crowd is involved. And crowd, in desperate situation, are paralyzed and lose their stability.

Certainly, terrorists (and we will refer, from now on, to Islamic groups, although it is necessary to mention that not all Arabians are terrorists, as not all terrorists are Arabians, and the incidents between protestants and Catholics in Ulster are a powerful example) never thought before executing their targets or maybe they were not interested in a very important detail: in states where attacks happened: USA, France, Spain, Great Britain, live large communities of Muslims. Who, from obvious reasons, were not very excited by their coreligionists' acts? After the World Trade Center attacks, there was very hard for Muslims in USA to explain their position concerning the tragic event: they did not approve what happened. A multicultural society begins a syncretic process, which leads to the appearance of tolerance. The "third culture" is born, the ideal solution to living together and the American society realized the need of this compromise decades ago, example followed by other western countries. The difference between multiculturalism and the third culture must be done. Multiculturalism has a bi-dimensional vision (two spheres interact, but they are still different) based on bringing together the culture of the two parts and on a better knowing between the members of a mutual territory. This kind of culture is meat in France, where the creation of a third culture was not necessary or forced. The third culture

has a tri-dimensional vision – the first two give birth to the third one, which is a new creation, different and able to assimilate parents' culture. It appears only if certain goals are mutual, which change in time, and if damaged or touched – the third culture can disappear, if new paradigms do not interfere.

This is the reason why it took official Muslim leaders from America to firmly state their position against terrorism. But not all Americans were convinced by USA Muslims' good intentions. Press presented few cases of Muslim shops vandalized, often by breaking the windows. It is important to mention that the authors were slightly influenced by radical Christian organizations. Although produced in small number, these attacks are symptomatic for a society considered to be, at least in the last decades, extremely tolerant and opened to any confession.

The continuation of terrorist attacks in Europe, the number of victims in Madrid and suburbia, the London subway attacks, the violent threats in other European capitals, trap-mail started to influence the degree of tolerance of a lot of Europeans. For decades, the western world, seeking for development and owning a great work market, based on cheap force work from poor countries. France and Great Britain took advantage of citizens from ex-colonies from Africa and Asia, now independent states, but with a low level of living. In time, economic crises and the rise of unemployment made the governments of those states to reconsider the position over the politics of immigration. Sociologists and anthropologists named the phenomena "the colonies doom". Many Africans and Asians invaded the metropolis, obtained citizenship, made families, promoted a high rate of birth and the demography started to present terrifying situations for pure blooded Europeans. A study made in France over the birth rate proved that this is highly superior in what concerns the black people or those came from magrebian countries, while white population has a low indicator, leading to the possibility that in 2035, France not to be a catholic white majority country any more. Although the awaiting horizon is large, Great Britain confronts with the same problem, generated by the flux of black people and the flux of Indians, Pakistanis or Asians, who invaded isle's cities.

Not few were those who predicted a dark future, marked by racial and confessional disputes between groups that still cohabite in these countries. This situation was nor obvious until now. Extremist organizations were not characterized by acts of racial violence until now. A special case is Germany, where neo-fascists, burn headed king, act against immigrants, registering a great rivalry with a Turkish community, which is very numerous (millions).

Terrorist attacks begun an explosion of indignation between West Europe citizens. Many believe now that immigrants and citizens of other confession, especially Muslims, do not appreciate the tolerant system in adoptive countries. The religious integration, the conflicts born due to imams' intolerance, the new Jihad, launched by religious leaders of integration organizations against Jewish people created, instinctively, a new type of Christian fundamentalism, first discovered inside each person. Europeans raise their voice against everything that menaces their harmony and comfort. Due to the activity of media, which made Osama Bin Laden an evil genius, the word refers now to all Muslims, especially after people found out that most terrorist are Islamic, raised and educated in the good tradition of western tolerance and democracy.

Now, Western Europe started to reject, instinctively, the values of Muslim civilization. We will analyze some situation, without pursuing a chronological line, which is less important. The vital information is that the tolerant spirit, the multiculturalism that existed in Western Europe is about to disappear and the reason is given by this terrorist attacks, which shook the grounds of western citizens' careless lives.

Muslim women's traditional vale, burka, generated great disputes in states like Belgium, France and Italy. In French Canada there is a big pressure over forbidding the outfit in public places. Great Britain is not an exception. The statesman Hollobone initiated a law that makes illegal covering the face in public. *It's like walking with paper bags on your face* said Hollobone to Daily Mail. The deputy took the project to the Parliament, in order to be debated. Criticized by colleagues, the initiator said that all his opponents are misinformed. In an interview for "The Independent", Hollobone mentioned that if he would meet a woman who wears the vale, he would ask her to take it off - *If she would refuse it and she can see my face and I cannot, then I will consider that she is not the one she says she is. God gave us faces so that we can express ourselves. Many consider that it has to be done something with the vale, but do not speak about it, they are afraid to be considered racists. The British way of life is about walking on the street, smiling to the people, salute them, no matter if you know them or not.*

Muslims are accused by the English Parliament that they refuse to integrate. Statesmen say that it is impossible to interact if your face is covered and that the vale it is a sign that Muslims do not want to be a part of the society.

Shaistei Gohir, representing Muslim Women Association agreed that wearing the vale has negative effects over the integration in community, but that most Muslims do not consider burka a religious obligation. *There are over one million Muslim women in Great Britain and only ten thousands wear the vale. Forbidding the vale will not help those women integrate. It will represent only another reason for extremists to start to fight* - she explained.

Manager of the "Stop violence against women" campaign, belonging to Amnesty International in Great Britain, Heather Harvey, had a similar opinion. "For those women who are forced to wear burka, the situation will only get worse. They will be blamed if leave the house or, most likely, they will not be allowed to get out on the street."

British secretary of Immigration, Damien Green, declared that a measure like that is slightly possible, because British society *is a tolerant one, which practices mutual respect*. The statesman also said that it is not acceptable that the Parliament dictates people how to dress in public, adding that, unlike France, where The National Assemblée adopted a law initiative in this case, United Kingdom it is not a "secular aggressive" state. Two other members of the Government, Caroline Spelman, Secretary of the Environment, and Sayeeda Warsi, president of the David Cameron's Conservative Party, first Muslim female Secretary of the United Kingdom, have similar positions.

The vale that arose so many controversies in Europe can cover the entire face (burka) or it may let the eyes uncovered (niqab). The regular Muslim vale (hijab) covers only the hair of the one that wears it.

It Great Britain is likely to see female teachers or female doctors who wear the Islamic vale (but not burka or niqab). It is true that sociological studies show that two thirds of those questioned approve forbidding the cover of the face in public, but it is also true that, similarly, although death punishment is down for 45 years, the same studies reveal constantly the majority's approval for the capital sentence.

Those in favor of forbidding the vale mention that this could be a way of protecting from terrorist danger, but official voices say that it is compulsory to show your face when checking driver license's, passport photos or when crossing the border. Among people who sustain the law which forbids wearing the Islamic vale in public – which would affect only a minority of Muslim women (3 percents of British population it is estimated to be formed by Muslims), there are few Moderate Muslims leaders who state that this piece of wardrobe has no Muslim character, but a tribal one, belonging to countries like South Arabia or Afghanistan.

First country that took out the law wearing the veil is Belgium, in 2010, after the statesmen from this country voted in unanimity the initiative that forbidden burka. Denis Ducarme, liberal deputy, sustained that a message with a major impact is sent to Islamic people. More precisely, not the Islamic veil is the blame, but the whole veil, which is considered to be an extremist measure. No more, burqa anoles women as individual entity: no face, no nothing. This is important because it states that law is not an attack to Islamic religion itself, but to an extreme way of rethinking woman and limiting her rights. In other words, we talk about two perspectives: the equality between men and women, feature of the western world versus Islamic paradigm regarding women. Phyllis Chesler is an American professor known through the books he wrote: *The death of the feminism*, *The new era of the anti-Semitism* or *Letters to a young feminist*, where she created herself the image of feminist. Phyllis Chesler consider that the integral Islamic veil it is a severe form of social isolation and the limitation of sensorial. More than that, she disqualify the critics of the law: it is not about censuring the right to free expression, but burqa, in fact, it is an intolerant measure, that anoles this right.

But there are voices that sustain that burqa does not violate western people's rights, although they feel insulted and protest against it. Burqa does not stop European women dress as they like. It is a part of a culture and as there are not inferior and superior cultures, superior and inferior religions do not exist either. Is it ethical to limit a practice of a religion because it interacts with a different culture? If you take off the veil out of the law, don't you trespass a right? Forbidding the veil would make women statute better in the Muslim world? Controversies will continue to exist. Every man is free to look for his happiness as long as through his actions does not limit other man's rights. So, someone who chooses to wear burqa what rights would trespass? Would he limit his own freedom? The answer is obvious, the veil that we are speaking about trespasses the Belgian laws.

The French Parliament voted for forbidding the Islamic veil in June 2009. The text of the law does not mention the Islam, the Government stating that only wants to protect women from the obligation of wearing the veil. Burqa is considered an attack to values of the French nation like dignity and equality. In France, less than 2.000 women wear this veil. The law offers a six months training to explain women who wear burqa that they can be arrested or be fined if they will continue to wear it in public. Also, a man who forces a woman to wear the veil can be fined up to 30.000 euros or he can be sentence to prison.

Measures like the ones in France and Belgium were taken in Spanish cities and in Italy a woman was fined because she refused to show her face to the police.

Most Swiss (57,5%) do not want to see minarets risen in their country, result shown after a referendum in November 2009, despite the sociological studies that estimated that such a lack of democracy will not get the support of more than 37 percents of population. ONU reporter for religios freedom, Amsa Jahangir, qualified the Swiss' decision as an obvious discrimination against the Muslim community. The European Council and some European Governments had a similar position. Vatican stated that this was a rough offense to religious freedom that Swiss catholic bishops had not approved.

France had a rough position, first through External Affairs Secretary, Bernard Kouchener, who described Swiss' will as an expression of intolerance. The French Secretary of Immigration said: "We do not have to stigmatize a religion, the Islam". Meanwhile, messages came from Islamic countries were full of irritation. For the great religious leader of Egypt, the referendum "it is not just a touch brought to religious freedom, but an insult to the feeling of Muslim community in Switzerland and everywhere else."

The Swiss Secretary of Justice, Eveline Wildmer – Schlumph, started to excuse her compatriots' decision, stating that the vote was not a referendum against Islam, but one

that aimed for stopping fundamentalist evolutions. Although the Government and the most important Swiss parties worked against the result, it was enough for two right wing parties (UDC and UDF) to convince people. Their explanation was that the result does not restrict the right of practicing the religion for the 400.000 Muslims. The four minarets already raised in Switzerland stay in their place and Muslims have the right to built mosques, but minarets must be forbidden as “an apparent symbol of a political religious demand.”

Swiss’ decision left traces all over Europe. In Holland, PVV leader, Geer Wilders, saluted Swiss’ act, which he considered to be an important step in “stopping the Muslims conquer Europe.” Wilders reopened the controversy, announcing that he will propose a similar referendum in Holland.

In Germany, Wolfgang Bosbach, spokesman of External Affairs Committee in Bundestag, considered as unproductive criticizing Swiss people. The Christian – democrat believes that the fear of Islam exists in Germany, too and it must be taken into serious by statesmen.

The Swiss referendum against building minarets brought back once again the problem of the rising presence of Muslims in Western Europe. In Switzerland there are about 200 mosques and prayer places, situated mostly in factories and abandoned warehouses. Only four of this have a minaret. Stefano Allievi, an Italian sociologist from Padova University made a report about mosques entitled “The conflict over European mosques: problems and political perspectives”. The report starts with a review of different controversies appeared in Europe due to Islamic presence: the Rushdie case in Great Britain, the Mohamed cartoons case in Denmark, the violent acts caused by terrorism, by woman statute in Muslim religion.

Speaking about mosques, Allievi explains that the problem is not about building churches only, but about its visibility in European cities, fact with a great symbolic value. And then is the problem of the adhan, the call to prayer, and the Muslim cemeteries and the right to have reserved space in existent cemeteries. It is a mistake, says the report, to analyze this conflicts only as a result of political intrusion. In reality, continues Allievi, it is about great social and cultural problems.

Historically speaking, the problem concerning Islamic churches is connected to the presence of Muslims workers in Europe, started centuries ago. Initially, explains Allievi, prayer rooms appeared in the arias where they were living and working. At the end of the ’80, there was a progressive spreading of the prayer rooms, based on the rising of immigration. In time, the number multiplied and the concentration of Muslims in local communities rose. In consequence, especially in big Capitals, important Islamic centers were built. This fact was possible due to external financing, came often from Muslim League, an organization under the control of Saudi Arabia. Except big cities, mosques that were built were placed in industrial suburbia, were it was easier to find edifices with diminsions appropriate to the goal or in ethnical neighborhoods.

A part of Allievi’s report contains an analysis regarding the number of mosques in Europe. The author compares the number of mosques with the number of Muslims in Europe. In Western Europe he calculates that live 18 million Muslims and 10.869 mosques, equivalent to one mosque to 1.600 Muslims. This report it is comparable to the situation in many Muslim countries and other religions’ churches. The report excludes dates from Bosnia, where Islam has a long historical presence, and Turkey. The result is that Muslim immigrants’ world, about 16.6 millions person, has 8.701 mosques, which means o mosque for 1.890 Muslims that live in Europe. *This fact may look surprisingly, because many people think Islamic churches are just a few*, notes Allievi. Except that, if compared this number of Muslims that practice effectively their religion, about a third, according to a recent study, the number of Muslims for a mosque reduces significantly.

*That is why, the problem concerning a lack of mosques does not exist, concludes the author.*

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