

THE TRUE BELIEVER

Eric Hoffer, that learned and venerated long-shoreman, self-taught, an observer of people in our society as well as in distant lands put his thoughts together called, "The True Believer" -fresh with ideas about mass movements, leadership impressions, and nature of their 'fanaticism' and persuasion...in 1951. A true belief has to be so overwhelming as to circumvent feelings towards family, religion, and moment. Some who fit the mold: Lenin, Hitler, Stalin, and, of course, Osama bin-Laden. History has allowed us a peek at the trek of these through the trauma, treachery, and terror of their times, and, so often, oblivious to their influence, almost too late.

Recently I re-visited the Afghanistan experience where there appeared to be a rebirth of Islam in defense and attack mode, and their firm belief they had defeated a super-power, then Soviet Union. Arguably, others played a part, the United States for one, but left the spoils and future to Afghan Mujahedin, Pakistan-created Taliban, Saudi(Sunni)influence and wealth, and bin-Laden.

Somehow we missed the significance of a renewed Islamic threat, despite evidence that al-Qaeda fingerprints appeared in US embassy attacks in Africa, the USS Cole in Yemen waters and the vehicle-bombing at the World Trade Center in New York. Tracking on again and off again by the CIA, curtailed by legal questions as well as uncertain intelligence dictated outcomes and all of this was transformed by the devastating attack on 9/11.

Apparently there is remaining ambivalence and misunderstanding of what is the threat? Is it unnamed terrorists, Islam as religion and state, or as they say, are we 'whistling in the dark' unable in finite terms to spell out the enemy? Time is fleeting.

Weigel(Faith, Reason and the War)defines the fight as 'Global Jihad' and dispells the argument of one God for all three religions: Koran speaks of Jesus but as a prophet, not as Son of God. Hezbollah's Hassan Nasrallah says seriously, "Let the entire world hear me. Our hostility to the United States(Great Satan)is absolute, Death to America!" President Ahmadinejad, a Shiite believes in the return of the 12th Imam who will 'cleanse the world of deceit and mischief' while bin-Laden, a Sunni follows the theorists(Taymiyya, Wahhab, al-Banna and Qutb)to establish an all-knowing, wise universal caliphate. Pope Benedict(at Regensburg, 2006)decried the defective concept of God by Jihadists, that all religions must get together and reconcile differences. Open letter from 30 plus Islamic leaders argued to 'get together', and condemned Jihadist murderers but not by name, and failed to address anti-semitism.

Real reconciliation between Judeo-Christians and Islam appears like a pipe-dream, lost in the 'true beliefs' of both sides yet tempered by memory of Jesus whose 'turning the cheek' to enemies always provided an approach. Often beliefs are locked in stone. And with great irony, the fire-brand preacher Reverend Jeremiah Wright provided a litany of beliefs between Black and White Americans citing in sequential speeches(Detroit NAACP)and National Press Club of Washington something he called 'different but not deficient' in his view of experiences, religion, culture, and existence of the races. Here he left the vitriol of his sermons(hate, venom and blame) to reveal why African-Americans had to be different and still do, but they long before white domination had an eloquent history, language and culture superior to the West. A subtle analogy?

One can imagine the shrill and venomous ranting in the Mosques/Madrassas about the same.