

Idolatry Of The Koran



The Rev. David R. Graham
Adwaita Hermitage
June 04, 2005

The irreligious and anti-religious press around the world is making a fuss over treatment of the Koran by United States military personnel guarding Islamist prisoners at

detention/prison facilities controlled by the United States.

As if they really cared, about religion or the Koran! They care about disparaging President Bush and unelecting representatives of the Republican Party.

Nonetheless, an important issue is raised by this fuss. It is the issue of idolatry.

Idolatry is the taking of anything less than ultimate as ultimate. The words "demonic" and "demon possessed" have the same meaning. The demonic is anything finite which claims to be infinite, anything temporal which claims to be eternal, anything spatial which claims to be universal, any thing, any aspect of existence, which claims to be of ultimate concern.

The object of idolatry can be any aspect of existence, from a plant to an idea, from a relationship to an organization, from an experience to a book. Any thing that exists can become the object of idolatry. Any thing less than ultimate can become the basis for a claim of ultimate concern.

Claiming ultimacy for the non-ultimate is a demonic act. It is the definition of the demonic aspect in life. It is epistemological error of the most subtle and therefore egregious kind. And of all errors to which man is prone, it is the most difficult to correct -- because it is the most subtle and therefore the least detectable.

Even the correction of demonic epistemology, of idolatry, is prone to demonic distortion: "I conquered the delusion!" and "I am free of delusion!" are delusional statements.

Idolatry is an egregious epistemological act. Man possesses neither structure nor power sufficient to conquer his proneness to idolatry. Man does not control the conditions of existence. Within a narrow range of potentiality he creates conditions of existence but he neither controls the conditions he creates nor establishes the basis, the ground, of existence itself -- nor systematically anticipates much less exhaustively controls the cascades of unintended consequences attending his creative activity.

Man is not all-knowing. Yet, man participates in existence and in the essence from which existence is created and fulfilled.

Since he participates in existence, man experiences estrangement from his essence and yearns for return to his essence. His embodiment in existence causes man to experience the grandeur and tragedy of the inorganic, organic, psychic, spiritual and historical dimensions of life which occur on account of his activity in freedom and destiny.

Since he participates in the ground of being, in essence, in, from and for which his existence is created and fulfilled, man experiences -- though

only through revelation and salvation -- the Abyssal, the Logistical and the Spiritual nature of his self, his life, including his life alone and in community, and the universe.

It is a peculiar failing of Semitic religions that, for religious discussions, they eschew images of natural objects as idols, yet they make of such things as letters, words, forms and books such idols as to keep masons, carvers, scribes, painters and other artisans busy indefinitely.

And then there is Mohammed Omar, the ex-Taliban gang lord, with pastoral-erotic frescoes at his residence in Kandahar ... and Arab and Zionist "clergy," "scholars" and potentates slipping Wahhabi and Hassidic leashes for orgies in European spas and private residences, primarily with boys.

Hebrew and Arabic alphabetical letters are said to deserve veneration, even to possess innate powers. The Torah and the Koran are said to be unconditional, ultimate words and laws of the unconditioned and ultimate God demanding unconditional obedience by man.

Judaism and Islam as religions are said to be perfect, unique, final and only-valid religions for mankind. The cultural, moral, religious and political forms enunciated by the Torah and the Koran -- as if they are clearly much less consistently enunciated -- are said to be valid for all times and climes and must be obeyed without caveat, impediment or delay. Judaism and Islam, separately, by the partisans of each, are said to be superior to other religions. Indeed, they are said to be the only religions worthy of the name, and therefore deserving preferred status in all aspects of society, guaranteed by law and enforced by civil authority.

Now, it is easy to conclude from these observations that Semitic religions are essentially hegemonistic, unpleasant and dangerous. Christianity, which is an Indo-European, not a Semitic, religion, also could be regarded as hegemonistic, etc., especially when accepting an influence

from Semitic religions, as it does today in both the Protestant and Roman Catholic churches.

The conclusion, however, is inaccurate and therefore unfair. Semitic religion, its finest example being Islam and Islam's least illegitimate representative today being [Sufism](#), opposes idolatry of any object, concept or group and therefore, on principle, of hegemony as a way of organizing life. God is Love, Islam means Peace, Jihad is by and for individuals and groups against demonic impulses in their own hearts and communities. Nothing in this world, nothing existing, can be an object of ultimate concern.

In any religion and *par excellence* in Semitic religion, because of its iconoclasm, idolatry of sacred scripture is a pernicious and recurring disease. The demonic elevation of sacred scripture and especially of a book that is claimed to comprise sacred scripture is a horrendous, terrifying development that all too commonly occurs in every time and clime.

Theologians and religious leaders, responsible for identifying and condemning the idolatry of sacred scripture, and especially of a mere book, are themselves prone to producing just this idolatry.

Taking the non-ultimate for ultimate is a delusion so easily adopted that it can happen in an instant without one's being aware that it has. This power of the demonic, called *maya* in Sanskrit, can overthrow the greatest sage, from within himself, in the blink of an eye.

Sacred scripture points to and participates in the truth, the ultimate, which, as personalized, is symbolized by the word God. Sacred scripture does not point to itself. It points beyond itself, to that which is its basis, to the ultimate. It points to God, who cannot be an object.

Sacred scripture itself is not ultimate and it makes no claim to be ultimate. It claims to point to that which is beyond itself and which alone is ultimate ... and non-objectifiable.

The book that contains sacred scripture is a medium on which are written the words of sacred scripture that point beyond themselves to that which alone is ultimate. A medium is a conveyor of power and meaning which point beyond themselves to their unity and source in the divine ground (pace McLuhan, who sought to deconstruct communication into entertainment).

The content that is sacred scripture does not depend on the medium of a book. It transcends all media.

Sacred scripture is any record of revelatory and salvic experience and also any act or artistic expression which becomes the medium of a revelatory and salvic experience by pointing beyond itself to the ultimate.

The ultimate -- and its self-expression -- is unhindered by and unaccountable to any thing in existence, any thing at all. No thing can restrict, measure, compel or predict the ground of being.

Furthermore, sacred scripture -- and also any act or artistic expression which becomes the medium of a revelatory and salvic experience -- becomes sacred and scripture only when it participates in a constellation of mystery and ecstasy, giving and receiving, which is revelatory and salvic.

As a book, sacred scripture is words on paper, nothing more, no more important than a newspaper and just as superficial and transient an object of man's attention.

Only in an actual revelatory and salvic experience, having the characteristics of mystery and ecstasy, is sacred scripture sacred and

scripture. It must have the religious existential component to be regarded as holy and venerable. And even then, it is not the text of sacred scripture, the book containing it, the ink on the pages or even the words of the language used to record it, but only the revelatory and salvific experience in which the text, book, ink and words participate as a medium that is holy and creative.

Nor are the authors of sacred scripture holy and venerable *per se*. In so far as they participate in the qualities of the holy and the venerable it is on account of their having entered the constellation of revelation and response that alone produces the record of their response in that constellation, namely, the Bible, Koran, Vedas, etc.

Sacred scripture points beyond itself to the ultimate, to the mystery of being which remains mysterious even after it is received in ecstasy through an experience of revelation and salvation.

Starting early in the 18th Century, Christian Scripture, the Old and New Testaments, began to receive critical examination by scholars. For three hundred years this process not only continued, it also effloresced and ramified. Eventually, several distinct types of criticism were developed and applied to the Old and New Testaments. These types are known as textual, literary, historical and formal criticism.

At first such activities were resisted by clerical hierarchies both Protestant and Roman Catholic. Early on, civil authorities also resisted these activities, often but not always at the request of clerical hierarchies.

Eventually, all types of critical examination of Old and New Testaments were accepted by most Protestant clerical hierarchies and unsuccessfully co-opted by most Roman Catholic clerical hierarchies. By the middle of the 19th Century, except in Roman Catholic areas such as France, civil authorities were unavailable to clerical instigation in the suppression of biblical criticism.

A reaction to biblical criticism grew into what is now called fundamentalism or biblical literalism, of which there are several varieties but all sharing the common themes of supranaturalism and rejection of critical examination of the Old and New Testaments.

The churches who accepted biblical criticism rejected Logos Theology, which formed the churches and the New Testament and which characterizes the vertical component of life, the aspect of transcendence. These churches devolved into horizontal legalisms of popular psychology. They became technical and rabbinical. Harvey Cox of Harvard Divinity School speaks for this degeneration, which calls itself "post-modernism" or "deconstructionism."

Only recently, in the last decade, is effort being made to keep Christian biblical criticism without losing the Christian message. The aim of this work is to clean up the churches and thereby restore the Church, the Spiritual Community.

Paul Tillich, during the 1950s/60s, pointed to the need for this cleaning and restoration and, for his efforts, was pronounced "a dangerous man" by clerical hierarchies of the day. Harvey Cox, a youngster and disparager of Tillich, was bitterly driven by ambition to pronounce nastily regarding Tillich.

Cleaning the churches and thereby restoring the Church involves a reacquisition of Logos Theology and a re-experience, through revelation and salvation, of the non-dualistic (*adwaitin*) depth and structure of reason. This revelation and salvation [is occurring](#) and will succeed in restoring the Christian message and the Church.

With respect to critical examination of its sacred scripture, Islam is now where Christianity was in the early 18th Century. Resistance to this

examination is fierce and will get fiercer before it dies out. But die out it must.

Idolatry has no defense and no staying power. The hegemonistic programs of demonic clergy and scholars of the Middle East and elsewhere, both Wahhabi and Shi'ite, are rear guards to protect idolatries, in particular idolatry of the Koran.

None can say what course the critical examination of the Koran and reaction to that examination will take. It will be dangerous, often lethal, to pursue that examination, including for non-Muslim scholars. However, the work will go ahead because critical examination is in the nature of man and because any idolatry, and especially an idolatry of sacred scripture, is a tempting target. Idolatry of the Koran, being falsehood itself, is being attacked by critical examination of the Koran and cannot be maintained therefore.

Demonic clergy and scholars thought to use technology to destroy the basis of technology, namely, the philosophical disposition to take no thing as ultimate. However, the technology they use was designed to articulate destruction of just such idolatries as support their aims, including idolatry of the Koran. By throwing the Koran -- and their savagery -- on the Internet, they subject the Koran -- and themselves -- to critical examination. Demonic clergy and scholars cannot survive critical examination.

Idolatry, as the prophets of Israel and Christianity have pointed out consistently, is not a good idea. It can be neither defended nor maintained. It must succumb to the inevitable attack that its colossal stupidity invites.

On the other side of critical examination of the Koran, with corresponding loss of respect for Islam inside and outside of Islam, is a

restoration of Islam comparable to the developing restoration of Christianity.

Pray God the restoration of Islam is sooner than later coming. The whole world groans now under the burden of Muslim disarray and irascibility, so callow, indecorous and bootless it is.

A restoration of Judaism as an independent religion will not occur because it is bound, irrevocably, to Christianity as a child is bound to the parent to whom destiny assigned it. By itself, Judaism is an array of attitudes and habits, not a religion.

A.M.D.G.