



Camille Pissarro, Boulevard Montmartre - 1897 (public domain)

ISIS, MERKEL, & MIGRANTS

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German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the daughter of a Lutheran pastor, has been widely hailed by American Christian elites for her open doors to Mideast refugees fleeing chaos in Syria and Iraq. Over 1 million migrants have in short order entered Germany, a country of 82 million, or the equivalent of 4 million migrants suddenly entering the USA. German intelligence services have openly protested they cannot vet such numbers. German police unions have complained about violence in refugee camps in Germany, with one suggestion being to institute religious segregation, to protect Christian migrants sometimes under attack by Muslims. Sexual assaults in and around refugee camps are reputedly high.

Most dramatic were the mass sexual assaults in Cologne on New Year's Eve, in which over a thousand Mideast and North African men, seemingly coordinating on social media, attacked hundreds of women in a public square. The term for the phenomenon of Mideast men attacking women in mass is "*Taharrush*," a word, sadly, that will enter common parlance. An American woman in Cologne described being groped, kissed, and frisked inside her pockets by various assailants while her hair was pulled and the police too busy to help. As of this writing, nearly 500 complaints of sexual assault, including three rapes, and many more for robbery, have been filed by women with the police of Cologne, who originally suppressed reporting about the mass assaults, and whose mayor initially responded by advising women to be more careful around men. Suspects include asylum seekers from Algeria, Morocco, Iran and Syria, but only a few have been arrested, and likely very few will be successfully prosecuted. Other German and Scandinavian cities reported similar though smaller sprees of sexual assault and robbery of women by male migrants. One German town initially banned male migrants from a public swimming pool, then relented after "intensive discussions with refugees on how they should treat women with respect."

Amid declining support for acceptance of more Mideast migrants, Chancellor Merkel has pledged that felonious refugees will be deported, but to what extent remains to be seen. German law makes deportation hard, but enlistment in welfare benefits easy. *New York Times* columnist Ross Douthat points out that the vast majority of German and other European

Mideast migrants are young men without families present. There are only about 5 million German men in their twenties, so the sudden addition of hundreds of thousands of unattached Mideast Muslim young men to this cohort will potentially have dramatic repercussions, including possibly more calamitous evenings like New Years in Cologne.

Then there were the horrific Paris attacks in November, killing 120, perpetrated by 9 pro-ISIS militants who were European residents of Arab descent, several of whom had been in Syria and reentered Europe with the refugee migration. Their monstrosities illustrate both the threat of Islamist radicalization within Europe's already large Muslim population and the reinforcing threat of ISIS and other Islamist movements in the Syrian civil war, some of whose combatants are slipping into Europe with hundreds of thousands of refugees.

Christians in Europe and the USA seem theologically and ethically unequal to these ominous threats to Western Civilization. Instead they are choosing to portray the drama as primarily an opportunity to show Christian hospitality to migrants, who are just like the Holy Family escaping Herod into Egypt, and to showcase often sanctimonious warnings against Islamophobia. Representatives of major USA Christian groups have loudly lobbied for quick entrance of large numbers of Syrian and other Mideast migrants to the USA, insisting the security process for refugees is thorough but not expressing too much interest in the details. After all, shouldn't Christians focus more on welcome than security, on trust more than fear?

Actually, no. Christians as individuals or as communities may indeed be called to risk themselves to extend sacrificial hospitality. Yet even in their own communities Christians have other duties that are sacred. Christian mothers and fathers cannot invite into their own homes persons who might endanger their children. Husbands and wives have similar obligations to each other. Christians in every commonwealth at all times are called to care about and work for the safety and prosperity of their larger political community. No government anywhere is ordained to extend one version of unlimited Christian hospitality to the detriment of its own people. The state's primary purpose, according to Christian teaching, is to provide security and order, which are themselves divine gifts essential for human flourishing.

Why the reluctance or perhaps ignorance about the state's core divinely ordained purpose by otherwise thoughtful Christian leaders and thinkers? Perhaps the teaching has been lost amid decades of careless assumptions by USA and other Western Christians, who live in prosperous and secure societies, that government's main calling is to provide for the material and even emotional well being of its people, with security just assumed as a given, and at times even a nuisance. This confusion is likely not shared by many of the dwindling numbers of Mideast Christians, who seemingly have been forgotten by much of Western Christianity. Unlike most of the fleeing Muslim refugees from Syria and Iraq, the Christians are specifically targeted by ISIS and other Islamist movements because of their Christianity. So far, scandalously, the USA

refuses to recognize that Mideast Christians, like the Yazidis, are the targets of genocide and merit special consideration in USA policy. Even more scandalously, many USA church groups openly oppose special USA consideration for oppressed Mideast Christians, accepting the narrative that such consideration would be religious “discrimination” against Muslims. They seem largely indifferent about de facto USA discrimination against Christian refugees, who do not feel safe in and mostly avoid the United Nations refugee camps from which the USA processes refugees. And they ignore already existing USA law that prioritizes consideration for groups earmarked for persecution and destruction.

The specter that haunts the West over the Mideast migrant crisis is the failure to save more Jews from Hitler’s mass murder when there was still time. But if there is any suitable contemporary comparison, it is the Mideast Christians, who are specifically targeted for their faith, have almost no international patrons, and very few offers of refuge, who come closest to the European Jewish parallel of the 1930s. Much of American Christianity, or at least its elites, is fixated on a storyline in which Christians are historically the privileged, not the persecuted. American Christian elites prefer to apologize to the Mideast for the Crusades, not uncomfortably fixate on Islamist liquidation of the Mideast’s few remaining ancient Christian communities.

Western governments, with Christian support, should both for humanitarian and security reasons assist millions of Syrian and other Mideast Muslim refugees. USA expenditure

on refugee camps in the region is already in the billions, not unserious or ungenerous. Establishing sanctuaries protected by no-fly zones inside Syria and Iraq is one option. Resettlement in other Muslim majority countries in the region may be another option. Permanently resettling millions of Mideast refugees in the West, burdening already over extended welfare states, and expanding already radicalizing Muslim communities in Europe, or ultimately the USA, poses countless challenges that most Christian political witness is not at all addressing. American Christian elites are also mostly ignoring the specific challenge of Islamic public theology and its ability, or inability, to mesh with American democracy and Western principles about legal equality for all. Should women be able to divorce their adulterous husbands? Should gays be able to live without fear of physical danger? Should anyone be free to criticize religion including Islam? Is anti-Semitism unacceptable? The answers are clear for Americans and most Westerners. They are not so clear for even many, perhaps most even moderate Muslims from the Mideast.

Too much of American and Western Christian political witness has been treating Muslims as disembodied spirits without their own history and culture who are primarily victims of Christian injustice and deserving recipients of Christian charity and recompense. This attitude is dehumanizing and far from charitable. It will only lead to further misunderstanding and conflict.

As to sanctimonious American Christian warnings against “fear” regarding Islamist terror, such posturing is premised

more on bumper sticker sloganeering than serious Christian moral reflection. Christians are called to be the most realistic and discerning of people with no illusions about fallen humanity, including above all ourselves. Christ taught “beware of men,” even as we trust God. We are commanded to love and seek peace with justice for all, but not to assume constant good will by all. Sometimes for the sake of peace with justice, there need to be walls, secured borders, and vigilant security services.

There also needs to be gratitude for what God has given us. The besieged democratic communities around the North Atlantic about which Reinhold Niebuhr wrote in early 1941 as he founded *Christianity and Crisis* to extol Christian defense against totalitarianism are precious and unique to human history. These communities that still, however distantly, root themselves in natural law and Christian anthropology, should be charitable and welcoming when prudent. We also have a sacred duty to nurture and uphold what has been gifted to us by countless generations more sacrificial and brave than ourselves. Anything less would be to betray both our Lord and any future generations that hope for lawful liberty and humane societies. P

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