

Bishops Ignore Laws of Probability, Chase after Red Herring

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“Only a blind man can deny that there is great confusion in the Church.”

~ Carlo Cardinal Caffarra

Cardinal Caffarra was speaking about the confusion surrounding *Amoris Laetitia* and the Church’s teaching about marriage and divorce. But much the same could be said about the Church’s position on Islam. The discrepancy between what Church leaders say about Islam and what the accumulating evidence shows about Islam must be a source of confusion to many Catholics.

It’s not as though the issues that surround Islam are abstruse questions that are better left to theologians. The most pressing issue is whether or not Islam is a religion of peace. And you don’t need a Ph.D. in Theology to determine that—only some basic powers of observation.

Catholic leaders say that Islam is a peaceful religion, but the daily news says otherwise. If there is a conflict ongoing in any part of the world, it’s a good bet that Muslims are one party to the conflict. And if a man shoots up a nightclub or plows a truck into a crowd, odds are his name will turn out to be Mohamed or Omar.

It can be objected that we should avoid jumping to such conclusions. And it will be said that it’s precisely because of such prejudicial attitudes that Catholic leaders need to support Muslims and fight against “Islamophobia.”

But “phobia” suggests an irrational fear, whereas many fears about Islam seem perfectly rational. Likewise, “prejudice” suggests an irrational bias. And, while it’s true that we shouldn’t jump to conclusions based on flimsy evidence, once there is sufficient evidence, rational, unprejudiced people do tend to draw conclusions. If one Latvian shoots up a nightclub while shouting “Latvia forever,” you are not justified in assuming that the next time a nightclub is shot up, the culprit must be a Latvian. But if a hundred different Latvians shoot up nightclubs on a hundred different occasions, you might well conclude that a Latvian is involved the next time it happens. You are no longer jumping to conclusions, you are simply acknowledging the laws of probability.

The bishops’ unwillingness to pay attention to the laws of probability is getting increasingly difficult to ignore. Take the open-door policy toward migrants advocated by many if not most of the European hierarchy as well as by the Vatican. Long before the migrant crisis of 2015-16, it was obvious that Muslims were not successfully assimilating to European society. It was also plain that crime and violence were on the rise, as evidenced, for example, by the rape epidemics sweeping through England and Sweden, and by the 40,000 or so cars burned annually in France by Muslim youth. It was highly probable that a sudden influx of millions of migrants from Islamic cultures would result in an explosion of violence, and it did. Moreover, there is evidence that much of the violence was not spontaneous but planned. It now appears that the sexual assaults targeting over 1,200 women in major

German cities on New Year’s Eve, 2015 was pre-planned as a test of Germany’s ability to protect its women.

Another probability that seems to have been left out of the bishop's calculation is the likelihood that many people would die on the journey to Europe. According to UN reports, over 5,000 migrants drowned crossing the Mediterranean in 2016, 3,800 in 2015, and over 3,000 in 2014. If it were not for the heroic efforts of the Turkish, Greek and, especially, the Italian Coast Guard, tens of thousands more would have perished.

When Pope Francis greeted refugees on the Isle of Lampedusa, he was not only encouraging Europeans to welcome them, he was also, in effect, encouraging Muslims to make the dangerous journey.

In addition to ignoring the laws of probability, some bishops seem quite willing to ignore the facts. Take the newly initiated Catholic-Muslim dialogue aimed at challenging U.S. Catholics to take an active role in combatting “the scourge of anti-Islamic prejudice.” According to Anthony Cirelli, the USCCB associate director of the Secretariat for Interreligious Affairs, “there is an urgency to engage more in a kind of advocacy and policy in support of the Muslim community.” Why? Because of “a serious uptick in violence against American Muslims.”

The trouble is, there has been no serious uptick in violence against Muslims. There may have been a slight uptick in anti-Muslim activities, but anti-Jewish hate crimes are still two times more common than anti-Muslim hate crimes. Why is there no sense of “urgency” to advocate for the Jewish community in America? Moreover, it appears that much of the “uptick” is due to an uptick in false reports of anti-Muslim violence. You've probably seen the headlines about mosque fires and attacks against Muslim women wearing hijabs. But have you seen these headlines?

There are many other examples of “hate crimes” against Muslims that turn out, upon inspection, to be fabricated. But although the initial accusations make the front pages of major newspapers, the subsequent retraction is tucked away on page 18, or else is only reported by local newspapers. Why all the fake “hate” news? One reason suggested by Jihad Watch's Robert Spencer is that there's a demand for it:

Islamic supremacist groups such as the Hamas-linked Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) want and need hate crimes against Muslims, because they're the currency they use to buy power and influence in our victimhood-oriented society...

The next question is this: Why is the membership of the USCCB so gullible? Why do they fall for the fake news? Why don't they check the facts? One reason may be that the bishops also need such stories. They need them to prop up their own rickety narrative about Islam being a peaceful and put-upon religion. In addition, they've invested so much energy and time in the dialogue process with Muslims that they can't afford to look too closely into facts that might undermine it.

Where does the USCCB get its facts? The primary source mentioned by Cirelli is a recent study by the Bridge Initiative, a project of Georgetown University's Alwaleed bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding (ACMCU). As I have pointed out elsewhere, the research generated at the Bridge Institute is of a rather shoddy nature. Their claim that there is an “Islamophobia industry” in America relies almost entirely on similar claims made by two left-wing George Soros-funded organizations, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) and the Center for American Progress (CAP). And then, of course, there is the

question of objectivity. Just how reliable are the studies that come out of an institute that is named after and funded by a Saudi prince? “Islamophobia industry”? What we seem to have at Georgetown is an Islamophilia industry—one that serves the interests of the Royal Kingdom rather than the interests of American Catholics.

The Georgetown-Saudi connection ought to raise some ecclesiastical eyebrows. When it comes to Islam, however, the bishops seem to be completely lacking in curiosity. They seem disinclined to check out the facts. Why, for example, the seeming lack of interest in the fact that their two major dialogue partners—the Islamic Society of North America and the Islamic Circle of North America—both have ties to a terrorist group? During the course of the Holy Land Foundation trial, documents were produced that linked ISNA and ICNA to the Muslim Brotherhood. Several Muslim countries, including Egypt, Bahrain, and the UAE have designated the Muslim Brotherhood as a terrorist organization. Now, Senator Ted Cruz and Representative Mario Diaz-Balart have introduced a bill asking the Secretary of State to designate the group as an international terrorist organization.

All of this might be expected to prompt some soul searching on the part of the USCCB leadership. But that doesn’t seem to have happened. If Ronald Reagan’s formula for negotiating with the Russians was “trust but verify.” The bishops’ formula for dialoguing with Islamic organizations is simply “trust.” Consider this statement from the USCCB’s “Dialogue with Muslims”:

Perhaps most importantly, our work together has forged true bonds of friendship that are supported by mutual esteem and an ever-growing trust.

That’s the most important part of their work—that they feel truly trustful toward the representatives of groups that are closely linked to the Muslim Brotherhood? On the contrary, too much “esteem,” “trust,” and “friendship” can easily undermine the main work of dialogue, which is not to build friendships, but to conduct honest and well-informed discussions. Terror researcher Patrick Poole recounts this incident about overly-trusting FBI agents which might serve as a cautionary tale for the bishops:

When we told the FBI about it [reports that an al-Shabaab operative in Columbus, Ohio was fundraising and recruiting for the terrorist groups in the area], the response was that our information couldn’t be accurate, because if it were true they would have heard about it from their local Muslim outreach partners.

As Robert Spencer comments, “this indicates a level of credulity on the part of law enforcement authorities that is truly breathtaking.” Yes, it does. And if the FBI is gullible enough to put so much faith in their outreach partners (generally, the same groups that the USCCB partners with), how much can we expect from the bishops?

The question for the bishops is not whether they can win the trust of Islamic activist groups, but whether they can hold the trust of Catholics. The bishops’ “advocacy ... in support of the Muslim community,” coming as it does during a time of widespread persecution of Christians by Muslims, can only add to the “great confusion in the Church” that Cardinal Caffarra speaks of. Islamic advocacy groups may have convinced the bishops to chase after the red herring of “Islamophobia,” but the real action, as most ordinary Catholics can see, is elsewhere. It is not fake hate crimes against Muslims that should concern the bishops, but real crimes against Christians.

According to the old saying, curiosity killed the cat, but it may well be that lack of curiosity on the part of Western bishops is what will kill Catholicism in Europe and America.