

Sticks and Stones Go Big Time.
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An idiot preacher with a congregation of maybe 50 people threatens to burn 200 Korans on 9/11 and the world goes mad! This incident shows us the downside of 24/7 news coverage. In Pakistan, a country that can afford to make nuclear weapons but not educate its young, is all up in arms when hearing that somebody is going to burn Korans. The usual rent-a mobs riot and burn American flags (and of course, this does not offend us, does it?) And one loudmouth grabs the microphone to announce that if this burning happens, \223they\224 will rain horror upon Americans\227Jews and Christians \227from the skies. I would love to know how they will do that\227and what about American Muslims? Can their destruction identify and spare them?

Book burning has an old\227and futile\227history. The Inquisitions held book burnings 500 years ago\227and burned people for good measure\227but they lost the argument nonetheless. More books were written and more religions emerged, despite all their intimidation.

Hitler was the first modern ruler to revive book burning. For the Nazis, this too was an \223auto de fe\224 (act of faith) that Nazism was all powerful and all other ideas (and people) had to go. They lost the argument too.

During the anti-war movement of the 1960s, young American radicals burned the American flag\227a symbol taken up eagerly by today\222s Islamic radicals. The purpose then was to offend the older generation. It did. But we ignored it and it went away.

Another notorious book burning was held in Bradford, a Pakistani-majority city in northern England in the late 1970s. The fire was laid and the burning was about to begin\227when the organizers found that the book: Salman Rushdie\222s Satanic Verses (fiction), was nowhere in town. Nobody had read it. They had to send to London for a copy to burn. Those are tough critics.

Then the Ayatollah Khomeini heard about this book, and someone read a chapter to him (the book was in English, which Khomeini did not speak), and he issued a fatwah putting a very large bounty\227seven million dollars, I think-- on the head of Rushdie. Well, Rushdie is still alive. Khomeini is dead, and the money is still earning interest unless some other official has made off with it.

What is painful here is that we all take such idiots seriously. We treat an insignificant preacher as someone who can bring real harm down on us by \223offending Islam.\224 In our culture, we can offend anybody we like as long as we keep our hands off. The Muslim World is not that grown up yet. They should treat a preacher like this as the fool he is. But they do not.

When our President, Secretary of State, Commanding General, all wring their hands over the harm that this book burning can do, we run the risk of censoring ourselves lest we \223offend Islam.\224 An award is being given to the Danish cartoonist this week who managed to offend Islam with a cartoon, of all things. Evidently nobody has looked at the cartoons in the Muslim world\227or if they have, they don\222t care.

American Muslims have not been persecuted because they live in a secular country where one religion is no different than another, as long as no religious practice is against state law (polygamy, honor killings, human sacrifice). Islam as a religion is no problem. Islam married to state power and fascist ideology is a threat to everyone.

The story of the minister grows even sillier when he tries to negotiate with the people planning to build an Islamic center near Ground Zero in New York. He is holding the korans hostage to changing the real estate location. Both issues are ridiculous. Even worse, he is now diddling with the press that he might cancel the book burning. I wouldn\222t hold my breath.

Let\222s suck it up and realize that no matter what we do or don\222t do, the Clash of Civilizations is here and we will survive this too.

656 words

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