

Fanatics

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

Helen Thomas is an ancient journalist, employed by Hearst Newspapers in the USA. She has been White House correspondent for decades, incidentally, though not surprisingly given her ancestry, an opponent of Israel. She should have been pensioned off years ago, but her survival is due to the fact that she is such a character that she is indulged. Her outburst now on YouTube, that the Jews get the hell out of Palestine and go back to Poland and Germany where they came from, illustrates her ignorance as well as her prejudice. Most Jews in Israel today originated in the Middle East and have never been anywhere else. There is no fool like an old fool and her own words have betrayed her. The ensuing furor has forced her to resign at last.

Normally one would swat the flea and laugh it off. However as Goebbels famously said, big lies when told often enough are believed, and the anti-Semitic anti-Israel websites are abuzz with approval of her comments.

My initial response was to say that it's a fair point, if she also agrees that all USA citizens return to their countries of origin and leave the continent to its indigenous population. Or that the Normans and their descendants in England go back to France. Let us indeed clear every person out of the Holy Land and then set up a universally recognized independent body (itself an impossibility nowadays) to take genetic, textual, historical, archaeological, and cultural evidence to show who has the longest and best claim going as far back as records of any kind exist. I am all the more confident now that the BBC reports that genetic evidence links most Jews to the Middle East. And since the majority of Israeli citizens came from Muslim lands, and of course anyone asked to move will also be financially compensated with compound interest.

To swing in a different direction, I regret that Geert Wilders has won such a significant number of votes in the Netherlands. But that is precisely because he is prepared to say unpalatable things about fanatical parts of Islam that manifest themselves today all over the place. And it precisely because other politicians are not willing to face reality that they lose credibility and right-wingers like him succeed.

He is wrong to think all Muslims take the text of the Koran literally. We also have texts of the Bible that need to be seen in context and have been reinterpreted subsequently. Every single religion I know of claims to be peaceful and only concerned with bringing God and love to the world. And every religion contains narrow-minded fanatics who believe that only they have the exclusive truth and intend to apply it to everyone else one way or another. And every religion in history that gets power ends up abusing it in horrible ways.

Every religion, when it starts up, has to prove itself against an earlier one and so systematically tries to discredit its predecessors, destroy them

either physically or ideologically. That is the strength and the weakness of religion and I am delighted that in the West now we have restricted the role of religion and limited its excesses.

I am also pleased that Britain's Home Secretary has announced she will require foreign spouses of British citizens to learn English before arriving. This will help the process of integration, something no British government has dared to consider hitherto. It won't change things overnight. The USA requires integration, but it has its home-grown fanatics too. The last thing we need now is a Trojan horse of religious fundamentalism. Actually the horse is already inside the gates.

In theory, Islam is as good a religion for the mass market as any other. It is much closer to Judaism than Christianity. I believe in choice. But I also believe in freedom and in honesty. Of course we know not all Muslims are Jihadis. Of course we know all Jews are not settlers or supporters of Kahane. But it is as much a lie to pretend Islam has no problem with increasing Jihadism as it would be to deny that sectors of Judaism have been taken over by extremists of one sort or another. That's the nature of the world we live in. It is the delusions of apologists that worry me. We Jews have to combat our extremists, and Muslims need to combat theirs and not pretend there aren't any.

In the world of PR, my product is better than yours. Yours stinks; mine works. Religion ought to be above PR lies. But tolerance demands that each religion must accept responsibility for its own problems. Unless all religions can recognize and identify their own lunatics and act to isolate them, unless moderates of all religions work together to stop everyone's fanatics, we will all be consumed.

We should strengthen the hands of those who genuinely want to work for cooperation and understanding. We cannot resolve all political issues. Of course most Muslims support Muslims, and most Jews support Jews, and most Christians support Christians and the vast majority want to live in peace. Just as most Englishmen optimistically will support England in the World Cup (I'm rooting for the USA because I think they have a better chance)! Christians, Muslims, and Jews are each internally divided. We cannot ask for unanimity, but we can expect realism and honesty.