

“That’s Who We Are”

by Hugh Fitzgerald (July 2016)



On June 23, Barack Obama expressed some unhappiness with the Supreme Court. By a vote of 4-4, a tie that effectively upheld a lower court’s ruling, the Court blocked Obama’s attempt, through Executive Orders, to protect from deportation millions of illegal immigrants who were the parents of U.S. citizens, or permanent residents, and to institute a program providing similar protections for young undocumented aliens.

Here is part of his speech, its tone borrowed from the Higher Peevery:

Because being an American is about something more than that. What makes us Americans is our shared commitment to an ideal that all of us are created equal, all of us have a chance to make of our lives what we will. And every study shows that whether it was the Irish or the Poles, or the Germans, or the Italians, or the Chinese, or the Japanese, or the Mexicans, or the Kenyans – whoever showed up, over time, by a second generation, third generation, those kids are Americans. They do look like us – because we don’t look one way. We don’t all have the same last names, but we all share a creed and we all share a commitment to the values that founded this nation. That’s who we are. And that is what I believe most Americans recognize.

The secular bomfoggery is par for Obama’s banal course, but still there are things in this paragraph that are worth noting. Obama is under the impression that “what makes us Americans” is our “shared commitment” to an ideal, the ideal that we are “created equal.” But is this true? Is it possible that at least a subset of “all of us” does not believe, and cannot believe, as a matter of deep faith, that we are all “created equal”? And what’s more, it isn’t true that we – “all of us” – “share a commitment” to the “values that founded this nation.”

Which brings me – you knew it would – to Islam. Does Islam share that “commitment to an ideal” that we are all “created equal”? Islam is based on a division of humanity into Believer and Unbeliever, just as the physical world is

split between dar al-Islam (the Domain of Islam, where Islam dominates, and Muslims rule) and dar al-Harb (the Domain of War or Chaos, where Islam does not as yet prevail). The Qur'an teaches that Muslims are the "best of peoples": "Ye are the *best of peoples*, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong." (3:110) And non-Muslims are, by contrast, the "vilest of creatures" (98:6). Of course, it is true that there is one way – only one way – for non-Muslims to become "equal" to Muslims, which is to become Muslims themselves. But non-Muslims, from birth, are "unequal" until they accept Islam. This is not what Obama had in mind when he assured us about how "all of us" have this "shared commitment" to the ideal of equality.

Then there was Obama's second assumption, that "we all share a creed and we all share a commitment to the values that founded this nation." Well, what are the values that founded this nation? One of the most important surely is that our government's legitimacy depends upon the extent to which it reflects the will of the people as expressed, however imperfectly, in elections. But that's not what legitimizes a government for Muslims. In Islam, legitimacy is ascribed to a ruler if he reflects the will of Allah, as set down in the Qur'an. That Islamic ideal explains the greater tolerance for despots in Muslim states; what matters is whether or not the ruler is a good Muslim.

What are the other values of greatest importance to Americans? Surely the freedom of religion and the freedom of speech would be at the top of anyone's list. By freedom of religion we mean both the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause. There is no official state religion, favored over all others, and the government will not abridge the right to the free exercise of any religion. But there is hardly a single Muslim-majority country where Islam is not favored over all other faiths (some might argue that Lebanon is one exception), and the exercise of those faiths other than Islam subject to various restrictions, including such things as limits on the building or repairing of places of non-Muslim worship, forbidding any public worship (try finding a church in Saudi Arabia), and creating a climate of permanent fear for individual worshippers (e.g., Hindus and Christians in Pakistan). Nor can the disaffected, that is ex-Muslims, publicly reveal their change or lack of faith; in Islam, the prescribed punishment for apostasy is death.

The other important value which Obama apparently believes we all share is that of the freedom of speech. But in Islam, the freedom of speech is severely

limited: speech that is held to blaspheme Muhammad, or to call Islam in any way into question, is punishable and has so often been punished, both by Muslim governments and by Muslim vigilantes. We shouldn't have to remind Obama about Lars Vilks, Molly Norris, Robert Redeker, the staff of *Charlie Hebdo*, and many others, but obviously he needs it. Or perhaps one could simply remind him of what the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights, the so-called "Islamic" Declaration, offers as its carefully-curtailed version of "freedom of speech":

Art 22 (a), "Everyone shall have the right to express his opinion freely in such a manner as would not be contrary to the principles of the Sharia," and

Art 22 (c) "Information...may not be exploited or misused in such a way as may violate sanctities and the dignity of Prophets"

Obama likes to tell us, superciliously, when there's a policy he wishes to push, it's because "that's who we are," and, about some outer-darkness alternative he wants us to shun, "that's not who we are." It would be wonderful if some interviewer were able to put Obama on the spot and make him explain how he reconciles the Islamic constraints on freedom of religion and speech, the Islamic understanding of what constitutes political legitimacy, the Islamic views on gender equality, the Islamic views on equality (of Muslims and non-Muslims), with the very different views of all of these as enshrined in the American Constitution. At the moment, few journalists have seemed to think it useful or necessary to cross-question Obama about his misunderstanding of Islam. Apparently, we are not to deviate from the party line, to dare to suggest that there is some permanent and irreducible difference between Islam and the West, or Islam and All The Rest. So for the moment, we will have to endure Obama's self-satisfied mantra of "that's not who we are" until, mugged by Islamic reality, enough Americans become so fed up that they publicly question the pollyannish people-are-the-same-the-whole-world-over view of Islam that Obama promotes, and not a moment too soon, because, at long last, "that's who we are."

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