

Author: The West is Paralyzed by Horror

Why has the West's response to violence perpetrated by radical Muslims been rather lukewarm? Why do leaders keep insisting that Islam is a "religion of peace"?

These are the questions many Europeans and Americans are asking themselves, and noted economist and author David Goldman has an intriguing answer. [According to Goldman](#), "The root of the problem is theological... The West is paralyzed by its own notion of the good."

As Goldman writes, the Christian West has a difficult time fathoming the rejection of its faith (which we can translate in our more secularized context as "values"):

"[H]orror is the Achilles' heel of the Christian world, whose founding premise is that God offers unselfish love and unmerited grace to mankind, and in a sense stacked the deck in favor of goodness. The perception that the universe is cruel and without purpose is poison to Christianity. That is the great paradox of salvation: If God's unselfish love and unmerited grace offer salvation to all humankind, what are we to make of those who willfully reject it?"

The idea of historical progress is Christian in origin. As Orthodox theologian Georges Florovsky emphasized, the Christian philosophy of history is the growth of the Body of Christ [the Church]. Some Christians have interpreted this to mean that history will be the story of the Christian faith continually expanding its numbers and influence. Some have even subscribed to the belief that everyone will eventually be saved, even the Devil; that good will succeed in attracting all.

Furnished with this Christian historical optimism, it's difficult for the West to make sense of the fact that Christianity has never really been able to take root in Muslim countries. It's incomprehensible to them that certain Muslims would reject Western society to the point of destroying themselves. Many simply don't know how to interpret recent mass acts of violence and rape.

And so, when faced with Muslim atrocities, Goldman says that many Western leaders and citizens "remain paralyzed with horror." In other words, they are unable to firmly and coherently respond.

Unlike Goldman, I don't think this reading represents Christianity as a whole but a modern, post-Enlightenment bastardization of Christianity. Another interpretation of the New Testament is that Christians shouldn't have optimism about "the world." As it says in the First Letter of John, "The whole world is under the power of the evil one." As it says in the Gospel of Matthew, "The gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few"—which [has been interpreted](#) to mean that most people will not be saved.

That said, Goldman's thesis is certainly interesting and worth pondering. It could very well be that the West's impotent response to Islamic violence is (at least in part) rooted in a deficient theology.