A Proposal for Europe

By Thomas Storck

Flemming Rose, cultural editor of the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*, the man responsible for the publication of the Mohammad cartoons in the fall of 2005 that occasioned the protests and rioting in more than one Moslem country, published a few months ago, both in English and German, some reflections on the position of Moslem immigrants in Europe. Mr. Rose is rightly concerned about the growing numbers of Moslems in Europe and about the seeming inability or difficulty of many Moslems to accept and live by the liberal, tolerant culture of Europe. And he is critical of the multiculturalism of many on the European left who make every excuse for Moslem intolerance and even violence, as long as it is directed against Europeans and European culture.

"...multiculturalism...has all too often become mere cultural relativism...that often justifies reactionary and oppressive practices. Giving the same weight to the illiberal values of conservative Islam as to the liberal traditions of the European Enlightenment will, in time, destroy the very things that make Europe such a desirable target for migration."

Rose realizes that a large and growing body of people who consider themselves an *imperium in imperio* is a danger to European culture. What then does he propose should be done?

Rose understands that the time is past for preventing large-scale Moslem immigration.

"Obviously, we can never return to the comfortable monocultures of old. A demographic revolution is changing the face, and look, of Europe. In an age of mass migration and the Internet, cheap air fares and cell phones everywhere, cultural pluralism is an irreversible fact, like it or not".

Rose's way of dealing with this situation is for Moslems to adapt to European culture and mores - at least as far as their public stance and participation in civic and political life. And just as Rose says that he would not hesitate to print cartoons of "any other Dane, whether the queen, the head of the Church, or the prime minister," Moslems must come to understand that the price of living in a liberal society is that their own sacred figures and symbols are subject to such satire. In fact, by doing so, Europeans will be treating the Moslems as equals:

"You are not strangers, you are here to stay, and we accept you as an integrated part of our life. And we will satirize you, too. It was an act of inclusion, not exclusion; an act of respect and recognition".

So "*Europe must shed the straitjacket of political correctness, which makes it impossible to criticize minorities for anything,*" while Moslem immigrants must "not only learn the host language but also respect their new countries' political and cultural traditions...."

There is certainly much to be said for Mr. Rose's proposals.

They are certainly better than a status quo which is afraid ever to point out failings in immigrants while equally afraid to defend anything which Europeans value. But nevertheless I fear that at bottom his program is lacking. For on what basis can Denmark or any other European nation make such demands of Moslems? What criteria of truth would such a demand be based on? If Moslems proclaim that the cartoons - and any similar kind of criticism - constitute "a declaration of war against our religion, our faith and our civilization," as Mullah Krekar, a Norwegian Kurd stated, what is a European to say in reply? How is he to respond to the Moslem's proclamation of an absolute, to the notion that mockery of the sacred is blasphemy? Remember that Rose had justified cartoons of "the queen, the head of the Church, or the prime minister" - and I daresay - of Jesus Christ and of the Blessed Virgin as well. But the liberal tolerance which Rose calls upon Moslems in part to embrace will never be able to stand up against the assertion of absolutes. The very European tolerance which Rose wants to preserve is the reason in the first place for the absurd refusal ever to point out the real faults of individual Moslems or of Islamic culture as a whole. A liberal Europe has at its heart only emptiness, the relativism which Pope Benedict XVI criticized. The assertion of absolutes can only be opposed with truth, not with an adherence to tolerance based on philosophical nihilism.

Rose in a way gives himself away when he writes: "Europe today finds itself trapped in a posture of moral relativism that is undermining its liberal values." But is it not precisely those "liberal values" that have created that relativism? Indeed, could not Rose's sentence be rewritten with little change of meaning to read: "Europe today finds itself trapped in a posture of liberal values that is undermining its moral relativism"? Liberalism is precisely the refusal to adhere to a religious or philosophical absolute. Its tolerance is grounded in an unwillingness to impose anything except relativism on the socio-political order, an unwillingness ultimately based on philosophical nihilism, a refusal to ground its way of life in religious or philosopical absolutes, even on a rejection of its own religious and cultural heritage, as in the refusal to mention Christianity in the preamble of the proposed European constitution. Unless European intellectual circles can say to Islam, You are wrong and this is why, in the end they will have no logical answer to Islamic assertions and demands.

What then is the real method of dealing with the Moslem immigrants? Rose is undoubtedly correct - Europe "can never return to the comfortable monocultures of old." A new and restless population has moved into that continent whose culture historically developed together with the Faith. But this happened once before. At the time of the collapse of the Roman Empire in western Europe large numbers of Germanic and other tribes - pagans - moved into all the old Roman lands. And what happened to these new peoples? Well, they were met by Europeans who valued more than tolerance. They were met by a Church that was sure of herself, by courageous bishops and monks, by popes whose first concern was converting the world to the revelation of Jesus Christ. And so these barbarian nations eventually became Catholic, they entered the Church and underwent that long religious and cultural tutelage which resulted in the glories and achievements of medieval Europe. Is something like this still possible today? Surely it is if we who are Catholics return to that firmness of faith that our fathers had. Then Europeans could say to their new fellow-citizens, "Forgive us for neglecting you, forgive us for not sharing with you the the greatest gift we have - not prosperity, not freedom, not security - but the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the riches of the Faith, the sure way to eternal salvation."

Is this ridiculous? No more ridiculous than to sit back and watch while Christianity withers away entirely and Islam - even if its adherents become mild-mannered and tolerant Europeans - becomes the principal religion of that continent. But if Europe is no longer willing to defend what is not just its own heritage but is the truth about the Incarnation of Jesus Christ into the world, then I see little reason why Catholics should take sides between militant Moslems and militant secularists. Both doubtless have their good points, and perhaps the secularists will allow us more freedom for a longer time, but in the end neither corresponds to either the revelation of God or to the real requirements of our human nature. Only in the Catholic Church, "the natural home of the human spirit" as Hilaire Belloc used to say, can European man, or any other man, find not only truth, but peace and genuine freedom.