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A Response to "Dead Wrong: The Anti-Muslim Myth"

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An especially stark example of how Leftists thrive on distorting history—a tactic pivotal to their very being—recently appeared. In a <u>video</u> titled "Dead Wrong: The Anti-Muslim Myth," Johan Norberg, a senior fellow at the Cato Institute who holds an MA in "the History of Ideas" from the University of Stockholm, begins as follows:

The Nativist right likes to tell the story of the West through the prism of a conflict between Christendom and Islam. One of the founding myths is the Battle of Vienna in 1683, when the united Christian armies defeated the Muslim Ottoman Turks. This historical narrative is *dead wrong*, because back then, people concerned themselves with other divisions.

The rest of the brief video—one minute, forty-two seconds are devoted to proving the "anti-Muslim myth"—tries to substantiate this, primarily by arguing that there were divisions within Christendom, specifically infighting between Catholics and Protestants, which prompted some of the latter to ally with the Ottomans against Vienna.

This argument fails on many levels. For starters, Norberg overlooks two simple and interrelated facts: 1) realpolitik—prioritizing the practical over the ideal—is as old as human society; 2) that does *not* mean that ideals do not exist and motivate politics, including war. It's not a question of "either/or."

Naturally, as northern Protestants and southern Muslims had the same common enemy between them—Catholic Christendom, particularly in the guise of the Holy Roman Empire—the timeless adage that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" was evident during the siege of Vienna, as well as previous conflicts.   Elizabeth I of England (r. 1558–1603), for example, formed an alliance with the Muslim Barbary pirates—who during her reign had enslaved hundreds of thousands of Europeans—against Catholic Spain.

Even so, Norberg ignores the fact that it is precisely because of the Catholic/Protestant schism—which was entirely religious—that Catholics and Protestants came to fight each other in the first place. While he lumps them together as "Christians" in an effort to show that Christian unity against Islam never existed, Catholics and Protestants did *not* see each other as "fellow Christians" but religious enemies of the first order—worse than Muslims. It is because of this ideological divide that one could ally with Islam against the other without breaking faith.

In short, during the siege of Vienna, realpolitik was evident only in the very limited sense that the *Catholic* king of France, Louis XIV—who once said "If there were no Algiers [to terrorize his competitors, particularly Spain] I would make one"—sided against *Catholic* Vienna.

Other than that, most if not all of the Christians and Muslims involved at Vienna saw the conflict in distinctly religious terms, beginning with the battle-hardened Catholic king of Poland, John Sobieski III. Although he had little to gain by fighting on behalf of and eventually delivering

Vienna, he still lamented how Islamic "fury is raging everywhere, attacking alas, the Christian princes with fire and sword." He also believed that "it is not a city alone that we have to save, but the whole of Christianity, of which the city of Vienna is the bulwark. The war is a holy one." Before setting off, he sent a message to Imre Thokoly, the Hungarian Protestant who was stirring trouble around Poland's border, "that if he burnt one straw in the territories of his allies, or in his own, he would go and burn him and all his family in his house."

Similarly, although the Ottoman pretext for war was support for their ally, the aforementioned Thokoly, the grand vizier who eventually led nearly 300,000 Turks to conquer Vienna, Kara Mustafa—reputed to be "fanatically anti-Christian"—exposed his mind earlier: "They ought," he had told Ottoman high command, "to take advantage of the disorders of the Christians [Catholic-Protestant schism] by the siege of the place [Vienna], the conquest of which would assure that of all Hungary [currently the Turks' "ally"], and open them a passage to the greatest victories." Later, during an elaborate pre-jihad ceremony, Sultan Muhammad IV, "desiring him [Mustafa] to fight generously for the Mahometan faith," placed "the standard of the Prophet … into his hands for the extirpation of infidels, and the increase of Muslemen."

There are many other examples highlighting the religious/ideological nature of the Ottoman siege of Vienna: before initiating its bombardment, Kara Mustafa offered the city the standard Islamic ultimatum (convert, capitulate, or else); and the Ottomans are constantly depicted as crying out typical jihadi phrases, such as "Allahu Akbar."

So much for Norberg's categorical claim that "back then, people concerned themselves with other divisions [than religion]."

In the end, however, Norberg's greatest failure is that his is a classic strawman argument. Recall the title of his video: "Dead Wrong: The Anti-Muslim Myth." Recall his opening sentence: "The Nativist right likes to tell the story of the West through the prism of a conflict between Christendom and Islam." Yet, while pretending to debunk the religious nature of the perennial conflict between Christendom and Islam—which dramatically manifested itself in countless ways and battles over the course of a millennium *before* the siege of Vienna in 1683—he talks only about that one encounter (and fails even there).

The reason is evident: before the aforementioned Catholic-Protestant rift began in the sixteenth century, Christian unity against Islam was relatively solid, providing little material for people like Norberg—such as John Voll and William Polk, professors of Islamic history—to manipulate in an effort to show that the "anti-Muslim myth" is "dead wrong."

Such are the Left's tired tricks when conforming history to its narrative: take exceptions and aberrations, exaggerate and place them at center stage, and completely ignore the constants. Above all, offer no context.