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June 2, 2008: Austin Dacey on Islam

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Title: Austin Dacey on Islam

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6/2/2008--Austin Dacey's book, *The Secular Conscience*, demonstrates why Hallowed Secularism is so necessary. He writes, "Islamism is the new totalitarianism and it demands a new liberalism that places global resistance to theocratic Islam at the center of its agenda." (195).

This is fine and good if he means suicide bombers, although this language would then be a little over the top. How are even the attacks of 9/11 an existential threat to the West? Al Qaeda is a small group of terrorists, after all.

Dacey means Islam itself is the enemy, unless Islam is willing to be tamed. Unless Islam is willing to become a private religion with no pretention to provide guidance to public life. As, Dacey sincerely hopes, Christianity and Judaism have been tamed.

Dacey quotes with strong approval the Declaration issued by the first Secular Islam Summit in 2007: "We say to Muslim believers: there is a noble future for Islam as a personal faith, not a political doctrine." (192).

Tell that to Martin Luther King, whose Christian faith somehow did not remain a mere "personal faith," but set fire to a people and through them to a nation. It isn't only Islam that is Dacey's enemy but any religion that purports to express God's will for a society.

And the odd thing is that Dacey's truth claims are the same of those of any believer, as he would willingly admit. Dacey claims that truth can only be arrived at through freedom of conscience, speech, the press and democracy. Dacey does not rest on the separation of church and state. He wants to be able to criticize religion in the public square. Dacey says the believer is quite welcome to participate.

Islam is not a different kind of thing that must be opposed. If the people of Iraq choose to embed Shari'a in their Constitution, and if channels to amend that Constitution remain open, where is the harm? Why is that not democracy? Certainly I would prefer a society that does not have a death penalty, but can I insist on that against the expression of democratic will? If women vote for this Constitution in overwhelming numbers, are these women to be forced to be free? By whose order?

In the name of resistance to Islam, we are already committing injustice in the United States. Debbie Almontaser is removed from the office of principal of an arabic culture public school in New York City (see post of 5/2/2008). Dr. Moniem El-Ganayni, a naturalized American citizen born in Egypt, is stripped of his security clearance and barred from continuing to work at Bechtel Bettis, Inc., on the basis of secret claims that the Government refuses to discuss, thus denying even the rudiments of due process. (See post of 2/4/2008 and the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette of 6/1/2008). We are becoming the very kind of closed society that Dacey claims to oppose. That is what happens when you define your enemy in religious terms.

Hallowed Secularism does not see religion as an enemy. Nor does it see the public expression of religion as a negative. Its understanding of democracy is genuinely open, not like the secular script of Austin Dacey.