

Sunday 8th July:

Liberal Islam, what is it?

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Islamic fundamentalism is the spectre haunting the West (to modify Marx), and those who incline towards 'clash of cultures' type arguments are firmly of the view that the world needs an outbreak of liberal Islam. The more extreme culture warriors even assert (on what evidence I know not) that Islam is somehow impervious to liberal tendencies and needs to be 'defeated'. On both ethical and pragmatic grounds, I hope this is not true.

It is hard not to suspect that there is a lot of semi-digested Eurocentrism in the assumption that Islam needs a reformation just like the one Christianity had 500 years ago. For what it's worth, recent historical scholarship has disposed of the old canard that there ever was a monolithic Medieval Christianity which (depending on your polemical needs) either needed to be protected or reformed. Even off my thin knowledge base, it's obvious that Islam is no monolith either.

Provide us with some real understanding about liberal Islam:

- Is there such a thing?
- How significant is it?
- Where does it flourish?
- How does it work differently in places where Islam is a majority or a minority religion?
- In what senses might it be the way of the future?