

BELIEVING THE UNBELIEVABLE

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The reason why Americans were so psychologically unprepared for the horrors of September 11th is because they simply could not conceive of normal human beings carrying out a plan of such diabolical destruction. We've been led by progressive education, liberal theology, and our left-leaning media to believe that human beings are basically good—and that when they do terrible things like hijacking planes, they are simply responding, justifiably, to American or Israeli aggression.

Ordinary Americans could not understand that there were human beings who would live among us, enjoy the hospitality of our free society and yet painstakingly plan to murder thousands of innocent people in the name of religion. A good many Americans are indifferent to religion. They enjoy Christmas and Easter, but mainly as cultural events of the yearly calendar. Religious fanaticism is something they cannot even begin to deal with.

Nor could Americans understand how anyone, particularly those who profess to believe in God, could be driven by such consummate hatred that they would gladly inflict on fellow human beings such extreme pain and cruelty. Nothing in our American idea of religion, toleration, sense of decency and love for one's neighbor prepared us for this kind of suicidal insanity, this startling encounter with evil.

And we are now being told that it could have been worse, and that these Islamic fanatics are planning bigger and better attacks against us. How does one understand such evil? Back in the days after World War II, our family in New York made contact with the family's sole survivor of the holocaust in Europe. My parents' extended families, living in Poland, had all been killed. That sole survivor, my parents' niece, had migrated to Canada with her husband whom she had met in a displaced persons camp in Germany. My mother and I took the train to Montreal where we had a very emotional meeting with my cousin. In the course of our conversations, I asked my cousin what went through their minds when the Germans invaded Poland. She said they all knew that things would be bad, "but we didn't know it would be that bad."

They had assumed that the Germans were a civilized, cultivated people, incapable of doing what they eventually did. In fact, the Germans had been very friendly to the Jews of Poland in World War I. What that—in time—taught me is that the most civilized people in the world were capable of the worst barbarism if the circumstances made it possible. The pagan Hitlerian regime is what made it all possible.

It wasn't until most of the Jews of Warsaw had been taken to the death camps that the remaining remnant decided to stage an uprising. They felt it was better to die by fighting a last-ditch battle and taking some of the enemy with them, than merely dying as victims. In that regard, I thought of those passengers in the hijacked plane over Pennsylvania who decided it was

better dying preventing the hijackers from killing more Americans than to die as passive victims smashing into the Capitol or White House.

It wasn't until I became a Calvinist that I began to understand how the Germans could do what they did. John Calvin had no illusions about human nature, and he found more than enough in the Bible to characterize man as "innately depraved." And it is this innate depravity that is the cause of evil in man. The only way that innate depravity can be controlled is by belief in the God of the Bible and his laws that tell us how to live. Since America was founded for the most part by Calvinists who believed in man's innate depravity, they conceived of a form of government that would prevent any one man from gaining so much power as to become a dictator. They believed that it wasn't power that corrupts man, but man who corrupts power. That Calvinist distrust of man is at the basis of our Constitutional system. But it is the liberals who have tried to convince us otherwise. "Trust us," they keep saying. "Give us your guns. Give us your children to educate. Give us your earnings. Trust us." But there is enough of a residual distrust of government among Americans that make them resist the liberal siren song of seduction.

Back in colonial days, children were taught to read with the New England Primer. Each letter of the alphabet was taught in reference to a lesson from the Bible. In teaching the letter A, the lesson was: "In Adam's fall, we sinned all." Powerful stuff for the children of early America. Today they are taught, "See Spot run," or its Mickey Mouse equivalent. We must do better than that if we are to survive as the nation our founding fathers gave us.

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