

A Leo III for Islam

George Weigel's oft-stated theme regarding jihadism is reflected in the following quote from his piece in the Jan. 17 Catholic Review: "certain tendencies in Islamic self-understanding ... can only be successfully overcome by reconnection in the Muslim mind with faith and moral reason."

It is an extraordinarily patronizing statement. Why only Islam? Could it also be applied to the Christian mind? Is our history, or the history of Western Christianity, less violent? Could we benefit from the reconnection of the Christian mind with faith and reason? Let us hope so.

More troubling, of course, is that Mr. Weigel's position is but part of a larger pattern in America by neoconservatives to "explain" jihadism and Muslim violence in order to justify our role as victims. The cause of this violence, their argument goes, rests primarily if not solely on the nature of Islam and the people who profess it. By this reasoning, this violence has nothing to do with us. This is the view that underpins our war on terror.

Mr. Weigel's piece and his book highlight how divergent his views are from those who urge that we examine the question of jihadism and terrorism differently. They do not condone violent behavior, but seek better ways to confront it. Theirs is a plea for greater empathy, to walk in the shoes of the Muslims in the Middle East and Southwest Asia, and to ask ourselves, do they attack us for who we are or what we have done and are doing to them. What can we and they do to stem this violence?