

Bob de Graaff

Bob de Graaff (1955) studied history at the Free University of Amsterdam (1974-1979). He taught 20th century political history at the Free University of Amsterdam (1979-1980) and the Erasmus University in Rotterdam (1980-1987). He also lectured in Japanese history (1600-1952) at the Japanese Studies department of the Erasmus University (1988-1999). From 1987 till 1999 he worked at the Institute of Netherlands History in The Hague as head of the department for 19th and 20th century history, publishing documents on Dutch foreign policy and reports from the Dutch internal security service. In 1997 he defended his Ph.D. thesis on the Dutch Colonial Office and its task environment between 1912 and 1940. From 1999 till 2002 he was co-ordinator of the research team of the Netherlands Institute for War Documentation in Amsterdam that produced the so-called Srebrenica-report. In September 2000 he was appointed as associate professor in the department for the History of International Affairs at the University of Utrecht, where he has been teaching 19th and 20th century European history, the history of human rights and the history of Yugoslavia. Since 2005 he holds the Socrates chair for political and cultural reconstruction from a humanistic perspective at this same university. Since February 2007 is professor for terrorism and counterterrorism at the Campus The Hague of Leiden University and director of the Centre for Terrorism and Counterterrorism. He is currently writing a history of fanaticism.

Abstract

Until the time of Enlightenment fanaticism was usually interpreted as a religious phenomenon. In my definition of fanaticism fanatics are those who aspired to establish the Heavenly Empire on Earth during their lifetime or to reach paradise by using violent means against non-believers who were thought to be obstructing God's intentions with mankind, i.e. its salvation, preceded by an ordeal or Armageddon. It turns out that the Enlightenment and the abolishment of God in no way lessened fanatic aspirations. Once man took the position of God it still proved possible to try to create a salutary endstate, as the ideologies and praxis of communism and fascism proved. They both leaned on Enlightenment philosophies, e.g. of Rousseau and De Sade. Currently so-called religious, esp. jihadist terrorism could be defined more profitably as a new form of fanaticism. However, one would be mistaken to interpret this new kind of fanaticism as a return to pre-Enlightenment times and solely in terms of religion. Jihadist fanaticism owes as much to Enlightenment philosophies as liberal democracies do. It even stresses the same core values, such as fraternity, liberty, equality, righteousness and happiness. Consequently, it suffers from the same problems that the combination of these values created already during the Enlightenment and were more or less present in the philosophies of that time. In other words, jihadist fanaticism is nothing else than version 3.0 of fanaticism instead of a return to the Middle Ages.