

Islamisation of Europe (1)

The 20th century was the age of World Wars. This century will experience its own dangers. A prominent Indian Muslim predicted in 1992 that the West's "next confrontation is definitely going to come from the Muslim world." He was right. The September 11, 2001, attack on America has been described as "the twenty-first century shot heard around the world." What happened in just one short day was the start of a new critical relationship between Islam and the West. In *Commentary* Norman Podhoretz even claims that we are now in the midst of World War IV (the Cold War was World War III). To get a better perspective of the clash between the West and Islam, we will take a brief look at the historical context.

The Spread of Christianity

Christianity spread through the preaching of the Apostles as contrasted with the extension of Islam by the sword. Christ was crucified. His cause seemed to have failed. After His resurrection, His early followers were persecuted. Muhammad triumphed during his lifetime and died a sovereign and a conqueror. It was not until 313 AD that emperor Constantine declared Christianity legal. Consequently, the West became different from other civilizations not in the way it developed but in the distinctive character of its values and institutions. In *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Samuel P. Huntington comments, "These include most notably its Christianity, pluralism, individualism, and rule of law, which made it possible for the West to invent modernity, expand throughout the world, and become the envy of other societies."

The Spread of Islam

From its very beginning, Islam expanded by conquest. An extremist Muslim scholar Hassan al-Banna (d.1949) said that Islam is nothing less than a universal "army of salvation" to conquer the world. The Koran is accepted as the literal Word of God, dictated to the last and final of God's messengers, Muhammad. During Muhammad's lifetime, the Muslims became a political and a religious community, with the Prophet as the head of state. The Muslim, therefore, knows nothing of separation between "church" and state. To him his religious life is also his political life. Traditionally Muslims divide the world in Dar al-Islam and Dar al-Harb, the abode of peace and the abode of war.

Since the beginning of Islam in 622, there have been continuous encounters and conflicts between Islam and Christianity. The rapid growth of Islam came at the expense of Christianity. By 711, Muslims controlled the entire north African shoreline and Spain. The once flourishing Greco-Roman-Christian civilization in North Africa disappeared. It was militarily destroyed by the advancing armies of Islam. The result of this Islamic conquest was of immense significance. It created the West by laying the equivalent of an iron curtain lengthwise through the Mediterranean and along the Pyrenees that

separated Gaul from Spain.

This brief sketch of the historical background of Islam shows the incompatibility between Islam and what we call "democracy." An Islamic state is in principle a theocracy - that is, a state ruled by God, according to his law. Bernard Lewis notes that "the history of the Islamic states, is one of almost unrelieved autocracy. The Muslim subject owed obedience to a legitimate Muslim ruler as a legitimate duty. That is to say, disobedience was a sin as well as a crime" (*The Atlantic Monthly*, Feb 1993).

In our time the Islamists argue that democracy is antithetical to Islam and moreover is specifically designed to destroy it. They believe that the Western concept of democracy is simply blasphemy and rebellion against the rule of God. This belief explains in large part the failure of democracy to emerge in much of the Muslim world. But Muslims do take advantage of the freedom of religion provided by Western democracies. A simple question. Why are Muslims allowed to establish mosques and Islamic centres in the Western world when the same privilege is not granted to Christians in many Islamic countries? For example, there is not a single church in Saudi Arabia.

In 732 Charles Martel (689-741), exactly a century after Muhammad's death, turned back a Muslim force near Poitiers which had made its deepest penetration ever into Western Europe. On Christmas Day, 800, Pope Leo III, created a new western empire by crowning Charlemagne, the Frankish king, emperor in St. Peter's basilica in Rome. Contemporaries recognized the decisive character of the event. They immediately labelled him the "father of Europe." The Carolingian empire preserved the achievements of Roman civilization and set the foundations for what we now call Europe. In medieval Europe the unity of Greco-Roman culture with the Christian faith was taken for granted. To the East, there was the constantly growing power of Islam which represented a cultural and military as well as a religious challenge to Christendom. There is no understanding of Europe, therefore, without Christianity.

Christian Apologists

From the very beginning of the emergence of Islam, Christian apologists defended the Christian faith. The eighth century John Damascene, born in Damascus, regarded Islam as an Arian heresy because it treats Christ only as a servant and a creature. He depicts Muhammad as misguided and dismisses the Koran as an empty dream. Peter Alphonsi (1062-1110) wrote a *Dialogue with the Jew Moses*, in which he combined a vigorous attack on Islam with ridicule for the Jewish Talmud. His work, however, has the great merit of presenting a relatively complete account of Muslim beliefs. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) contrasted the spread of Christianity with that of Islam. He said that Muhammad taught nothing new and sublime. The Koran is mixed with fables and errors. Muhammad, moreover, performed no miracles and fulfilled no prophecies. The further expansion of Islam took place by force of arms. The military successes of the Turks in the fifteenth century prompted many theologians to write treatises aimed at their conversion. Among the creative theologians of this era who concerned themselves with the Islamic problems, the first place should probably be given to Cardinal Nicholas of

Cusa (1401-1464).

The Fall of Constantinople

The eastern half of the Roman empire survived until 1453. The last eastern Roman emperor, Constantine XI, who fell defending Constantinople against the Turks in 1453, was the direct heir, in unbroken succession, of the first Constantine, the first Christian emperor. An often-cited event that marks the fall of Constantinople and its conversion to Islam is the Hagia Sophia, the main cathedral of the eastern capital. The church, which had been the heart of the Orthodox faith became a mosque. The city thereafter became known as Istanbul. Christendom shuddered at the news.

Further Clashes

The year 1492 was notorious in Europe, not because Columbus sailed from Cadiz, but for another Spanish event, the fall of Grenada, which marked the end of the *reconquista*, the Christian counteroffensive against the Islamic invaders who had arrived in 711 AD. In 1530 the pope crowned Charles V (1500-1558) as the Holy Roman Emperor - the last such coronation - and confirmed his role as the defender of the Catholics against the "heretics." Charles governed as though he intended and hoped to become a world ruler as he believed his namesake, Charlemagne, had been. Three great problems plagued his reign - the religious revolt in Germany, the Turkish threat, and the continuing struggle with France for the European hegemony. Charles V was ready to suppress the Reformation, but the Turks reached the gates of Vienna in 1529 for the first time. European rulers had really only themselves to blame; they had never been able to unite effectively against the Turks. Someone commented that this siege of Vienna was one of the factors that saved the Reformation. Needing help against the Turks, Charles V made a truce with Protestant princes (Nuremberg Standstill, 1532).

Islam is the only civilization, which has put the survival of the West in doubt, and it has done that at least twice. The Turks made one last push forward, besieging Vienna again in 1683. This second Vienna's siege was lifted by the Polish King, Jan III Sobieski's victory. Turkish failure to capture the city was followed by headlong retreat - an entirely new experience for the Ottomans' armies. In *The Cube and the Cathedral: Europe, America, and Politics without God* George, Weigel expresses the fear that this victory in 1648 is now being reversed. He notes that the Europe of the twenty-second century, or even the late twenty-first, is a Europe increasingly influenced, and perhaps even dominated, by militant Islamic populations, convinced that their long-delayed triumph in European heartland is at hand.

The Crimean War (1854-1856)

The Crimean War marked a drastic change in the European nations' attitude toward Christianity. This armed conflict was between Russia on the one side and France, Britain, and Turkey on the other. British and French fears of Russian expansion into Europe were an underlying cause of the conflict. The end of the hostilities was formally

concluded by the treaty of Paris (March 1856). Russia abandoned its claim to act as the protector of Orthodox Christians living under Turkish rule. Turkish independence was guaranteed by Britain, France, and Austria. The Treaty of Paris is particularly noteworthy because it included Turkey in the European community of states and ended the classical greeting "In the Name of the Holy Trinity," which began each treaty in Europe. To accommodate Islam, the heading of the Paris treaty began: "In the Name of the almighty God." German Christian statesman Friedrich Von Stahl (1802-1861) believed that the emperor of Russia or his own king would never approve of this, but they did.

(To Be continued)

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April 2006