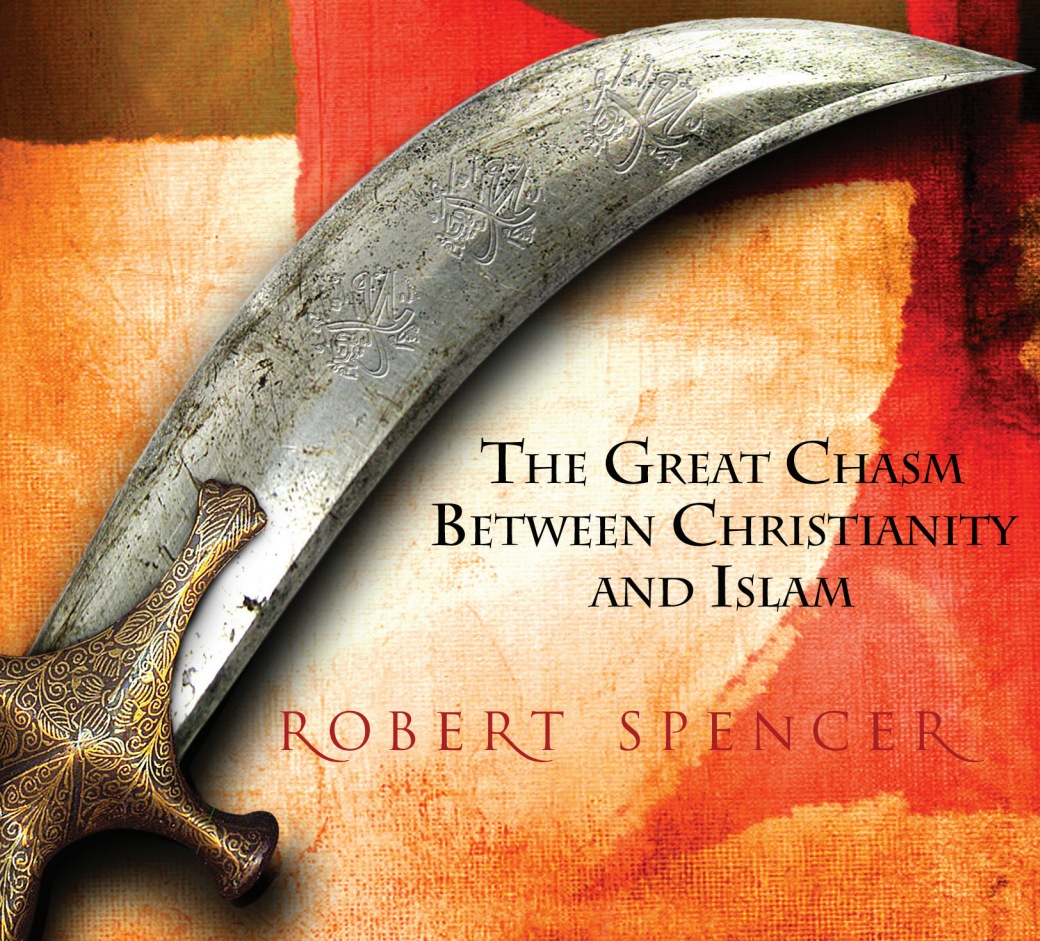


NOT
PEACE
BUT A
SWORD



THE GREAT CHASM
BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY
AND ISLAM

ROBERT SPENCER

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Not Peace but a Sword
The Great Chasm Between
Christianity and Islam



Catholic Answers

San Diego
2013

Not Peace but a Sword

The Great Chasm Between Christianity and Islam

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In memory of the Christian martyrs of Islamic jihad,
known and unknown.

*Your martyrs, O Lord, received the crown of immortality
from you, O our God, on account of their struggle.
Armed with your strength, they have vanquished their persecutors
and crushed the powerless arrogance of demons. Through their
intercessions, O Christ God, save our souls.*

This book would not have been written were it not for Todd M. Aglialoro, who conceived of it, encouraged me to write it, smoothed out its infelicities, and ably saw it through to completion. I am grateful for his patience and his keen eye. Thanks also to Fr. Thomas P. Steinmetz, a priest of priests, and to the many Catholic and Orthodox believers from the Middle East who discussed the issues in this book with me. Though I cannot name them for unfortunate but unavoidable reasons, I am deeply grateful for their insights.

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Introduction

Vile Heretics, Separated Brethren, or Something Else?

Can't we all just get along? Maybe not. And if not, what then?

A book about the differences, rather than similarities, of two religious traditions, and how in certain important ways we may *not* be able to get along, and indeed should not work closely together (even as we strive always to preserve harmonious relations), may seem at first glance to be uncharitable. It is certainly against the spirit of the age.

To those who assume that to speak of other religions in anything but a complimentary fashion is contrary to Vatican II and to the divine command to love our neighbor, it may even seem un-Christian.

It is a peculiar, albeit common, misconception of our age to think that dispensing with the truth can be an act of charity. It never truly can be. We must always, as the Apostle says, speak the truth in love—that is, enunciate the realities that we know to be true without rancor, or pride, or arrogance, or condemnation. But, we must never think our obligation to be charitable can or should overwhelm our responsibility to bear witness to the truth.

When it comes to people of other faiths, as Catholics we must always treat them with the respect they warrant as human beings made in the image of God and endowed with an immortal soul, a soul for whom Christ died. It is not, however, an act either of disrespect or lack of charity to speak honestly about what divides us, about why we have separate religious traditions in the first place, and what the prospects are, in light of these differences, for collaboration and genuine dialogue.

In fact, one of the oddities of contemporary “interfaith dialogue” is that all too often, out of overzealous irenicism, it glosses over, or ignores altogether, the disagreements between religious traditions, as if pretending that they didn’t exist would make them go away. This approach may make for a pleasant afternoon coffee, but as a basis for lasting cooperation or partnership it is fraught with hazards. The most obvious of these is the possibility that the very differences of belief and outlook that have been downplayed will operate in some way to derail the collaborative effort: People act all the time on the basis of the core assumptions and beliefs they have about the world and other people, and there is no field in which core assumptions and beliefs are more likely to come into play than the religious realm.

A respectful and accurate examination of differences, then, can make cooperation between people of different faiths more fruitful, helping all parties see the parameters for dialogue clearly and guard against unrealistic expectations. This is particularly true regarding the vexing question of dialogue and cooperation with Muslims.

It is fashionable in certain sectors for Catholics in the U.S. and Europe to call upon the Church to make common cause on life issues, and other areas of apparently shared moral concern, with Muslims. After all, both Catholics and Muslims face the same radical secularist foe; it’s time, or so the contention goes, for a common front of believers to defend the theistic worldview against ever more intrusive, arrogant, and assertive unbelievers. At the same time, however, this call for a common cause seems to meet an immediate obstacle in the growing Muslim aggression against Christians around the globe. For many, this raises some fundamental questions: Is cooperation with Muslims really a good idea? If so, to what extent can it be done? What are the implications of that cooperation?

Related to these questions are considerations of what might be accomplished through dialogue between Catholics and Muslims, and indeed whether, given the realities of Islam's theological view of Christians as well as present-day political realities, such dialogue (that is, a genuine, honest, mutually respectful give-and-take) is even possible.

To answer these questions properly, Catholics should have a clear understanding of what they're getting into when they enter into dialogue or make common cause with Muslims: They should know what Muslims actually believe about various issues of morality and ethics, and what they think of Catholics and of Christianity in general. Only then can they avoid pitfalls in a field that is unusually strewn with them.

Islam today presents a double aspect. On the one hand, Islamic jihadists, acting explicitly and proudly in the name of Islam and its texts and teachings, commit acts of violence and persecute Christians with increasing virulence in Egypt, Iraq, Pakistan, Nigeria, Indonesia, and elsewhere. (In such contexts it may be useful to recall that the Crusades, for all their errors and excesses, were a defensive action after 450 years of unanswered Islamic aggression.)

On the other hand, Muslims in Western countries reach out to Catholics and other non-Muslims, pointing out all the many things that we have in common. These Muslims appear to be as different from their co-religionists who are torching churches and massacring Christians as a tongues-speaking, fire-baptized Pentecostal is from a blue-blooded Episcopalian who listens to NPR in his Mercedes.

The relationship between these two groups of Muslims, and the relationship of Islam in general to Christianity and

the Catholic Church, is the preoccupation of this book. We will explore how Muslims understand not only their own religion but also ours, and what that implies for the prospects of collaboration, dialogue, and more. We'll also compare the Muslim and Catholic understandings of God, Christ, revelation, salvation, and morality.

The object of these explorations is to generate more light than heat, but these are heated issues. It is our responsibility as Catholics to approach Muslims, as everyone else, with unflagging charity.

That does not, however, require that we close our eyes.

Time for an “Ecumenical Jihad”?

They’re pious. They’re pro-life. They’re uncompromising. What’s not to like?

Many faithful Catholics today look at Muslims and see a formidable friend and ally in the struggle against secularist efforts to drive religion out of the public square and erase all vestiges of natural law from positive law. The Qur’an, the holy book of Islam, tells Muslims that “thou wilt surely find the nearest of them in love to the believers are those who say ‘We are Christians’; that, because some of them are priests and monks, and they wax not proud” (5:82).¹ And some Christians have been anxious to show that same love to the believers in Islam. The foremost popular exponent of this view is the Catholic philosopher and apologist Peter Kreeft, who engagingly articulated the need for this alliance in his 1996 book *Ecumenical Jihad* and reiterated and expanded upon his call for it in his 2010 follow-up, *Between Allah and Jesus*.

“The age of religious wars is ending,” proclaimed Kreeft five years before the September 11 attacks. Kreeft continued: “The age of religious *war* is beginning: a war of all religions against none.”² Kreeft issues a strong call for making common cause with Muslims on moral issues and questions relating to maintaining a place for religion in public life. Noting that the highly charged Arabic word *jihad* actually means simply “struggle,” he maintains that “an ‘ecumenical jihad’ is possible and is called for, for the simple and strong reason that Muslims and Christians preach and practice the same First Commandment: *islam*, total surrender, submission of the human will to the divine will. We fight side by side not only

because we face a common enemy but above all because we serve and worship the same divine Commander.”³

Leaving aside for a moment the question of whether Catholics and Muslims view the submission of the human will to the divine will in an identical or even analogous way, bolstering Kreeft’s point is the fact that Catholics and Muslims have already fought side by side. At the United Nations World Conference on Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994, the international media made a great deal out of a Vatican alliance with Muslim nations in opposition to anti-life initiatives. At the World Conference on Women held the next year in Beijing, Catholics and Muslims together called upon the conference to emphasize the family’s role as society’s basic unit.

These alliances were not flawless. At the Cairo conference, the Church along with Muslim leaders succeeded in ensuring that the final document affirmed that “in no case should abortion be promoted as a method of family planning,”⁴ but the Vatican failed to strike from the document all language suggesting that abortion was a woman’s right, leading the *New York Times* to report with obvious satisfaction that “many conference delegates said the Vatican seriously miscalculated its potential clout in the debate, especially among . . . Islamic governments to which it had appealed for support.”⁵ The Muslim representatives agreed to the language ruling out the use of abortion as a means of family planning but opposed Vatican efforts to call for an end to it in all circumstances. For Islamic law, unlike Church teaching and contrary to widespread belief, does not forbid abortion in every case.⁶

Of course, Vatican officials don’t have to secure 100 percent agreement with everyone with whom they collaborate. The limitations of such cooperation with Muslims, how-

ever, are not isolated to disagreements about various aspects of core issues. They also stem from the irreconcilability between the calls for Christian-Muslim cooperation and the trend of anti-Christian violence committed by Muslims.

The jihad against modern-day Christians

In the popular mind, even after all these centuries since the Crusades, most Westerners tend to think that if there has been any aggression between Muslims and Christians, it was the Christians' fault. And so it is that the epithet of choice that Islamic jihadists apply to their foes today is *crusaders*. Canny at public relations, the jihadists hope thereby to conjure up an image of aggressive Christian warriors forcing non-Christians to convert or expelling them from their lands and establishing a Christian theocracy.

Islamic jihadists for years called American forces in Iraq and Afghanistan "Crusaders" and claimed that they were there as part of a war being waged by Christians against Islam. Confirmation of this came from an unlikely source in January 2011, when the acclaimed journalist Seymour Hersh, speaking in Qatar, charged that retired General Stanley McChrystal and military personnel currently serving in special operations units were part of a secret cabal bent on waging a new Crusade against Muslims: "They do see what they're doing—and this is not an atypical attitude among some military—it's a crusade, literally," Hersh asserted. "They see themselves as the protectors of the Christians. They're protecting them from the Muslims [as in] the thirteenth century. And this is their function."⁷

If McChrystal and others really considered themselves to be "the protectors of the Christians" from Islamic jihad attacks, they were failing dismally at their task. There is, of

course, no new Crusade, but Christians in Muslim lands are being victimized more relentlessly and brutally today than they have been for centuries.

Egyptian Catholic spokesman Fr. Rafic Greische told Vatican Radio in December 2010 that “Muslim fundamentalists . . . want the Christians to evacuate from the Middle East and leave. And this is what is happening every day.”⁸ From Egypt to Nigeria, from Iraq to Pakistan, Christians in majority-Muslim countries face a grimmer present and a more uncertain future than ever as Islamic jihadists step up their efforts to Islamize them, to drive them out of their lands—or to kill them outright.

Still, the world generally continues to avert its eyes. Fearful of offending Muslim sensibilities, the international community has largely ignored this persecution, allowing it to continue under the cover of darkness. Thus unchallenged, Muslim persecution of Christians has become a drearily familiar narrative, repeated with increasingly terrifying frequency in Muslim-controlled areas throughout the world.

Moreover, this religious bigotry, hatred, and violence are legitimized by holy writ: the Qur’an and other Islamic texts and teachings. Nowhere else does religious bigotry have such bloody consequences. And yet, nowhere else does such religious bigotry take place almost entirely without comment, let alone condemnation, from the human rights community.

Emblematic of how the mainstream media, and in turn human rights organizations, gloss over the harsh reality of Christian persecution is a January 2011 Associated Press story. When machete-wielding Muslims brutally murdered six Christians in Nigeria in January 2011, AP’s headline was “6 dead in religion-torn central Nigerian region,” as if the cause of the problem was “sectarian strife” that was the equal responsibility of both sides. The lead paragraph read: “Authorities say machete-wielding attackers have killed six

people in two attacks on Christian villages in central Nigeria.”⁹ Although the victims were identified, the attackers were not until later in the story, and then only in the context of their retaliating against an earlier attack upon Muslims by Christians. And indeed, Christians have fought back in Nigeria, but Islamic jihadists are the aggressors and created the conflict. One would never, however, get that idea from the Associated Press.

Human rights organizations give only perfunctory recognition to such outrages, and world leaders yawn. Christians are not fashionable or politically correct victims.

Before the Gulf War, some estimates held the number of Christians in Iraq to be approaching a million or more; but since 2003, over half of Iraq’s prewar Christians have fled the country. This is not to suggest that the brutal regime of Saddam Hussein was particularly hospitable to Iraqi Christians; even in the relatively secular Iraq of Saddam, where Deputy Prime Minister Tariq Aziz was a Chaldean Catholic Christian, the small Christian community faced random violence from the Muslim majority. Aside from outbreaks of actual persecution, including murder, Christians were routinely pressured to renounce their religion and to marry Muslims.¹⁰

But now the situation has grown exponentially worse. Saddam did not enforce the fullness of Islamic law mandating the subjugation of Christians; now, numerous armed groups are determined to do so, or to punish those Christians who do not submit. Jihadists bombed forty Iraqi churches between 2004 and 2011—seven on a single day, Orthodox Christmas Eve 2007.¹¹ The most notorious attack came on October 31, 2010, a Sunday, when jihadists stormed the crowded Our Lady of Salvation church in Baghdad and began murdering worshippers in cold blood. Sixty-eight people were killed.¹²

The situation of Christians in Egypt is no better. Late in 2010 Copts in Egypt experienced an unprecedented reign of terror. An Islamic suicide bomber murdered twenty-two people and wounded eighty more at the Coptic Christian Church of the Saints in Alexandria, Egypt on New Year's Eve.¹³ Just days later in 2011, as Christmas (which Copts celebrate on January 7) approached, an Islamic website carried this ominous exhortation: "Blow up the churches while they are celebrating Christmas or any other time when the churches are packed."¹⁴

Islamic authorities in Egypt are generally disinclined to discuss the plight of Christians there. When Pope Benedict XVI spoke out in January 2011 against the persecution of Christians in Egypt and elsewhere in the Middle East, Al-Azhar University in Cairo, the world's most prestigious Sunni Muslim institution, reacted angrily, breaking off dialogue with the Vatican and accusing the Pope of interference in internal Egyptian affairs. In a statement, Al-Azhar denounced the pontiff's "repeated negative references to Islam and his claims that Muslims persecute those living among them in the Middle East."¹⁵ This was not the first time Al-Azhar had moved against those who decried the persecution of Christians in Egypt rather than against the persecutors: Just weeks before taking issue with the Pope's statements, Al-Azhar demanded that Copts repudiate a U.S. report on Coptic persecution.¹⁶ The Mubarak government of Egypt, meanwhile, recalled its ambassador to the Vatican.¹⁷

In Pakistan, Christians are physically attacked and falsely accused under the nation's blasphemy laws so frequently that a steady stream of Christians is converting to Islam simply in order to be safe from legal harassment and rampaging Islamist mobs.¹⁸ In 2010, blasphemy charges against a Christian woman, Asia Bibi, gained international attention

and widespread criticism of Pakistan's blasphemy laws. Yet, when the governor of Punjab, Salman Taseer, spoke out in favor of the repeal of such laws, he was assassinated by an Islamic supremacist who explained that he was acting in defense of the blasphemy laws.¹⁹

And just as Al-Azhar reacted angrily when the Pope spoke out against the persecution of Christians in Egypt, in Pakistan Islamic supremacist groups became enraged when the pontiff called for repeal of the nation's blasphemy laws. Farid Paracha, the leader of Jamaat-i-Islami, the largest pro-Sharia party in Pakistan, fumed: "The Pope's statement is an insult to Muslims across the world."²⁰ Islamic supremacist groups held rallies protesting the Pope's statement as "part of a conspiracy to pit the world's religions against each other," in the words of Pakistani parliamentarian Sahibzada Fazal Karim.²¹

The punishment for exercising freedom of conscience: death

Converts from Islam to Christianity are often hunted in the Muslim world, where virtually all religious authorities agree that such individuals deserve death. Muhammad himself commanded this: "Whoever changed his Islamic religion, then kill him."²² This is still the position of all the schools of Islamic jurisprudence, although there is some disagreement over whether the law applies only to men or to women also.

At Cairo's Al-Azhar University, the most prestigious and influential institution in the Islamic world, an Islamic manual certified as a reliable guide to Sunni Muslim orthodoxy, states: "When a person who has reached puberty and is sane voluntarily apostatizes from Islam, he deserves to be killed." Although the right to kill an apostate is reserved in Islamic law to the leader of the community and theoretically other Muslims can be punished for taking this duty upon them-

selves, in practice a Muslim who kills an apostate needs to pay no indemnity and perform no expiatory acts (as he must in other kinds of murder cases under classic Islamic law). This accommodation is made because killing an apostate “is killing someone who deserves to die.”²³

IslamOnline, a website manned by a team of Islam scholars headed by the internationally influential Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, explains, “If a sane person who has reached puberty voluntarily apostatizes from Islam, he deserves to be punished. In such a case, it is obligatory for the caliph (or his representative) to ask him to repent and return to Islam.

If he does, it is accepted from him, but if he refuses, he is immediately killed.” And what if someone doesn’t wait for a caliph to appear and takes matters into his own hands? Although the killer is to be “disciplined” for “arrogating the caliph’s prerogative and encroaching upon his rights,” there is “no blood money for killing an apostate (or any expiation)” — in other words, no significant punishment for the killer.²⁴

Two Afghans, Said Musa and Abdul Rahman, know all this well. Both were arrested for the crime of leaving Islam for Christianity.²⁵ The Afghan Constitution stipulates that “no law can be contrary to the beliefs and provisions of the sacred religion of Islam.”²⁶ Even after Abdul Rahman’s arrest, which took place in 2006, Western analysts seem to have had trouble grasping the import of this provision. A “human rights expert” quoted by the *Times of London* summed up confusion widespread in Western countries: “The constitution says Islam is the religion of Afghanistan, yet it also mentions the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and Article 18 specifically forbids this kind of recourse. It really highlights the problem the judiciary faces.”²⁷

But, in fact, there was no contradiction. The constitution may declare its “respect” for the Universal Declaration

of Human Rights, but it also says that no law can contradict Islamic law. The Constitution’s definition of religious freedom is explicit: “The religion of the state of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan is the sacred religion of Islam. Followers of other religions are free to exercise their faith and perform their religious rites *within the limits of the provisions of law*” (emphasis added).

The death penalty for apostasy is deeply ingrained in Islamic culture—which is one reason why it was Abdul Rahman’s own family that went to police to file a complaint about his conversion. Whatever triggered their action in 2006, they could be confident that the police would receive such a complaint with the utmost seriousness. After an international outcry, Abdul Rahman was eventually spirited out of Afghanistan to relative safety in Italy. Despite the publicity, his case was hardly unique, as other nearly identical cases—that of Said Musa in February 2011 and that of Youcef Nadarkhani in early 2012—attest. And yet, while international indignation rained down upon the Afghan government for the arrest and trial of Abdul Rahman, the world community showed hardly any interest at all in Said Musa. Perhaps the intervening years had inured the world’s opinion makers to Islamic atrocities against Christians, although Nadarkhani’s capital trial in Iran did call new international attention to the plight of ex-Muslims in Muslim countries.

Meanwhile, in Egypt in August 2007, Mohammed Hegazy, a convert from Islam to Christianity, was forced to go into hiding after a death sentence was pronounced against him by Islamic clerics. He refused to flee Egypt, declaring, “I know there are fatwas to shed my blood, but I will not give up and I will not leave the country.”²⁸ Early in 2008, his father told Egyptian newspapers: “I am going to try to talk to my son and convince him to return to Islam. If he re-

fuses, I am going to kill him with my own hands.” Hegazy remains in hiding in Egypt.²⁹

A tradition of persecution

The prophet of Islam set the pattern for all of this, for he himself made war against Christians. Muhammad’s last military expedition was against the Christian forces of the Byzantine Empire in the northern Arabian garrison of Tabuk; and shortly after their prophet’s death, Islamic jihadists conquered and Islamized the Christian lands of the Middle East, North Africa, and Spain. The jihad then pointed toward Christian Europe and continued for centuries, the high-water mark coming in 1453 with the conquest of Constantinople. After September 1683, when the Ottoman siege of Vienna was broken, the Islamic tide in Europe began to recede. But the doctrines that fueled the jihad against Christians were never reformed or rejected by any Islamic sect.

Consequently, with the renewal of jihadist sentiments among Muslims in the twentieth century came renewed persecution of Christians. This chilling story told by a woman who lived during the Ottoman Empire of the late nineteenth century captures the moment of that renewal in one household:

Then one night, my husband came home and told me that the padisha had sent word that we were to kill all the Christians in our village, and that we would have to kill our neighbours. I was very angry, and told him that I did not care who gave such orders, they were wrong. These neighbours had always been kind to us, and if he dared to kill them Allah would pay us out. I tried all I could to stop him, but he killed them—killed them with his own hand.³⁰

The Christian population in Turkey has declined from 15 percent in 1920 to 1 percent today. In Syria, it has declined from 33 percent to 10 percent in the same span. In Bethlehem, 85 percent of the population was Christian in 1948; today, 12 percent hold to the faith founded by the town's most celebrated native son.³¹ The burden of the past lies heavy on the present for Christians in the Muslim world. Sheikh Omar Bakri Muhammad, a controversial pro-Osama Muslim leader who lived for years in Great Britain but is now barred from reentering that country, wrote in October 2002, "We cannot simply say that because we have no Khilafah [caliphate] we can just go ahead and kill any non-Muslim, rather, we must still fulfill their *Dhimmah*."³²

The *Dhimmah* is the Islamic legal contract of protection for Jews, Christians, and some other inferiors under Islamic rule; those who accept this protection, and the concomitant deprivation of various rights, are known as *dhimmis*. In 1999, Sheikh Yussef Salameh, the Palestinian Authority's undersecretary for religious endowment, according to Jonathan Adelman and Agota Kuperman of the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies, "praised the idea that Christians should become *dhimmis* under Muslim rule, and such suggestions have become more common since the second intifada began in October 2000."³³

In a recent Friday sermon at a mosque in Mecca, Sheikh Marzouq Salem Al-Ghamdi spelled out the Sharia's injunctions for *dhimmis*:

If the infidels live among the Muslims, in accordance with the conditions set out by the Prophet—there is nothing wrong with it provided they pay Jizya to the Islamic treasury. Other conditions are . . . that they do not renovate a church or a monastery, do not rebuild ones that were

destroyed, that they feed for three days any Muslim who passes by their homes . . . that they rise when a Muslim wishes to sit, that they do not imitate Muslims in dress and speech, nor ride horses, nor own swords, nor arm themselves with any kind of weapon; that they do not sell wine, do not show the cross, do not ring church bells, do not raise their voices during prayer, that they shave their hair in front so as to make them easily identifiable, do not incite anyone against the Muslims, and do not strike a Muslim. . . . If they violate these conditions, they have no protection.³⁴

These Sharia provisions have not been fully enforced since the mid-nineteenth century, but today's jihadists want to restore these laws along with the rest of the Sharia. The idea that Christians must "feel themselves subdued" (Qur'an 9:29) in Islamic lands is also very much alive. When the first Catholic Church in Qatar opened in March 2008, it sported no cross, no bell, no steeple, and no sign. "The idea," explained the church's pastor, Fr. Tom Veneracion, "is to be discreet because we don't want to inflame any sensitivities."³⁵

In the Philippines, the church in the nation's one Islamic city, Marawi, has also done away with the cross. A Catholic priest, Fr. Teresito Soganub, explains: "To avoid arguments and to avoid further misunderstandings we just plant the cross deep in our hearts." Fr. Soganub, according to Reuters, "doesn't wear a crucifix or a clerical collar and sports a beard out of respect for his Muslim neighbors." He celebrates few weddings, since roast pork is a staple of wedding receptions for Filipino Catholics.³⁶

It is easy to see the need for such discretion. Preaching in a mosque in Al-Damam, Saudi Arabia, the popular Saudi Sheikh Muhammad Saleh Al-Munajjid recommended ha-

ted of Christians and Jews as a proper course: "Muslims must educate their children to Jihad. This is the greatest benefit of the situation: educating the children to Jihad and to hatred of the Jews, the Christians, and the infidels; educating the children to Jihad and to revival of the embers of Jihad in their souls. This is what is needed now."³⁷

The silence of human rights groups

What Justus Reid Weiner, an international human rights lawyer, stated in December 2007 about Christians in Palestinian areas applies to Christians in the Islamic world generally: "The systematic persecution of Christian Arabs living in Palestinian areas is being met with nearly total silence by the international community, human rights activists, the media and NGOs." He said that if nothing were done, no Christians would be left there in fifteen years, for "Christian leaders are being forced to abandon their followers to the forces of radical Islam."³⁸

The nearly total silence manifests itself in the curiously euphemistic manner in which human rights groups report on the plight of Christians, when they notice that plight at all. For example, Amnesty International's 2007 report on the human rights situation in Egypt dismisses the suffering of Coptic Christians in a single sentence so filled with euphemism and moral equivalence and so lacking in context that it almost erases the crime it describes: "There were sporadic outbreaks of sectarian violence between Muslims and Christians. In April [2006], three days of religious violence in Alexandria resulted in at least three deaths and dozens of injuries."³⁹ In reality, the strife began when a Muslim stabbed a Christian to death inside a church, and when armed jihadists attacked three churches in Alexandria that same month.⁴⁰

The passive voice seems to be the rule of the day where jihad violence against Christians is concerned. The 2007 Amnesty International report on Indonesia includes this line: “Minority religious groups and church buildings continued to be attacked.” By whom? AI is silent. “In Sulawesi, sporadic religious violence occurred throughout the year.”⁴¹ Who is responsible for that violence? AI doesn’t say. Amnesty International seems more concerned about protecting Islam and Islamic groups from being implicated in human rights abuses than about protecting Christians from those abuses.

It appears that Christianity—even indigenous Egyptian Christianity, which of course predates the advent of Islam in that country—is too closely identified with the United States and the West for the multiculturalist tastes of the human rights elite. The situation is dire. Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch Gregory III, who lives in Damascus, declared in April 2006 that “after 11 September, there is a plot to eliminate all the Christian minorities from the Arabic world. . . . Our simple existence ruins the equations whereby Arabs can’t be other than Moslems, and Christians but be Westerners. . . . If the Chaldeans, the Assyrians, the Orthodox, the Latin Catholics leave, if the Middle East is cleansed of all the Arabic Christians, the Moslem Arab world and a so-called Christian Western world will be left face to face. It will be easier to provoke a clash and justify it with religion.”⁴² Several years later, Gregory III himself showed he felt the pressure to please the Muslims—or else—when he publicly blamed the Muslim persecution of Christians not on Islamic supremacists but on that ever-present bogey of Middle Eastern conspiracy theories, the Zionists.⁴³

Yet some American Catholics and non-Christians are surprised to discover that there are ancient communities of Christians in Islamic lands at all and that those communities

are being persecuted. Others are indifferent because of the growing movement of fashionable atheism, which sees all religions as equally repugnant and liable to lead to violence, whatever the differences in their actual teachings. And many Westerners, particularly those in the human rights elite, are wedded to a worldview in which only non-Western non-Christians can possibly fit into the human rights groups’ victim paradigm: Middle Eastern Christians are identified with white Western oppressors and could not be victims. Some Westerners even indulge in a certain *schadenfreude* at the persecution of Christians worldwide, seeing in it a comeuppance for a church and a belief system for which they have long harbored hatred or self-loathing guilt. That Christians in Muslim lands are generally poor, disenfranchised, and worlds away from the oppressive force that is the Christianity of Leftist myth doesn’t seem to enter their minds.

And so Islamic jihadists and Sharia supremacists, with ever increasing confidence and brutality, and virtually no protest from the West, continue to prey on the Christians in their midst. These embattled communities are now on the verge of extinction, with no one to speak up for them. Their continued existence and safety would require nothing short of a miracle.

Cognitive dissonance

In light of all this (and much more) evidence of an escalating global Islamic jihad against Christians, Peter Kreeft’s assertion—that “an ‘ecumenical jihad’ is possible and is called for, for the simple and strong reason that Muslims and Christians preach and practice the same First Commandment: *islam*, total surrender, submission of the human will to the divine will”—seems ironic. At the very least, the impulse to wage a

new war of all religions united against secularism is coming largely from Christians, without significant interest from the Muslim side. There is much more evidence of Muslim hatred and contempt for Christians, as evidenced by the global violence against them, than there is of Muslim interest in a common front with Catholics or any other Christians. To be sure, several years ago a large group of Islamic scholars did write to Pope Benedict and other Christian leaders, inviting them to dialogue (an initiative we'll examine in depth later on), but they have not managed to restrain their bloody-minded coreligionists.

The reasons for this may be many and elusive, but the reality of the escalating Muslim persecution of Christians and the comparatively small number of Muslims who have shown interest in anything like the common front that Kreeft advocates highlight the danger that, in their haste to gain an advantage in the culture wars, Western Catholics may be papering over vast and substantial differences between Catholicism and Islam solely in the hope of gaining an ally. And that way lies danger, for an ally gained by such means will hardly be dependable, and the ways in which that lack of dependability may manifest itself could have consequences nothing short of catastrophic.

Saladin: myth versus reality

Kreeft, and others like him, envision Muslims as devout, God-fearing, moral people who would naturally align themselves with others, such as Catholics, who share their concerns about galloping secularism and the erosion of moral values in society. In his book *The Enemy at Home*, conservative pundit Dinesh D'Souza advocates a common front between conservative Americans of all faiths and conserva-

tive Muslims, portraying these Muslims, whom he does not identify by name, as honorable, pious, humble, and appalled by contemporary Western popular culture. No doubt these qualities describe many Muslims. They certainly recall one particular Muslim: the semi-legendary sultan of the Crusader era, Saladin.

In the twelfth century, Saladin dealt decisive blows to the Crusader enterprise; but did it, according to prevailing historical myth, in a magnanimous and noble manner. Today Saladin is generally regarded as an exponent of the best aspects of Islam and proof that it need not be a religion of terrorism and intransigence. The Arab historian Amin Maalouf sums this up in his description of Saladin: "He was always affable with visitors, insisting that they stay to eat, treating them with full honours, even if they were infidels, and satisfying all their requests. He could not bear to let someone who had come to him depart disappointed, and there were those who did not hesitate to take advantage of this quality. One day, during a truce with the Franj [Franks], the 'Brins,' lord of Antioch, arrived unexpectedly at Saladin's tent and asked him to return a district that the sultan had taken four years earlier. And he agreed!"⁴⁴

The real Saladin of history was not quite as magnificently noble of spirit and generous as he is usually portrayed. After his great victory over the Crusaders at Hattin on July 4, 1187, he ordered that his Christian captives "should be beheaded [in accordance with Qur'an 47:4: "When you meet the unbelievers, smite their necks"], choosing to have them dead rather than in prison. With him was a whole band of scholars and Sufis and a certain number of devout men and ascetics; each begged to be allowed to kill one of them, and drew his sword and rolled back his sleeve. Saladin, his face joyful, was sitting on his dais; the unbelievers showed black despair."⁴⁵

Saladin was just as ruthless and bloodthirsty on other occasions.⁴⁶ Here again, his positive reputation in the modern West is more a matter of wishful thinking than of realism. And so it is with so much Catholic-Muslim interaction nowadays.