ISLAMO-CHRISTIAN CIVILIZATION

Richard W. Bulliet

The phrase "Islamo-Christian civilization" first appeared in 2004 in the book *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* by historian Richard W. Bulliet. It was coined with a two-fold purpose. First, in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, it was proposed as a way of focusing on the shared history and characteristics of the Islamic and Christian religious communities, rather than on past and current episodes of enmity between them. It followed the pattern of "Judeo-Christian civilization," a phrase that came into vogue in the 1950s as an oblique avowal of the post-Holocaust mood of interfaith reconciliation in Europe and America. Second, it was proposed as a way of encouraging historical and conceptual investigation of the great extent of overlap and parallel growth between the two religions that had manifested itself in myriad ways over many centuries. It took as an axiom this notion: The greater the recognition of a sibling relationship between Islam and Christianity, the better the prospects for peaceful coexistence in future years.

Half of the people in the world profess either Christianity or Islam. Each of these vast communities contain variant interpretations the stray far from the earliest versions of the faith. As a rule, believers who define their faith by adherence to what they understand those earliest versions to be, exhibit hostility toward, or at most grudging toleration of, interpretations that came into being at a later point in time. Within Christianity, Catholics went through centuries of militant opposition to

Protestants, and many Protestants and Catholics find it difficult to grant full acceptance to Mormonism, Christian Science, and other comparatively recent interpretations of Christianity. Within Islam, it is difficult to assign chronological priority to either Sunnism or Shi'ism; however, Sufi organizations and branches of Shi'ism that emerged at comparatively late dates, such as the Nusairis and the Druze, initially encountered hostility from the older versions of the faith. Interpretations that have emerged even more recently, such as the Baha'is and the Ahmadis, still face widespread rejection as versions of Islam.

For later versions of a faith to encounter difficulty in establishing their legitimacy in the eyes of those who adhere to earlier versions is normal in religious history. But this generally does not prevent the sundry versions being gathered under a single umbrella for purposes of identification. That is to say, when people speak of Christianity today they group Catholics, Eastern Orthodox, and Protestants together despite the undeniable histories of enmity within Christendom, just as estimates of the world Muslim population group Sunnis and Shi'is together despite their manifest differences and, in some contexts, murderous hostility. This being the case, how difficult can it be to look beyond the historical episodes of Muslim-Christian warfare and vilification, which were no greater in dogmatic intensity or bloodthirstiness than those between Catholics and

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

RICHARD W. BULLIET

Richard W. Bulliet is a professor of history at Columbia University who specializes in the history of Islamic society and institutions, the history of technology, and the history of the role of animals in human society. He first visited the Middle East in 1965. On his many subsequent trips he has spent time in virtually every region of the Middle East, North Africa, Central Asia, and South Asia. Bulliet has given several hundred interviews to the print and broadcast media. His commentaries have appeared in *Newsday*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Boston Globe*, and *The Arizona Republic*, and he has served as a consultant on Islamic matters for *Time Magazine*. His books include *The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization* (2004, in press), *The Columbia History of the Twentieth Century* (ed., 1998), *The Encyclopaedia of the Modern Middle East* (co-ed., 1996), *Islam: The View from the Edge* (1994), *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period* (1979), *The Camel and the Wheel* (1975), and *The Patricians of Nishapur* (1972).

Protestants or between Sunnis and Shi'ites, and group Christianity and Islam together as a single Islamo-Christian civilization that encompasses half the world?

If we go back to the early days of Islam, it is apparent that the first Muslims were no more certain that they were pioneers of a new religion than were the first followers of Jesus. Scholars sometimes use the term "believers" (Arabic: *mu'minun*) for Muhammad's earliest followers and refer to the early community that formed around Jesus' disciples after the crucifixion as "the Jesus movement." In this way, they seek to account for the time that elapsed before the words "Muslim" and "Christian" became fixed as the signifiers of new faith communities. Exactly when Islam's distinctiveness became universally recognized remains a matter of debate. In fact, medieval sources reflecting Christian viewpoints on the matter expressed ambivalence for several centuries. To medieval Christians, it seemed quite possible that Islam was a Christian heresy, just as Protestantism would seem to be to Roman Catholics a millennium later. After all, many Germanic peoples followed the Egyptian bishop Arius in his Unitarian teaching that Jesus was not truly or fully God, but rather a man who became divinized at the time of his baptism. Yet the Arians are always classified as Christians, albeit of heretical belief.

The *Gospel of Barnabas*, an account of Jesus' life dating in the extant Italian and Spanish versions to the sixteenth century, provides evidence that some Christians and/or Muslims—the actual author is unknown—never gave up the idea that the two religions were one. Not only does this "gospel" mirror the details about Jesus' life contained in the Qur'an while including the substance of the New Testament gospels, but it explicitly "predicts" the coming of Muhammad, as when God says: *"When I shall send thee into the world I shall send thee as my messenger of salvation, and thy word shall be true, insomuch that heaven and earth shall fail, but thy faith shall never fail."* Mohammed is his blessed name (*Barnabas 97:10*).

Was it political and military success that reified Islam's position as a separate faith? Or was it perhaps the Christians' bewilderment and fear who saw the majority of their brothers and sisters in faith absorbed within the Muslim caliphate, ultimately to convert in large numbers to Islam over a period of some four centuries? There is no way of telling. If one looks, however, at the earliest widespread public avowal of Islam accessible to people

of all faiths, namely, the gold and silver coinage in Arabic script that began to be issued in 76 AH, it is easier to see the caliphate as an economic power focused on the Arab people than as the institutional embodiment of a new religion. There was no iconic equivalent of the cross to symbolize doctrinal difference, and the words of the Qur'an that appeared on the coins would have conveyed very little to most people in an era when fewer than five percent of the caliphate's population could actually read the Arabic script.

What would have made Islam seem like a branch of Christianity rather than an absolutely separate religion? First and foremost, the Qur'anic revelation portrayed Jesus as a divine messenger who brought a sacred book to the Israelites and predicted the coming of Muhammad: *Jesus, the son of Mary, said: "O children of Israel! Behold, I am an apostle of God unto you, [sent] to confirm the truth of whatever there still remains of the Torah, and to give [you] glad tidings of an apostle who shall come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad [i.e., Muhammad]" (Sura 61: 6)*. The virginity of Mary was similarly affirmed. Jesus' death on the cross was denied, but that was not an unheard of view among early Christians who followed the so-called Docetist heresy.

Muslim readers who read the New Testament closely further pointed to passages that could be taken to imply that Jesus would send another "Comforter" or "Intercessor." The Greek used here is *parakletos*, sometimes taken as a misspelling of *periklytos*, meaning "praised one" (i.e., Muhammad) to care for people after his own departure. *Nevertheless I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Paraclete will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will prove the world wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment. (John 16: 7–8)* And again: *If you love Me, keep My commandments. Then I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Paraclete to be with you forever. He is the Spirit of Truth whom the world cannot receive, for it does not see Him nor know Him, but you know Him, for He is ever with you and will be in you (John 14: 16–17)*.

Eminent Muslim scholars repeatedly interpreted these passages as predictions of the coming of Muhammad, or as intimations of the End Times, when a Messiah ("anointed one"), known to both Sunni and Shi'ite Muslims as the Mahdi ("the right guide"), would come to redeem a sinful world. In that eschatological context, which was elaborated upon extensively in the collections of Muhammad's sayings (the *Hadith* literature), Muslim tradition strongly affirmed that Jesus would return in the End Times to combat and defeat the demonic Antichrist, known to Muslims as the Dajjal, and thus pave the way for the arrival of the Mahdi, who would preside over a millennium of peace and justice.

Christian theologians, naturally, did not share these Muslim interpretations. Instead, they saw John's verses dealing with the Paraclete as references to the Holy Spirit, one of the three components of the Trinity, despite the implication in the cited verses that the Paraclete had not yet arrived while the Holy Spirit had already figured in Jesus's baptism. But the effort of the Muslims to see Muhammad's coming as something predicted in the Bible, both in the old and the new testaments, was parallel to the systematic Christian effort to interpret the Old Testament as a prediction of the coming of Jesus Christ and his church. Both Muslims and Christians, in other words, sought to portray their spiritual founders as fulfilling prophecies found in earlier scripture.

In hindsight, it seems apparent that Islam was not just a new version of Christianity. Rather, they did indeed become separate religions regardless of any ambiguity or efforts at doctrinal reconciliation that may have existed in the first centuries after Muhammad. Yet hindsight changes, depending upon how far past the history is that one is scrutinizing. It is easy to find Protestant and Catholic leaders around the year 1600 who denied the validity of one another's faith, just as it is easy to find Catholic and Orthodox leaders in 1100 who rejected one another's version of Christianity or Protestant preachers today who cannot accept the Mormon brand

of Christianity. Eventually, however, once many battles had been fought, Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox Christians grudgingly came to accept one another as Christians. And they may all eventually agree to accept under the Christian umbrella the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (the Mormons) and Korea's Unification Church, established by the late Sun Myung Moon (d. 2012), who represented himself as the Messiah and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

By some measures, Islam is closer to Christianity doctrinally than either the Mormons or the Unification Church. To be sure, Islam denies the Trinity, as have

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various Christian sects over the centuries from the Arians to the Unitarians. But the revelations contained in the Qur'an and the traditions preserved in the *Hadith* literature echo and reiterate the traditions of the Jews and Christians who were living at the time of Muhammad and thus contain almost none of extra-Biblical content that pervades the Book of Mormon, especially its account of Jesus appearing in the Americas after his resurrection and his establishment there of a community of believers. Nor is there any Qur'anic parallel to Sun Myung Moon's claim that he is the Messiah who has come to complete the unfinished mission of Jesus. Muhammad is one of God's messengers, not a messiah. If a sufficient degree of hindsight someday allows the Mormons and the Unification Church to be fully accepted as parts of the world Christian community, then it would be absurd to deny the possibility of a similar reconceptualization of Islam.

Except that Muslims would thereby lose their independent identity and history as a separate and remarkably successful religion. There are Muslims who do, in fact, consider themselves Christians by virtue of the reverence they feel for Jesus as a messenger of God. Yet they do not subordinate this sort of affiliation to their primary identity as Muslims. Are there Christians who feel that they are also Muslims? Perhaps, particularly among those individuals who are attracted to Sufism. But no amount of hindsight is likely to see the concept of Christianity engrossed into the concept of Islam, if only because the former is six centuries older than the latter.

The term "Islamo-Christian" conveys the vast degree of overlap between the two faiths, a degree of overlap that is significantly greater than the overlap suggested by the commonplace term "Judeo-Christian." Use of this term encourages a comparison between Islam and Christianity that can yield valuable insights into each religion's history and institutional structure. What follows outlines some of the lessons that can be learned by exploring the common characteristics of Islamo-Christian civilization.

HELLENISM

Both Christianity and Islam emerged from the philosophical, institutional, and cultural milieu of Hellenism. Over time, the major Latin and Greek writings of the Hellenistic era became available to people of both faiths in their own languages. The learned elite valued these works as essential underpinnings of their culture and worked diligently to refine and augment them, as well as to harmonize them with their scriptures. When Christians became aware of the trove of Hellenistic lore available in Arabic translations of classical texts, they eagerly rendered those works into Latin. By contrast, when Muslims with a knowledge of these texts traveled to India and China, they found no special interest in what they contained. Practitioners of Chinese or Ayurvedic medicine were not eager for the insights of Galen, nor did Confucian and Hindu philosophers seek enlightenment

in the works of Aristotle, Avicenna, and Averroes. This Hellenistic substrate accounts for many of the shared cultural traits of Islamo-Christian civilization, as well as for the great dissimilarity among Muslim and Christian cultural traits in the lands outside the ambit of Hellenism to which these two religions spread from the fourteenth century onward: mainly Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Western Hemisphere.

ABRAHAMIC SCRIPTURE

Islam and Christianity obviously share certain scriptural elements present in the Old Testament. Does this make it plausible to conceive of a Judeo-Islamo-Christian civilization? Not easily. Islam recognizes parts of the Torah, particularly the accounts of the creation, some patriarchal stories from Noah to Moses, and a few tales from the era of David and Solomon—but not the books of prophecy. Of the New Testament, the four gospels make a limited contribution to Muslim belief, whereas the later books make virtually none. In addition, Islamic law bears similarities to Jewish law, particularly in the techniques by which the law is derived from sacred sources. As for Christianity, the Old Testament is accepted *in toto*, but not Jewish law. Judaism, of course, makes no recognition of non-Judaic elements in the New Testament and the Qur'an. What the three faiths share, therefore, is mostly cosmology and whatever lessons can be read into the tales of the patriarchs and kings. The absence of a common scripture-based engagement with Christology, salvation, proselytization, and apocalypse, which arise in Christianity and Islam but only minimally, if at all, in Judaism, provides a narrow base on which to postulate a tripartite civilizational identity. The social reality of Judaism being restricted to a small and kinship-defined population after the Second Temple's destruction in 70 CE, and of Christianity and Islam becoming enormous, multi-ethnic, world-spanning religious systems in the subsequent centuries, underlines this limitation.

SIN AND SALVATION

Most versions of Islam and Christianity incorporate an expectation that individual believers will be awarded the pleasures of Paradise or the torments of Hellfire in a final judgment that will bring earthly history to an end. Islamo-Christian imaginings of the End Times anticipate a Messiah, known to Muslims as the Mahdi; an alluring demonic figure, the Antichrist for Christians and the Dajjal for Muslims, whom the naïve will follow to their doom; and the reappearance of Jesus as the Messiah for Christians and the heroic slayer of the Dajjal for Muslims.

Both components of Islamo-Christian civilization have experienced repeated episodes of millenarian expectations, often accompanied by social or political turmoil, and repeated anxieties about God punishing the community for moral wrongdoing. Christians and Muslims alike saw the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century as punishments for sin. Some Christians felt the same way about the Arab conquests of the seventh century, the Black Death of 1348, the Ottoman conquests of the fifteenth century, and even the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Some Muslims similarly saw the Crusades as a divine punishment.

Although both religions have differing and complex, but generally parallel, ideas about what will determine a believer's fate in the Hereafter, punishing sin in the here and now can inspire wide support. In Islam, the phrase "commanding the right and forbidding the wrong" has a long history of warranting intrusive action to correct wayward groups or individuals. Destroying wine jars and breaking musical instruments constituted a theme for this kind of corrective behavior. While it has been argued that this is a uniquely Muslim behavior pattern, it has, in fact, been extremely common in American Protestantism. Twentieth-century Muslim leaders sometimes praised America's Prohibition movement, including physical attacks on saloons, as a highpoint of Christian culture. Moreover, Protestants and Catholics alike participated in crazed witch-hunts that tortured and killed tens

of thousands of women who were regarded by their neighbors as social deviates.

Hyper-awareness of the imminence of divine judgment and the wages of sin has recurred repeatedly among both Christians and Muslims. Islamic tradition maintains that a renewer or revivifier of the faith (a *mujaddid*) will appear at the beginning of each Islamic century. Calls upon Christians to repent of their sins and live every day as Jesus would have them live have found receptive audiences again and again. Polling has revealed that over half of America's evangelical Protestants expect the End Times to occur before the year 2050. Messianic expectations, with parallel emphases on foreswearing sinful behaviors, excite many Muslims as well.

It may well be that these forceful and recurrent expectations contribute to some elements of Islamo-Christian civilization being inclined to expect change rather than embrace unchanging tradition. The idea of "progress" is not without theological underpinnings.

SPIRITUALITY AND MYSTICISM

Both branches of Islamo-Christian civilization accepted spiritual and mystic otherworldliness even as they elaborated clerical, legal, and governmental structures that focused on the mundane world. In Christianity, otherworldliness first took the form of individuals and groups living apart from society as monks and nuns, and later became manifest in the doctrines and lifestyles of certain groups of Protestants, like the Quakers. In Islam, an early proliferation of non-communal ascetics and mystics (Sufis) evolved into an ever-growing network of Sufi brotherhoods after the thirteenth century. In the early centuries, individual Sufis were ecstatic mystics seeking union with God. Within the brotherhood structure, ecstasy was routinized. A *shaikh* could guide a devotee toward divine union, but most brethren never attained such a level.

Several concerns that contributed to the eventual emergence of Protestantism simultaneously, that is, in the twelfth through fifteenth centuries, contributed to the coalescence of Islamic spirituality into brotherhoods (*turuq*). The languages of the common people became spiritual vehicles alongside Latin and Arabic. Expressions of Islamic mysticism filled volumes of poetry in Persian, Turkish, and Urdu. Christian mystics produced parallel works in Provençal, German, and other languages.

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Christians and Muslims alike attributed charisma to local saintly figures who were not always credentialed as members of the clergy or *ulama*. Movements led by people like Peter Waldo and John Wycliffe stirred Christians. In Islam, Sufi *shaikhs* and descendants of the Prophet received local allegiance and, after their deaths, shrine visitations.

Collective religious expression grew alongside a more passive witnessing of church pageantry or a similarly passive reverence for the strictures of Islamic law. Sufi brotherhoods instituted *dhikr* (vocal or performance remembrances of God) in which all brethren took part, and Protestants instituted congregational singing. Christians who were poor in worldly goods but spiritually rich formed communes of Beguines and Beghards outside the framework of monastic institutions, while in Islam a proliferation of Sufi convents and rules of behavior manifested a parallel devotion to poverty in the name of God. Overall, the monopoly on religious authority claimed by Christian clergy and Muslim legists (*fuqaha'*) was called into question.

Why these changes in the popular attitudes of Christians and Muslims toward their respective faiths took place simultaneously in Islam and Christianity is uncertain. But their eventual resolution in the growth of

Protestantism and the proliferation of Sufi brotherhoods strongly affected their religious environments after 1500. Conflict with the Catholic hierarchy led Protestants to emphasize militancy more than otherworldliness. In Islam the emphasis was reversed, although some Sufi orders did become militarized.

CONVERSION

Seeking and welcoming converts has characterized both Islam and Christianity throughout their histories. Requirements for "membership" have generally been low, often amounting to little more than a willingness of proselytes to self-identify as Muslims or Christians. This has made possible a large array of sects, pietistic groups, and syncretic movements catering to individuals who take comfort in retaining some elements of their old religious traditions after formal or nominal adoption of a Christian or Muslim identity. Conversion rituals and traditions explicitly exclude membership qualifications based on language, color, ethnicity, or previous religious identity.

STATE AND LAW

Throughout history, Islamo-Christian civilization has been inextricably intertwined with governing and legal institutions. Although modern Christians living in secular societies often cite Jesus' command to render unto Caesar's that which is Caesar's as a basis for a strict separation of church and state, Christianity has had a consistent history of maximal involvement with governing structures from the time of Emperor Constantine (ca. 320) down to the nineteenth century. Many Christians continue even today to believe that the state should take their religious and moral views into account. For its part, Islam has a governing tradition that goes back to the Prophet Muhammad, develops in a series of avowedly religious caliphates, sultanates, and emirates; and continues to appeal to many Muslims today despite a general turn toward secular governance in the nineteenth century.

As a legal system, the elaboration of canon law by the Roman Catholic church lost much of its relevance in the course of the sixteenth-century's wars of religion between Protestants and Catholics. Protestantism and Orthodox Christianity never adumbrated law codes comparable to those of the Catholic church. Islamic law (*shari'a*), a much more extensive and elaborate phenomenon, suffered considerable shrinkage in the nineteenth century as secularizing governments adopted European-derived civil, commercial, and criminal codes. Unlike canon law, however, it remains a touchstone of Muslim identity and thus a significant factor in political affairs. Inasmuch as *shari'a* never encountered a delegitimizing force as substantial as the Peace of Westphalia, which confined Europe's legal systems within national boundaries and thus made law a matter of kings and parliaments rather than of popes and church councils claiming universal jurisdiction, Islamic law still retains a claim to supra-national authority that puts it at odds, to some degree, with the modern nation-state system.

VIOLENCE AND TOLERATION

Islamo-Christian civilization, although steeped in religiously sanctioned violence, can also embrace toleration. At its outset Christianity suffered persecution; but once in power, it eventually extirpated virtually every pagan cult in Europe. In some instances, this violence took the form of warfare followed by forced baptism of the defeated survivors. Charlemagne's wars against the Saxons are a case in point. During his first campaign he destroyed Irminsul, the pillar or tree trunk that the Saxons believed sustained the world; and after his last campaign he ruled that anyone persisting in their pagan belief should be killed. Later the Teutonic Knights in the Baltic region exercised a similar degree of warlike violence against the pagan Prussians. More often than not, however, bans on pagan beliefs and traditions were ordered and enforced by the Christian clergy without extensive bloodshed—unless one includes the witch-hunting craze. Zero tolerance of

paganism was nevertheless assumed.

Ironically, despite explicit Qur'anic condemnations of idol-worship, the Arab conquests that established the Muslim caliphate involved little or no forced conversion or slaughter of unbelievers. This is because Christianity's prior spread throughout the Middle East and North Africa had already eliminated paganism from most areas outside the Arabian peninsula proper—and even there modern scholars have cast doubt upon its extent. The Qur'an mandated tolerance for the Christian and Jewish populations that predominated in the conquest areas west of Iran, and the Arabs extended similar tolerance *de facto* to the Zoroastrians of Iran and Buddhists of Central Asia.

Contemporary Muslim and Christian spiritual leaders often renounce past violence and embrace, to a greater or lesser degree, some form of ecumenism. Yet each religion reserves the right to defend itself, as a religious community, when it feels it is under attack by the other. For the late Osama bin Laden (d. 2011), this meant portraying "Crusaders and Jews" as groups that have been killing and injuring Muslims for decades. For presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, this has meant recognizing what are called "militant jihadist groups" as a worldwide enemy. As leaders of a secular republic, both presidents have explicitly eschewed making a connection between these groups and the religion of Islam *per se*. However, many Christians in the United States and Europe do make such a connection. The degree of mutual distrust vividly recalls centuries of enmity between Catholics and Protestants, Catholics and Orthodox Christians, and Sunnis and Shi'ites.

WORD AND LANGUAGE

Drawing on its Hellenistic philosophical substrate, both religions attribute great importance to words and language. Philosophically, this takes the form of identifying Jesus with a neo-Platonic *logos* and ascribing (co-)eternal status to the Qur'an as God's word. Muslims further consider the Arabic language to be the chosen

vehicle of God's utterance, to the extent of relegating all translations into other languages to a distinctly lower level of truth and reliability. Christians accepted the fact that the Bible was composed in Hebrew and Greek, but place great reliance on translations, first into Latin and later into vernacular languages. Many regard the words of the Bible as literally true and divinely inspired regardless of

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the language in which they encounter them. Memorization of the Qur'an in Arabic became a hallmark of Islam at a very early point. Memorization of the Christian mass, the psalter, and favorite hymns has played an important role in some Christian communities. However, such practices have often been confined to the clergy.

Writing systems stand in for religious identity. Texts in the Arabic, Roman, Greek, Cyrillic, Armenian, or Ethiopian scripts are typically taken as visual religious signifiers regardless of the actual language or import of the words. Calligraphy became a medium of artistic expression in all of these sacred scripts.

CLERGY

Religious specialists form a core element of both Muslim and Christian societies, although they do not have a monopoly on scriptural knowledge. Catholic and Orthodox priests do exercise a monopoly over certain sacred rituals that are more clearly delineated in doctrine than are the ritual roles of mosque leaders (*imams*) and religious judges (*qadis*) in Islam. This is less the case in Protestantism. Over the past two centuries it has become

increasingly common for Christian laypeople and Muslims without formal religious credentials to play active roles in debating, interpreting, and innovating matters of faith.

The movement away from seeing clergy as the moral core of society contributed strongly to the emergence of currents of secular modernity in European Christianity from the seventeenth century onward, and from the nineteenth century onward in Islam, where the equivalent of the clergy is known as the *ulama*. This temporal difference explains many of the discordant views that Muslims and Christians have entertained of one other in recent times. But overall, Islamo-Christian civilization shares a fairly consistent tradition of ordinary believers respecting or deferring to the clergy/*ulama* on matters of faith and morals. Clerical roles in, and in remonstrance against, government have recurred in both faiths.

EDUCATION AND MISSION

Although Christianity and Islam have not been unique as religions that have developed high-level educational institutions, they have expanded their institutional structures beyond those of any other faith. The common Hellenistic substrate of Islamo-Christian civilization partly accounts for this, even though religious concerns long outpaced scientific or secular ones. Similarities in the organization of Muslim *madrasas* (higher Islamic colleges) and Christian universities, both of which proliferated in the fourteenth century, have suggested direct influences across confessional boundaries. This cannot be proven, but it is entirely plausible. Law played a more important role in Islamic institutions than in their Christian counterparts, but both focused on training young men to address the concerns of their societies. This is in contradistinction to the pre-university monastic studies, which kept scholars isolated from Christian communities outside the monastic walls.

In the absence of the Roman Catholic commitment to clerical celibacy, whole families of Muslim scholars worked to advance various intellectual programs. Family networks gave the *ulama* a partial structural independence from state authority parallel to that secured in Christian society by the ecclesiastical hierarchy headed by the pope. Although the rise of Protestantism fractured the unity of the Roman church, the nascent Protestant denominations held fast to their doctrinal independence, and families of Protestant clerics sometimes came to resemble those of leading Muslim *ulama*.

Missionary outreach became an important area of activity for educated clerics. Sufi *shaikhs*, who were often highly educated, gained particular prominence in forging syncretic relations with peoples in new lands who were in the process of shifting their identities to Islam. More normative, *madrasa*-trained, scholars played a missionary role in bringing heterodox communities, many of them originally inspired by Sufism, closer to the views of the Muslim mainstream. Christian missionaries played a similar dual role. Many devoted their careers to improving the lives and morals of other Christians, while others focused on bringing unbelievers into the fold.

At the present day, the United States and Saudi Arabia stand out in the commitment of some of their most devout citizens to missionary activity around the world. As at earlier points in history, some of this activity is doctrinally fundamentalist and revivalist in character, while other movements operate through good works and personal witness for the faith in a spirit of ecumenical cooperation.

THE FUTURE OF ISLAMO-CHRISTIAN CIVILIZATION

The life or death of a catchphrase is truly inconsequential. However, Muslims and Christians will continue to interact far into a seemingly indefinite future. Whether their interaction will incline toward growing conflict or mutual tolerance cannot be predicted, but people who hope for the latter need tools to help their cause along. Viewing the two religions as estranged siblings who have the potential to rediscover or reinvent their family ties, and thereby discover a peaceful *modus vivendi*, can be one

such tool. Hysterical diatribes attributing the vilest motives or the most sordid and deceitful origins to one side or the other can lead in the opposite direction.

As a matter of history, there is no denying the intimate contact and close relationship between Islam and Christianity, just as there is no denying their eras of interfaith warfare and constructive cultural borrowing. Judaism, the religion with the closest claim to being a third partner in faith, has, at least since 70 CE, lacked the numbers, the zeal for converts, the agency of state power, and the apocalyptic dreams of the other two. Despite the profundity of its contributions to both of its offshoots in the scriptural, legal, ethical, and philosophical arenas, Judaism's historical interactions with them have taken the form of discrimination, persecution, exclusion, and grudging tolerance rather than crusades, jihads, conquests, reconquests, and imperial domination. The details of the relations among the three, and separately between Jews and Christians and between Jews and Muslims, warrant close attention, both historically and today. But the bigger challenge is to understand the past and prepare for the future of relations between Islam and Christianity. The concept of Islamo-Christian civilization can be of value in that enterprise.

CURRENT DEBATES AND FUTURE DISCOURSES

Samuel Huntington's phrase "clash of civilizations" captured the public imagination to such a degree that many current debates take it as a starting point, either to agree with it or to challenge its pertinence. Those who agree usually cast "crusade" and "jihad" as symbols of recurrent age-old animosities, despite the fact that neither concept has consistently or continuously manifested itself in violent confrontation and that both are used figuratively in non-military and non-violent contexts. Western countries, for example, have had countless "crusades" against diseases, while in 1980 Ayatollah Khomeini summoned Iranian young people to a Reconstruction Jihad (Jihad-e

Sazandegi) aimed at improving the quality of village life. Even without Huntington's slogan there would still be a history of crusades and jihads; however, the "clash of civilizations" encourages the idea that Muslims and Christians have always dealt with one another as enemies.

Historically speaking, despite the overheated political rhetoric on both sides, this is nonsense. Christians have always lived and been accepted in Muslim countries; and even during episodes of warfare—primarily in the seventh, twelfth, fifteenth, sixteenth, and twenty-first centuries—there has usually been a continuation of the lively economic and even cultural relations that have

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normally preceded and followed such realities. (Contrast Christian Europe's wholesale cultural, intellectual, and economic borrowings from the Muslim world during the Crusades with the unbridgeable economic divides that characterized the Napoleonic era or the cold war.)

What is needed to counter the bellicose attitudes of a few religious and political leaders on both sides is a new starting point, a revised assumption about how relations between Islam and Christendom (i.e., the West) developed and where they could be headed. The specific phrase "Islamo-Christian civilization" is no more necessary to a recasting of this relationship than the "clash of civilizations" has been in turning the western imagination toward a narrative of endless violence. Terrorism and warfare shape people's minds whether a catchphrase is available or not.

But "Islamo-Christian civilization" nevertheless encapsulates the change in perspective that we will all have to adopt in the coming years. A billion-plus Muslims and a billion-plus Christians cannot permanently think in terms of violent confrontation in a global environment that every year necessitates greater international cooperation, more

effective economic integration, and fuller acceptance of the modern norms of civilized behavior. In the seventeenth century war was simple: opposed national armies and alliances fought for land, glory, and the truth of their respective faiths. Today wars are universal tragedies, not campaigns to win or lose ground. Whatever contributes to a continuation of such tragedies reflects a warlike era that ended in bloody exhaustion in the twentieth century. Thus there is every reason to encourage an assumption of past and future peaceful cohabitation and to discourage the contrary assumption of endless violence—particularly when the historical record of actual relations and structural similarities between Muslim and Christian communities points definitively in the direction of cohabitation.

From a policy standpoint, it has become obvious in the context of the Arab Spring that Islam did not fade into insignificance as the modernization theorists of the post-World War II era predicted. Nor has Christianity remained politically quiescent, particularly in the country that counts itself the champion of modern thinking: the

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A billion-plus Muslims and a billion-plus Christians cannot permanently think in terms of violent confrontation in a global environment that every year necessitates greater international cooperation, more effective economic integration, and fuller acceptance of the modern norms of civilized behavior.

United States. Religion is part of today's political world, and people of faith as well as people who have little regard for organized religion have no choice but to accept the world as it is.

Policymakers in Europe, America, and Israel observe

what is happening in the Muslim world with feelings that range from extreme anxiety to a *laissez-faire* distancing from day-to-day events. The latter position, which is the most appropriate one for rapidly changing circumstances, is easier to maintain if one takes it as axiomatic that Islam and Christianity are now, as they always have been, closely—if not harmoniously—linked faith systems that are fully capable to developing peaceful and constructive interrelationships if given the opportunity.

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