



The Case for Islamo-Christian Civilization

Richard W. Bulliet

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Conventional wisdom maintains that the differences between Islam and Christianity are irreconcilable. Pre-eminent Middle East scholar Richard W. Bulliet disagrees, and in this fresh, provocative book he looks beneath the rhetoric of hatred and misunderstanding to challenge prevailing -- and misleading -- views of Islamic history and a "clash of civilizations." These sibling societies begin at the same time, go through the same developmental stages, and confront the same internal challenges. Yet as Christianity grows rich and powerful and less central to everyday life, Islam finds success around the globe but falls behind in wealth and power.

Modernization in the nineteenth century brings in secular forces that marginalize religion in political and public life. In the Christian world, this simply furthers a process that had already begun. In the Middle East this gives rise to the tyrannical governments that continue to dominate. Bulliet argues that beginning in the 1950s American policymakers misread the Muslim world and, instead of focusing on the growing discontent against the unpopular governments, saw only a forum for liberal, democratic reforms within those governments. By fostering slogans like "clash of civilizations" and "what went wrong," Americans to this day continue to misread the Muslim world and to miss the opportunity to focus on common ground for building lasting peace. This book offers a fresh perspective on U.S.-Muslim relations and provides the intellectual groundwork upon which to help build a peaceful and democratic future in the Muslim world.

On "clash of civilizations"

"Civilizations that are destined to clash cannot seek together a common future. Like Mathews' Islam, Huntington's Islam is beyond redemption. The strain of Protestant American thought that both men are heir to, pronounces against Islam the same self-righteous and unequivocal sentence of 'otherness' that American Protestants once visited upon Catholics and Jews."

On "what went wrong"

"The idea that people in the Middle East once embraced the goal of becoming like Europe and hoped that by adopting European ideas and institutions they would someday experience all of the liberal values we recognize in the Europe of today is nonsense. It assumes a historical outcome for Europe itself that no one even in Europe could have predicted."

On "why do they hate us"

"Those who advanced the Japanese occupation as a model for postwar Iraq seem to have baseball, Hello Kitty, and Elvis impersonators in the back of their minds rather than headscarves and turbaned mullahs.... Like latter day missionaries, we want the Muslims to love us, not just for what we can offer in the way of a technological society but for who we are -- for our values. But we refuse to countenance the thought of loving them for their values."

On Islam's ideological shortcomings

"Jim Jones, David Koresh, and Meir Kahane do not typify Christianity and Judaism in the eyes of the civilized West but those same eyes are prone to see Osama bin Laden and Mullah Muhammad Omar as

typifying Islam."

On Middle East studies

"The founders of Middle East studies ignored recommendations that they focus on contemporary Islam and focused instead on Middle Easterners trying to act like westerners. There weren't a lot of these, just as there hadn't been a lot of converts, but the conviction was strong that those few would be pioneers in bringing western modernity to the region... The people we supported as agents of modernity became tyrants."

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