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Book Review

Islam and Dhimmitude: Where Civilizations Collide

*Bat Ye'or. Trans. By Miriam Kochan and David Littman
Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses. 2002, 528 pp.*

Islam and Dhimmitude is an attempt to confute the concept of "protected minority" under which Islamic civilization established what was, up to its time, the most successful model of pluralistic society with the worst aberrations from that model. The sub-title "Where Civilizations Collide" indicates how the author expects her polemic to serve the current wave of neo-imperialism. The book aims to recruit Christians in support of the Zionist project by explaining away Christian expressions of appreciation of Muslim tolerance as a false consciousness inspired by a self-hatred she calls "dhimmitude," meaning a state of mind that acquiesces, even promotes, the victim's own subjugation.

The first half of the book is devoted to proposing a paradigm in which Islamic scripture in favor of human rights are ignored, official acts to the benefit of dhimmis are brushed away as machinations to breed resentment between dhimmi groups, and injustices against Muslims are figments of the imagination invented to whitewash the Islamic master plan for the subjugation of the non-Muslim world into a state of "dhimmitude." The second half works within this paradigm to vilify Christian anti-Zionists (including Europeans as well as Arabs) as dhimmi pawns of Muslim oppressors. (Curiously she does not attempt to dismiss Jewish critics of Israel in the same manner.)

The author declares, "the terms 'religious minorities' and 'Islamic tolerance' should be completely excluded from serious research in this field" (p. 22). She cuts short quotations when the context undermines her thesis. Thus, "whoever obeys the messenger obeys Allah" (p.36) is cut off from its essential conclusion "but if any turns away, we have not sent thee to watch over their (evil deeds)" (Qur'an 4:80).

By omitting any evidence that would undermine her premise, the author turns a collection of alleged persecutions into a claim of a persistent persecuted status. She forces her discussion into a context of *harbi* and *jihâdi* (e.g., pp. 27, 38) stereotypes that might delight Osama bin Ladin, but will leave knowledgeable scholars and the majority of lay Muslims astonished at how she has alienated the discussion from mainstream Islamic thought and the reality of Muslim practice. Contradicting both mainstream Islamic jurisprudence and the Qur'an (e.g., 2:193), she defines *jihâd* as "inviting non-Muslims to convert to Islam, then, if they refused, to fight them until victory" (p. 38).

The author defines "dhimmitude" to include "Christian anti-Judaism" (p. 28). She shows little respect for the historical record. In mentioning Muhammad's (pbuh)

conflict with the Jews of Madinah, she dismisses (without identifying them) the accusations of treachery leveled against the Jews. The judgment against the Banu Qurayza, taken from the Jewish Law by their erstwhile ally Sa`d ibn Mu`adh, whom they insisted judge their case instead of Muhammad, is labeled as “part of a strategy of conflicts or alliances with the Arab tribes, aimed at unifying them under Muhammad’s command” (p. 37).

The author relies on context-dropping, cut-and-paste quotations from scholars aimed at putting the most malicious spin on their arguments, the omission or glossing over nuance that might require qualification of her claims, and a bias towards those scholars with the harshest views on dhimmis. She considers An-Nawawi’s view that a Muslim cannot be executed for the murder of a dhimmi a more representative statement of Islamic law than the fact that Muhammad ordered a Muslim executed for just such a crime (p. 75). She prefers Mawardi over Umar as the authority on Islamic law, and asserts her indifference to the objections other Islamic authorities may have to Mawardi’s views (p. 350).

The survival of dhimmi communities and the appointment of dhimmis to high administrative positions is dismissed as “inevitable result of the Islamic conquests which reserved the military sector to warlike Muslim tribes, and assigned the administration of the vanquished Christian peoples to their coreligionists” (p. 75). She argues that the very fact that Christians prospered under Islam was because they were collaborators and traitors to their own faith community, playing on inter-Christian rivalry to serve personal ambitions and attempting to blame the suffering of Christians on anonymous Jews (p. 110). She tops this off by claiming that European persecution of Jews became worse after the rise of Islam both because Europeans learned new techniques of persecution from the Muslims (p. 113 *ff.*) and because Jews were blamed for collaborating with Muslims during the Crusades (p. 117).

According to the author, fedeyeen (which Wehr’s English-Arabic dictionary defines as “one who sacrifices his life, especially for his country”) is “literally a fighter against Christians for the triumph of Islam” (p. 319). She claims that “the enemies of God [is] an expression very common in the Koran to describe Jews, Christians and other non-Muslims” (p. 349), although the phrase is never used in the Qur’an to denote Christians, and the only time it is used in connection with Jews is a reference to particular Jews who identified themselves as enemies of Gabriel (2:98), no different in its use to describe Muslims who engage in hypocrisy (63:1). She objects that the movement to substitute the phrase “Abrahamic civilization” for “Judeo-Christian civilization” is exclusive of Jews and Christians because Muslims think of Abraham as a Muslim.

Protests of Eastern Christians against the Vatican’s decision to remove the charge of deicide against the Jews are blamed on a desire to please Muslims (pp. 272-2) despite the fact that the author knows full well that the Qur’an rejects the claim of deicide (p. 272). As her agenda prohibits her from admitting that Palestinian Christians and Muslims have a shared cause as victims of Israeli persecution, she claims that Arab Christian anti-

Zionism is dhimmi submission to Muslim masters. Even the Israeli murder of Christians is the fault of Muslims (p. 278, 386).

At least the author documents her sources. Thus, anyone seeking to use her allegations as a starting point for a serious study of this subject may go to original sources to determine what actually happened and explore with sound research and a more scholarly attitude whether the persecution was inspired by or in violation of Islamic principles and the spirit of minority protection. Beyond that, this book has little to offer serious scholars of Islam or of world civilizations. It has much to offer propagandists who seek rhetorical ammunition to increase rather than decrease the hatred and strife in the world.

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