

THE DECLINE OF EASTERN CHRISTIANITY UNDER ISLAM

(BAT YE'OR)

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For twenty years, our rulers have propagandized us with two contradictory claims. First, that the West is locked in an existential conflict with Islam, justifying any spending, any killing, and any erasure of our ancient liberties. And second, that no Muslim, as a Muslim, is any threat to anybody whatsoever. Resolving the contradiction is not hard, but why bother, because what American cares about global Islam now? As the American empire collapses inward and America's divisions are elucidated ever more clearly, our internal conflicts have superseded any conflict with Islam. Still, maybe conflict will return when the West is reborn, or replaced, and as always we can learn a lot from studying the past that may yet be useful in the future.

The Decline of Eastern Christianity Under Islam is a longitudinal historical analysis of how Islam has dealt with other religions where Islam has conquered. This book also illuminates, or acts as a jumping-off point, for two other topics that interest me—why modern Eastern Christians often irrationally pander to Islam, and why Europe, Western Europe at least, is probably entirely lost and should be left to sink beneath the waves of history. Ye'or makes clear up front her book is not about Islam, but rather about the peoples subjugated by Islam. Nonetheless, we get a lot of history of Islam, because it's necessary to understand the institution of dhimmitude. And actually, the title is misleading—Eastern Christianity is not really the focus, because Jews, also *dhimmi*, are covered nearly as much as Christians.

The author, Gisèle Littman, who uses the pen name Bat Ye'or, has written several books about Islam's always-troubled relationship with its neighbors. Unlike the Johnny-come-latelies who swarmed out of the woodwork in 2001, she has made this topic her academic focus for decades (she is now eighty-eight, and lives in Switzerland). In this she fits along with Samuel P. Huntington, who accurately predicted in the 1990s that Islam's "bloody borders" would be an ongoing problem for the modern world. When Saudi-backed Muslims managed to pull off the September 11th attacks, what Ye'or had been saying for some

time, of how Islam has always viewed areas not controlled by Islam as the House of War (*dar al-harb*), to be moved into the sphere of Muslim domination, the House of Islam (*dar al-Islam*), where Islam rules, forever, seemed to be both proven and imminently relevant.

As it turned out, though, Islam did not really threaten America, nor did various tinpot dictators of the Islamic world, such as Saddam Hussein, or violent groupings of Muslim traditionalists, such as ISIS. Rather, our globalist overlords used fear whipped up by propaganda to extend their dominion over us, and to line their pockets while leaving hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of innocents in other countries dead. We got in return not more security, but a totalitarian (yet clownish) surveillance state now turned against dissent by the common man. The connected in our elites profited hugely—not from oil, the seizing of which to repay our expenditures would at least make sense, but from unnecessary and corrupt government spending bloated to incomprehensible proportions. The poor and idealistic volunteered for our military; they were sent to Afghanistan and Iraq to get their legs blown off in pursuit of the insane quest of George W. Bush (God rot him) to impose liberal democracy on the entire Middle East, which morphed into the ruling classes' insane quest to impose globohomo on the entire Middle East. And now we have been driven, covered in humiliation, from Afghanistan, with our rainbow flags flung after us as we ran for the exit—yet those same ruling classes now import to America hundreds of thousands of alien Afghans, not to their neighborhoods, but to the towns and neighborhoods of the hated deplorables, using them as yet another weapon against their domestic enemies. The past twenty years sure haven't worked out so well for most of America.

Ye'or didn't claim Islam threatened America, however. Her constant focus has always been not the United States, but Europe. She was the first to give a name, "Eurabia," to the projected end result of the invasion and transformation of Western Europe by Muslim multitudes invited, welcomed, and cossetted by rotten elites, the only elites in history who actually hate their own civilization. Thirty years ago, the advent of Eurabia seemed inevitable; less so now. Naturally, for her honesty and clear thinking Ye'or has long been subject to vicious attacks, both by those Europeans she criticizes for betraying their people, and by the Left generally, which views Muslims as a victim class in need of emancipation

(and Muslims return the favor by voting for the Left, completing the cycle of civilizational destruction).

We will get to Europe, but to be sure, Islam does existentially threaten the Jews and Israel, though the idea that our wars in the Middle East over the past twenty years have been conducted to benefit Israel is silly. Ye'or correctly notes that Israel is responsible neither for the resurgence of traditional (i.e., "radical") Islam, nor for the always-present division of the world into the House of Islam and the House of War. Yet too many on the Right still peddle stories about the nefarious Eternal Jew, when the reality is that despite occasional friction, Israel is far better for Christians in the Middle East than any Muslim regime (except perhaps that of Bashar al-Assad, and he's not really a Muslim). Regardless, Israel seems more than capable of taking care of itself.

None of this is to criticize this excellent book. The foreword is by Jacques Ellul, whose books *The Technological Society* and *Propaganda* have of late returned to notice (and the latter of which I am currently reading). Ellul notes, writing in 1991, the early existence of two pieces of lying propaganda that became ubiquitous in the West after 9/11—the pretense that *jihad* is a mere spiritual struggle, and that Islam has mostly spread and expanded through peaceful means. The first is actually a minor variation on the core meaning of *jihad*, which is violent struggle against non-Muslims. The second is simply a lie. Expansion by violence is in the nature of Islam and it has always driven growth primarily by the sword. Islam is, and always has been, a triumphalist religion, in which Islam must permanently dominate in any area where there are Muslims, and struggle mightily until this is achieved.

Ye'or's primary goal here, however, is not to complain about Islam, but to document the relationship between Muslim rulers and non-Muslim ruled, across both time and space. Once a geographic area becomes part of the House of Islam, the goal of the new rulers is not conversion. In fact, as seen again and again in this book, conversion is frequently discouraged. Islam originated, and is still in some ways organized as, a booty-collecting warrior culture. Conversion reduces the tax base, because Muslims are exempt from many of the taxes imposed on non-Muslims. The solution is that non-Muslims are assigned *dhimmi* status, a well-developed status that has been applied very differently in various times and places. The core of being a *dhimmi* is that one

formally acknowledges Muslim rulership and superiority, and pays money extorted as “protection”—and in return receives protection of variable effectiveness, but is not (usually) harassed to convert.

As with everything in Islam, the rules of dhimmitude, historically accurately or not, are traced back by Muslims to what Muhammad is said to have done, such as confiscating the land of Jews (those he did not kill) and then permitting them, upon submission, to maintain possession, without retaining ownership, subject at any time to abrogation by the Muslim ruler in charge at the time. Really, the law of dhimmitude is mostly a codified way of dealing with the standard early Muslim practice of raids for booty, which was simply a continuation of the usual ways of the Arab tribes. Thus, organizationally, dhimmitude is in many ways preferable to the alternative, which is merely constant slaughter and looting—Muhammad was wise to see that this was not the path to grow a new civilization.

Key to the success of this system was that the new Muslim rulers needed the locals to maintain the tax base, and therefore aggressively put down not only destructive and short-term-profitable freelance Muslim raiding, but also other forms of Arabization, such as land seizure, that destroyed the tax base (then as now Arab men didn't like to actually work). They needed the locals not only for the tax base, but to maintain all elements of higher civilization, from administration to art, of which the new Muslim invaders were ignorant. Thus, the new rulers had strong incentives to maintain the existing structures, merely redirected to their benefit. The institution of the *dhimmi* was crucial to this project. (It is false, although it is often said, that *dhimmis* are “minorities”; for centuries, in most Muslim countries, Muslims were the minority.) A variety of ad hoc rules to address local conditions, combined with adopting elements of Byzantine and Persian taxation, ultimately resulted in the so-called Pact of Umar, which codified the basic rules of dhimmitude—even though the actual rules ascribed to Umar developed long after his rule.

One fact that emerges very clearly from these pages (which include about 250 pages of translated source documents) is the great diversity of Eastern Christianity, and how this contributed to Muslim success in conquering new territory. We tend to see Christianity prior to the Protestant Reformation as largely unitary, or, for the better informed,

involving a split between Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy, the latter centered in Constantinople. But once, before the catastrophe of Islam, the East was filled many other Christian churches, mostly split along the lines of earlier Christological debates. Monophysites, Jacobites, Copts, Nestorians, Syriacs, and others felt, and often were, oppressed by the Byzantines and the Persians and thus were usually not unhappy when Islam arrived. It was, famously, initially viewed as just another Christian heresy (the Qur'an was only reduced to writing later, and it is obvious that early Muslim belief was often very different than it later evolved to be), and Muslim raids didn't necessarily seem a harbinger of the invaders actually taking over. The Muslims not infrequently lowered taxes, or simply made it unnecessary to pay taxes to the Persians or the Byzantines. Moreover, the Muslims, needing to administer their new conquests, often used the hierarchs of the oppressed churches, enhancing their power and prestige after centuries of oppression. This resulted, early on, in a type of symbiosis, in which non-Muslims were not obviously, or not always, worse off than they would have been otherwise.

The history of the next twelve hundred years, as covered by Ye'or, is one of gradual total Islamization in most areas dominated by Islam. Elites slowly converted, due to some combination of persecution, restrictions imposed on *dhimmis*, and the desire to retain and enhance elite status. The peasantry similarly mostly converted over time. This summation covers a vast divergence of history and practice across time and place, of course. Ye'or goes into exhaustive detail from original documents, to narrate not only the theoretical practice, but the actual practice, of dhimmitude. Taxation was only part of it—other elements of dhimmitude, less related to money and more related to Muslim domination, included civil debilities, such as disallowing judicial testimony by *dhimmis*, even in their own defense, and forbidding *dhimmis* from holding any civil office with authority over any Muslim. Along with this went limitations on, destruction of, and forbidding any repair of, Christian churches and Jewish synagogues. In some times and places, forced conversions were common, along with other religious fanaticism, often whipped up by local rulers to distract the populace from some other problem, or by local religious leaders to enhance their prestige and power. Enslavement of *dhimmis* was also frequent—usually generic chattel slavery, of which Muslims have always been by far the greatest global practitioners (and,

because slavery is fully approved—of by Islam, a practice that continues today in some Muslim countries), but also various forms of military slavery, of which the most notable examples are the Mamluks, who seized Egypt from their masters, and the janissaries, Christian children stolen by the Ottomans.

Thus Islamization went hand-in-glove with dhimmitude. This is no surprise; it is the obvious path of gradual civilizational ascendancy over a conquered society. Quite a few pictures are sprinkled through the book, showing places, costumes, and other items of interest; the saddest ones are churches and monasteries in the East abandoned for a thousand years. I have to be honest, though—my objection to Islam's ascendance to total control through the *dhimmi* system isn't that it violates some principle of religious self-determination, it's that it's Islam doing the dominating. No doubt a strong society will impose some set of debilities on those who worship the wrong God. This is both inevitable and good. I just think it should be Christians doing it, what I have elsewhere discussed as "pluralism lite." I have also discussed elsewhere the possibilities for a future mass conversion of Muslim nations to Christianity—unlikely, but not impossible, especially if coupled with arms. A lot would have to change before any of this became possible, however.

The *dhimmi* system survived into the modern era. As Western power increased, in those Muslim countries that received the benefits of colonialism, Western functionaries extended protection to *dhimmis*, eroding the worst effects of the system. At the same time, a return to strict orthodoxy by many Muslims as a reaction to the unfathomable loss of Muslim power, and an increase in nationalism, combined with modern technology, led Muslims in some areas to engage in mass slaughter of Christians, something that had not generally featured in Muslim-Christian interactions in the past. The most notable example is the Armenian genocide, but other examples also show up in this book. Of course, the increase in nationalism also gave the *dhimmis* a new sense of purpose and a new set of goals, in those areas such as the Balkans and Greece where large numbers of Christians still lived, resulting in a spiral of violence, as the Muslims tried to retain control and the benefits of the tribute system.

Ye'or says that a new nationalist, bourgeois set of *dhimmis* cooperated with their declining Muslim overlords to largely erase the memory of

centuries of dhimmitude, and then to adopt a pan-Arab philosophy in the twentieth century, further erasing the memory. Western states, eager for oil and influence, likewise had every reason to forget past oppression of Christians and Jews, and many Westerners saw in Islam itself an oppressed group, and assigned the *dhimmis* the status of foreigners in their own lands. And today? Certainly, in parts of Europe, Muslim invaders purport to impose certain aspects of dhimmitude—notably sexual violence against *dhimmis*, abetted as in England by Englishmen, or covered-up as in Germany, or dealt with ineffectively as in Sweden. But these are mostly just crimes committed by shiftless young men who have nothing but contempt for the societies that have unwisely invited them in; Islam doesn't control Europe, even if it has grossly excessive influence. We are a long way from a new caliphate.

Ye'or's Eurabia hypothesis has thus proven only partially correct, so far. But even if it does prove wholly correct, what of it? None of the countries of Western Europe deserve to survive. When you will not fight for your nation and culture; when you spend your days in the pursuit of transitory delight and the hysterical avoidance of any thought of death; when you abandon the faith of your fathers; when you refuse to have, and often kill, your own children so that you may not be hindered in your pleasures—you deserve what you get. Just this week, for example, first Austria and then other European nations adopted an insane, hateful, and stupid regime where those who have not gotten the dubiously-effective shot forced on everyone for the Wuhan Plague are locked in their houses—without armed revolt of, or even much murmur from, the populace. Whoever permanently destroys such nations does mankind a favor. Yes, it is sad that a thousand years of grandeur will perish. But it is crucial to recognize that culture, that civilization, of Christendom, is already dead and gone. The Left killed it, replacing it with an ephemeral, doomed culture, clothed in the skin of the civilization it had slain. Nobody should mourn when Europe disappears—even if it's replaced by an inferior, extractive, Muslim culture.

Oh, maybe this is too pessimistic. Maybe, like Abraham in his argument with God, we should consider whether Europe still has a substantial minority of righteous men, who with decisive action could rescue and renew their civilization. I doubt it. But I don't actually know—and I do know that such a minority most definitely exists in America, so

perhaps I should not rule it out so quickly in Europe. At the end of the day, it is not my conflict, yet I wish those men well, however many there are.

Moreover, it seems entirely possible Islam will soon crest in Europe. Islam is more susceptible than people realize to the poison of the Left; birthrates of Muslims are falling, just like everyone else's. More likely than Ye'or's original vision of Eurabia, swarms of Africans (some Muslims, true) will take over, as they already have in parts of southern Europe, reducing what was Europe (although not Eastern Europe, if they have the will to fight) to Lagos writ large, an open sewer of no accomplishment and civilizational incompetence. Or, perhaps, a new empire, of arms and ideas, will arise from that same south. Maybe the Ethiopians will unveil the Ark of the Covenant and sweep across the lands that once were Europe, raising up the New Empire of Aksum in the name of Saint Kaleb the King. Stranger things have happened, though not many, and in this case, unfortunately, past performance probably is a strong indicator of future results.

Ye'or only touches briefly on another subject I find of great interest—why is it that the Christian churches of the East tend to aggressively oppose the Jews and Israel, when it is obvious their real enemy is Islam, and has been for well over a thousand years? She ascribes it both to traditional “Judeophobia” of Eastern Christians and to Arab nationalism. As to the first, true, low-level conflict among Jews and Christians under Islam was endemic. This is not surprising, given that Jews and Christians traded abuse in the East when each was in power, and thereafter Muslim rulers often dexterously further encouraged such schisms in order to divide and conquer—easy to do, given the wholly justified complaints of both Christians and Jews, in which each stored up centuries of wrongs, great and small. And as to the second, in more modern times, the dead end of pan-Arab nationalism, wherein there was an embedded conflict with Israel, seemed to attract “Arab” Christians.

But that does not explain why non-Arab Christians, such as the Greek Orthodox, kowtow to Islam and pretend it is anything but their mortal enemy. Certainly the Ecumenical Patriarch, head of my own church, is sadly under the thumb of the Turks, perhaps explaining why he focuses on third-order issues such as environmentalism, rather than the existential threats facing all Christians today. And let's not

forget that George W. Bush is single-handedly responsible for the total destruction of the Christians of Iraq by Muslims—something Eastern Christian leaders say little or nothing about. I'm hardly an expert in the various threads among today's Eastern Christians, to be sure, or who is an Arab (how can it be that most Eastern Christians are Arabs, any more than Turks are Arabs?), or many other relevant matters. Maybe it's just as simple as that Eastern Christians who live in Muslim countries are relentlessly bombarded with propaganda, and they know that any swimming against the tide is both difficult and dangerous—most of all for Eastern Christian hierarchs, who hold themselves responsible for the safety of their flocks.

So here we are today, in a world that Ye'or could not have predicted, where the West has hurtled into the pit by its own choice, and Islam is not our main problem. It is utterly bizarre to me, for example, that today the Taliban are far more worthy to rule than our own current ruling class—not that I want to be ruled by the Taliban, but it'd be a close run between being ruled by the Taliban and Joe Biden's puppeteers. But here we are.