

The Return of Islam to Europe

Bat Ye'or Interviewed by Paul Giniewski

Bat Ye'or is a historian specializing in the problems of minorities under Islam. She is the author of a basic study, *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians Under Islam*, preface by Jacques Elul (Fairleigh Dickinson & Associated University Presses: New Jersey, London, Toronto, 1985), and more recently, *Les Chrétientés d'Orient entre Jihad et Dhimmitude: VIIe-XXe Siècles*, with a preface by Jacques Elul, published by Le Cerf in 1991, and to be published in an English translation in fall, 1994. Her latest book, *Juifs et Chrétiens sous l'Islam: les Dhimmis au face défi intégriste*, will be published in March, 1994 by Berg International, Paris.

This interview was conducted in Paris in 1993 by Paul Giniewski, a political analyst well known to Midstream readers.



PAUL GINIEWSKI: The Islamic-Arab and Iranian regimes are progressing in the political and military spheres throughout Africa and Asia. This is also happening in Europe, especially economically — through oil and the purchase of arms and technology — and demographically, through immigration. What will be the consequences of this penetration?

BAT YE'OR: Several million immigrants pose problems of a different kind than only a few hundred thousand. Other factors affecting integration relate to the political regime of the country of origin and the social stratum to which the immigrants belong. Westernized elements will adapt better to our societies than others. But this is a rationalization: the countries that have adopted Western models — Iran, Egypt, Algeria among others — have been or are being overwhelmed by a wave of fundamentalism, whose theoreticians generally are intellectuals educated in Western universities. The immigrant communities will always be bound by emotional, religious and political ties to their countries of origin, and the host societies will experience, via their immigrants, the conflicts convulsing these countries, but without being able to control their ideological and economic causes. Iranian and Pakistani fundamentalism, for instance, gave rise to hate-filled demonstrations by Muslim immigrants in England against the British citizen Salman Rushdie, and a terrorist campaign developed against translators and booksellers in Europe. After the destruction of the Ayodhya mosque in India, two Hindu temples in England were set on fire. Throughout Europe, the Arab-Israeli conflict has led to several terrorist campaigns aimed at Europeans. The political or ideological recuperation of immigrant circles by their countries of origin weakens European social cohesion.

In international politics, the Muslim vote will more and more influence the foreign policy of the European Union (EU), particularly in cases of conflict with one or more of the countries of emigration. Reciprocity is nonexistent in the Muslim countries, most of which have dictatorial regimes, and the religious minorities that subsist there are rendered impotent by terror and insecurity. In the Arab-Muslim countries, the fundamental rights of the Christian communities (the Jewish communities hardly exist any more) are not as extensive as those of Muslim emigrants who have entered Europe legally. On the other hand, the idea of citizenship and political rights being granted to thousands, let alone millions, of Europeans emigrating to Muslim countries is absolutely inconceivable.

In internal politics, a strong Muslim electoral representation would profoundly alter Western political and cultural institutions. Between the Islamic and Western systems of values, insurmountable differences have determined, during thirteen hundred years, different, always conflicting evolutions. Even today, these intractable differences prevent real agreement on a set of values as general in character as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). The Muslim world distanced itself from them by proclaiming an Islamic Declaration of Human Rights (UNESCO, 1981), conditional on prescriptions of the *shari'a* which postulate as articles of faith the inequality of the sexes and of Muslims and non-Muslims. A similar document, the "Cairo Declaration," surfaced in August 1990. Other areas of disagreement concern the validity of secularism, the freedom of conscience, opinion and expression, and the laws governing personal status and international relations. These rights, won at great cost in Europe through centuries of struggle and revolution, form part of a vast cultural and political development that has marked the whole of Europe, but that has affected the *dar-al-islam* (Islamic regions) only very superficially, and then usually through the elites of its Westernized minorities.

The gradual Muslim penetration of Europe has also changed our perception of the history of the Muslim peoples. The intellectual integrity that prevailed in this matter until the 1950s and 1960s seems to have been tainted with a spirit of political compromise aimed at effacing, or at least obscuring, historical realities, and at sparing the feelings of Muslims.

Finally, we should note the essential points of difference between the current waves of migration and inter-European migrations. The latter were demographically less massive than the former and were spread out over a long period. Of European origin, the economic immi-

grants integrated rapidly, while the political refugees — in danger of losing their lives in their countries of origin — were grateful and loyal to the host country. The integration of Muslim immigrants, on the other hand, comes up against certain difficulties specific to this particular group: 1) They belong to non-European cultures; 2) Their considerable numbers — several millions in 30 years — have resulted in the emergence, within the host society, of ethnic microentities that hinder the process of absorption and provoke a reaction of rejection.; 3) The major difficulty, however, remains a serious stumbling-block: a long history in which the Muslim peoples were the gravediggers of the Christian civilizations they conquered, which, under various labels, they are still fighting.

GINIEWSKI: In that case, do you consider that Islam's progress in Europe is part of a historical tradition?

BAT YE'OR: It forms an integral part of more than a thousand years of history and conquests. The Islamic vocation of world-conquest is derived from the injunctions of the Koran. Coming out of Arabia, the first wave of Islamization (from 632 to 750 CE) imposed the rule of the caliphate on millions of Christians and Jews living in Mesopotamia and the Mediterranean countries. From the eighth to the tenth century, the Arab assault on Europe expanded outwards in a serrated movement of thrusts forward followed by partial withdrawals. During this period, the ethnic and demographic composition of the Islamized countries underwent changes which in the 11th century became irreversible. It was a transformation of the non-Muslim indigenous peoples from being majorities in their own countries to that of atomized minorities living in the midst of a Muslim majority which had formerly been a minority. This is the process I have called "dhimmitude."

The second strong Islamic thrust into Europe took place with the Turkish conquests from the 11th to the 17th century, which repeated the same Islamic model of conquest and domination of Christian peoples represented by the previous wave. In fact, the whole spread of Arab and Turkish Islamic civilization in the Mediterranean regions was accompanied by this process of the destruction of an indigenous Christianity. This shows how rooted in history the phenomenon is.

GINIEWSKI: Parallel to this, what tradition underlies the resistance or the inertia of Europe, faced with this process?

BAT YE'OR: The Christian societies gave rise to conflicting, self-destructive forces that were exploited by the Muslim leaders. The progress of Islam always relied on an Islamophilia current among the Christians, active at the highest political or religious level: princes, prelates, military leaders. Today one would call it an Islamophile "lobby." There are innumerable examples. Without such collaboration, Islam would perhaps never have left Arabia.

After the conquests, this collaboration of leaders of the subjugated Christian peoples continued, sustained by corruptibility. However, a movement of Christian resistance, weak and always unsuccessful, survived in various

forms. This current, which — in different places and historical circumstances — checked the process of Islamization, gave rise to rebellions, and over the centuries, with variable degrees of success, inspired wars of liberation of the *dhimmi* peoples.

GINIEWSKI: Are Bosnia-Herzegovina, where 44 percent of the population is Muslim, and Macedonia-Skopje, where 67 percent is Muslim, survivals or spearheads — the avant-garde — of a future Islamic thrust into Europe?

BAT YE'OR: They are both simultaneously. They are survivals, for these Muslim populations are the residue of an Islamic reflux resulting from the wars of liberation of the Christian *dhimmis*. These wars were the continuation of the many rebellions over the centuries by Serbian resistance-movements already mentioned.

The new artificially-created Bosnian state — whatever its final borders — will be dependent on the Muslim states that insisted on its creation: i.e., Turkey, which has stamped out all indigenous pre-Islamic culture within its borders, and Saudi Arabia, for which the impurity of all non-Muslims is an article of faith. The Muslim states in the Balkans will undoubtedly become points of attraction for immigrants who, by obtaining a European nationality, will thus be able to circulate freely in Europe.

GINIEWSKI: Islamic programs have been formulated that are disturbing from the European point of view. For instance, President of Bosnia Alija Isotbegovic wrote in his "Islamic Declaration": "Turkey as an Islamic power dominated the world. As a copy of Europe, it is only a third-rate country There can be no peace or coexistence between the Islamic faith and non-Islamic social and political institutions The Islamic movement can and should assume power as soon as it is morally and numerically capable of destroying the existing non-Islamic regime"

Sheik Sami Abu-Assad declared in *Les Cahiers d'Orient*, published in Paris: "The Koran absolutely forbids Muslims to accept the sovereignty of non-Muslims in Islamic territory. There is no exception to this rule — not in Jerusalem, nor in Cairo, Beirut, Madrid, and in the future, perhaps, neither in Paris."

GINIEWSKI: To what extent do these views reflect a political program?

BAT YE'OR: They conform to the political conceptions of classical Islam, and they have always been applied as circumstances permitted. They belong to the ideology of the world-wide *jihad*, the war to suppress all non-Islamic regimes. Thus, Izetbegovic's statements — first published in 1970 and then again in 1990 — are correct where doctrine and history are concerned. However, liberal Muslims receptive to modernization reject these opinions.

Sheik Abu-Assad's declaration raises an essential point of Koranic law proclaimed by all Muslim jurists from the eighth century onwards and supported by many Koranic verses. In fact, it is not only a matter of sovereignty but also of authority, as, according to religious doctrine, no non-Muslim has the right to exercise

authority over a Muslim. This is a fundamental Islamic principle of politics and government, even if it has not always been rigorously applied. In Lebanon, Sunnite circles have always contested the legitimacy of the Christian political regime. The movements for Muslim autonomy in Kashmir, the Philippines and elsewhere follow the same principle.

Here I must make a digression and say that those Bosnians who compare their situation with that of the Jews err, for it was against the principles of Judaism to claim sovereignty anywhere except in their historical homeland, which is not the case with the Muslims. Moreover, the 2,000-year-old Jewish principle that the law of the land must be obeyed is contrary to the principle forbidding Muslims to submit to a non-Koranic law.

GINIEWSKI: Is the terrorism from across the Mediterranean the spearhead of a future north-south confrontation in which the southern and eastern part would in the nature of things be Islamic?

BAT YE'OR: Like all other terrorism derived from an ideology, whether nihilist, anarchistic or Communist, Islamic terrorism receives legitimation from a doctrine: that of the *jihād*, which regards all non-Muslim countries as a sphere of war (*dar al-harb*), except where there is a peace treaty, which can only be of a temporary nature. This position, common to all authoritative Muslim legislators, formerly justified the covert war — what today would be called terrorism — which formerly devastated the frontier areas between Christian and Muslim states. The ransom of hostages, the abduction of Christian populations for the purpose of slavery permeated Christian chronicles from Andalusia to the Caucasus. Nowadays, the terrorism of the *jihād* also targets modernizing Muslims, regarded as traitors — “hypocrites” is a classic description. One sees this in the internal conflicts at present taking place in many Muslim countries, whose governments — whether dictatorial or not — engaged in modernization, reject these out-of-date concepts.

GINIEWSKI: Could you, finally, comment on the following statement by Jacques Attali: “Islam has its place in Europe: Europe must stop behaving like a Christian club. After five centuries of exclusion, one can no longer deny that Islam is in Albania, in Kosovo, in Bosnia, in Bulgaria and in Turkey, and that it is the second most important religion in France! Thus, the choice is between sealing the frontiers and acknowledging that Europe is multi-religious. This is a choice of great philosophical and political significance.”

BAT YE'OR: This statement is based on a mythical concept devoid of any historical background. When considering the vast regions of Judeo-Christian culture already Islamized, and whose original civilizations and peoples have practically disappeared — I am not here referring to a similar phenomenon, Buddhist and Hindu Asia — I do feel that, as a European, I am not bound by any moral obligation or feelings of guilt to encourage such an expansionism, whose ideology — as is demon-

strated by history as a whole, and the situation of the world today — is fundamentally hostile to our shared value system.

On the other hand, it is true that greed, venality and political blindness have forced us to accept an alternative created during these last 20 years that can scarcely be avoided. One of the aspects of this alternative is the preference for a multireligious Europe, which does not represent anything new. In fact, it reflects, but on a territorial scale embracing the whole of Europe, the classic process of Arab or Turkish Islamic penetration via Spain or via the Balkans.

For those able to see things in a long-term perspective and who are not blinkered by a conception of time fragmented by journalistic immediacy, this phenomenon, which is hardly original, forms part of a thousand-year-old movement with the same economic, political, ideological and demographic character, whose development follows the same lines and results in similar patterns of behavior. Moreover, one must recognize that this idea of a multicultural Europe corresponds to a French policy deliberately adopted from the 1960s onwards in consequence of certain ideological and economic choices. The desire to see mythical Andalusias all over Europe is part of this movement, as is the wish to create a new Islam, whereas the Muslim peoples, being possessed of vast territories, have enough room in their homelands to carry out their Islamic experiments. And if a new Islamic development did come about, it ought to be expressed first among the billion Muslims living on this planet, in one of the 50 or so countries which they control, where the indigenous non-Muslim inhabitants, if they have not already disappeared, are rapidly on their way to extinction, with the exception of Egypt.

GINIEWSKI: In other words, is Islam becoming Europeanized, or is Europe becoming Islamized?

BAT YE'OR: I think the movement of Islamic radicalism will eventually sweep away the present Muslim governments and will win the allegiance of the Muslim masses in Europe, despite the very great courage of those Muslims opposing it. For my part, I do not see serious signs of a Europeanization of Islam anywhere, a move that would be expressed in a relativization of religion, a self-critical view of the history of Islamic imperialism, an acceptance of the principle of equality between Muslims and non-Muslims, a retroactive recognition of the rights of the peoples decimated and degraded by the system of dhimmitude, and an attitude of great moral humility — a necessary stage on the path toward reconciliation between peoples: we are light-years away from such a development! On the contrary, I think that we are participating in an Islamization of Europe, reflected both in daily occurrences and in our way of thinking. In virtually all Muslim countries, Jewish and Christian cemeteries are desecralized and the churches and synagogues — where they still exist — are targets of terrorism and vandalism. Judeophobia and Christophobia are virulent in various degrees, and since the 1950s the negationist theories of the Nazis who have taken refuge in Arab countries have been totally accepted. All the racist fanaticism that per-

meates Arab countries and Iran has been manifested in Europe in recent years. Finally, the Islamic law that forbids all criticism of the *shari'a* and the Muslim religion has appeared here with the taboo concerning Islam. Europeans, both Muslims and non-Muslims, who infringe upon this fundamental Islamic law have — as in the case of Rushdie — been the objects of intimidations and threats on the part of immigrant groups. In the political sphere, Europe's espousal of many Islamic causes — anti-Zionism, the destruction of Christian Lebanon and even the oral condemnation of the West and anti-Americanism — betrays a *dhimmi* mentality. Europe fully supported the PLO, but the sufferings of the Lebanese Christian exiles was not the object of any political solidarity. Two Bosnian ministers were murdered in Sarajevo on two successive days in early 1993: one was a Christian¹ killed by a Muslim, the other a Muslim² killed by a Serb. Only the latter aroused any indignation in the media, the former hardly being mentioned.

Contrary to what is generally maintained, the Gulf War was not fought exclusively to protect Western interests but also, and above all, those of the Muslim countries of the region — Kuwait, Turkey, Syria and the Gulf States — which were directly threatened by Iraq. Arab states obfuscated this reality and by a crude amalgamation called for sanctions against Israel which, during the war itself had been forced by Western countries — advocates of human rights — to adopt a *dhimmi*-like position: i.e., that of a Jew or Christian who accepts blows without responding. It was a scandalous situation imposed on the West by the Arab governments: there is no parallel for depriving an entire nation of the right to its self-defense.

Attempts to starve Armenia, terrorism against the Copts, and the genocide of the Christians and animists in the Sudan — as horrible as the war in Bosnia — have not aroused in the West — nor in Muslim countries — an information media campaign or any moral condemnation. Many Europeans — so antimilitaristic when it is a matter of defending their own freedom — seem ready to kill and be killed on behalf of a multicultural Muslim state and a harmonious coexistence of which there is no real trace in history, as it is completely contrary to Islamic doctrine and law.

In short, we live in a state of semidhimmitude, most fascinating for the detached observer, who may see in contemporary behavior and policies an actualization of the patterns of past history. He may perceive beneath the various masks of time the immutability of man, and whatever be the disguises adopted, he may discern the old demons of greed, corruption and intellectual cow-

ardice active and cunning as ever, that lead peoples to their downfall.

But there are also good reasons for optimism. Among these are the mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO signed in Washington — and also between Israel and Jordan. This beginning could eventually bring to the region and its peoples peace, prosperity and reconciliation. Another very positive development is the Vatican's recognition of Israel — at last — to be completed in the spring of 1994 when full diplomatic exchanges will take place, something that so many Christians have desired ardently.

In the Islamic world also, there are significant groups — whether in the political, intellectual or popular spheres — who are earnestly striving for peace and the modernization of their countries. World peace and the survival of humanity itself will depend on whether these forces of peace will prevail against the obscurantist forces of hatred and destruction.

One should also stress that the pro-Islamic lobbies in the West never failed to imply that the creation of Israel was at the root of the ever-deteriorating situation of the Christians throughout the Arab countries of the Middle East. In reality, the Christians of the Orient had always been persecuted, or discriminated against, as *dhimmis*. Their status was identical to that of the Jews and was determined by Islamic *shari'a* law, not because of the State of Israel's existence since 1948. This *dhimmi* condition had prevailed for 13 centuries.

The status of the Christians throughout the Muslim world — as well as of the remnants of Jewish communities — will only change radically if the *dhimmi* concept itself is repudiated by the Islamic world, through education and modernization.

This explains why a knowledge of "dhimmitude" is the necessary and essential step toward peace between the three monotheistic religions. Reconciliation between Judaism and Christianity is a major step that will allow the two peoples of the Bible, who bear exactly the same status under Islam, to work together in order to lead Islam to partake of this mutual reconciliation. At the dawn of a new century, it is time to get rid of old theological hatreds, recognizing instead the finer aspects of each religion in order to work together toward a better world.*

Notes

1. Josef Gogola on 7 January 1993.

2. Vice-Premier Hakija Turajlik on 8 January 1993.