

Digital Commons
@ LMU and LLS

Digital Commons@
Loyola Marymount University
and Loyola Law School

Theological Studies Faculty Works

Theological Studies

1-1-2009

Review of Emran Qureshi and Michael A. Sells, *The New Crusades: Constructing the Muslim Enemy*

Daniel L. Smith-Christopher

Loyola Marymount University, dchristopher@lmu.edu

Repository Citation

Smith-Christopher, Daniel L., "Review of Emran Qureshi and Michael A. Sells, *The New Crusades: Constructing the Muslim Enemy*" (2009). *Theological Studies Faculty Works*. 321.
http://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/theo_fac/321

Recommended Citation

Smith-Christopher, Daniel. Review of *The New Crusades: Constructing the Muslim Enemy* by E. Qureshi and M.A. Sells, eds. *Studies of Contemporary Islam* 10 (2009): 139-143.

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Theological Studies at Digital Commons @ Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theological Studies Faculty Works by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lmu.edu.

Book Reviews

number of books published in and outside Iran discussing and analyzing the dynamics of Iranian politics and society is numerous. It seems a little odd that Zahedi relies mostly on secondary sources.

Faegheh Shirazi
University of Texas at Austin

Emran Qureshi and Michael A. Sells, eds. *The New Crusades: Constructing the Muslim Enemy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003. xii, 416 pages. PB. \$24.50. ISBN 0-231-12667-0.

It is rare that a book actually keeps me up at night thinking about the implications of what I have just read—but this one most certainly did! Qureshi and Sells have not only constructed a very readable work, they have provided an important book at an important time in American social thought.

The book consists largely of responses to the widely cited works of Samuel Huntington, especially his essay “The Clash of Civilizations,” published in the influential Washington “insider’s” journal *Foreign Affairs* (72:3, 1993), and Bernard Lewis, especially his popular piece, “The Roots of Muslim Rage,” which was published in *Atlantic Monthly* (September 1990). Lewis is, of course, an accomplished scholar of the Middle East, but his views made popular in his own articles, and Huntington’s elaborations, are the views addressed in this collection of essays.

The basic thesis is not difficult to either summarize or understand. Western civilization is at a crossroads in its international standing—and it is marked by the “basic clash” between the values of the Islamic East and the Judeo-Christian West. There are few possibilities of coexistence of these two social forms and societal theories. In short, we are at war (again).

In their introduction, Qureshi and Sells make telling points about the curiosities of this constructed conflict. First of all, they note, Lewis refers casually to “our Judeo-Christian civilization” (6), yet “for a thousand years, up through the Holocaust, Jews were, at

Studies in Contemporary Islam

best, tolerated evils in the view of dominant Christian ideologies” (6). One suspects contemporary political alignments behind the identification of “historic” relationships. Furthermore, Jewish contributions to Islamic/Mediterranean cultures and civilizations are flatly denied by such a bifurcation of East and West, with Jewish contributions to the West exclusively highlighted.

More serious, however, is the accusation that contemporary “scholarly” attacks on Islam as inevitably and invariably set on conquest have been self-fulfilling prophecies in situations of conflict in the modern world. The editors write, “The claim of Lewis and Huntington that Muslims are obligated by their religion to work for world domination reinforced the claims of extremist Serb and Croat nationalists that Muslims could never be trusted to live among them. It is not surprising, therefore, that Serb and Croat nationalists championed the Lewis and Huntington theories of civilizational clash in arguing for the inability of Muslims to be integrated into the European communities of the Balkan region” (9).

This, in summary, is the real reason why this book is so important. It is critically important to answer the demagogues of war between East and West, the advocates of “irreconcilable differences” between Christian and Islamic societies. In this collection, we are not only the beneficiaries of careful analysis of the problems, the deeply troubling roots and history of the Lewis/Huntington theses, but also of responses on the basis of reasoned, historical analysis.

In the first major essay, “Palace Fundamentalism and Liberal Democracy” (51–67), Fatema Mernissi elaborates how Western connivance with Islamic monarchical powers have contrived to hold back democratic developments in those lands, and, thus, cynically perpetuating the very “Palace” powers that are used as examples of the incompatibility of “Western democracy” and Islamic regimes. Oil, of course, becomes the lubricant of any conscience that would object to supporting ruling “friends” in Arab countries whose political policies otherwise seem so objectionable. They may not be democratic, but we can still drive our cars!

In “The Clash of Definitions” (68–87), the late Edward Said demonstrates again the kind of analysis that made him such an influential theorist. Taking on the Lewis/Huntington thesis directly,

Book Reviews

Said shows how the contradicting realities of cultural exchange and intersocietal influences across only apparently “incompatible cultures” puts the lie to any attempt to say that there exists in the world certain kinds of people who cannot ultimately find ways to richly influence each other, interact peacefully, and create striking examples of crosscultural artifacts, music, novels, and other demonstrations of conviviality. The multiplying exceptions eventually do disprove the rule.

John Trumpdour, in his essay: “The Clash of Civilizations: Samuel P. Huntington, Bernard Lewis, and the Remaking of the Post-Cold War World Order” (88–130), traces how the American foreign policy is driven by the search for, and construction of, “enemies” against which to insist on certain economic policies, with often catastrophic results for domestic well-being, and equally catastrophic results for international relations. With the demise of the Soviet Union, and the ties to China that force us to choose between our injected plastic McDonalds toys or supporting real democratic reform, the Islamic world appears to be the newly constructed enemy of choice to defend policies advantageous to Western, and, especially, American, markets.

Roy Mottahedeh’s “The Clash of Civilizations: An Islamicist’s Critique” (131–151) is a well constructed criticism of many of the stereotypes used in Huntington’s own work, and Rob Nixon, in “Among the Mimics and the Parasites: V. S. Naipaul’s Islam” (152–169), points out that such stereotyping can be found in Indian popular novelists as well as in the “serious” analysis of American and European historical and social scholarship. Finally, Mujeeb Khan traces Western (and the occasional non-Western) philosophical and social commentary on perceptions of the East and Islam specifically that have had significant influence—especially how one generally conceives of “the Other” in his essay, “The Islamic and Western Worlds: ‘End of History’ or the ‘Clash of Civilizations’” (170–201).

In Part Two of this volume, the uniting theme appears to be “case studies” of specific regions or countries where these issues of Western and Islamic conflicts or tensions are informed by prejudices and cultural traditions of chauvinism (often, it must be said, on both sides).

Studies in Contemporary Islam

Tomaz Mastnak takes up the critically important question of European dealings with the Ottoman Empire as an essential aspect of defining “Europe” in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries in his impressively researched essay, “Europe and the Muslims: The Permanent Crusade?” (205–248). Maria Rosa Menocal deals with literary influences between the Christian and Islamic cultures (especially of southern Europe—of course, most notably, in Spanish history) in her essay, “The Myth of Westernness in Medieval Literary Historiography” (249–287). Neil MacMaster provides very important background on French attitudes toward Islam that is directly linked to their colonial experience in Algeria—and his essay provides important background material to the recent French rejection of the European Constitution, allegedly motivated (according to many media reports) at least in part by French resistance to Turkish admission to the European Union. His essay is entitled, “Islamophobia in France and the ‘Algerian Problem’” (288–313).

Two final essays venture into the cultural histories of societies in conflict. Norman Cigar ventures into the highly charged issues surrounding the Serbian conflicts in “The Nationalist Serbian Intellectuals and Islam: Defining and Eliminating a Muslim Community” (314–351), which is helpfully accompanied by analysis of nearby conflicts in Michael Sells’ essay, “Christ Killer, Kremlin, Contagion” (352–388). The presence of Sells’ essay reminds me to note that readers of *The New Crusades* would benefit immensely by a reading of an important related work, *In God’s Name: Genocide and Religion in the Twentieth Century*, edited by Omer Bartov and Phyllis Mack (Berghahn Books, 2001), where Sells also makes an important contribution.

The New Crusades does an admirable job of responding the Huntington’s famous thesis, but it does have its limitations. There are issues that hover around the periphery of these discussions—for example, the issue of minorities, both Christian and Jewish, in the Islamic world, and of Islamic minorities in the European world—issues that are especially relevant for understanding European dealings with the Ottoman Empire over at least two centuries, and, arguably, more. I would want to offer a firm “amen” to those who point out that Lewis and Huntington’s easy references to a Western

Book Reviews

“Judeo-Christian” culture are quite a generalization that hides centuries of Christian brutality toward Jews—yet somehow we “share” a culture that is “different” from Islam? It is hard to feel comfortable with the fact, pointed out by more than one of the essayists in this collection, that these wagons appear to be rather hastily drawn in a circle for the purpose of making an argument over and against Islam. Is the Jewish-Christian agenda somehow completed? That would indeed be news to many of us, and a significant Jewish contribution to this collection would have been helpful, and certainly relevant.

Finally, I feel a bit like a “broken record” (a metaphor that reveals this reviewer’s age, alas) in suggesting that such serious analysis of the background of conflicts and social tensions, especially between Christians and Muslims, would benefit from a sustained attention (beyond Said’s helpful pointers in his essay) on those times and events that exemplified the best in Islamic-Christian relations. It is one thing for Christians and Muslims to insist—rightly but often against frustratingly frequent historical realities—that “our religion does not endorse that kind of behaviour,” it is quite another thing to highlight those times when the faithful of the two traditions actually managed to realize this, and live a different way—and then analyze at length why peace and co-existence happened!

Daniel L. Smith-Christopher
Loyola Marymount University

Steven I. Wilkinson. *Votes and Violence: Electoral Competition and Ethnic Riots in India*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004. xiii, 293 pages. HB. \$39.99. ISBN 0-521-82916-X.

Democracy in pluralistic societies can be a tricky enterprise. A major source of threat to democratic viability in such societies is ethnic violence. Therefore, observers from John Stuart Mill and Thomas Jefferson to Kenneth Shepsle and Alvin Rabushka have doubted the success of democratic institutions in ethnically heterogeneous states.