

Richard W. Bulliet. *The Case For Islamo-Christian Civilization*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. Pp. 187. Paper \$23.95.

In *The Case For Islamo-Christian Civilization*, Richard Bulliet, a Professor of History at Columbia University, argues that Latin Christian and Muslim histories are deeply intertwined and that neither tradition can be fully understood in the absence of the other, challenging deep-rooted Western Islamophobia. Using sources written by Orientalists as well as Islamic scholars, Bulliet challenges current distorted Western views in regards to the Middle East and uncovers a similar heritage between Western Christendom during its rise in the first century and Islam with its ascendance during the seventh century. In his preface, Bulliet tells readers that he writes in response to the September 11, 2001 attacks and the growing subsequent Islamophobia. His work shows the shared heritage of Islam and Judeo-Christian civilization, which has been distorted, obscured and rejected by political and social forces for centuries.

Bulliet begins with an evaluation of different aspects of Christianity, such as traditions borrowed from pagan customs as well as Western Christianity's early notions of superiority over the East. He discusses the many achievements of Islamic peoples, explaining that Islam proved more successful in its conversion efforts than Christianity. He then highlights a common heritage of Latin Christendom and Islam, examining the roots from which both began and the centuries over which both faiths spread. In the second chapter, Bulliet explores the question of "what went wrong" in the Middle East. This notion suggests that the Western world still holds Islam to Euro-American social values. Democracy, freedom of speech, and religious freedom are, for example, socio-political elements of the modern Western cultural tradition. Proposing an alternative point of view, Bulliet explains why Islamic society exists as it does, focusing on past and present Arab and Muslim leaders. Sharia law, for example, the primary statute and authority of Islam, calls for a religious leadership by the ulama and other religious authorities, thus rejecting a Euro-American political idea of separation of church and state.

In relations between the United States and the Middle East, Bulliet shows that American understanding of Islamic culture and society was very limited before World War II. During the Cold War, growing political and military tensions led western powers to strive for domination of resources and a constant flow of oil became paramount. Thus, interest in the Middle East, Islam, its cultures and traditions grew and government programs and institutions supporting research in the region emerged. With greater comprehension, hope that Muslims would become more westernized grew. However, Bulliet argues that the Middle East must not be modernized through Western means and instead must be understood from within and consider Islamic tradition and its heritage. If this rethinking fails, Bulliet fears that relations between the United States and the Middle East will deteriorate. Bulliet suggests that expectations by western powers further push Islamic and Middle Eastern rulers and leaders to reject western politico-social ideas, becoming more radical in their authoritarian rule and homogeneous religious institutions.

Bulliet reveals a similar ancestry between Western Christendom and Islam and explores the contorted Western and Orientalist outlook of the Islamic Middle East. He introduces new principles to the study of the Middle East and deconstructs western Islamophobia. These new tenets call for on the West to fundamentally change their ideas

about Islam and the Middle East and ushering in a different approach to its studies and relations. As a short and concise book that covers much information in just four chapters, this book is appropriate for both graduate and undergraduate students alike, as well as general readers who are interested in the Islamic world, offering innovative ideology and intellectual satisfaction.

*John-Paul Fernandes*

