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civilization, brought together as a living system by the whole as the primary actor, from the top down, not the bottom up, even though no separate new element can be detected. The uniqueness of the governing whole must be present before the assembled physical elements will become a living cell under its direction, and not just an assembly of parts that come together by chance. Scientists cannot just add another part to make it live. No one has yet defined “life”. The unity of the physical sciences and the human sciences has not yet been achieved.

Lee Daniel Snyder

**Reza Aslan, *No God but God—The Origins, Evolution, and Future of Islam***

Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2005

The most difficult task for a secular scholar is to analyze a religion critically. However, scholars of each of the three “revealed” religions have debated the meaning of religious texts throughout history, but none of them criticized the religion itself or dared to criticize the religion’s founder, until after the 16th Century.

Jews have a long tradition of textual analysis, the Talmud, which permitted their rabbis to interpret and reinterpret the meaning of the scriptures that confronted new contemporary conditions. And because Judaism has no body such as the Papacy that can enforce conformity, the religion has changed and evolved over time. “Reform” Jews live as do their Christian neighbors in secular democracies, whereas at the other end of the spectrum, small communities of “Ultra-Orthodox” Jews dress, live, and practice their faith as though they live in 17th century Poland.

Christianity was diverse and fluid during its first few centuries as the religion was breaking away from Judaism. But the Roman Emperor Constantine put a stop to this in the fourth century AD. He demanded uniformity of belief and ritual, and compelled Christian elders to forge agreements that would stop the diversity. Catholic bishops had convened ecumenical conferences in 324, to denounce one of the bishops, Arius, for an interpretation that they considered a heresy. Constantine, in the interest of peace within his empire, call the Council of Nicaea in which the bishops decided on which beliefs were mandatory in the faith. For the next thousand years, the Catholic church of the west fought heresies of increasing bitterness. This struggle culminated with the rebellion of Martin Luther, whose rupture with the church was backed by

some German princes—and Protestantism was born.

With Protestantism came the printing press, increased literacy, and the ability of all who read the Bible with devotion to come to some of their own conclusions. Thus was born Biblical Criticism and—I believe—the modern secular world.

The earlier years of Islam enjoyed the same process of varied interpretations of the Koran, resulting in multiple “schools” of belief. This tolerance was brought to an end by one of the Caliphs, al-Ma'mun (d. 833 A.D.), who began an “inquisition” centuries before the Catholics thought of doing so. He arrested, questioned, and tortured religious scholars who believed that the Koran was a human work (created), the position of the “Rationalist” school, rather than uncreated (coeternal with God), the position of the “Traditionalists.” This inquisition went on under Ma'mun's successor, and continued until 861, when it was halted. Unfortunately, in a backlash, the hitherto persecuted “Traditionalist” school became dominant and the rationalists were silenced. With this silencing, the Golden Age of Islamic Science came to an end, as did any further intellectual openness.

Reza Aslan's detailing of the origins, evolution, and future of Islam is a fascinating work of scholarship which is largely sympathetic to the enterprise of this religion. He manages to interpret the details of the life of the Prophet Muhammad in the most positive light, something that critics of the religion do not do. He presents the Prophet's ministry as an evolution, an ongoing process of development of a religion new to the Arab people. By tracing those elements that existed in pre-Islamic Arabia, Muhammad's exposure to Judaism, Christianity, and some Zoroastrianism, he shows the process whereby adapting Jewish monotheism became transformed into a separate religion. Muhammad is shown as very human, sometimes personally flawed, but overall obsessed by the vision that took over his life when he was 40. The mystery is always there when one reads the biographies of religious prophets: why did each give up a perfectly satisfactory life to take on such a task of creating a new religion that would bring himself stress and grief?

Aslan is very solid in his description of the evolution of Islam after the death of the Prophet. It is a picture of infighting, assassinations, and unremitting warfare, which even a sympathetic historian cannot white-wash. But a historian has great difficulty in totally removing himself from personal loyalties. Aslan demonstrates Iranian sympathy for the

Shiite quarrel that darkened Islam from its beginnings. He presents their side of the inter-Islamic power struggle with more justification than I can find. The power struggle lay between those who believed that the leadership of the Muslim community should be determined by consensus of the elders, and those who believed that being from the family of Muhammad himself should determine leadership. Unfortunately, as the history of monarchy illustrates, the families of great men are not necessarily great. But Iranians, descended from a long tradition of absolute monarchs, have been caught up in this ancient political quarrel.

Aslan's chapters on the rise of the Shiites, the Sufis, and the struggles in the Middle East under Western colonialism, are interesting, but are what one would expect from a Persian perspective. There were some modernists who emerged, obviously exposed to western ideas, who attempted to rescue Islam from its rigid traditionalist position under the clergy. The clergy did not take this quietly, which is most painfully illustrated by the destruction of modernization in Iran by the Ayatollah Khomeini.

Aslan, optimistic to the end, believes that Islam has within it qualities that can make it a valid and constructive faith in the modern world. This, of course, is the substance of the internal war that is devastating Islam and has poured out into the larger world today. Aslan's view is in the minority at the moment.

**Bat Ye'or, *Eurabia The Euro-Arab Axis: Land of Dhimmitude*, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005-6.**

This book is about the transformation of Europe into "Eurabia," a cultural and political appendage of the Arab/Muslim world. Eurabia is fundamentally anti-Christian, anti-Western, Anti-American, and anti-Semitic. The institution that has been responsible for this transformation, and that continues to propagate its ideological message, is the Euro-Arab Dialogue, developed by European and Arab politicians and intellectuals over the past thirty years.

Born in Egypt, the author is a pioneer researcher on "dhimmitude" (the treatment of non-Muslims in the Arab-conquered lands). Her three major books translated from French are: *The Dhimmi: Jews and Christians under Islam* (1985); *The Decline of Eastern Christianity under Islam: From Jihad to Dhimmitude* (1996); and *Islam and Dhimmitude: Where Civilizations Collide* (2002). Her works are very readable, scholarly, historically sound, and extremely well documented.

Until the 1970s, Europeans were favorable toward Israel as a fel-

low democracy. From that point on, a new ideology emerged in Europe that enjoyed general agreement by the governing, media, and academic elites. The new ideology, promoted with monotonous uniformity, is anti-American, anti-Israeli, anti-Jewish, and "Palestinianist." Interestingly enough, these are the old Soviet principles that were adopted by the left-wing elites in Europe, by Arabs, and by many of the academic elites in the United States—and still is in fashion.

The main reason for this new ideology ties in with the first oil embargo—an issue that, had it continued, would have devastated Europe. The second reason is that the growing EU had delusions of grandeur that they could become the next great power to challenge American superpower status. And to do this, they needed the Arabs with their oil as well.

This European dream has been dashed by the realization that this may not have been the best of choices. With the flood of Muslim immigrants eating up the pool of welfare money so generously lavished on them, and with the emergence of second and third generation Muslim men who are radicalized, alienated, and emboldened by European passivity, Europe is in trouble. There are 751 areas in France alone that the police do not go (too dangerous). Europe's prisons are increasingly run by Muslim radicals and the few prisoners who are not Muslim are being converted.

Can the worm turn before things get worse? Perhaps Europe's ordinary people will finally say that they are fed up with the establishment. If that does not happen, the US will be standing alone against this very dangerous resurgent Islam, according to Bat Ye'or.

**Robert Kagan, *Dangerous Nation: America's Place in the World from Its Earliest Days to the Dawn of the Twentieth Century*,**  
Vintage Paperback, 2007 (Alfred A. Knopf, 2006).

Last summer included reading books that require digestion, not skimming. Robert Kagan, whose father and brother are also distinguished historians of war and military history, has written an extremely useful book about the history of America's foreign policy (*Dangerous Nation*, 2006). We of the notoriously short attention span are often surprised at the foreign policy choices made by our various governments without understanding that these choices have a long, continuous history.

So many idealists believe that we Americans are generally isolationist, ignorant of countries outside of our own, and when we are engaged with the world, it is out of the best and most generous impulses. This is how we like to see ourselves, at least in the popular press. We are astonished that other countries around the world badmouth us, call us “imperialists,” show no gratitude when we rescue them from disaster (the French), and worry about our unpopularity around the world. However, reality and a good grasp of history can tell us otherwise.

Robert Kagan has produced a 500-page volume on America’s relations with the rest of the world, relations that began even before our successful revolution against the British in 1776. His documentation is extensive, drawing from the letters of our Presidents and Secretaries of State from the time of George Washington through our presidents of today.

There is a continuity of two themes: American attitudes toward our “special mission” and international hostility toward this mission. According to Abraham Lincoln on June 26, 1857:

The authors of [the Declaration of Independence] set up a standard maxim for free society, which should be familiar to all, and revered by all; constantly looked to, constantly labored for, and even though never perfectly attained, constantly approximated, and thereby constantly spreading and deepening its influence, and augmenting the happiness and value of life to all people of all colors everywhere.”

But in the words and actions of presidents from Thomas Jefferson to today, the same view is expressed. And we aggressively pursued the expansion of our civilization across this continent and have been attempting to “spread democracy” around the world to the very present. Furthermore, we are the only major society in the world that has ever been concerned with people’s “happiness.”

The response to this mission from aristocrats around the world was to recognize that we were a dangerous nation—a model that they did not want their people to follow. The elites of Europe feared and detested us from our inception, and tried hard, while we were small and weak, to undo our revolution. However, our rapid growth and prosperity soon made it difficult to reestablish the old order.

When President Bush talks about wanting to spread democracy and insists that the reason the Islamists hate us is because they hate our freedoms, both his vision and the resistance to this vision are an old story. We have been called an “ambitious and encroaching people” by

Europeans as early as 1819, according to an American congressman upon visiting Europe. In 1817, John Quincy Adams reported that the universal feeling of Europe was that we shall, if united, become a very dangerous member of the society of nations. This sounds no different from what we hear around the world today from our many detractors.

These early 19th century Europeans certainly hoped that we would not remain united, and when that came to pass during our Civil War, various European powers attempted to help the South. However, the North won the war and the most glaring hypocrisy in our policy was finally set right. How could we profess to promote liberty and yet tolerate slavery? This issue was recognized by the founding fathers as something that would come back to bite us later, and it most certainly did.

But once we were reunited and flourishing as never before, our presidents without exception engaged in ambitious foreign policies that included mediating between belligerents (the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5), siding with Greeks and others rebelling against the Ottoman Empire, and interfering with European powers who were trying to establish toeholds in Latin America.

Our policies from the beginning have always teetered between idealism and pragmatism, disinterest and hegemony. And our detractors abroad, formerly the power structure of the ancien regimes but today the new far left, have always suspected our idealism (or called it naïve) or attributed all of our actions to Machiavellian lust for power. Kagan shows how unchanging our behavior and the world's responses to it have been. It is important for us to become conscious of who we are and what we do because when we sneeze, the world catches cold.

Kagan's *Dangerous Nation* is a thoroughly readable work—and one useful for anyone who cares about what makes the United States tick.

Laina Farhat-Holzman