Epistle to the Muslims: Christian leaders abase themselves before Islam

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On Nov. 18, the New York Times ran a full-page ad titled "A Christian Response to a Common Word Between Us and You." A Common Word is an October letter from 138 Muslim scholars and clerics to leaders of Christian churches, everywhere. It reads like an invitation to ecumenical tolerance and "peace and understanding" based on "the very foundational principles of both faiths"; "the Unity of God, the necessity of love for Him, and the necessity of love of the neighbour is thus the common ground between Islam and Christianity." Over 300 Christian theologians and church leaders signed the "Christian Response," including the heads of some of the nation's most prestigious seminaries and theological schools. But if it accurately represents the thinking of mainstream Christian leadership, then Christianity in America is in deep trouble.

The response opens on a familiar self-loathing note, in the therapeutic style that has convinced jihadists that Christianity in the West is an empty shell, a mere lifestyle choice. Noting that Muslim and Christian "relations have sometimes been tense, even characterized by outright hostility," the letter professes "that in the past (e.g. in the Crusades) and in the present (e.g. in excesses of the 'war on terror') many Christians have been guilty of winning against our Muslim neighbors," and so "we ask forgiveness of the All-Merciful One and of the Muslim community around the world."

The groveling self-abasement of this language, particularly its begging forgiveness of Allah, is matched only by its remarkable historical ignorance. "Outright hostility" has indeed existed between Muslims and Christians, for the simple reason that for 13 centuries Islam grew and spread by war, plunder, rape and enslavement throughout the Christian Middle East. Allah's armies destroyed regions that were culturally Christian for centuries, variously slaughtering, enslaving and converting their inhabitants, or allowing them to live as oppressed dhimmi, their lives and property dependent on a temporary "truce" that Muslim overlords could abrogate at any time.

And let's not forget the seven-century-long Islamic occupation of Spain, the centuries of raids into southern Italy and southern France, the near-sack of Rome in 846, the occupation of Sicily and Greece, the four-century-long occupation of the Balkans, the destruction of Constantinople, the two sieges of Vienna, the kidnapping of Christian youths to serve as janissaries from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries, the continual raiding of the northern Mediterranean littoral for slaves from 1500 to 1800 and the current jihadist terrorist attacks against the West.

These historical crimes dwarf those committed during the few centuries of the Crusades, which, for all of their excesses and mixed motives, were fought to liberate from Muslim hegemony the lands that had been Christian for six and a half centuries before Islam burst forth from the Arabian Peninsula. Many contemporary Christians betray their moral and spiritual incoherence when they demonize the Crusades but excuse, as justified "liberation," the numerous Arab assaults on Israel's "occupation" of lands to which the Jews have a 3,000-year-old connection.

For its part, "A Common Word" makes no apologies for the violence that Islam has perpetrated against Christian people up to the present day. And the "Christian Response" repeats the "common ground" mantra, along with the usual calls to "interfaith dialogue," and makes flattering references to the Muslim clerics' "deep insight and courage" and their "generous letter." This appealing tone of the traditional dhimmi -- an unreciprocated solicitude typical of the inferior when dealing with his superior -- suggests
once again that the West is spiritually dead, its Christian faith in the hands of those who will not defend it, even in print.

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