For centuries, Muslims have captured Christians in exchange for demands of one kind or another. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the United States disbursed “protection money” to North African Muslim pirates—against the advice of Thomas Jefferson, who argued that paying only encouraged attacks (“Millions for Defense, not One Cent for Tribute,” was his version of delenda est Carthago). When he and John Adams tried to end the practice through negotiation, they were told by Tripoli’s ambassador to London that extorting money and taking slaves was justified by the Quran, which admonished Muslims to make Jihad against unbelievers and take them captive until they were ransomed. As President, Jefferson finally got his wishes: in 1801 he refused to pay what was de facto a traditional tribute of non-Muslims (the jizya). The North Africans then desecrated the American flag and the President, without a Congressional declaration of war but with Congressional authorization, sent the U.S. Navy and Marines against Tripoli. By 1816, after two wars, the U.S. had succeeded in ending Muslim attacks on ships and the enslavement of Christians in the Mediterranean.

The eight centuries-long intermittent war between Catholics and Muslims in the Iberian peninsula had as one of its byproducts the creation of a class of captives and slaves. This readable, but fundamentally flawed, book explains the phenomenon of captivity concentrating on the kingdom of Aragon and the capture of Catholics by Muslims. The extant records facilitate this approach: although a parallel activity, the capture of Muslims by Catholics is less well documented, perhaps because it had a comparatively lesser impact. After all, for a long time Muslims held the military initiative and their plundering of Catholic kingdoms brought a steady supply of slaves to Muslim lands. Eventually, Christians reciprocated, raiding Muslim lands and taking captives. Capturing Muslims was therefore an imitative activity that never quite reached the same magnitude. The ransoming of Muslim captives, for example, never led to the creation of specialized Muslim organizations analogous to the Trinitarian...
or Mercedarian orders. It is often forgotten that it was not Christian armies that initially invaded Islamic lands, but the other way around—first the Middle East and North Africa (both part of the Greek Orthodox Roman Empire) and eventually Catholic Europe itself through the Iberian peninsula and into Southern France, where Muslim armies were defeated and thrown back across the Pyrenees by the Catholic King of the Franks, Charles Martel. Eventually Spaniards repeated this feat after the victory of Navas de Tolosa in 1212 in a centuries-long reconquest of formerly Catholic territory (the Reconquista) that culminated in the final defeat of European Islam at Granada in 1492.

The descriptions in this book of the hardships suffered by Christian captives would make for a good horror film. Hunger, cold, and beatings were part of the experience. The book also shows how female Catholic captives often ended up as sexual slaves within and without the harem—not a Catholic institution and therefore not an incentive to the capturing of masses of Muslim women. This phenomenon of sexual servitude is related to another one not discussed in the book: since the invaders consisted of male warriors, most of the various forms of Muslim sexual union, from concubinage inside and outside the harem to marriage, took place by necessity with the females of the conquered population. This process makes speaking of an “Arab” Andalusia inexact at best. The population was indeed increasingly Muslim, for a number of reasons, but it was not increasingly Arab. To begin with, true Arabs—that is, those from the Arabian peninsula—were a minority within the Muslim armies from the beginning, exercising hegemony over a mass of invaders made up of Syrians and Berbers. Moreover, since in Spain the subjugated natives outnumbered the invaders, there resulted a mixed population in which the Arab, Berber, and Syrian elements were variously diluted. Indeed, some of the great leaders of Muslim Spain were the sons of formerly Catholic mothers, blond women being favored by the conquerors: the famous Abd-al-Rahman III even had blue eyes and tinted his reddish hair black in order to appear more “Arabic” before his subjects. The son of Almanzor, Sanchuelo, was the child of a Navarrese princess handed over to Almanzor after his victories over the king of Navarra. The favorite concubine of Almanzor’s protector was also from Navarra. Blond female slaves from Slavic lands were also numerous, and some of their descendants achieved positions of power within Andalusia.

In this otherwise informative book, the author makes a few very misleading assertions. One is the all too often repeated claim that “Islam is not a proselytizing religion in the same sense as Christianity[...]. Forced conversions were also forbidden as the Koran declared that ‘there should be no compulsion in religion.’” But Islam is indeed a proselytizing religion. That is why it came out of Arabia and defeated and converted to Islam “infidel” nations like the Greek Orthodox Romans (“Byzantines”), the Zoroastrian Persians, the animist Berbers, the Catholic Visigoths, and many others. In Persia and adjacent regions, Zoroastrian culture was wiped out with ruthless brutality. In other nations, animism was violently eradicated.

One can explain the historical trajectory of Islam as a militarily proselytizing religion despite the Quranic injunction against forced conversion because the more peaceful suita two, invoked even by scholars who should know better, is considered earlier than the sura nine, where the opposite is commanded—namely, to make war against and convert the infidels. In Islamic interpretative practice, earlier suras are superseded by later suras whenever there is a conflict of meaning. Sura nine (also called the “Song of the Sword”) makes such statements as “fight and
sly the Pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent, and establish regular prayers [...] then open the way for them” (9:5) and “Fight those who believe not in God nor the Last Day nor hold that forbidden which hath been forbidden by God and His Messenger, nor acknowledge the Religion of Truth, even if they are of the People of the Book, until they pay the Jizya with willing submission, and feel themselves subdued” (9:29).

In the glorious age of Islamic expansion, this sura was often recited by Islamic armies before Muslim warriors went into battle. One may wonder why the scholarly author of this book skipped this sura, which supersedes the one he chooses to quote. In Spain, Islam followed this normal course. As a result, although many Catholics adapted or gave up their faith, many others fled to the northern Catholic kingdoms to escape such options as to convert to Islam or die, or pay the jizya (the special tax imposed on Christians and Jews) and submit to a Muslim hegemony that, from the earliest conquests of Islam (cf. the fundamental “Pact of Umar”), relegated Christians to a secondary status (dhimmitude) which, among other things, forbade them to bear arms, ride a stallion, hold processions, or otherwise celebrate Christianity except inside a church, build new churches, toll church bells, or proselytize; and that required Christians to stand up and defer to Muslims whenever the occasion arose. After 1138 A.D., thousands of Jews, too, fled Muslim lands to the Spanish Catholic kingdoms to find a better life.

Claiming that Islam lacks proselytizing institutions because it lacks the preaching orders of Catholicism or Protestant missionaries is misleading as well because Islam does have an equivalent and certainly hierarchical system of imams, mullahs, ayatollahs, and other offices that can and do convert people as effectively as priests and missionaries. Today the success of Islamic preachers in the West and in other parts of the world such as Africa is common knowledge.

It is also inaccurate to assert that Islam “allowed intermarriage.” Islam did not allow a non-Muslim man to marry a Muslim woman. It allowed the marriage of a Muslim man to a non-Muslim woman, but stipulated that any resulting children must be brought up in the Muslim faith. This rule is one of several reasons for the well-known invariable decline in the number of Christian faithful in Christian lands conquered by Islam. This has not changed: even today, one reads of foreign men who convert to be able to marry a Muslim woman. Islam is a one-way street, and in more than one sense: in medieval times, Muslim authorities punished with death those who abandoned Islam. For centuries, those who abandoned Christianity and Judaism also risked their lives, but for a long time neither religion has killed its apostates. Islam, however, still does: newspapers frequently carry stories of former Muslims who upon conversion to Christianity risk death in Islamic countries.

This book claims that forcing conversions of Catholic captives was the exception, not the rule, contrary to Catholic contemporary claims. Although it mentions “other equally credible sources” to support this claim, it does not list those sources. A reading of the testimonies provided in the pages of this book, however, leads to a different conclusion: captives were clearly under enormous pressure to convert in order to lessen or avoid the difficult conditions in which they lived. The literature supporting the existence of this pressure is of two kinds. One includes a manual used by Catholic preachers to strengthen the faith of the captives and combat the temptation to convert. Another is an abundant literature consisting of diplomatic correspondence, chronicles, hagiographic materials, and “other sources” indicating
that captives were put under pressure to convert if only to lessen or avoid the burden of captivity and de facto slavery. The life of Santo Domingo de Silos, which produced one of the masterpieces of medieval Spanish literature—the thirteenth century poem *Vida de Santo Domingo de Silos* by Gonzalo de Berceo—is in part a litany of the saint’s miracles preventing apostasy among captured Catholics.

The reality of captivity led to the creation of unique Catholic institutions and procedures. Religious orders such as the Mercedarians and the Trinitarians were founded to assist captives and if possible obtain their freedom through ransom. As late as the seventeenth century, priests from these orders were helping Catholics pay for their freedom. The temporal and geographical parameters of this book prevent it from examining the case of probably the most famous Catholic captive of all times: Miguel de Cervantes. After participating in the Catholic victory over Islam at Lepanto (October 7, 1571), Cervantes was captured by Muslim pirates and taken to North Africa, where he was kept as a slave in Argel (1575–1580). In his works he includes possibly autobiographical passages showing the fictional speaker bleeding from beatings received at the hands of his masters; and several contemporary witnesses attest to Cervantes’ sufferings in captivity and his Christian steadfastness (see the most recent and thoroughly documented biography: Krzysztof Sliwa’s *Vida de Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra*). His strong faith may be contrasted with the actions of at least one of Cervantes’ fictional characters who became a “renegade” by converting to Islam. In one of his poems, Cervantes calls upon Philip II to attack Muslim lairs in North Africa and liberate the over 25,000 Christian slaves kept in Algiers; and at one point in *Don Quixote*, the hero declares his desire to go to North Africa to fight Islam. Cervantes was eventually ransomed through the efforts of the Trinitarian friars. This experience with a providential religious order may have influenced Cervantes’ decision to profess as a Tertiary Franciscan lay brother in the last year of his life. (On this point, see Dario Fernández-Morera, “Cervantes and Islam: A Contemporary Analogy,” in *Cervantes y su mundo*, ed. K. Reichenberger [Kassell, 2005], 123–66.)

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**The Sacralization of Politics**

Thomas F. Bertonneau

**The Strange Death of Marxism: The European Left in the New Millennium**


154 pp.

Paul Gottfried’s previous book, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Guilt* (2002), examined the emergence of “secular theocracy” in North America, as the latest phase of the reigning “managerial state.” Gottfried argued there the thesis that contemporary American liberalism has increasingly assumed a religious, indeed a millenarian, tenor, taking as its mission the therapeutic reconstruction—and thereby the spiritual redemption—of the benighted mass. The therapeutic regime proceeds according to the notion of “tolerance” and under the scheme of “multiculturalism.” Contemporary liberalism habitually sees the average person as condemned to preterition, helplessly enthralled by his reactionary “middle class”...

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