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### Apologize for the Crusades? Never!

By [Robert Spencer](#) [1]

As part of its effort to portray the West as the guilty party in today's global jihad, Al-Azhar (the most respected Sunni Muslim authority in the world), has asked the Vatican for an apology for the Crusades. Sheikh Fawzi Zafzaf, President of the Interfaith Dialogue Committee of Al-Azhar, explained that "Al-Azhar is only asking for a similar treatment" following Vatican apologies to other groups. According to the Vatican ambassador to Egypt, the Holy See is thinking it over.

This is just the latest indication that the Crusades have grown into a myth that little resembles reality, and remain politically charged over three years after President Bush was roundly criticized for labeling the war on terror a "Crusade." Former President Bill Clinton even explained 9/11 as fallout from the Crusades: "Indeed, in the first Crusade, when the Christian soldiers took Jerusalem, they first burned a synagogue with 300 Jews in it, and proceeded to kill every woman and child who was Muslim on the Temple mound.... I can tell you that that story is still being told to today in the Middle East and we are still paying for it."

The West has questioned the Crusades — something probably not possible if the shoe were on the Islamic foot — almost since they took place. Virtually all Westerners have learned to apologize for the Crusades, but less noted is the fact that the Crusades have an Islamic counterpart for which no one is apologizing and of which few are even aware. I am working on a new book, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam and the Crusades*, which will out from Regnery Publishing in a few months. In it, I am clearing away propaganda and telling what really happened.

Islam originated in Arabia in the seventh century. At that time Egypt, Libya, and all of North Africa were Christian, and had been so for hundreds of years. So were Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, and Asia Minor. But then Muhammad and his Muslim armies arose out of the desert, and — as most modern textbooks would put it — these lands became Muslim. But in fact the transition was cataclysmic. Muslims won these lands by conquest and, in obedience to the words of the Qur'an and the Prophet, put to the sword the infidels therein who refused to submit to the new Islamic regime. Those who remained alive lived in humiliating second-class status.

Clinton may be right that Muslims still seethe about the sack of Jerusalem, but he and they are strangely silent about similar behavior on the Muslim side. In those days, invading armies were considered to be entitled to sack cities that resisted them. On May 29, 1453, Constantinople, the jewel of Christendom, finally fell to an overwhelming Muslim force after weeks of resistance by a small band of valiant Greeks. According to the great historian of the Crusades Steven Runciman, the Muslim soldiers "slew everyone that they met in the streets, men, women, and children without discrimination. The blood ran in rivers down the steep streets from the heights of Petra toward the Golden Horn. But soon the lust for slaughter was assuaged. The soldiers realized that captives and precious objects would bring them greater profit."

The first Crusade was called because Christian pilgrims to the Holy Land were being molested by Muslims and prevented from reaching the holy places. Some were killed. "The Crusade," noted the historian Bernard Lewis, "was a delayed response to the jihad, the holy war for Islam, and its purpose was to recover by war what had been lost by war — to free the holy places of Christendom and open them once again, without impediment, to Christian pilgrimage."

Thus if Al-Azhar really wants to demand that the Vatican apologize for the Crusades, it should be ready to apologize for the Islamic conquests of the Middle East and North Africa. But the most disturbing element of this sorry exercise of historical revision is that their "request" may well be granted by the Vatican. And if it is, it would be just one more link on a long chain of double standards by which Western authorities seem ready to bend over backwards to grant concessions to the Islamic world, while asking for and receiving nothing in return. For example, Al-Azhar itself has praised suicide bombers as martyrs and declared that Islamic states have a religious obligation to acquire nuclear weapons. Yet no one in the West is demanding an apology from them for these approvals of very contemporary menaces. It figures.

**Robert Spencer is the director of [Jihad Watch](#) [2]; author of [Onward Muslim Soldiers: How Jihad Still Threatens America and the West](#) [3] (Regnery), and [Islam Unveiled: Disturbing Questions About the World's Fastest Growing Faith](#) [4] (Encounter); and editor of the essay collection [The Myth of Islamic Tolerance: Islamic Law and Non-Muslims](#) [5] (Prometheus). He is working on a new book, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam and the Crusades* (forthcoming from Regnery).**

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