

# Militant Muslims, West square off

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

The No. 1 religious theme of 2005—and presumably for 2006 and years beyond—is the faceoff between militant Islam and Western civilization, with its scriptural Jewish and Christian heritage.

That confrontation overshadowed Catholicism's changeover from Pope John Paul II to Pope Benedict XVI and Protestants' severe dispute about homosexuality and the Bible.

Stepping back from the daily headlines about terrorism, the question arises: What underlies this lethal global tension? Ohio University historian T. David Curp has an answer that turns explanations inside out.

"It is commonplace to claim that the Crusades scarred the imagination of the Muslim world for centuries," he wrote recently in *Crisis*, a Catholic magazine. Islamists and Arab nationalists regularly cite the medieval warfare between Christians and Muslims as a source for today's anti-Western views across the Mideast.

"This is simply incorrect," Curp asserted, noting that Princeton University's Bernard Lewis said Muslims actually had little interest in Western Christendom for centuries following the Crusades (apart from those directly involved in invading Christian territory).

Curp's key claim: "Radical Islam's protest against the West is not fueled primarily by aggrieved victimhood, it is nourished by an even stronger memory of how Islam's final victory over Christendom remained for so long a real possibility."

For about 1,000 years, the Muslim world experienced mostly expansion and military triumph. That era ended in 1683, when Muslims held

lands suffered the humiliation of European colonialism, then the cultural weakness of independent Muslim countries extending to the present. That has created a psychological crisis for Islam.

Curp's retelling of the history explains the context that first created widespread Muslim-Christian combat.

Islam originally took the Holy Land in 638 and quickly vanquished large tracts of the former Christendom. This provoked no sweeping outrage, nor did Western Christians manage any concerted military counterattack until 1095, when Pope Urban II summoned the First Crusade.

What caused the pope's radical step? During that turbulent epoch, Eastern Christianity's Byzantine Empire had finally broken with Western Catholicism and its pope. The Byzantines faced the greater Islamic military threat, but Western Catholics, too, were agitated about increased persecution of Christian pilgrims seeking to visit their holy sites in Jerusalem, which required them to travel through Muslim regions.

Meanwhile, the 10th-century Islamic preacher Ibn Nubata al-Fariqi developed a cycle of sermons calling for holy war—somewhat resembling Urban's later Crusade call—that had considerable influence on Muslim thinking in succeeding centuries.

Christians' situation in the East began to deteriorate militarily in 903 when Muslims sacked Thessalonica, the Byzantines' second-ranking city, and enslaved 30,000 inhabitants. In 931 they took Ankariya (present-day Ankara) and enslaved thousands more.

In 1064 the Turks seized

the capital of Christian Armenia, slaughtering the populace and imprisoning 30,000 people. Then, in the climactic Battle of Mantzikert in 1071, the Muslims virtually crushed Byzantine military power. In Curp's telling, it was that disaster that provoked the Crusades in response.

The campaign in present-day Turkey "to expel, enslave or impoverish the region's Christian inhabitants" lasted 300 years, during which the population dropped by half. The once-thriving Christian area "became a wasteland under the rule of its new religiously intolerant and alien mas-

ters," he wrote.

Curp summarizes that climactic era: "The wars that Islam waged against Christendom—and Christendom's counterattacks, degenerated into remarkably dirty wars that often empowered the worst impulses in both faiths."



PHOTO/THE STOCK MARKET

vast terrain in eastern Europe and 140,000 Turkish troops nearly conquered Vienna, posing a significant threat for the West. But the Muslim invaders were defeated.

One might develop Curp's scenario this way: After numerous victories, Islamic

## Church plans to give house away on New Year's Eve

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LA MARQUE, Tex.—In a game show-style giveaway, a church plans to award a \$120,000 three-bedroom house to one of its worshippers on New Year's Eve.

Since 2003, Abundant Life Christian Center has given away a car, a motorcycle and furniture.

"It encourages people to come to the service, and it helps keep people off the street with all that revelry going on," said pastor Walter Hallam.

During Saturday's service, 20 names will be selected at random and placed with 100 others chosen from services

throughout the year. Twelve finalists—symbolizing the 12 apostles—will be selected.

Each of the finalists will receive a key, which they will try in a door on stage. The person whose key unlocks the door wins the home. Lighting, music, indoor fireworks and balloon drops will also be part of the festivities.

More than 2,000 people typically attend the church's New Year's Eve service.

Church member Richard Murillo, who owns Trinity Builders, charged the church \$53,000 to cover the cost of materials to construct the house.

## Texas pastor's wife says she chose to leave plane after argument

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

HOUSTON—The wife of the pastor of the nation's largest church said she chose to leave an airplane after a disagreement with a flight attendant, disputing accounts that she was asked to go.

The FBI has said Victoria Osteen was asked to leave after failing to obey crew instructions. The Continental Airlines flight Monday from Houston to Vail, Colo., was delayed an hour as a result.

In a statement posted on the Lakewood Church Web site, Osteen says: "Regardless of how some have portrayed the situation, please know that it was truly a minor misunderstanding and did not escalate into what you saw or read in the news. Contrary to those reports, it was my choice to remove myself from the situation. Nonetheless, it was a most unfortunate event and I truly regret that it happened."

A statement from Continental said the situation was resolved and a spokeswoman would not elaborate. The FBI reviewed a report from the airline and determined that no illegal activity had occurred, FBI spokeswoman Luz Garcia said.

"She failed to comply with the flight attendant's instructions, and they were asked to leave the flight," Garcia said Tuesday. Church spokesman Don Iloff said the Osteen family took another flight to Vail.

Pastor Joel Osteen took over his father's church in 1999 and has since increased its following to more than 30,000 worshippers weekly. The congregation of Lakewood Church meets in a renovated sports arena where the Houston Rockets once played.

Osteen's sermons are also broadcast throughout the country and his book "Your Best Life Now" has become a best seller.

Lakewood Church: <http://www.lakewood.cc/>

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