Review of *Worlds at War: The 2,500 Year Struggle Between East and West*. By Anthony Pagden. Random House. 640 pp. $29.95

In 1526, following the defeat of Louis II of Hungary by Suleyman I, the Italian poet Ludovico Ariosto observed that "two suns" now illuminated the globe. Engaged in a struggle that began in the age of antiquity, and continued with the Crusade of Pope Urban II in 1095, two rulers, Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor in the Christian West, and Suleyman "The Magnificent," Sultan of the Ottoman Empire in the Muslim East, vied for supremacy in "the inhabited world." Each sovereign saw himself as a soldier-statesman, with a mandate from heaven to convert, conquer, or kill the benighted barbarians beyond their borders. In 1526 it was not at all clear which one of them would prevail.

Although once great civilizations in China, Japan, Korea, and India have reached some accommodation with the West, Anthony Pagden, a professor of political science and history at the University of California at Los Angeles, reminds us, the conflict between Western Europe (and the United States) and the Holy Land still simmers and boils, rooted in drastically different "visions of what nature and God had intended for man, and the memories of ancient hostilities, carefully nurtured by generation after generation of historians, poets, and preachers on both sides of the divide." In *Worlds at War*, Pagden provides a sweeping, searching, and somber survey—from Alexander to Al Qaeda—of twenty-five hundred years of "perpetual enmity," filled with crusades and jihads.

Pagden's account of the power and persistence of that enmity is suffused with his own hostility toward religion. For all their flaws, he argues, secularization, Enlightenment rationalism, and political liberalism have given people longer, freer, and happier lives. Religious doctrine, by contrast, has caused "more lasting harm to the human race than any other single set
of beliefs." To claim otherwise "is mere sentimentality....What is wrong on this earth can never be remedied by appeals to God. There is no Eden at the end of history nor in some imagined afterlife."

While Christianity has a lot to answer for in *Worlds at War*, Pagden is much tougher on Islam. Both religions, he acknowledges, insist that their beliefs and values apply equally to all mankind. Both see their own bloody conquests as acts of liberation. But while most Christians have come to accept restrictions on religion in civil society as legitimate, history in the Muslim world has moved in the opposite direction—or not at all. Western societies accept and embrace human volition; Middle Eastern societies condemn individual choice as a delusion—and a denial of God's sovereignty.

In the nineteenth century, Pagden maintains, a separation between the sacred and secular in the Muslim World seemed possible. Muhammed Abdu, the chief mufti of Egypt, preached that a blind adherence to tradition violated the teachings of the Qur'an and called for a wholesale revision of laws, ranging from charging interest on loans to regulations for marriage and divorce. In the twenty-first century, however, "no Islamic theologian is prepared to accept such a position." In many parts of the world, Islam has become a religion of resentment and protest against Western culture, science, technology, and imperialism, "most of it understandable, some of it justifiable, but all of it ultimately barren."

Pagden recognizes that the rise of fundamentalism is related to realities on the ground in the Middle East. But he still suggests that in Islam one doctrinal size fits all. The radical pronouncements of Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, however, may not be "strictly in keeping" with the beliefs "not only of all Islamists but increasingly of many more accommodating Muslims." After all, modernity and Islam coexist and thrive in Turkey. In
Malaysia, mosque and state are separated. Even in Indonesia, a fertile ground for radical Islam, the world's largest Muslim organizations, Nadhlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, remain credible voices against shariatization.

The "clash of civilizations" has, indeed, been a "central feature of Islamic history"—and is "an enduring reality of Islamic life." But whether or not "there can be no meeting" of East and West—and no end to an apocalyptic struggle—remains to be seen.

Glenn C. Altschuler is the Thomas and Dorothy Litwin Professor of American Studies at Cornell University.