

Jihad and the Roots of Europe's Religious Identity

by **Richard L. Rubenstein** (Jan. 2009)

[\[1\]](#) What was left unsaid was the Vatican's attitude toward the place of the more than 23,000,000 Muslims currently residing in Europe. [\[2\]](#)

[\[3\]](#) Could, as some observers suggest, the civilization and culture of Europe be in danger of an unprecedented religio-cultural transformation as Europe's Muslim population continues to increase?[\[4\]](#)

[\[5\]](#) Arguing that the so-called "fall of Rome" did not take place in 476 C.E., as Gibbon had maintained, Pirenne contended that the Germanic invaders of the fifth century were not interested in destroying Roman civilization but in becoming Romanized.[\[6\]](#) He further held that a unified Roman Christian civilization, "Romania," survived on both shores of the Mediterranean until the unprecedented Muslim assaults against the wholly unprepared Empire. Pirenne's thesis has been subject to critical scrutiny. Nevertheless, there is a scholarly consensus that he revolutionized the study of the transition from the ancient to the medieval world and with it our understanding of the religious roots of European identity.[\[7\]](#) Moreover, the Pope appears to accept the basic outlines of Pirenne's thesis in his important essay, "Europe and Its Discontents."[\[8\]](#)