

The Islamic World

The West pays attention to the Islamic world when there is a crisis—when hostages are taken, or a bloody jihad is waged, or an ayatollah pronounces a death sentence upon a “blasphemous” novelist. Few Westerners recognize that beneath such headline events lie ancient, tangled conflicts that go to the heart of Islamic faith and civilization, often threatening to divide it.

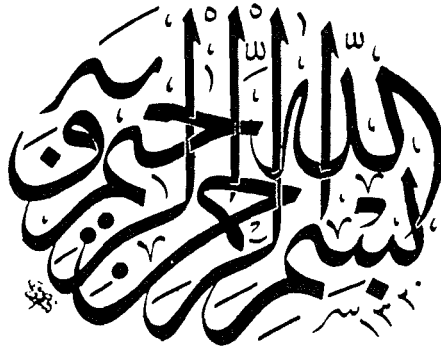
One such conflict—between worldly and spiritual authority—finds apt expression in the 16th-century Persian painting featured on this page. It depicts an early Muslim caliph, Hisham, who, on his pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca, tried unsuccessfully to touch the shrine of the Ka’ba. The caliph looks on as the crowd parts to allow a holy man, the Imam ‘Ali Zaynul-Abidin, to approach and kiss the shrine. The painting implies that the imam is morally and spiritually superior to the caliph—and that this makes him, in principle if not in fact, the rightful leader of the Muslim people.



While the image is a partisan one, reflecting the Shiite view about ultimate authority in this world [see box, p. 60], the painting circles a number of related questions faced by all Muslims throughout their 1400-year-old history: Who is the rightful ruler of an Islamic state? What constitutes a proper state and society under Islam? And, indeed, is there one and only one correct conception of state, society, and leadership under Islam? The questions are far from academic. To many of the one billion Muslims living today, they are often matters of life or death.

Our contributors here offer three approaches to the ongoing Islamic debate. Bernard Lewis considers the evolution of civic and social arrangements in Muslim polities from the time of Muhammad to the present. Some Islamic leaders who today claim to be recreating the community as it was under Muhammad and the early caliphs are, Lewis argues, inventing something quite new. Shaul Bakhash looks at the first 10 years of the Islamic Republic of Iran to show how a fundamentalist theocracy has fared in coping with the problems of everyday governance. Finally, Mahnaz Ispahani, who recently returned from a tour of several Muslim nations, surveys the variety of contemporary Muslim cultures and states. This diversity, she finds, allows many liberal and moderate Muslims to challenge the fundamentalists' notion of a single, orthodox Muslim state without abandoning the vision of unified community of believers.

Each of the articles is opened by a calligraphic rendering of the first line of the Qur'an, "In the Name of Allah, the Merciful, the Compassionate."



STATE AND SOCIETY UNDER ISLAM

by Bernard Lewis

Christendom and Islam are in many ways sister civilizations, both drawing on the shared heritage of Jewish revelation and prophesy and Greek philosophy and science, and both nourished by the immemorial traditions of Middle Eastern antiquity. For most of their joint history, they have been locked in combat, in an endless series of attacks and counter-attacks, jihads and crusades, conquests and reconquests. But even in struggle and polemic they reveal their essential kinship and the common features which link them to each other and set them apart from the remoter civilizations of Asia.

As well as resemblances, there are, of course, profound disparities between the two, and these go beyond the obvious differences in dogma and worship. Nowhere are these differences more profound—and more obvious—than in the attitudes of these two religions, and of their authorized exponents, to the relations among government, religion, and society. The founder of

Christianity bade his followers “render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things which are God’s”—and for centuries Christianity grew and developed as a religion of the downtrodden, until Caesar himself became a Christian and inaugurated a series of changes by which the new faith captured the Roman Empire and—some would add—was captured by it.

The founder of Islam was his own Constantine and founded his own empire. He did not therefore create—or need to create—a church. The dichotomy of *regnum* and *sacerdotium*, so crucial in the history of Western Christendom, had no equivalent in Islam. During Muhammad’s lifetime, the Muslims became at once a political and a religious community, with the Prophet as head of state. As such, he governed a place and a people, dispensed justice, collected taxes, commanded armies, waged war, and made peace. For the first generation of Muslims, whose adventures are the sacred

and salvation history of Islam, there was no protracted testing by persecution, no tradition of resistance to a hostile state power. On the contrary, the state that ruled them was that of Islam, and God's approval of their cause was made clear to them in the form of victory and empire in this world.

In pagan Rome, Caesar was God. For Christians, there is a choice between God and Caesar, and endless generations of Christians have been ensnared in that choice. In Islam, there was no such choice. In the universal Islamic polity as conceived by Muslims, there is no Caesar, but only God, who is the sole sovereign and the sole source of law. Muhammad was his Prophet, who during his lifetime both taught and ruled on God's behalf. When Muhammad died in A.D. 632, his spiritual and prophetic mission, to bring God's book to man, was completed. What remained was the religious mission of spreading God's revelation until finally all the world accepted it. This was to be achieved by extending the authority and thus also the membership of the community which embraced the true faith and upheld God's law. To provide the necessary cohesion and leadership for this task, a deputy or successor of the Prophet was required. The Arabic word *khalifa*, the title by which that successor came to be known, combines the two meanings. This was the title adopted by the Prophet's father-in-law and first successor, 'Abū Bakr, whose accession to the leadership of the Islamic community marked the foundation of the great historic institution of the caliphate.

Under the caliphs, the community of

Medina, where the Prophet had held sway, grew in a century into a vast empire, and Islam became a world religion. In the experience of the first Muslims, as preserved and recorded for later generations, religious belief and political power were indissolubly associated: The first sanctified the second; the second sustained the first. The late Ayatollah Khomeini once remarked that "Islam is politics or it is nothing." Not all Muslims would go that far, but most would agree that God is concerned with politics, and this belief is confirmed and sustained by the Shari'a, the Holy Law, which deals extensively with the acquisition and exercise of power, the nature of authority, the duties of ruler and subject—in a word, with what we in the West would call constitutional law and political philosophy.

In the Islamic state, as ideally conceived and as it indeed existed from medieval through to Ottoman times almost into the 19th century, there could be no conflict between Pope and Emperor; in classical Middle Eastern Islam, the two mighty powers which these two represented were one and the same, and the caliph was the embodiment of both. As a building, a place of public worship, the Muslim equivalent of the church is the mosque; as an institution, a corporate body with its own hierarchy and laws, there is no church in Islam. For the same reason, there is no priesthood in the true sense of the term, and therefore no prelates or hierarchy, no councils or synods, to define orthodoxy and thus condemn heterodoxy. The ulema, the professional men of religion in the Islamic world, may perhaps be called a clergy in the sociological but certainly not in the theological

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sense. They receive no ordination, have no parishes, perform no sacraments. There is no priestly mediation between the worshiper and his God, and in early Islam there was no constituted ecclesiastical authority of any kind.

The primary function of the ulema—from a word meaning knowledge—is to uphold and interpret the Holy Law. From late medieval times, something like a parish clergy emerged, ministering to the needs of ordinary people in cities and villages, but these were usually separate from and mistrusted by the ulema, and owed much more to mystical than to dogmatic Islam. In the later Islamic monarchies, in Turkey and Iran, a kind of ecclesiastical hierarchy appeared, but this had no roots in the classical Muslim tradition, and members of these hierarchies never claimed and still less exercised the powers of Christian prelates.

If one may speak of a clergy only in a limited sociological sense in the Islamic world, there is no sense at all in which one can speak of a laity. The very notion of something that is separate or even separable from religious authority, expressed in Christian languages by such terms as lay, temporal, or secular, is totally alien to Islamic thought and practice. It was not until relatively modern times that equivalents for these terms were used in Arabic. They were borrowed from the usage of Arabic-speaking Christians.

Yet, from the days of the Prophet, the Islamic society had a dual character. On the one hand it was a polity—a chieftaincy which successively became a state and an empire. At the same



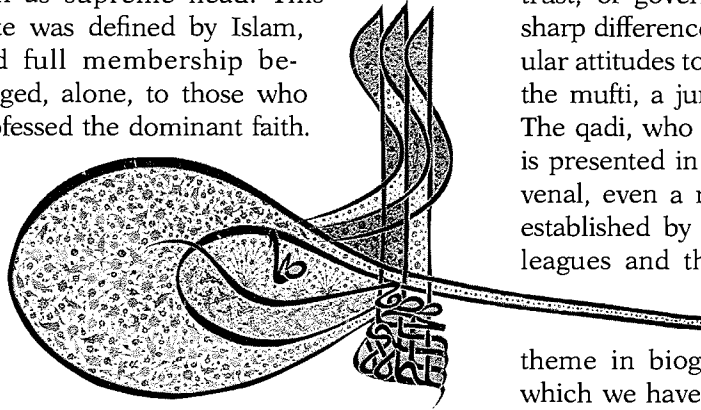
Islamic civilization, as it spread, accommodated and absorbed other cultures. In this 16th-century Mughal painting, Alexander the Great, wearing an Islamic turban, is shown being lowered into the sea in a glass jar.

time, it was a religious community, founded by a Prophet and ruled by his deputies who were also his successors.

Christ was crucified, Moses died without entering the Promised Land, and the beliefs and attitudes of their religious followers are still profoundly influenced by the memory of these facts. Muhammad triumphed during his lifetime and died a conqueror and a sovereign. The resulting Muslim attitudes can only have been confirmed by the subsequent history of their religion.

In the West, barbarian but teachable in-

vaders came to an existing state and religion, the Roman empire and the Christian church. The invaders recognized both and tried to serve their own aims and needs within the existing structures of Roman polity and Christian religion, both using the Latin language. The Muslim Arab invaders who conquered the Middle East and North Africa brought their own faith, with their own scriptures in their own language; they created their own polity, with a new set of laws, a new imperial language, and a new imperial structure, with the caliph as supreme head. This state was defined by Islam, and full membership belonged, alone, to those who professed the dominant faith.



Calligraphic emblem of Süleyman I.

The career of the Prophet Muhammad, in this as in all else the model which all good Muslims seek to emulate, falls into two parts. In the first, during his years in his birthplace Mecca (?570–622), he was an opponent of the reigning pagan oligarchy. In the second, after his migration from Mecca to Medina (622–632), he was the head of a state. These two phases in the Prophet's career, the one of resistance, the other of rule, are both reflected in the Qur'an, where, in different chapters, the believers are enjoined to obey God's representative and to disobey Pharaoh, the paradigm of the unjust and tyrannical ruler. These two aspects of the Prophet's life and work inspired two traditions in Islam, the one authoritarian

and quietist, the other radical and activist. Both are amply reflected, on the one hand in the development of the tradition, on the other, in the unfolding of events. It was not always easy to determine who was God's representative and who was Pharaoh; many books were written, and many battles fought, in the attempt. Both traditions can be seen very clearly in the polemics and struggles of our own times.

Between the extremes of quietism and radicalism, there is a pervasive, widely expressed attitude of reserve, even of mistrust, of government. An example is the sharp difference, in medieval times, of popular attitudes towards the qadi, a judge, and the mufti, a jurisconsult in the Holy Law. The qadi, who was appointed by the ruler, is presented in literature and folklore as a venal, even a ridiculous figure; the mufti, established by the recognition of his colleagues and the general population, enjoyed esteem and respect. A recurring theme in biographies of pious men—of which we have hundreds of thousands—is that the hero was offered a government appointment, and refused. The offer establishes his learning and reputation, the refusal his integrity.

Under the Ottoman sultans there was an important change. The qadi gained greatly in power and authority, and even the mufti was integrated into the public chain of authority. But the old attitude of mistrust of government persisted, and is frequently expressed in proverbs, folk tales, and even high literature.

For more than a thousand years, Islam provided the only universally acceptable set of rules and principles for the regulation of public and social life. Even during the period of maximum European influence, in the countries ruled or dominated by European imperial powers as well as in those that remained independent, Islamic politi-

cal notions and attitudes remained a profound and pervasive influence.

In recent years there have been many signs that these notions and attitudes may be returning, albeit in much modified forms, to their previous dominance. There are therefore good reasons to devote a serious study to these ideas, and in particular to how they deal with the relations among government, religion, and society.

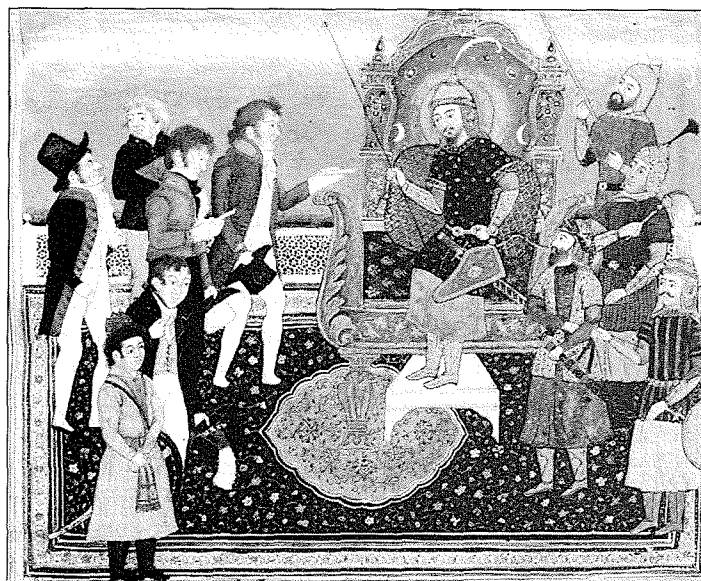
The term "civil society" has become very popular in recent years, and is used in a number of different—sometimes overlapping, sometimes conflicting—senses. It may therefore be useful to examine Islamic perceptions of civility, according to various definitions of that term.

Perhaps the primary meaning of civil, in the Middle East today, is as the converse of military; it is in this sense that civility must begin, before any other is conceivable. This has a special relevance in a place and at a time when the professional officer corps is often both the source and the instrument of power. Understood this way, Islamic society, at the time of its inception and in its early formative years, was unequivocally civil. The Prophet and the early caliphs that followed employed no professional soldiers but relied for military duties on a kind of armed, mostly voluntary militia.

It is not until the second century of the Islamic era (A.D. eighth century) that one can speak, with certitude, of a professional army. The caliph, who in early though not in later times occasionally commanded his armies, was nevertheless a civilian. So too was the wazir, who, under the caliph's authority,

was in charge of all branches of the government, both civil and military. The wazir's emblem of office was an inkpot, which was carried before him on ceremonial public occasions. During the later Middle Ages, internal upheavals and external invasions brought about changes which resulted in the militarization of most Islamic regimes. This has persisted to modern times. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, there was an interlude of civilian, more or less constitutional government, mostly on Western models. During the 1950s and after, these civilian regimes, for the most part, came to an end and were replaced by authoritarian governments under ultimate military control.

This is, however, by no means universal. In some countries, including, for example, Saudi Arabia and Morocco, traditional monarchies still maintain a traditional civilian order; in others, such as Turkey and, later, Egypt and Pakistan, the military themselves have prepared the way for a return to



A Castilian embassy, led by Don Clavijo, arrives at the court of Timur (1336–1405). The domain of the Muslim warrior-leader extended from Mongolia to the Mediterranean. He is known in the West as Tamarlane, a name derived from his alleged lameness.

MUHAMMAD THE PROPHET

The Prophet Muhammad (?570–632) lived only 1400 years ago. Of all the founders of major world religions, he is the closest to us in time. Yet historians have struggled to piece together a complete and accurate biography of the man who Muslims believe is the last prophet in the succession of Abraham. Scarce primary sources include the Qur'an and the *Hadith*, traditional accounts of Muhammad's words and deeds. Early biographies (8th–9th centuries)—the *Sirah* (Life) by Ibn Ishaq, the *Maghazi* (Expeditions) by Al-Waqidi, and the writings of Ibn Sa'd—also remain valuable to scholars.

The Prophet was born in Mecca, a prosperous trading town located in the western part of the Arabian Peninsula. Shortly before his birth around 570, the town's preeminent tribe, the Quraysh, appears to have gained control of the lucrative caravan trade running between Yemen and Syria. This new prosperity, according to some historians, may have created a rift between the great merchants and the lesser

Quraysh "clans," undermining an older code that emphasized communal wealth and protection through kinship ties.

Muhammad, the son of a respected Quraysh family, was orphaned at six and raised, successively, by his grandfather and uncle. He himself went on to become a successful caravan merchant, and at 25 he married his employer, Khadijah, a wealthy widow (and the first of several wives). Financially secure, Muhammad turned to other, higher matters, and sometime in his late thirties he began to meditate in a hill cave outside of town. Around 610, the faithful believe, he had a vision of the archangel Gabriel, who pronounced Muhammad the "Messenger of God." To his friends and relatives and later to the entire community, Muhammad began to relate messages that he claimed came directly from God.

The central tenet of Muhammad's teachings posed a threat to the polytheistic creed of most of his fellow Arabs: He declared that there was

civilian legality. On the whole, the prospects for civilianization at the present time seem to be reasonably good.

In the more generally accepted interpretation of the term civil society, civil is opposed not to religious or to military but to government as such. So construed, the civil society is one in which the main-springs of organization, initiative, and action come from within the society rather than from above, from the holders of authority, the wielders of power. Islamic precept, as presented by the jurists and theologians, and Islamic practice, as reflected by the historians, offer a variety of sometimes contradictory precedents.

The tradition of private charity, for example, is old and deeply rooted in Islam, and is given legal expression in the institution of *waqf*. A *waqf* is a pious endowment in mortmain, consisting of some income-producing property, the proceeds of which are dedicated to a pious purpose—the up-

keep of a place of worship, a school, a bathhouse, a soup kitchen, a water fountain, and the like. The donor might be a ruler or government official; he might equally be, and very often was, a private person. Women, who in Islamic law had the right to own and dispose of property, figure prominently among founders of *waqfs*, sometimes reaching almost half the number. This is perhaps the only area in the traditional Muslim society in which they approach equality with men. By means of the institution of *waqf*, many services, which in other systems are the principal or sole responsibility of the state, are provided by private initiative. One of the major changes brought by modernizing autocrats in the 19th century was to bring the *waqfs* under state control. (Several present-day Muslim states, including Egypt, have departments or ministries of *waqfs*.)

Islamic law, unlike Roman law and its derivatives, does not recognize corporate

only one good and all-powerful God. He also preached about the coming of a Day of Judgment and the existence of Heaven (the Garden) and Hell (the Fire). Islam literally means submission, and Muhammad's faith called on Muslims (those who submit) to acknowledge God's might and majesty and to accept Muhammad as the final prophet.

Muhammad's preaching was, above all, religious, but it also contained a social message that was troubling to some of Mecca's wealthier merchants. By A.D. 616, many of the Quraysh leaders had grown alarmed by the Prophet's success, and Muhammad began coming under verbal and then physical attack. By this time, too, the Prophet's reputation had begun to spread beyond Mecca. During the summer of 620, six pilgrims from Yathrib, an oasis town 250 miles north of Mecca, came to hear the Prophet preach. Impressed, they begged him to return with them to arbitrate among the rival tribes in their own community. In 622, Muhammad and some 70 of his followers moved to Yathrib; the *Hijra* (migration) marks year one

of the Islamic calendar.

Established in Yathrib (which the Muslims renamed al-Madina, the city), Muhammad and his followers soon came into conflict with the pagan oligarchy in Mecca. War broke out and Muhammad's forces, though greatly outnumbered, outfought their foes. Each victory seemed proof of Allah's will, and the Islamic ranks swelled to some 10,000 fighting men. In 630, Muhammad triumphantly returned to Mecca at the head of his army; the city surrendered and many of its inhabitants converted to Islam. Muhammad now ruled as the most powerful political and religious leader in Arabia.

The Prophet, however, had little time to savor his triumph. He died a natural death in 632. Thereafter, a line of caliphs (successors), beginning with Muhammad's faithful lieutenant and father-in-law, 'Abū Bakr, spread the power and faith of Islam. Within little more than a century, Islam had expanded north as far as the Atlas Mountains, east across Persia and central Asia to the borders of India and China, and west across North Africa and into Spain.

legal persons, and there are therefore no Islamic equivalents to such Western corporate entities as the city, the monastery, or the college. Cities were mostly governed by royal officers, while convents and colleges relied on royal or private *waqfs*. There are, however, other groupings of considerable importance in traditional Muslim society. Such, for example, are the kin group—family, clan, tribe; the faith group, often linked together by common membership of a sufi fraternity; the craft group, joined in a guild; the ward or neighborhood within a city. Very often these groups overlap or even coincide, and much of the life of a Muslim city is determined by their interaction.

In the Islamic context, the independence and initiative of the civil society may best be measured not in relation to the state but in relation to religion, of which, in the Muslim perception, the state itself is a manifestation and an instrument. In this sense, the primary meaning of civil is non-

religious, and the civil society is one in which the organizing principle is something other than religion, that being a private affair of the individual. This idea received its first classical formulation in the *Letter Concerning Toleration* by the English philosopher John Locke, published in 1689. Locke's conclusion is that "neither Pagan, nor Mahometan, nor Jew, ought to be excluded from the civil rights of the commonwealth because of his religion."

The first European country which actually accorded civil rights to non-Christians was Holland, followed within a short time by England and the English colonies in North America, where extensive, though not as yet equal rights were granted to nonconformist Christians and to Jews. These examples were followed by others, and the libertarian ideas which they expressed contributed significantly to the ideologies of both the American and

French Revolutions.

In time, these ideas were almost universally accepted in Western Christendom. Though few nations, other than France and the United States, accepted a formal constitutional separation of religion and the state, most of them in fact accepted secular principles. This virtually ended the earlier situation which Danish scholar Vilhelm Gronbech spoke of as "a religion which is the soul of society, the obverse of the practical, a living and real religion, the practical relationship of the people to God, soul and eternity, that manifests itself in worship and works as a life-giving power in politics and economics, in crafts and commerce, in ethics as in law. In this sense," he concludes, "the modern state has no religion."

Despite the personal devoutness of great and growing numbers of people, Gronbech is right—the Western democratic state has no religion, and most, even among the devout, see this as a merit, not a defect. They are encouraged in this belief by the example of some states in Central and Eastern Europe, yesterday and today, where the principle of unity and direction was retained but with a shift of stress—religion replaced by ideology, and the church by the single ruling party, with its own hierarchy, synods, inquisition, dogmas, and heresies. In such countries, it was not the state that withered away but the civil society.

In the Islamic world, the dethronement of religion as the organizing principle of society was not attempted until much later and resulted entirely from European influences. It was never really completed and is perhaps now being reversed. Certainly in Iran, organized religion has returned to something like the status which it enjoyed in the medieval world, both Christian and Islamic. Indeed, in some ways—notably in the power of the priesthood and the emergence of a political prelacy—the

Iranian theocracy is closer to the Christian than to the classical Islamic model.

During the 14 centuries of Islamic history, there have been many changes. In particular, the long association, sometimes in coexistence, but more often in confrontation, with Christendom, led to the acceptance, in the later Islamic monarchies in Iran and Turkey and their successor states, of patterns of religious organization that might suggest a probably unconscious imitation of Christian ecclesiastical usage. Certainly there is nothing in the classical Islamic past that resembles the more recent offices of the chief mufti of the Ottoman empire or the grand ayatollah of Iran.

These Western influences became more powerful and more important after the French Revolution—the first great movement of ideas in Christendom which was not Christian but was even, in a sense, anti-Christian, and could therefore be considered by Muslim observers with relative detachment. Such earlier movements of ideas in Europe as the Renaissance, the Reformation, or the Enlightenment had no impact whatsoever on the Muslim world, and are virtually unnoticed in contemporary Muslim philosophical and even historical writings. The initial response to the French Revolution was much the same, and the first Muslim comments dismiss it as an internal affair of Christendom, of no interest or concern to Muslims and, more important, offering them no threat.

It was on this last point that they were soon obliged to change their minds. The dissemination of French revolutionary ideas in the Islamic world was not left to chance but was actively promoted by successive French regimes, both by force of arms, and, much more effectively, by translation and publication. The penetration of Western ideas into the Islamic world was greatly accelerated when, from the early 19th century, Muslim students in increasing



An illustration from a 13th-century Iraqi manuscript on the pharmaceutical uses of plants. Islamic civilization is known for its contributions to medicine and other sciences.

numbers were sent to institutions of higher education in France, Italy, and Britain, and later also in other countries. Many of these, on their return home, became carriers of infectious new ideas.

The revolutionaries in France had summarized their ideology in a formula of classical terseness—liberty, equality, fraternity. Some time was to pass before they, and ultimately their disciples elsewhere, came to realize that the first two were mutually exclusive and the third meaningless. Of far greater effect, in the impact of Western ideas on Islam, were two related notions—neither of them originating with the French Revolution, but both of them classically formulated and actively disseminated by its leaders: namely, secularism and nationalism. The one sought to displace religion as the ultimate basis of identity, loyalty, and authority in society; the other provided an alternative.

In the new dispensation, God was to be doubly replaced, both as the source of authority and as the object of worship, by the Nation. Secularism as such had no appeal to Muslims, but an ideology of change and

progress, free—as it seemed then—from any taint of a rival religion, offered attractions to 19th-century Muslims who were increasingly aware of the relatively backward and impoverished state of their own society, as contrasted with the wealth and power of Europe. Liberalism and patriotism seemed to be part of the same progressive ideology and were eagerly adopted by young Muslim intellectuals, seeking arguments to criticize and methods to change their own societies. The West European civic patriotism proved to have limited relevance or appeal, but the ethnic nationalism of Central and Eastern Europe had greater relevance to Middle Eastern conditions, and evoked a much more powerful response. According to the old view, the Muslims are one community, subdivided into such nations as the Turks, the Arabs, the Persians, etc. But according to the new, the Arabs are a nation, subdivided into Muslims and Christians, to which some were, for a while, willing to add Jews.

For a time the idea of the secular nation, defined by country, language, culture, and descent, was dominant among the more or

QUR'AN

Accepted as the word of God by Muslims, the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam, remains the fundamental source of Islamic doctrine, law, thinking, and teaching. It says to its followers, "You are the best nation ever brought forth to men, bidding to honour, and forbidding dishonour, and believing in God" (III, 106).*

During Muhammad's life, observes historian Marshall Hodgson in *The Venture of Islam* (1974), it "served at once as the inspiration of Muslim life and the commentary on what was done under that inspiration; its message transcended any particular circumstances yet at the same time served as a running guide to the community experiences, often down to seemingly petty details." The Qur'an (literally "recitations") touches on everything from manners—"O believers, do not enter houses other than your houses until you first ask leave and salute the people thereof..." (XXIV, 27)—to the largest questions of spiritual import: "O believers, fear God as He should be feared, and see you do not die, save in surrender" (III, 97).

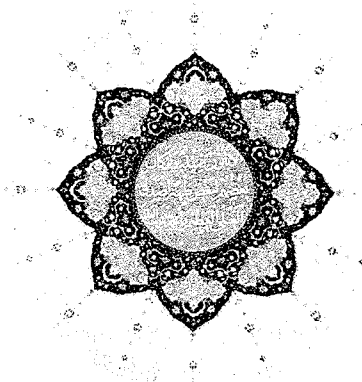
Scholars distinguish between two main parts of the Qur'an, the whole of which consists of 114 *Surahs* (chapters) of varying numbers of *Ayahs* (verses). The early *Surahs*, revealed to Muhammad while at Mecca, focus upon ethical and spiritual teachings: "Then he whose deeds weigh heavy in the Balance shall inherit a pleasing life, but he whose deeds weigh light in the Balance shall plunge in the womb of the Pit" (CI, 6). *Surahs* revealed later at Medina, however, concern social legislation and the politico-moral principles for constituting and ordering the community. Verses such as "God has promised those of you who believe and do righteous deeds that He will surely make you successors in the land..." (XXIV, 54) point to a concern with the rightful rule.

According to tradition, Muhammad received the verses of the Qur'an at irregular intervals from around A.D. 610 to 632. Many of Muhammad's devout followers memorized the

Qur'an, and for a time no comprehensive written collection of the *Surahs* existed. After the Prophet's death, and especially after the battle of Yamamah (633), where many who knew the words by heart fell in combat, fear of losing the record of God's word spurred meticulous collection efforts. Several versions resulted. But a desire for consistency led the third caliph, 'Uthmān (ruled 644–656), to order its consolidation, producing the authoritative 'Uthmānic recension now used. 'Uthmān then had all other copies destroyed.

'Uthmān's version, compiled by a handful of learned Muslims, arranges the chapters approximately according to length (except for the opening chapter, longest first). Yet Qur'anic specialists have assembled a rough chronology and identified a handful of recurring themes. The essential message is that there is only one God, Allah, who will judge men by their earthly deeds on the Last Day. Men, therefore, should endeavor to worship God and to act generously in dealings with others.

As Islam became established during the centuries after Muhammad's death, theological and legal questions inevitably arose. What was the correct way for Muslims to pray, to live, to do business, to govern? To deal with such questions, a succession of distinguished theologians and jurists employed three methods: study of the Qur'an; consideration of the precepts and practices of the Prophet, as handed down by tradition; the use of independent reason to apply the first two to problems that arose. (Sunnis, the majority of Muslims, believed that independent reason ceased to be a valid method after the ninth century; Shiites believe that it still is.) The Qur'an remains the ultimate authority to all Muslims, but pious believers have frequently differed over points of interpretation. For example, the Shiites argue that passages on divorce allow temporary marriages for a fixed dower; the Sunnis, however, find no Qur'anic support for such temporary arrangements.



*Qur'anic quotations are from *The Koran Interpreted*, translated by A. J. Arberry (© George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1955).

less Westernized minority of political activists. Beginning with the decline and fall of the old Westernized elites in the mid-20th century, and the entry into political life of more authentically popular elements, the ideal of the secular nation came under challenge and in some areas has been decisively defeated.

Nowadays, for the first time in many years, even nationalism itself is under attack and has been denounced by some Muslim writers as divisive and un-Islamic. When Arab nationalists complain that the religious fundamentalists are creating divisions between Muslim and Christian Arabs, the latter respond that the secular nationalists are creating divisions between Arabs and other Muslims and that theirs is the larger and greater offense.

The attack on secularism—seen as an attempt to undermine and supplant the Islamic way of life—has been gathering force and is now a major element in the writings of religious fundamentalists and other similar groups. For these, all the modernizing leaders—Kemal Atatürk in Turkey, the Shah in Iran, Faruq, Nasser, and Sadat alike in Egypt, the Ba'thist rulers of Syria and Iraq, and their equivalents elsewhere—are tarred with the same brush. They are all apostates who have renounced Islam and are trying to impose neo-pagan doctrines and institutions on the Muslim world. Of all the Muslim states, only one, the Turkish republic, has formally declared itself a secular state and legislated, in its constitution, the separation of religion and government. Indonesia, by far the largest Islamic state, includes belief in one God among the basic constitutional principles but does not formally establish Islam. Virtually all the others either proclaim Islam as the state religion or lay down that the laws of the state shall be based on, or inspired by, the holy

law of Islam. In fact, many of them had adopted secular legislation, mostly inspired by European models, over a wide range of civil and criminal matters, and it is these laws that are now under strong attack.

This is of particular concern to the two groups which had, in law at least, benefited most from the reforms, namely women and non-Muslims. Hence the phenomenon, paradoxical in Western but not in Muslim eyes, that such conventionally liberal causes as equal rights for women have hitherto been espoused and enforced only by autocratic rulers like Kemal Atatürk in Turkey and Mohamed Reza Shah in Iran. For the latter, this was indeed one of the main grievances of the revolutionaries who overthrew him. It has been remedied under their rule.

Until the recent impact of Western secularist ideas, the idea of a non-religious society as something desirable or even permissible was totally alien to Islam. Other religious dispensations, namely Christianity and Judaism, were tolerable because they were earlier and superseded versions of God's revelation, of which Islam itself was the final and perfect version, and therefore lived by a form—albeit incomplete and perhaps debased—of God's law. Those who lacked even this measure of religious guidance were pagans and idolaters, and their society was evil. Any Muslim who sought to join them or imitate them was an apostate.

Some medieval Muslim jurists, confronting a new problem posed by the Christian reconquest, asked whether it was lawful for Muslims to live under non-Muslim rule, and found different answers. According to one view, they might stay, provided that the non-Muslim government allowed them to observe the Muslim religion in all its aspects and to live a full Muslim life; according to another school, no such thing was possible, and Muslims whose homeland was conquered by a non-Muslim ruler were obliged to migrate, as the Prophet did



The harem, no pleasure-den, was simply where women and children lived in a Muslim house.

from pagan Mecca to Medina, and seek a haven in Muslim lands, until in God's good time they were able to return and restore the rule of Islam.

One of the tests of civility is surely tolerance—a willingness to coexist with those who hold and practice other beliefs. John Locke, and most other Westerners, believed that the best way to ensure this was to sever or at least to weaken the bonds between religion and state power. In the past, Muslims never professed any such belief. They did however see a certain form of tolerance as an obligation of the dominant Islamic religion. “There is no compulsion in religion” runs a much quoted verse in the Qur’an, and this was generally interpreted by Muslim jurists and rulers to authorize a limited measure

of tolerance for certain specified other religious beliefs, though of course without questioning or compromising the primacy of Islam and the supremacy of the Muslims.

Does this mean that the classical Islamic state was a theocracy? In the sense that Britain today is a monarchy, the answer is certainly yes. That is to say that, in the Muslim conception, God is the true sovereign of the community, the ultimate source of authority, the sole source of legislation. In the first extant Muslim account of the British House of Commons, written by a visitor who went to England at the end of the 18th century, the writer expresses his astonishment at the fate of a people who, unlike the Muslims, did not have a divinely revealed law and were therefore reduced to the pitiable expedient of enacting their own laws. But in the sense of a state ruled by the church or by priests, Islam was not and indeed could not be a theocracy. Classical Islam had no priesthood, no prelates who might rule or even decisively influence those who did. The caliph, who was head of a governing institution that was state and church in one, was himself neither a jurist nor a theologian but a practitioner of the arts of politics and sometimes of war. There are no popes in Islamic history and no political cardinals like Wolsey or Richelieu or Alberoni. The office of ayatollah is a creation of the 19th century; the rule of Khomeini an innovation of the 20th.

In most tests of tolerance, Islam, both in theory and in practice, compares unfavorably with the Western democracies as they have developed during the last two or three centuries, but very favorably with most other Christian and post-Christian societies and regimes. There is nothing in Islamic history to compare with the emancipation, acceptance, and integration of other-believers and non-believers in the West. But equally, there is nothing in Islamic history to compare with the Spanish expulsion of

Jews and Muslims, the Inquisition, the autos-da-fé, the wars of religion, not to speak of more recent crimes of commission and acquiescence. There were occasional persecutions, but they were rare and atypical, and usually of brief duration, related to local and specific circumstances.

Within certain limits and subject to certain restrictions, Islamic governments were willing to tolerate the practice, though not the dissemination, of other revealed, monotheistic religions. They were able to pass an even severer test by tolerating divergent forms of their own. Even polytheists, though condemned by the strict letter of the law to a choice between conversion and enslavement, were in fact tolerated, as Islamic rule spread to most of India. Only the total unbeliever—the agnostic or atheist—was beyond the pale of tolerance, and even this exclusion was usually enforced only when the offense became public and scandalous. The same standard was applied to the tolerance of deviant forms of Islam.

In modern times, Islamic tolerance has been somewhat diminished. After the second Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683, Islam was a retreating force in the world, and Muslims began to feel threatened by the rise and expansion of the great Christian empires of Eastern and Western Europe. The old easy-going tolerance, resting on an assumption not only of superior religion but also of superior power, was becoming difficult for Muslims to maintain. The threat which Christendom now seemed to be offering to Islam was no longer merely military and political; it was beginning to shake the very structure of Muslim society. Western rulers, and, to a far greater extent, their enthusiastic Muslim disciples and imitators, brought in a whole series of reforms, almost all of them of Western origin or inspiration. These reforms increasingly af-

ected the way Muslims lived in their countries, their cities and villages, and finally in their own homes.

These changes were rightly seen as being of Western origin or inspiration; the non-Muslim minorities, mostly Christian but also Jewish, were often seen, sometimes also rightly, as agents or instruments of these changes. The old pluralistic order, multi-denominational and polyethnic, was breaking down, and the tacit social contract on which it was based was violated on both sides. The Christian minorities, inspired by Western ideas of self-determination, were no longer prepared to accept the tolerated but inferior status accorded to them by the old order, and made new demands—sometimes for equal rights within the nation, sometimes for separate nationhood, sometimes for both at the same time. Muslim majorities, feeling threatened, became unwilling to accord even the traditional measure of tolerance.

By a sad paradox, in some of the semi-secularized nation-states of modern times, the non-Muslim minorities, while enjoying complete equality on paper, in fact have fewer opportunities and face greater dangers than under the old Islamic yet pluralistic order. The present regime in Iran, with its ruling clerics, its executions for blasphemy, its consecrated assassins, represents a new departure in Islamic history. In the present mood, a triumph of militant Islam would be unlikely to bring a return to traditional Islamic tolerance—and even that would no longer be acceptable to minority elements schooled on modern ideas of human, civil, and political rights. The emergence of some form of civil society would therefore seem to offer the best hope for decent coexistence based on mutual respect.

A BRIEF CHRONOLOGY OF THE ISLAMIC WORLD

570: Muhammad born in Mecca.

610: Muhammad receives first revelation.

613: Muhammad begins preaching notion of single God and other revelations to fellow Meccans.

622: The *Hijra*. Muhammad and his followers move to Yathrib (Medina).

630: Muhammad captures Mecca.

632: Muhammad dies and is succeeded in Medina by 'Abū Bakr (ruled 632–634).

634: 'Umar (634–644), former lieutenant of Muhammad, succeeds 'Abū Bakr as caliph and organizes an Arab empire.

644: 'Uthmān (644–656), an Umayyad, becomes caliph and continues expansion.

656: First *fitna* (civil war). 'Uthmān's murder. The attempt of Muhammad's companion 'Ali to assume the caliphate sparks a five-year civil war.

661: 'Ali murdered. Umayyad dynasty (661–750) established in Damascus. A pious opposition to Umayyad rule develops, however, and support increases for the claims of the 'Alids (descendants of Muhammad through 'Ali) to the caliphate.

680: Second *fitna*. The murder of 'Ali's son Husayn by the Umayyads at Karbalā'.

744: Third *fitna*. A six-year civil war erupts, supported by pious religious scholars, Shiites, and converts in eastern Persia. It brings down Umayyads, but an 'Abbasid (a kinsman of Muhammad through his uncle 'Abbas), not an 'Alid, comes to power.

750: 'Abbasids establish Muslim empire at Baghdad, replacing Arab empire of Umayyads.

861: 'Abbasid caliphs become puppets of officers of Turkish elite guard. Provinces increasingly fragment.

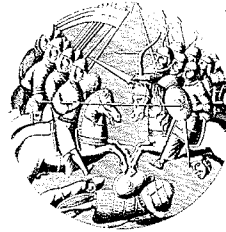
929: 'Abd al-Rahmān III of Cordova adopts the title of caliph.

969: Ismā'īli Shiite Fatimids conquer Egypt (held to 1171); found Cairo.

1044: Seljuq Turks occupy most of Iranian Plateau.

1058: 'Abbasid caliphs crown Seljuq leader Tughril Beg as sultān (temporal leader), with support of Sunni religious leaders.

1099: First Crusade. Jerusalem conquered by European Christians.



1157: A Seljuq officer's son, adopting the title Shah (king), suppresses a Turk rebellion in Persia (at Khorasan) and builds an Iranian empire in opposition to 'Abbasids.

1220: Genghis Khan, leading Mongol horde, sweeps through Iran and destroys Shah's empire.

1250: Crusader King Louis IX of France invades Egypt. Egyptian Mamluks, slave soldiers of Sultān Salih Ayyub, defeat the French and assume power in Egypt at Sultān's death.

1260: Battle of 'Ayn Jalut. Egyptian Mamluks, now the best trained force in Muslim world, defeat the Mongols in Syria.

1369: Timur (Tamarlane), from Transoxania, conquers most of Islamic world, from Delhi in India to Damascus and Anatolia.

1405: Timur dies. His empire crumbles except for small Persian remnants.

1453: Growing Ottoman state captures Constantinople and makes it the capital.

1501: Isma'il defeats Turkmen confederation that rules Persia and proclaims himself Shah, founding the Safavid dynasty and establishing Shiism as religion of the realm.

1517: Ottomans take over Syria and Egypt.

1520: Süleyman the Magnificent becomes sultān of Ottoman Empire.

1526: Süleyman's troops defeat Hungary at Battle of Mohács.

1551: Ottomans establish suzerainty over North Africa except Morocco.

1552: Russia conquers and annexes Kazan.

1556: Russia conquers and annexes Astrakhan.

1744: House of Sa'ud, a petty emirate in central Arabia, makes alliance with 'Abd al-Wahhab, a strict fundamentalist leader. Viewing the Ottoman religious establishment as impious, the militant sect gains control of Medina and Mecca and raids religious centers in Iraq, laying the foundation for today's Saudi Arabian state.

1783: Russia annexes Crimea.

1798: French forces under General Napoleon Bonaparte invade and occupy Egypt.

1801: Allied British and Ottoman forces expel the French, allowing an Ottoman officer, Muhammad 'Ali Pasha to rule Egypt as viceroy.

1803: British East India Company places Indian Mughal emperor under their "protection."

1839: The Tanzimat (1839-76), a series of educational and legal reforms, is begun by Sultān Abdulmecid (1839-61) to preserve Ottoman state through modernization.

1868: Khanates of Kokand and Bokhara become Russian protectorates.

1881: Tunisia made a French protectorate.

1882: British occupy Egypt.

1907: Anglo-Russian convention establishes exclusive Anglo-Russian spheres of influence in Iran, Afghanistan, and Tibet.

1908: Young Turk Revolution in Ottoman Empire leads to the transfer of real power from the sultān to parliament.



Süleyman the Magnificent

1914: Ottoman Empire enters World War I allied to Germany.

1917: Balfour Declaration—Britain promises to support establishment of a national home for Jewish people in Palestine.

1918: Arab world partitioned among the European powers following World War I.

1919: Mustafa Kemal, later known as Atatürk (father of the Turks), organizes Turkish resistance to postwar European occupation and partitioning of the Ottoman Empire.

1921: Persian cavalry officer Reza Khan takes control of military in Iran.

1923: Turkish National Assembly declares Turkey a republic and names Atatürk first president.

1925: Reza Khan deposes last Qājār Shah and adopts the title for himself.

1941: Anglo-Russian forces invade Iran, force Reza (Khan) Shah to abdicate to his son, Mohammad Reza Shah.

1947: Pakistan emerges an independent state after the partition of British India.

1948: U.N. partitions Palestine into separate Arab and Jewish states. State of Israel is created. Arab neighbors invade but are defeated.

1949: Dutch recognize Indonesian independence.

1951: Libya becomes independent.

1952: Officers led by Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser topple Egyptian monarchy.

1954: Anglo-Egyptian Treaty—British troops agree to evacuate Suez Canal zone.

1956: Nasser nationalizes canal zone; Israel, Britain, and France attack Egypt, but U.S. and USSR pressure them into withdrawing.

1958: Egypt and Syria merge to form United Arab Republic. Alliance dissolves by 1961.

1962: Algeria wins independence.

1979: Shah of Iran deposed; Ayatollah Khomeini comes to power.

1979: Soviet troops invade Afghanistan.

1980: Iran-Iraq War begins.

1988: Iran-Iraq War ends.

1989: Soviet troops withdraw from Afghanistan.

1989: Ayatollah Khomeini dies.