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Islam: A short History

(New York: Modern Library,

2002)

THE ARRIVAL OF THE WEST (1750-2000)

The rise of the West is unparalleled in world history. The countries north of the Alps had for centuries been regarded as a backward region, which had attached itself to the Greco-Roman culture of the south and had, gradually, developed its own distinctive version of Christianity and its own form of agrarian culture. Western Europe lagged far behind the Christian empire of Byzantium, where the Roman Empire had not collapsed as it had in Europe. By the twelfth and thirteenth centuries these western European countries had just about caught up with the other core cultures, and by the sixteenth century had begun a process of major transformation that would enable the West to dominate the rest of the world. The achievement of such ascendancy by an outgroup is unique. It is similar to the emergence of the Arab Muslims as a major world power in the seventh and eighth centuries, but the Muslims had not achieved world hegemony, and had not developed a new kind of civilization, as Europe had begun to do in the sixteenth century. When the Ottomans had tried to reorganize their army along Western lines in the hope of containing the threat from Europe, their efforts were doomed because they were too superficial. To beat Europe at its own game, a conventional agrarian society would have to transform itself from top to bottom, and re-create its entire social, economic, educational, religious, spiritual, political and intellectual structures. And it would have to do this very quickly, an impossible task, since it had taken the West almost three hundred years to achieve this development.

The new society of Europe and its American colonies had a different economic basis. Instead of relying upon a surplus of agricultural produce, it was founded on a technology and an investment of capital that enabled the West to reproduce its resources indefinitely, so that Western society was no longer subject to the same constraints as an agrarian culture. This major revolution in reality constituted a second Axial Age, which demanded a revolution of the established mores on several fronts at the same time: political, social and intellectual. It had not been planned or thought out in advance, but had been the result of a complex process which had led to the creation of democratic, secular social structures. By the sixteenth century Europeans had achieved a scientific revolution that gave them greater control over the environment than anybody had achieved before. There were new inventions in medicine, navigation, agriculture and industry. None of these was in itself decisive, but their cumulative effect was radical. By 1600 innovations were occurring on such a scale that progress seemed irreversible: a discovery in one field would often lead to fresh insights in another. Instead of seeing the world as governed by immutable laws, Europeans had found that they could alter the course of nature. Where the conservative society created by agrarian culture had not been able to afford such change, people in Europe and America were becoming more confident. They were now prepared to invest and reinvest capital in the firm expectation of continuing progress and the continuous improvement of trade. By the time this technicalization of society had resulted in the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, Westerners felt such assurance that they no longer looked back to the past for inspiration, as in the agrarian cultures and religions, but looked forward to the future.

The modernization of society involved social and intellectual change. The watchword was efficiency: an invention or a

polity had to be seen to work effectively. An increasing number of people were needed to take part in the various scientific and industrial projects at quite humble levels—as printers, clerks, factory workers—and in order to acquire a modicum of the new standards, they had to receive some kind of education. More people were needed to buy the mass-produced goods, so that to keep the economy going an increasing number of people had to live above subsistence level. As more of the workers became literate, they demanded a greater share in the decisions of government. If a nation wanted to use all its human resources to enhance its productivity, it had to bring groups who had hitherto been segregated and marginalized, such as the Jews, into mainstream culture. Religious differences and spiritual ideals must not be allowed to impede the progress of society, and scientists, monarchs and government officials insisted that they be free of ecclesiastical control. Thus the ideals of democracy, pluralism, toleration, human rights and secularism were not simply beautiful ideals dreamed up by political scientists, but were, at least in part, dictated by the needs of the modern state. It was found that in order to be efficient and productive, a modern nation had to be organized on a secular, democratic basis. But it was also found that if societies did organize all their institutions according to the new rational and scientific norms, they became indomitable and the conventional agrarian states were no match for them.

This had fateful consequences for the Islamic world. The progressive nature of modern society and an industrialized economy meant that it had continuously to expand. New markets were needed, and, once the home countries had been saturated, they had to be sought abroad. The Western states therefore began, in various ways, to colonize the agrarian countries outside modern Europe in order to draw them into their commercial network. This too was a complex process.

The colonized country provided raw materials for export, which were fed into European industry. In return, it received cheap manufactured Western goods, which meant that local industry was usually ruined. The colony also had to be transformed and modernized along European lines, its financial and commercial life rationalized and brought into the Western system, and at least some of the "natives" had to acquire some familiarity with the modern ideas and ethos.

This colonization was experienced by the agrarian colonies as invasive, disturbing and alien. Modernization was inevitably superficial, since a process that had taken Europe three centuries had to be achieved at top speed. Where modern ideas had time to filter down gradually to all classes of society in Europe, in the colonies only a small number of people, who were members of the upper classes and—significantly—the military, could receive a Western education and appreciate the dynamic of modernity. The vast majority of the population were left perforce to rot in the old agrarian ethos. Society was divided, therefore, and increasingly neither side could understand the other. Those who had been left outside the modernizing process had the disturbing experience of watching their country become utterly strange, like a friend disfigured by disease and become unrecognizable. They were ruled by secular foreign law-codes which they could not understand. Their cities were transformed, as Western buildings "modernized" the towns, often leaving the "old city" as a museum piece, a tourist trap and a relic of a superseded age. Western tourists have often felt disoriented and lost in the winding alleys and apparent chaos of an oriental city: they do not always appreciate that for many of the indigenous population, their modernized capitals are equally alien. People felt lost in their own countries. Above all, local people of all classes of society resented the fact that they were no longer in control of their own destiny. They felt that they had severed

all connection with their roots, and experienced a sinking loss of identity.

Where Europeans and Americans had been allowed to modernize at their own pace, and to set their own agendas, the inhabitants of the colonized countries had to modernize far too rapidly and were forced to comply with somebody else's programme. But even Western people had found the transformation of their society painful. They had experienced almost four hundred years of political and often bloody revolutions, reigns of terror, genocide, violent wars of religion, the despoliation of the countryside, vast social upheavals, exploitation in the factories, spiritual malaise and profound anomie in the new megacities. Today we are seeing similar violence, cruelty, revolution and disorientation in the developing countries, which are making an even more difficult rite of passage to modernity. It is also true that the modern spirit that developed in the West is fundamentally different. In Europe and America it had two main characteristics: innovation and autonomy (the modernizing process was punctuated in Europe and America by declarations of independence on the political, intellectual, religious and social fronts). But in the developing world, modernity has been accompanied not by autonomy but by a loss of independence and national autonomy. Instead of innovation, the developing countries can only modernize by imitating the West, which is so far advanced that they have no hope of catching up. Since the modernizing process has not been the same, it is unlikely that the end product will conform to what the West regards as the desirable norm. If the correct ingredients of a cake are not available—if rice is used instead of flour, dried eggs instead of fresh, and spices instead of sugar—the result will be different from the cake described in the cookbook. Very different ingredients have gone into the modern cake of the colonized countries, and democracy, secularism, pluralism and the rest

are not likely to emerge from the process in the way that they did in the West.

The Islamic world has been convulsed by the modernization process. Instead of being one of the leaders of world civilization, Islamdom was quickly and permanently reduced to a dependent bloc by the European powers. Muslims were exposed to the contempt of the colonialists, who were so thoroughly imbued with the modern ethos that they were often appalled by what they could only see as the backwardness, inefficiency, fatalism and corruption of Muslim society. They assumed that European culture had always been progressive, and lacked the historical perspective to see that they were simply seeing a pre-modern agrarian society, and that a few centuries earlier Europe had been just as "backward." They often took it for granted that Westerners were inherently and racially superior to "orientals" and expressed their contempt in myriad ways. All this not unnaturally had a corrosive effect. Western people are often bewildered by the hostility and rage that Muslims often feel for their culture, which, because of their very different experience, they have found to be liberating and empowering. But the Muslim response is not bizarre and eccentric; because the Islamic world was so widespread and strategically placed, it was the first to be subjected in a concerted, systematic manner to the colonization process in the Middle East, India, Arabia, Malaya and a significant part of Africa. Muslims in all these places very early felt the brunt of this modernizing assault. Their response has not been simply *a* reaction to the new West, but *the* paradigmatic reaction. They would not be able to come to modernity as successfully or as smoothly as, for example, Japan, which had never been colonized, whose economy and institutions had remained intact and which had not been forced into a debilitating dependency on the West.

The European invasion of the Islamic world was not uniform, but it was thorough and effective. It began in Moghul India. During the latter half of the eighteenth century, British traders had established themselves in Bengal, and at this time, when modernization was still in its infancy, the British lived on a par with the Hindu and Muslim merchants. But this phase of British activity is known as the "plundering of Bengal," because it permanently damaged the local industry, and changed its agriculture so that Bengalis no longer grew crops for themselves but produced raw materials for the industrialized Western markets. Bengal had been reduced to second-class status in the world economy. Gradually as the British became more "modern" and efficient themselves, their attitude became more superior, and they were determined to "civilize" the Indians, backed up by the Protestant missionaries who started to arrive in 1793. But the Bengalis were not encouraged to evolve a fully industrialized society of their own; the British administrators introduced only those aspects of modern technology that would reinforce their supremacy and keep Bengal in a complementary role. The Bengalis did benefit from British efficiency, which kept such disasters as disease, famine and war at bay, and the population increased as a result; but this created new problems of overcrowding and poverty, since there was no option of migration to the towns, as in the West, and the people all had to stay on the land.

The plundering of Bengal economically led to political domination. Between 1798 and 1818, by treaty or by military conquest, British rule was established throughout India, except in the Indus Valley, which was subdued between 1843 and 1849. In the meantime, the French had tried to set up an empire of their own. In 1798 Napoleon Bonaparte occupied Egypt, hoping to establish a base in Suez that would cut the British sea routes to India. He brought with him a corps of

scholars, a library of modern European literature, a scientific laboratory and a printing press with Arabic type. From the start, the advanced culture of Europe, coming as it did with a superbly efficient modern army, was experienced in the Muslim Middle East as an assault. Napoleon's expedition to Egypt and Syria failed. He had intended to attack British India from the north, with the help of Russia. This gave Iran a wholly new strategic importance, and for the next century Britain established a base in the south of the country, while the Russians tried to get control of the north. Neither wanted to make Iran a full colony or protectorate (until oil was discovered there in the early twentieth century), but both powers dominated the new Qajar dynasty, so that the shahs did not dare to make a move without the support of at least one of them. As in Bengal, both Britain and Russia promoted only the technology that furthered their own interests and blocked such inventions as the railway, which might have benefited the Iranian people, in case it endangered their own strategic positions.

The European powers colonized one Islamic country after another. France occupied Algeria in 1830, and Britain Aden nine years later. Tunisia was occupied in 1881, Egypt in 1882, the Sudan in 1889 and Libya and Morocco in 1912. In 1915 the Sykes-Picot agreement divided the territories of the moribund Ottoman Empire (which had sided with Germany during the First World War) between Britain and France in anticipation of victory. After the war, Britain and France duly set up protectorates and mandates in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq and Transjordan. This was experienced as an outrage, since the European powers had promised the Arab provinces of the Ottoman Empire independence. In the Ottoman heartlands, Mustafa Kemal, known as Atatürk (1881–1938), was able to keep the Europeans at bay and set up the independent state of Turkey. Muslims in the Balkans, Russia and Central Asia be-

came subject to the new Soviet Union. Even after some of these countries had been allowed to become independent, the West often continued to control the economy, the oil or such resources as the Suez Canal. European occupation often left a legacy of bitter conflict. When the British withdrew from India in 1947, the Indian subcontinent was partitioned between Hindu India and Muslim Pakistan, which are to this day in a state of deadly hostility, with nuclear weapons aimed at each other's capitals. In 1948 the Arabs of Palestine lost their homeland to the Zionists, who set up the Jewish secular state of Israel there, with the support of the United Nations and the international community. The loss of Palestine became a potent symbol of the humiliation of the Muslim world at the hands of the Western powers, who seemed to feel no qualms about the dispossession and permanent exile of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.

Nevertheless, in the very early days, some Muslims were in love with the West. The Iranian intellectuals Mulkum Khan (1833–1908) and Aqa Khan Kirmani (1853–96) urged Iranians to acquire a Western education and replace the Shariah with a modern secular legal code, seeing this as the only route to progress. Secularists from these circles joined the more liberal *ulama* in the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, and forced the Qajars to set up a modern constitution, to limit the powers of the monarchy and give Iranians parliamentary representation. Most of the leading *mujtahids* in Najaf supported the constitution. Sheikh Muhammad Husain Naini expressed their view most cogently in his *Admonition to the Nation* (1909), which argued that limiting tyranny in this way was clearly an act worthy of the Shiah, and that constitutional government, Western-style, was the next best thing to the return of the Hidden Imam. The Egyptian writer Rifah al-Tahtawi (1801–73) was enthralled by the ideas of the European Enlightenment, whose vision reminded him of Fal-

safah. He loved the way everything worked properly in Paris, was impressed by the rational precision of French culture, by the literacy of even the common people, and intrigued by the passion for innovation. He longed to help Egypt enter this brave new world. In India, Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–98) tried to adapt Islam to modern Western liberalism, claiming that the Quran was quite in accordance with the natural laws that were being discovered by modern science. He founded a college at Aligharh where Muslims could study science and English alongside the conventional Islamic subjects. He wanted to help Muslims to live in a modernized society without becoming carbon copies of the British, retaining a sense of their own cultural identity.

Before colonization had got under way in their areas, some Muslim rulers had tried to modernize on their own initiative. The Ottoman Sultan Mahmud II had inaugurated the Tanzimat (Regulations) in 1826, which abolished the Janissaries, modernized the army and introduced some of the new technology. In 1839 Sultan Abdulhamid issued the Gülhane decree, which made his rule dependent upon a contractual relationship with his subjects, and looked forward to major reform of the empire's institutions. More dramatic, however, was the modernization programme of the Albanian *pasha* of Egypt Muhammad Ali (1769–1849), who made Egypt virtually independent of Istanbul, and almost single-handedly dragged this backward province into the modern world. But the brutality of his methods showed how difficult it was to modernize at such breakneck speed. He massacred the political opposition; twenty-three thousand peasants are said to have died in the conscripted labour bands that improved Egypt's irrigation and water communications; other peasants so feared conscription into Muhammad Ali's modernized army that they frequently resorted to self-mutilation, cutting off their own fingers and even blinding themselves. To secu-

larize the country, Muhammad Ali simply confiscated much religiously endowed property and systematically marginalized the *ulama*, divesting them of any shred of power. As a result, the *ulama*, who had experienced modernity as a shocking assault, became even more insular and closed their minds against the new world that was coming into being in their country. Muhammad Ali's grandson Ismail Pasha (1803–95) was even more successful: he paid for the construction of the Suez Canal, built nine hundred miles of railways, irrigated some 1,373,000 acres of hitherto uncultivable land, set up modern schools for boys and girls and transformed Cairo into a modern city. Unfortunately, the cost of this ambitious programme made Egypt bankrupt, forced the country into debt and gave Britain a pretext for establishing its military occupation in 1882 to safeguard the interests of the European shareholders. Muhammad Ali and Ismail had wanted to make Egypt a modern independent state; instead, as a result of modernization, it simply became a virtual British colony.

None of these early reformers fully appreciated the ideas behind the transformation of Europe. Their reforms were, therefore, superficial. But later reformers up to and including Saddam Hussein have also simply tried to acquire the military technology and outer trappings of the modern West, without bothering overmuch about its effects upon the rest of society. From an early date, however, some reformers were acutely aware of these dangers. One of the first to sound the alarm was the Iranian activist Jamal al-Din (1839–97), who styled himself "al-Afghani" ("the Afghan"), probably hoping that he would attract a wider audience in the Muslim world as an Afghan Sunni than as an Iranian Shii. He had been in India at the time of the great mutiny of Hindus and Muslims against British rule in 1857; wherever he travelled in Arabia, Egypt, Turkey, Russia or Europe he was aware of the ubiquitous power of the West, and was convinced that it would soon

dominate and crush the Muslim world. He could see the dangers of a shallow imitation of Western life, and asked the people of the Islamic world to join forces against the European threat; they must come to the scientific culture of the new world on their own terms. They must, therefore, cultivate their own cultural traditions, and that meant Islam. But Islam itself must respond to the changed conditions and become more rational and modern. Muslims must rebel against the long closing of the "gates of *ijtihad*" and use their own unfettered reason, as both the Prophet and the Koran had insisted.

The Western encroachment had made politics central to the Islamic experience once more. From the time of the Prophet Muhammad, Muslims had seen current events as theophanies; they had encountered a God who was present in history, and had issued a constant challenge to build a better world. Muslims had sought a divine meaning in political events, and even their setbacks and tragedies had led to major developments in theology and spirituality. When Muslims had achieved a type of polity that was more in accordance with the spirit of the Quran after the decline of the Abbasid caliphate, they had agonized less about the political health of the *ummah,* and felt free to develop a more interior piety. But the intrusion of the West into their lives raised major religious questions. The humiliation of the *ummah* was not merely a political catastrophe, but touched a Muslim's very soul. This new weakness was a sign that something had gone gravely awry in Islamic history. The Quran had promised that a society which surrendered to God's revealed will could not fail. Muslim history had proved this. Time and again, when disaster had struck, the most devout Muslims had turned to religion, made it speak to their new circumstances, and the *ummah* had not only revived but had usually gone on to greater achievements. How could Islamdom be falling more and more under the domination of the secular,

Godless West? From this point, a growing number of Muslims would wrestle with these questions, and their attempts to put Muslim history back on the straight path would sometimes appear desperate and even despairing. The suicide bomber—an almost unparalleled phenomenon in Islamic history—shows that some Muslims are convinced that they are pitted against hopeless odds.

Al-Afghani's political campaigns, which were often either bizarre or downright immoral, smacked of this new desperation. In 1896, for example, one of his disciples assassinated the shah of Iran. But his friend and colleague the Egyptian scholar Muhammad Abdu (1849–1905) was a deeper and more measured thinker. He believed that education and not revolution was the answer. Abdu had been devastated by the British occupation of Egypt, but he loved Europe, felt quite at ease with Europeans and was widely read in Western science and philosophy. He greatly respected the political, legal and educational institutions of the modern West, but did not believe that they could be transplanted wholesale in a deeply religious country, such as Egypt, where modernization had been too rapid and had perforce excluded the vast mass of the people. It was essential to graft modern legal and constitutional innovations on to traditional Islamic ideas that the people could understand; a society in which people cannot understand the law becomes in effect a country without law. The Islamic principle of *shurah* (consultation), for example, could help Muslims to understand the meaning of democracy. Education also needed reform. *Madrasah* students should study modern science, so that they could help Muslims to enter the new world in an Islamic context that would make it meaningful to them. But the Shariah would need to be brought up to date, and both Abdu and his younger contemporary, the journalist Rashid Rida (1865–1935), knew that this would be a long and complex process. Rida was alarmed by

the growing secularism of Arab intellectuals and pundits, who sometimes poured scorn upon Islam in the belief that it was holding their people back. This, Rida believed, could only weaken the *ummah* and make it even more prey to Western imperialism. Rida was one of the first Muslims to advocate the establishment of a fully modernized but fully Islamic state, based on the reformed Shariah. He wanted to establish a college where students could be introduced to the study of international law, sociology, world history, the scientific study of religion, and modern science, at the same time as they studied *fiqh*. This would ensure that Islamic jurisprudence would develop in a truly modern context that would wed the traditions of East and West, and make the Shariah, an agrarian law code, compatible with the new type of society that the West had evolved.

The reformers constantly felt that they had to answer the European criticisms of Islam. In religious as in political affairs, the West was now setting the Muslim agenda. In India, the poet and philosopher Muhammad Iqbal (1876–1938) insisted that Islam was just as rational as any Western system. Indeed, it was the most rational and advanced of all the confessional faiths. Its strict monotheism had liberated humanity from mythology, and the Quran had urged Muslims to observe nature closely, reflect upon their observations and subject their actions to constant scrutiny. Thus the empirical spirit that had given birth to modernity had in fact originated in Islam. This was a partial and inaccurate interpretation of history, but no more biased than the Western tendency at this time to see Christianity as the superior faith and Europe as always having been in the vanguard of progress. Iqbal's emphasis on the rational spirit of Islam led him to denigrate Sufism. He represented the new trend away from mysticism that would become increasingly prevalent in the Muslim world, as modern rationalism came to seem the only way forward. Iqbal

had been deeply influenced by Western thought and had received a Ph.D. in London. Yet he believed that the West had elevated progress at the expense of continuity; its secular individualism separated the notion of personality from God and made it idolatrous and potentially demonic. As a result, the West would eventually destroy itself, a position that was easy to understand after the First World War, which could be seen as the collective suicide of Europe. Muslims therefore had a vital mission to witness to the divine dimension of life, not by retiring from the world to engage in contemplation, but by an activism that implemented the social ideals of the Shariah.

The reformers we have considered so far were intellectuals, who spoke chiefly to the educated elite. In Egypt, the young schoolteacher Hasan al-Banna (1906–49) founded an organization that brought their ideas to the masses. The Society of Muslim Brothers became a mass movement throughout the Middle East, and was the only ideology at this time that was able to appeal to all sectors of society. Al-Banna knew that Muslims needed Western science and technology, and that they must reform their political and social institutions. But he was also convinced, like the reformers, that this must go hand in hand with a spiritual reformation. When al-Banna saw the British living in luxury in the Suez Canal Zone, he was moved to tears by the contrast with the miserable hovels of the Egyptian workers. He saw this as a religious problem that needed an Islamic solution. Where Christians would often respond to the challenge of modernity by a reassertion of doctrine, Muslims have responded by making a social or political effort (*jihad*). Al-Banna insisted that Islam was a total way of life; religion could not be confined to the private sphere, as the West contended. His society tried to interpret the Quran to meet the spirit of the new age, but also to unify the Islamic nations, raise the standard of living,

achieve a higher level of social justice, fight against illiteracy and poverty and liberate Muslim lands from foreign domination. Under the colonialists, Muslims had been cut off from their roots. As long as they copied other peoples, they would remain cultural mongrels. Besides training the Brothers and Sisters in the rituals of prayer and Quranic living, al-Banna built schools, founded a modern scout movement, ran night schools for workers and tutorial colleges to prepare for the civil service examinations. The Brothers founded clinics and hospitals in the rural areas, built factories, where Muslims got better pay, health insurance and holidays than in the state sector, and taught Muslims modern labour laws so that they could defend their rights.

The society had its faults. A small minority engaged in terrorism and this brought about its dissolution (though it has since revived, under different auspices). But most of the members—who numbered millions of Muslims by 1948—knew nothing about these fringe activities and saw their welfare and religious mission as crucial. The instant success of the society, which had become the most powerful political institution in Egypt by the Second World War, showed that the vast mass of the people wanted to be modern *and* religious, whatever the intellectuals or the secularist government maintained. This type of social work has continued to characterize many of the modern Islamic movements, notably the Mujamah (Islamic Congress), founded by Sheikh Ahmed Yasin in Gaza, which built a similar welfare empire to bring the benefits of modernity to Palestinians in the territories occupied by Israel after the June War of 1967, but in an Islamic context.

WHAT IS A MODERN MUSLIM STATE?

The colonial experience and the collision with Europe had dislocated Islamic society. The world had irrevocably changed. It

was hard for Muslims to know how to respond to the West, because the challenge was unprecedented. If they were to participate as full partners in the modern world, Muslims had to incorporate these changes. In particular, the West had found it necessary to separate religion and politics in order to free government, science and technology from the constraints of conservative religion. In Europe, nationalism had replaced the allegiance of faith, which had formerly enabled its societies to cohere. But this nineteenth-century experiment proved problematic. The nation states of Europe embarked on an arms race in 1870, which led ultimately to two world wars. Secular ideologies proved to be just as murderous as the old religious bigotry, as became clear in the Nazi Holocaust and the Soviet Gulag. The Enlightenment *philosophes* had believed that the more educated people became, the more rational and tolerant they would be. This hope proved to be as utopian as any of the old messianic fantasies. Finally, modern society was committed to democracy, and this had, in general, made life more just and equitable for more people in Europe and America. But the people of the West had had centuries to prepare for the democratic experiment. It would be a very different matter when modern parliamentary systems would be imposed upon societies that were still predominantly agrarian or imperfectly modernized, and where the vast majority of the population found modern political discourse incomprehensible.

Politics had never been central to the Christian religious experience. Jesus had, after all, said that his Kingdom was not of this world. For centuries, the Jews of Europe had refrained from political involvement as a matter of principle. But politics was no secondary issue for Muslims. We have seen that it had been the theatre of their religious quest. Salvation did not mean redemption from sin, but the creation of a just society in which the individual could more easily make that existential surrender of his or her whole being that would bring

fulfilment. The polity was therefore a matter of supreme importance, and throughout the twentieth century there has been one attempt after another to create a truly Islamic state. This has always been difficult. It was an aspiration that required a *jihad*, a struggle that could find no simple outcome.

The ideal of *tawhid* would seem to preclude the ideal of secularism, but in the past both Shiis and Sunnis had accepted a separation of religion and politics. Pragmatic politics is messy and often cruel; the ideal Muslim state is not a "given" that is simply applied, but it takes creative ingenuity and discipline to implement the egalitarian ideal of the Quran in the grim realities of political life. It is not true that Islam makes it impossible for Muslims to create a modern secular society, as Westerners sometimes imagine. But it is true that secularization has been very different in the Muslim world. In the West, it has usually been experienced as benign. In the early days, it was conceived by such philosophers as John Locke (1632–1704) as a new and better way of being religious, since it freed religion from coercive state control and enabled it to be more true to its spiritual ideals. But in the Muslim world, secularism has often consisted of a brutal attack upon religion and the religious.

Atatürk, for example, closed down all the *madrasahs*, suppressed the Sufi orders and forced men and women to wear modern Western dress. Such coercion is always counterproductive. Islam in Turkey did not disappear, it simply went underground. Muhammad Ali had also despoiled the Egyptian *ulama*, appropriated their endowments and deprived them of influence. Later Jamal Abd al-Nasser (1918–70) became for a time quite militantly anti-Islamic, and suppressed the Muslim Brotherhood. One of the Brothers, who belonged to the secret terrorist wing of the society, had made an attempt on al-Nasser's life, but the majority of the thousands of Brothers who languished for years in al-Nasser's concentration camps

had done nothing more inflammatory than hand out leaflets or attend a meeting. In Iran, the Pahlavi monarchs were also ruthless in their secularism. Reza Shah Pahlavi (reigned 1921–41) deprived the *ulama* of their endowments, and replaced the Shariah with a civil system; he suppressed the Ashura celebrations in honour of Husain, and forbade Iranians to go on the *hajj*. Islamic dress was prohibited, and Reza's soldiers used to tear off women's veils with their bayonets and rip them to pieces in the street. In 1935, when protestors peacefully demonstrated against the Dress Laws in the shrine of the Eighth Imam at Mashhad, the soldiers fired on the unarmed crowd and there were hundreds of casualties. The *ulama*, who had enjoyed unrivalled power in Iran, had to watch their influence crumble. But Ayatollah Muddaris, the cleric who attacked Reza in the parliamentary Assembly, was murdered by the regime in 1937 and the *ulama* became too frightened to make any further protest. Reza's son and successor, Muhammad Reza Shah (reigned 1944–79), proved to be just as hostile to and contemptuous of Islam. Hundreds of *madrasah* students who dared to protest against the regime were shot in the streets, *madrasahs* were closed and leading *ulama* were tortured to death, imprisoned and exiled. There was nothing democratic about this secular regime. SAVAK, the shah's secret police, imprisoned Iranians without trial, subjected them to torture and intimidation, and there was no possibility of truly representative government.

Nationalism, from which Europeans themselves had begun to retreat in the latter part of the twentieth century, was also problematic. The unity of the *ummah* had long been a treasured ideal; now the Muslim world was split into kingdoms and republics, whose borders were arbitrarily drawn up by the Western powers. It was not easy to build a national spirit, when Muslims had been accustomed to think of themselves as Ottoman citizens and members of the Dar al-Islam. Sometimes

what passed as nationalism took a purely negative stance and became identified with the desire to get rid of the West. Some of the new nations had been so constructed that there was bound to be tension among their citizens. The southern part of the Sudan, for example, was largely Christian, while the north was Muslim. For a people who were accustomed to defining their identity in religious terms, it would be hard to establish a common "Sudanese" nationalism. The problem was even more acute in Lebanon, where the population was equally divided among at least three religious communities—Sunni, Shii and Maronite Christian—which had always been autonomous before. Power sharing proved to be an impossibility. The demographic time bomb led to the civil war (1975–90), which tragically tore the country apart. In other countries, such as Syria, Egypt or Iraq, nationalism would be adopted by an elite, but not by the more conservative masses. In Iran, the nationalism of the Pahlavis was directly hostile to Islam, since it tried to sever the country's connection with Shiism and based itself on the ancient Persian culture of the pre-Islamic period.

Democracy also posed problems. The reformers who wanted to graft modernity on to an Islamic substructure pointed out that in itself the ideal of democracy was not inimical to Islam. Islamic law promoted the principles of *shurah* (consultation) and *ijmah*, where a law had to be endorsed by the "consensus" of a representative portion of the *ummah*. The *rashidun* had been elected by a majority vote. All this was quite compatible with the democratic ideal. Part of the difficulty lay in the way that the West formulated democracy as "government of the people, by the people, and for the people." In Islam, it is God and not the people who gives a government legitimacy. This elevation of humanity could seem like idolatry (*shirk*), since it was a usurpation of God's sovereignty. But it was not impossible for the Muslim coun-

tries to introduce representative forms of government without complying with the Western slogan. But the democratic ideal had often been tainted in practice. When the Iranians set up their Majlis (Assembly) after the Constitutional Revolution of 1906, the Russians helped the shah to close it down. Later, when the British were trying to make Iran a protectorate during the 1920s, the Americans noted that they often rigged the elections to secure a result favourable to themselves. Later American support for the unpopular Muhammad Reza Shah, who not only closed down the Majlis to effect his modernization programme, but systematically denied Iranians fundamental human rights that democracy was supposed to guarantee, made it seem that there was a double standard. The West proudly proclaimed democracy for its own people, but Muslims were expected to submit to cruel dictatorships. In Egypt there were seventeen general elections between 1923 and 1952, all of which were won by the popular Wafd party, but the Wafd were permitted to rule only five times. They were usually forced to stand down by either the British or by the king of Egypt.

It was, therefore, difficult for Muslims to set up a modern democratic nation-state, in which religion was relegated to the private sphere. Other solutions seemed little better. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, founded in 1932, was based on the Wahhabi ideal. The official view was that a constitution was unnecessary, since the government was based on a literal reading of the Quran. But the Quran contains very little legislation and it had always been found necessary in practice to supplement it with more complex jurisprudence. The Saudis proclaimed that they were the heirs of the pristine Islam of the Arabian peninsula, and the *ulama* granted the state legitimacy; in return the kings enforced conservative religious values. Women are shrouded from view and secluded (even though this had not been the case in the Prophet's time), gam-

bling and alcohol are forbidden and traditional punishments, such as the mutilation of thieves, are enshrined in the legal system. Most Muslim states and organizations do not consider that fidelity to the Quran requires these pre-modern penal practices. The Muslim Brotherhood, for example, from a very early date condemned the Saudis' use of Islamic punishments as inappropriate and archaic, especially when the lavish wealth of the ruling elite and the unequal distribution of wealth offended far more crucial Quranic values.

Pakistan was another modern Islamic experiment. Muhammad Ali Jinnah (1876–1948), the founder of the state, was imbued with the modern secular ideal. Ever since the time of Aurengzebe, Muslims had felt unhappy and insecure in India: they had feared for their identity and felt anxious about the power of the Hindu majority. This naturally became more acute after the partition of the subcontinent by the British in 1947, when communal violence exploded on both sides and thousands of people lost their lives. Jinnah had wanted to create a political arena in which Muslims were not defined or limited by their religious identity. But what did it mean for a Muslim state which made great use of Islamic symbols to be "secular"? The Jamaat-i Islami, founded by Abul Ala Mawdudi (1903–79), pressed for a more strict application of Shariah norms, and in 1956 the constitution formally defined Pakistan as an Islamic Republic. This represented an aspiration, which now had to be incarnated in the political institutions of the country. The government of General Muhammad Ayub Khan (1958–69) was a typical example of the aggressive secularism that we have already considered. He nationalized the religious endowments (*awqaf*), placed restrictions on *madrasah* education and promoted a purely secular legal system. His aim was to make Islam a civil religion, amenable to state control, but this led inevitably to tension with the Islamists and eventually to Khan's downfall.

During the 1970s, the Islamist forces became the main focus of opposition to the government, and the leftist, secularist Prime Minister Zulfaqir Ali Bhutto (1971–77) tried to mollify them by banning alcohol and gambling, but this was not sufficient and in July 1977 the devout Muslim Muhammad Zia al-Haqq led a successful coup, and established an ostensibly more Islamic regime. He reinstated traditional Muslim dress, and restored Islamic penal and commercial law. But even President Zia kept Islam at bay in political and economic matters, where his policy was avowedly secularist. Since his death in a plane crash in 1988, Pakistani politics has been dominated by ethnic tension, rivalries and corruption scandals among members of the elite classes, and the Islamists have been less influential. Islam remains important to Pakistan's identity and is ubiquitous in public life, but it still does not affect realpolitik. The compromise is reminiscent of the solutions of the Abbasids and Mongols, which saw a similar separation of powers. The state seems to have forced the Islamic parties into line, but this state of affairs is far from ideal. As in India, disproportionate sums are spent on nuclear weapons, while at least a third of the population languishes in hopeless poverty, a situation which is abhorrent to a truly Muslim sensibility. Muslim activists who feel coerced by the state look towards the fundamentalist government of the Taliban in neighbouring Afghanistan.

The fact that Muslims have not yet found an ideal polity for the twentieth century does not mean that Islam is incompatible with modernity. The struggle to enshrine the Islamic ideal in state structures and to find the right leader has preoccupied Muslims throughout their history. Because, like any religious value, the notion of the true Islamic state is transcendent, it can never be perfectly expressed in human form and always eludes the grasp of frail and flawed human beings. Religious life is difficult, and the secular rationalism

of our modern culture poses special problems for people in all the major traditions. Christians, who are more preoccupied by doctrine than by politics, are currently wrestling with dogmatic questions in their effort to make their faith speak to the modern sensibility. They are debating their belief in the divinity of Christ, for example, some clinging to the older formulations of the dogma, others finding more radical solutions. Sometimes these discussions become anguished and even acrimonious, because the issues touch the nub of religiosity that lies at the heart of the Christian vision. The struggle for a modern Islamic state is the Muslim equivalent of this dilemma. All religious people in any age have to make their traditions address the challenge of their particular modernity, and the quest for an ideal form of Muslim government should not be viewed as aberrant but as an essentially and typically religious activity.

FUNDAMENTALISM

The Western media often give the impression that the embattled and occasionally violent form of religiosity known as "fundamentalism" is a purely Islamic phenomenon. This is not the case. Fundamentalism is a global fact and has surfaced in every major faith in response to the problems of our modernity. There is fundamentalist Judaism, fundamentalist Christianity, fundamentalist Hinduism, fundamentalist Buddhism, fundamentalist Sikhism and even fundamentalist Confucianism. This type of faith surfaced first in the Christian world in the United States at the beginning of the twentieth century. This was not accidental. Fundamentalism is not a monolithic movement; each form of fundamentalism, even within the same tradition, develops independently and has its own symbols and enthusiasms, but its different manifestations all bear a family resemblance. It has been noted that a funda-

mentalist movement does not arise immediately, as a knee-jerk response to the advent of Western modernity, but only takes shape when the modernization process is quite far advanced. At first religious people try to reform their traditions and effect a marriage between them and modern culture, as we have seen the Muslim reformers do. But when these moderate measures are found to be of no avail, some people resort to more extreme methods, and a fundamentalist movement is born. With hindsight, we can see that it was only to be expected that fundamentalism should first make itself known in the United States, the showcase of modernity, and only appear in other parts of the world at a later date. Of the three monotheistic religions, Islam was in fact the last to develop a fundamentalist strain, when modern culture began to take root in the Muslim world in the late 1960s and 1970s. By this date, fundamentalism was quite well established among Christians and Jews, who had had a longer exposure to the modern experience.

Fundamentalist movements in all faiths share certain characteristics. They reveal a deep disappointment and disenchantment with the modern experiment, which has not fulfilled all that it promised. They also express real fear. Every single fundamentalist movement that I have studied is convinced that the secular establishment is determined to wipe religion out. This is not always a paranoid reaction. We have seen that secularism has often been imposed very aggressively in the Muslim world. Fundamentalists look back to a "golden age" before the irruption of modernity for inspiration, but they are not atavistically returning to the Middle Ages. All are intrinsically modern movements and could have appeared at no time other than our own. All are innovative and often radical in their reinterpretation of religion. As such, fundamentalism is an essential part of the modern scene. Wherever modernity takes root, a fundamentalist movement

is likely to rise up alongside it in conscious reaction. Fundamentalists will often express their discontent with a modern development by overstressing those elements in their tradition that militate against it. They are all—even in the United States—highly critical of democracy and secularism. Because the emancipation of women has been one of the hallmarks of modern culture, fundamentalists tend to emphasise conventional, agrarian gender roles, putting women back into veils and into the home. The fundamentalist community can thus be seen as the shadow-side of modernity; it can also highlight some of the darker sides of the modern experiment.

Fundamentalism, therefore, exists in a symbiotic relationship with a coercive secularism. Fundamentalists nearly always feel assaulted by the liberal or modernizing establishment, and their views and behaviour become more extreme as a result. After the famous Scopes Trial (1925) in Tennessee, when Protestant fundamentalists tried to prevent the teaching of evolution in the public schools, they were so ridiculed by the secularist press that their theology became more reactionary and excessively literal, and they turned from the left to the extreme right of the political spectrum. When the secularist attack has been more violent, the fundamentalist reaction is likely to be even greater. Fundamentalism therefore reveals a fissure in society, which is polarized between those who enjoy secular culture and those who regard it with dread. As time passes, the two camps become increasingly unable to understand one another. Fundamentalism thus begins as an internal dispute, with liberalizers or secularists within one's *own* culture or nation. In the first instance, for example, Muslim fundamentalists will often oppose their fellow countrymen or fellow Muslims who take a more positive view of modernity, rather than such external foes as the West or Israel. Very often, fundamentalists begin by withdrawing from mainstream cul-

ture to create an enclave of pure faith (as, for example, within the ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities in Jerusalem or New York). Thence they will sometimes conduct an offensive which can take many forms, designed to bring the mainstream back to the right path and resacralize the world. All fundamentalists feel that they are fighting for survival, and because their backs are to the wall, they can believe that they have to fight their way out of the impasse. In this frame of mind, on rare occasions, some resort to terrorism. The vast majority, however, do not commit acts of violence, but simply try to revive their faith in a more conventional, lawful way.

Fundamentalists have been successful in so far as they have pushed religion from the sidelines and back to centre stage, so that it now plays a major part in international affairs once again, a development that would have seemed inconceivable in the mid–twentieth century when secularism seemed in the ascendant. This has certainly been the case in the Islamic world since the 1970s. But fundamentalism is not simply a way of "using" religion for a political end. These are essentially rebellions against the secularist exclusion of the divine from public life, and a frequently desperate attempt to make spiritual values prevail in the modern world. But the desperation and fear that fuel fundamentalists also tend to distort the religious tradition, and accentuate its more aggressive aspects at the expense of those that preach toleration and reconciliation.

Muslim fundamentalism corresponds very closely to these general characteristics. It is not correct, therefore, to imagine that Islam has within it a militant, fanatic strain that impels Muslims into a crazed and violent rejection of modernity. Muslims are in tune with fundamentalists in other faiths all over the world, who share their profound misgivings about modern secular culture. It should also be said that Muslims

object to the use of the term "fundamentalism," pointing out quite correctly that it was coined by American Protestants as a badge of pride, and cannot be usefully translated into Arabic. *Usul*, as we have seen, refers to the fundamental principles of Islamic jurisprudence, and as all Muslims agree on these, all Muslims could be said to subscribe to *usuliyyah* (fundamentalism). Nevertheless, for all its shortcomings, "fundamentalism" is the only term we have to describe this family of embattled religious movements, and it is difficult to come up with a more satisfactory substitute.

One of the early fundamentalist idealogues was Mawdudi, the founder of the Jamaat-i Islami in Pakistan. He saw the mighty power of the West as gathering its forces to crush Islam. Muslims, he argued, must band together to fight this encroaching secularism, if they wanted their religion and their culture to survive. Muslims had encountered hostile societies before and had experienced disasters but, starting with Afghani, a new note had crept into Islamic discourse. The Western threat had made Muslims defensive for the first time. Mawdudi defied the whole secularist ethos: he was proposing an Islamic liberation theology. Because God alone was sovereign, nobody was obliged to take orders from any other human being. Revolution against the colonial powers was not just a right but a duty. Mawdudi called for a universal *jihad*. Just as the Prophet had fought the *jahiliyyah* (the "ignorance" and barbarism of the pre-Islamic period), Muslims must use all means in their power to resist the modern *jahiliyyah* of the West. Mawdudi argued that *jihad* was the central tenet of Islam. This was an innovation. Nobody had ever claimed before that *jihad* was equivalent to the five Pillars of Islam, but Mawdudi felt that the innovation was justified by the present emergency. The stress and fear of cultural and religious annihilation had led to the development of a more extreme and potentially violent distortion of the faith.

But the real founder of Islamic fundamentalism in the Sunni world was Sayyid Qutb (1906–66), who was greatly influenced by Mawdudi. Yet he had not originally been an extremist but had been filled with enthusiasm for Western culture and secular politics. Even after he joined the Muslim Brotherhood in 1953 he had been a reformer, hoping to give Western democracy an Islamic dimension that would avoid the excesses of a wholly secularist ideology. However, in 1956 he was imprisoned by al-Nasser for membership of the Brotherhood, and in the concentration camp he became convinced that religious people and secularists could not live in peace in the same society. As he witnessed the torture and execution of the Brothers, and reflected upon al-Nasser's avowed determination to cast religion into a marginal role in Egypt, he could see all the characteristics of *jahiliyyah,* which he defined as the barbarism that was for ever and for all time the enemy of faith, and which Muslims, following the example of the Prophet Muhammad, were bound to fight to the death. Qutb went further than Mawdudi, who had seen only non-Muslim societies as *jahili.* Qutb applied the term *jahiliyyah,* which in conventional Muslim historiography had been used simply to describe the pre-Islamic period in Arabia, to contemporary Muslim society. Even though a ruler such as al-Nasser outwardly professed Islam, his words and actions proved him to be an apostate and Muslims were duty-bound to overthrow such a government, just as Muhammad had forced the pagan establishment of Mecca (the *jahiliyyah* of his day) into submission.

The violent secularism of al-Nasser had led Qutb to espouse a form of Islam that distorted both the message of the Quran and the Prophet's life. Qutb told Muslims to model themselves on Muhammad: to separate themselves from mainstream society (as Muhammad had made the *hijrah* from Mecca to Medina), and then engage in a violent *jihad.* But

Muhammad had in fact finally achieved victory by an ingenious policy of non-violence; the Quran adamantly opposed force and coercion in religious matters, and its vision—far from preaching exclusion and separation—was tolerant and inclusive. Qutb insisted that the Quranic injunction to toleration could occur only *after* the political victory of Islam and the establishment of a true Muslim state. The new intransigence sprang from the profound fear that is at the core of fundamentalist religion. Qutb did not survive. At al-Nasser's personal insistence, he was executed in 1966.

Every Sunni fundamentalist movement has been influenced by Qutb. Most spectacularly it has inspired Muslims to assassinate such leaders as Anwar al-Sadat, denounced as a *jahili* ruler because of his oppressive policies towards his own people. The Taliban, who came to power in Afghanistan in 1994, are also affected by his ideology. They are determined to return to what they see as the original vision of Islam. The *ulama* are the leaders of the government; women are veiled and not permitted to take part in professional life. Only religious broadcasting is permitted and the Islamic punishments of stoning and mutilation have been reintroduced. In some circles of the West, the Taliban are seen as quintessential Muslims, but their regime violates crucial Islamic precepts. Most of the Taliban ("students" of the *madrasahs*) belong to the Pashtun tribe, and they tend to target non-Pashtuns, who fight the regime from the north of the country. Such ethnic chauvinism was forbidden by the Prophet and by the Quran. Their harsh treatment of minority groups is also opposed to clear Quranic requirements. The Taliban's discrimination against women is completely opposed to the practice of the Prophet and the conduct of the first *ummah*. The Taliban are typically fundamentalist, however, in their highly selective vision of religion (which reflects their narrow education in some of the *madrasahs* of Pakistan), which perverts the faith

and turns it in the opposite direction of what was intended. Like all the major faiths, Muslim fundamentalists, in their struggle to survive, make religion a tool of oppression and even of violence.

But most Sunni fundamentalists have not resorted to such an extreme. The fundamentalist movements that sprang up during the 1970s and 1980s all tried to change the world about them in less drastic but telling ways. After the humiliating defeat of the Arab armies in the Six-Day War against Israel in 1967, there was a swing towards religion throughout the Middle East. The old secularist policies of such leaders as al-Nasser seemed discredited. People felt that the Muslims had failed because they had not been true to their religion. They could see that while secularism and democracy worked very well in the West, they did not benefit ordinary Muslims but only an elite in the Islamic world. Fundamentalism can be seen as a "post-modern" movement, which rejects some of the tenets and enthusiasms of modernity, such as colonialism. Throughout the Islamic world, students and factory workers started to change their immediate environment. They created mosques in their universities and factories, where they could make *salat,* and set up Banna-style welfare societies with an Islamic orientation, demonstrating that Islam worked for the people better than the secularist governments did. When students declared a shady patch of lawn—or even a noticeboard—to be an Islamic zone, they felt that they had made a small but significant attempt to push Islam from the marginal realm to which it had been relegated in secularist society, and reclaimed a part of the world—however tiny—for Islam. They were pushing forward the frontiers of the sacred, in rather the same way as the Jewish fundamentalists in Israel who made settlements in the occupied West Bank, reclaiming Arab land and bringing it under the aegis of Judaism.

The same principle underlines the return to Islamic dress. When this is forced upon people against their will (as by the Taliban) it is coercive and as likely to create a backlash as the aggressive techniques of Reza Shah Pahlavi. But many Muslim women feel that veiling is a symbolic return to the pre-colonial period, before their society was disrupted and deflected from its true course. Yet they have not simply turned the clock back. Surveys show that a large proportion of veiled women hold progressive views on such matters as gender. For some women, who have come from rural areas to the university and are the first members of their family to advance beyond basic literacy, the assumption of Islamic dress provides continuity and makes their rite of passage to modernity less traumatic than it might otherwise have been. They are coming to join the modern world, but on their own terms and in an Islamic context that gives it sacred meaning. Veiling can also be seen as a tacit critique of some of the less positive aspects of modernity. It defies the strange Western compulsion to "reveal all" in sexual matters. In the West, people often flaunt their tanned, well-honed bodies as a sign of privilege; they try to counteract the signs of ageing and hold on to this life. The shrouded Islamic body declares that it is oriented to transcendence, and the uniformity of dress abolishes class difference and stresses the importance of community over Western individualism.

People have often used religion as a way of making modern ideas and enthusiasms comprehensible. Not all the American Calvinists at the time of the 1776 American Revolution shared or even understood the secularist ethos of the Founding Fathers, for example. They gave the struggle a Christian colouration so that they were able to fight alongside the secularists in the creation of a new world. Some Sunni and Shii fundamentalists are also using religion to make the alien

tenor of modern culture familiar, giving it a context of meaning and spirituality that makes it more accessible. Again, they are tacitly asserting that it is possible to be modern on other cultural terms than those laid down by the West. The Iranian Revolution of 1978–79 can be seen in this light. During the 1960s Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini (1902–89) brought the people of Iran out onto the streets to protest against the cruel and unconstitutional policies of Muhammad Reza Shah, whom he identified with Yazid, the Umayyad caliph who had been responsible for the death of Husain at Kerbala, the type of the unjust ruler in Shii Islam. Muslims had a duty to fight such tyranny, and the mass of the people, who would have been quite unmoved by a socialist call to revolution, could respond to Khomeini's summons, which resonated with their deepest traditions. Khomeini provided a Shii alternative to the secular nationalism of the shah. He came to seem more and more like one of the *imams:* like all the *imams,* he had been attacked, imprisoned and almost killed by an unjust ruler; like some of the *imams,* he was forced into exile and deprived of what was his own; like Ali and Husain, he had bravely opposed injustice and stood up for true Islamic values; like all the *imams,* he was known to be a practising mystic; like Husain, whose son was killed at Kerbala, Khomeini's son Mustafa was killed by the shah's agents.

When the revolution broke in 1978, after a slanderous attack on Khomeini in the semi-official newspaper *Ettelaat,* and the shocking massacre of young *madrasah* students who came out onto the streets in protest, Khomeini seemed to be directing operations from afar (from Najaf, his place of exile), rather like the Hidden Imam. Secularists and intellectuals were willing to join forces with the *ulama* because they knew that only Khomeini could command the grass-roots support of the people. The Iranian Revolution was the only revolution inspired by a twentieth-century ideology (the Russian

and Chinese revolutions both owed their inspiration to the nineteenth-century vision of Karl Marx). Khomeini had evolved a radically new interpretation of Shiism: in the absence of the Hidden Imam, only the mystically inspired jurist, who knew the sacred law, could validly govern the nation. For centuries, Twelver Shiis had prohibited clerics from participating in government, but the revolutionaries (if not many of the *ulama*) were willing to subscribe to this theory of Velayat-i Faqih (the Mandate of the Jurist).[1] Throughout the revolution, the symbolism of Kerbala was predominant. Traditional religious ceremonies to mourn the dead and the Ashura celebrations in honour of Husain became demonstrations against the regime. The Kerbala myth inspired ordinary Shiis to brave the shah's guns and die in their thousands, some donning the white shroud of martyrdom. Religion was proved to be so powerful a force that it brought down the Pahlavi state, which had seemed the most stable and powerful in the Middle East.

But, like all fundamentalists, Khomeini's vision was also distorting. The taking of the American hostages in Teheran (and, later, by Shii radicals in Lebanon, who were inspired by the Iranian example) violates clear Quranic commands about the treatment of prisoners, who must be handled with dignity and respect, and freed as soon as possible. The captor is even obliged to contribute to the ransom from his own resources. Indeed, the Quran expressly forbids the taking of prisoners except during a conventional war, which obviously rules out hostage-taking when hostilities are not in progress.[2] After the revolution, Khomeini insisted on what he called "unity of expression," suppressing any dissentient voice. Not only had the demand for free speech been one of the chief concerns of the revolution, but Islam had never insisted on ideological conformity, only upon a uniformity of practice. Coercion in religious matters is forbidden in the Quran, and was abhorred by

Mulla Sadra, Khomeini's spiritual mentor. When Khomeini issued his *fatwah* against novelist Salman Rushdie on February 14, 1989, for his allegedly blasphemous portrait of Muhammad in *The Satanic Verses*, he also contravened Sadra's impassioned defence of freedom of thought. The *fatwah* was declared un-Islamic by the *ulama* of al-Azhar and Saudi Arabia, and was condemned by forty-eight out of the forty-nine member states of the Islamic Conference the following month.

But it appears that the Islamic revolution may have helped the Iranian people to come to modernity on their own terms. Shortly before his death, Khomeini tried to pass more power to the parliament, and, with his apparent blessing, Hashami Rafsanjani, the Speaker of the Majlis, gave a democratic interpretation of Velayat-i Faqih. The needs of the modern state had convinced Shiis of the necessity of democracy, but this time it came in an Islamic package that made it acceptable to the majority of the people. This seemed confirmed on May 23, 1997, when Hojjat ol-Islam Seyyid Khatami was elected to the presidency in a landslide victory. He immediately made it clear that he wanted to build a more positive relationship with the West, and in September 1998 he dissociated his government from the *fatwah* against Rushdie, a move which was later endorsed by Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the Supreme Faqih of Iran. Khatami's election signalled the strong desire of a large segment of the population for greater pluralism, a gentler interpretation of Islamic law, more democracy and a more progressive policy for women. The battle is still not won. The conservative clerics who opposed Khomeini and for whom he had little time are still able to block many of Khatami's reforms, but the struggle to create a viable Islamic state, true to the spirit of the Quran and yet responsive to current conditions, is still a major preoccupation of the Iranian people.

MUSLIMS IN A MINORITY

The spectre of Islamic fundamentalism sends a shiver through Western society, which seems not nearly so threatened by the equally prevalent and violent fundamentalism of other faiths. This has certainly affected the attitude of Western people towards the Muslims living in their own countries. Five to six million Muslims reside in Europe, and seven to eight million in the United States. There are now about a thousand mosques each in Germany and France, and five hundred in the United Kingdom. About half the Muslims in the West today have been born there to parents who immigrated in the 1950s and 1960s. They rejected their parents' meeker stance, are better educated and seek greater visibility and acceptance. Sometimes their efforts are ill-advised, as, for example, Dr. Kalim Siddiqui's call for a Muslim parliament in the United Kingdom in the early 1990s, a project which received very little support from most British Muslims but which made people fear that Muslims were not willing to integrate into mainstream society. There was immense hostility towards the Muslim community during the crisis over *The Satanic Verses,* when Muslims in Bradford publicly burned the book. Most British Muslims may have disapproved of the novel, but had no desire to see Rushdie killed. Europeans seem to find it difficult to relate to their Muslim fellow countrymen in a natural, balanced manner. Turkish migrant workers have been murdered in race riots in Germany, and girls who choose to wear a *hijab* to school have received extremely hostile coverage in the French press. In Britain, there is often outrage when Muslims request separate schools for their children, even though people do not voice the same objections about special schools for Jews, Roman Catholics or Quakers. It is as though Muslims are viewed as a Fifth Column, plotting to undermine British society.

Muslims have fared better in the United States. The Muslim immigrants there are better educated and middle class. They work as doctors, academics and engineers, whereas in Europe the Muslim community is still predominantly working class. American Muslims feel that they are in the United States by choice. They want to become Americans, and in the land of the melting pot integration is more of a possibility than in Europe. Some Muslims, such as Malcolm X (1925–65), the charismatic leader of the black separatist group called the Nation of Islam, gained widespread respect at the time of the Civil Rights movement, and became an emblem of Black and Muslim power. The Nation of Islam, however, was a heterodox party. Founded in 1930 by Wallace Fard, a pedlar of Detroit, and, after the mysterious disappearance of Fard in 1934, led by Elijah Muhammad (1897–1975), it claimed that God had been incarnated in Fard, that white people are inherently evil and that there was no life after death—all views that are heretical from an Islamic perspective. The Nation of Islam demanded a separate state for African Americans to compensate them for the years of slavery, and is adamantly hostile to the West. Malcolm X became disillusioned with the Nation of Islam, however, when he discovered the moral laxity of Elijah Muhammad, and took his followers into Sunni Islam: two years later, he was assassinated for this apostasy. But the Nation of Islam still gains far more media coverage than the much larger American Muslim Mission, founded by Malcolm X, which is now wholly orthodox, sends its members to study at al-Azhar and explores the possibility of working alongside white Americans for a more just society. The bizarre and rejectionist stance of the Nation may seem closer to the Western stereotype of Islam as an inherently intolerant and fanatical faith.

In India, those Muslims who did not emigrate to Pakistan in 1947 and their descendants now number 115 million. But despite their large numbers, many feel even more belea-

guered and endangered than their brothers and sisters in the West. The Hindus and Muslims of India are all still haunted by the tragic violence of the partition of the subcontinent in 1947, and though many Hindus stand up for Muslim rights in India, Muslims tend to get a bad press. They are accused of a ghetto mentality, of being loyal at heart to Pakistan or Kashmir; they are blamed for having too many children, and for being backward. Indian Muslims are being squeezed out of the villages, cannot easily get good jobs and are often refused decent accommodation. The only signs of the glorious Moghul past are the great buildings: the Taj Mahal, the Red Fort and the Juneh Mosque, which have also become a rallying point for the Hindu fundamentalist group, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which claims that they were really built by Hindus, that the Muslims destroyed the temples of India and erected mosques in their place. The BJP's chief target was the Mosque of Babur, the founder of the Moghul dynasty, at Ayodhya, which the BJP dismantled in ten hours in December 1992, while the press and army stood by and watched. The impact on the Muslims of India has been devastating. They fear that this symbolic destruction was only the beginning of further troubles, and that soon they and their memory will be erased in India. This dread of annihilation lay behind their frantic opposition to *The Satanic Verses*, which seemed yet another threat to the faith. Yet the communalism and intolerance is against the most tolerant and civilized traditions of Indian Islam. Yet again, fear and oppression have distorted the faith.

THE WAY FORWARD

On the eve of the second Christian millennium, the Crusaders massacred some thirty thousand Jews and Muslims in Jerusalem, turning the thriving Islamic holy city into a stink-

ing charnel house. For at least five months the valleys and ditches around the city were filled with putrefying corpses, which were too numerous for the small number of Crusaders who remained behind after the expedition to clear away, and a stench hung over Jerusalem, where the three religions of Abraham had been able to coexist in relative harmony under Islamic rule for nearly five hundred years. This was the Muslims' first experience of the Christian West, as it pulled itself out of the dark age that had descended after the collapse of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, and fought its way back on to the international scene. The Muslims suffered from the Crusaders, but were not long incommoded by their presence. In 1187 Saladin was able to recapture Jerusalem for Islam and though the Crusaders hung on in the Near East for another century, they seemed an unimportant passing episode in the long Islamic history of the region. Most of the inhabitants of Islamdon were entirely unaffected by the Crusades and remained uninterested in western Europe, which, despite its dramatic cultural advance during the crusading period, still lagged behind the Muslim world.

Europeans did not forget the Crusades, however, nor could they ignore the Dar al-Islam, which, as the years went by, seemed to rule the entire globe. Ever since the Crusades, the people of Western Christendom developed a stereotypical and distorted image of Islam, which they regarded as the enemy of decent civilization. The prejudice became entwined with European fantasies about Jews, the other victims of the Crusaders, and often reflected buried worry about the conduct of Christians. It was, for example, during the Crusades, when it was Christians who had instigated a series of brutal holy wars against the Muslim world, that Islam was described by the learned scholar-monks of Europe as an inherently violent and intolerant faith, which had only been able to establish itself by the sword. The myth of the supposed fanat-

ical intolerance of Islam has become one of the received ideas of the West.

As the millennium drew to a close, however, some Muslims seemed to live up to this Western perception, and, for the first time, have made sacred violence a cardinal Islamic duty. These fundamentalists often call Western colonialism and post-colonial Western imperialism *al-Salibiyyah*: the Crusade. The colonial crusade has been less violent but its impact has been more devastating than the medieval holy wars. The powerful Muslim world has been reduced to a dependent bloc, and Muslim society has been gravely dislocated in the course of an accelerated modernization programme. All over the world, as we have seen, people in all the major faiths have reeled under the impact of Western modernity, and have produced the embattled and frequently intolerant religiosity that we call fundamentalism. As they struggle to rectify what they see as the damaging effects of modern secular culture, fundamentalists fight back and, in the process, they depart from the core values of compassion, justice and benevolence that characterize all the world faiths, including Islam. Religion, like any other human activity, is often abused, but at its best it helps human beings to cultivate a sense of the sacred inviolability of each individual, and thus to mitigate the murderous violence to which our species is tragically prone. Religion has committed atrocities in the past, but in its brief history secularism has proved that it can be just as violent. As we have seen, secular aggression and persecution have often led to a heightening of religious intolerance and hatred.

This became tragically clear in Algeria in 1992. During the religious revival of the 1970s, the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) challenged the hegemony of the secular nationalist party, the National Liberation Front (FLN), which had led the revolution against French colonial rule in 1954, and had established a socialist government in the country in 1962. The

Algerian revolution against France had been an inspiration to Arabs and Muslims who were also struggling to gain independence from Europe. The FLN was similar to the other secular and socialist governments in the Middle East at this time, which had relegated Islam to the private sphere, on the Western pattern. By the 1970s, however, people all over the Muslim world were becoming dissatisfied with these secularist ideologies which had not delivered what they had promised. Abbas Madani, one of the founding members of FIS, wanted to create an Islamic political ideology for the modern world; Ali ibn Hajj, the *imam* of a mosque in a poor neighbourhood in Algiers, led a more radical wing of FIS. Slowly, FIS began to build its own mosques, without getting permission from the government; it took root in the Muslim community in France, where workers demanded places of prayer in the factories and offices, incurring the wrath of the right-wing party led by Jean-Marie Le Pen.

By the 1980s, Algeria was in the grip of an economic crisis. FLN had set the country on the path to democracy and statehood, but over the years it had become corrupt. The old *garde* were reluctant to attempt more democratic reforms. There had been a population explosion in Algeria; most of its thirty million inhabitants were under thirty, many were unemployed, and there was an acute housing shortage. There were riots. Frustrated with the stagnation and ineptitude of the FLN, the young wanted something new and turned to the Islamic parties. In June 1990 the FIS scored major victories in the local elections, especially in the urban areas. FIS activists were mostly young, idealistic and well educated; they were known to be honest and efficient in government, though they were dogmatic and conservative in some areas, such as their insistence upon traditional Islamic dress for women. But the FIS was not anti-Western. Leaders spoke of encouraging links with the European Union and fresh Western investment.

After the electoral victories at the local level, they seemed certain to succeed in the legislative elections that were scheduled for 1992.

There was to be no Islamic government in Algeria, however. The military staged a coup, ousted the liberal FLN President Benjedid (who had promised democratic reforms), suppressed FIS, and threw its leaders into prison. Had elections been prevented in such a violent and unconstitutional manner in Iran and Pakistan, there would have been an outcry in the West. Such a coup would have been seen as an example of Islam's supposedly endemic aversion to democracy, and its basic incompatibility with the modern world. But because it was an Islamic government that had been thwarted by the coup, there was jubilation in the Western press. Algeria had been saved from the Islamic menace; the bars, casinos and discotheques of Algiers had been spared; and in some mysterious way, this undemocratic action had made Algeria safe for democracy. The French government threw its support behind the new hardline FLN of President Liamine Zeroual and strengthened his resolve to hold no further dialogue with FIS. Not surprisingly, the Muslim world was shocked by this fresh instance of Western double standards.

The result was tragically predictable. Pushed outside the due processes of law, outraged, and despairing of justice, the more radical members of FIS broke away to form a guerrilla organization, the Armed Islamic Group (GIA), and began a terror campaign in the mountainous regions south of Algiers. There were massacres, in which the population of entire villages was killed. Journalists and intellectuals, secular and religious, were also targeted. It was generally assumed that the Islamists were wholly responsible for these atrocities, but gradually questions were asked which pointed to the fact that some elements in the Algerian military forces not only acquiesced but also participated in the killing to dis-

credit the GIA. There was now a ghastly stalemate. Both FLN and FIS were torn apart by an internal feud between the pragmatists, who wanted a solution, and the hardliners, who refused to negotiate. The violence of the initial coup to stop the elections had led to an outright war between the religious and secularists. In January 1995 the Roman Catholic Church helped to organize a meeting in Rome to bring the two sides together, but Zeroual's government refused to participate. A golden opportunity had been lost. There was more Islamic terror, and a constitutional referendum banned all religious political parties.

The tragic case of Algeria must not become a paradigm for the future. Suppression and coercion had helped to push a disgruntled Muslim minority into a violence that offends every central tenet of Islam. An aggressive secularism had resulted in a religiosity that was a travesty of true faith. The incident further tarnished the notion of democracy, which the West is so anxious to promote, but which, it appeared, had limits, if the democratic process might lead to the establishment of an elected Islamic government. The people of Europe and the United States were shown to be ignorant about the various parties and groups within the Islamic world. The moderate FIS was equated with the most violent fundamentalist groups and was associated in the Western mind with the violence, illegality and anti-democratic behaviour that had this time been displayed by the secularists in the FLN.

But whether the West likes it or not, the initial success of the FIS in the local elections showed that the people wanted some form of Islamic government. It passed a clear message to Egypt, Morocco and Tunisia, where secularist governments had long been aware of the growing religiosity of their countries. In the middle of the twentieth century, secularism had been dominant, and Islam was thought to be irredeemably passé. Now any secularist government in the Middle East was

uncomfortably aware that if there were truly democratic elections, an Islamic government might well come to power. In Egypt, for example, Islam is as popular as Nasserism was in the 1950s. Islamic dress is ubiquitous and, since Mubarak's government is secularist, is clearly voluntarily assumed. Even in secularist Turkey, recent polls showed that some 70 percent of the population claimed to be devout, and that 20 percent prayed five times a day. People are turning to the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, and Palestinians are looking to Mujamah, while the PLO, which in the 1960s carried all before it, is now looking cumbersome, corrupt and out of date. In the republics of Central Asia, Muslims are rediscovering their religion after decades of Soviet oppression. People have tried the secularist ideologies, which have worked so successfully in Western countries where they are on home ground. Increasingly, Muslims want their governments to conform more closely to the Islamic norm.

The precise form that this will take is not yet clear. In Egypt it seems that a majority of Muslims would like to see the Shariah as the law of the land, whereas in Turkey only 3 percent want this. Even in Egypt, however, some of the *ulama* are aware that the problems of transforming the Shariah, an agrarian law code, to the very different conditions of modernity will be extreme. Rashid Rida had been aware of this as early as the 1930s. But that is not to say that it cannot be done.

It is not true that Muslims are now uniformly filled with hatred of the West. In the early stages of modernization, many leading thinkers were infatuated with European culture, and by the end of the twentieth century some of the most eminent and influential Muslim thinkers were now reaching out to the West again. President Khatami of Iran is only one example of this trend. So is the Iranian intellectual Abdolkarim Sorush, who held important posts in Khomeini's

government, and though he is often harried by the more conservative *mujtahids*, he strongly influences those in power. Sorush admires Khomeini, but has moved beyond him. He maintains that Iranians now have three identities: pre-Islamic, Islamic and Western, which they must try to reconcile. Sorush rejects the secularism of the West and believes that human beings will always need spirituality, but advises Iranians to study the modern sciences, while holding on to Shii tradition. Islam must develop its *fiqh*, so as to accommodate the modern industrial world, and evolve a philosophy of civil rights and an economic theory capable of holding its own in the twenty-first century.

Sunni thinkers have come to similar conclusions. Western hostility towards Islam springs from ignorance, Rashid al-Ghannouchi, the leader of the exiled Renaissance Party in Tunisia, believes. It also springs from a bad experience of Christianity, which did stifle thought and creativity. He describes himself as a "democratic Islamist" and sees no incompatibility between Islam and democracy, but he rejects the secularism of the West, because the human being cannot be so divided and fragmented. The Muslim ideal of *tawhid* rejects the duality of body and spirit, intellect and spirituality, men and women, morality and the economy, East and West. Muslims want modernity, but not one that has been imposed upon them by America, Britain or France. Muslims admire the efficiency and beautiful technology of the West; they are fascinated by the way a regime can be changed in the West without bloodshed. But when Muslims look at Western society, they see no light, no heart and no spirituality. They want to hold on to their own religious and moral traditions and, at the same time, to try to incorporate some of the best aspects of Western civilization. Yusuf Abdallah al-Qaradawi, a graduate of al-Azhar, and a Muslim Brother, who is currently the director of the Centre for Sunnah and Sirah at the University

of Qatar, takes a similar line. He believes in moderation, and is convinced that the bigotry that has recently appeared in the Muslim world will impoverish people by depriving them of the insights and visions of other human beings. The Prophet Muhammad said that he had come to bring a "Middle Way" of religious life that shunned extremes, and Qaradawi thinks that the current extremism in some quarters of the Islamic world is alien to the Muslim spirit and will not last. Islam is a religion of peace, as the Prophet had shown when he made an unpopular treaty with the Quraysh at Hudaybiyyah, a feat which the Quran calls "a great victory."[3] The West, he insists, must learn to recognize the Muslims' right to live their religion and, if they choose, to incorporate the Islamic ideal in their polity. They have to appreciate that there is more than one way of life. Variety benefits the whole world. God gave human beings the right and ability to choose, and some may opt for a religious way of life—including an Islamic state—while others prefer the secular ideal.

"It is better for the West that Muslims should be religious," Qaradawi argues, "hold to their religion, and try to be moral."[4] He raises an important point. Many Western people are also becoming uncomfortable about the absence of spirituality in their lives. They do not necessarily want to return to pre-modern religious lifestyles or to conventionally institutional faith. But there is a growing appreciation that, at its best, religion has helped human beings to cultivate decent values. Islam kept the notions of social justice, equality, tolerance and practical compassion in the forefront of the Muslim conscience for centuries. Muslims did not always live up to these ideals and frequently found difficulty in incarnating them in their social and political institutions. But the struggle to achieve this was for centuries the mainspring of Islamic spirituality. Western people must become aware that it is in their interests too that Islam remains healthy and strong.

The West has not been wholly responsible for the extreme forms of Islam, which have cultivated a violence that violates the most sacred canons of religion. But the West has certainly contributed to this development and, to assuage the fear and despair that lies at the root of all fundamentalist vision, should cultivate a more accurate appreciation of Islam in the third Christian millennium.