

Peace With Islam

Floy E. Doull
Memorial University
fdoull@gmail.com

Introduction

Two dominant and conflicting theses concerning world order have emerged since the end of the Cold War. They have found expression most directly and perhaps naively in the writings of two American political thinkers, Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington. But the theses are far more widespread, far more divisive on the world scene, if given their full import. Under their rubric fall the differences between the European Union and the United States in matters pertaining to war and peace, for example.

The first thesis was expressed by Fukuyama in an essay simply titled “The End of History?”, published in an obscure American journal in 1989.¹ By the “end of history”, Fukuyama does not mean the end of events of this world, however momentous they might be, but the end of ideologies governing political and social organization which ultimately produce the events of the world.² This “end of history” has been achieved through the success of liberal democracy as victorious over all other ideologies, most significantly over fascism³ and communism. It is scarcely deniable that economic liberalism, “globalization” in contemporary currency, is pervasive. What Fukuyama maintains is that political liberalism, where the state “recognizes and protects through a system of laws man’s universal right to freedom” and consequently where the state exists only with the consent of the governed, inevitably follows economic liberalism. Fascism and communism, the last bastions of opposition to liberalism, showed themselves to be self-destructive, the former in its colossal failure in World War II both materially and ideally, the latter as it imploded economically and spiritually in the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Fukuyama asks, in the face of the collapse of fascism and communism, whether there are any other competing ideologies left or, what amounts to the same thing, whether there is something wanting in liberalism which another ideology might provide. He considers religious fundamentalism – Christian, Jewish and Muslim – briefly, attesting, he thinks, to the “spiritual vacuity” of liberal consumer societies, and while he recognizes this flaw in liberal secularity, he

¹*National Interest*, No. 16 (Summer 1989), followed in 1992 by *The End of History and the Last Man*, New York.. Henceforth the article will be “End of History”.

²See his “Reply to my Critics” in the subsequent issue of *National Interest* (Fall, 1989). Henceforth “Reply”.

³Fascism he defines as “any organized ultra nationalist movement with universalistic pretensions”, e.g. imperial Japan which sought to dominate its neighbours. “End of History”, n. 11.

does not think religiously based societies could be successful, at least not in the West.⁴ If not religion, what of nationalism and other racial or ethnic ideologies: not the benign form of a cultural nostalgia but a thoroughgoing, systematic nationalism, arising from a desire for independence from some other dominant race or ethnic group. “While they may constitute a source of conflict for liberal societies, this conflict does not arise from liberalism itself so much as from the fact that the liberalism in question is incomplete.”⁵ And while it is impossible *a priori* to rule out new more comprehensive ideologies or hidden contradictions in liberal democracy, two centuries of success suggest otherwise.

He considers finally the implications of the thesis of the “end of history” for international relations. Post-historical states, the liberal democracies of the West who have reached their end, can be assumed to be preoccupied with a growing “Common Marketization” in international relations, the preoccupations of the countries of postwar Western Europe, “precisely those flabby, prosperous, self-satisfied, inward-looking, weak-willed states whose grandest project was nothing more heroic than the creation of the Common Market.”⁶ This does not mean the end of international conflict because there remain states still in history who might rise up against each other, or against post-historical states – ethnic and national violence, terrorism, wars of national liberation. But large-scale war and large states still in the grip of history are what is passing away. It is, Fukuyama muses, a rather sad thing too: “The struggle for recognition, the willingness to risk one’s life for a purely abstract goal, the worldwide ideological struggle that called forth daring, courage, imagination, and idealism, will be replaced by economic calculation, the endless solving of technical problems, environmental concerns, and the satisfaction of sophisticated consumer demands. In the post-historical period there will be neither art nor philosophy, just the perpetual caretaking of the museum of human history.”⁷ In the rejoinder to the critics of his essay, Fukuyama returns to these sentiments, stating his unflagging support for liberalism and his passionate belief in the superiority of liberal democracy over any other political order, yet aware also that “liberal states do not refer their citizens to higher aims beyond the responsibilities of general civic-mindedness ... This failure to address the question of the content of the good life is of course why liberalism works, but it also means that the vacuum that constitutes our freedom can be filled with anything: sloth and self-indulgence as well as moderation and courage, desire for wealth and preoccupation with commercial gain as well as love of reflection and pursuit of beauty, banality alongside spirituality ... there is a side of man that despises a riskless life, that seeks danger and heroism and sacrifice.”⁸

From the principle of freedom that inspires liberal democracy, there must be a separation of Church and State; otherwise, the state would retain an element of coercion and man would not be free in it. This might be interpreted, perhaps naively, as simply that the state is open alike to all religions, that “each is permitted to worship his maker after his own judgment”, in the eloquent words of John Tyler, tenth President of the United States.⁹ Such separation has been interpreted

⁴Only Islam offers a theocratic state as an alternative to liberal democracy and “it is hard to believe that the movement will take on any universal significance,” he says!

⁵“End of History”, 13.

⁶*Ibid.*, 5.

⁷*Ibid.*, 18.

⁸*Ibid.*, 28.

⁹“The United States have ventured upon a great and noble experiment, which is believed to have been hazarded in the absence of all previous precedent – that of total separation of Church and State. No religious establishment by

less benignly as hostility to religion and all morality associated with religion. But, as will appear in this paper, liberal democracy is itself a uniquely Christian invention. There is consequently something wanting to liberal democracy, for what is essential to it leaves its citizens adrift in a sea of possibilities, noble and ignoble, as Fukuyama recognized.

The second and opposite thesis, expressed by Huntington, first appeared in an article in *Foreign Affairs*, Summer, 1993, "The Clash of Civilizations".¹⁰ From the wars of religion culminating in the Thirty Years War which ended with the Peace of Westphalia (1648) to the wars of kings and princes ending with the French Revolution and its aftermath¹¹, to nineteenth century conflicts between nation states¹², these giving way with the Russian Revolution to ideological wars – liberal democracy and fascism, Nazism, communism – the history of conflict in the modern world, is not over as Fukuyama supposed. Rather, wars within Western civilization will be succeeded by conflicts between "the West and the Rest"¹³, clashes great and small between "civilizations"¹⁴, broad cultural entities usually encompassing several nations with perhaps one as center, having a common culture and usually a common religion. States formerly defined by ideology are disintegrating, to be replaced by communities defined by culture including ethnicity and religion, where former animosities against those of a different culture reappear as in the break-up of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. Civilizational identity is forged in opposition and hostility to an "other". Western civilization is at the peak of its power, posing an unintended threat to other civilizations as it naively pursues its economic advantage and cultural expansion.

Huntington counters Fukuyama's sanguine conviction that economic and political liberalism are ultimately irresistible with the observation that Western culture differs fundamentally from what prevails in non-Western cultures. "Western ideas of individualism, liberalism, constitutionalism, human rights, equality, liberty, rule of law, democracy, free markets, the separation of church and state, often have little resonance in Islamic, Confucian, Japanese, Hindu, Buddhist or Orthodox cultures,"¹⁵ and "the values that are most important in the West are least important worldwide."¹⁶ Moreover, Western attempts to spread freedom and

law exists among us. The conscience is left free for all restraint and each is permitted to worship his Maker after his own judgment. The offices of Government are open alike to all. No tithes are levied to support an established Hierarchy, not is the fallible judgment of man set up as the sure and infallible creed of faith. The Mohammedan, if he will come among us would have the privilege guaranteed to him by the Constitution to worship according to the Koran; and the East Indian might erect a shrine to Brahma if it so pleased him ... the Hebrew persecuted and down trodden in other regions takes up his abode among us with none to make him afraid ... and the Aegis of the government is over him to defend and protect him. Such is the great experiment which we have tried, and such are the happy fruits which have resulted from it; our system of free government would be imperfect without it." In a letter dated July 10, 1843, quoted in Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage", *Atlantic Monthly*, Vol. 266, No. 3 (September, 1990).

¹⁰Followed by his book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York, 1996. Henceforth *Clash*. The article henceforth "Clash".

¹¹Hegel describes Napoleon during the Battle of Jena in 1806 as "the World Spirit on horseback".

¹²Huntington quotes R.R. Palmer: "The wars of kings were over; the wars of peoples had begun."

¹³"The central axis of world politics in the future is likely to be ...the conflict between 'the West and the Rest' and the responses of non-Western civilizations to Western power and values." "Clash", 21.

¹⁴The world's "civilizations", which number "seven or eight" in Huntington's reckoning, include Western, Confucian, Japanese, Islamic, Hindu, Slavic-Orthodox, Latin American and possibly African.

¹⁵"Clash", 30.

¹⁶"Clash", 45, quoting a study by Harry C. Triandis.

equality abroad, to promote free elections, for example, can backfire with quite undesirable consequences. He notes that in many Arab countries, as they reach new levels of economic and social development, autocracy is giving way to democratically elected governments which have given new power to Islamic movements. “In the Arab world, in short, Western democracy strengthens anti-Western political forces.”¹⁷ More generally, economic globalization and the spread of Western culture are interpreted by many non-Western communities as simply the latest form of Western, or specifically American, imperialism. The United Nations Security Council and the International Monetary Fund routinely promote Western interests in the name of the world community.¹⁸ “The very phrase ‘the world community’ has become the euphemistic collective noun (replacing ‘the Free World’) to give global legitimacy to actions reflecting the interests of the United States and other Western powers.”¹⁹

The civilization most vigorously resistant to foreign incursion – especially Western incursion – is Islam. Unlike other civilizations which are situated in a specific territory, Muslims form the majority in several countries and significant minorities all over the globe. The *umma*, the worldwide community of Muslims at any given time, is a “civilization” in Huntington’s scheme: it encompasses a religion but more than a religion, a total integration of all human interests of its members. It is not limited to a nation, ethnicity or locale. Where its members do occupy a particular state, Huntington says “it has bloody borders”, violent conflicts with its neighbours (including Muslim neighbours).²⁰ Wherever the *umma* is present, it is not absorbable in larger cultures. Muslim people are “indigestible” in Huntington’s description, they do not easily assimilate. Dividing the world into *dar al-islam*, the “House of Submission” and *dar al-harb*, the “House of Warfare”, Muslims are inoculated against those outside the *umma*, and even when they have immigrated to a foreign culture, as in Western Europe and North America, they live in self-imposed isolation from their hosts.

Huntington maintains that Christianity will soon be overtaken by Islam as the dominant religion. Though this thesis is disputed by specialists on global religion²¹ the point that Western Christianity is in significant decline over against a resurgent Islam is undeniable. Huntington’s principal thesis in this context is that Western domination economically and politically is bound to recede, to show itself as a mere “two-hundred-year Western blip on the world economy.”²² Attacking Fukuyama head on, he declares, “The West won the world not by superiority of its ideas or values or religion ... but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence. Westerners often forget this fact; non-Westerners never do.”²³ The decline of Western power will

¹⁷When the “free” election in Algeria resulted in a victory for the extremists, the military saw the need to take over, with continuing disastrous results.

¹⁸The Security Council legitimated the first Gulf War, demanded that Libya turn over the Lockerbie bombing suspects and imposed sanctions when Libya refused, examples Huntington provides.

¹⁹“Clash”, 27.

²⁰“Clash”, 20. In *Clash*, 256, he provides statistics to justify the assertion that “wherever one looks along the perimeter of Islam, Muslims have problems living peacefully with their neighbors.”

²¹Notably by Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom*, Oxford, 2002, who highlights the massive growth of Christian populations in the global south.

²²*Clash*, 88.

²³ *Clash*, 51.

be followed by a retreat of Western culture, for even as non-Western civilizations increasingly develop and prosper, "...modernization does not equal Westernization."²⁴

Non-Western civilizations have attempted to become modern without becoming Western. To date only Japan has fully succeeded in this quest. Non-Western civilizations will continue to attempt to acquire the wealth, technology, skills, machines and weapons that are part of being modern. They will also attempt to reconcile this modernity with their traditional culture and values. Their economic and military strength relative to the West will increase. Hence the West will increasingly have to accommodate these non-Western modern civilizations whose power approaches that of the West but whose values and interests differ significantly from those of the West.²⁵

Following the events of September 11, 2001, Huntington's anticipation of civilizational clash and violent confrontation especially with Islam seems remarkably prescient. As Stanley Kurtz writes, "This is Samuel P. Huntington's moment."²⁶ If Western leaders including British Prime Minister Blair and President Bush publicly proclaim that present strife is only against an extremist fringe and not the Muslim world itself, Huntington demurs.²⁷ He gives this further account:

The underlying problem for the West is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power. The problem for Islam is not the CIA or the U.S. Department of Defense. It is the West, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the universality of their culture.

Fukuyama's optimistic vision of a universal end of history in a worldwide embrace of "modernity" characterized by liberal institutions of democracy, individual freedom and a free economy is countered by Huntington's dark predictions of a clash of civilizations, Western liberal democracy just one among several alternatives at war with one another. Huntington predicts the non-viability of Western domination while Fukuyama expresses its total victory in the long run. Huntington warns of the dangers of Western arrogance while Fukuyama is confident that all cultures will come to embrace Western values. Fukuyama's vision suffers from the boredom with which it ends, "... not with a bang but a whimper," a matter not lost among thinking non-Westerners.²⁸ Huntington envisions conflict and violence of culture against culture, driven by religion, a return in another form to the wars of religion which ended with Westphalia – wars seemingly without end. "Wherever one turns, the world is at odds with itself."²⁹

²⁴ "If not Civilizations, What?", *Foreign Affairs* Nov./Dec., 1993, online at <http://www.foreignaffairs.org/>

²⁵ "Clash", 49.

²⁶ "The Future of 'History'", *Policy Review*, N. 113, available online at <http://policyreview.org/JUN02/kurtz.html>.| Henceforth, Kurtz.

²⁷ "Muslim bellicosity and violence are late-twentieth-century facts which neither Muslims nor non-Muslims can deny." *Clash*, 259.

²⁸ As Negrzad Boroujerdi observes, "Many people contend that Western modernity resembles a Faustian bargain in which you have to sacrifice your variant and traditional familial, tribal, ethnic, religious and national identities/attachments for the tediously monotonous materialism of the present age." "Iranian Islam and the Faustian Bargain of Western Modernity", -----.

²⁹ "If not civilizations..."

These two positions are in wonderful dialectical relation. Confronting the same issue and coming to diametrically opposed conclusions, neither can be refuted by the other. Neither position is falsifiable – Huntington’s because it is too nuanced with exceptions and ‘wiggle room’³⁰, Fukuyama because he can (and does) appeal to the longer view, an eventual triumph of western values.³¹ As Stanley Kurtz observes, “The books [*The End of History* and *The Clash of Civilizations*] are at once complementary and irreconcilable. Taken together they frame our current perplexity.”³²

What is our current perplexity? The question is can we in Western society live in peace with Islam. From our side, democratic institutions and respect for individual freedom require that we embrace Muslims among us, even as we fear we are harbouring some among them who would destroy us. From the Muslim side, the question is whether Islam can accept those outside the *umma*, its opposite the *dar al-harb*, as its equal, without succumbing to it. The reflections here will examine the relation of religion to secularity, how the Christian religion can be understood as the foundation of Western secularity, and under what circumstances Islam can support a secularity not foreign to itself but one which could tolerate Western civilization. Although the discussion here centers principally on the different relations of Islam and the Christian religion to secularity, the Jewish religion is drawn into the argument for the clarification it provides in understanding Islam.

I. Judaism, Islam And The Christian Religion

The UN “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”, approved on December 10, 1948, states that we are all entitled to a set of human rights “without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status”. Among the rights set forth are the civil and political rights to life, liberty, security, protection against torture and arbitrary arrest, equal protection of the law, freedom of movement, participation in government, religious freedom, freedom of assembly and association, and ownership of property. The declaration offers no philosophical justification for these rights, simply stating that “the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights”. Jacques Maritain in 1951 referred to this international consensus as a kind of “secular faith”.³³ But after some years, all three religious traditions we shall examine here have claimed these rights as rooted in their traditions.³⁴ We shall be in a position

³⁰.As Glenn Perry observes, “It becomes impossible to use facts to refute a generalization whose advocate himself proclaims that it is ‘highly simplified’, and that it ‘omits many things, distorts some things, and obscures others’ (p.29).” “Huntington and his Critics: the West and Islam – Samuel H. Huntington”, *Arab Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 24 (Winter 2002), 34.

³¹.A month after 9-11, Fukuyama wrote, “We remain at the end of history ...”

³². Kurtz.

³³. Cf. Robert Traer, “Religious Communities in the Struggle for Human Rights”, *Christian Century*, September 28, 1988, 835.

³⁴. Cf. *Judaism and Human Rights*, ed. Milton Konvitz, 1972, and Rabbi Daniel Polish in *Human Rights in Religious Traditions*, 1982, who states that the idea of human rights “derives in the Jewish tradition from the basic theological affirmation of Jewish faith.” John Warwick Montgomery, *Human rights and Human Dignity: an Apologetic for the Transcendent Perspective*, 1986, provides a comprehensive argument that the rights set forth in the Universal Declaration are derived from inerrant teachings of the Bible. And in 1981, the Islamic Foundation adopted and

subsequently to assess these claims. But first a brief treatment of the differences of these three religions, which unabashedly owes a great deal to Hegel's treatment of these matters, as does the whole position of the paper.

1. *Judaism*

For religion to be possible there must be a *difference* of God and finite spirit, and there must be a *relationship*. Thus, deism is not a religion – it expresses no relationship. What kind of religion is Judaism? Judaism is that “stern, stubborn, incorruptible witness to divine-human nonunion”³⁵, and yet it is a religion. In spite of the absolute difference of God and man, this is not irrelevance (as in deism) or indifference. There is still union of human and divine, as the longing of the soul for God, for conformity to the will of God, or the prophet recognizing God as Lord, himself as servant. But Judaism is antidote to those who would deny either human finitude or the Divine infinity. God is “infinite power” in Judaism precisely as power *over* the finite; this infinite power as divine is not then mere necessity but the “power of wisdom”, and what it produces is a work of goodness and justice.³⁶ Human life participates in the infinite divine purpose, knowing that divine alone is what is actual. It participates precisely as a *finite* witness to the divine-human nonunion, and for this reason such witness could only have reality in the life of a particular people. To affirm the hidden unity of human and divine in which this difference is a moment is beyond Judaism. But that moment of difference known immediately could only be particular. Job is symbolic of God's whole dealings with the Jews – a defense of the finite spirit as well as its overcoming, the spirit which doubts and in expressing the doubt overthrows the doubt. “Job is guiltless; he finds his misfortune unjustifiable and so is dissatisfied...He is dissatisfied precisely because he does not regard necessity as blind fate ... The critical point, then, occurs when this dissatisfaction and despondency has to submit to absolute, pure confidence. The submission is the end point. That trust in God is none other than the consciousness of this harmony between power and wisdom.”³⁷

Judaism thus holds together even in their contradictoriness the knowledge that God is the creator of all and that God is the God of a particular people. “This is the striking contrast, infinitely difficult, the most difficult of all. On the one hand God is universal, the God of heaven and earth, the God of all humanity, absolute wisdom and universal power; on the other hand, his purpose and operation in the spiritual world are so limited as to be confined to just this one family, just this one people.”³⁸ But “it is this people that worship him, and so he is the God of this people, he is its Lord in fact.”³⁹ There is nothing here to take glory in, or to boast about, “the

published the “Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights”, which has become sufficiently authoritative to be cited in an Islamic court decision in Pakistan; it supports the UN Declaration, justifying and defining these rights from Islamic Law and the *Qur' n*.

³⁵.Emil Fackenheim, “Hegel and Judaism: a Flaw in the Hegelian Mediation”, *The Legacy of Hegel: Proceedings of the Marquette Hegel Symposium, 1970, 1973*, 164.

³⁶.Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Peter C. Hodgson, California, 1984, ii, 427-9 [1824 Lectures]. Henceforth LPR; “Hegel and Judaism”, 164-5. “What has been differentiated has no right to be, it is outside the one, it is a manifold and therefore a limited, finite thing whose destination is *not* to be; that it nonetheless *is*, is the goodness of God.” “Justice in turn is the manifestation of the nullity or ideality of this finite being, it is the fact that this finite being is not genuine independence -- this manifestation of God as power is what endows finite things with their right.” 675 [1827 Lectures]

³⁷ LPR, iii, 681-2.

³⁸.LPR, ii, 436 (1824 Lectures).

³⁹.LPR, ii, 684.

enjoyment uniquely confined to this one people, and the relationship of this one people to the all-powerful, omniscient God.”⁴⁰ There is no sense of obligation to bring others to this religion, no proselytizing spirit in the Jewish people. All peoples -- Jews and Gentiles -- are called upon to glorify his name [Ps. 117:1-2], but this remains only an idle wish, not a goal as later it will be for Islam. It engenders no fanaticism, as it will in Islam. “Fanaticism is found among the Jews, but only where their possessions or their religion comes under attack ...”⁴¹

2. *Islam*

What kind of religion is Islam? This is the subject of a recent article by Alain Besançon⁴². He observes that with respect to Islam the churches in Europe -- and here it is the same -- are inclined to an “indulgent ecumenism”. We share, after all, at least these elements in common: Islam is a monotheism, grounded like Christianity and Judaism, in a divine revelation; its revelation is recorded in a book, the *Qur’ n*, “biblical” as it were as is the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament; and Islam claims a common descent with us from the biblical patriarch Abraham. Moreover, Christians might remind themselves that the *Qur’ n* makes mention of Jesus and Mary and accords them an honoured status. Is Islam, as Judaism and Christianity, to be regarded by Christians and Jews also as a “revealed religion”?

In traditional Christian theology, “revealed religion” is distinguished from “natural religion”, the latter more generic and primitive than the former. Those who possess “natural religion” are bound by natural law and by the universal morality expressed simply as “Do good and avoid evil”. In rabbinic theology, they fall under the covenant between God and Noah, struck with those who survived the flood, that is, all humanity (*Genesis*, ch.9). They may have some elements of a true idea of God even within the framework of a pagan religion. Then God chose from this common humanity, in the person of Abraham, a special people with whom he made another covenant, to whom in the person of Moses He revealed himself as *Yahveh*. These Chosen People are bound by the Law of Moses and know God as the one eternal God, as the entirely self-determined, self-sufficient substantiality who is because he is. Finally, God established a new covenant through the person of his incarnate Son Jesus, the complete revelation of God, a covenant which will finally extend to all mankind.⁴³ Thus, Judaism and Christianity are ‘revealed religions’.

But what kind of religion is Islam? After all, it proclaims Allah as One, eternal, almighty, beneficent, all knowing. It claims to have received a revelation, one which moreover it claims is comprehensive of Judaism and Christianity, for Islam shares with them a common descent from Abraham and acknowledges Adam, Noah, Moses, David, Jesus too as true “messengers” (only Mohammed is God’s prophet); and the *Qur’ n* makes mention of Jesus and Mary according them an honoured status. Besançon argues persuasively that the *Qur’ n* cannot be regarded by Jews

⁴⁰.LPR, ii, 437.

⁴¹.LPR, ii, 438.

⁴² “What Kind of Religion is Islam?”, *Commentary*, May, 2004, 42-48. Alain Besançon, the renowned French Roman Catholic historian, has written extensively on the what he regards as a false interpretation of Islam as he finds it in the Roman Catholic Church in general and the Church in France in particular. He especially singles out these two theses: that the *Qur’ n* is a scripture in a certain continuity with Judeo-Christian scriptures, and that Islam falls within the Judeo-Christian Abrahamic tradition.

⁴³.Besançon, 42-43.

and Christians as continuous with their scriptures: Abraham of *Genesis* is not the Ibrahim of the *Qur' n*, Moses is not Moussa⁴⁴; Jesus, as Issa in the *Qur' n*, appears out of place and time and without reference to Israel. Mary (Mariam) is the sister of Aaron. Issu gives the same message as the earlier prophets, Islam, i.e. the oneness of God (certainly not the Trinity). He is neither “the Son of God” nor a mediator – in Islam there is no mediation. Muhammad’s ignorance about the elements of the Christian religion is easily explained: there was no translation of the New Testament into Arabic available to him.⁴⁵ He relied solely on oral accounts, clearly with elements of fanciful apocrapha and heretical additions.⁴⁶

The message of Islam was infused into Adam, repeated by the subsequent “messengers” to particular people, and finally, because men forget the message, it was dictated to Muhammad, messenger and Prophet. Only he received a mission to all mankind. The books of the earlier messengers had become falsified, it was claimed, the writings manipulated and the meaning distorted. Thus the true Torah, the authentic Gospel is found only in the *Qur' n*, and Muslims are the true followers of Jesus.⁴⁷ Whatever is true, then, is found in the *Qur' n*, and if it is not found there then it is false. Hegel gives this as the Muslim justification for the destruction of the noble Alexandrian library: Omar is reported to have said, “These books either contain what is in the Koran or something else. In either case they are superfluous.”⁴⁸

Since the *Qur' n* is neither continuous nor consistent with the scriptures of Jews and Christians, they could not regard it as a true revelation of God. But is Islam then some heretical version of one or the other, or should it be regarded rather as a “natural religion”? It has in common with natural religions a sense of God as immediately evident, so that one would have to be perverse or insane not to believe that God (or the gods) exists; one does not need faith or a revelation to know the divine, but only to know that the divine is One. Furthermore, Islamic ethics has much in common with pagan ethics. “There is a Muslim spirit of *carpe diem*, a this-worldly contentment that often fascinated Christians who may have seen in it a dim echo of the ancient, classical world. There is nothing like the doctrine of original sin in Islam ...”⁴⁹ Moreover, eternal life as described in the *Qur' n* is not a participation in the divine life, but rather a return to Eden, “those are they brought nigh the Throne, in the Gardens of Delight (a throng of the ancients and how few of the later folk) upon close-wrought couches reclining upon them, set face to face, immortal youths going round about them with goblets, and ewers, and a cup from a spring (no brows throbbing, no intoxication); and such fruits as they shall choose, and such flesh of fowl as they desire, and wide-eyed houris as the likeness of hidden pearls, a recompense for

⁴⁴.Abraham is the common father first of Israel and then of Christians, but this is Adam for Muslims. Ibrahim builds the Ka’ba temple and institutes the pilgrimage to Mecca. *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴⁵.Cf. Samuel Hugh Moffatt, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, New York, 1992, 330: “But after at least three hundred years in Arabia, Christians, whether Calcedonian, Nestorian, or Monophysite, had made no translation of the New Testament into Arabic.” A tradition relates that an Arab prince ordered a translation around the year 635, but “the earliest surviving fragments cannot be dated earlier than the ninth century.” Moffatt, 363, n.21.

⁴⁶.The *Qur' n* denies that Christ died on the cross, for example. He was, it states, rescued from the cross and another put in his place.

⁴⁷.Besançon, 44-5. This inclination to deny the truth of whatever stands opposed to the *Qur' n* is frustrating to one who would wish to examine these differences objectively; it also accounts for the difficulty in converting Muslims, and even for moving them beyond their medieval mores and convictions. Dialogue is only possible with Muslims who have moved beyond the literal acceptance of their scriptures.

⁴⁸.*Philosophy of History*, 360.

⁴⁹.Besançon, 46.

that they laboured. Therein they shall hear no idle talk, no cause of sin, only the saying 'Peace, Peace!'” (*Qur’ n*, 56:15). These are the very elements notoriously promised to the martyr/suicide bomber.

Among the ninety-nine names for Allah, one will not find “Father”, or any personal name, for God in Islam is completely indeterminate. “God is himself the perfectly undefined, His activity is altogether abstract, ...the particulars produced thereby are perfectly contingent... The activity of God is thus represented as perfectly devoid of reason.”⁵⁰ In the existent world nothing is fixed, nothing sensible exists by nature, the nature of this or that body does not entail its accidents. Rather, God creates all accidents instantaneously, without causal mediation. Only God is substantially; everything else is devoid of necessity, is absolutely changeable, changed at every instant. For example, we have not really dyed the dress red when we believe we’re coloured it with red dye; rather, at that instant God has made the red colour the property of the dress, and continuously recreates the red colour instant by instant.⁵¹ Scientific knowledge is also an accident of this kind: we do not know today what we knew yesterday. Hegel says, “All we can discern here is the complete dissolution of all interdependence, of everything that pertains to rationality. ...[God’s activity] is wholly abstract, and that is why the differentiating that has been posited by means of it is wholly contingent.... The Arabs developed sciences and philosophy in this way, where all is caprice.”⁵²

The *Qur’ n* itself is similarly unsystematic. There is no doctrine beyond “there is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his Prophet.” Rather, it tells men what they are to do, what to avoid, and paints the joys of heaven and pains of hell in vivid sensual images. At times polemical, at times oracular, it is also (especially in its earlier chapters) full of visionary enthusiasm. To a Western mind it leaves an impression of great confusion, repetition, sometimes inconsistency. Its chapters (*s ra*) can be variously ordered, and pass from one subject to another without obvious transitions. When attention is given to how it was composed, its structure (or lack of it) becomes more intelligible. Muhammad claimed that it was dictated to him piecemeal, over a long period of time, and he in turn repeated its elements to his scribes. Sometimes these repetitions were immediate, sometimes only when he later recalled them. He sometimes had bits inserted and at other times erased or ‘abrogated’ elements. And it is even admitted in the *Qur’ n* that Allah caused him to forget some revelations.(87:7) But the *Qur’ n* is also poetry, “bold and tender in a way already reminiscent of later Spanish chivalry”, as Hegel describes it, and must be read as poetry. The *Qur’ n* is written in a tongue which Albert Hourani calls “The Language of Poetry”⁵³, a common poetic language which emerged out of the dialects of Arabic.

Islam is a *positive* religion, as are Judaism and Christianity, that is, having scriptures which are taken as God’s revelation to the believer; and after a period of time, having a developed doctrine which measures who is a true believer, thus having a certain externality. Everything,

⁵⁰. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, ed. Haldane and Simson, III, 32. What is said here is true of the Asharite tradition, the tradition of the vast majority of Muslims to this day. It is not true of the Mutazilites. For their difference, see *infra*.

⁵¹. These elements are reported by Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, 1.71, quoted in Hegel, “Arabic Philosophy” in *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (ed. Brown), 37.

⁵². Brown, 38-9.

⁵³. Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, London, 1991, 12.

says Hegel, must initially come to us from outside. Civil laws are something positive, are simply given to us by legislators, are binding on us at first simply because they are the laws of the land. But when we have thought about the law, when we find it rational that crime should be punished, then the positivity of the law becomes our own, is valid for us rationally. The rules we impose on our children, that they must tell the truth, be polite, brush their teeth, over time become their own rules and are no longer imposed externally. The positivity of religion, its doctrines and moral precepts, need not detract from its character as rational simply because it is first posited in scriptures and doctrine. But if a religion is positive *according to its nature* then it has nothing rational in it. The Jewish religion has elements that seem to be irremediably positive: as Hegel observes, the most trifling regulations, those for example concerning the arrangement of the tabernacle, or those pertaining to sacrifices and other ceremonies, are given as divine command: “God says...” , and these are side by side with the completely rational Law of Moses. But the Torah presents also passages of the highest rationality: the account of creation, the Fall, God’s characterization of Himself as “I am”. Apart from its central thesis, that God is One and thus Spirit, the *Qur’ n* presents Islam as wholly *positive*. Allah can turn night into day, undo what has been done, his activity presented as utterly contingent and devoid of reason.

3. The Christian Religion

The Christian religion is positive insofar as it has been given to humanity externally, from without, in history. For the Christian, it appeared “in the fullness of time”, as emerging out of the great spiritual needs of all mankind, by then entirely manifest when Christ was born into the world. But what was revealed is that Christ himself, the one who reveals God’s nature to mankind, belongs as Son of God to the nature of God. Christians believe this not on the strength of miracles or through some dictation of an angel, but by the “witness of the spirit”, as wholly commensurate with their spirit. Christ proclaims the unity of human and divine and is Himself that unity. The Christian likewise believes and witnesses to that same unity. Thus, the content of the Christian religion, though positive as given to the believer, demands that it become his own, an object of thought. It is not simply revealed but revelatory. Thus there arises out of this faith in its earliest centuries the need of an *intellectus fidei*, a need that cannot fully be satisfied until, after long centuries in which the faith has informed the institutions and historical life of its people, a new philosophy equal to the task arises.

St. Paul’s *Epistles* might be thought the first elements of that *intellectus fidei*. His resolution of the controversies in the early Christian communities was to a higher authority than could be tolerated in a fanatical positivism: “The letter killeth, the spirit gives life.” Patristic theology, although prompted by heresies which would undermine the unity of faith of Christians, was “the explication and discovery to the Church of what it thinks.”⁵⁴ It is in this spirit that the Church discovers the Doctrine of the Trinity.⁵⁵

In the revelation that Christ is the Son of God, that “I and the Father are one”, known to Christians by the “witness of the Spirit”, the Spirit whom the Father would send only with the death of Jesus, there is given in inchoate form the doctrine of Trinity which the Church Fathers must render intelligible. Because the Spirit is present to the community of Christ’s followers – is

⁵⁴James Doull, “The Christian Origin of Contemporary Institutions”, Part II, *Dionysius*, Vol. VIII (1984), 79.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, 81-103.

present to the human spirit therefore – they can see “Indeed this man was the Son of God”, that this man Jesus is the revelation of God and is himself divine. This they know through the Spirit, the divinity in the believing community, and as the self-movement within God himself. If metaphorically they give names to the moments of this self-movement – Father, Son, Spirit – it is the theologians who must give precision to the orthodox belief that God brings forth from Himself his own opposite, his other in every way equal to himself, and knowing himself in his other, loves his other in himself and himself in his other. God therefore has an inner trinitarian life of the outpouring of himself and the reconciliation of what he has brought forth with himself. God is not merely being but living, actual, self-determined (thus free) being.

Without God’s self-revelation as trinity of divine relationships, hence of persons, in an infinite unity, given to the believer in the witness of the indwelling Spirit, he could not know this. But once it is his, reason can grasp that God must necessarily enjoy this trinitarian life, that God could not be God as isolated and alone. God must be triune. When God creates a world, it too is the self-determination, self-revelation of God, in which He knows himself. When out of the slime of that world, God brings forth man made in his image, that same trinitarian life the believer comes to know as also his life. The world which confronts him as other and external is his own externality, which in knowing he comes to know himself. But only modern philosophy understood systematically (in Hegel’s sense) is able to give precision to this.

II. Islam And Christendom: Religion In The World

Since our interest here is to explore how we in the West, Christian civilization at least in origin and inspiration, might live in peace with Muslims, we turn from the differences of these religions to their manifestation in the world. It might be noted that, after the Bar Kokhba revolt and their expulsion from Palestine in 135 AD, Jews in the Diaspora of the centuries which followed lived according to the principle first articulated by Samuel, the rabbinic authority in Babylon where many of the Jews had fled after the exile: “The law of the land is the law.” Jews regarded themselves as guests in any country where they resided in the Diaspora, and were obligated to adhere to the host country’s laws. Until, as was their fervent hope, they were able to return to the land of their forefathers, there could be no civilizational expression which was properly Jewish. Let us move then to the Muslims and the Christians.

“For the first thousand years or so of the long struggle between the two world systems, the Muslims on the whole had the upper hand.”⁵⁶ In the early centuries Muslims were largely indifferent to the “infidels”, whom they regarded as uncivilized barbarians. This was by any objective measure largely the case. While barbaric hordes were pillaging and plundering across Europe, Islam was the greatest military and economic power in the world. Its armies out of Arabia conquered Syria, Egypt, Palestine, North Africa, in the seventh century (its first century), then in the eighth century it conquered Spain and Portugal, and invaded France where the Muslims were finally turned back by Charles Martel at the Battle of Tours in 732. But they went on in the ninth century to conquer Sicily and invade the Italian peninsula, sacking Ostia and Rome. Islam had highly developed arts and sciences, preserved Greek science and philosophy, possessed a commercial and communications network throughout Europe, Asia and Africa. Even as

⁵⁶.Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East*, London, 1995, 274.

Christendom gradually emerged as a potential military rival to Islam, Muslims' sense of themselves was that civilization and culture were one with Islam itself, that is, they understood their superiority to be directly linked to their religion. "The religion of Islam is essentially a religion of success; it is a winner's religion", writes Daniel Pipes. "In the year 1000, say, Islam was on top no matter what index of worldly success one looks at – health, literacy, culture, power. This association become customary and assumed: to be a Muslim was to be a favourite of God, a winner."⁵⁷

1. *The Success of Islam*

How did this happen? There were a host of external conditions: the decline of the Mediterranean world because of barbaric invasions, agricultural failures and shrinking urban markets; the weakening of the Byzantine and Sasanian (Iranian) Empires by epidemics of the plague and long wars; and the indifference of the city dwellers of these two empires who did not care who ruled them as long as they could have a certain security, reasonable taxes and peace. When Muhammad's new movement first appeared in Mecca, it aroused suspicion even in his own tribe. Pressures and perhaps even persecution drove him to leave Mecca for the oasis at Yathrib (renamed Medina, "the city") where he and his followers were welcomed, the migration we know as the *Hijra*. In the Muslim calendar, the year of this migration (622 AD) is the first year in Islam. Here in Medina, Muhammad became a ruler, with political and military power to shore up his spiritual authority. Soon this Muslim city was involved in warfare with Mecca, which he conquered eight years later, establishing Islam there in place of the polytheism he had himself abjured much earlier.⁵⁸ Medina, the *umma* or community, had become a state and would soon be the seat of an empire.

It was inevitable early in its foundation that Islam would be more than a religion, that a separation of 'church and state' would not be appropriate to it. The *Qur' n* enjoins Muslims to "obey God, obey his Prophet, and obey those in authority over you"(4:59). At the death of the Prophet, the question of his successor was controversial, resulting in what came to be the division of Islam itself. First there were the Sunnis, those who believed that prophesy was then completed, and what was required was a secular succession, an ordinary person elected by the *umma* who would rule according to strict Islamic law. Opposed to that view were the Shi'ites who believed in a continuity of prophesy, where succeeding *imams* have access to divine revelation through the "hidden" *imam* working behind the scenes, inspiring them. Thus the division itself has at its heart a conflict between religion and secularity.

The precepts and practices of the Prophet were handed down orally for generations and later written down. These admonitions and examples are revered by most Muslims as extensions of the *Qur' n* and together form the basis of the Holy Law, further interpreted and elaborated by later generations of Islamic jurists, the *mufti*, whose judgments or rulings are the *fatw*. These laws extend to every aspect of Muslim life, domestic, economic, political, social, aesthetic, as

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Â Daniel Pipes, "Distinguishing between Islam and Islamism", *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, June 30, 1998. [<http://www.sullivan-county.com/id3/islamism.htm>]

⁵⁸. *The Middle East*, 52-3.

well as religious.⁵⁹ Thus, all law for the Muslim is divine law revealed by Allah.⁶⁰ This universalism implicit in Muhammad's teaching and practice asserted itself even in his own day: he sent military expeditions to the Byzantine frontier and emissaries to the rulers of the day, calling on them to accept Islam. After his death, his successor, Abu Bakr, created an organized army and the enthusiasm – some might say fanaticism⁶¹ -- of the Muslims, moved by the fervour of their convictions, as also by the prospect of land and wealth, was such that the Near East was remade: the center of political life moved from the rich, populous Fertile Crescent to the small town of Medina on the western edge of the Arabian peninsula.

Two centuries after the death of the Prophet there were two distinct schools of Islamic speculative theology, the Mutazilites who in the 8th century were the first Muslims to apply Greek philosophy to Islamic doctrine, and the Asharites, the “nominalists of Islam”⁶², followers of the 10th century orthodox theologian al-Ashari. Acknowledging the absolute oneness of God, the Mutazilites reasoned therefore that the *Qur' n* could not legitimately be thought the co-eternal word of God, which was the orthodox view, but was rather created. There was place therefore for a realm of truth and morality not derived from religion, a rationality or secularity not simply given in the *Qur' n*. For more than a century the doctrine of the created *Qur' n* was state dogma, proclaimed in 827 under the caliph al-Ma'm n. But in 932, al-Ashari, an established theologian, renounced the Mutazilah, broke the force of their rationalism, and using atomist principles returned to the earlier orthodoxy where God's omnipotence is not bound by morality or causality, and therefore morality cannot be discovered by reason. There is thus nothing true, nothing good, except insofar as it was given in religion. This is the orthodox position of the vast majority of Muslims even today, especially among the Sunnis who account for approximately ninety percent of the Muslim population.⁶³

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.Theologians committed to a “reformed Islam” draw a distinction between portions of the *Qur' n* revealed in Mecca (where Mohammed was strictly a prophet) and those revealed in Medina where he ran a state and his successors an empire. The Medina revelation, they argue, is only one possible application of Mecca's religious and moral principles. We shall return to this subsequently.

⁶⁰.There is a fascinating story recounted by Bernard Lewis of a Muslim visitor to England in the 18th century who left an account of his visit. He described a visit to the House of Commons, whose astonishing function was to make laws and fix penalties for wrongdoers. “Unlike the Muslims, he explained to his readers, the English have not accepted a divine law revealed from heaven, and were therefore reduced to the expedient of making their own laws...” *The Middle East*, London, 1995.

⁶¹.“Fanaticism” is an enthusiasm for something abstract, and in the case of Islam, to have an entirely negative destructive and negative relation to the established order. Cf. Hegel, *Philosophy of History*, 356.

⁶².The apt characterization of Abdolkarim Soroush, foremost Iranian and Islamic political philosopher and theologian.

⁶³.It is for this reason also that the *Qur' n* is recited rather than read. “The individual act of *reading* the Bible constituted an intellectually revolutionary development in that it brought about a crucial transition, which might be described as a transition from rhetoric to hermeneutics. In the Arab world traditional patriarchal culture never promoted the *reading* of the *Qur' n*, even after it became widely available following the introduction of printing in the nineteenth century. To this day it is still recited, chanted, and repeated by heart but not, or rarely, *read*. *Interpretation* has remained the monopoly of specialists or religious officials, whose exegesis, moreover, derives less from the sacred text than traditional commentaries on it.” Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society*, New York and Oxford, 1988, 87; quoted in Mehrzad Boroujerdi, “Can Islam be Secularized?”, *In Transition: Essays on Culture and Identity in the Middle Eastern Society*, ed. M. R. Ghanoonparvar and Faridoun Farrokh, Laredo, TX, 1994, 58.

The Muslim Empire saw the gradual disappearance of unitary government, but nothing seemed to stop its phenomenal growth. In the 8th century, the Muslim population of Iran, Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, Spain was less than 10%; by the 10th century a large part of the population was Muslim. Among the reasons for such success, we should note that Islam was by that time clearly defined, and the line between Muslim and non-Muslim sharply drawn. They had an elaborate system of ritual, doctrine and law. In order to preserve the absoluteness of Islam, the non-Moslem could at best be tolerated within the Moslem milieu. The status of the non-Muslim was therefore precisely defined as inferior in these ways: non-Muslims paid a special poll tax (*jizya*) to live under the protection of a Muslim state; their clothes had to be of a certain kind and certain colours avoided; they could not carry arms or ride horses, but must use donkeys or mules instead; they could not marry Muslim women, their evidence was not accepted against Muslims in Islamic courts; their houses of worship could not be ostentatious nor could they build new ones; they were excluded from positions of power.⁶⁴ Thus there were less than subtle inducements to convert.⁶⁵ Moreover, for those who did convert, there was immediate equality with their Muslim brothers.

Another reason for the phenomenal growth of Islam was that through the conquests Arabic became a universal language. As the language of the *Qur' n*, it was transmitted with the religion. The language of the *Qur' n* was the paradigm of classical Arabic. In the 8th and 9th centuries, lexicography, grammar, literary theory – the sciences of language – were created and studied by those for whom Arabic was a second language. Scholars collected the ancient poetry of Arabia and in the 9th and subsequent centuries poetry itself flourished. Later there was the high literature of a new kind of Persian, written in Arabic script and a vocabulary enriched with Arabic words. The epic poetry recording the history of Iran in pre-Islamic times was revived and written in the new Persian. Muslim countries were not generally interested in their pre-Islamic past.

By the 10th century, there was a recognizable “Islamic World”.⁶⁶ We stand in awe today of its great architecture from Cordoba to Iraq – mosques surrounded by other religious buildings (courthouses, hospitals, hostels for travellers and pilgrims), shrines such as the Ka’ba in Mecca, the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem, the tomb of Abraham at Hebron, Muhammad’s tomb in Medina, and then of course the great palaces (the Alhambra in Granada is much later, a 14th century masterpiece). Walls of public buildings were covered with decorations: those endlessly iterating geometric forms or highly stylized representations of plants and flowers.⁶⁷ The calligrapher’s art held a special significance for Muslims, especially copying words of the *Qur' n* where Allah was revealed to the world.⁶⁸

The great cities of Islam in subsequent centuries were the largest in the western world: Cairo and Baghdad with a quarter of a million inhabitants each were two or three times as large as any city in western Europe. Then there were Cordoba, Granada, Seville in Andalus, Fez and Marrakish in Morocco, Damascus and Aleppo in Syria, Mosul and Basra in Iraq, the cities of Iran

⁶⁴.Albert Hourani, 47.

⁶⁵. But the *Qur' n* is quite explicit that there must be no forced conversions: “There is no compulsion in religion”, 2:256.

⁶⁶.Hourani, 54.

⁶⁷.Although not explicitly forbidden in the *Qur' n*, Islamic jurists generally held that the depiction of living forms was improper in religious buildings, reasoning that Allah alone has the power to create life. Cf. Hourani, 56.

⁶⁸.Hourani, 56.

and of northern India, each the equal in size if not in grandeur of Paris, Florence, Venice and Rome.

In addition to this worldly success, or rather inseparable from it, we must note what Islam accomplished spiritually or religiously for its followers, and for the wider world. Initially it brought them out of the benightedness of the polytheism and idolatry of the Arabian peninsula. Then in Medina, Muhammad rejected the exclusivist claim of the Jews that they were uniquely related to the one God, proclaiming instead that Allah⁶⁹ was the one God of all humanity. Islam brought monotheism and the whole rich civilization emanating from it to many lands and peoples, to Hindu and Buddhist as well as Zoroastrian and Manichean. But even more significantly, they offered a universal religion and universal civilization in place of particular peoples with gods peculiar to themselves.

2. *Islamic Social Order*

It is said that Islam is an egalitarian religion. It explicitly rejects privilege based on birth, race, wealth, rank. “O, people. We have created you from one male and one female, and we have made you into peoples and tribes that you might know one another. Indeed the noblest among you in the sight of God is the most God-fearing.” (*Qur’ n*, 49:13) Islam brought to its adherents their equality with one another. But certain western historians⁷⁰ are quick to note that there were three inequalities sanctioned, if not sanctified, in the religion and therefore in the Islamic empires: the inequality of master and slave, of man and woman, of Muslim and non-Muslim. Each of these relations was regulated in Islamic law, accepted therefore but also mitigated and restricted in practice. To what has been said already of the difference of Muslim and non-Muslim in the Islamic world, there was the result that as Muslims were increasingly numerous in the lands they conquered, they were able to conduct their lives in virtual separation from non-Muslims. Tolerated non-Muslims (*dhimm*) were principally Jews and Christians, “People of the Book” in Islam and therefore possessing some elements of the revelation of Allah (however confused and misinterpreted). Other non-Muslims would more likely be slaves. The treatment of Jews and Muslims in Christendom was generally not as liberal as their treatment in Muslim states.

Slavery was a universally accepted institution, as we know, until more or less recent times. In the conquest of foreign lands, it was inevitable and anticipated in the Holy Law that hordes would be either slaughtered or enslaved by the great Muslim armies. Some slaves were drafted into the military itself, others brought into agricultural or domestic service. Slaves were also bought and sold, especially concubines (generally white) and domestic servants (frequently black). Masters were exhorted to treat their slaves with justice and kindness, and the *Qur’ n* praises the master who would free a slave. Muslims could not enslave other Muslims, and normally did not enslave other “Peoples of the Book”. The practice was, if anything, less cruel than in medieval Christendom simply because it was based on fixed law. Although the slave

⁶⁹. Given that Muhammad saw no conflict between the word of God as revealed to the Jewish prophets and to Jesus and the apostles, one might ask why he did not use the Hebrew or Greek name for God, instead of Allah, the name in Arabic for the pagan Supreme Being. This is but a consequence of the absence of a translation of the Bible into Arabic, already noted.

⁷⁰. Cf. Bernard Lewis, *What Went Wrong*, Oxford, 2002, 82-95; *The Middle East*, 205-217. The Lebanese historian, Hourani, born in England, also treats of these matters, 116-122.

could not give evidence in an Islamic court, and the penalty for an offense against a slave was half the penalty for such an offense against a free man, still the slave was entitled to food, medical attention and support in his old age, and the court could order that the slave be freed if his master failed in these obligations.

The *Qur' n* conceives ultimately an equality of destiny for the sexes, stating of men and women, "Whosoever does an evil deed shall be recompensed only with the like of it, but whosoever does a righteous deed, be it male or female, believing shall enter Paradise, therein provided without reckoning." (40:40, Cf.16:97. But the status of women in conduct and law was not equal to that of men. Women, except poor women, were confined largely to the home, and to the extent that a family was wealthy, powerful or respected, women in the home were secluded in that special part of the home called the *harim*. On the relatively rare occasions when they emerged, they were veiled. An Egyptian jurist of the 14th century reflected: "Some of the pious elders (may God be pleased with them) have said that a woman should leave her house on three occasions only: when she is conducted to the house of her bridegroom, on the deaths of her parents, and when she goes to her own grave."⁷¹ The social order was predicated on superior rights and powers for men. Men could divorce their wives by simple repudiation, whereas women needed cause.⁷² Men could have more than one wife (up to four) if he could provide for them adequately, and also slave concubines up to any number. In an Islamic court, the testimony of a woman counted for only half the weight of the testimony of a man, and daughters could inherit only half as much as sons. As Bernard Lewis observes, the non-Muslim could overcome his inequality by conversion to Islam, and the slave might be freed by his master, but the inequality of the woman could never be redressed. It remains to this day the most difficult liberation to achieve in Islam.

3. *Islam and Terror*

It is undeniable that in the past Muslims resorted to war to bring the "infidels" under the umbrella of Islam. The Prophet was himself quite early on drawn into armed conflict against his own tribe: "When Quraysh [the tribe] became insolent towards God and rejected His gracious purpose...He gave permission to His apostle to fight and protect himself."⁷³ But does the religion countenance the violence and terrorism of al-Qaeda or Hezbollah, or the *fatw* issued by Ayatollah Khomeini in 1989 against the novelist Salman Rushdie?⁷⁴ There are significant departures from Islamic law in both cases. Concerning the actions of the Ayatollah, there are these irregularities about this particular *fatw* : the ayatollah pronounced a death sentence, recruited would-be assassins, and did all this without attention to the requirement under Islamic law that the accused

⁷¹Quoted in Hourani, 120.

⁷². Impotence, madness, denial of her rights to clothing, lodging, maintenance and sexual relations were acceptable causes.

⁷³.Quoted Hourani, 18. The *Qur' n*: "Prophet, make war on the unbelievers and the hypocrites and deal sternly with them. Hell shall be their home, evil their fate." [Prohibition, 66:9]

⁷⁴.A *fatw* is not, as some might think from the manner in which this particular one was issued, a murder contract after the manner of the *mafiosi*. It is a legal opinion or ruling on a point of Islamic law, and the Islamic jurist authorized to issue it is the *mufti*.

be brought to trial and given the opportunity to defend himself against the charge. And there are more serious reservations about the terrorist activities of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda.⁷⁵

A Muslim sect known as the Assassins were active in Iran and Syria from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries against certain Muslim rulers whom they regarded as unjust usurpers. They called themselves *fidayeen*, “one who is ready to sacrifice his life for the cause”⁷⁶. They were signally different from the contemporary *fidayeen* suicide bomber. The victim was always a leader – political, religious or military – identified as a source of great evil; the weapon, a dagger, which meant that the assassin had to encounter his target quite directly. Thus, the assassin could well expect not to survive the action he took. This was not an act of suicide, but death at the hands of the bodyguards of his victim. Suicide is proscribed in the strongest terms in Islamic law⁷⁷. Moreover, the slaughter of innocent civilians, which in the case of contemporary terrorists is the objective, as in the destruction of the World Trade Center, is without precedent in Islam. For this reason, a distinction is now drawn between Islam, the religious tradition dating back thirteen hundred years, and “Islamism”, that contemporary fanaticism which has spawned suicide bombers and other such terrorists, a new ideology which clothes itself in words of old: “infidels”, “crusaders”, “Martyrs”, “jihad”, etc.⁷⁸ As the Boroumand sisters put it,

... this religious vocabulary hides violent Islamism’s true nature as a modern totalitarian challenge to both traditional Islam and modern democracy. If terrorism is truly as close to the core of Islamic belief as both the Islamists and many of their enemies claim, why does international Islamist terrorism date only to 1979? ... The truth is that contemporary Islamist terror is an eminently modern practice thoroughly at odds with Islamic traditions and ethics.⁷⁹

If not Islam itself, what then are the roots of this contemporary Islamism of Osama bin Laden, al-Qaeda, the suicide bombers in Israel and other such terrorists? Are they representative of one side in the “clash of civilizations” predicted by Samuel Huntington? They do not aim in general aim to restore a strict traditional Islamic practice. Ladan and Roya Boroumand see their origin rather in 20th century organizations of the extreme right and left. One such organization is the Muslim Brotherhood founded in Egypt in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna and modelled on Italian Fascist principles – its slogan, “action, obedience, silence” and its idea of unquestioned loyalty to a leader clearly are inspired by Mussolini’s “believe, obey, fight”. On the left, there was the Marxist movement founded by Maulana Mawdudi in Pakistan in the early ‘40s, opposed both to

⁷⁵. On February 23, 1998, Osama bin Laden, together with Jihad groups in Egypt, Pakistan and Bangladesh, issued their own *fatw* in their “Declaration of the World Islamic Front for Jihad against the Jews and the Crusaders”, laying down that “to kill Americans and their allies, both civil and military, is an individual duty of every Muslim who is able, in any country where this is possible, until the Aqsa mosque [in Jerusalem] and the Har m mosque [in Mecca] are freed from their grip, and until their armies, shattered and broken-winged, depart from all the lands of Islam, incapable of threatening any Muslim.” In Bernard Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam*, 2003, xxv. Henceforth *Crisis*.

⁷⁶. *Crisis*, 123.

⁷⁷. Cf. this passage from the traditions of the Prophet: “The Prophet said: Whoever kills himself with a blade will be tormented with that blade in the fires of Hell. The Prophet also said: He who strangles himself will strangle himself in Hell ... etc. Whoever kills himself in any way in this world will be tormented with it on the day of resurrection.” In *Crisis*, 131.

⁷⁸. As well, “Islamist” rather than “Islamic”, where the former is actually in conflict with authentic Islam.

⁷⁹. Ladan Boroumand and Roya Boroumand, “Terror, Islam, and Democracy”, *Journal of Democracy* 13 (2002), 6. Henceforth Boroumand.

the West and to traditional Islam. These strands from left and right came together in Sayyid Qutb who called for a monolithic Muslim state led by an Islamic party which would use every violent means necessary to achieve its ends, a classless society, where the “selfish individual” is annihilated and the “exploitation of man by man” is ended -- “Leninism in Islamic dress” as the Boroumands describe it, the creed embraced by most young Islamist cadres today.⁸⁰

Thus, when Muslims here or elsewhere flatly deny that Islam condones terrorism, when they assert instead that it is a religion of peace, of justice, when they are appalled that the West thinks of them as implicitly supporting terrorism, they are to be believed. Present day Islamist terrorists are as opposed to them as they are to the West. But this does not mean that the West can feel confident that Islamic civilization is on the same side as they are, or that Muslims themselves remain true to their Islamic principles.

4. *The Limit of Islam*

For centuries Islam was civilization itself. Muslims viewed themselves as the possessors of God’s truth with the obligation of bringing it to all mankind. If they were in a state of perpetual war against the infidel, it was war whose outcome was inevitable and certain -- the *civitas dei* would overcome the *civitas terrena*, Islam would triumph over unbelief and the whole world would be converted to it. Their convictions were confirmed with the Ottoman successes in the 15th and 16th centuries. With the loss of Ottoman territories in Europe in the 18th century, the question raised by the Ottomans was not “Who did this to us?”, but “What did we do wrong?”. The answer they gave was this, according to Bernard Lewis: “The basic fault, according to most of these memoranda, was falling away from the good old ways, Islamic and Ottoman; the basic remedy was a return to them. This diagnosis and prescription still command wide acceptance in the Middle East.”⁸¹ But as we in the West look at that same history, our diagnosis is perhaps different. Lewis, reflecting on what has come to pass, offers this account:

In the late S.D. Goitein’s felicitous phrase, the Islamic world was ‘the intermediate civilization’ – intermediate in both time and space. Its outer limits were in southern Europe, in Central Africa, in southern and southeastern and eastern Asia, and it embraced elements of all of these. It was also intermediate in time, between antiquity and modernity, sharing the Hellenistic and Judaeo-Christian heritage with Europe and enriching it with elements from remoter lands and cultures. Of the alternative routes from Hellenistic antiquity to modern times, it might well have seemed that it was the Islamic civilization of the Arabs, rather than those of Greek or Latin Christendom, that offered the greater promise of advancing toward a modern and universal civilization.

Yet it was the poor, parochial, monochrome culture of Christian Europe that advanced from strength to strength, while the Islamic civilization of the Middle East suffered a loss of creativity, of energy, and of power. Its subsequent development has been overshadowed

⁸⁰. Boroumand, 7-9. See also Francis Fukuyama and Nadav Samin, “Can Any Good Come of Radical Islam? A Modernizing Force? Maybe.” *Wall Street Journal*, September 12, 2002.

⁸¹. *What Went Wrong*, 23.

by a growing awareness of this loss, the search for its causes, and a passionate desire to restore its bygone glories.⁸²

Over and above these reflections of an historian and the conundrum that a contemporary Muslim faces, what must be said is this, that after a millennium and a half the Christian world finally took possession of its principle, the principle of freedom. It is this principle which is asserted in the Reformation. As Hegel says, "This is the essence of the Reformation: Man is in his very nature destined to be free."⁸³ It is not from the external authority of the Church, nor of a book, but from the internal authority of conscience, now matured after those many centuries of Christianization which formed it, that man finds relation to God. Conscience had made its own those same principles which had formerly been imposed on it. As the external authority of the priest was replaced by the internal authority of conscience, so reason was emancipated from dogma and a presumed creed.⁸⁴ But as in the first case, this was a reason formed and informed by the faith from which it freed itself. The reformed Christian knew also that the absolute truth was not only beyond the world but incarnate in the world. There was engendered an intense interest in every element of worldly life, now conducted from that same self-determination which the Christian religion had formed in men. This is the foundation of the modern world.

The principle of the European mind is, therefore, self-conscious Reason which is confident that for it there can be no insuperable barrier and which therefore takes an interest in everything in order to become present to itself therein. The European mind opposes the world to itself, makes itself free of it, but in turn annuls this opposition, takes its Other, the manifold, back into itself, into its unitary nature. In Europe, therefore, there prevails this infinite thirst for knowledge which is alien to other races. The European is interested in the world, he wants to know it, to make this Other confronting him his own, to bring to view the genus, law, universal, thought, the inner rationality, in the particular forms of the world.⁸⁵

The Christian revelation, of God incarnate and trinitarian, is blasphemy to the Muslim. The principle of freedom, of self-determination, given in that revelation and reaching its maturity in the lives of Christians in the 16th and 17th centuries is only intelligible to the Muslim as gross distortion of the true revelation. But has his religion then shut him off from the modern world?

III. Religion And Secularity

It follows from what has been said that the foundation for a knowledge of human freedom is the Trinitarian doctrine of the Christian religion. Although the grounds for this knowledge were present since the revelation of the Christian religion, it required the mediation of history and the emergence of Christian institutions for this knowledge to become universally known. God's trinitarian life as the foundation for our trinitarian life, God's self-determination as the paradigm for our self-determination, was the source of seventeenth and eighteenth century doctrines of the

⁸². *The Middle East*, 270.

⁸³. *Philosophy of History*, 417.

⁸⁴. Philosophy was no longer *ancilla theologiae*.

⁸⁵. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, "Anthropology", §393, *Zusatz*.

equality of all men, their inalienable rights to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”, of a universal humanity which transcends differences of race, language, culture and creed. Can the Muslim have access to these principles, to doctrines of human rights, and the principle of freedom which underlies them?

Abdolkarim Soroush, the renowned contemporary Iranian philosopher who is in the vanguard of those Muslims who aim at reconciling Islam and the modern world, would urge Muslims first to distinguish religion, which is eternal, and people’s understanding of religion, which is necessarily limited to its own time and place. “It is up to God to reveal a religion, but up to us to understand and realize it.”⁸⁶ Religious knowledge is “entirely human and subject to all the dictates of human knowledge.” It is “incomplete, impure, insufficient, culture bound.” Religion is constant, religious understanding is what changes. “Constant, eternal religion begets changing and evolving religious knowledge.”⁸⁷ And concerning the *Qur’ n* itself, he would remind the hearer that not everything said by the Prophet is prophesy; not everything written by the Prophet is religious.⁸⁸ The *Qur’ n* is a created thing, calling forth human interpretation. Soroush sympathizes with those who would distinguish the elements in it revealed in Mecca, the universal elements appropriate for all times, from those revealed in Medina, appropriate to its own time and circumstances. To the latter belong those elements most offensive to a modern sensibility, the three inequalities discussed earlier and the more violent and militaristic pronouncements quoted today by angry Muslim fundamentalists.

Soroush, in the tradition of the Mutazilites, proceeds from a rationality not confined to religion, a free and independent thought which is thoroughly modern in its assertions as distinct from its presuppositions. “Modern humanity aims to create the world in its own image rather than accepting it as it is. Nothing is deemed indisputably ‘given’.”⁸⁹ This leads him to an essentially modern view of the relation of secular government to religion. “Every government, in order to survive and endure, needs two things: a source of legitimation and a normative framework. ... Nowadays (roughly the last three hundred years) governments derive their legitimacy from the consent of the governed. The norms of governance too, are determined, in theory at least, by laws established by institutions representing the people.”⁹⁰ But Soroush’s requirement of the separation of religion and government is motivated by “the belief in the fundamental truth of religion coupled with concern over its contamination and profanation by political concerns”, in short, by a conviction in the discontinuity and incongruity of the sacred and the secular, and hence an instability in the relation. The two are not drawn into one view as in the relation of the divine and human in the Christian religion.

In a liberal democracy we suppose that a citizen’s particular interests have a fundamental right to assert themselves, limited only by the competing interests of others in society. The collision of such interests is resolved in each surrendering something to the others. This might be a solution where the particular interests are simply particular, but religion makes universal demands of the believer. Only where a common secular life is stronger in its citizens than their

⁸⁶ “Islamic Revival and Reform” in his *Reason, Freedom, and Democracy in Islam*, Oxford and New York, 2000, 31.

⁸⁷ Soroush, 33.

⁸⁸ From an address given in May, 2004, at Catholic University in Washington.

⁸⁹ “The sense and essence of secularism”, *Ibid.*, 55.

⁹⁰ Soroush, 57.

different religions will such a resolution be tolerable. Modern secular culture assimilates Jew, Muslim, Christian, to one another. But this is only acceptable if it is comprehensive of their differences. Hegel in his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* examines the different religions in which men have found relation to the divine, and measuring them by their conformity to what he calls the Idea, he uncovers in each of them that element which is the truth of that religion, a truth preserved in the Christian religion, the absolute or consummate religion, without which it would not be absolute. The argument for Hegel's position must be left for another time. But here I might observe that no contemporary self-respecting Jew or Muslim is likely to find Hegel's analysis acceptable.⁹¹ Moreover, even if its justification were given, it would remain theoretical and abstract until it found expression in secular life and the state. We in the West have obviously not achieved that unity of creeds in which each is preserved and manifested in a common culture. We must therefore live with what we have, a state which affirms the right of all to their religious belief and its expression, subject only to such limits as are required by the common good.

In 1790, George Washington, replying to the warm letter he had received from the Hebrew Congregation in Newport, Rhode Island, wrote the following:

The Citizens of the United States of America have a right to applaud themselves for having given to mankind examples of an enlarged and liberal policy: a policy worthy of imitation. All possess alike liberty of conscience and immunities of citizenship. It is now no more that toleration is spoken of, as if it was by the indulgence of one class of people that another enjoyed the exercise of their natural rights. For happily the Government of the United States, which gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.

...May the Children of the Stock of Abraham, who dwell in this land, continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants, while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid. May the father of all mercies scatter light and not darkness in our paths, and make us all in our several vocations useful here, and in his own due time and way everlastingly happy.

We may hope that views such as those of Dr. Soroush will find wide acceptance in Islam, so that there too other religious traditions might be respected and God addressed in many names.

⁹¹In the remarkable debate between Emil Fackenheim and James Doull, first at the Marquette Symposium in 1970, and then continued in *Dialogue* that same year, Fackenheim protests that Hegel had not done justice of Judaism, nor to other non-Christian religions, commenting that a Jew could only follow Hegel at the price of his religion.