

# Islamic Perspective

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The Journal of Islamic Perspective is a peer reviewed publication of the Center for Humanities and Sociological Studies, affiliated to the London Academy of Iranian Studies (LAIS) and aims to create a dialogue between intellectuals, thinkers and writers from the Islamic World and academics, intellectuals, thinkers and writers from other parts of the Globe. Issues in the context of Culture, Islamic Thoughts & Civilizations, and other relevant areas of social sciences, humanities and cultural studies are of interest and we hope to create a global platform to deepen and develop these issues in the frame of a Critical Perspective. Our motto is homo sum; humani nihil a me alienum puto. Contributions to Islamic Perspective do not necessarily reflect the views of the editorial board or the Center for Humanities and Sociological Studies. The mailing address of the journal is:

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# | Interview



## Interview on Globalization

### Note

Dr. Seyed Javad Miri from The Center for Humanities and Sociological Studies (IPCHS) conducted the following interview with Judith Blau. She is professor of sociology at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill and chair of the *Social and Economic Justice Undergraduate Minor*. Her field is Human Rights, which is a normative approach to human societies, collective goods, political institutions, economy, and democracy. Drawing from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, international human rights treaties and conventions, Human Rights axiomatically asserts the inalienable and equal rights of all humans. One challenge everywhere is to ensure equal rights to those who are denied them owing to, for example, poverty or disability. Another challenge is to combat discrimination that stands in the way of people achieving equality. Another is to ensure diversity of culture and of cultural expressions.

These challenges are met at the international level in quasi-judicial proceedings carried out by The UN Human Rights Council, which reviews States' progress in meeting their obligations under international Human Rights Treaties. This is all fine and dandy, but it is far removed from praxis, from the realization of human rights, and from human rights abuses. Judith Blau has found that she can structure learning experiences with the students in her classes to engage them in highly egalitarian and non-threatening human rights projects.

Judith Blau is the director of the Human Rights Center of Chapel Hill & Carrboro. She is also the president of the US chapter of *Sociologists without Borders (SSF)*, which is affiliated with Sociologists without Borders International/ Sociologos sin Fronteras. Blau is the co-editor of the journal, *Societies without Borders: Human Rights & the Social Sciences* and serves on the Science & Human Rights Coalition of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. She is one of the co-founders of SSF Think-Tank, a state-of-the-art space for democratic, global discussions and debate. Besides writing for an academic audience, she also writes for the Huffington Post and Commondreams, and writes a blog for a more general audience: *Human Rights Now* (<http://www.humanrightsnow.net>)

## Questions on Globalization

**What is the nature of globalization? Do you see it as a process or a project or both?**

**Judith Blau:** Globalization, or the advance of interconnections on a global scale, as a generic process, has been occurring for many centuries, through exchange, trade, colonization, imperial expansion, and religious conversion. What we now refer to as “globalization” has been the attempt by western powers and international institutions (IMF and WTO) to create unlimited opportunities for multinationals and financial institutions throughout the world. Often referred to as Neoliberalism, globalization led to the concentration of wealth and economic power, unprecedented environmental degradation, and in many parts of the world, it has fueled poverty and migration.

Therefore, globalization is a generic process, but one with many historical instances of it, with each ignited by a project – of states, empires, churches, financiers, and capitalists. There were preliminary projects that made neoliberalism possible, including abandoning the gold standard in 1973/4, the provision of tax havens, and, most importantly, the internet. Multinational operations throughout the world can be centrally controlled from offices in New York City! (Like the drones that bomb villages in Pakistan and Afghanistan are controlled by operators at a military base in Colorado)

Only now, with the diffusion of electronic technologies can we see the possibilities of genuine “peoples’ projects,” based on the interconnectedness of the world’s peoples. We

are just at the beginning of these projects, but I would speculate that they will be democratic, consensual, egalitarian, and pluralistic.

**What are the main components of globalization and how effective is each component's contribution to its realization?**

**Judith Blau:** If by globalization here, we refer to the project started by Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan and continued through George W. Bush (and implemented by the US Treasury Department, IMF and WTO), we now can see clearly what the consequences are. The world is now in a recession and the people who are now the main victims are the world's poorest. Neoliberal institutions forced these peoples into trade and employment that have now collapsed. There is severe hunger now because local economies were displaced by multinationals, and multinationals roll back their production.

**In your view what is the relation of Islamic thought with globalization?**

**Judith Blau:** The Persian Empire was unique in its cultural openness, scientific advance, social flexibility, support of education and philosophy. Would these be global virtues today, the world would be a better place.

I am not an expert, but Islamic thought in contemporary times is complex and varied as is western, Christian thought. I ran across a Christian webpage that advocated militant approaches to the conversion of every Iraqi alive and a crusade against science.

If, as I posited above, these religious Americans were to have contact with Iraqis, we could imagine them enjoying striking up conversations about rebuilding Iraq, about their families, about soccer and American football. (We academicians never could have anticipated the success of YouTube, Google Talk, and Twitter, but that is, perhaps one indication of popular globalism)

**What are the most effective policies and tools of "superpowers" in advancing the impact of globalization on the Islamic world?**

**Judith Blau:** There are none outside of multilateral negotiations, which would build on scientific, cultural and educational exchanges. I do not believe that advancing globalization is worthwhile, at least as I have defined globalization above. This is just a matter of language. If we instead posit a globalization to be the great variety of ways that countries, producers, NGO's, and United Nations agencies can advance exchanges that benefit the world's peoples, we have seen glimpses of how this might work and probably recognize that such a globalization would promote peace and security.

**What has been the impact of globalization on Islamic world in general and on your nation in particular?**

**Judith Blau:** I do not know, but I have written about the outrageous statements that George W. Bush made after 9/11 and America's imperialist venture in Iraq, U.S. torture practices, and renditions. People in the Islamic world have every reason to fear and hate the U.S.

Fundamentalist Christians, often allied with Israel, are influential in the U.S. Still today, with Obama, the US is blind to Israeli's expansionist policies, war on Gaza, and disenfranchisement of Israeli-Palestinians. I have defined globalization in economic terms above, but, of course, politics and economy are intertwined. The US wants cheap oil from Iraq, and thus the war, and thus the advance of the interests of multinationals – Exxon and Mobile. Likewise, it's not all “shared values” (as Obama has said) that ties the US to Israel. Such ties also support U.S. military industries.

**What do you consider to be the strengths and weaknesses of Muslims in confronting globalization as a project as well as a process?**

**Judith Blau:** I will quote Mahmood Mamdani here: there are “good Muslims and bad Muslims” and these are social constructions of the West, just, as I assume, there are social constructions among Muslims of “good Americans” and “bad Americans”

That said, Islam is not especially conducive to radical capitalism, as Christianity and Judaism have been. It is possible that new experiments and ideas in social economies will come from the Middle East.

**In your view what are the most effective ways for Muslims nations and Muslims societies to confront the challenges of globalization?**

**Judith Blau:** That is not for me to say or conjecture. I am not Muslim. I wish, as a westerner, that we would hear more from Muslim nations and societies about social economies.

**In your view, what are the most informative and illuminative works published concerning globalization and its challenges?**

**Judith Blau:** If we define globalization in the narrow sense to refer to the neo-liberal experiment, then I would say critical works by Joseph Stiglitz, Samir Amin, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Robert Pollin.

I have been influenced in my own thinking and writing by additional sources: the reports of Via Campesina (the international peasants' movement), the work of the International Labour Organization (especially its report, Fair Globalization), the activities and vision of the World Social Forum, and local and international NGOs that advance human rights. In recent years I have traveled to several African countries and Brazil. Each time, I bring back a wealth of new ideas and understandings.



# | **Articles**



# **Deconstructing Global Education**

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## **Abstract**

Global education is inextricably tied to multifarious layers that need to be deconstructed by virtue of a recondite excavation which allow us to fathom the process, the strategies and the etiology of global education. This article presents a deconstruction of some of the major layers and discusses how the search for this deconstruction may lead us towards a reflection on a global thinking about a global wisdom and its implications for global education. The paper calls for the deconstruction's dialectical connection with some of the mostly concealed to oblivion representations.

## **Keywords**

*Deconstruction, Education, Global Wisdom, Enlightenment, Illumination, Progress.*

## **Deconstructing Global Education**

Global education is a term with complimentary associations. Its acclamation has been coupled with its claims of enlightenment, illumination, improvement, progress, cultural awareness, appreciation of diversity, human rights awareness, global knowledge and global change (see for instance, Hanvey, 1976; Anderson, 1979; Merryfield, Jarchow, & Pickert, 1997; Tucker 2009). Respect for others, listening to other voices, appreciation of cultural diversity, openness towards learning from other cultures, recognizing the rights for other groups and people who may have been marginalized, underrepresented or misrepresented come at the forefront of the pro global education campaign (see for instance, Coombs, 1989; Case, 1993).

While global education can offer promising chapters in affecting the quality of life of both educators and the educated, it needs to be mindfully deconstructed in order to present practical solutions for global challenges. In line with this deconstruction, certain layers appear to be of first and foremost excavation.

### **The global education reactivity**

The roots of global education are mainly embedded within the political conditions after World War II. These conditions seem to have contributed to the emergence of a global thinking about a number of issues including education. The United States membership in UNESCO , the approval of the Fulbright Act with a focus on the exchange of students around the world, passing the National Defense Education Act in the United States and its call for funding foreign languages and studies on foreign cultures as a response to the Soviet Union's launching of Sputnik, the first man-made space satellite, are all examples of conditions which gave rise to thinking about global education. Organizations such as American Forum for Global Education, Education for a World in Change and the Study Commission on Global Education have accordingly appeared in the contextual flow of the political conditions (Tucker, 2009).

Understanding the underlying political factors and components of global education would elucidate that global education did not emerge as an independent philosophical enterprise within the Westernized discourse of education. Global education did not present itself as a utopian constituent of a worldview on human beings where education had to be a significant pillar of recognition. Global education, thus, was not created within an ontological system of a worldview that encouraged and promoted education as a value system. The 'ought' of global education, in other words, did not extract its implications from the 'is' of a philosophical project with a mission for human beings; it came mainly as a response or a reaction to conditions and situational analyses that

induced thinking globally about education. Underneath this reaction, there were sedimentations of fear, hysteria of the cold war, the anxiety of losing the competitive game and the fervor for superiority. The global education discourse was, therefore, not a creative and proactive discourse of its own within the Westernized worldview on education. This is not to downgrade the positive effects of global education but to illustrate the necessity of reflecting on the possibility of thinking independently about global education. An independent project on global education needs to address the following questions:

A) Is global education inherently defined in the etiological patterns of utilitarianism or is it embedded within a spiritual and transcendental mission? The implications of each would bring about practical involvements and sensitive engagements with opposing and paradoxical programs. Think about a global education program with a utilitarian focus to understand the children or the war torn situation in Iraq and Afghanistan. A global education in pursuit of clandestinely defined profits at a local level, albeit a global local, would fail. On numerous manifestation of this failure, Spariosu (2004) writes:

Our global pundits, whether on the right or the left, seem to connect human progress primarily with material development. Most worldwide statistics and indicators are economic in nature, measuring human happiness by what an individual or a social group has, rather than by what they are. Thus, we have presently divided the world into “developed,” underdeveloped,” and “developing” societies. But if we truly wish to change our global paradigms, then we need to change the focus of our world wide efforts from social and economic development to human self-development. From the standpoint of the latter, there are no developed or underdeveloped societies, but only developing ones. It is this kind of development that in the end will help us solve our practical problems, including world hunger, poverty, and violence, and will turn the earth into a welcoming and nurturing home for all of its inhabitants, human and nonhuman (p.5).

b) How does global education define human beings? Can we really do global education without spelling out very clearly what we mean by being and becoming a human? Does global education serve as a program for humanity or is a prescriptive program which endorses certain privileged groups? If the former tends to be the case, what are

the underlying constituents of a project on humanity? If the latter turns out to be the goal, what are the sources of legitimacy? Is the global connection elicited from common human bonds or is it taken from the interests of special groups?

If global education tends to proceed with an evolutionary Darwinian view point and its definition of human beings, it can not down play the acknowledgement that certain groups should perish since they can not cope with the changes. Global education, therefore, is to engage in a profound ontological and epistemological deconstruction: what is knowing and what is the meaning of being? What is learning about? Is learning a process of producing automatons or is it a process of liberation? How does knowing and being interact with one another? Where does humanity stand in the project? What does a student in North America need to know about his/her being and its connection to other beings? Is he/she considered a knower only if he/she has access to certain modes of knowing? What if the circle of knowing excludes certain ways of knowing and encourages special ways of knowing? How does the definition of humanity affect the search for knowing? Is the sphere of *being* bound by the empirically established categories and propositions? If yes, how does that sphere include and exclude the claims of global education and global project? If the children in Islamabad, Tehran, Cairo and Bangladesh are exposed to presentations that give credit to non-empirical and non positivist observations, does that make sense to a global education that has nullified non-empirical observations? How can a child in North America get a sense of education of let's say Afghanistan children if the North American child is only exposed to pervasive Westernized discourses? If the documentaries that report the status of education cite Taliban as the representation of Islam and Taliban's emphasis on preventing females from attending schools, how does that image correspond to the world of Islam where Muslims quoting the prophet Mohammad claim that seeking to know and learning would be incumbent upon both males and females?

If the community of learners is infused with numerous forms of politically based information, does that promote a true global education?

c) how does global education address the gaps between signs and meanings? A sign is a combination of both signifier and signified. The signifier is an image or a sound which refers to a concept. The signified is the concept to which the signifier is referring to. Let's say that I ask you any of the following questions: how is your mom doing? How is your mother doing? How is your ma doing? How is your mommy doing? I have used different signs with some similarities and some differences. Nonetheless, the meaning of a mother is going to be different for the recipients of the message. If you have experienced a very emotional attachment to your mother, the meaning would be way different for you in comparison with some one who can think of his/her mother only as the one who carried him/her for about a year. Global education is brim with signs. The

meanings, however, need to be explored and examined not through the lenses of the core references but through the marginal, associative, affective and emotional reference points. To exemplify, Iranian based curriculum on both the elementary and the secondary level has a huge emphasis on meta cognition in classes such as language arts and social studies. For an educator not familiar with the cultural styles and cognitive styles behind those meta cognition prompts, the curriculum may appear to be esoteric, insensible and unrelated.

Studies by Osunde, Tlou, and Brown (1996) indicate that lack of accessibility towards the deep layers of understanding others from a different culture would bring about clichés and stereotyped knowing that work against the true nature of a global education. In their study, they focused on how preservice social studies teachers perceived Africa. In their study of one hundred preservice teachers from the United States, Osunde, Tlou, and Brown (1996) found that the majority of the concepts associated with Africa were nothing but tigers, disease, jungles, poor, deserts and superstition. Osunde, Tlou, and Brown (1996) demonstrate how the American preservice teachers's exposure to signs (as indicated above) prevent them from understanding the deep layers of meaning making about Africa. They indicate that

Even though preservice teachers are exposed to an increasing amount of information on Africa through their college courses and seminars and even though the media now presents news on Africa with more frequency, the results of our data analysis showed that a majority of the preservice social studies teachers had the same misconceptions about Africa that their grandparents and parents had several decades ago (p. 120, cited in Tucker, 2009).

It is in line with this attempt that Spariosu (2004) focuses on ways and strategies that can bring about a "global mindset" for fostering a true global education. He brings numerous examples from Rumi, Abu Sa'id, Shabestari and others as "an expression of the same nonlinear, irenic way of thinking in the Islamic tradition" to elucidate the significance of thinking that lie outside the Western civilization (Spariosu, 2009, p. 133). His arguments on establishing a real engagement with a concentration on multilateral team work, intercultural and transdisciplinary dialogue would facilitate the process of identifying non-western educational approaches. These approaches may be easily concealed to oblivion because of the pervasive discourses within the Western educational system.

A global education that is entrenched within one single perspective would lead to a mindlessness that ignores and discounts other perspectives. Langer (1997) encourages

a mindful disengagement from remaining in a single perspective and exploring alternative ways of looking and says:

In a mindful state, we implicitly recognize that no one perspective optimally explains a situation. Therefore, we do not seek to select the one response that corresponds to the situation, but we recognize that there is more than one perspective on the information given and we choose from among these. (p. 108)

### **Global education claim of authority and ownership**

Deep within the underlying elements of global education, its conceptualization, planning, policies and proposals, there lie a claim of authority and ownership. To put it differently, global education is strongly embedded within the assumptions of power and authority in that education needs to be done globally but by virtue of a leadership that not only gives direction to how and what of the movement but also decides on the sources which endorse or refute the legitimacy of inclusion, sensibility and expressiveness of others. The discourse of power, itself, emanates from a potpourri of political and economic factors with a strong propensity towards superiority. The establishment of the claim of authority and ownership can play a huge destructive role in the true nature of global education as it imposes narrow mindedness and parochialism in a wide variety of levels; it sanctions against inclusionality, it impedes the process of a real understanding and it censures a profound deconstruction of the politically and economically established assumptions. Huntington's assumptions, for instance, have widened the gap between the West and the East. Global education's hubris with the ownership takes an expansionist view that marginalizes learning and dialogue about others and projects a series of assumptions and perceptions upon the world.

Building upon Willinsky (1998), Merryfield (2009) illustrates how imperialism and imperialist way of thinking can influence global education with specific political and economic ambitions. She reminds us how the discourse of power within the imperialist design of education can highlight the grandeur of one thing and downgrade the other thing. On this analysis, Merryfield (2009) writes:

Whether the dichotomous terms are The Orient/The occident, First World/Third World, free/communist, or industrialized/developing nations, there is an "us"—usually the white middle-class descendants of Western Europeans

who are said to have developed democracy and today make the world safe- and “them,” the Others who are divided from real Americans by their culture, skin color, language, politics, or other differences (p. 219).

The claim for ownership and authority for global education is associated with the emergence of a privileged status with certain goals. If the etiological definition of the global education is summed up in reductionism, materialism, a positivist and linear way of thinking about the subject matter of global education namely human beings, the privilege will be designated and assigned to the voices that would substantiate the utilitarian project. How can global education offer an in-depth understanding of intercultural relationship if it is encapsulated and circumscribed by a culture of reductionism? If voices need to be expressed on the strength of global education discourse of sensibility, how can global education provide a practically opulent dialogue among cultures?

The claim of ownership and authority is largely indebted to the technological advancement in numerous stages, the natural science's salient leaps of progress and the rapid growth of information and communication technology. This can have several adverse effects in the way of a proactive global education: 1) it can generate a huge emphasis on accessing the technique at the peril of ignoring the ethical values. The notion that an increase of computers in classrooms would give rise to a growth in understanding is an example of such an emphasis. 2) It can impose a machine oriented perspective on human beings. This perspective would lead to a metaphor where the subject matter of global education namely human beings would be equal to automatons. You may cry beside a computer, tell the funniest jokes, read the most beautiful poems or show the scenes of human massacre or explicate the values of devotion and benevolence, what does the computer do? A machine oriented perspective would have no room for promoting global responsibility. 3) Global education, in its present form, can easily neglect and ignore voices that fall outside the discourses of linear and positivist thinking. I shall explain one of such examples of negligence or ignorance in the context of discussions on global education. Huntington(1996) tries to indicate that Islam is inherently tied to violence and violent actions are ineluctably linked to Islamic perspective. With a very basic understanding of Islamic worldview, one can easily identify the frivolousness of Huntington's statements. Examining the Islamic perspective on the rights of human beings and the significance of a comprehensive respect towards Human rights, Jafari, an Iranian contemporary philosopher and scholar of Islam, (2006) cites Imam Ali of Muslims with the following decrees on the rights of animals:

“Do not keep the animals and their children separate from one another”

“Make sure that you keep your nails short upon milking lest the animals may feel annoyed”

“If you happen to take the animals out for grazing, make sure that you walk them through the beautiful meadows if there are any”

“Rest assured that enough milk is left for the animal when milking”

“God will damn the one who uses profane language while addressing any animal”

“The governor can punish anyone who does not take care of his/her animal.” (p.159-162 ).

Jafari (2006) then asks how a worldview that is so sensitive towards the rights of animals can go indifferent when dealing with the human rights and global education. He brings numerous examples within the Islamic tradition to argue that Islam displays an essentially vital sensitivity towards the rights of any living creature with the maximum possible rights for any human being.

Huntington’s allegations are strongly refuted even in the West by those with a very basic understanding about Islam. On “the invidiousness of Huntington’s arguments,” Spariosu(2004) writes:

The traditional greeting among Muslims is “Peace be with you” (Al-Salam Alei-kum) or that Sufi teachings do not condone violence and conflict any more than their Budhist, Taoist, or Christian counterparts do. For example, the prophet Muhammad says: “If a man gives up quarreling when he is in the wrong, a house will be built for him in Paradise. But if a man gives up a conflict even when he is in the right, a house will be built for him in the loftiest of Paradise” (Frager and Fadiman 1997, p. 84). If anything, Huntington’s and Payne’s arguments highlight the ignorance of even-well trained Westerners about other cultures and religions( not to mention their own) and the urgent need for educating the world’s youth about each other’s—and their own—cultural traditions (p.51).

Hakimi , another Iranian philosopher and scholar of Islam(2009) presents an in-depth analysis on the word “Islam” and prophet Muhammad on the strength of a series of evidence within Islamic tradition and argues that prophet Muhammad serves as the source of mercy, peace and compassion for the whole universe. In citing numerous evidence, he recounts the story of prophet Muhammad who comes under the frequent daily attack of an assailant who even throws the bladder of a sheep to the prophet. The prophet pays a visit to the man once he receives the news of his illness.

Having read the above examples, one may reflect on how a learner in North America may be subscribed to a single perspective that would be drastically different from the original culture.

Global education needs to disclaim its belonging to merely Westernized discourse of power and its politically established agenda. It needs to extend the possibility of connection to the peripheral and the marginal voices, to the visible and the invisible players, to the represented, underrepresented and misrepresented. Global education needs to offer the possibility of a collaboration among the world people so they construct knowledge through their contribution and participation not that they be given the knowledge through the privileged. Global education needs to disavow its belonging to political agenda that move in line with the interest of some political leaders. In the words of Spariosu(2004), “ so, it is neither Islam nor the West that are a problem for each other, but certain political leaders and their advisers” (p. 52).

Spariosu(2004) considers the practical key to the promotion of global education as the implementation of major reforms within higher education system particularly in the universities. He argues that educational institutions overwhelmed by red tape and bureaucratic systems would act as obstacles in the way of true global education. Such institutions, he further claims, develop entanglements in the face of real participative measures and global education. He argues that

In attempting to reorient the university toward global education, let alone global intelligence, we come up against what seem to be insurmountable obstacles, because the very academic place that has traditionally been designed to address important social and human problems seems now to compound, rather than to alleviate, such problems. As we have seen, many of our educational institutions have simply become reflections of global predicaments, instead of active leaders out of such predicaments. For instance, at most U.S. universities, current administrators, despite paying lip service to the ‘internationalization of the curriculum,’ often

perceive study abroad and experiential education as expensive extras that interrupt students' normal campus activities. To make matters worse, the academic credit systems that are currently in place at most North American Universities are highly protectionist. Through time-and energy-consuming bureaucratic red tape, they make it deliberately difficult for students to move across disciplines and institutions of higher learning both in the United States and overseas (p. 200).

Said's *Orientalism*(1978), *Culture and Imperialism*(1993) and *Covering Islam* (1997) demonstrate how Western education is entangled with a hegemonic discourse that gives superiority, authority and ownership to certain groups namely Europeans. Said(1978) argues that colonizers considered themselves as not only the possessors of knowledge, expertise and education but also the source of privileges that bestowed them with the right to define others. He indicates that the education driven by colonization and oppressors controlled the construction of the interaction among identity, power, language, education and knowing. Such an education, Said argues, imposed certain prescriptions against the oppressed and the exploited.

Said's arguments in *Culture and Imperialism* ( 1993) depict how the discourse of oppression and power clandestinely and extensively infiltrated the realm of not only the cognition but also emotions and behavior: the oppressed had to see the world through the glasses of the oppressors and those colonized had to abide by the mindset and the culture of the colonizers, the exploited had to choose the choice of words of the exploiters, the deprived had to express themselves in accordance with the standards set by the oppressors. The oppressors had the privilege of defining the right and the wrong: they had the ownership of every thing.

The sedimentation of the imperialist way of thinking allows the Western global education a claim that can justify a quintessential supervision for decision making, diagnosis and intervention in the realm of education.

The entrapment of global education within the ideologically and economically driven globalization would hinder the process of global education as a movement that can promote global citizenship.

Freire's *Pedagogy of Freedom* (1998a) and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1998b) critically delineate the dangers of an economically driven global education and encourage awareness towards a real collaboration among the educators and learners so they can critically examine the creation and construction of knowledge. Such

construction of knowledge, Freire argues, needs to be liberated from the subjugation of those who grandiloquently consider themselves as the owner of knowing.

For global education to be globally effective, it needs to revisit the plethora of forces that have explicated the claim and totalitarian tyranny of global education. This can produce huge implications for addressing the situations and conditions of those who are not affiliated to the privileged voices. An authentic global education needs to allow every one to critically elucidate and analyze the input and output of the so-called globally education establishments and organizations. Such an analytical approach would involve not only the interests of the citizens of wealthy countries that happen to be the members of the organizations but also the interests of the non-members that can contribute to a global education for achieving a globally sustainable peace and development.

In line with this revisiting, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the UN's Conference of Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and so many other organizations and programs can be encouraged to explore the possibility of a shift of attention from the political leaders' presumptions of education to a comprehensive inclusion of others who may have been fully concealed to oblivion through the ownership of global education. The shift can bring to light the multiplicities and fragments that have been put aside in the galloping trend of the reductionist materialism of global education. The shift can also illustrate the significance of an engagement with the practical intercultural strategies that help the implementation of an effective global education management program.

### **Global education and global citizenship**

If global education is incarcerated within the power of politics and its ramifications, how can it foster global citizenship? In order for global education to harbor global citizenship, global education needs to be emancipated from the manacles of politically based parochialism that circumscribe the open and comprehensive activities of global education. Global citizenship requires an involvement and an active participation of every one in a global level; it necessitates an active engagement on the part of every one. How can a participative involvement transpire if the discourse of power has already established contingencies that hamper the presence of others who do not move in line with the rules of the games within the hegemonic discourse of power and its utilitarian domination?

Questioning and critiquing the paradigms that define global action and infuse globalization, Gills (2002) indicates that

There has been much discussion of the so-called nonstate actors and the rise and importance of nongovernmental organizations and other international societal factors in recent years of globalization. Yet we can observe for ourselves how it is still the most powerful governments of the world that determine the primary course of action and define the parameters of mainstream discussion whenever there is a crisis. Thus, the embedded power structure of the world order has been highlighted even in the so-called era of globalization. Nevertheless, if we look deeper, we can see things differently, and we may realize the potential for positive change. Rather than accepting the still reigning paradigm of (past) international relations, with its enduring feature of governance by a few great powers based on their ability to use military force, we must urgently look for ways to turn to a positive alternative (p.159).

If globalization is politically tied to global education with a focus on particular voices, how can it truly listen to other voices? Global education inspired by the political globalization would develop a monological and not a dialogical relationship where citizens receive prescription before they can get any diagnosis.

Challenging such a globalization and its outcry for subjugation, Spariosu( 2004) mindfully examines Huntington's perniciously destructive analysis and states that

If Huntington's history teaches us anything, it is that power has often fared best under various disguises, rather than through raw display, that is, that soft power can often be harder than hard power. This truth should be painfully obvious to those U.S. foreign policy makers who advocate preemptive strikes as a way of preventing terrorist and other military activities on the part of so-called rogue nations and political groups, inimical to the United States and its closets allies. Such displays of raw power have lead, for example, to the current debacle in the Middle East p. 55).

The concept of citizenship, ipso facto, is a Western oriented concept with its roots in liberalism, the classical ideas of democracy and participation in the 'polis' of ancient Greece, and an entitlement within the autonomous cities of northern Italy (Turner, 1993). If global education's global citizenship is positioned within the circumscribing

discourse of the West, how can it bring an involvement from every one? Furthermore, if global education fails to study the global education experience of other countries, how can it enter a global dialogue to invite every one's contribution?

Global education's present literature is rife with works within the Western discourse of education and hardly has serious inclusion of any works from the other parts of the world. Interesting and ironically enough, Hakimi (2004 )and Jafari ( 2006 ) present evidence that indicate the engagements of some of the Muslim scholars with both global education and internationalization of education. They argue that Islamic worldview does not belong to geography or a place and therefore addresses the common ties among human beings in explicating a message that is not bound by one nation or a group. Both Hakimi (2002) and Jafari (2006) claim that an Islamic ontology is in pursuit of bringing education for every one in the world as it has a special focus on human beings' togetherness. Hakimi (2002) cites Imam Ali saying that there is not even one single action, neither minor nor major whereupon one is in dire need of understanding and awareness. He proposes an Islamic global perspective on education where every one feels connected and tied to the others in the world and this connection can be further strengthened through a mindful involvement for implementing peace and mercy not only in small and interconnected communicates but also in larger worldwide networks.

The present literature on global education seldom reflects any of such propositions as the assumptions promoted by Huntington and Lewis bring forth the fear and negativity and not hope and optimism. In delineating this fear, Said (2003) writes

As I suggest, European interest in Islam derived not from curiosity but from fear of a monotheistic, culturally and militarily formidable competitor to Christianity. The earliest European scholars of Islam, as numerous historians have shown, were medieval polemicists writing to ward off the threat to Muslim hordes and apostasy. In one way or another that combination of fear and hostility has persisted to the present day, both in scholarly and non-scholarly attention to an Islam which is viewed as belonging to a part of the world—the Orient—counterposed imaginatively, geographically, and historically against Europe and the West (p. 344).

Global education needs to choose a different language, a different discourse and new approach towards examining, discussing and presenting issues in the global world. It needs to openly listen to others without imposing a selective process for listening. In

doing this, the discourse of superiority needs to be replaced with a shift in listening, thinking and analyzing. Global education's mindset needs to be liberated from the yoke of the poisonous emotions and feelings which dictate coercive and manipulative decision makings.

In explaining the flux of such implications, Said (2003) indicates:

There has been so massive and calculatedly aggressive attack on the contemporary societies of the Arab and Muslim for their backwardness, lack of democracy, and abrogation of women's rights that we simply forget that such notions as modernity, enlightenment and democracy are by no means simple and agreed upon concepts that one wither does or does not find, like Easter eggs in the living-room. The breathtaking insouciance of jejune publicists who speak in the name of foreign policy and who have no living notion (or any knowledge at all) of the language of what real people actually speak has fabricated an arid landscape ready for American power to construct there an ersatz model of free market "democracy," without even a trace of doubt that such projects don't exist outside of Swift's Academy of Lagado" (p. xiv).

For global education to take a new stance, it needs to revisit the definition of human beings and the common denominators of being a human being. The current language of violence as conspicuously exhibited by mass media needs to be fundamentally transformed into a language of peace not just in perfunctory levels but in profound demonstrations of peaceful structures. The current news coverage is drastically deleterious, violent and destructive. What do citizens of the world learn when they are extensively and frequently exposed to annihilating fashions of conflicts, skirmishes and encounters? If global education tacitly gets stratified within the discourse of antagonism, how can global education serve as a source for composure? If the culture of violence and threat serves to be persistently viable and pervasive, how can global education promise the possibility of celebrating global citizenship where empathy and comfort stand at the threshold of its commencement? How can global education offer the panacea of solidarity and togetherness when the citizens of the world feel inextricably enslaved by a seemingly insurmountable culture of alienation and separation? As the etymology of both whole and health suggest, the detachment from the whole works against the process of the health. A fragmented global education with the political egoism and egotism would block the exploratory journey of learning from

the *whole* where each part needs to be fully recognized as a complementary phase of the project and not in contraposition to the others.

Global education needs to be connected to a global wisdom where the heart and mind walk arms in arms and not against one another, where the roots are allowed to stand out right by the appearances, where multiplicity of thinking can open up the possibility of consensus. Global education inspired by a global wisdom looks for human freedom from the modern slavery that is not unlike the old slavery in nature. Global education driven by a global wisdom calls on cultures to borrow from one another, to share their experienced individuality, to get united for the implementation of affecting the quality of life beyond the quotidian stratum of consumerism and materialism. Global education intertwined with a global wisdom would substantiate the pearl of living together through peace and understanding away from manufacturing solipsism.

The first move towards this possibility begins with the courage to challenge the insinuations which defy and denounce the wisdom that would reveal the nakedness of global education: a mischievous kid may help us see the captivity of the crowd and their infatuation with the surface.

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# **Are We Now “Post-Secular”? A Critique of Some of The Recent Claims**

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## **Abstract**

In the last few years it has become popular to write about—or urge us to move toward—a “desecularization,” or a “post secular” age. Lying behind these calls has been the assumption that “secular” means the same as lacking values, or implies the wrong values, in particular, succumbing to a crass consumerism. But what, then, is meant by “post-secular”? Is it a helpful term? And does it rest on an adequate understanding of what secularism actually is? By examining the contrasting views of three critics; Charles Taylor, Clive Hamilton and Richard Fenn, an answer to these questions is offered. The article then takes a fresh look at secularists’ own arguments and, in that light, the claims made on behalf of a post-secular dispensation are criticized.

## Keywords

*Post-secular, Desecularization, Consumerism, Critique, Religion*

## Introduction

In the last few years it has become popular among some to write about—or urge us to move toward—a “desecularization,” or a “post secular” age. Lying behind these calls has been the assumption that “secular” means the same as lacking values, or implies the wrong values, in particular, succumbing to a crass consumerism. There is no shortage of people wanting to make this connection. At its most extreme, we find fundamentalist Protestants like David Noebel announcing happily that secularism “is graveyard dead,” and that secular humanism, its supposedly inevitable corollary, is not far behind.<sup>1</sup> Declarations like this could be replicated *ad nauseum*.

Few among the scholars would go this far in linking secularism with everything they detest, but many agree that the question is at least a valid one to ask. And at the same time as these complaints are made, we find—not infrequently from the same authors—that secular values are being upheld strongly. Rather less frequent is the recognition that the question could not be posed in the first place unless we enjoyed the fruits of living in a secular society. In the face of these confusions, it seems timely to remind ourselves of what a secular society means. There are few clearer, simpler definitions than that of Horace Kallen, who spoke of secularism as “the name for a way of being together of the religiously different, such that equal rights and liberties are assured to all, special privileges to none.”<sup>2</sup> For Kallen and those who think like him, to uphold the open society where divergent views are at least tolerated and maybe even celebrated, and where religious belief enjoys no special role in determining access to positions of power and influence, is to uphold a secular society. If people’s company is valued because of the qualities of character rather than because of an outward display of theological conformity, then we can also suppose we live in a secular society. If most of us, religious and non-religious, could agree that these values are significant ones, hard-won and easily forfeited, why have we become so cavalier about secularism? And do we jeopardize these values when we speak of the post-secular?

No attempt is going to be made here to delve into the disturbed and murky world of secularization theory. Instead, this article shall be content to follow the general conclusion of Norris and Inglehart that Western societies are becoming more secular, while much of the non-Western world is becoming more religious.<sup>3</sup> Should we need confirmation for this position, we can turn to the work of a major Christian philosopher. Charles Taylor is a practicing Catholic whose recent work, *A Secular Age*, won the Templeton Prize. Taylor is happy to defend the core claims of the secularization thesis, saying that it has successfully resisted most recent challenges on its legitimacy.<sup>4</sup> There has clearly been a decline of religion, Taylor says, and, especially since the 1960s, we live in a world with an ever-broadening range of “recompositions of spiritual life” as well as various forms of “demurrals and rejection.”<sup>5</sup> And while Taylor is critical of aspects of what he calls “exclusive humanism,” he rejects the conservative gambit of claiming it is possible or desirable to return to earlier dispensations. “Even if we had a choice,” he writes, “I’m not sure we wouldn’t be wiser to stick with the present dispensation.”<sup>6</sup>

Having recognized the reality, and even the desirability, of the secular age we live, Taylor goes on to make some significant caveats. In particular, he draws a bleak picture of what he calls the “immanent frame” of the secular age and the sense of flatness that underlies it. So while not disputing the existence of our secular age, he finds serious fault with it, and lays much of the blame at the feet of what he calls “exclusive humanism,” a term borrowed from Pope Paul VI.<sup>7</sup> Towards the end of the Introduction, Taylor outlines his core claim:

I would like to claim that the coming of modern secularity...has been coterminous with the rise of a society in which for the first time in history a purely self-sufficient humanism came to be a widely available option. I mean by this a humanism accepting no final goals beyond human flourishing, nor any allegiance to anything else beyond this flourishing. Of no previous society was this true.<sup>8</sup>

A lot, then, is going to hang on Taylor’s conception of humanism. But here is the abiding weakness of his critique. The point to bear in mind is that Taylor claims to be thoroughly familiar with contemporary humanism. He begins Part Two promising an

exploration of “the polemics around belief and unbelief in the last two centuries.”<sup>9</sup> And towards the end of the book, he says that the nineteenth chapter (“Unquiet Frontiers of Modernity”) was an attempt “to describe the contemporary debate, *largely through examining unbelieving positions*, and their critiques of religion.”<sup>10</sup> But how comprehensive has Taylor’s reading actually been?

The simplest way to illustrate this point is to list names. What follows is a partial list of people over the past century who have publicly identified themselves as humanists and who have written one or more books on humanism. Irving Babbitt, Harold Blackham, Alan Bullock, John Dietrich, Jeaneane Fowler, Edward Howard Griggs, R. B. Haldane, Hector Hawton, Finngair Hiorth, Sidney Hook, Julian Huxley, Margaret Knight, Paul Kurtz, Corliss Lamont, Kit Mouat, Richard Norman, George Novack, Curtis Reece, Anthony B. Pinn, Oliver Reiser, M. Roshwald, M. N. Roy, F. C. S. Schiller, V. M. Tarkunde, Tzvetan Todorov, Jaap van Praag, V. P. Varma, Georg Henrik von Wright, Xingyun.

These authors have said radically different things about humanism, coming at the word from different perspectives. But they’ve all seen value in theorizing about, and identifying themselves with humanism as they understand it. Whether humanists (secular or religious), naturalists, pragmatists, atheists, Marxists, existentialists, evolutionists or positivists, all have thought long and hard about what they mean by these words. Some were respected academic scholars at prestigious universities, some popularizers who wrote for the general reader. Together they have contributed a wealth of insights into the humanist tradition. The only thing all these people have in common is that none of them are so much as mentioned, even in passing, by Charles Taylor.

If we extend this to include important philosophers who are broadly humanistic without specifically labelling themselves as humanist (think of Kwame Anthony Appiah, A. J. Ayer, John Dewey, Ernest Gellner, A. C. Grayling, Kai Nielsen, Derek Parfit, John Passmore, Karl Popper, George Santayana, John Searle, or Roy Wood Sellars, to take a minimum list) we would be similarly disappointed. Things improve fractionally with respect to freethinking novelists: George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and E. M. Forster are referred to a couple of times, Thomas Mann mentioned once in passing. But of these references, only Hardy is referred to directly.

And as Taylor's book is an historical account of "exclusive humanism," we could reasonably expect to see some reference to historians of humanism writing from within the tradition. Taking a minimum list, we would note that Susan Jacoby, J. M. Robertson, David Tribe, James Thrower have all written historical accounts of humanism or atheism. As with the earlier lists, the main thing these varied scholars have in common is that none of them are mentioned, even in passing, by Charles Taylor.

Of the few "unbelieving" authorities Taylor does refer to, most are cited from secondary sources, not infrequently from their critics. Richard Dawkins, for instance, is dismissed not on the authority of anything he wrote, but on the secondhand testimony of a hostile witness; Alister McGrath, author of the pot-boiler, *The Twilight of Atheism*.<sup>11</sup> The only item written by Dawkins that Taylor cites specifically is an article from the *Times Literary Supplement* from 2000. Similarly, Bertrand Russell is mentioned only in passing, and with reference only to his 1913 essay 'The Essence of Religion', taken not from the essay itself but from Ronald Clark's biography.<sup>12</sup>

The only people from the secular intellectual traditions that Taylor exhibits a broad reading of, from original sources, are Hume, Nietzsche, and Camus, with a fair grasp of John Stuart Mill and Martha Nussbaum. It is fair to conclude, then, that Taylor's understanding of the "unbelieving positions" is vastly less comprehensive than he claims. Taylor is not the first to have made large claims on the basis of scanty research and he will not be the last. But the fact he is in good company does not make the practice any more defensible academically. His book, therefore, may well be valuable as a record of Taylor's views on humanism, but it can't be seen as a well-researched, objective critique of the humanist outlook. The point, then, is that if we are going to lament the qualities of the secular age we live in, it would be a useful idea to acquaint oneself with some of the people who have extolled its virtues.

### **What has been said about secularism**

Informed in the most partial and incomplete way, Taylor proceeds to give a gloomy account of life lived within the immanent frame, a world limited by its secularism. At this point, attention should be drawn to another confusion Taylor falls prey to: he speaks not of secularism but of secularity. But there is a difference here. Secularity is

best seen as the broad phenomenon of indifference to religion in modern Western societies. This is not the same as secularism, which is the body of thought about the separation of church and state and the freedom of conscience this entails.<sup>13</sup> A secularist, therefore, is someone who subscribes to this body of thought, and by virtue of which cannot, by definition, be indifferent to the issue. And in the same manner, a secularist can lament the indifferentism of secularity with just as much urgency as a religious person can. This has been done by the French atheist philosopher André Comte-Sponville who, while rejoicing in Europe's post-religious condition, also worries that it should be more than simply "an elegant form of amnesia or denial."<sup>14</sup>

Noting the difference between secularity and secularism is not as outlandish a distinction as might be thought. Think, for example, of the distinction we see quite often made between Christendom and Christianity. Christendom is that pervasive political climate of coercive state religion, the history of which we can trace from Constantine to the Romanovs, and which some among the American religious right are seeking to reinstate when they speak of Dominionism. Christianity, by contrast, is the belief an individual holds about the Son of God, who died for our sins and that we may live more abundantly. We have become used to Christians deprecating Christendom. If this distinction is valid, as I believe it is, then the distinction between secularity and secularism is no less justified. Indeed, one could argue it is more so because, unlike the apologists of Christendom who passionately thought of themselves as Christians, the vast majority of indifferentists who comprise secularity would object just as strongly to being called a secularist as they would a Christian. That is what being indifferent means. So Taylor's failure to draw this clear distinction—again, something not peculiar to him—has helped muddy waters already far from clear.

Taylor talks of the three "malaises of immanence," which he lists as the sense of fragility of meaning or of a search for significance; the felt flatness of our attempts to solemnize the crucial moments of passage; and the flatness and emptiness of the ordinary. These are all malaises of secularity, not of secularism. But he then goes on to make the important point that while these malaises arose from the decay of transcendence, it "doesn't follow that the only cure for them is a return to transcendence."<sup>15</sup> This valuable insight, again, not peculiar to Taylor of course, is often overlooked.

It follows from this that one does not have to pine for any form of transcendence to agree with Taylor that the three malaises he identifies are significant. They all revolve, in the end, around a notion of flatness, which elsewhere he contrasts with “fullness.” But is flatness an inevitable malaise of immanence as Taylor supposes? Is it possible that it is not so much immanence to blame here but a failure of imagination, one exacerbated in no small measure by the illusions of transcendence that make most things seem ordinary? Maybe what is needed is a new ability to recognize fullness in the secular realm, without seeking to give it an artificial gloss of transcendent guilt. But this, of course, is precisely what Taylor does not allow himself to do, because of his almost total avoidance of humanist thought on the subject. It would have been interesting, for example, to have Taylor compare his notion of fullness with the secular humanist philosopher Paul Kurtz, who wrote a book called *The Fullness of Life*.<sup>16</sup> This doesn’t happen, because Taylor seems not to have read this, or indeed anything else by Kurtz. It is not that Kurtz’s book “refutes” Taylor’s notion or anything like that. In fact, Taylor’s criticisms may have been employed to good effect by reference to Kurtz’s book, but in the absence of this engagement, we cannot know.

Another important new voice in this trend toward damning secularism with faint praise is the Australian intellectual Clive Hamilton, whose recent work *The Freedom Paradox: Towards a Post-Secular Ethics* articulates the problem well. But if he articulates the problem well, so is he illustrating it. Much of what Hamilton has to say is sound. Like Taylor, he decries the blight of moral relativism and postmodernism, and outlines their intellectual bankruptcy. But equally, he is impatient with moral conservatives, anxious to have their questionable and often fallacious absolutes pass unchallenged behind a smokescreen of condemnation of secular humanism. But where Taylor’s solution revolves around a rarefied, patrician Catholic transcendentalism, Hamilton’s is based on a transcendental idealism that owes a particular debt to Schopenhauer’s reading of Kant. Hamilton’s solution is not my concern here, so much as his assumption that it should be a “post-secular” solution. His overriding mistake is his unthinking equation of nihilism and meaningless consumerism with secularization. Once again, he is criticizing aspects of secularity, and assuming that secularism therefore stands condemned. He spends little time justifying why his theory should be “post-secular,” beyond merely asserting that all modern theories of morality, except his own, are rationalistic.

It is now safe to allow the noumenon back into ethics; indeed, the failure of humanism and all Kantian ethics demands that we do. A post-secular ethics locates moral authority not in the abstractions of reason or in enslavement to faith; it places it in our own inner selves.<sup>17</sup>

How Hamilton believes the diverse, pluralist twenty-first century world is going to accept this dauntingly abstract duality of phenomenon and noumenon remains unexplained. No account is offered as to how this magical transformation is to take place. But in the meantime, we are left with a pluralist world-society drifting dangerously, with the twin menaces of unalloyed hedonism and consumption on the one hand and fundamentalism on the other.

A more productive approach was taken by Richard Fenn in his book *Beyond Idols: The Shape of a Secular Society* (2001). Departing slightly from Taylor or Hamilton, Fenn distinguishes sharply between the sacred and the Sacred. The sacred is that range of beliefs, rites and practices that remain bound within, and controlled by, those whose jobs depend on maintaining their privileged role as gatekeeper. But the Sacred is an altogether broader notion. It is “the world that lies alongside the one in which we ordinarily move, talk, imagine, and have what is left of our being.”<sup>18</sup> In the manner of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Fenn argues that the Sacred is not the exclusive preserve of purveyors of religion. On the contrary, once access to sacred things is bound and limited in this way, the road lies open to the creation of idols; shadows of the sacred deemed beyond challenge and study and left high and dry as a result. So the more these idols are exposed to criticism and challenge, the more secular a society becomes. And this in turn makes it more open to the possibilities of the Sacred.<sup>19</sup>

Using Taylor’s language, Fenn claims we cannot hope to achieve fullness *unless* we live in a secular society, a truly secular society. Fenn’s Sacred has parallels with Hamilton’s noumenon, but is, in the end, not the same thing, because Fenn has little time for the transcendental idealism needed to nourish such an abstraction. And, of course, he sees the true home of the Sacred in a secular society in a way Hamilton can not. Fenn’s work is a far cry from utopian talk of a “post-secular” society open to remythologization. But it does leave open the question, why speak of this dimension of fullness as the Sacred? If we know by now that reason is made no mightier by becoming Reason, why should this not be true for the sacred?

### Secularism as understood by secularists

In their various ways Charles Taylor, Clive Hamilton and Richard Fenn have all found fault with the phenomenon of secularity. Many who would identify as secularists would share their concerns, even if they balked at following them into their variously-conceived clouds of unknowing. And most of the current critics of secularity—as we saw with Charles Taylor—have made little or no effort to familiarize themselves with what secularists have actually said. So what *have* secularists actually meant by secularism? We can't hope to give a comprehensive account here, so a couple of snapshots should give a fair picture. The word was coined by the English reformer and journalist George Jacob Holyoake (1817-1906) around 1851. Neither Taylor, Hamilton, nor Fenn mentions Holyoake, even in passing, despite the worldwide significance of the word he coined. This is unfair to Holyoake and to secularism. Holyoake brought together two traditions of freethought into secularism: the radical, republican, activist and anti-clerical tradition of Thomas Paine, and the ethical, utopian and rationalistic tradition of Robert Owen. And unlike thinkers a century and a half later, Holyoake understood the difference between the “secular” and “secularism.”

Secular teaching comprises a set of rules of instruction in trade, business, and professional knowledge. Secularism furnishes a set of principles for the ethical conduct of life. Secular instruction is far more limited in its range than Secularism which defends secular pursuits against theology, where theology attacks them or obstructs them.<sup>20</sup>

Holyoake wrote and thought about secularism for fifty years, but in his most protracted study of the subject, *The Origin and Nature of Secularism* (1896), he defined secularism as a “code of duty pertaining to this life for those who find theology indefinite or inadequate, unreliable or unbelievable.”<sup>21</sup> The three essential principles of secularism were held to be: the improvement of life and human effort; that science can have a material part to play in that improvement, and; that it is good to do good.<sup>22</sup>

Holyoake was adamant that secularism was not anti-religious. And we can see from his three key tenets that there is indeed no necessary conflict between secularism and religion. It is of necessity anti-theological, when theology presumes for itself a defining role in areas of government and society, but it is not anti-religious.<sup>23</sup> He wanted secularism to avoid the excesses of both doctrinal Christianity and atheism. Secularism

in the sense of a moral life stance without religion is now better understood as humanism. Indeed, Holyoake toyed for a while of speaking of humanism rather than secularism, but chose not to, mainly because he was worried by radical associations humanism was taking on at the hands of some exiled Germans in England at the time, Arnold Ruge (1802-1880) in particular.<sup>24</sup>

Holyoake said that science can have a positive role to play in the improvement of material conditions of living. His actual words were: “That science is the available Providence of man.” A statement worded like this is sure to provoke lengthy criticism from partisans of the conflict between science and religion argument. Opponents of the conflict thesis will look on a phrase like this as flagrant evidence of scientific reductionism (the favorite term of condemnation). But Holyoake was aware of the objections the term might stimulate. He added a footnote that the phrase was suggested to him by his friend the Rev. Dr. Henry Crosskey, and that Holyoake added “available,” with the intention of leaving open the existence of any other form of Providence. In other words, Holyoake was taking neither a scientific nor a reductionist attitude with this phrase. Rather, it made the uncontroversial point that science is a means available for us to improve the human lot.<sup>25</sup>

Holyoake thought of secularism as a moral movement, unconcerned with abstruse theological battles about God. He outlined the secularist rules for human conduct as: truth in speech; honesty in transactions; industry in business, and; equity in reward.<sup>26</sup> The first three of these points would probably find support from left and right of the political spectrum and across the religious/non-religious divide. His secularist rules were given in the same vein as the various outlines of humanist values which more recent thinkers have outlined. The claim was never made that these virtues were the sole preserve of secularists, only that they are entirely consistent with secularism. And, of course, this secularist code for human conduct distinguishes it clearly from the amoral indifferentism of the condition of secularity.

At this point the Taylorian could well complain that this secularist morality is all very well, but it seems precisely the sort of flatness that is being lamented. Where is the transcendence, the majesty in all this? But surely the secularist or humanist can respond by challenging the validity of the question. Who are we to presume that we should seek, let alone deserve, any more than this? Paul Kurtz spoke of the transcendental temptation, whereby people are tempted into the hubris of supposing

themselves worthy of immortality, against the prevailing rule of nature.<sup>27</sup> It is a theme that goes back to Heraclitus, who called conceit “the sacred disease.”<sup>28</sup> At its core is the presumption of according to oneself a place in the scheme of things one does not deserve. This presumption has a long history, going back to geocentric religion and the Great Chain of Being, none of which stands up to scrutiny in a post-Galileo universe. It is the core insight of all naturalistic systems of thought, of which secularism is a major consequence, that *Homo sapiens* does not, in fact, deserve the exalted place in the cosmos it has traditionally arrogated to itself.

Baruch Spinoza spoke in these terms when he extolled the virtue of *sub specie aeternitatis*, or “under the aspect of eternity.” And Nietzsche observed that Christianity owes its victory to its pandering to human conceit. “‘Salvation of the soul’ – in plain words: ‘The world revolves around *me*’...”<sup>29</sup> Bertrand Russell had the same thing in mind when he asked: “Is there not something a trifle absurd in the spectacle of human beings holding a mirror before themselves, and thinking what they behold so excellent as to prove that a Cosmic Purpose must have been aiming at it all along?”<sup>30</sup>

What is less well-known is that George Jacob Holyoake anticipated Nietzsche and Russell when he said: “Were I to pray, I should pray God to spare me from the presumption of expecting to meet him, and from the vanity and conceit of thinking that the God of the universe will take the opportunity of meeting me.”<sup>31</sup> Secularist metaphysics, in other words, is not antithetical to a proper sense of cosmic humility. Indeed, some would add that only a non-theistic position is truly able to avoid the dangers of the transcendental temptation.

Working from this metaphysics of cosmic humility, secularists have tended to proceed to notions of fallibility and its corollary of toleration. This is why the link between the secular society and the open society is so strong. The open society, wrote Karl Popper, is where the individual is confronted with personal decisions.<sup>32</sup> More recently, Ernest Gellner expanded on this when he outlined the merits of the civil society, which he characterized as a “cluster of institutions and associations strong enough to prevent tyranny, but which are, none the less, entered and left freely, rather than imposed by birth or sustained by awesome ritual.”<sup>33</sup> Nobody has yet found a convincing means by which this ideal can be achieved outside a secular society.

Some might object at this point that Albania under Enver Hoxha or Stalinist Russia were secular societies, and not noted for their defence of freedom. Once again, the

distinction between “secular” and “secularist” is useful. Stalinist Russia was a secular society in the sense of not having an established church, but it assuredly was not secularist in the sense of embracing the metaphysics of cosmic humility, from which is taken a high valuation on personal freedom and non-coercive institutions as protectors of that freedom. There should be no need at this point to rehearse the teleological presumptions in communism, a feature it shared in common with monotheistic religion rather than with naturalistic outlooks.

What is clear, in conclusion, is the urgent need to appreciate the fragile gift that is a secular society, and to look to nurturing that gift to greater strength and outreach. One person who has done this recently is Lloyd Geering, the New Zealand radical theologian who, along with Don Cupitt in the United Kingdom and John Shelby Spong in the United States, has devoted his life to forging a Christianity that can live, even prosper, within the parameters of modernity. He does this because he is quite clear, as are many of his fellow theologians, that traditional, doctrinal Christianity is unable to make this transition. Geering identifies three primary secular values: personal freedom; defence of human rights; and its welcoming attitude toward diversity.<sup>34</sup> I doubt that Charles Taylor, Clive Hamilton or Richard Fenn would quibble with any of these. Holyoake certainly wouldn't. But what distinguishes Geering from Taylor, Hamilton and Fenn is his willingness to praise the secular in the language of the secular. More of this is needed. Even when Geering goes on to plea for a planetary spirituality, he does so in secular terms.<sup>35</sup> And once this happens, a truly exciting confluence of ideas takes place when we notice that the details of what Geering calls a secular spirituality are difficult to distinguish from what secular humanist philosopher Paul Kurtz has called planetary humanism, or the British atheist philosopher Ted Honderich has in mind with his proposed Principle of Humanity.<sup>36</sup> There are also close parallels with Comte-Sponville's atheist spirituality we referred to earlier. It would seem that we do not need to renounce the secular in order to see the need for inspiring programs to motivate us out of the doldrums of secularity. Indeed the surest paths away from those doldrums seem to be consciously secular ones. To indulge, therefore, in the language of the “post-secular” is to confuse the issue and risks jettisoning secular principles altogether.

Another way out of the doldrums we find ourselves in now is to at least start talking about religion once again. Western societies have been drifting toward a multi-cultural notion that talk of religion is tantamount to hate-talk, racism or some other gross

cultural insensitivity. But as Austin Dacey and others have argued, this sells us all short. It is not intolerant of religion to subject it to informed criticism, just as it is not being intolerant of secularism to subject it to criticism. The point, he says rightly, “of the open, secular society is not to privatize or bracket questions of conscience, but to pursue them in conversation with others.”<sup>37</sup> But clearly, if we are going to do this, we need to be sure of a secular society which guarantees our freedom to engage in this conversation without fear of repercussions. There is nothing “post-secular” about this: it is at the heart of what secularism is about.

## Notes

- 1 Noebel, David, contribution to a symposium, “Will Secularism Survive?” *Free Inquiry*, Vol 25. No.6, Oct/Nov 2005, p 32. John Gray attempts a similar put-down when he equates secularism with chastity, “a condition defined by what it denies.” See Gray, John (2002), *Straw Dogs*, London: Granta, p 126.
- 2 Kallen, Horace (1954), *Secularism is the Will of God*, New York: Twayne, p 57. For a more recent, and non-Western, understanding of secularism that is much the same, see Sen, Amartya (2006), *The Argumentative Indian*, London: Penguin, p 296. The urgent endorsement of secular principles by non-Western thinkers like Sen should go some way to dispelling the postmodernist accusation of secularism as an exclusively Western discourse.
- 3 Norris, Pippa & Inglehart, Ronald (2004), *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p 217.
- 4 Taylor, Charles (2007), *A Secular Age*, Cambridge, Mass: Belknap/Harvard University Press, p 427.
- 5 *ibid*, p 437.
- 6 *ibid*, p 513.
- 7 [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_pvi-enc\\_26031967\\_populorum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_pvi-enc_26031967_populorum_en.html).
- 8 Taylor, *op.cit.*, p 18.
- 9 *ibid*, p 299.
- 10 *ibid*, p 728, *my italics*.

- 11 *ibid*, p 562. McGrath's book relies on an even scantier reading of humanist work. See *The Open Society*, Vol. 77, No. 3, Spring 2004, pp 20-22 for my review of *The Twilight of Atheism*, including a similarly exhaustive list of atheist authorities McGrath ignores.
- 12 *ibid*, p 251.
- 13 Dacey, Austin (2008), *The Secular Conscience: Why Belief Belongs in Public Life*, Amherst, NY: Prometheus, p 30.
- 14 Comte-Sponville, André (2007), *The Book of Atheist Spirituality*, London: Bantam, p.28.
- 15 Taylor, *op.cit.*, p 309.
- 16 Kurtz, Paul (1974), *The Fullness of Life*, New York: Horizon.
- 17 Hamilton, Clive (2008), *The Freedom Paradox: Towards a Post-Secular Ethics*, Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, p 220.
- 18 Fenn, Richard (2001), *Beyond Idols: The Shape of a Secular Society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p 22. This distinction parallels that between Christendom and Christianity already alluded to.
- 19 *ibid*, p 7.
- 20 Holyoake, George Jacob (1896), *The Origin and Nature of Secularism*, London: Watts, pp 61-2.
- 21 *ibid*, p 41.
- 22 *ibid*.
- 23 This was a distinction the English secularist G. W. Foote (1850-1915) made. See Foote, G. W (1879), *Secularism: The True Philosophy of Life*, London: G. W. Foote, p 9.
- 24 My forthcoming book, *A Wealth of Insights: Humanist Thought Since the Enlightenment*, to be published by Prometheus in 2010, discusses this in detail.
- 25 Holyoake, *op.cit.*, p 41.
- 26 *ibid*, p 108.
- 27 Kurtz, Paul (1986), *The Transcendental Temptation: A Critique of Religion and the Paranormal*, Buffalo: Prometheus Books, p 461.
- 28 Wilbur, J. B. & Allen, H. J. (1979), *The Worlds of The Early Greek Philosophers*, Buffalo: Prometheus Books, p 61.

- <sup>29</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich (1986), *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*, London: Penguin, No. 43, p 156.
- <sup>30</sup> Russell, Bertrand (1960 [1935]), *Religion and Science*, London: Oxford University Press, p 221.
- <sup>31</sup> Holyoake, op.cit., p 100.
- <sup>32</sup> Popper, Karl R. (1963 [1945]), *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Vol. I, p 173.
- <sup>33</sup> Gellner, Ernest (1995), *Conditions of Liberty*, London: Hamish Hamilton, p 103.
- <sup>34</sup> Geering, Lloyd (2007), *In Praise of the Secular*, Wellington: St Andrew's Trust, pp 33-4.
- <sup>35</sup> *ibid*, p 54.
- <sup>36</sup> See Kurtz, Paul (2000), *Humanist Manifesto 2000: A Call for a New Planetary Humanism*, Amherst, NY: Prometheus and Honderich, Ted (2003), *On Political Means and Social Ends*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp 87-9.
- <sup>37</sup> Dacey, op.cit., p 210.

# **Faith and Science: Juan Luís Segundo on Religion and Science**

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## **Abstract**

This paper attempts to detangle Juan Luís Segundo's writings on the relationship between faith and religion, which is to say religion and science as well. Segundo argued for a new and different conception of faith, based on a notion he called "learning to learn." The point is that faith involves a commitment to learn from others, history, and the social sciences. What is learned are lessons (ideologies) on how to live, for him especially, a just life. But in order to be effective these ideologies must be scientifically grounded instead of dogma. Segundo concluded that the most helpful science is that of historical materialism. Some have suggested that this is a move that negates theology as such in favor of critical theory. I argue that this is true, but the scientific methodology does not negate religion per se, but brings it down from the clouds into the human realm.

I wrote that for a different purpose (a conference where I presented this paper) and they had a shorter word limit, but I think this abstract still works.

## Keywords

*Juan Luis Segundo, S.J., Liberation Theology, Faith, Science, Historical Materialism*

## Introduction

First of all, it is clear that in reality the "religious" realm is generally a realm of *instrumentality* rather than a realm of value-structure. Secondly, it is clear that the "divine" character attributed to this instrumentality, however unwittingly, constitutes one of the most serious dangers facing human life. -- Fr. Juan Luis Segundo, S.J. from *Faith and Ideologies*<sup>1</sup>

Juan Luis Segundo's thinking and writing on the question of the nature of faith, the nature of ideologies, and the relationship between the two was terribly enigmatic. One can read through the relevant texts and emerge with only the most basic sense of his intentions or be overwhelmed by the unique ways in which this priest and theologian talked about religion. Mostly, the creativity was in the move from theology focused on orthodoxy to orthopraxy. What was also new about Segundo was the passionate and involved way in which he conceived the human project means the role of religious activists – if not theologians proper – is, in Segundo's terminology, to become “Artisans of a New Humanity.” Segundo was a profound thinker and to fully appreciate his work it is vital (in this theorist's view) to include his last book, *The Liberation of Dogma*. It is my contention that a full reading of Segundo's work reveals that he was saying that religion must become scientific, must adopt the methodology of the social sciences, in particular historical materialism. My purpose is to explore this subtle point in his thinking.

Segundo said that human interaction with the world and history requires that we learn more with each generation, indeed with each day, in order to be ever more successful in developing our humanity, and at this point in history this means a focus on liberation. Religion is the social system in which this interaction takes place over time, and therefore in which the process of learning takes place. The logical conclusion

is that we are obliged –to humanity – to make the most of the process; we must engage the world and ourselves scientifically. In this regard he understood faith as the commitment to learn as one goes along. He contrasted that idea with “ideology,” which was a very nuanced concept for him (see his *Faith and Ideologies* for details). Ideologies – such as religion – then are the various approaches at knowledge and learning that human beings develop collectively, and when done with openness and honesty these ideologies are science, *Wissenschaft*. This is the understanding I will explore and explain in what follows.

## Theology

One commentator summed up Segundo’s work like this:

In my view, Juan Luís Segundo seeks to liberate theology from the strictly metaphysical, to the thoroughly historical and political realm of human experience. In other words, Segundo seeks to liberate theology from itself, in the sense of breaking down the distinction between the metaphysical and historical planes of reality, with the result that all reality and human experience is situated within the historical and social realm of existence.<sup>2</sup>

In some sense Segundo was doing to theology what Karl Marx did to Hegelian philosophy, he was standing theology on its feet in order to make it useful for the human project of liberation. All of this follows from Segundo's methodology, which is based on a rejection of orthodoxy in favor of orthopraxy. One might say that Segundo was merely taking Marx seriously when he wrote that the point of philosophy is not to describe the world but to change it.<sup>3</sup> Since people are social animals who exist in and through their collective activity, our lives are social, complex, interactive and therefore political (Aristotle, of course, said that first). Segundo's understanding of religion, as an ideology, was that it is a guide for this activity, a guide for living.

It is important to note that Segundo based his discussion of ideology on Marx, but was adopting an explicitly neutral use of the term similar to Karl Mannheim and, more directly, V.I. Lenin. For Marx, as is well known, ideology was a cover the ruling class

used to justify its domination. For Segundo, as for Lenin, ideology is a term that is more akin to class-consciousness generally.<sup>4</sup> The neutral use of the term comes from Lenin's political philosophy, and the way in which he conceived revolutionary struggle, as in *The State and Revolution*. In this sense, all human activity requires analysis of the situation, decisions on how to proceed, etc. The point being that the collective activity of the revolutionary class requires an ideology, a comprehensive understanding of the situation and the necessary praxis given present historical realities.

For Segundo, religion is an ideology. And herein lies the rub, as they say, if religion is this kind of class conscious ideology directed towards liberation, then it is – or at least seems very similar to – science in the way Marx and Frederick Engels understood historical materialism to be a science. Segundo did not say that religion should be identical to historical materialism, but in as much as religion should be like a social science at all, it comes to resemble historical materialism because of the commitment to liberation and the working class perspective. This perspective, I think, is faith, as Segundo understood that term.<sup>5</sup> As far as religion is Christian religion the faith is a commitment to love one another – what the Marxists would call solidarity.

What remains approximates a critical social theory with a strong Christian ethical substrate, which in turn rests upon the gospel imperative to love thy neighbor.<sup>6</sup>

But there is a difficulty in all this, in that Marx and Engels (in their own ways at times) were very critical of the inclusion of values in the struggle for socialism. In his time, Engel's little book *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* made this argument widely known.<sup>7</sup> Historical materialism, as a science, looks to the ways in which history moves, understood "objectively" through the methodology of science (really *Wissenschaft*, as the German concept is broader than the English).<sup>8</sup> Socialism may be about justice, but the struggle itself must be scientifically grounded in order to succeed in the most efficient manner. Or so the argument goes. Segundo is challenging all of this by arguing that our ideologies are necessarily connected to our faith.<sup>9</sup>

The struggle for justice may be scientifically understood and advanced, but it is also ultimately about our human desires. Personally, I think Segundo makes a very good case for this connection and it cannot be doubted that if people had no desire for justice there would be no class struggle; people would simply accept class domination.<sup>10</sup> But

people do expect and fight for justice, so human values are part of the equation, part of the dialectical complexity of the movement of history. That said, Engels' point had more to do with faith-based socialism in the more traditional sense of faith (Utopian Socialism), as in waiting for God to bring justice down from heaven. Engels was arguing for a scientifically organized and historically informed human struggle for justice rather than mere good intentions. Segundo was simply adopting the understanding of ideology advanced by Lenin using the language of faith.<sup>11</sup> Faith is dialectically connected with ideology, so the historical project for social change must then be guided by both the ideology of that change as well as the valuation of justice, and the faith commitment to the science. The struggle rests on the human value of justice, faith in the human capacity to learn how to apply that value in different situations at different times, and the historically developing ideologies applying that value in light of that faith at different times and places.

For Segundo all of this was clear, and was theology in some sense of the word. Theology has just been brought down out of the clouds and in Segundo's hands became a tool for human living, focused on human experience and human values. This appears to have been his theological project. His claim was that

faith relates to values-structure as its grounding, or as its hope in itself, in the sense that 'in the end it will be seen that it was better to act' in accordance with a particular value-structure.<sup>12</sup>

That superior values-structure was, for that Christian theologian, a Christian value: love one another.<sup>13</sup> And it is absolute, but not universal. These values-structures, or more simply values, are absolute for the person who holds them but others may choose other values.

But we are talking about religion, and some would say religion cannot liberate. Quite famously, Marx wrote:

The abolition of religion as the *illusory* happiness of people is a demand for their *real* happiness. The call to abandon their illusions about their condition is a *call to abandon a condition that requires illusions*.<sup>14</sup>

Thus, even when religion embraces the cause of the oppressed, in Marx's view it still functions as an ideological barrier to the formation of a practical, revolutionary class consciousness, inspiring human beings to fight their oppressors in a condition of ignorance, rather than from a position based upon a scientific knowledge of society.<sup>15</sup>

However, my opinion is that Segundo was working with a radically different understanding of religion. This understanding was extremely creative in that he articulated a vision of religion and the place for commitment to it using a model more associated with secular theorists like Clifford Geertz and Peter Berger.<sup>16</sup> Segundo, at times, claimed his religion, or ideology, was superior. The question of superiority was for him practical, not metaphysical. An ideology is superior because it is more effective, by virtue of scientifically describing reality and offering a praxis that can ultimately succeed in making real historical change. Segundo's Christianity is superior, in short, because historical materialism as a science is superior and Segundo's Christianity is one very interesting way to make use of historical materialism. He offers the values of the Christian as the approach but recognizes as well that other people approach Marxism from other, although obviously similar, values-structures. In the simplest terms, some have said that since Segundo's theology has nothing to say about God it is not theology (a pedantic argument, to be sure). It is, I think, an involved discussion of religion in a way that would satisfy Marx, in that this is a religion that has adopted Marx's scientific method and has given up traditional religion's focus on a divine other.<sup>17</sup>

As I said, Segundo claimed that praxis is its own measure: if it liberates it works. From his point of view, what else is there? And I would argue that was the core of Segundo's move to science: observe and test. The test is does it liberate. In Segundo's view to test the praxis against some metaphysical value would miss the point and inevitably cause greater suffering – this argument strikes me as eminently convincing given the suffering justified on theological grounds throughout history. In fact, Segundo made that exact point in his own discussion of these issues.<sup>18</sup> It is all the more convincing because his Christianity is of absolute value only to Christians and makes no universal claim, as an ideology. But there is one part of this that does make a universal claim, that part is faith.

## Faith

Segundo's most fundamental statement about faith is that it is essentially a living and dynamic commitment on the part of the human being rather than a 'possession' or 'deposit' consisting of formulas and creeds which require preservation and to which the individual returns for repeatable solutions when confronted with the struggles of life.<sup>19</sup>

So faith is not a kind of fundamental trust in reality but a commitment to learning what reality has to teach.<sup>20</sup> Faith is, in one of Segundo's classic phrases, a learning to learn, and most importantly here faith is communicated in the realm of iconic language rather than digital language.<sup>21</sup> Let me unpack that. Writing a paper on this subject, or for Segundo writing a book, is inherently limited because in these forms one uses digital language. Digital language is the language of straightforward prose, it is logical and in theory consistent. Iconic language is the language of poetry, of images, and of faith.<sup>22</sup> Segundo's point, borrowed from Gregory Bateson, was that iconic language multiplies the information communicated, thus the power of poetry. And as a result of this increased power to communicate, iconic language is the way in which we communicate values. And where iconic language expresses our values, digital language is needed to express what Segundo called "transcendent data," meaning our conceptions of reality or metaphysics.

Faith gives us some sense of what should be and that is judged against what is, the transcendent data. But since faith is expressed iconically it can only be judged existentially. Ideology, in particular science, is expressed digitally and so can only be judged logically. But these things interact dialectically.

The language of faith, then, is a dialectic involving our notions of how things "ought to be" and our notions of how things "in the ultimate instance" really are. Thus all faith statements necessarily conjoin a particular interpretation of reality with the implications of that interpretation for concrete human life and praxis.<sup>23</sup>

Most importantly here, things ought to be just, and this is basic to how humans experience reality.

What often confuses people is the relationship between what is and what we want. According to dialectics, reality is always a curious mixture of what is and what we want it to be. As Engels explained it, reality is matter in motion, or more properly stated in a post-quantum mechanics world, I should say that reality is matter

undergoing constant change. Because our reality is socially constructed, our own behavior forms part of the immediate data. What we want and what we do is part of the dialectical process of reality. So we have both notions of reality as it is and reality as we would like it to be. As we act to bring about some coincidence between what we take as given and what we want, the nature of what really is changes because we are part of the totality of change that reality undergoes constantly. Therefore, to say what *is*, is not really possible, one can say what was and what we think or hope will be, but what *is* changes as we say it. I think Segundo is explaining all of this in the language of theology, in a way that embraces the dialectical nature of reality and self-consciously involves itself in history, which is to say the human side of reality.

I am convinced that what Segundo was articulating was an understanding of how people go about engaging dialectical reality in a way that appreciates the human interest in what otherwise seems like an "objective reality."<sup>24</sup> What we think is impacts what we want, what we want influences what we do, and what we do changes what is, which then changes what we want, and so on. The obvious difficulty, which is obvious to anyone familiar with dialectical philosophy, Taoism, or Quantum Mechanics, is that reality also changes of its own accord, and resists human attempts to mold it to exactly fit our wishes. So the complexity is two-fold, on the human scale the ruling class resists efforts to construct a more just society directly, and on an ontological level reality itself resists in a purely dialectical fashion -- meaning that most of our efforts have effects that we never contemplated.

To some it seems that Segundo was left with faith as merely an inspirational force, a good intention. But the complexity of the dialectic is that the intention actually is part of reality, and comes from reality. Our activity, motivated by intentions, is part of what is. Faith as mere intention would be external to reality, like a view in upon it. This misses the point that we are involved in reality, not spectators of it. And in a related way, as I mentioned above, one can interpret faith, in Segundo's sense, as an aspect of class-consciousness -- as the class location and identification aspect of class-consciousness. Faith is not just a good intention, it is a social and political location; so if history and politics were ontological for Segundo then this faith is properly ontological in that it is an expression of our being, qua social and historical subjects.

## Marxism

Segundo devoted a good deal of space to an analysis of the question of whether science is an ideology, and can ideologies be scientific. In that discussion he focused on Marx's own arguments and those of later, mostly European Marxist theoreticians. Segundo's point, in the end, was that when Marx claimed to have subjected economics to the rigor of the natural sciences he was mistaken. Actually the mistake is two-fold, in the first case Segundo argued that the natural sciences are not ideologically neutral in spite of their claims, and second that economic science in particular is not as rigorous as Marx believed at the time.<sup>25</sup>

Segundo's point was not about science as science, but concerns the issue of the divorce of ideology and science. Segundo accepted that historical materialism is science; he simply argued that the science of history and all science are their own forms of ideology and therefore relate to issues of faith.<sup>26</sup> Marx wanted to believe that the science of history, his science of history, did not depend upon the values of the investigator. It is that contention that Segundo disputed. As he explained it:

Such ["objective"] science would be part of "ideology" [in the generic sense] only to the extent that anything, depending on its own particular characteristics, can be *used* as an instrument by conscious beings endowed with will and the ability to plan things out. What would be "ideological" [in the pejorative sense] in such a case would be a particular "use" of science, based on values alien to science itself.<sup>27</sup>

His ultimate point being that science, like any human endeavor, is related to our values. One cannot claim to be doing something completely objective and have that mean that all human values have been removed.

In this discussion too, I claim, Segundo is not really as controversial as he presented himself, or as others may make him out to be. I am convinced that what Segundo claimed about science based on Marx's work is substantially in agreement with traditional interpretations. Marxism is primarily a methodology, and dialectical at that, so particular conclusions will change over time or be reformulated. Therefore,

Marx's science as science is related to particular human values, especially justice and democracy.

Georg Lukács argued that the proletariat has greater access to truth through their science because the truth is not impartial in these questions. The tide of history is on the side of democracy and justice, and therefore on the side of the proletariat.<sup>28</sup> Segundo clearly agreed with this position, though he phrased the issue a bit differently focusing on faith and values. Then in an extended discussion of the relationship between dialectical materialism and historical materialism Segundo turned to Louis Althusser. Althusser was an even bigger advocate of the science of history developed by Marx. Where Segundo disagreed with Althusser was the question of the origin of the values behind the science. Althusser claimed that values come out of science and Segundo, obviously, argued that values are in some sense prior to the science and are the motivation for one's commitment to a particular science.<sup>29</sup> Further, as I mentioned above Segundo noted that Lenin discussed the interconnection between values and science in a similar manner.

So, what I hope to have demonstrated thus far is that science is a form of ideology in the way Segundo discussed these terms. That science, like all ideology, is intimately related to various human values and works to support and actualize those values. The values a person has inform their faith and this faith leads the individual to choose particular ideologies as a way of living. The faith that we call working class consciousness leads to the adoption of the ideology we call the science of historical materialism. And most importantly when Segundo talked about religion, as a form of ideology, he was advocating a religion that is substantially informed by the science of historical materialism. The difference between science and religion is that religion self-consciously incorporates the values behind both in a unified vision of human life, where science is specifically focused its subject area, in this case on the movement of history. From the discussion above, I think it is clear that this movement of history is vital to Segundo's religion, but as a theologian Segundo was also interested in religious life, qua religious life, which is to say social issues like ritual, celebration, and mourning; existential issues like meaning; and aesthetic issues like spirituality. Segundo was interested in the whole human person and the whole society, his ontological focus was still historical and political but the human person exists as a complex actor in the struggles of history and politics.

## Religion

Having established that religion must be informed by science, this leads to the real question of this paper, must religion adopt the methodology of historical materialism and become scientifically constructed? The reason I began this essay with an emphasis on Segundo's last book is that I think a reading of *Faith and Ideologies* implies that the answer to the above question might actually be found in his discussion of dialectical materialism as its own ontology, which would of course invite a direct confrontation between Segundo's theism and dialectical materialism's atheism. But Segundo actually negated this question by returning to his original focus, from *The Liberation of Theology*, on faith as deuterio-learning, learning to learn. My claim is that learning to learn is faith in science, in the dialectical method of historical materialism.

In *The Liberation of Theology* Segundo presented an understanding that seemed to be relatively neutral with regard to the question of the superior functionality of Christianity. He discussed the Christian faith and compared that with the Marxist faith and determined that both are equally functional. Then in *Faith and Ideologies* he seemed to go back to a position that did see Christianity as superior through a long discussion of the fact of Marx's atheism, and the necessity of dialectical materialism being an atheistic system or not. He rejected both of these claims through arguments that I personally did not find convincing. The trajectory seemed to be one in which his arguments for theism generally and Christianity in particular were getting stronger. Indeed the title and much of the text of *The Liberation of Dogma* imply a Christocentric position. That is not what it all comes to however.

The core of *The Liberation of Dogma* is a plea to adopt a scientific methodology with regard to religious life. Segundo argued, quite in line with his previous work, that our faith needs to involve a commitment to learn from previous generations. As a theologian his interest was in Christian dogma, in Christian scripture particularly. His point however was not that these represent superior sources, as that would ultimately contradict his whole argument. The Christian scripture, indeed any historical text (including Marx's writing for that matter) cannot be a "deposit" of wisdom. He had always argued that this was the basic and most dangerous error of Fundamentalism – muzzling the word of God. But here he is not so interested in the "word" of God as

much as the pedagogy of God through the scriptures. Revelation is not the content; it is the process of inquiry. He said,

Like any other message transmitted by human beings, dogma ought to be well interpreted.<sup>30</sup>

This is because, "...the central divine communication from which all dogma proceeds is made in language that is primarily 'iconic': myths, legends, narratives, and history." Here my discussion of iconic language bears fruit; the iconic touches us on the level of faith, and that is its importance, but what it means requires an interpretation. The scripture is not in digital language; to take it literally is an absurdity. And to think that an interpretation in one place or time will speak to all other places or times is equally absurd. Segundo argued that this is a core teaching of the church today,<sup>31</sup> and is

...more worthy of God than the function of dictating.<sup>32</sup>

He wrote:

In somewhat more technical language, the idea is that one generation transmits to another not so much a "what to do if" but rather "epistemological premises" – that is guidelines for understanding what happens that enable the new generation to gradually acquire its own experience. This is an extraordinary saving of energy, but not when it is taken to the point of a "reaction" mechanically learned and practiced. It saves energy for the sake of experimentation.<sup>33</sup>

The core argument here is that scripture offers,

... the process of a pedagogy that does not pile up items of information, but helps human beings go deeper into their problems....<sup>34</sup>

The technical mechanism for this pedagogy is through a process of teaching us how to "punctuate" our experiences.<sup>35</sup> He explained that what we learn from experience has to do with where we put pauses in our internal narration of the events. If I pause, like

putting a period at the end of a sentence, after a tragedy my lesson will focus on the tragic. If the pause is after the recovery from the tragedy, then the lesson involves recovery. All of which strikes me as eminently dialectical, reality keeps moving so the lessons have to do with where we pause for reflection. So the stories in the Bible offer examples of how to set about "punctuating" our lives.

Now all of this sounds Christo-centric, but that is not the whole story. What Segundo was saying is that great art generally serves this function. His contention is that Christian Dogma, indeed any form of dogma, must be liberated through the process he described. But the book is silent on the superiority question. In that regard he seemed to have given up that debate and was concentrating his attention on his own area, his own community. Further, he remarked,

Like everything dividing the churches, Catholic doctrine on the Bible is right, I believe, in one respect: the Bible does not become a human and rich norm except by becoming *tradition*.<sup>36</sup>

My reading of this, coupled with the danger of attributing a divine character to the realm of instrumentality, and his point about the very human nature of this process by which each generation transmits guidelines for understanding experience, leads me to an open reading of the text in which the lesson is as clear for the non-Christian as it is for the Christian, it is just that his examples were all focused on his interests (the Catholic Church's use of dogma).<sup>37</sup> For example, the sources from which we learn how to learn are our iconic repositories; they are the great art and wisdom of the ages. It is important in this regard that Segundo did not argue that scripture was the sole source, only that it is a very good source as evidenced by the tradition, by previous generations seeing value in it and handing it on to the next.<sup>38</sup>

Segundo concluded with observations such as:

However, it would be even worse if by passively accepting scattered and contradictory bits of information believers were to lose the experiential character (and hence the existential logic) of the message of Christ.<sup>39</sup>

For my purposes here I think it is important to focus on the points about "experiential character" and the point about one generation's transmissions to the next. These points, I think, represent the scientific focus of Segundo's thought. In particular he was obviously concerned with the issue of methodology. The information that each generation passes down is not in the details but in the method. The important lessons in the scripture are also not in the details but in the method. We must learn how to learn, which is to say we must adopt the methodology of science in order to discover what we need to know as we go along, informed by the successes and failures of past generations. Learning to learn is a focus on method and for his (and the masses of humanity's) liberationist purposes that method is the scientific method of historical materialism. So, religion must become not just a kind of science but that specific kind of science, subjecting itself to the methodology of science, to the openness to the future of science, and to the pragmatic standards of science (does it work?).

## Conclusion

Assuming that the arguments above are convincing, and Segundo actually claimed that religion ought to be organized around the science of historical materialism, I think a more interesting question then presents itself. In what ways was Segundo's conception of religion based on historical materialism substantially different from Lenin's conception of the party based on dialectical materialism? In the Preface to *The Liberation of Dogma* Segundo has some very cryptic remarks about this being his last book, not being allowed to publish after this, etc. I think what he meant was that having fully developed this understanding I am articulating, and having applied it directly to the Catholic Church, he expected to completely alienate the leadership of the Church. If I am correct, Segundo was saying that the Catholic Church, and indeed all churches and religious organizations, must become like the Marxist-Leninist version of the Communist Party if they are to exist honestly and fulfill their self described moral imperative. This is obviously an interpretation on my part, as his remarks were indeed cryptic. In a first read through of the book I was confused as to why he made them at all. But upon further reflection on the place that book occupies in his work generally I am left with the profound impression that this priest from Uruguay was telling religious people to be like the Communists (in an ideal sense, not that they

should all go out and join the local party organization, which itself may or may not fit the ideal he was laying out).

This interpretation may not be as unique as it seems at first, after all the American priest known as Padre Guadalupe interpreted Segundo in just this way decades earlier. Fr. James Carney (his real name) was heavily influenced by the work of Segundo intellectually and morally. Carney cited Segundo's writings in his autobiography as being formative to the development of his thinking. In a chapter covering 1961, Carney wrote,

Some years later in Honduras, on reading the theology of Juan Luis Segundo, S.J., I completed my personal synthesis of God's plan for this world.<sup>40</sup>

The reference is toward God's plan for justice. And in fact he specifically mentions having read and made pastoral use of virtually all of Segundo's writing through the time of his death in 1983.<sup>41</sup> He also listed Segundo's conclusions as the major intellectual force behind his decision to join a group of Honduran revolutionaries in Nicaragua in 1983. In Carney's words,

My studies of [Teilhard de] Chardin and Juan Luis Segundo made it clear to me that God's plan for the evolution of this world and of human society is obviously dialectical, involving conflict and at times even armed revolution.<sup>42</sup>

This decision was fatal to Carney, as he was captured entering Honduras with a group of 97 rebels and was executed by Honduran Special Forces. Carney's position was that the revolutionaries were on the side of justice and God, and therefore should have the support of clergy just as the regular army did. He said that "to be a Christian is to be a revolutionary."<sup>43</sup>

I mention this story because I would like to conclude with some thoughts about what it means to take Segundo seriously and move towards a scientifically constructed religion. Padre Guadalupe is in some sense the model for this construction, certainly for the model of the role of the clergy. I observed above a sense in which the clergy is analogous to the party, but this is not a strict identity. Carney joined the revolutionaries (which is strictly identical with the party in this context), not to be a

soldier but to minister to the soldiers. He did not see himself shooting people, that was not his role. In the party sense, I would say that he did not see himself as a party leader, in the political leadership of the vanguard of the working class. But his involvement was equally deep, I think, and equally important.

So, my conclusion on this issue is that the role of the clergy is the cultivation of the religious side of being human in the midst of struggle. This religious side is the part of our selves that is emotive and emotional, the part that communicates primarily in the iconic realm. Other aspects of our lived experience certainly involve iconic communication, but the religious side is primarily iconic. Thus religion has always made such pervasive use of ritual and art; by this I mean music, paintings, stained glass, sculpture, architecture, food, wine, ceremony, dance, and more. The clergy cultivates the aesthetic, existential and social aspects of being human.<sup>44</sup> The direct overlap with the social sciences is with the social aspect that is directly informed by social and political philosophy, psychology, sociology, and anthropology. And Segundo's point was that all of religion must be analyzed scientifically in order to guide our praxis. But this praxis is not just the construction of religion; it is vital in the construction of the New Humanity. Thus the larger scientific analysis is immediately relevant, in the ways Segundo discussed it because our praxis must not only respond to our lived reality, but also anticipate developments and coordinate praxis proactively. The whole project of human existence points towards justice, or in Carney's words; it is God's plan. God aside, the trajectory towards justice that inspired Carney is the same trajectory Marx and Engels were talking about, that motivated Lenin and Che, Althusser and Lukács, Juan Luís Segundo and countless others. Justice is the human project, and thus the project of religion (cultivating the human "spirit" in the course of struggle), and the science of historical materialism is the tool for its realization. That is what Segundo was trying to teach us.

## Notes

- 1 Juan Luís Segundo, *Faith and Ideologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1984): 50.
- 2 Marsha Aileen Hewitt, *From Theology to Social Theory: Juan Luís Segundo and the Theology of Liberation* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990): 8.
- 3 Marx's XI Thesis on Feuerbach.

4 Hewitt, 13.

5 Segundo, *Faith and Ideologies*, 95. Marx uses "consciousness" as a synonym for "ideology," my point is that the particular class perspective is where the element of what Segundo calls "faith" comes in.

6 Hewitt, 13-14.

7 Frederick Engels, "Socialism: Utopian and Scientific" was originally part of the larger book *Anti-Dühring* which can be found in Volume 25 of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels *Collected Works* (New York: International Publishers, 1987). Engels commented in the Introduction to the English edition that this book was the most widely translated of any of his or Marx's work up to that time.

8 Clearly Segundo is saying that objectivity is a charade that covers class position. I would interpret this emphasis on science from Segundo to be more about a relative objectivity in the sense of unemotional confrontation with the facts as they can be gathered and understood.

9 Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976): Chapter Four.

10 Segundo develops the interconnections between faith, values, and ideologies in *Faith and Ideologies*, particularly Chapter III.

11 For Hewitt the move is not responsibly grounded in that Marx and even Lukács would have rejected it, see pages 66-67.

12 Hewitt, 48, quoting *Faith and Ideologies*, 107. Here and in what follows I do not distinguish between my use of "values" and Segundo's "values-structure."

13 The claim of superiority seems clear in some places, but I think eventually drops out of Segundo's discussion. I return to this question below.

14 Hewitt, 70, quoting Marx.

15 Hewitt, 71.

16 Segundo himself discusses Geertz' work in *Faith and Ideologies* (see page 35) in order to solidify his position.

17 This analysis is adapted from: Richard Curtis, "The Essence of Religion: Homo Religiosus in a Dialectical Material World", *Nature, Society, and Thought*, Volume 11, Number 3 (1998): 311-330.

18 Specifically in *Faith and Ideologies*.

- 19 Bryan P. Stone, *Effective Faith: A Critical Study of the Christology of Juan Luis Segundo* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994): 46.
- 20 See Stone, 51, and Segundo, *Liberation of Theology*, 121.
- 21 This discussion of iconic verse digital language is introduced here because it fits with the discussion of Stone, but its full relevance for the paper comes out below.
- 22 This language comes out in *Faith and Ideologies*, Chapter VI, and Stone, pp56-60.
- 23 Stone, 59.
- 24 Segundo objected to the "material" part of dialectical materialism, but was very interested in the dialectical methodology of historical materialism. See Segundo, *Faith and Ideologies*, Chapter IX particularly.
- 25 This part of the discussion draws especially on Chapter IV of *Faith and Ideologies*.
- 26 Segundo, *Faith and Ideologies*, 100.
- 27 Segundo, *Faith and Ideologies*, 101.
- 28 Segundo, *Faith and Ideologies*, 246.
- 29 Segundo, *Faith and Ideologies*, 241.
- 30 Segundo, *Liberation of Dogma*, 7.
- 31 Segundo, *Liberation of Dogma*, 76, referring to *Dei Verbum* from Vatican II.
- 32 Segundo, *Liberation of Dogma*, 41.
- 33 Juan Luis Segundo, *The Liberation of Dogma* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992): 176.
- 34 Segundo, *Liberation of Dogma*, 41.
- 35 Segundo, *Liberation of Dogma*, 48.
- 36 Segundo, *Liberation of Dogma*, 203.
- 37 This point is weaker than Segundo admitted, in that various class interests will participate in the process of handing down iconic repositories, including the ruling class. This is related to the point the English theologian Daphne Hampson makes in her feminist and Marxist critique of the Bible as unredeemable for liberative purposes, for example see her essays in: Daphne Hampson, ed., *Swallowing a Fishbone? Feminist Theologians Debate Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1996). The issue of resolving Hampson's critique with Segundo's is interesting but beyond the scope of this project.
- 38 This is the weakest part of my argument in that Segundo did equivocate on the issues I cite. I think my interpretation is the most reasonable given the totality of

his comments in this and other books, but one could take the whole of just page 203 and make the reverse argument. Further, any other interpretation would be incoherent given Segundo's general argument. I don't think, for example, that he would dispute the value of the Upanishads given their even longer tradition.

<sup>39</sup> Segundo, *Liberation of Dogma*, 263.

<sup>40</sup> Padre J. Guadalupe Carney, *To Be A Revolutionary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985): 120.

<sup>41</sup> Carney, 288, 290.

<sup>42</sup> Carney, 312.

<sup>43</sup> Carney, inscription to: *To Be A Revolutionary*.

<sup>44</sup> See the Curtis article (referenced above) for a full discussion of this analysis of religiosity.

# **The Swastika and The Crescent “Islamofascism”: Reality or Political Syllogism**

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## **Abstract**

This article attempts to analyze the now popular neologism “Islamofascism” in order to ascertain whether or not it is a viable term or concept to describe modern Islamic fundamentalism and or Islamic extremism. Through the use of Robert O. Paxton's list of essential characteristics of fascism, and the religious norms of Islam, the author attempts to clarify what fascism is, and what Islam is, and then compare the two in order to determine whether it is theoretically possible for Muslims, and in this case Islamists, to be accurately labeled fascists, or if the two phenomenon are too distinct from each other to have a viable neologism that combines the two. The article examines the roots of fascism, which shares some of the same roots as modern Islamism, especially in its discontent with modern liberal political-economy, and demonstrates that there is an abundance of similarities between the two. However, through the analysis of the differences, the author concludes that the differentiation

between the two is too substantive, and as such, a reconciliation is impossible. Therefore, the author concludes that it is more accurate to describe the worldview and actions of some Islamists as “fascistic” but should not be understood as a new form of fascism. To artificially conflate the two would distort both concepts and movements beyond repair, and would result in the diminishment of their distinctive qualities. If “fascism” or “Islam” are to mean anything substantive, they must remain linguistically unencumbered by the other.

### **Keywords**

*Cultural Critic, Historical Fascism, Islam, Sociology, Psychology*

### **Introduction**

Since the year 2006, President Bush and others personalities on the American political right popularized a “neologism” in their rhetorical battle with Usama bin Laden and other Muslim extremists. When commenting on the thwarted Britain-based suicide attack on civilian jetliners in August of 2006, President Bush said that it serves as a “stark reminder that this nation is at war with Islamic fascists.”<sup>1</sup>

Such sentiments have been further expressed by the likes of Fox New’s Bill O’Reilly and Sean Hannity, conservative radio’s Rush Limbaugh, and former House of Representative speaker Newt Gingrich, etc. Within hours of its first use by the commander-and-chief, this termed entered into the popular discourse in the major news media, as well as a vigorous on-line debate among students, activists, political pundits, etc. The on-line democratic encyclopedia, “Wikipedia,” nearly instantly had the new term defined and debated, offering multiple perceptions, definitions, and critiques of those definitions. However, academic scholars of the science of religion, political scientists, and religious leaders, almost uniformly neglected to give an objective, thorough, and critical examination of this newly coined term. Some conservative religious personalities, such as Franklin Graham and Pat Robertson, fully embraced the term, while others simply ignored it; seeing it as a non-scholastic rhetorical strategy by the administration to induce fear, misunderstanding, and a sense of historical connection to America’s fight against German fascism of Hitler’s Third Reich.

It is unclear as to who first coined the term “Islamofascism.” Although popular “experts,” whose credentials as “experts” are never questioned, i.e. terrorism “expert” Steve Emerson, “cultural critic” and author Christopher Hitchens, and the notorious Islamophobic “expert” Stephen Schwartz, have all in some way tried to take credit for the term.<sup>2</sup> However, the renowned scholar and author Dr. Malise Ruthven seemed to have invented the term in the early 90’s when discussing the authoritarian disposition of Middle Eastern governments.<sup>3</sup> Although he was discussing a specific form of government, the term has been appropriated by secular neo-cons and Christian conservatives alike, and cast upon a wide range of cultural, religious, political, and economic movements, philosophies, groups, and personalities among Muslims. Indeed, even those moderate Muslims who do not agree with bin Laden or similar ideologies, yet so happen to be critical of America’s foreign policy in the Middle East, have been accused of being an “Islamofascist.”<sup>4</sup>

In order to fully grasp the concept of “Islamofascism,” we must ask some fundamental questions. First, since fascism is the noun in the neologism, we must first define what fascism is, through its ideology, goals, and strategies. Second, we must define what “Islam” is; more specifically, what Islamic fundamentalism, extremism, or Islamism, is, by way of its ideology, goals, and strategies. Third, through comparative analysis, we must ask the question as to whether or not these terms can be synthesized into a meaningful, coherent, and logical neologism, or if the differences between these two concepts are too vast to be reconciled. Fourth, if “Islamofascism” is not a valid term, we must ask if there is an alternative that is more viable. Through this critical analysis, we hope that we can come to a better understanding of what it is that Usama bin Laden and other groups want and are fighting for, what their ideology is comprised of, and to clarify whether or not this violent Muslim movement represents a new form of fascism.

### **Historical Fascism and its Characteristics**

It is entirely unclear as to whether the Bush administration was referring to fascism as an a-historical ideological and philosophical phenomenon, or if he was implying “Islamofascism” was similar to the National Socialist philosophy of Hitler’s Third Reich. If one assumes, and I’ll admit that I do, the intention of the neologism was to

conjure up memories of Nazi Germany in the minds of the American public, then I must assume that he was implying the later. Any thorough study of fascism will demonstrate that the authoritarian, nationalistic, militaristic, characteristics manifest themselves in various time and place specific ways. For instance, the fascism of Germany had a very prominent anti-Semitic component, whereas the fascism of Italy had much less. Furthermore, the identification of anti-Semitism among a certain group is not sufficient enough to label such group fascist. Indeed, no one characteristic of a given group legitimates it as being labeled fascist. At best, such groups can be labeled “fascistic,” but not fascist.

Defining fascism has been a major endeavor for many scholars of history, psychology, sociology, religion, political science, etc. Often simply used as an emotive-pejorative term, a precise definition has eluded much of contemporary scholarship. It has broadly defined as a “sum of all right-wing reactionary tendencies,” to very precise definitions that would exclude everything except the Third Reich.<sup>5</sup> However, since I believe the motives of the administration in using the term was to invoke visions of the Nazis, I will attempt to extract some general characteristics from German fascism specifically, instead of engage in an broad phenomenological investigation of fascism.

From his research on fascist Italy and German, Columbia Professor Robert O. Paxton, author of *The Anatomy of Fascism*, presents a broad definition of fascism by 9 general criteria.

- § “a sense of overwhelming crisis beyond the reach of any traditional solutions;
- § the primacy of the group, toward which one has duties superior to every right, whether individual or universal, and the subordination of the individual to it;
- § the belief that one’s group is a victim, a sentiment that justifies any action, without legal or moral limits, against its enemies, both internal and external;
- § dread of the group’s decline under the corrosive effects of individualistic liberalism, class conflict, and alien influences;
- § the need for closer integration of a purer community, by consent if possible, or by exclusionary violence if necessary;
- § the need for authority by natural chiefs (always male), culminating in a

national chieftain who alone is capable of incarnating the group's historical destiny;

§ the superiority of the leader's instincts over abstract and universal reason;

§ the beauty of violence and the efficacy of will, when they are devoted to the group's success;

§ the right of the chosen people to dominate others without restraint from any kind of human or divine law, right being decided by the sole criterion of the group's prowess within a Darwinian struggle.”<sup>6</sup>

Historically, fascism as a movement was first elucidated by the Italian dictator Benito Mussolini. Etymologically, the term comes from the Latin word *fasces*, which was a bundle of rods fastened to an axe which represented ancient Roman authority as well as Roman solidarity. Mussolini spelled out four important essentials of fascism. 1) The individual is subordinate to the state and his interests are only valid if they correspond to the interests of the state. 2) The state is an all-encompassing entity, which assigns and negates value to all human activities and endeavors. 3) Fascism is inherently anti-democratic, because democracy allows the majority to establish that which is lawful, meaningful, and in the interest of the people. Furthermore, democracy places government below the will of the people. It is a tool of the demos to establish order, execute laws, and provide security. However, fascism places the state above the people, and therefore the people are a tool of the state. 4) Fascism is fundamentally anti-liberal, in terms of cultural liberalism, which emphasizes individualism. The collective solidarity is supreme over individual autonomy.<sup>7</sup>

Mussolini was also prone to label fascism as “corporatism,” i.e. the marriage of state and civil society, where “corporate” interest, i.e. un-elected hierarchical bodies of power exert control and force over all aspects of the nation-state. Ultimately, neither business serves state, nor state serves business, but their interests are fused together. The interest of state is the interest of business and vice versa.

When we look at the specifics of German fascism, we see a combination of anti-communism, anti-democracy, authoritarianism, ethnocentrism, militarism, radical nationalism, racism, and aspects of sexism.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the development of many of these aspects were congruent and complimentary. For instance, Nazi anti-Semitism, which

is scientific anti-Semitism as opposed to religious anti-Semitism, was born out of the hatred for communism, which Hitler and many others believed was to blame for the German defeat in WWI.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Hitler and the Nazi's believed communism was secularized Judaism, with its stress on equality. For Hitler, the Wagnerian and social Darwinist, the hope for the *messianic age* was the wrong utopia. His utopia was predicated on the "natural outcome" of the "aristocratic law of nature;" that the most powerful race would *naturally* come to dominate the less races. The god of prophetic religion was replaced by the god of nature, and just as the lion devours the lamb - this god was not for equality.

When looked at critically, one can see that fascism is a product of the secular modern world. For example, Hitler's anti-Semitism was not based in religion. The Jews didn't have the wrong god, they had the wrong DNA. The scientific anthropology of race allowed Hitler to overcome the pre-modern bias toward the Jews as "Christ killers," and replace it with a scientific argument based in social Darwinist theory. National Socialism's ideology was based in scientific arguments, not religious. Although the Aryan mythology was eluded to by members of the Nazi's, especially Heinrich Himmler, the "providence" that Hitler spoke of was the providence of nature. This relying on science as a foundation for a worldviews is an entirely modern and likewise secular phenomenon - product of the secular-bourgeois enlightenment, i.e. science's patricide of religion.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the Nazis used the most advanced and sophisticated technology of the day to forward very modern goals. The establishment of a secular nation-state, with a separation of church and state, based in certain clearly defined borders, with a legitimate system of government and administration of justice, is a modern phenomenon. Such entities did not exist before the modern period.

Like Mussolini's notion of "corporatism," the economy of the Third Reich was a convenient marriage between the interests of high finance and late (monopoly) capitalism, and that of the state with its ruling party and ruling ideology. Indeed, it was the large businesses and banks that supported and funded Hitler in his early years as a political agitator, chancellor, and then as Führer. Why did they support such an ideology? The rise of post WWI communism in Germany was a threat to the interests of the business class. The establishment of Munich's *Räterepublik* of 1919 during the strife of the early Weimar Republic, demonstrated to the German businessman how possible it was to end his "private accumulation of collective surplus value," by seizing

the “means of production” held by business owners, and shifting it to a collective ownership, based on the model of the Soviet Union. Communism was a threat to corporate profits, and therefore radical means must be employed to end the threat. In essence, fascism was born out of economic liberalism, and continued to be a convenient bedfellow. Furthermore, it was the model of economic liberalism, that competition would produce the strongest and best product and services, that partially fueled Hitler’s belief in the “aristocratic law of nature.” Only the strong will survive, whether it be in realm of natural selection, competing nations, competing races, or competing business. Max Horkheimer wrote,

...to appeal to nineteenth-century liberal thought in the struggle against fascism is to invoke the very force which has enabled it to triumph. As victor it can appropriate the slogan ‘let the most able rise to the top.’<sup>11</sup>

The goals of the National Socialists were essentially threefold. First, to reunite the German peoples and establish a dominant German culture over the rest of Europe - a thousand year Reich which would restore Deutschland to its “natural” role as the primary force in Europe, which included the forced appropriation of eastern lands to be resettled and cultivated by Germans (*Lebensraum*). Second, it was to establish a racially pure Germanic *volk*, expunging the Aryan race of all “genetic defects,” i.e. mentally and physically handicapped, etc. Third, and the most important to much of the Nazi leadership, the elimination of European Jewry.

There’s no doubt that the main strategy deployed by the Nazis to further their goals was violence. If a nation could not be intimidated into submission, it was forcibly brought into submission, i.e. Poland, France, Netherlands, Belgium, etc. On the domestic level, if a given group or individuals resisted the fascist takeover of all German culture and life-world, then they were physically removed from existence. Therefore, leftists, communists, Jews, intellectuals, homosexuals, artists, anyone that didn’t conform to their *rassepolitik* (racial politics), had to be eliminated from the gene-pool and German life.

## Islam and Islamism

Sunni Islam as a religious tradition, way of life, worldview, orientation of thought, and guidance system for praxis, has, since the end of the First World War, been without a central authority. Unlike Catholicism, with doctrinal authority resting in the hands of the Pope, Islamic authority has rested in the hands of the *‘ulama*, or religious scholars of *Kalam* (theology), and *fiqh* (jurisprudence).<sup>12</sup> Moreover, their religious opinions on matters can differ greatly and are not binding on all Muslims. If there is something called a “normative Islam,” it should be based on the essential criteria established by the Prophet Muhammad himself. This essential criteria, i.e. the five pillars, are the *Shahada* (testimony of faith), *Salah* (daily prayers), *Zakat* (almsgiving), *Sawm* (fasting in Ramadan), and *Hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca). These are unquestioned in the Muslim world, except for a few minor groups of mystics and reformers. However, the *Qur’an* and the *hadith*, though they are universally accepted as the “word of Allah” and the authentic recollections about Muhammad, are subject to interpretation and have led to multiple understandings of Islam. The philosopher and physician Ibn Rushd or Averroës (1126 - 1198 CE) understood sacred scripture through Aristotelian logic, leading to the accusation of *bid‘a* (innovation), while the reformer *Taqi al-Din Ahmed Ibn Taymiyyah* (1263 - 1328 CE) had a very literal reading of the text, which led to accusations of anthropomorphism. Either way, the task of deciding what is “normative” in Islam, and what is an aberration is a tricky endeavor to engage in. Not all Muslims agree on the meaning of the Qur’an, hadith, and Sunnah (way) of the Prophet. However, with that in the background, we must examine how bin Laden and other “Islamists” understand and practice their faith. For the argument here, it is a mute point as to whether or not it is “normative” in Islam or if it constitutes an aberration.

Usama bin Laden’s understanding of Islam is rooted in two main schools of thought. First, the ultra-conservative Wahhabi (muwahidun) orientation in Islam with its adherence to the Hanbali *madhab* (school of law), and second, in the modern militant and radicalized form of Islam stemming from Sayyid Qutb (1906 - 1966 CE).

Though Wahhabism has unique and defining characteristics amongst Sunni Islam, it is not in and of itself a separate sect.<sup>13</sup> Started by Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab (1703 - 1792 CE) as a reform movement in Arabia, Wahhabism meant to restore and

revive a pure Islam by expunging *bid'a* (innovations) that had been absorbed by the Islamic civilization from other cultures, religions, etc. Calling themselves the *al-muwahhidun* (the unitarians) and *Salafi* (followers of the pious predecessors), they stressed the literal interpretation of the Qur'an and hadith, and a return to the strict ways of the Prophet and his companions (*Sahaba*). Like Usama bin Laden, Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab was influenced by the fourteenth century scholar Ibn Taymiyyah, who also preached a return to strict adherence to Islamic principles - a certain form of radical fundamentalism or what Jürgen Habermas calls "dogmatism." However, though Arabia was later violently conquered by the Saudis (who were descendants of the 18th century alliance between Muhammad bin Saud and Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab), to be a Wahhabi is not necessarily to be violent or a terrorist. Too often in popular discourse, "terrorist" and "Wahhabi" are used interchangeably. Though conservatism and radicalism are often complimentary, to simply have a conservative, fundamentalistic orientation of religious adherence does not necessarily make one a violent person. In bin Laden's case, the radicalization of this young Wahhabi Muslim came through another strain of thought, i.e. Sayyid Qutb and his followers.

Sayyid Qutb was a scholar, activist, and a member of the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan al-Muslimun*) in Egypt in the 1950's and 1960's. After being radicalized by studying in America, where he found the culture to be animalistic, barbaric, racist, and oversexed, he returned home with an even more disgust for the West and a determination to resist Western political, economic, and cultural influence on the Muslim world. In his book "Milestones," (*Ma'alim fil-Tariq*), Qutb attributed this to the morally corroding effects of secularization, and therefore turned against the U.S. and other secular Western and 'Arab nations believing that they were trying to impose a new "age of ignorance" (*Jahaliyyah*) on the Muslim world.<sup>14</sup> He advocated a wholesale return to Shari'a law, defensive *jihad* (struggle) against the forces of secularism, abandonment of socialism, democracy, communism, and other Western inventions, and a restoration of Islamic governance across the Muslim domains. Sayyid Qutb was also among those who believed the Jews were consistently and perniciously trying to undermine the Muslim world through Western financial institutions. In bin Laden's world, after Sayyid Qutb, who laid down the intellectual

legitimation of violent jihad against the west, came the individual who established the actual praxis of resistance to the West, i.e. ‘Abdallah Yusuf ‘Azzam.

Born in 1941 under the British mandate of Palestine, ‘Abdallah ‘Azzam has made a major impact of global “jihadist” movement.<sup>15</sup> He was Usama bin Laden’s teacher and spiritual guide at the King ‘Abdal ‘Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, where the young bin Laden was attracted to ‘Azzam’s fiery rhetoric of jihad, global Islamic revival, and his anti-Westernism. ‘Azzam taught that it was the individual responsibility of every Muslim male to liberate the Muslims from the *kafirum* (unbelievers). When the Soviet Union entered into Afghanistan in 1979, ‘Azzam encouraged bin Laden to participate in the defense of the Afghani *ummah* (community) by funding and supporting “Afghan Arabs” with safe houses in Pakistan and later by creating his own militia. Shaykh ‘Azzam also participated in the U.S. supported resistance to the Soviets. ‘Azzam and his two sons would later be assassinated in Peshawar, Pakistan while on his way to *Salat al-Jumah* (Friday prayers). The importance of ‘Azzam to bin Laden is that he served as a living example of the theory-praxis connection - not only was he a lecturer of Islamic resistance, he practiced his rhetoric.<sup>16</sup> It was he that persuaded bin Laden to actively join the effort against the atheist-communists who had attacked the *dar al-Islam* (abode of Islam). That which was rhetorical, theoretical, and literary in Sayyed Qutb, manifested into violent action in ‘Azzam.

### **Usama Bin Laden’s Political-Religious Philosophy**

Since Usama bin Laden has become the public face of “radical Islam” and terrorism in the minds of most Westerners, as well as a lauded hero in much of the Islamic world, it is fitting that we should use his political-religious philosophy in our comparison to fascism. Though we do not want to discount other groups and individuals who are known for their radicalism, i.e. Hezbollah, Hamas, Jamat-i-Islami, Ansar al-Islam, and the Iranian government, etc., some of whom had previously attacked the U.S., the “war on terror” was launched after 19 of bin Laden’s followers struck America on 9/11, and therefore I will limit myself to his philosophy. Furthermore, much of his beliefs are shared wholeheartedly by those other groups.

Bin Laden's philosophy can be summarized as such: *based in Wahhabi Islam, it is non-traditional, non-dialectical, literalistic, de-hellenized, with internal logic, appealing to the legitimate grievances of the Muslim world, based in historical consciousness and religious worldview, emphasizing the theory-praxis connection, pan-Islamism, defensive in nature, and hostile to Western culture, capitalism, secularism, democracy, socialism-communism, atheism, the U.N., and globalization, which he refers to as global "unbelief."*

The goals of UBL's philosophy are twofold. First, his philosophy is *destructive* in nature, legitimated as a form of *defense*, and based in the *Lex Talionis* (law of retaliation). UBL understands his actions to be defending the Muslim *ummah*, and consequently obeying the Qur'anic ban on being the violent aggressor,<sup>17</sup> while championing the call to protect the Muslim world.<sup>18</sup> In an interview in November of 2001, UBL said,

We ourselves are the victims of murder and massacres. We are only defending ourselves against the United States. This is a *defensive jihad* to protect our land and people. That's why I have said that if we don't have security, neither will the Americans. It's a very simple equation that any American child could understand: live and let others live.<sup>19</sup>

Furthermore, in December of 2001, he said,

The events of 22nd Jumada al-Thani, or Aylul [September 11] are merely a response to the continuous injustice inflicted upon our sons in Palestine, Iraq, Somalia, southern Sudan, and other places, like Kashmir. The matter concerns the entire *umma*. People need to wake up from their sleep and try to find a solution to this catastrophe that is *threatening all of humanity*.<sup>20</sup>

In essence, UBL's defense of Islam and the Muslims is to *destroy* the un-Islamic regimes of the Muslim world, Western corporate capitalism in the Muslim world, the U.S. governments occupation of Muslim lands, Israeli occupation of Palestine, the cultural Westernization of the Muslim world, and secular - atheism. In Qur'anic terms, he is "enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong."<sup>21</sup>

The second goal of UBL's philosophy is *constructive*. In place of that which he wishes to destroy, he wants to replace with a pan-Islamic super-state, under the authority of a revived *Caliphate*, which would direct the Muslim ummah into its own Islamic modernity. In order to do this, jihad must be waged against the "apostate" regimes of the Middle East, and against the West. During which a temporary council of rightly guided '*ulama* (UBL calls them *ahl al-hall wa al-aqd*: Those who loose and bind) should secretly meet and appoint an Imam (who can be removed if action are not in accordance with Islam), who will enforce Islamic law and be "tough on the... nation." Although UBL is quite vague about his goals, an Islamic Republic, much like that of Iran, seems to be alluded to. It is safe to assume that some sort of *shura* (council) would legislate while the *Caliph* (successor) would be the ultimate judge as to whether or not said legislation is in accordance with Islamic law.

In essence, Usama bin Laden wishes to restore Muslim sovereignty, unity, honor, and political-economic and cultural self-determination, to the Muslim lands, via a conservative, jihad-inspired, revival of Islam.

Unlike Samuel Huntington's thesis of the "Clash of Civilizations," which pits the "Islamic world" against the "West," bin Laden sees it simply as a struggle between those who believe (*al-Muslimun*) and those who do not (*al-Kafirun*). He sees all forces of "evil," i.e. corruption, cronyism, cultural degradation, porno-culture, drugs and alcohol, commercialization, marketization, and commodification of the entire life-world, political submission - all as symptoms of unbelief. Furthermore, democracy is the form of government that legislates human desires into law, thus replacing the divine law to "enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong." That which is illegal in divine law, i.e. alcohol, adultery, fornication, gambling, theft (capitalism), etc., is made legal in human law.

However, when one looks critically and disregards the ideology of both sides, the struggle seems to be between "modern, secular, corporate capitalism, backed by the power of U.S. and Western states and their allies (Israel, Arab regimes), against a conservative, militant, non-state entity or movement, based in a conservative, dogmatic, and reactionary form of Islam."

### Similarities Between Radical Islam and Fascism

A comparative study between radical Islam and fascism demonstrates that they do have some major characteristic in common. Partially based on the list given by Robert O. Paxton, those 9 major characteristics are,

- § Both agree that there is a “crisis” situation in their given communities, nations, cultures, etc., and “traditional” and or routine “solutions” have not been adequate in addressing said crisis. Therefore, extraordinary measures need to be take to address the issues.
- § Both “ideologies” subject the will of the individual to the will of the collective. The balance between personal autonomy and collective solidarity shifts from an extreme individualistic culture to a enforced solidarity culture under both systems of thought. UBL’s super-state would enforce harsh Islamic law, “being tough on the community,” holding adherence to strict Islamic law as the supreme value, while the Nazi’s enforced their *rassenpolitik* on the European continent, using racial identification as a means to enforce solidarity.
- § Both share in the “victim mentality,” which justifies and legitimates their reactions to the imminent threat, whether real or perceived. For UBL and other radical Muslims, it is the political, economic, cultural, and military invasion of the Muslim world by the West that sanctions their response. For the Nazi, it is the subversive presence of the communists and Jews, as well as the cultural decadence of the Weimar Republic that elicits a radical response.
- § Both agree that “individualistic liberalism, class conflict, and alien influences” decay the core of the civilization and therefore like a cancer, must be removed before the community is destroyed from within.<sup>22</sup>
- § The closer integration of the “nation” is desired by both ideologies. For the Nazi it was the Deutsch Volk which need to be integrated, thus Germany’s annexation of Austria, Sudetenland (Checkoslovakia), East Prussia, etc, which would integrate the major areas of Germanic people. For UBL, it is the integration of the *ummah*, under and authority of the Caliph, in one super-state which negates traditional boards of the nation-states.

- § Both demonstrate their authoritarian nature by their willingness to use bribes, coercion, or violence to implement their goals, whether it be acts of terrorism against civilians by a non-state entity, or by state initiated systematic and wholesale destruction of peoples and cities to achieve ideological war goals. Either way, both demonstrate their desire and ability to remove those who oppose the implementation of their vision.
- § Both reveal contempt for international law and international institutions that limit the will of the nation, community, or group, i.e. League of Nations, or the United Nations.
- § Both show contempt and hatred for democracy as a form of government. For UBL, it is the fact that under democratic regimes, that which is illegal in Islam is made legal, and that which is legal is made illegal. For the Nazis, democracy was deficient in restoring Germany's dominant role in Europe, as well as its potential to be manipulated by powerful minority groups. Furthermore, democracies represent the rule of law, and the Nazis emphasized the nations "will" over "law."
- § Both are dedicated to the advancement of *technological modernity*, while resisting *cultural modernity*. Cosmopolitanism and internationalism is a threat to group identity and solidarity, as well as being a vehicle for the induction of alien influences.

### **Differences in Radical Islam and Fascism**

Just as there are many similarities between radical Islam and fascism, there are also significant differences, that are necessary to highlight. Among these differences are,

- § Radical Islam is religiously based, having its guiding principles found in a religious text. Its source of authority is a divine being and a scripture, as opposed to an earthly leader, race, or nature. Fascism, as practiced by the Third Reich, was extremely secular - even hostile toward religion. Hitler believed that organized religion, Christianity especially, stood in the way of national and racial progress. Furthermore, communism was secularized Judaism, and was in direct opposition to the *aristocratic law of nature*, or natural religion. If there was a religion of the

Nazis, it was science.

- § Islam, as well as radical Islam, emphasizes law (though in the case of radical Islam, shari'a law over man-made domestic or international law. Although the Nazis passed laws, case in point the Nuremberg laws that stripped Jews from German cultural life, they generally emphasized the "will" of the nation, race, and the Führer over all existing law. Therefore, laws were normative, until deemed necessary to be negated by the will of the Führer.
- § The racism of the Nazis is in extreme contrast to the non-racism of radical Islam. Radical Muslims have maintained their Islamic belief that race is not a matter of superiority and inferiority, but that the yardstick for which to judge individuals is based on piety of thought and action, adherence to divine law and commands, and purity of intention. The aristocratic law of nature - that it is the natural right of one race to dominate, oppress, exploit, or annihilate another race simply does not exist in the Islamic tradition. The normative stance on race in Islam can be found in the Prophet Muhammad's final sermon, where he said "all mankind is from Adam and Eve, an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab nor a non-Arab has any superiority over an Arab; also a white has no superiority over a black nor a black has any superiority over white except by piety and good action."<sup>23</sup> The thought that the Jews are *racially* inferior to Muslims is not a claim bin Laden makes. For him, it is their actions, be they political, economic, cultural, or militarily, i.e. their lack of piety and righteous belief, that make them inferior to Muslims.
- § In accordance with the last point, the radical Muslims wish to unify the community based on their creed (or their ideology) rather than on race. Though both seek to unify the group they identify themselves with, the underlying substance that cements that cohesion is fundamentally different.
- § Although religious fundamentalism is modern, due to the fact that it is a reaction to secular modernity - and therefore a by-product of that modernity, it is at its core a defense of pre-modern ideas, worldviews, and ways of life. Religious beliefs, such as the "creation" of the world, historically involved divine beings, monogenesis, miracles, eschatology, etc., are all pre-modern concepts.

Furthermore, fundamentalism employs modern technologies in a defense of a pre-modern worldview. Ex., the use of civilian airliners as a weapons against the U.S., the use of modern communication and information systems, i.e. T.V., internet, radio, and modern transportation systems. It also uses to its advantage the political rights gained through the Western enlightenment project, i.e. right free speech, freedom of assembly, freedom to move freely, liberal immigration policies, open education, and the transparency of democratic governance. On the other hand, the Nazis were a modern phenomenon in defense of a form of modernity. Nationalism, socialism, capitalism in all its forms, racism, are all products of secular modernity. Though some of the Nazis belief may seem crude and barbaric, they were very modern at their core, chiefly because they were grounded in science. Where the Nazis where examples of faithless rationality, the radical Islamists often demonstrate irrational faith.

§ Although bin Laden's views on capitalism do not seem to be well formulated, it does seem clear that he understand that much of what drives America's foreign policy in the Middle East in based on the demands of corporate capitalism. Being a business man himself, he understands the economic imperative to expand the market, gain access to cheaper labor and resources, and to control the domestic politics in other nations, all in the name of higher profits. What is unclear is whether or not he is fundamentally opposed to all forms of capitalism, or simply capitalist exploitation coming from the West. It is clear however, although some have made arguments to the contrary, that capitalism, especially corporate capitalism which disregards any responsibility to a state, people, workers, etc., is in stark contradiction to the prophetic nature of Islam and the Prophet. The "private accumulation of collective surplus value," based on the modern economic system of interest and excessive profit taking (*riba'*) was expressly made forbidden (*haram*) by Muhammad in the 7th century. Needless to say that that ban is normative and has not changed due to the modern age. That it is hardly practiced in the modern Muslim world is one of the complaints made my fundamentalists who seek to restore Muhammad's ban. On the other hand, the tight relationship between the fascist regime and the capitalist of Germany has been well documented. Indeed, the concentration camps where primarily forced labor camps dedicated to the extraction of surplus value from the interned. However, one must

remember that capitalism is opportunistic, loyalless to any given state, and untrustworthy. For the Nazis, as long as the goals of German capitalism could coincide with the goals of the state, they would remain in bed together.

§ Probably the most important of all the differences is that of their ultimate goal. Combining most of what we've already discussed in this section, the goal of radical Islam is entirely different from that of fascism. One cannot overstate the vast difference between a racially bound secular state, based on the instrumental-rationality of modern corporate capitalism, and a pre-modern, religious, non-racial, super-state, based in the communicative-rationality of sacred tradition.

### **So Are Islamists Muslims Fascists?**

The answer to that question is not black or white. Many tactics of the Fascists are used by radical Muslims; be it violence, intimidation, terrorism, disregard for innocent life, etc. Some of their subsequent goals are also similar; purification of the nation of foreign and alien influences, unification and integration of the nation, ending democratic rule, and restoring honor to the nation. However, do these similarities legitimate the use of the word fascist to describe these Muslims. Through my analysis, I believe I've come to a conclusion that is most apparent. Islamist Muslims, should not be called fascists, as if there are not differences between historical fascist regimes and modern religious fundamentalism. It can be said that these Muslims are "fascistic," but are not fascists, due to their adherence to a pre-modern religious worldview with pre-modern and religious goals. Furthermore, fascism as a scholastic term loses its peculiar and unique meaning when it is muddled by denouncing a different phenomenon using that term. Bin Laden is no Hitler, and Hitler is not bin Laden. To be "fascistic" is a tendency one can identify in much of contemporary history throughout much of the world. However, "fascism," if the word is to mean anything at all, has very defined constitutive elements, of which modern Islamists are lacking. In my view, the term "Islamofascism" is much more productive in a strategic political discourse, meant to draw a parallel between the "evils" of historical fascism with the phenomenon of violent Islamism. The repeated use of the term seems to be an attempt to blur the distinction between the two, not to offer a balanced analysis of either fascism or Islamism. It may work as an emotive syllogism in the public sphere of

popular discourse, but despite their surface similarities, the term itself fails to construct internal coherency whence under linguistic and historical scrutiny. Islamofascism simply does not exist.

## Notes

- 1 [www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/08/print/20060810-3.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/08/print/20060810-3.html) Retrieved 12/8/2006.
- 2 Stephen Schwartz argues that he was the first to use the term in his article in the Daily Standard, Aug. 16, 2006. Retrieved 12/8/2006.
- 3 [www.alternet.org/waroniraq/40850/](http://www.alternet.org/waroniraq/40850/) Retrieved 3/26/2007.
- 4 An example of this is the treatment of the French scholar Tariq Ramadan, who, in 2004, after accepting a position at Notre Dame, was forced to resign because the Bush administration's State Department refused to grant him a visa. Though no charges have ever been brought against him, he has been accused of being an al-Qa'eda sympathizer and an anti-Semite due to his vigorous critique of the state of Israel. See <http://www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn/A64700-2004Dec14>, and <http://www.danielpipes.org/article/2043>. Both Retrieved 3/26/2007.
- 5 See the works of critical theorist Herbert Marcuse.
- 6 Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 219 - 220.
- 7 To review a copy of this text see, <http://www.worldfuturefund.org/wffmaster/Reading/Germany/mussolini.htm> Retrieved 3/26/2007.
- 8 See Walter Jensen's list of Fascist characteristics at [www.walterjensen.net](http://www.walterjensen.net)
- 9 Claudia Koonz, *The Nazi Conscience* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 20.
- 10 Those periods that decisively led to the modern-secular-scientific-positivistic age, breaking from the pre-modern, religious ages, where the Renaissance, Protestant Reformation, Bourgeois Enlightenment, Marxist and Freudian Enlightenment, Industrial Revolution, and the advance of capitalism.
- 11 Max Horkheimer, "Die Juden und Europa" in *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung*, 8 (1939), 132 - 135. This can be found as "The Iron Heel" in Roger Griffin, ed.

*Fascism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 272 - 273.

- 12 The Sufi Shaykhs also represent another form of authority.
- 13 For a good overview of Wahhabism, see Natanan J. DeLong-Bas *Wahhabi Islam: From Revival and Reform to Global Jihad*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004., and Hamid Algar *Wahhabism: A Critical Essay*. Oneonta, NY: Islamic Publications International, 2002.
- 14 Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones*. Cedar Rapids, IA: The Mother Mosque Foundation, (date not published)
- 15 [http://www.intelligence.org.il/eng/sib/11\\_04/legacy.htm](http://www.intelligence.org.il/eng/sib/11_04/legacy.htm) Retrieved 3/26/2007.
- 16 In a sermon given on February 14, 2003, bin Laden expounded on the theory-praxis connection saying, “There is a world of difference between sitting and giving lessons on the one hand, and giving our souls and heads for the victory of God.” Usama bin Laden, *Message to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden*. Bruce Lawrence ed., (New York: Verso, 2005), 200 - 201.
- 17 Qur’an, Surah 2: 190. “Fight for the sake of Allah those who fight you, but do not violate the limits, Allah does not love aggressors.” My translation.
- 18 Qur’an, Surah 2: 193. “Fight them until there is no more chaos and oppression, until there is justice and faith in Allah. If they cease hostilities, let there be no hostility except for those who oppress.” My translation.
- 19 Usama bin Laden, *Message to the World: The Statements of Osama bin Laden*. Bruce Lawrence ed., (New York: Verso, 2005), 141. Emphasis mine.
- 20 *Ibid.*, pg. 148 - 149. Emphasis mine.
- 21 Qur’an, 3:110.
- 22 Paxton, *Fascism*. pg. 219.
- 23 [http://www.themodernreligion.com/prophet/prophet\\_lastsermon.htm](http://www.themodernreligion.com/prophet/prophet_lastsermon.htm) Retrieved 3/26/2007.

# The Paradoxes of the Secular State

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## **Abstract**

In light of the flowering of all manner of religious and spiritual practices it would seem that the secular project has run into the mud. This essay asks why this has happened by means of three major points: a reconsideration of the definition of secularism and its derivatives; and exploration of their paradoxes; an extended exploration of the separation of church and state. I begin with the definition of secularism: it is a way of thinking and living that draws its terms, beliefs and practices from this age and this world (Latin *saeculum* and *saecularis*). If we take this definition then the other senses of secularism become secondary or derivative: the anti-religious nature of secularism; the separation of church and state; the distinction between scientific academic study and theology; the separation of civil and ecclesiastical law. However, a close look at each derivative reveals some deep contradictions, especially with regard to the separation of church and state. The discussion turns to an old discussion that is increasingly relevant, namely the deliberations of Marx and Engels concerning the emergence of the

secular state as an attempted resolution to the contradictions of the Christian state. The next step is to explore the implications of this discussion in relation to the USA, Turkey and Australia. Finally, the article asks what is to be done.

If you call your state a *general Christian* state, you are admitting with a diplomatic turn of phrase that it is *un-Christian* (Marx 1975 [1843]-b: 118; 1975 [1843]-a: 106).<sup>1</sup>

The precarious separation of church and state is, once again, under threat. From the invocation of a vague 'Christian heritage' by European countries, through the contradictory debates over (Muslim) head-coverings in France and Denmark, to the open avowals of Christian belief and its effect on their political lives by leaders in the UK, Australia and Malaysia, it has once again become clear that the separation of church and state is either an impossible goal or a political fiction. At the same time, a number of major studies have appeared that challenge assumptions concerning secularism. For example, Charles Taylor (2007) argues that secularism entails not the banishment of religion but other, diverse ways of being religion. And Talal Asad (2003) proposes that the separation of religion and the state is not the removal of religion from public affairs but another means for the state to control religion.

These developments raise once again the old-become-new question of the separation of church and state. Is it not crucial to maintain a separation of church and state, or religion and politics? However, the deeper issue is secularism itself, which needs to be addressed before any discussion of church and state may take place. So in the following discussion I return to some basics, outlining the definition of secularism and its secondary developments. From there I focus on the question of the separation of church and state, exploring its paradoxes through some surprisingly relevant material from Marx and Engels and then some observations on the USA, Turkey and Australia. Finally, I ask what the implications might be for politics.

### **Keywords**

*Paradox, Secular, State, Secularism, Religion, Non-Religious Position*

## Definitions and Derivatives

All too often one bumps into the assumption that secularism means a non-religious or anti-religious position, or that it means the separation of church and state, or the distinction between ecclesiastical and civil law. So let us return to the basic meaning of secularism. It derives from the Latin noun *saeculum* (adjective *saecularis*), which means an age, a world or a generation. In this light secularism means taking our terms of reference or living our lives with regard only to this age and this world. Note that there is no reference to religion in this definition. Of course, the implication is that we do not refer to or draw our terms from any world above (the heavens) or indeed a world to come (an age of the future). The distinction is actually quite important: these negatives are implications of the basic definition, but not intrinsic to it. They are, in other words, derivative or secondary positions that may follow from the primary definition.

Before I outline those derivatives, a word is needed on the origins of the word 'secularism' itself. It was coined by the Englishman George Holyoake in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Holyoake was a colourful character, having done a stint in prison for blasphemy, so his role in the early secularist movement was not restricted to opinions expressed over a pipe and a beer at the local watering hole. However, within the English secularist movement a split soon opened up between those, like Holyoake, who argued that secularism should be indifferent to religion, that religion was irrelevant, and those like Charles Bradlaugh, who argued that anti-religious activism was crucial to secularism.

I think Holyoake's position – that atheism is not necessary to secularism – was on the right track. The reason is that the anti-religious position is a derivative of the basic definition of secularism I outlined above. Perhaps the most common perception of secularism is that it is anti-religious or at least non-religious. Secularism becomes the logical opposite of religion, and so becomes a synonym for atheism. This sense of secularism may be derived from the definition with which I began, but it remains that, secondary and derivative. If one shapes a way of life and analysis that is based purely on this world and this age, then one possible step is to argue that religion is no longer a legitimate court of appeal.

A further derivative is the distinction between religiously-driven academic disciplines and those free from religion. In this case a proper scientific discipline is one that

operates according to the prescriptions of rigorous reason. There is no room for the gods, for religious motivation or indeed for theological models. The proper place for disciplines such as theology or biblical studies or Qur'anic interpretation is not the secular educational institution. Again, this is a secondary position, derived from the initial definition of secularism but by no means a necessary derivation.

Similar arguments can be made for the law: ecclesiastical and secular judiciaries are distinct from one another with carefully demarcated zones of jurisdiction. This was a long, convolute process that goes back to the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries when Church canon law – as a result of the 'Papal Revolution' – became a distinct entity over against various other semi-autonomous fields, such as the royal law of the major kingdoms, the urban law of the newly emerging cities, feudal law, manorial law, and mercantile law (see Berman 1983). With the Protestant Reformation of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and then the English Revolution of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the distinction between ecclesiastical and secular law sharpened (Berman 2006). Today the various churches maintain a tradition of ecclesiastical law, with their own courts, trial procedures and sentences. They are careful to keep their own version of the law separate from the secular system, and vice versa.

The mention of 'secularism' may not immediately conjure up the distinction between ecclesiastical and secular law, but it more often than not does invoke the separation of church and state. For many, this separation is intrinsic to very idea of secularism. Not so, I suggest, for it may be one logical outcome of secularism, but it is no means central to the definition I outlined earlier. The position is all too well known: the state should be free from control by any religious institution, whether church, synagogue, mosque, temple or what have you. It should not favour one religion over another in any fashion, especially in terms of legislation and funding. And religious institutions should not seek any favours, least of all a return to the time of ecclesiastical privilege. I will have much more to say on this topic in a few moments, so I will hold fire for now.

### **Antinomies**

So we have a definition of secularism – a resolute focus on this age and this world – and the various derivatives that position, namely anti-religion, intellectual disciplines, the law and the separation of church and state. The problem with each of these secondary

categories is that they are riddled with contradictions. Part of my argument is that these contradictions go a long way towards identifying some of the binds in which we find ourselves, as well as national governments of many different stripes. So let us return to each of our four derivatives and explore their problems.

The argument that secularism is by necessity opposed to religion relies on a crucial assumption and faces at least one contradiction. First, the assumption: religion is concerned merely with the world above or perhaps the age to come. It owes its allegiance to a heavenly and other-worldly realm and thereby has little concern with this mortal world. Unfortunately, this assertion is as mistaken as it is common. It is mistaken since it is based on a half truth. In one respect religions (the plural is deliberate) do seek to transcend this earthly life, having reference to a wider sphere than our own limited existence. But they also have a great interest in this age and this world. To take Christianity as an example, there is great concern with the human condition, so much so that there is a whole branch of traditional theology called ‘anthropology’ (from where the discipline we know drew its name). As a more contemporary example, ecotheology’s focus is the created world of which we are a part. So it could well be argued that a religion like Christianity is both secular and anti-secular, since it concerns both the earthly and heavenly worlds, as well as this age and the age to come.

Now for the contradiction: the existence of religious secularists. They argue that the best way to ensure religious tolerance is by taking a secular position. If one were to favour one religion over others, as has happened throughout history, then practitioners of other religions end up being discriminated against and persecuted. At this point an important distinction must be made between religious intolerance and religious indifference, or between an anti-religious position and a non-religious one. Religious secularists take a position of religious indifference: it matters not what you, you and you believe and practice. The only stipulation is that it should not harm someone else in the process. This is a classic liberal position – let all the flowers bloom in the sun and the rain – and is a common justification for the secular state. By contrast, an anti-religious position argues that religion has been and is the source of many of our ills. Fundamentalisms, violence, sexist oppression, racism and environmental degradation have all been fostered by religions, so we are better off without it.

This anti-religious position is characteristic of the ‘new atheists’ such as Richard Dawkins (2006), Daniel Dennett (2007), Sam Harris (2005, 2006), Christopher Hitchens (2007) and a host of lesser lights. In the face of what they perceive as a return to unenlightened and superstitious barbarism, they have dusted off the old weapons of the Enlightenment and taken up once again the battle cry of *écrasez l’infame*, the banishment of superstition in the name of Reason. While all of this good, militant reading, it is actually based on a conservative assumption: ideas rule history and determine our actions. It is the classic idealist assumption. Since ideas are the most powerful forces, one must show that someone’s ideas are wrong in order to set history on a better path. It simply ignores the roles of class, power, politics and economics in the list of religious evils one finds in these works. Religion may provide the ideology of such barbarity, but it has no effect without the powerful institutional and political forces for which it serves as an ideology.

A comparable batch of problems faces the academic disciplines that make some claim to scientific and rational method. I do not mean the tired old point that such disciplines, especially the hard sciences, are based on an unverifiable collection of beliefs and assumptions, nor do I mean the fact that such disciplines can trace their convoluted ancestries back to theology (the discovery of God’s creation in physics, the influence of biblical myths of human existence in anthropology, the role of biblical interpretation in the assumptions of literary criticism, and so on). Instead, I am interested in the split lives that many academics lead. This problem comes to a head in university-based programs in theology and studies in religion, especially with the increasing number of universities that have programs in one or both disciplines. Studies in religion, which in its first generation actually employed those trained in theology, now defines itself as an objective discipline that has a rightful place in secular universities. More often than not its practitioners are atheists, arguing that lack of religious commitment actually allows them to study religion in an unbiased fashion. By contrast, theology programs do not hide the fact that religious commitment is assumed. After all, why would you want to study theology in the first place? And if an atheist turns up to study theology, then he or she is like a specimen in a freak show.

The problem in both cases is that the positions taken are in fact religious positions. Atheism is as much a religious position as is Roman Catholicism or Eastern Orthodoxy. The problem is exacerbated by the assumptions as to what constitutes acceptable

scientific research. Above all, it must exclude references to the gods as actual forces in human history, society and thought. This assumption applies to areas such as the study of religious ritual, institutions, biblical criticism and church history, to name but a few. Yet those who undertake such research come to it with assumed commitments regarding the subject matter under consideration. Some will attend worship on a weekend, while others assume that such beliefs are simply untrue. This situation leads to an impossible tension, an effort to hold apart two dimensions that simply cannot be kept apart, even with a crowbar.

As far as the law is concerned, the contradiction that shows up here is that the nature of secular law cannot be thought without the deep effect of religious developments. The very possibility for a secular law in the Western world first arose when the Papacy disentangled itself from the control of kings, emperors and feudal lords. One result was the development of a distinct tradition of canon law. Only then and in response did the various domains of secular, or worldly law, establish themselves as distinct entities. Indeed the Western legal tradition is unthinkable without the dual role of ecclesiastical and secular domains. But it was the Reformation, especially in its German Lutheran and English Calvinist forms that gave definitive shape to what is now regarded as secular law. They effectively transferred spiritual authority and responsibilities to secular lawmakers. Read Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (2006 [1559]) and you will soon see that the governing authorities are granted tasks directly relating to the correct observance of Christianity. The outcome was twofold: first, legal traditions were nationalised, especially where Roman Catholic, Lutheran and Calvinist forms of Christianity were adopted as national religions; secular law gained immense power and ecclesiastical law became a shadow of its former self (it is subject on key matters of private property, life and death to secular law). In short, secular law could not exist without this religious history.

### **The Secular Logic of the Christian State**

The final batch of contradictions is connected with the troubled separation of church and state, and to that topic I would like to devote the remainder of this essay. I do so by dusting off an old discussion that has an increasing and surprising relevance in our own time, namely the heated debates over precisely this issue at the time of Marx and

Engels. They write of the situation in Germany in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, when Friedrich Wilhelm IV, the king of Prussia, desperately tried to hang onto the idea of a Christian state. Marx and Engels mercilessly explore the contradictions in that position. After seeking an insight or two from Marx and Engels I leap into the present, focusing on the situations in the USA, Turkey and Australia.

As for Marx and Engels, I focus on a number of journalistic pieces, one an early article by Marx called *Comments on the Latest Prussian Censorship Instruction* (1975 [1843]), which ironically did not pass the censor, another from this early period entitled *On the Jewish Question* (1975 [1844]). At this point I bring Engels into the discussion with an astute journal article from the same time, *Frederick William IV, King of Prussia* (1975 [1842]). Marx's two texts actually embody a tension, for Marx argues on the one hand that religion should have no truck with the state, but then he moves on to make the far more astute point that the secular state actually arises from the contradictions of the Christian state. I would suggest that here we find at least one key to the problems facing the secular state in our own day. Let us see what Marx argues.

In his first journalistic article (Marx 1975 [1843], pp. 109-31, especially pp. 116-21), where he reflects on the revisions to the Prussian censorship law of 1842, Marx develops the following argument. Each religion is a particular system, with its own exclusive worldview which by definition must exclude others. Either a state must opt for one religion at the expense of all others, or it must opt for none, being indifferent to whatever shape religion might take. What is not possible – and what the Prussian king desperately tried to do – is to claim that the state supports religion in general, for religion can only be particular and not general. This argument that leads Marx to the following conclusion: the only way to allow a plurality of religions within any state is to have a secular state that is entirely indifferent to religion. Muslims, Hindus, Greenlandic shamans, Christianity and so on can all exist together as long as I am not interested in any of them. This position of indifference has had a long shelf-life, since it is still touted today by a good number of champions of the secular state. Indeed, it is one of its *raison d'être* in our own time. Marx's position, just like those who subscribe to it today, is in itself quite unremarkable.

But then we come to a disconnection with this argument. Over against his distinction between particular and general, between one religion and complete indifference, he makes a much more astute dialectical observation in the intriguing text

called *On the Jewish Question*. Here Marx argues that the fully realised Christian state is simultaneously the negation and realisation (*Aufhebung*) of Christianity; that is, the Christian state's logical outcome is a secular, atheistic and democratic one (Marx 1975 [1844], pp. 156-8; 1976 [1844], pp. 357-9). Some of this argument is a little too clever, running in all directions with the Hegelian dialectic. However, a couple of solid points emerge, one of which is the argument that the contradictions inherent within the idea and practice of a Christian state can only lead to its dissolution. These contradictions include the tension between otherworldly religion and this-worldly politics, and the problems inherent in a political attitude to religion and a religious attitude to politics, the impossibility of actually living out the prescriptions of the Bible for living with one's fellow human beings (turning the other cheek, giving your coat as well as your tunic, walking the extra mile and so on). And what is the resolution of these contradictions? It is 'the state which relegates religion to a place among other elements of civil society (*der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft*)' (Marx 1975 [1844], p. 156; 1976 [1844], p. 357).<sup>2</sup> This is the realised Christian state, that is, one that has negated itself and relegated Christianity to its own, private place among other religions and other parts of society. This is of course the way in which religion now operates in secular Western societies. In his own time Marx espied its arrival in the United States.<sup>3</sup>

What is intriguing about this argument is that this secular state arises from, or is the simultaneous realisation and negation of, the Christian state. This argument is a long way from his efforts to banish religion theology from any form of the state. It could be argued that his characterisation of theology as other-worldly and Christianity as exclusively particular is consistent with this idea of the secular state. But the difference is that such a particular, heavenly Christianity would have no place in a secular state unless it was thoroughly transformed.

Marx's argument – the simultaneous negation and realisation (the famous *Aufhebung*) of the Christian state in the secular state – moves in a different direction, for it connects with a point still made today: the secular state arose out of the Christian need for religious tolerance and pluralism (for example, see Brett 2009). Even more, the secular state is the only proper basis of religious tolerance. In order to overcome older practices of religious intolerance and in response to the sheer number of different forms of Christianity, the only viable response was a secular state that favoured no Christian

denomination or indeed any religion at all. Or as Marx put it, Christianity itself 'separated church and state' (Marx 1975 [1842], p. 198).

This position actually has a sting in its tail. Before we feel that sting, I would like to bring Engels into our discussion, for in an early piece he makes a strikingly similar argument to Marx's. Engels tackles the question of church and state in a rather astute and dense piece from 1842 called *Frederick William IV, King of Prussia* (1975 [1842]).<sup>4</sup> His main point is that the efforts of self-described 'Christian king' (always in mocking quotation marks<sup>5</sup>) to establish a Christian state are doomed to collapse through a series of contradictions. The underlying problem is that the Christian-feudal model the king has in mind is, like theology itself, an ossified relic from the past that will no longer work in a world that has made huge strides in science and free thought, by which I take it he means not merely philosophy but also democracy, representation and republicanism. The result is that the Prussian king must make a whole series of compromises that doom the effort from the start.

Now Engels does not find the Prussian king an obnoxious person as such. He credits him with having a system, even with being kind-hearted and witty, but he is also a reactionary with an impossible agenda. Engels begins by pointing out that various obvious measures are really the outward manifestation of a deeper problem – encouraging church attendance, laws strengthening the observance of Sunday rest, tightening the laws concerning divorce, purging of the theological faculties, changing examinations to emphasise firm belief, and appointing believers to government positions. The problem is that the Prussian king is caught in a dilemma: the logical outcome of his program is the separation of church and state, yet he seeks to fuse the two. On the one hand, as the Head of the Evangelical Church, as *summus episcopus*, he seeks to subordinate the church to secular power. Even though he wants to combine ecclesiastical and state power in his own person, to join 'all power, earthly and heavenly' so that he becomes 'an earthly God' (Engels 1975 [1842], p. 362), he is in fact king first and supreme bishop second. On the other hand, such a move runs directly into the wall of Christian doctrine: one's primary allegiance should be to God and not some temporal power, whether state or king: 'A person who makes his whole being, his whole life, a preparation for heaven cannot have the interest in earthly affairs which the state demands of its citizens' (Engels 1975 [1842], p. 363). In other words, a full recovery of Christianity means the separation of church and state.

Engels's argument intersects quite neatly with Marx's: Christianity itself leads to a separation of church and state, for there is a logic of secularisation within Christianity. That logic finds its basis in the endless divergence within Christianity. Any effort at a Christian state must decide what form of Christianity is to be favoured.<sup>6</sup> Is it to be Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Methodist, Congregational, or ...? The existence of the Orthodox churches in their multiplicity, as well as the event of the Protestant Reformation put the lie to the claim by the Roman Catholics to be the one 'Catholic' church. Even within its own history there are numerous schisms and breakaways that were either absorbed and curtailed or expelled as heretics (if you can't absorb them, crush them). According to this argument, any Christian theory of the state must enable and allow for such diversity. The only way that can happen is through a separation of church and state: no one form of Christianity can dominate without making a travesty of theology itself.

It seems to me that this argument is implicit in Engels' exploration of the contradictions in Friedrich Wilhelm's programme. For example, this Prussian king not only recognises both Roman Catholic and Protestant, but he also freed the Old Lutherans from the enforced union in 1817 of Lutherans and Calvinists in the Evangelical Church. With the various Protestant churches now given freedom in their internal affairs, the king struggles to maintain his role as the head of the church. Which church? Is one church to submit to the state-imposed authority of another? It is a hopelessly contradictory solution and one unacceptable to the churches themselves. The more Friedrich Wilhelm IV tries to deal with each situation in question, the more confused the whole situation becomes. In the end, these efforts – like those that sought to restore feudal privilege in the context of the Enlightenment-inspired basis of Prussian law – will lead to the collapse of the so-called Christian state through internal contradictions. The outcome of these impossible contradictions is a secular state.<sup>7</sup>

### **Contradictions in the Secular State**

A little earlier I suggested that this argument has a nasty sting in its tail. If we grant the point that the secular state arose as an attempted resolution of the tensions within the Christian state of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, then it follows that secularism cannot escape religion, since religion is the reason the secular state exists at all. In other words,

religion and secularism are two sides of the one coin. Look at one side and it says, 'church and state, forever separate'; flip it over and you read, 'church and state, never to part'.

Let me put it in terms of a paradox: the more church and state are separated, the more they seem to be entwined. Of course, the awareness of this paradox comes with some hindsight after a reasonable history of the secular state. For example, in the United States the separation between church and state is, as is well known and much discussed, enshrined in the First Amendment to the Constitution: 'Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof'. Initially a response to the established Church of England, especially after the American War of Independence, it has come to be interpreted as any act by the Congress and the legislature that favours one religion over another with the possible outcome that such a religion may become established. In practice, this really means Christianity and shows up with monotonous regularity in the area of state-funded education. The Bible is not to be taught, prayer is not appropriate and one cannot teach religious doctrines in state schools.

However, in the United States the separation of church and state has become a legal fiction. The more strictly the courts apply the First Amendment, the more pervasive religion becomes in public life. An external observer cannot help noticing that religion saturates public life in the USA: the founding myth of the escape from oppression to a land of freedom is drawn from the story of the Exodus and the Promised land, presidents must be openly Christian, they make decisions with religious concerns in mind, whether on questions of sex education, stem-cell research and same-sex relationships, voting patterns follow religious lines, and, especially in the Bible Belt, there is a sharp polarisation over religion. One is either passionately Christian or passionately atheist. By comparison, states which still have an established church, such as Denmark, or those with only recently disestablished churches such as Sweden, are among the least religiously observant countries in the world.

A very different example of the paradox of the secular state may be found in Turkey. Ever since Atatürk in 1924, the separation of church and state has been central to the constitution of a secular Turkey. All levels of government and state-supported institutions, such as schools, universities, hospitals, police and the army, must operate without influence from the Sunni Muslim majority. However, in Turkey there is a

specific government agency, the Department of Religious Affairs, which watches Islam very closely. The content of sermons, statements and views must avoid political content, and, like France, all female state employees are banned from wearing the *hijab*. The state also restricts any independent religious communities and religious schools. At the same time the state supports mosques through taxes and subsidies. In other words Turkey has a situation comparable to the established church in some western European countries. The difference is that the recognition of Islam, even to the point of providing state funds, is designed to negate the effect of Islam in affairs of the state. The state supports religion in order to watch it and maintain the separation of church and state, or rather, mosque and state.<sup>8</sup>

This state of affairs has been severely tested of late. In 2002 and then again in 2007 the Justice and Development Party (AKP) achieved a majority in the Parliament with Recep Erdoğan as Prime Minister. The party's origins lie in a number of banned parties with explicit Islamic links. The Prime Minister claims that the AKP does not have a religious basis, yet some of its measures, such as relaxing the ban on the hijab and the invocation of sharia, suggested to many that religion was infringing on the state. In 2008 the chief prosecutor of the Supreme Court filed a suit with the Constitutional Court, whose task is to protect the secular constitution of Turkey. The court has the ability to ban any party that undermines the principle of secularism at the heart of the constitution. In July 2008 it found that the ruling AKP had indeed breached the provisions of the constitution, but instead of banning the party (it fell one vote short of the 7 out of 11 required to do so) gave it a severe reprimand and cut half of the funding to which it was eligible as a recognised political party. In effect, the court upheld the constitution while avoiding the massive political turmoil of banning a ruling party.

In Australia, where I live, the situation is somewhat different again. Despite claims that Australia does have a separation of church and state, the actual situation has always been a compromise. Article 116 of the Australian Constitution reads: 'The Commonwealth shall not make any law for establishing any religion, or for imposing any religious observance, or for prohibiting the free exercise of any religion, and no religious test shall be required as a qualification for any office or public trust under the Commonwealth'. Yet churches are established by acts of Parliament – the Anglican, Presbyterian, Congregational and Uniting churches were established in this fashion – so that we may say that there are multiple 'established' churches rather than one.

Schools run by churches are eligible for extensive state funding, so much so that the amount (around \$10 billion per annum as I write for private schools) has generated significant controversy. Yet Australia does not guarantee freedom of religion in its constitution.

## Conclusion

So what is to be done? In conclusion let me make a couple of brief points. To begin with, the opposition of religion and secularism draws the line at the wrong point. If we go back to the definition of secularism with which I began, then religion is nowhere to be found in that basic definition. As I have suggested a few times, the opposition of religion and secularism is a secondary one that may but does not necessarily flow from the definition.

Secondly, an underlying assumption of secularism is that it is a progressive program. Since religion is a regressive and superstitious business, or so the argument goes, a secular program that challenges this repressive system must be enlightening and progressive. But is secularism necessarily progressive? It may well be quite reactionary, as we find in recent examples from Denmark and the Netherlands. In both places the argument goes as follows: we are a secular country, where gay couples live openly, where nudity is accepted, where women and men have equal rights, and where freedom of speech is protected, so we will not tolerate any religion that challenges those features (and others) of our society. That 'religion' is of course none other than Islam. So we find the bits and pieces of an apparently secular society marshalled in opposition to the perceived barbarism and superstition of a particular religion. Needless to say this convoluted position in the hands of conservatives actually justifies a resurgent xenophobia, Islamophobia and religious intolerance.

Perhaps the way forward is to recognise that secularism is not necessarily progressive and that religion is not a default reactionary position. Would it not be wiser to seek the progressive dimension of both so that the concerns of this age and this world might be addressed? Is it not possible that a politics of alliance might develop between progressive elements within various religions and secular movements? Perhaps a 'new secularism' is in order in which this politics of alliance takes place. I close with an example of how this might work. At the various anti-capitalist and anti-

globalization protests, such as those against the World Economic Forum in Melbourne in 2000 and then again at the G20 meeting in 2006, we found anarchists, greenies, ferals, socialists, feminists, various elements of the loopy left, and some religious groups for whom the protests were perfectly consistent with their convictions.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Where Marx and Engels wrote the original text in German, I cite the English source first and then the German source.
- <sup>2</sup> Or as he puts it in his debate with Bauer in *The Holy Family*, the ‘modern state that knows no religious privileges is also the fully developed *Christian* state’ ((Marx and Engels 1975 [1845], p. 111)).
- <sup>3</sup> In his usual comprehensive fashion, Charles Taylor makes a similar argument, namely that secularism is another way of being religious (Taylor 2007).
- <sup>4</sup> See also Engels’s comments in his later letters on Paul Lafargue’s efforts to raise the matter of the separation of church and state in the French assembly ((Engels 2001 [1959]-b, p. 320; 2001 [1959]-a, p. 330)).
- <sup>5</sup> ‘The Prussian King, who calls himself emphatically “the Christian King”, and has made his court a most ludicrous assemblage of whining saints and piety-feigning courtiers’ (Engels 1975 [1842], p. 515; see also Engels 1975 [1844], p. 530).
- <sup>6</sup> He makes a similar point in his discussion of the Established Church of England and the English constitution in relation to ‘Dissenters’ and the Roman Catholics. See (Engels 1975 [1842], p. 501).
- <sup>7</sup> Indeed, the separation of church and state would become standard socialist policy (see Marx and Engels 1977 [1848], p. 4; Engels 1990 [1936], p. 229).
- <sup>8</sup> For Talal Asad, secularism is another way for the state, especially in Muslim-majority countries, to control religion (Asad 2003).

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# **Religion as Worldview: Its Primordial, Perennial, and Practical Significance**

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## **Abstract**

In this article, the author outlines the basic elements of what constitutes in modern terminology a global worldview based on the traditional sources. We are well familiar with the concept of the modern scientific worldview that dominates the thinking of contemporary societies today. A worldview as such is not only a well defined body of knowledge that people come to accept as the driving force of their perceptions; it is also a reflection of the society's fundamental attitudes and manner of approach to the great questions that underscore their lives with their mystery and their latent potential. We endeavor to put the concept of religion itself into a clear context and identify the specific and unique meaning of the term within the religious and spiritual context of Islam as not only a prescriptive body of doctrines, but an entire way of life that is based on the revelatory Quran and the Sunnah or life practices of the Prophet. We have clearly stated the two kinds of knowledge that have emerged down through

history to the present moment, namely a traditional knowledge that finds its origin and source within the great world religions and the scientific knowledge that has evolved since the Renaissance with its well specified reliance on human reason and an empirical method of investigation based on reasoning and the pinpoint observation of facts and data. We have raised the question that is on everyone's mind concerning the concept of origins, of the universe, of life, of man in an effort to identify the grand first cause of all that becomes inevitable consequence. Finally, we have asked and answered the question how do we know what we know in both the traditional and modern science frame of reference, in an attempt to come to terms with the identification of the true sources of knowledge that provides the certitude we are seeking as the basis of our lives.

## **Keywords**

*Religion, Worldview, Primordial, Perennial, Human Reason*

### **1. Religion and Tradition in Context**

Religion has many shades and colors, like a house with many floors and rooms. The walls of this house contain both history and future promise; dogma and rituals, spiritual disciplines and ethical valuations, not to forget the sinners and saints who mingle together within its nook and crannies. Its framework has sects and schools of thought, commandments to follow and customs to take part in. Like all fine mansions, it is well placed with a garden whose setting provides a spiritual and universal context to its order and functioning. But what is religion precisely and how are we to understand its full meaning and significance within the framework of our lives? All Muslims know that they take part in and embrace whole-heartedly the *Dar al-Islam* as their religion by birth and spiritual inheritance, but what does this legacy mean to them and how does the individual Muslim fulfill its mandate? Is it an empty house with creaking stairs and a leaky roof, or is it a vibrant, living presence whose open doors and windows give fresh air and light to the meaning of their lives?

Religion has the power to hover over us like a giant of some mythic fairy tale, uplifting trees to throw across to the horizon and climbing some magical beanstalk to a

distant land set amid floating clouds and mountain peaks. The specter of religion terrorizes us with its demands of obedience and the curse of damnation, and challenges us with the power of our own free will and the promise of eternal life of the soul in Paradise. Like a ghost in the night, a rainbow in the mist, or a mirage in the desert, we cannot put our finger on its mysterious presence. Somehow it escapes the glare of too much light and the rational scrutiny of the five senses. We rely on the intuition of our sixth sense to use the context and framework that religion provides us to move through life with a sense of place and belonging within a universe that does not fully explain itself. Religion encourages us to use the faculties and senses that we do have to make our way through life and fulfill the mandate of the human condition. Its ghost-like presence in our lives demands a leap of faith to transcend the limitations of the physical in order to reveal a world of inner experience with the power to transform lives and change destinies; yet through a trick of mind, this entire world can escape us if we close ourselves off to its miraculous possibility.

Young Muslims by and large still appreciate the vast legacy that Islam brings to the table of their lives and they still instinctively believe in the precepts and dogmas of the religion and unashamedly abide by the implicit faith that serves as the flint and spark of all religious commitment and spirituality; but they may not fully know the true value of their religion within the broader context of what is called the perennial philosophy in which all the great world religions take part. There is a sacred theme of unity that runs as a golden thread through the fabric of all the world religions including the ancient wisdoms of Hinduism, Taoism and Buddhism of the Far East, together with the religions “of the book” that include Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This theme of oneness is none other than the existence of a Supreme Being and a Universal Intelligence, a Presence that is Transcendent and Absolute, what Islam identifies as the Outward, the Inward, and the Friend. Call it what you will, the belief in a Universal Creator that sustains and guides the universe cuts across religion as such and forms the foundation and cornerstone to its meaning and significance.

The Religion of Islam understands very well its place within the universal scheme of things. While it is very prescriptive with clear dogmas, specific laws, and well identified rituals and spiritual disciplines that constitute its own angle of vision and approach, it also identifies its role within the universal application of religion and connects into a broader system of metaphysical principles that transcend the individual religious

forms. Islam understands itself as the primordial religion (*al-dīn al-hanīf*) because it is based on the unique doctrine of Unity that lies at the heart of the universe as well as within the framework of the natural order. In complement, humanity has been given a “human nature”, a primordial nature (*fiṭrah*) according to the Quran, an original and pure human nature that they bear deep within their own soul as the essence of their being, a nature that makes them not only uniquely human but also uniquely spiritual beings. Similarly, Islam is considered to be the last of the great world religions in its form and in its character. The Prophet Mohammed is identified in the Quran as the “seal of the prophets” and this is emphasized at the end of his mission with the descent of the final verse of the Quran that states dramatically: “Today I have perfected your religion for you, completed my favor upon you, and have chosen for you *islam* as your religion” (5:3). It is none other than the religion of surrender (*islam*) that is the cornerstone of the first, primordial religion, bringing to full circle with its nucleus of unity the entire progression of the formal religious experience back to the original primordial point out of which the universe was born. Before Islam was a formalized religion with a capital “I”, cast within the stone of a fixed and ritualized community of worshippers with a professed history and an accepted body of dogma and laws, it was a community of men and women whose minds had been captured by the essence of what would become elaborated upon by the details of the religion and its formal practice. That essence is none other than the great witnessing in Islam, the *Shahādah*, that seized the mind and hearts of the Companions of the Prophet with its incisive knowledge of the One and the clear path of return to the Source to internalize that knowledge through surrender (*Islam*) and worship (*ibadah*).

The concept of religion, its source and its *raison d’être*, finds its origin and support in the descent of a revelation from the Divine Being to the human creature. The actual form of the religion and its entire structure and scaffolding is born out of a direct communication, a Word or Logos, in which the Supreme Being identifies Himself as the true reality and the only reality worthy of worship and praise. Every religious form builds its supporting tradition—both social, cultural or otherwise—from the bedrock of a direct revelation that lays out in detail the essential knowledge of God and all that relates to the human response to that knowledge. This revelatory knowledge speaks directly to the human faculties and senses that in turn process this knowledge and set the scene within the mind and heart for the development of human excellence (*ihsan*)

over the course of life. As knowledge from the Divine Realm, universal revelation substantiates each of the individual religious forms with its knowledge of universal existence and the metaphysical principles that underlie all of existence. As such, the main significance of revelation lies in the fact of its “word of God” quality, partaking as it does in the character of absoluteness, from sacred laws, to rites and rituals, to the importance of sacred symbols and myths and to the efficacy of the spiritual disciplines, all of which contain blessing (*barakah*) for Muslims as well as knowledge that is absolute and beyond human argument.

The meaning of religion in the Islamic context goes beyond the concept of revelation as the descent of knowledge from the Divine to the human as point of departure and source of the religion. The Arabic word *din*, usually translated into English as “religion”, does little justice to the full significance of the word’s meaning in Arabic, because the concept of *din* in Islam is less formal and more practical than you find within the English context. It consists in being a way of life that adheres to a sacred norm in which the entire life is molded to become a way of being, in addition to being a way of knowledge that commences with the descent of the Book and the inscription of the pen on the heart of the Muslims, echoing the very first verse, in the form of a direct command, to descend into the mind and heart of the Prophet in the cave of Mt. Hira: “Read (recite) in the name of thy Lord Who created. . . “ (96:1) To that end, what the Muslims call the Sunnah comprises not only the verses and laws and entreaties of the Holy Quran; but also the sayings of the Prophet, compiled a century or more after his death, that perpetuate his attitudes, his behavior and virtually his way of life. The Prophet himself represents the supreme example of a human being who was the receptacle and instrument of the sacred verses, the very words and vibration of the Holy Spirit.

Obviously, we need the individual form of a specific religion to make our way. Indeed, the religion itself provides not only the destination in the form of fulfillment, salvation, and ultimately the peace of the Paradise; but also the way to arrive at that destination. What is the good of knowing where you want to go and profess to believe in a body of knowledge that promises blessing, happiness and peace, if we do not know how to arrive at that self-professed goal. Young people today do not need convincing about the importance of being on top of their game, of being adept and professional at what they need to accomplish. There are enough examples in the professional and

entertainment world in the form of Superman, Spiderman, the person with special powers or the one who has special insights to impress upon young people nowadays the importance of having goals and being successful. There are ample stories of entrepreneurs like Bill Gates, a high-tech nerd who dropped out of college to become the richest man in the world, to attest to the fact that people now know that they need to develop themselves, to have special powers and fully developed skills, in order to raise their consciousness and will power so that they can transcend their own inherent limitations and be successful in life.

The question is how can these fundamental insights that are self-evident to all be accomplished not only in this life but within the context of a greater, inner journey into the soul and spirit of ourselves and the universe? We cannot just run through fields with our shoes off or desire to float upon clouds and expect to arrive at the true destination that is built into the human condition. The great gift of Islam is that it provides the Muslims with the means to achieve transcendence within the human condition. This transcendence means an escape from their own weaknesses and limitations through the inner *Jihad al-Nafs*, or battle of the mind, heart, and soul, and the ability to rise above themselves to higher level of consciousness through the remembrance of God every moment of their lives and to achieve a high level of virtue through application of the principles of the religion in their actions and in their lives. The great Shahadah or testament of faith in Islam is not just a one-time recitation but an inner truth that shapes and colors every moment of a Muslim life.

It is not so much what we believe as Muslims, but rather how we can give meaning to the form of the religion through our actions and lives. It is not the ritual acts of prayer and fasting and the other duties that make Muslims what they are. These are just the artifacts of a ritual foundation to the religion that attempts to remember and uphold the truths of the religion through a scaffolding of rites and rituals. We should not say that I am Muslim because I pray and fast and have made the hajj. These things are between you and God whose effectiveness depends on their level of sincerity and commitment, especially the fast, for who knows but God whether a person has truly abstained from food and drink during the daylight hours. If being a Muslim means being a member of a club whose clubhouse contains all the tomes of literature that describe the knowledge of God, then we can close the door of this house and confine ourselves within some small box. But that is not what the great sheikhs and walis and

spiritual poets of the past have left behind as a legacy of the spiritual life. What they have left behind to emulate is the manner of being Muslim, the “how” and not the “what” of a Muslim life, through actions that contain their own truth, through intentions that have the backing of the divine will, through surrender that meets the moment of the divine command and through virtue that contains its own light and that shines from the human face to light the way.

This is the true meaning of the Islamic *din*. As one of the family of the great and revealed world religions, Islam adds its own particular perspective to the history of formal religions unfolding by highlighting once again the supreme principle of unity (*tawhīd*) expressed in the first of the two statements of the *Shahādah* as “no god but God”. Secondly, Islam emphasizes the importance of commitment to the singular Islamic path in the second of the two statements of the *Shahādah*, namely that “Mohamed is His Messenger”. As such, Islam’s unique angle of vision rests with the polarity “knowledge and action”, or alternatively “faith and surrender”, or yet again “law and path”. As Muslims, young people need to understand the unique position that Islam now plays as a religion both worthy of the world’s attention and capable of leading people into the future of themselves and the world. It identifies itself with the primordial religion that always was since the symbolic time of Adam and the Golden Era, and as the final religion and “seal” of all religions, it recognizes and accepts the chain of prophets and religions that have preceded it. It could be called the “natural religion” insofar as it is the religion of proto-nature (*al-din al-fitrah*), that is to say that this religion is in the nature of things and identifies the true nature of both man and the natural order. The Oneness of the Absolute is revealed in the natural order and in the heart of humanity as the “primordial message” that lies within the very heart of the universe. This is the true meaning and significance of Islam as a religion within the broader concept of religion “as such”, as a principle of unfolding spiritual life in the knowledge of God that is expressed and realized within the *Ummah* (community) of Islam as a living tradition.

Any betrayal in preserving a way of life that reflects the very spirit of *din* as understood in the Islamic worldview as an elaborate and well specified way of life of precepts, dogmas, and modes of action runs the risk of a self-betrayal in the way Muslims understand themselves and their place in the world. As bearers of the banner of Islam, they set the example that needs to be upheld like a flag in the wind of a way

of living and of being that reflects the traditional knowledge and the universal truth, the individual religion and the universal prototype of religion coming together in the silhouette of man against the distant horizon. Islam has bestowed a powerful gift upon the Muslims; a gift that they themselves can become in their encounter with the world.

## 2. The Encounter of Traditional and Scientific Knowledge

Two great ships of behemoth proportions are floating through the waters of life that propose to take us to the ultimate destination. Regrettably, they are on a collision course with each other that could have devastating consequences for humanity. In the absence of a clearly defined concept of religion in the modern world, the concept of knowledge itself has undergone a gradual shift of seismic proportions that we need to understand in order to address its inevitable consequences. A fracture, a crack, indeed a Grand Canyon is in the making that has slowly developed over time, leading into what we now call the modern, and sometimes post-modern, world. Whether this modern-day fissure widens or narrows will depend largely upon the extent of our understanding of what knowledge truly is and how we apply that knowledge to our lives. No one now needs convincing of the importance of knowledge, especially in today's competitive world where education is the key to a successful career and life. But what do we mean by knowledge that we believe so strongly in its possibilities and what are the sources of knowledge that we believe so completely in its certitude?

Since the 17th century, the advance of modern science has proclaimed a universe whose laws are open to discovery through human reason and an emerging scientific methodology. The new science sought, in the uncompromising words of one of its earliest exponent, Francis Bacon, "not to imagine or suppose, but to *discover* what nature does or may be made to do." Similar to the traditional point of view, the modern, scientific mind is concerned with the imponderable mysteries of existence, and has sought to equip present and future generations with a long list of provable, objective, and thus convincing facts in order to discredit the traditional knowledge set forth by the great world religions.

The grand divide between modern science and traditional knowledge are everywhere apparent from their methods and in their angle of approach to the pursuit of knowledge. The method of scientific research is outwardly directed, while the pursuit of

traditional knowledge is directed inwardly. Modern science finds its basis in observation and deduction from sense data together with the theories and facts that emerge from the pursuit of the scientific method. Religion finds its source in revelation and the human ability to understand the truth through the intellect and discern the truth through intelligence, while realization and internalization of that truth comes through spiritual experience. The focus of science is on the natural order within nature, while the focus of religion is man, striving to know himself and attempting to grow beyond himself. Science is knowledge and its application; religion is knowledge and transcendence of self.

Religion begins as the synthesis of revelation that unveils the mystery of the Divinity and speaks of the unity of the cosmos as a manifestation of the Principle of the One from which everything originates. Science begins with a faith in its own assumptions and proceeds with the accumulation and analysis of data through the scientific method. It constructs a mosaic of fragmented facts, figures, and formulas and speaks of patterns, tendencies, and possibilities, but it categorically refuses to refer to a metaphysical principle that transcends the human order. It does not admit of an inner message or profess an inherent meaning and purpose to the natural order of the universe. We could ask the reason for this posture; but an answer may break apart the myth of the independence of science and the absolute quality of its point of view that repudiates everything that transcends it by declaring it unproved and thus unsubstantiated.

Ultimately, knowledge must reflect the whole; reality must be a manifestation of an organic reality; the universe must be what it is, namely an ordered totality. The elements found in the natural order must be related to the whole, partly in order to understand their meaning and purpose, and partly to preserve the integrity of their own individual harmony which relies on the harmony and balance of the Whole. "The science of our time knows how to measure galaxies and split atoms, but it is incapable of the smallest investigation beyond the sensible world, so much so that outside its own self-imposed but unrecognized limits it remains more ignorant than the most rudimentary magic.<sup>1</sup> Modern science presents a vast accumulation of detailed knowledge which no one could hope to grasp in its totality, partly because modern science does not accept a perspective of totality that satisfies its demand for physical

proof, and partly because the accumulated facts simply do not add up to a complete and unified theory in the scientific sense, a totality and a whole in the spiritual sense.

If, from the scientific point of view, the traditional knowledge of metaphysics lacks proof, then it could be affirmed that from the metaphysical perspective, modern science lacks significance. It is not worth an extensive knowledge of the physical world to lose the essential knowledge of the soul of man and the Spirit of God. It is not worth the sacrifice of a traditional knowledge that belongs to a higher order with the power of unifying the multiplicity of all knowledge and of unifying the wide diversity of the manifested world into a single Whole, for the sake of an analytic knowledge that knows everything but that understands nothing worth knowing.

The prevailing attitudes of modern science have not always been the norm. Science has not always been modern. History portrays western science as having gone through a far more traditional era when the meaning of the term "science" itself reflected the metaphysical and spiritual roots of a knowledge that found its ultimate source in the sacred scriptures of the various religions. The traditional sciences were considered "a knowledge, which, while not pure metaphysics, is traditional, that is, related to metaphysical principles, and though a science in the sense of organized knowledge of a particular domain of reality, it is not divorced from the immutability which characterizes the principal order."<sup>2</sup>

Another notable difference between traditional knowledge and modern science lies in the meaning of their application in life. Modern science applies its knowledge to the benefit and enhancement of the quality of life on the physical, practical, and sensorial level of experience and not surprisingly since it is only interested in the physical plane of existence as the sole expression of reality. The traditional sciences, on the other hand, understand themselves to be applications of a metaphysical doctrine that gains entrance to a different order of reality and integrates them into a unity through a synthesis of knowledge. They prepare the way for a higher expression of the essential knowledge and provide a pathway leading toward that knowledge.

Today scientists describe the universe in terms of two basic theories, relativity, and quantum mechanics, considered the two great intellectual achievements of the twentieth century. The theory of relativity now dominates the field of astronomy by describing the force of gravity and the large-scale structure of the universe. Quantum mechanics, on the other hand, deals with phenomena on very small scales within the

quantum world. Not surprisingly, astronomy as the macrocosmic field of the infinitely large<sup>3</sup> and quantum physics as the microcosmic field of the infinitely small<sup>4</sup> are beginning to create cracks in the wall of denial that has always accompanied the scientific attitude concerning higher levels of reality. The findings of both astronomy and physics have begun to hint at the possibility of domains that are actually "trans-physical", domains that virtually transcend the purely physical plane of existence.

The sciences of physics and astronomy also points to another astounding insight: they both contain their own distinct worlds and suggest as yet undisclosed insights that are different from anything we perceive directly with our senses; as such they seem to follow their own distinct laws. We live between two worlds, the one macro and the other micro, just as from the traditional point of view, we live within the envelope of time within eternity. Our lives are but fragments, a parenthesis that opens the envelope of the space // time continuum and closes out the eternal now. Between the infinitely large and infinitely small worlds of astronomy and physics lies the meso world of the intelligible and the understandable, the meso-world of everyday phenomena. This middle land is reminiscent of the "middle way" of Islam. We experience directly a "meso" world with our senses and are expected to follow the middle way, a path that not only reflects the reality of the natural order in which Nature is beautiful because it symbolizes and reflects beauty, but also because the middle way represents the way of measure and balance.

For centuries, western science has insisted on observing the natural order directly, while at the same time it has systematically refused to believe in anything that was perceived indirectly from behind a veil as it were, such as the truths of the traditional world that were perceived indirectly through myths and symbols. It wanted to find its truth in every drop of water and every grain of sand. Now, however, with the discoveries of quantum physics, modern science has turned a corner only to arrive at a kind of black hole in its study of the physical universe. It has discovered to its surprise that matter cannot always be substantiated and form cannot always be visualized. In fact, modern science is now reaching beyond its traditional domain of the physical world into areas that are difficult to imagine even for scientists, much less visualize. For example, physicists are forced to ask themselves: Is a neutron a particle or a wave? Physicists no longer know since it behaves as both a particle and a wave.

In the traditional perspective, people were accused of believing without understanding. With regard to some of the latest findings of quantum physics, scientists find themselves understanding their theories without actually believing them,<sup>5</sup> because they point towards border areas into which science has been forbidden to venture. Now quantum and astro-physics are exploring the frontiers of these borderlands with an intensity and thoroughness that it always brings to its investigations, and these scientific disciplines are beginning to make some startling discoveries and some inescapable realizations.

The time has come when we must reflect within ourselves the interrelatedness and unicity that scientists are discovering lies within the basic elements of the phenomenal world. The time has come to use the great achievements of modern science together with traditional knowledge to provide a consistent perspective and philosophical depth to the knowledge that is being made available to us at this time. We need to leave behind with finality all preconceived notions concerning the unknown mystery, in order to open ourselves to the full view of a new and unexplored horizon that begins within humanity as a realization that his origin and final end is one and the same. The aim of knowledge is not the discovery of some ultimate proof that will prove all our scientific theories. The aim of knowledge is but a return to the Origin of all things which lies at the heart of man, within the nucleus of the atom, and at the Absolute Center of the Universe. To have knowledge of our origins and our final end is to know from where we originate and therefore the destination to which we will ultimately return.

Whether it be the incredible recent findings of modern science in the fields of biology, chemistry and physics that have revolutionized the entire intellectual framework and enriched the storehouse of modern knowledge as never before, or the wide diversity and profound scope of the traditional knowledge whose fullness reaches down from Heaven to earth and whose extent spans across all races and cultures, one thing must become clear. The deeper a modern and contemporary person explores either the rational or intuitive perspective, the more that person must realize the existence of a unique similarity of aim and purpose between the two contemporary paradigms of knowledge. A bridge of opportunity is beginning to emerge that may span the divide that exists between scientific and traditional knowledge that would be too important to ignore.

Science needs a perennial philosophy in order to substantiate the facts and the findings that it uncovers on the physical plane of manifestation and to give them accessibility and meaning. Traditionally, the world religions and the religion of Islam in particular have accomplished this feat with considerable success by offering a sacred philosophy of life and practical wisdom to help fulfill life's purpose. The science we envision would have to be a "sacred science" rather than an exclusively "empirical science" such as we have now, a science that holds the door open to permit the higher, metaphysical realities to reveal themselves within the natural order.

Neither science nor religion can continue into the new millennium as islands unto themselves. Nor can either modern science or religion suffer a fatal compromise at the expense of the other perspective. The world cannot afford to lose either the incredible quality and depth of traditional knowledge or the incredible precision, accuracy and range of the knowledge of modern science. They both need to integrate themselves into a comprehensive theory of knowledge that the adherents of both of these perspectives would be willing to believe in. They both need to exhibit a new consciousness that complements the incredible breadth of knowledge and possibility that these valid and alternative fields of vision encompass. They both need to be inclusive rather than exclusive, inviting dialogue and exchange between related fields of interest to bridge their differences and frames of reference. It is not for nothing that the Messenger of Islam is quoted as having said: "Seek knowledge<sup>6</sup> (of science), even unto China," which was a form of Arab hyperbole to suggest that the knowledge of science was so important one should seek it even unto "the ends of the earth". No doubt, he was thinking of a traditional knowledge that found its source in the headwaters of revelation that flowed through him and beyond to his Companions and ultimately the world we now live in.

### **3. The Question of Origins**

Every system of knowledge that aspires to being a worldview that captures the minds and hearts of a mass population needs to address and come to terms with the question of origins. It is a perennial question that will not go away and its unresolved mystery continues to haunt the modern psyche of humanity no matter how adept scientists have become at extricating the secrets that lie sequestered within the bedrock of the

natural order. No matter how determined their efforts to lay claim once and for all to a definitive discovery that would resolve the secret of origins, and no matter how far we have come in discovering the source of the proverbial Nile that runs as an undercurrent within us when it come the definitive encounter of humanity with their absolute, primal origins, scientists never quite arrive at the source of the universal river that whose narrative would reveal the true origin of existence.

Our search for true origins leads us back through time to the moment of the initial creation often fantasized today as the Big Bang when the universe virtually exploded into being from what modern science calls an “initial singularity” or what the traditions call the “primordial point”. The traditional point of view that Islam sets forth returns us once again to the source, at the moment of the initial creation of the universe, or what modern science curiously refers to as the “initial singularity”. God's existence is eternal, but the knowledge of God's existence begins with the act of the initial creation. What science envisions as a singularity is actually the first manifestation of multiplicity, a multiplicity that will virtually characterize a created universe that reflects unity through multiplicity, the absolute through the relative, and the infinite through the finite. The secret of the divine mystery, the universal unknown that modern science aspires to uncover and categorize, lies embedded with the very substance and manifestation of the creation as the One, the Absolute and the Infinite.

We have, of course, a serious difference of opinion between the theory of cosmic origins portrayed through modern science and the perennial explanation of the creation set forth in the religion of Islam. The Quranic *kun fa yakoon* (be and it becomes) encapsulate within the divine speech of revelation the initial impulse of the Divinity to commence the unfolding of His Self Disclosure at the dawn of creation and refers to the auditory sound **KUN** that virtually initiated the divine act of creation. The scientific model of the universe leads us back to the horizon of time to the moment of initial singularly beyond which the theoretical model of the universe portrayed by modern science breaks down. Any further speculation concerning the nature of reality has no consequence because it lies outside the paradigm of science.

In its search for the knowledge of universal origins, modern science takes us back to the edge of the time/space continuum at the outer periphery of the known universe, and then comes to an abrupt halt. Seemingly, it is enough to know that the universe began “in the beginning”,<sup>7</sup> but the questions of *how* it began and more philosophically

**why** find no place in the scientific inquiry, perhaps for no other reason than the fact that the answers lie outside the parameters of its sources of knowledge, namely human reason and the physical senses, supported by the consistent and verifiable laws of nature, and is therefore irrelevant. Yet the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of the origin of the universe are questions that don’t give up their challenge to human curiosity easily and linger at the gate of human inquiry expecting ultimately an answer. They simply don’t go away and continue to a purpose to the universe that give a lie to the “random chance” referred to in the theory of evolution, the spontaneous appearance of life, or the explosion of an unexpected universe that provides the ground for the laws of nature.

The scientific theory of universal origins fails on fundamental levels, partly because there is no “source” knowledge to speak of, but rather a dead-end theory bereft of any nascent mystery, and partly because it simply does not make sense and is without reference to anything man can freely associate with either mentally or spiritually. As a scientific theory, it remains incomplete because it cannot tell us **how** the universe began and its power of prediction is fundamentally negative: it tells us that all physical theories break down at the beginning of the universe. Indeed, the origin of the universe according to modern science is a singularly precisely because the space-time continuum cannot be extended that far and survive.

According to the traditional perspective, it is by virtue of the command of God that the question of origins is resolved. The universe, indeed the very existence of the cosmos, points beyond itself to a universal principle and a first cause. When the Bible asserts the well-known phrase “in the beginning”, are we to interpret the Biblical *in principio* as an initiation and principle of time in a timely sense or a timely principle in a metaphysical sense that can serve as a reference point and framework within which to understand the genesis of the creation and the act of the Creator. In this context, the knowledge of the true beginning finds its “source” in God Himself, Who lies outside the reference point of time and outside the framework of the cosmos as such. Time actually begins in eternity through a vertical descent as a macrocosmic manifestation of a metacosmic Principle. Therefore, neither time nor its source-point in eternity are within the reach of modern science and cannot suffer from its dispassionate and cold scrutiny.

Instead, the initial singularly presents itself, in the words of Wolfgang Smith,<sup>8</sup> as an “incurably transcendent” point from which, according to modern scientific theory, the

entire universe has sprung and continues to expand. This point is actually the origin of the Metacosmic Center that initiates the true Beginning when the universe was brought into existence. It is the result of the Creative Act whose point within the Center and whose time at the Beginning affirm the unity of the creation within the very fold of a Divine and Transcendent Being who, through an act of vertical causation that originates outside of time and space, actually creates the continuum in which the universe is made possible. In this way, the revealed sources of knowledge clarify the event—perhaps the non-event, for what can “happen” outside of the framework of time—of the initial creation and re-create in the words of scripture the knowledge of the True Beginning.

Three fundamental questions concerning origins have proven to be as enigmatic and mysterious as they are magnetic and inviting to the human mentality. They are: What is the universe? What is Life? What is Man? The search for the answers to these three questions represents the unending search of humanity for the First Cause to which all knowledge and experience can be referred. The answers to these questions would solve for humanity all the perennial mystery of the universe, of life, of man. Perhaps that is why we have no definitive answers to these questions except what comes to us through the self-disclosure of the Divinity through Revelation, through Nature and through Man.

The problem of the genesis of life commences with the life force itself. What is it and from where does it originate? Modern science studiously avoids unnecessary speculation concerning the emergence of the life force itself. That must remain the sacrosanct preserve of the traditions which speak both eloquently and definitively about the origin of the life force and its implicit meaning as a manifestation of the Spirit that animates all of the creation. Instead, modern science predictably focuses on the physical and the observable and dismisses the initial process of creation that something has emerged from nothing as a purely spontaneous happening, arising out of favorable conditions on the planet at that time.

According to modern science, the origin of the life force commences from within the time/space matrix that existed at the origin of the physical cosmos without the intrusion of any transcendent cause. Within a purely material and temporal matrix, modern science suggests that the life force issued accidentally and randomly out of non-life, and that both life and intelligence came forth out of brute and inanimate

matter. There is nothing to prove that inorganic matter could have induced the creation of living matter when the determining factor for this phenomenon remains unknown.

We need to remember in this context the great biological discovery of DNA double helix. The life force itself represents sheer intelligence, commencing with the intelligent life force of a single cell.<sup>9</sup> Intelligent biology is perhaps the most meaningful message of the new biology. The micro-biological order is alive with intelligence, order and purpose that constitutes the 'elementary particles' of our very flesh. Why then do many people today still cling "blindly" to the essentially mindless theory of natural selection as the cornerstone of evolutionary life? Similarly, scientists refer to hot little pools, primordial soup and primal seas in their speculation of the origin of life itself, and this directly coincides with the Quranic injunctions that everything originates from water. "Do not the unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together, then We clove them asunder and We got every living thing out of water. Will they then not believe"? (21: 30)<sup>10</sup>

Scientists freely confess that they have no direct evidence of the replication event that instigated the origin and replication of life on earth. "We do not know exactly what the original critical event, the initiation of self-replication, looked like, but we can infer what kind of an event it must have been." Further on the same author concludes: "What we can do is guess at a general chronology of a life explosion on any planet, anywhere in the universe."<sup>11</sup> We are witnessing in action the interweaving of a fabric whose woof constitutes the available facts and whose warp is derived from the fiction of inferences and suppositions that are freely admitted. Whatever the angle you approach the problem, whether it be from the traditional or the scientific perspective, the creation of life seems either a miracle or an anomaly.

The idea that evolution could be significantly shaped by hidden harmonies and an ordered design reflecting purpose and intelligence is scorned by most, but not all, biologists. "Certain thinkers, who until now have approached the problem from a strictly materialistic point of view, are beginning to realize that the question must henceforth be seen in a light that introduces – at the very least – certain metaphysical considerations."<sup>12</sup> While the physicist Wolfgang Smith writes from a slight different perspective: "There are first origins, then, and indeed there must be. Every chain of secondary causes, traced backwards, must eventually lead to the brink of a mystery;

even physical cosmology, it seems, has at last come to this recognition. Likewise, so far as biological chains of descent are concerned, there must always be a "missing link": the only question is whether there are many – one for each natural species – or whether the branches of the genealogical tree trace back to one common primordial ancestor, so that the mystery of creation appears to be concentrated, so to speak, at a single point."<sup>13</sup> Until now, biology and physics are worlds apart, not only substantively by virtue of what they study, but also philosophically through the manner in which they approach their subject. Many physicists, in their study of the minutiae of the sub-atomic world, are beginning to see through the window to the other side of reality, while most biologists seem to be intent on proving the traditions "wrong".

Because of the traditional perspective they believe in, modern Muslims are standing on a horizon with a panoramic view overlooking two compelling worldviews, the one horizontal with an earthly horizon, the other vertical with a celestial horizon. The world of science looms ahead on this side of the horizon with its precision, objectivity in the name of physicality, and exactitude, insisting on the preeminence of matter as the ultimate reality and the sanctity of life as a natural process of selection. The substantive world of religion lies beyond the other side of the horizon and extends vertically upward. The traditional world of the revealed religions is a world of unity that speaks of realities that transcend matter and human reason and that offer spiritual meaning to the life of humanity, a meaning that encompasses the physicality of this world and transcends it through the reality of the Spirit of God, the "breath of the Compassionate". (*al-nafas ar-Rahman*).

These two world-views are separated by the seam of an earthly horizon; but they could be united by the Principle of Unity that the religion of Islam preserves for humanity. The mystery of cosmic genesis and the knowledge of a true beginning lies hidden within the mystery of a transcendent consciousness that has proclaimed as an eternal remembrance: "I was a hidden treasure and wanted to be known. Therefore, I created the world."

#### **4. The Sources of Knowledge**

In the encounter of traditional and scientific knowledge that the modern mentality must come to terms with, it is no longer good enough to say that we know something.

The worldview that people adhere to must address and answer the vital question in the minds and on the lips of every reflective person: How do we know what we know? The Muslim themselves must be ready to give an accounting to themselves and others whenever possible when the question is asked. After all, Muslims are ready enough to say what they believe in; the beliefs and doctrines of the religion has been drummed into their heads since childhood and they can proclaim what they know from the rooftops along with the *adhan* that joyously gives the call five times a day from minarets across the Islamic crescent. But lifting the veil or scratching below the surface of knowledge and lifelong habits for the sources of our inspiration may prove to be a challenging task, much less internalizing and living what we believe to be true knowledge. We as Muslims need to look beyond the horizon of “this world” and back to the edge of time. We must attempt to uncover once again at the crack in the universe, to that knowledge, according to the mystic poet Wordsworth of a presence that disturbs him with the joy of elevated thoughts and a sense of something sublime. There is a secret door that leads beyond the known horizon “whose dwelling is in the light of setting suns, and the round ocean and the living air, and the blue sky, and in the mind of man.”<sup>14</sup>

Yes, the mind of man apparently holds the key to a higher consciousness that we will always remember and never forget. We need to ask ourselves a number of questions before we can take comfort in the certitude of a universal knowledge that can provide the framework to the way we live our lives. What are the original sources of knowledge? Are they valid, authentic and objective beyond any reasonable human doubt? Is there a headwater of knowledge or a well-spring of truth that serves as the fundamental source of all knowing, or is knowledge relative and all truth conditioned by the impulses of human minds such as contemporary scientists would have us believe? Is there a source so otherworldly and so profound that it has the power to wipe away all duality and all polarity, a mega-power that is able to synthesize, into a single unifying web, the disparate elements that we witness within the existential reality of our lives? In short, is there a knowledge that can neutralize the split image of the horizon and bring the multifarious elements of the phenomenal world into a unified Whole?

When it comes to the question of a knowledge that explains certain fundamental mysteries, a knowledge that transcends any “provable” medium such as the alleged

objectivity of matter that is the yardstick of modern science, and a knowledge that rises above the level of pure reasoning to the realm of ultimate meaning and purpose, the subject of sources and their authenticity must inevitably arise and be seriously considered. It does not matter to what extent we as a civilization are able to uncover aspects of a knowledge that may lead to the explanation of certain fundamental mysteries. What must sustain a viable credibility in the minds and hearts of mass populations around the globe will be the original sources of a particular paradigm of knowledge and the authenticity of its consequent worldview. Ultimately, the only thing that truly matters to humankind is whether the knowledge of the absolute Reality is true and whether it lives in the mind as an enduring certainty. Are there headwaters for the laws and principles that flow through the cosmos into the mind of man? Is there a wellspring of knowledge that shrouds in a perennial mystery the origin of man and the birth of the universe and that seals with certainty the meaning and the ultimate fulfillment of man and the creation?

We intend to answer these questions by referring to the three clearly articulated sources of knowledge as they are identified within the religion of Islam, namely Revelation as the divine disclosure of the mind of God, Nature as the naturalized and formal body of God and Man as the human image of God. Stephen Hawkins, the well-known and controversial physicist, concluded his intriguing book *A Brief History of Time* with two surprising aspirations, firstly to discover a complete theory of knowledge concerning the true nature of the reality whose broad principle could be understood by everyone, and secondly the desire to understand why we and the cosmos exist. "For then," he concludes, "we would know the mind of God." For a contemporary scientist, it is a bold and courageous thought. From the traditional Islamic point of view, however, the mind of God has already been made manifest through the verses of sacred Quranic scripture and the other traditionally accepted revelations down through the millennia.

The Quran itself, of course, is the primary source of knowledge *par excellence* within the Islamic tradition and a sacred communication from the Mind of God to the mind of man. It is the direct descent of the essential knowledge from the Divine Being to the human being through Sacred Speech. The Religion of Islam began as a spiritual force with the first descent of the revelation to the Prophet Mohammed, upon whom blessings and peace, and with the descent of the final verses came the completion and

fulfillment of the religion as a spiritual force on earth. "This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed My favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion" (5:3).

Two other sources of knowledge made available for the benefit of humanity are specifically mentioned in the Quran. "Soon We will show them our Signs on the distant horizon and within their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the absolute Truth" (41:53). These alternative sources of knowledge are respectively the manifested creation in the form of Nature, and man himself who is considered in Islam a living source of knowledge as well as a human revelation. "Know thyself in order to know thy Lord" is a well-known Holy Tradition (*hadith*) of the Prophet. What may prove enigmatic to the modern mentality, steeped as it is in the secular and scientist ambiance of the modern world, is the meaning of the word "knowledge" itself, since distinctions need to be made between the sacred and essential knowledge contained within a revealed scripture with its holy metaphorical tales and symbolic imagery, and the speculative, empirical and scientific knowledge that serves as the backcloth and worldview for the modernist mentality.

Within the Islamic tradition, the Quran clearly states that the source of all true knowledge lies within the phenomenal world as symbolized in the image of the distant horizon and within man as symbolized in the image of the near horizon of the self within man. The near horizon of the inner self lies within man and represents a kind of isthmus and passageway between the outer and inner worlds of the human being. The distant earthly horizon marks the terminus of the known world that marks the end of knowledge and the beginning of mystery. Both horizons imply the possibility of a knowledge that finds its origin in the Absolute Truth and traces its roots back to the Divine Source.

The image of the near horizon within mankind and the distant horizon on the edge of the known world identifies through the bold stroke of a single, horizontal line the separation that exists between two alien worlds, the one physical, visible, and apparently real, the other rarefied, invisible and apparently unreal. The horizon traces the distinct realities of Nature and Man with a celestial line that cuts across the face of the phenomenal world of nature and across the ground of the soul of man. On the one side lies the visibly convincing, physical reality of this world, tempting us into believing the world to be an independent reality that is absolute within itself. On the

other side of this dividing line lies the elusive world of the spirit that overlays all of physical reality with its vivifying force and its definitive presence.

To look at the distant horizon with its split image of heaven and earth is to gaze at the duality of the world. To gaze at the near horizon that exists within man is to bear witness to the duality that exists within us as the existential reality of our being. Heaven and earth, matter and spirit, body and soul, light and darkness, good and evil: These are the existential polarities that highlight the separation of two alien worlds that exist within man as a near horizon and manifest symbolically on the periphery of the world as the distant horizon. The image of the horizon, as macrocosmic symbol *par excellence*, is the remembrance of the unity of separate worlds that in appearance are two but in truth are one, for as the Quran repeatedly asserts, there is but one Reality and there is only one God.

The split image of the world and the duality of man have never held such prominence as during the present era at the dawn of a new millennium. This duality vividly expresses itself during these times in the way we understand ourselves, the way we express our self-image, the way we perceive our world, and the way we approach the very portals of knowledge itself. As individuals, we are living out the complexities of a split image that is embedded within our beings and reflected within the very framework of the creation. Heaven and earth is there on the horizon, as though it were traced across the celestial divide of the heavens with the ink of the Divine Pen. Body, soul and spirit constitute the totality of the human entity, as though the thin line of the near horizon cuts across our being with the invisible blade of the Divinity, thereby creating a clean and unbreachable chasm between the known and unknown self.

This split image of man and the world manifests itself during the present era as the relentless revolution of the scientific point of view over the minds and hearts of people everywhere. There are now two points of reference and two paradigms of knowledge that vie for the attention of mass populations everywhere. There is the vision of a metaphysical knowledge, of eternal and supernatural realities, that is rooted in first principles and that is conveyed to humanity through revelation, through nature and through man. It is a principal knowledge that begins with revelation, becomes internalized in man through a faith in God that is witnessed by every thought and action, and ultimately ends with certainty in the reality of the Supreme Being. Then there is the vision of a physical reality, of rational and natural realities rooted in

physical matter and conveyed to humanity through human reason and the observations and calculations of an experimental and mathematical science. It is a knowledge that begins with hypothesis and ends with the certainty of physical proofs as the definitive source of an objective knowledge and the only reality worth believing in and studying.

The age we live in harbors frightening challenges, but it also inspires bold thinking. There is a feeling of the "eleventh hour" about our time. Modern speculation concerning the eternal mysteries is fast approaching an edge of time and space whose drop-off point is as abrupt and final as the end of the earth was for 16<sup>th</sup> century seafarers. Yet, a compensation of our time may provide an unexpected insight into the dilemma that confronts us by believing in a scientific conception of knowledge that has become equated with the only way of knowing there is.

Yet, does this attitude need to set the norm for everyone? People are becoming increasingly aware of how little our rational knowing pushes back the frontiers of our conscious unknowing. What we know no longer begins to satisfy the aching mystery of what we do not know. No matter what wondrous scientific revelation stimulates contemporary thinking—from the theory of relativity to the mysteries of the quantum universe—the parade of demonstrable and ascertainable facts that result from the high fever pursuit of the scientific inquiry throws no more light on the dark mystery that clouds our knowing than a bright wood fire throws into the dark, moonless night.

Yet, there is a way of knowing that transcends the rational world of the mind for a higher consciousness of knowing. Every search implies a journey and every journey requires a final destination. The search for the authentic sources of knowledge begins with the words of revealed scripture, manifests through the symbolic messages of every created thing within the phenomenal world of nature, and ends with the self-revelation of man. It marks an inner journey across frontier lands that lie beyond the horizon and off the map. No well-defined road leads there and no one can find the way on his or her own. It is a journey that will take us to the central *mihrab*<sup>5</sup> of the inner self as the focus and prelude for the experience of that Center and Source of the Metacosmic Universe that exists beyond the edge of space and time, but that manifests here and now as the Divine Disclosure and the Sacred Presence.

The Religion of Islam highlights for modern humanity once again the importance of the primordial truth that lies within each of the traditional religions. Allah is the

Source and Origin of all knowledge; He is the creator of the universe and all life within its realm; from His Throne flows the headwaters of the human narrative. “We come from God and to Him will be return.”

## 5. The Islamic Worldview

In the first four sections of this chapter, we outlined the basic elements of what constitutes in modern terminology a global worldview. We are well familiar with the concept of the modern scientific worldview that dominates the thinking of contemporary societies today. A worldview as such is not only a well defined body of knowledge that people come to accept as the driving force of their perceptions; it is also a reflection of the society’s fundamental attitudes and manner of approach to the great questions that underscore their lives with their mystery and their latent potential. We have endeavored to put the concept of religion itself into a clear context and identified the specific and unique meaning of the term within the religious and spiritual context of Islam as not only a prescriptive body of doctrines, but an entire way of life that is based on the revelatory Quran and the Sunnah or life practices of the Prophet. We have clearly stated the two kinds of knowledge that have emerged down through history to the present moment, namely a traditional knowledge that finds its origin and source within the great world religions and the scientific knowledge that has evolved since the Renaissance with its well specified reliance on human reason and an empirical method of investigation based on reasoning and the pinpoint observation of facts and data. We have raised the question that is on everyone’s mind concerning the concept of origins, of the universe, of life, of man in an effort to identify the grand first cause of all that becomes inevitable consequence. Finally, we have asked and answered the question how do we know what we know, in an attempt to come to terms with the identification of the true sources of knowledge that provides the certitude we are seeking as the basis of our lives.

We are not concerned here with either the existence or the definition of traditional knowledge although it forms the texture and frame of which we write; rather we are concerned with clarifying why and how a given body of knowledge, its framework and its ensuing worldview is traditional. The knowledge itself cannot be everything. What makes it anything and everything is the fact that far beyond its actuality lies its source

that substantiates it and gives it meaning and life. What makes traditional knowledge unique is the fact that, because of its source within the Divinity, everything within the body of the tradition must already be there from the very beginning in its essence. The latter developments of the tradition and its full articulation, the shades and colors of the traditional knowledge and the diversity of its scope down through the ages only serve to make it more explicit, without adding new elements from another source. According to the Islamic doctrine, there is only one first origin and source, namely the knowledge of Unity (*tawheed*) and the knowledge of the One (*al-Ahad*).

We wish to highlight that traditional knowledge generally is shaped by the nature of its origins and we wish to emphasize the importance of identifying the first principles that form the coloration and ambiance of its enduring truth. The recognition of truth, the pursuit of knowledge, and the wisdom of life find their impetus and source within a realm that transcends the temporal and the earthly. It is the sacred realm of universals, of first principles, of first knowledge and first origins that live now and forever as they exist in truth. It is a realm, needless to say, that has been identified through the revelation with the names of God representing His qualities and attributes. He is the First (*al-Awwal*) and the Last (*al-Akhir*). All that we know comes from He who is the Knowing (*al-Alim*), the Living (*al-Hayy*) and the Eternal (*al-Samad*).

The question of the source and authenticity of knowledge that serves as a paradigm of self-knowledge and as a worldview to explain the true nature of the cosmic reality strikes at the heart of modern man's understanding of the word *knowledge* and the modern scientific approach to its acquisition. The question of source is fundamental to the entire endeavor in the search for knowledge and will ultimately define the contours, color and shape of any framework of knowledge that calls itself a worldview whether it is metaphysical, traditional, rational or scientific knowledge. The question of the truth of a given framework of knowledge highlights, perhaps more than we may care to admit, the modern-day approach to the search for a unified theory of knowledge that serves as the *raison d'être* for the scientific enterprise. A comprehensive worldview will project into the consciousness of the world its objectivity, its persuasiveness, and its validity to the extent that it is accessible and believable to mass populations at its source, is convincing at simple levels of expression, and is profound in its truth.

While no one would deny that a comprehensive knowledge of the reality is of vital

interest and importance to humanity and always has been, during these times the modern-day approach and understanding of existential and ultimate knowledge has been two-edged and the search for a complete knowledge runs forward on dual tracks. On the one hand, we have the traditional knowledge that has come down to us through the millennia and is followed instinctively by billions of people. Down through the ages, the traditional worldview has embodied a higher knowledge, spiritual knowledge, essential knowledge, traditional knowledge and metaphysical knowledge that ultimately reflects the instinctive and universal inclination of people in every time and place to resolve their doubts, have faith and believe in God. On the other hand, the defining worldview of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is a "scientific knowledge" that marks the parameters of the contemporary worldview. Alternatively, this knowledge has been referred to as speculative knowledge, rational knowledge, secular knowledge, empirical knowledge, and of course scientific knowledge, but it ultimately reflects a self-proclaimed knowledge in the objectivity of physical matter, rational thinking and mathematical formulation that dominates the intellectual horizon and is a sign of our time.

What people yearn for, however, is a definitive knowledge, a principial knowledge and a first knowledge that has the power to resolve the perennial mystery that lies at the heart of existence and at the center of the universe. What we are faced with first and foremost is a mystery rather than a knowledge and what we need to resolve before all else is to know the true origin of existence and have available the true sources of knowledge gathered together into a comprehensive form that makes a worldview that can be drawn from your pocket at world and relied on to provide the guidance that the demands of life call upon us.. At face value, we do not know what constitutes the true nature of the human reality in terms of first origin and final end, nor do we know what empowers and governs the reality of phenomenal nature that extends within our depths and beyond into the depths of the night sky. At the heart of all existential knowledge lies a divine mystery that declines to give up its secrets and refuses to resolve the enigmatic challenges of life during this or any other time.

In the Islamic worldview, God is the ultimate source of all existent things in their multi-faceted manifestations and forms. God, as absolute mystery as well as "hidden treasure", is the Originator and the Source of all that exists. He is, therefore, the Originator of a time in the beginning, now and ever shall be and He is the Source of all

that exists as created and manifested form. Out of the headwaters of the Source flow all primordial forms, all archetypes, all embryos, all seeds, germs, buds, eggs, rootlets, and sprigs. According to Ibn al-'Arabi, buds are possibilities that have not yet "smelled the perfume of existence". In the Source, all things are eternally present, just as in the bud the flower is forever present. Nothing can appear on the plane of physical manifestation without having its transcendent cause and the primary root of its being well placed in the soil of the Primordial Source. Similarly, all existent things both contain and preserve the integrity of the bud, sprig, embryo, seed and source that begot it.

The notion of origin refers to a Supreme Being that is before us, behind us, below us and above us, both now, in the past and in the future, in short in a time that is summarized by the eternal moment. *It is He who beginneth the process of creation, and He repeateth it* (10: 4). The Name of Allah identifies an eternal Presence and a living Reality that is certainly not subject to the conventional notions of time and space. He does not have a beginning in time; instead, He represents the ever-present Origin, Source, Center and Final End. According to a Holy Tradition of the Prophet (*hadith*) in Islam: "There was a time when God existed, and nothing else existed alongside Him."

Do we know why the Divinity created the universe? As human beings, we might project anthropomorphic feelings of loneliness in the face of an eternal solitude, but God has revealed another reason. We have come to know why God created the universe because a well-known *hadith qudsi*<sup>16</sup> has conveyed this rarefied knowledge to humanity. "David (peace be upon him) said, 'Oh Lord, why did You cause creation to come into being?' God replied, 'I was a hidden treasure and I wanted to be known, therefore I created the universe.'" We have here in the words of God a direct statement of divine motivation and purpose that is conveyed to man as a divine disclosure through the prophets so that humanity may know once and for all time the reason for our existence and the purpose for which we live, namely to know the Divinity and through the realization of this knowledge to worship and praise Him. The miraculous faculty of consciousness<sup>17</sup> implicit in this revealed knowledge is the counterpart and reflection of the magnificent beauty of the creation.

To have faith in a body of traditional knowledge and to live a traditional life of spirituality is to live within sight of the Origin. It is because of the origin of existence and the sources of knowledge that every moment of life can be lived at all, giving life

its spiritual and transcendent character. He who denies this denies the living reality within himself. He who lives this, lives a life of affirmation that finds its source and origin in the Divine Being who is the Creator and Originator of the space–time matrix that characterizes the universal cosmos.

If the Divinity is the Primal Origin and Original Source of all knowledge as embodied in the revelation, in nature and in man, then the revelation as a transcendent world, cosmic nature as a book of phenomenal existence and man as microcosm and world within a world represent the intermediary sources of knowledge in the form of a written book, as a theatre of nature reflecting through multiple mirrors the Face of the Beloved (*Wherever you turn, there is the Face of God*), and as the human revelation in which man himself becomes a true theophany of the Reality. The correspondence between man, the cosmos and revelation is crucial in the religious configuration of Islam, partly because each element forms a contiguous part as the source material for the religion and partly because the written wisdom, the natural wisdom and the human wisdom contained in the scripture, nature and man all deliver the essential knowledge that bespeaks of the true nature of the one Reality.

As such, revelation, nature and man each exhibit signs that are direct reflections of the Divinity and these “signs” are intended to serve mankind as a means of lifting the veil that separates humanity from direct knowledge of the Divinity. The revealed words of the Quran descend from the Mind of Allah, pass through the mind of the Messenger of Islam and ultimately set down as a written book (*al-Qur’an al-tadwini*) with verses that in Arabic are called *ayat* which when translated means “signs” or “verses”, linking the verses of the Book with the well known Quranic verse “We will show them Our signs on the horizon and within themselves” (41:53). The cosmos itself, referred to in Arabic as the cosmic Quran (*al-Qur’an al-Takwini*) or the book of existence,<sup>18</sup> represents a vast book in complement to the Islamic book of revelation, and like the revealed scripture, it also contains signs and symbols, verses if you will, that have the power to reveal as much as they conceal and possess levels of meaning that can serve the needs of every mentality and that ultimately lead toward a complete understanding of the true nature of reality. Finally, man himself is a book of self-revelation whose story becomes a conscious human life and whose thoughts and actions become the signs and symbols of a tale well lived.

Therefore, the *ayat* manifest themselves within the Holy Book, within the

macrocosmic universe, and within the soul of man, in other words *on the distant horizon and within their own selves*. “The Quran and the great phenomena of nature are twin manifestations of the divine act of Self-revelation. For Islam, the natural world in its totality is a vast fabric into which the ‘signs’ of the Creator are woven.”<sup>19</sup> Man can realize his own being as a sign of God, the cosmos as a grand theophany and mirror of the Divine Qualities and Attributes, and the revealed book that contains all the verses and thus all the knowledge that a human being needs to know in order to come to terms with him/herself and the universe as the *vestigia Dei*, according to Christian terminology. Each element has its own form of metaphysics and its own mode of prayer, man through living the tale, the cosmos through being the sanctuary and theatre wherein the Divinity can become manifest, and revelation by recreating for humanity aspects of the mind of God through words.

According to the modern scientific worldview, the universe constitutes a single manifestation of reality, one level as it were, while all speculation concerning intangible, spiritual or in any sense other-worldly phenomena is dismissed as an expression of “unreality”. The objective of modern science is to uncover a unified theory of knowledge that would bring all the known laws of nature into a single comprehensive framework. According to the traditional perspective, however, the universe partakes of levels of reality. The message of its very magnitude and breadth amply attests to that truth. Its billions and billions of galaxies swirling around a central core and its light-years upon light years, reflecting as they do both immense distance and time, would only numb the mind with their unreal and incomprehensible projection without the enlightening perspective of the Transcendent Center that unifies both man and the universe into a single “principle” of knowledge at source. As such, in addition to the Quran, the universe itself is a great book of knowledge that can teach us far more about ourselves and our world than we might have thought possible or imaginable.

To understand the vision of the world of man and the world of nature as being irrevocably related to the world of the revelation is to live and experience ourselves and the world we live in as the sacred realities that they are. Without a sense of the sacred and without a feeling for the sublime articulation of the Whole—of man and nature and the cosmos that envelopes them both—we would simply remain the three-dimensional figurines we now envision ourselves to be, on the road to self-destruction

and ultimately oblivion. We need to abandon a paradigm of thought that relies solely on facts and figures to determine our self-image and worldview. We need to see through the one-sided and narrow perspective of modern science whose vision does not extend beyond human perception of self and that uses reason alone to interact with the “stuff” of matter that constitutes the physical world.

When we think of the universe, how do we picture it and therefore what does it mean to us? Do we recreate in our mind’s eye, for example, the dark matter and black holes, the red hot suns and white dwarfs, the vast distances that preclude any thought of deep space travel and the tremendous aeons of time required to allow the universe “to happen”? Or do we recreate in our mind’s eye the vision of a sublime totality that lives eternally as a Transcendent Center; but that has created the primordial point that expanded into the grand manifestation of a living and organic universe, because this transcendent and eternal Center wanted “to be known” and therefore executed the miracle of cosmic and human consciousness? Do the laws that govern what we witness to be an ordered cosmos exist as the expression of an inevitable virtuality and a blind expression of random fact, or are they the evidence of a divine self-disclosure and the reflection of an intelligence, the Supreme Intelligence if you will, that has created, governs and sustains the universe? When the spiritual traditions say that man is the microcosm and the universe is the macrocosm, implying that the universe exists within man just as man exists within the universe, what does that mean and does anyone really know? Whatever may be the true answer, one thing is clear: In whatever sense or in whatever way the universe can be reflected in man, can I claim to be that man? Is order and purpose reflected within nature a motivating force in my awareness? Finally, is the universe a conscious and living reality, just as I know myself to be and am?

We began this chapter by relying on the source material of a *hadith qudsi*, a Holy Tradition in the words of the Divinity, that suggests the ultimate rationale for the creation of the both man and the universe. Modern man’s scale of the universe is staggering, numbing the mind with its vast time frames and incredible distances because it is outside of us and we are not apart of it in some qualitative manner. Ancient and traditional man’s scale of the universe is equally awesome, but in an entirely different way. The modern scale of the universe exceeds all of man’s expectations of quantity by dwarfing him in size in relation to the vast physical

perspective and leaving him bereft of a purpose and a meaning that can integrate him into the Whole, thereby disassociating him from the world of nature and the universe in which he inevitably takes part. In addition, the modern speculative discoveries of such things as dark matter, black holes and parallel universes have no symbolic value. Their theoretical existence may intrigue the mind with its technical virtuosity and its imaginative flare, but in terms of how they might possibly relate to man and his world, they mean nothing.

Once upon a time and forever more, the sources of traditional knowledge will continue to inspire the minds and hearts of humanity. The night sky will always be the “city of God” and the vast cosmic universe will always be a magnificent universal book (*ayat//verses*) and a mirror reflection of the Divinity. The traditional scale of the universe fully establishes the value of the qualitative experience behind the cold face of quantity. It weaves an intricate web of purpose and a hierarchy of meaning that permits man to find his place in the universe precisely because the essential elements of the universe exist within the human being, namely knowledge, intelligence, existence, life, and consciousness. The mystery of cosmic genesis and the knowledge of a true beginning lies hidden within the mystery of a transcendent consciousness that has proclaimed as an eternal remembrance: “I was a hidden treasure and wanted to be known. Therefore, I created the world.”

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Frithjof Schuon, *In the Tracts of Buddhism*, tr. Marco Pallis, London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1989, p. 40.
- <sup>2</sup> S. H. Nasr, *The Need for a Sacred Science*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1993, p. 95.
- <sup>3</sup> The general theory of relativity describes the force of gravity and the large-scale structure of the universe, sizes on a scale as large as a million million million million (1 with twenty four zeros after it) miles, which is the size of the observable universe.
- <sup>4</sup> Quantum mechanics deals with phenomena on extremely small scales, such as a millionth of a millionth of an inch.
- <sup>5</sup> "The normal reaction to a first exposure to relativity is: 'I think I understand it; I just don't believe it.' Normally it takes a physicist about five years of contact with the ideas before he feels comfortable with them – not because they are complex or

obscure, but just terribly strange.” Robert March, *Physics for Poets*, New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970, p. 128.

- 6 Etymologically, linguistically, and historically, science in its root meaning was always considered a knowledge and knowledge science, expressing or implying possibly a difference in degree but not in kind.
- 7 Not “in the beginning of time”, for example, as opposed to the atemporal context within the envelope of eternity. In fact, it is only in the last 30 years of this century that the modern scientific establishment has come around to the Biblical and Quranic view. From the time of Aristotle 2,300 years ago, scientific theory held the universe to be eternal. Now we accept the theory of the Big Bang as a “popular wisdom”.
- 8 *Cosmos and Transcendence*, Peru, Ill: Sherwood Sugden & Company, 1990, p. 110.
- 9 Unicellular life forms are amazingly complex, even though the cells are measured in units of 1/1,000 of a millimeter. Cells have a highly complex chemical structure and a nucleus that is composed of many parts, including chromosomes that contain genes. These control every single aspect of the cell's functioning, namely its life.
- 10 The reference concerning water can have a double meaning: that everything living thing was made of water as its essential component, or that every living thing originated in water. Another revealing verse adds: *G*”od created every living thing from water”. (24: 45)
- 11 George Johnson, *Fire in the Mind*, p. 138.
- 12 Dr. Maurice Bucaille, *What is the Origin of Man?*, p. 194.
- 13 *Cosmos and Transcendence*, Peru, Ill: Sherwood Sugden & Company, 1990, p.89-90.
- 14 “Tintern Abbey”, William Wordsworth.
- 15 Every mosque contains a central prayer niche that faces Makkah and serves as the orientation point for the prayer.
- 16 One of the traditional Holy Sayings of the prophet Mohammed that is said to be the direct speech of Allah.
- 17 Chapter 9 will deal more thoroughly with the significance and implications of man’s ‘human’ consciousness
- 18 The 8<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century Sufi ‘Aziz al-Din Nasafi has written the following concerning the book of nature: “Each day destiny and the passage of time set this book before you, *sura* for *sura*, verse for verse, letter for letter, and read it to you . . . like one

who sets a real book before you and reads it to you line for line, letter for letter, that you may learn the content of these lines and their letters.” Quoted in *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, Seyyed Hossein Nasr (ed.), New York: Crossroad, 1987, p. 355.

- <sup>19</sup> Charles Le Gai Eaton, *Islam and the Destiny of Man*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1985, p. 87.

# **Johannine Christianity and Secularisation**

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## **Abstract**

Secularity is best understood in terms of Christian religious culture, and the Jewish biblical religious culture from which it stems. In our age of Christianity, which is distinctive in important ways, we can see that historically secularity as we experience it today was born out of revolutions of various kinds: religious (Protestantism), scientific (mathematical and experimental method), philosophical (the subjective turn), political (democratization) and economic (commercialization). Christianity is both continuous and also discontinuous with these revolutions; Christianity's relationship to secularity today is dialectical (one of identity and non-identity). Intrinsic to both a secular and Christian mentality is the "Mosaic distinction", which applies the distinction "true/false" in the religious sphere and thereby destroys a pagan spirit, based on the distinctions clean/unclean; pure/impure. Christianity applies the Mosaic distinction to other religions, while secularity applies the Mosaic distinction to Christianity itself.

## Keywords

*Secularity, Christianity, Religious Culture, Secularization, Protestantism*

## Introduction

This arguments that comprise this chapter come from my work on the “three ages of the church”: the Petrine age (Catholic), the Pauline age (Protestant) and in our time the Johannine age (Pentecostal).<sup>1</sup> I have been trying to persuade my reader that *Pentecostal Christianity is as different from Protestantism as Protestantism is from Catholicism*. The chapter is essentially about the relation of Christianity as a *globalising* religious phenomenon to secularisation. I take “Christianity” not as a whole or as such, but in terms of *time*, in terms of “the three ages of the church”. In this introduction I will briefly introduce what I mean therefore by the three ages of the church.

Pentecostalism is a recent name for a form of Christianity which has broken out in every continent of our planet, often right in the midst of already existing Christianity, and which in an age of waning numbers going to conventional churches, have (in all likelihood) 800 million adherents world-wide. Most people imagine that Pentecostalism is a kind of Protestantism. I’m saying it isn’t. I’m saying it is *a distinct form of Christianity* associated with a “new age” of the church.

In the first age of the church, the Petrine age, associated with St. Peter, the church was a conglomeration of local churches which looked to Rome as a centre (and later, also to the displaced “centre” of Constantinople) – this displacement of centres would foster separation of culture, which in time would lead to a separation of communions (East and West, “Catholic” and “Orthodox”). I’ve said that in the Apostolic age a conglomeration of local churches looked to the centre (Rome), but the establishment of Christianity as the religion of the Empire in the fourth century meant the potential was there for this conglomeration to be *ruled from the centre*. This actually didn’t really happen properly until the Sixteenth century, after the Protestant revolution, with the Council of Trent. And centralisation was stepped up in the Nineteenth century after the Catholic Church lost its lands and with the unification of Italy retreated to the

Vatican. The Catholic age of “ultra-montanism” as it used to be called, our age, is one where the centre rules the periphery. This is Christianity as empire. The Catholic dream of a holy Roman Empire traces from today, back through Trent, to the Middle Ages, and right back to the age of Constantine. This dream typifies the Petrine age of the church. You can see it is not just an age which is here-and-gone; but an age which is with us.

The Pauline age of the church, associated with St. Paul, is also with us. The Pauline age is that of *Christianity as denomination*. Pauline or Protestant Christianity is totally defined by *belief*. In the First age “faith” was synonymous with “religion”. If my Lord is a Christian, so am I, and that is my faith. In the Second age, the Pauline age, “faith” is synonymous with “belief”. One who has faith is one who believes “correctly”. Such Christianity of the Second age will start with Luther and Calvin, certainly, but find its apogee in the United States of America, a nation founded by Protestant belief-based faith. The Second age is not Christianity as empire, but Christianity as ideology. This Christianity will call its ideology, “theology”; and it will not be led by a Pope and Bishops, but by professional class of theologians, principally those working in the Universities.

The Johannine Age of the church, associated with St. John, is the age of the Holy Spirit. Its global face today is Pentecostalism, although Pentecostal elements reach deeply into Catholicism and to a lesser extent (because barred by “theology”) into Protestantism. Pentecostal is not ideological, but experiential. It is not about theology but real presence of the spirit. In its sense of the real presence of the spirit (of course not restricted in any way) Pentecostalism has affinities with Catholicism, over the head of Protestantism, which is ideologically opposed to real presence in the name of *sola scriptura*. The Pentecostal churches are not led by a professional breed of theologian, but a *spirit-led pastor*. Pentecostal churches are a conglomeration of local churches that look not to a centre, but to a future: “Hope” is the word that hangs over their door and guides whatever theology they care for.

The “three ages of the church” in my account do, I believe, reflect a sense of “periodicity” in time, and I talk about this elsewhere, but I principally mean them *as hermeneutic*. To take the “three ages” too theosophically, as Schelling does, I think is to mistake them in an overly Protestant spirit. Hegel himself does not take the three ages in this “theosophical” way, as he well might have done. He had the sense not to.

As a hermeneutic “the three ages” are a way of interpreting and understanding the time, of thinking in time, in a way which it *true to time*, as well as timely. The “three ages” therefore belong to a philosophy of time, as Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and Franz Rosenzweig first realised.

## Secularity

Having given a short introduction to the three ages of the church, I shall now come on to discuss the relation of Christianity to secularity, in terms of a philosophy of time.

Secularity is born *out of revolution*. The relation of Christianity to secularity is neither continuous nor discontinuous, but *dialectical*.<sup>2</sup> If we can understand this, we can understand what the postmodern Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo means when he thinks, “*secularisation as the authentic destiny of Christianity*.”<sup>3</sup> In other words, secularity was written into the genetic profile of Christianity from the first and the history of Christianity is the history of the outworking of this, of secularisation. This is not the common view in the media or among atheists, who would see secularism as over and against Christianity and religion in general. But we need to distinguish the historic process of secularisation, which means a drift from the sacred, from the modernist ideology of secularism. Secularism has made a cult out of the secular, and while is only itself secular in a narrow sense. It is not post-modern. There is no such thing as post-modernist atheism as atheism is a modernism through and through; for it belongs to the age of ideologies, which is the modern age. The post modernism is by definition suspicious of totalising ideologies like atheism or secularism. Post-modernists (all young people too young for modernism and the age of ideology in any case) know that religion is not an ideology; it is a culture. Opposition to religion is an ideology and can never develop to comprise a culture; for a lack of religion is precisely a lack of culture – as in Communist ideology, the prime example of atheist ‘culture’ which produced no lasting literature, music or art, except in the sense of cultural ‘curiosities’ and mementos. The same can be said of Capitalist atheism; it thrives on pop culture, in other words on the commodified culture industry; again a lack of culture. So secularity is a cultural drift from the sacred, having been unshackled from it, but is to be distinguished from secularism. The secular world is not opposed to Christianity, but shares (if not the same beliefs) all of the same core values, which are humanitarian and

seek the common good and to live peacefully in freedom. How it brings this about is the same problem that the church faces with the secular world; the church tending to emphasise the primacy of belief, the world, the primacy of values (most of which are consonant with those beliefs).

I would identify five revolutions that constitute our secular world and define it as distinctively Western in character. I am merely going to be signposting these five revolutions. What I will say is not supposed to be in any way an explanation or indeed a narrative. Also, I realize that each 'revolution' is a *typification* in fact, retrospectively applied to an undecidable number of micro-revolutions, which together make up what we then retrospectively apply the larger label to. Yet I don't think it is pointless to rehearse, even if briefly, the keynotes of the larger revolutions. I want to look briefly at each of these five revolutions, each of which can be read about fully in many other places and so will not be gone into here. Then I want to look at some philosophical aspects that traverse both Judaism, Christianity and secularism and that they have in common. Judaism and Christianity, although they both have unsecular ends (Christian monasticism and Jewish sectarianism e.g. ultra-orthodoxy), are the only two proper secular-friendly religions. All other religions are destroyed insofar as they are secularised. Secularity underlines the importance of man in a way impossible in a conformist religion like Islam; the extent to which Islam is secularised is the extent to which it is Christianised. The secularisation of Eastern religions has a devastating effect on their culture. Buddhism is essentially a reform of Hinduism and is only intelligible in that regard, although it has developed a decent psychology and so on this basis has made inroads into the West, which is has become fascinated by psychology; and Christianity has never developed a religious psychology itself. Christians can learn about the way the mind works from Buddhists. But that is about as far as it goes. Beyond that, unless you want to become a monk and turn from the world, Buddhism is unworldly and negates what, from a Western point of view, is the true, the good and the beautiful. Once I have outlined the revolutions from which secularity emerges, I want to talk about two things integral to Judaism, Christianity and secularism, both of which have a devastating effect on non-Christian religions, and so differentiate Judaism and Christianity from them.

## Five Revolutions

First, then, *a revolution in religion*. This was the Protestant revolution in which Luther, in 1520, on his way to being excommunicated by the church, in his work, *The Freedom of the Christian*, one among his many revolutionary writings, expressed the insight that if you read the Gospels, Jesus said nothing about Empires or the like, he only asked for faith; all the rest is contingency, idolatry, and fabrication. We would simply say, superstructure.

Second, *a revolution in science*. In the thirteenth century, Roger Bacon (c. 1214–1294) at Oxford championed empirical methods as more trustworthy than idealist – or at that time, scholastic – methods. Then, around the time of Luther the Ptolemaic theory of the universe, which was believed to be upheld by the authority of the bible, was questioned. A few years before the death of Luther, Copernicus published *On the Revolution of the Heavenly Spheres* in 1543, and Galileo, almost one hundred years later, the *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems* published in Florence in 1632. Neither of these men could prove the heliocentric view of the universe, and neither could Leibniz (c.1690), one hundred and fifty years after Copernicus in his recommendations to the church to adopt the Copernican system. By then it had become a reasonable assumption. What mattered by Leibniz’s day was a more reasonable hypothesis, combined with the fact that the Ptolemaic system under the same logic was unable to be proved either.<sup>4</sup> This recognisably modern hypothetical way of speaking with its criteria of observation and measurement owed much to Francis Bacon in the generation before Galileo. In a series of works Bacon moved toward what, retrospectively, looks more like modern empirical experimental method than anything hitherto, *The Refutation of Philosophies* (1605), *The Advancement of Learning* (1608) and *The New Organon* (1620). Bacon’s work was based on Occamist (nominalist) premises and was radical for the time. “Bacon well understood the scientific temper that was to come after him,” writes Adorno.<sup>5</sup>

Another great mathematician, Descartes repressed his own cosmological work, because of the heat Galileo was getting from the religious authorities, but he published his *Discourse on Method* in 1637, thus starting a revolution, our *third revolution, in philosophy*, which would feed ideas into the Enlightenment, and indeed conceptually ground the Enlightenment in Europe. The revolution in philosophy would reach its

denouement in Kant's Critiques, especially the first, *The Critique Of Pure Reason* (1781/87). Reading the three critiques together, it was seen that Kant posited *God without being* an idea which is still absolutely contemporary today. Voltaire, a great avatar of secularism and Enlightenment in the popular mind published his *Treatise on Tolerance* in 1763.

The *fourth revolution is political*. The British philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) permanently radicalised political thinking. He had lived through the English civil war in which Charles I was executed (in 1649). In his main political work, *Leviathan* (1651) Hobbes broke with the traditional notions of a fixed and divinely ordained order of nature that was socially reflected and depicted nature famously, and perhaps over-emphatically, as a war of all against all, which must be controlled. According to him, the state should operate as a purely rational power to control the innate strife of society and provide security. But what is most influential about Hobbes is not so much his absolutism, but his genre: his was the first rational and secular political statement. Political science in the modern sense starts here and will be the discourse in which the terms of the debate will be couched thereafter, right into our own time. In the next generation John Locke tempered Hobbes's view in his *Two Treatises on Government* (1690), at the same time as developing, exemplifying and more widely disseminating the new style of discourse and the attitude of the political scientist that went with it.. His *Two Treatises* were published shortly after the English Enlightenment, the so-called Glorious Revolution, otherwise called the Bloodless revolution of 1689, in which a bill of rights and parliamentary democracy were established, hallmarks of modernity and secularity. Turning now to Germany, the German *Aufklärung* or Enlightenment was more intellectual and cultural and was largely contemporary with Kant and Goethe. In English, Tom Paine's *Common Sense* was published in 1776, which fed into American Independence, declared in 1776; and in 1791, Paine published *The Rights of Man*. The French Revolution which had held off till the last, being the most strongly Catholic of countries, was (as we all know) in 1789. It was the most radical of revolutions and had especially anti-clerical and anti-Christian overtones, which have retrospectively and wrongly marked our whole sense of the Enlightenment as a process over a long period with an even longer period of gestation before it.

Lastly, fifthly, a *revolution in production*. This began with an idea that would produce the *dissemination* of ideas. From the dissemination of ideas, the productive forces of the new bourgeois society would organise and mobilise. The dissemination of ideas started before the days of Luther, but he was the first major heir. A goldsmith named Johannes Gutenberg had the idea of moveable type. This idea struck him one day as a pure inspiration. The Gutenberg presses lost money, but the great man himself never abandoned his belief in his idea and as a result learning was disseminated. But most of all a spirit of *questioning* was disseminated which fuelled a new creativity. Then, later, in the nineteenth century, as we know, with the invention of steam machines, there is an industrial revolution, the harbinger of the technological revolution of the twentieth. My point is that *secularity is born of these revolutions*.

### The dialectic of Christianity and secularity

Christianity is neither continuous nor discontinuous with these revolutions, but dialectically related to them. For a start, the separation of church and state, an Eighteenth century expression, has a Christian history. It is not, as secularists imagine, a secular idea in order to contain religion. It is a Christian idea aimed at right order in the world, which came about in the Middle ages. The whole matter behind Christian martyrdom in the ancient world was to do with Christians not willing to worship the Emperor in the religious sphere but to honour him, and only in the worldly sphere. In this, the ancient Christians followed Jewish practice. The origin of the difference between church and state traces back to these centuries of martyrdom and the Christian abhorrence of worshipping the Emperor. Christians would die rather than worship the Emperor. Those who didn't die martyrs turned their back on the Empire altogether and headed for the desert. Christian monasticism has its origins in the sensibility that kept church and state apart; that rendered to Caesar the things that were Caesar's and to God the things that were God's.<sup>6</sup> Once the church ruled, at least in the West, it structured the Empire so that the Emperor ruled in the secular sphere and the Pope ruled in the religious sphere. This division of Empire between secular and religious effectively dates from the coronation of Charlemagne as *Imperator Augustus* in St. Peter's by the Pope Leo III on Christmas Day in 800. Centuries later, this act was further ratified in the papal Bull *Unam Sanctum* (18 November 1302) propagated by

Pope Boniface VIII (1235-1303). The document spoke of the allegorical and also very literal Two Swords; the spiritual sword held by the church and the temporal sword held by the state. Together they made the Empire. The evaluation at work here is that given in the Gospel to render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's. On this wisdom church and empire, and later church and state could function side-by-side much more easily. The Islamic idea of theocracy or divine law functioning as civil law was regarded as pagan in the Middle Ages. All religions, and secularisation itself, have their requirement for obedience, Islam only represents the extreme case in this regard; Islam means submission, which refers to *human* submissiveness; by contrast, Christianity underlines the human like Judaism, but for other reasons. For in Christianity God *becomes* man. Athanasius of Alexandria one of the great Fathers of the church, the bishop who provided the list of books which would become the canon of the New Testament at a time when different communities used different books and were not sure which were apostolic, Athanasius said, "The Son of God became man so that man we might become [like] God."<sup>7</sup> The divine proportions of the human in Christianity historically foreshadow the positivity of the humanism to follow and provide a culture at every level in which it becomes possible. Even in the French Revolution, which was so strongly anti-Christian, liberty, equality and fraternity were Christian values that Jesus canvassed in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere and which the early church community with its communalism, with its women leaders, and with its freedom from the past, lived. It was in fact Luther who most explicitly differentiated the secular and religious spheres, in his book *On Secular Authority* (1523) where he elaborated a doctrine of the two kingdoms, church and state and passionately defended freedom of conscience. This comes together in the seventeenth century with the English philosopher John Locke's *Two Treatises on Government* (1690) where Luther's points are picked up, and also the Christian notion of natural law, the idea that God creates us to know right from wrong (Rom. 2: 14-15), was applied to Government in terms of people's natural rights. Locke argued persuasively and it was understood thereafter that Government's job was to guard people's natural rights and uphold them against power that would undermine them. Locke was coming out of the biblical teaching of Paul and the ideas of Luther. He himself wrote a monograph, *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695).

The point I am trying, briefly and sketchily to convey is that while revolution marks discontinuity, there were at the same time strong Christian continuities within every revolution, which leads one more readily to appreciate Vattimo's interpretation of *secularisation as the authentic destiny of Christianity*. The age-makers were all Christian. Roger Bacon was a Franciscan Friar, Gutenberg was a Catholic whose father was an employee of the church. Martin Luther was an Augustinian monk of strict observance and the religious revolution he started and fuelled with his passion was based on his, and later others', educated knowledge of the Hebrew and Greek texts of the Bible. William of Occam was a Friar; Descartes was educated by the Jesuits; Kant was a member of the Pietist sect who believed in God and the immortality of the soul, and so on. The continuities strengthened the discontinuities. The relation of Christianity to secularity is dialectical. Secularity does not separate us from Christianity, but is a further incarnation of it, unwrapped from theological language and religious institutionalisation, but supporting *the same values*. To claim to be a secular person but not to be Christian, is still, culturally speaking, to be Christian. To be Western is to be Christian. This is taking the word 'Christian' in a broader sense than 'church'. Christ's great commission to the apostles to go out to all the world is come true in secularity in a way the church itself never predicted or planned; but this is the kind of thing, perhaps, that happens when yours is a phenomenon wrapped up with the nature of time itself. The Christian philosopher Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy adds: "Unity transcending Church unity [he means the unity of all-humanity] has been a tenet of our faith from the beginning. At the end of Revelation, St. John foresaw the New Jerusalem as a healing of the nations without any visible Church at the centre."<sup>8</sup>

### **The Mosaic distinction**

There is something intrinsic to Judaism, Christianity and secularity, which I want to come onto now. In the time of Moses religions divided the world between sacred and profane, clean and unclean. All religion and all culture revolved around these categories: sacred and profane; clean and unclean. Moses introduced a revolutionary distinction into the world.<sup>9</sup> The Mosaic distinction is that between true and false. It is given in the first three of the Ten Commandments. These commandments are that you shall not have other gods; that you shall not make idols; that you shall not blaspheme.

The first commandment indicates that there is only one God; the second commandment that all the other gods that are not this God are *false gods* or idols; the third commandment says that because all the other gods are false, their names don't matter; only one name is of consequence – and this is the unpronounceable Name above all names. The strict iconoclasm of Judaism destroys or deconstructs gods which are not really divine at all, but mythological, mere stories or cultural constructs or symbolic projections. In the ancient world it was often thought the Jews didn't have a God, because he could not be seen. Pagans said the same of the early Christians. Jesus was mocked on the cross, 'Let this Christ come down off the cross and save himself that we might see and believe' they said (Mk. 15:29-32). *God was invisible*. When Pilate asked Jesus 'What is truth?' *truth* was invisible (Jn.18:38). The truth in Christianity is invisible and that people – like Pontius Pilate - might not be able to see it, even if is staring them in the face. This is a theme stretching right through the Bible like a thread.

The Mosaic distinction has a devastating effect on other religions as it forces them *to judge what they hold most sacred* in terms of true or false. Consequently, most of religion was judged false, idolatrous and superstitious, even if for sentimental or nostalgic reasons some people wish to preserve the religion or continue pretending it is true. Ever since Moses, the application of the distinction between true and false to the so-called sacred has been destroying religion, as it is realised that the so-called sacred is not sacred in any ontological sense, but is really a cultural relic. Early Christianity applied the Mosaic distinction to its Jewish practices and concluded that while circumcision and dietary laws may still apply to the Jews, to Gentiles coming into covenant with God through Christ, these things had no ongoing value, and therefore their *intrinsic* value is called in question. Also, the Mosaic distinction works *within* Christianity. Here it works differently from the way it works on other religion. The Mosaic distinction exists within Christianity as *the idea of reform*.<sup>10</sup> Protestantism can be interpreted, and should be seen, as a reform which applied the Mosaic distinction to the church itself. Jesus had just called for faith, and this had nothing to do with selling church offices (simony) and indulgences to shorten time in purgatory, in fact purgatory isn't in the Bible, the Reformers said. The Council of Trent within Catholicism was a reforming Council and so on. In these and other ways the Mosaic distinction applied to Christianity as well. The distinction between true-sacred and false-sacred is intrinsic to

Western culture and is so deeply part of it that we no longer associate it with Moses, but imagine, wrongly, that it is natural and native to human reflection on culture.

I see the secular mind as a further application of the Mosaic distinction; secularism is really a logical extension within culture of the Reformation. The secular mind takes Christian values and questions the sacredness of various Christian customs and beliefs. Secular society applies the Mosaic distinction to the church. So it says, equal opportunities for women; women's participation in leadership and decision making at all levels; accountable and transparent business practices – all of these the church has learnt from the world, or has still to learn, if it church has yet to realise that these secular reforms are in line with Christian values. In the 1880s Soloviev already lists the abolition of torture and cruel executions; the cessation of the persecution of heretics and dissenters, the abolition of serfdom and feudal bondage, and says, “if all these reforms were made by unbelievers, so much worse for the believers.”<sup>11</sup> The dignity of women, the dignity of work and the workers, the scandal of financial corruption and nepotism, and latterly, sexual abuse, it is the world that has been leading the church in all these areas, and it is part of contemporary culture now that most people, in the West anyway, expect the world to continue to lead the church in the war on poverty, drugs, sex trafficking, terrorism. The Rights of Man is the prime example. The Rights of Man are in line with Christian values, but the secular world led the way and the church followed – and in the old denominations, rather reluctantly. Our historical experience is that *the secular world teaches the church Christian values*.

There never was a time, as Charles Taylor supposes in his immense and erudite study, when it was virtually impossible *not* to believe in God.<sup>12</sup> An Christian “lay” person might readily believe, like any pagan, that there are gods in everything, or angels in everything. But Taylor is right in the second half of his proposition, when he says that today a religious position is unmistakably one among many. To the first proposition I would say that even among clerics and theologians in the high Middle-Ages there were a plurality of views about every aspect of Christian truth, no one of which was ultimately decidable. Every decision about theological truth, therefore, was “dogmatic” in the sense of asserted as such by Catholic authorities, and therefore, philosophically, merely provisional. What most ordinary working people in Christian lands believed would have been as much *pagan* as Christian. The literal belief in heaven and hell, eternal salvation and eternal damnation, which dominated popular

imagination in the Middle Ages, is as much pagan as Christian – and who can say if it is more one than the other? It is precisely characteristic of Christianity to be a paganised Judaism, by virtue of thinking the Hebraic in the Greek to begin with, rather than thinking the Hebraic in Hebrew, like the rabbis. The internal dialectic of Jew/Greek and Christian/pagan allows the Mosaic distinction to apply to the very soul of Christian religion, as a Christian, by virtue of being Christian, not pagan, will ask: *true or false?* In time this gave rise to a *new kind of reason* that we associate with Galileo, modern reason.<sup>13</sup> Secularity has grown out of this internal maturation, slowly, from past to future, from the souls of individuals to the structures of the world they create around themselves. Secularity comes out of the core of Christianity; it is not a subtraction from it, nor is it a shift into a shiftless situation from one where it was virtually impossible not to believe in God. It is only in a situation where it is all-too-possible to *not* believe in one God and to believe in any or many gods, that the tradition of the ontological proof becomes so decisive and crucial, as it always has been in theology.

At the end of the Eighteenth century Kant dared educated people to think and judge for themselves – empowering people and encouraging people toward *personal responsibility* in a way the church should have been doing, but wasn't. Voltaire insisted on tolerance in the teeth of Christianity which had been tearing Europe apart with war for a century or more; the state had to step in and settle the disputes. Secular Europe was really born out of these settlements. And it was born out of them because the secular sphere was able to exhibit a justice and tolerance, a fairness and level of organisation (backed of course with might) that the churches were unable to exhibit themselves, although it was in the Gospel charter of all of them try to do so, and at least *not to war!* But behind the secular settlements of new nation-states in Europe is the Mosaic distinction, on the basis of which people could see that what the churches were fighting and killing over was the false-sacred, and the true-sacred is tolerance of difference of belief and dialogue rather than violence. As a result “we can see that salvation does not lie in religions as such, but is connected to them, inasmuch as, and to the extent that, it leads people toward the one good, toward the search for what is absolute (God), for truth and for love.”<sup>14</sup>

I would extend this point and go so far as to say that the universalisation of Christian values, which is the Christian mission and the mission of churches, will happen through *the secularisation of the world*. I don't think the Christian mission will

be achieved by bringing of the whole world into the church, as many Christians imagine. In my view the secularisation of the world is inevitable, because at the heart of secularisation is the Mosaic distinction, the discernment of the true-sacred from the false-sacred. The false-sacred hides in notions of pure and impure, clean and unclean, but ultimately the Mosaic distinction will decide what is clean and unclean, what is pure and impure. And I think this is right in the teaching of the Gospel - of Jesus - who said such things as *the law is made for man, not man for the law*. He meant it is the human being that is sacred and the law is sacred only insofar as it raises up mankind into peace and love. Any secular person can relate to this easily.

### **All-human religion**

The second point I want to make with regard to what is intrinsic to Judaism, Christianity and secularism has to do with the covenant. I am asking if there is something *within* Christianity and within Judaism, in the core of their religion, which might key into secularity as we know it? Obviously secularity doesn't arise out of Christology, upon which Christianity is dependent. Nor does secularity arise out of the chosenness of the Jewish people, upon which so much depends – for otherwise Torah from heaven (the eighth principle of faith in Maimonides) makes no sense. Given that secularity doesn't arise simply out of Enlightenment reason or out of itself, or out of the so-called disappearance of religion in an age informed by science, if all these views are naïve and ill-informed, from where does secularity issue? Where does secularity come from within Jewish and Christian culture?

The answer I believe is in the Noahide covenant. The Noahide covenant is the one God made with Noah in Genesis 9 and is clarified in the Talmud.<sup>15</sup> There are seven prohibitions which the Jewish sages believed were universal. Do not worship false gods (the Mosaic distinction); do not murder, steal, be sexually unfaithful/incestuous, blasphemous, or bestial and have an effective legal system. These prohibitions are *intrinsic* to the Torah, to the Christian gospel and to secularity. When, 5000 years after Noah and his ark the French revolution declares, in an anti-religious spirit, freedom, equality and the oneness of humanity, it unwittingly presupposes the Noahide covenant. The Noahide law is free from religion to begin with and purely human. The Noahide law makes no distinction between male and female, the same goes

for both. The Noahide law goes for everyone, presupposing all-human all-togetherness, *Sobornost* - to use the great Russian Orthodox term for human solidarity. Secularity then, is something deeply and primordially built into Judaism and therefore Christianity and cannot be adequately thought of except in relation to them.

However, the Noahide law is biblical and as typical of the Bible, is a set of prohibitions. But from a Christian point of view – which is a point of view that thinks in Greek about the Hebraic, distinct from Judaism which thinks in Hebrew about the Hebraic – we can see from Aristotle’s *Ethics* that the Noahide covenant is not some strange cultic phenomenon, but perfectly rational. But we see it more clearly in Kant. The idea set out by the Noahide law, of a universal ethic of humanity, is synonymous with Kant’s sense of what Enlightenment means. The essential message of *Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason* (1793) is that ethics is the core matter of religion, that is, with what we should do, given that, we humans are “ends unto ourselves”; and given that each human being is a unique *absolute*. The rational ethical postulates to which religion – if it is worthy of the name - is bound, in Kant’s book, affirm the social establishment of law, which affirms our rights in terms of our obligations – Kant’s famous concept of duty. He is saying that these rights and obligations define our humanity. Kant’s idea of duty is in line with the ancient Noahide covenant which forbids the worship of false ideas (i.e. all unreason) murdering, stealing, lying and faithlessness, blasphemy (all shameful words and acts), bestiality and cruelty. Whatever else religion may get up to in terms of its “revelation” or its ritual or its spiritual practices or its culture, belong to it in various ways, depending on the religion. But the *essence* of religion is the creation of *ethical community*, Kant says.<sup>16</sup> If a religion is not creating ethical community it is failing and needs to self-correct or reform. Such an ethical community accords with reason, but cannot be created by it, i.e. rationalistically. Ethical community has to be created from above, Kant argues; it can only exist “as a people of God, and according to the laws of virtue.”<sup>17</sup> Ethical secularity follows from ethical religion. There may be discontinuity of belief, but there are continuities of values, of virtues, of ethics. Secularity which does not acknowledge the priority of religion will implode in time because it has no basis for its values except the self-assertion of them; an idea which contradicts reason, as how can self-assertion be the basis of truth, goodness and beauty? It has to be the other way around. Truth, goodness and beauty need to be the basis of self-assertion, indeed of self, of humanity.

But they can't be this without religion. In fact they can *only* be this *with* religion, Kant says.

Of course, Kant's thesis is radical. Just taking the case of Christianity, the religion to which his thesis is most amenable, we find a *theological* thinking in which reason is quite confused by the postulates of customary practice, ritual practice, and revelation. But Kant is firm: "the new order is to be a human work" achieved through "gradually progressing reform". This is where *religion needs secularity*. For *secular* reason (in Kant's ethical sense) will call *religious* reason to account. And I think that looking at the time between Kant and ourselves, in the example of Christianity, this has been happening to some degree, but slowly. For the reasonably educated church-goer "the ethical community" will be more important than ceremony or ritual; the educated church-goer won't tolerate ceremony and ritual – what Kant calls *pseudoservice* and *church-faith* at the expense of ethical community, unless they are corrupt of heart and institution. Kant advocates that this "enlightenment" about the truth of religion should increase and not decrease. "World religion", to use Kant's term, or the "kingdom of God" in theological parlance, will only be established on the basis of what we reasonably should do; and the only right religion is one that can provide a proper and adequate sense of this.

The Noahide laws, or Kant's ethical critique of religion, are from a philosophical point of view agnostic, rather than Gnostic. They do not pretend to know. For instance, in Christianity, theological discourse speaks as if it were knowledge. Kant is critical of this. The agnostic point of view, of Love and Wisdom, sees religion and "religious knowledge" as the "dress" by which the bare bones of reason clothes itself. But true religion lies within reason, not within the clothes which beautify its nakedness. The Noahide or Kantian agnosticism is not *fideism* ("faith alone"). Doing by faith alone is merely a form of ignorance and is fundamentally unreasonable (and today often "fundamentalist"). Reason does not determine what its dress (religion) should look and sound like (i.e. ritual, liturgy, theology), reason does not determine faith and pious feeling that accompany religion, what reason determines, on an agnostic basis, with respect to divine revelation, is what we need to do in any given circumstance. Many circumstances are tremendously complex - we know that – but reason alone will be able to determine the best course, and to keep correcting itself.

Closer to our time Emmanuel Levinas is the philosopher who has re-encapsulated a traditional thought – or for Kant an enlightened thought – of “a universal human society that incorporates the just people of every nation and belief”;<sup>18</sup> different in belief and custom, culture and religion, but united in love and justice, the only possible condition for unity and civility and society. Levinas has seen that while Judaism is the living and “eternal” embodiment of monotheism, Christianity spreads this monotheism to the ends of the earth, for as long as it takes. “The Christian church is essentially a mission.”<sup>19</sup> The mission is not religious (it may be to the faithful, but not from a philosophical point of view), but has more essentially to do with what Levinas calls an *ethics* which is an *optics*;<sup>20</sup> in other words, a way of living that allows us to see things in perspective as they *should* be. Evil, in this optic, “is not a mystical principle that can be effaced by a ritual, it is an offence perpetrated on man by man. No-one, not even God can substitute himself for the victim.”<sup>21</sup>

## Finally

Secularity is seen in this discussion as the child of Judaism and Christianity and as the way these world religions will “Christianise” the world. They will do this not by converting the world to their religion, but by secularising the world. Therefore, in this perspective, the degree to which a society becomes secular is the degree to which it is implicitly “Christianised”. And to be Christianised, it is recognised, is by the same token, to be “Judaised”, for Judaism is the source of Christianity and the key that unlocks all its force. By extension, the secularisation of other religions is also their Christianisation.

My presupposition, which I mentioned at the outset, was that Christianity is affected by a periodicity, or what I have called “three ages” of the church – Petrine; Pauline and Johannine Christianity. These “ages” are also “modes” in which Christianity may be seen to operate. In any case, the three ages are, to my mind, not so much some kind of “datum” but what I think of as an “encapsulative hermeneutic” by which we can understand the working of the church in the world, and by which we can understand the difference of ways that Christianity and secularity work in and out of each other.

Secularity “as the authentic destiny of Christianity” is so in different ways for each of the three ages of the church and is only really a “destiny” in my view, in the third

age of the church (the Johannine, synonymous with Pentecostalism). However, secularity will continue to operate, within my “encapsulative hermeneutic” not just to “Christianise” other religions, but to purify Christianity of the false sacred whenever it tries to operate a *sacral* hermeneutic that opposes what one *should* do, ethically speaking within reason. In that sense, agreeing with Kant, the ethical will govern the sacred not only in religion, but in the secular sphere (which has its sacred cows) as it *ought*. What all three ages of the church have in common with secularity is the *hope*, the *vision*, the *promise*, of an embracing incorporation of every nation and belief, in an ethic which cannot be said to belong here or there, to religion or secularity.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See Del Nevo, ‘Goethe, First Father of the Third Age of the Church’ in *The Cross and the Star: The Post-Nietzschean Christian and Jewish Thought of Eugen Rosenstock-Huessy and Franz Rosenzweig*, ed. Wayne Cristaudo and Frances Huessy (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Press, 2009); ‘Pentecostalism and the Age of Interpretation’. *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* 11 (2008); “Rosenzweig the Three Ages of the Church” in *INTER, The Romanian Review for Inter-Orthodox, Inter-Confessional and Inter-Religious Studies* Vol II, nr. 1-2 (2008).
- <sup>2</sup> Dialectical in the Hegelian sense in which opposites (e.g. good and evil) exist in harness to one another and are constituted and determined out of one another, that is, out of their own negation.
- <sup>3</sup> Vattimo, *After Interpretation*. Transl. David Webb (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1997) 51.
- <sup>4</sup> Leibniz not only invented calculus at the same time as Newton, but prefigured what we now call ‘post-Newtonian’ sciences in a range of areas. See Jürgen Lawrenz, *The Renaissance of Leibniz’s Cosmology and Natural Philosophy in the Present-day Scientific Environment* (MA Thesis, Sydney College of Divinity, 2004).
- <sup>5</sup> M. Horkheimer and T. W. Adorno. *Dialectic of the Enlightenment*. Transl. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2002) 2.
- <sup>6</sup> Rosenzweig, *Star*, 373.
- <sup>7</sup> *De Incarnatione*, 54,3 PG 25, 192B; cited *Catechism of the Catholic Church* # 460.

- 8 E. Rosenstock-Huessy, *The Christian Future*. Transl. Harold Stahmer (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966) 159-160.
- 9 Ratzinger, Cardinal Joseph. *Truth and Tolerance*. Transl. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2005) 211f.
- 10 The magisterial study of this is by Ladner, G. B., *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1959)
- 11 Vladimir Solovyov, *The Solovyov Anthology*. Ed. S. L. Frank (London: SCM) 70.
- 12 Charles Taylor. *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Mass: Harvard University, 2007).
- 13 See on this, Edmund Husserl. *The Crisis of the European Sciences*. Transl. David Carr. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970. Parts I and II.
- 14 Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger. *Truth and Tolerance*. Transl. Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004) 205.
- 15 Babylonian Talmud, *Sanhedrin* 56a-57a; *Avodah Zarah* 63a. Tosefta, *Avodah Zarah* 8(9). Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, Laws of Kings, Chapters 8-9.
- 16 Kant, *Religion Within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, Transl. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2009) 102.
- 17 Kant, *Religion*, 109.
- 18 E. Levinas. *Difficult Freedom*. Transl. Seán Hand (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1997) 163.
- 19 Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 193.
- 20 Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 17, 159.
- 21 Levinas, *Difficult Freedom*, 20.

# **The Vatopedi Monasteri Scandal: What Does the Media Coverage of the Scandal Show about the Contemporary Social and Political Role of Greek Orthodox Church?**

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## **Abstract**

This article aims to evaluate the progress of the Greek Orthodox Church in the secularization process through the coverage of a political and economical scandal which took place in Greece in 2008 and involved part of the clergy as well as politicians. In order to examine this topic, I applied the method of content analysis of news bulletins in three popular greek *TV* broadcasters: the coverage of the Vatopedi monastery scandal from the media implicates that Greek Orthodox Church is not moving towards secularization as discussed by academics worldwide but towards a communicational

secularization, that is it prefers to increase only its visibility in the media rather than adjust to the contemporary political, social and cultural context.

## **Keywords**

*Greek Orthodoxy, Church, Monastery, Media, Religion*

## **Introduction**

This article explores the position of the Greek Orthodox Church within the Greek society through the way media covered the Vatopedi Monastery scandal, given that it is an agent which plays an important role in the secularization of religion and churches worldwide (Stout & Buddenbaum, 1996, 2003; Badaracco, 2005). More specifically, I intend to show what the media coverage of a scandal in which clergy is involved reveals about the sociopolitical role of the Greek Orthodox Church and about the extent to which the Church has moved towards secularization.

I begin with a short discussion of the Greek Orthodox Church's political and social role, and then I try to set the secularization of the Greek Orthodox Church within the secularization debate on the whole. As soon as the findings of the research are presented, I will end with the discussion of the conclusions that came out of this analysis.

### **1. Greek Orthodox Church and its political and social role within the Greek society**

The State and the Greek Orthodox Church have had a very close relationship since the time of the Byzantine and the Ottoman Empire (Svoronos, 1982; Kitromilides, 1989)<sup>1</sup>. Since then, the Orthodox Church's political role is apparent along with its powerful social role, and as a body it is an important part of the greek national identity (Tsaliki, 1997: 30-31): this is still the current situation, along with the embrace of the Church with the State.

The topic of secularization is an ongoing and multidimensional debate among academics (Chiotakis, 2002:329; Bainbridge, 1997; Berger, 1999; Bruce, 1992, 2002; Dobbelaere, 1993, 1999; Finke, 1992; Luckman, 1967; Martin, 1978; Norris & Inglehart, 2004; Stark, 1999; Warner, 1993), politicians and the clergy. If we pick out

the Greek case, the society was delayed in fitting itself into modernity and post modernity for a number of historical, political and social reasons: Greece's industrial character<sup>2</sup> has an impact on the progress of secularization of the Church: Demertzis considers Greece a modern traditional society (2003:2) and argues that the secularization of the Church exists mainly in a communicational level (2002a).

Since the development of the newly-emerged Greek state – in 1821- up to the present, the role of the Greek Church within the Greek society remains dynamic and incisive; nonetheless, Greeks face more critically the power of the Greek Church today and its way of interfering in public affairs.

What someone understands by following the reports of a recent opinion research is that (Public Issue, 2008a):

- § Greek citizens are aware of the fact that religion and the Church are very powerful within the Greek society and have a considerably important impact on it
- § They oppose to the superior clergy's interference in public affairs, especially to their interference in political affairs
- § They support the idea of the economic independence of the Church from the State, they stand for the Church's property taxation<sup>3</sup> and they also oppose to the Church's business activity
- § Finally, they show great interest for anything happening within the Church and they get relevant information from the media (Rass, 2004: 6)

Georgiadou and Nikolakopoulos classify Greek Christians into “strong followers”, “habitual followers” and “followers critical towards the Church” (2002:261); additionally, a Public Issue survey shows that 56% of the participants pray regularly and follow the religious rituals and 75% believe that God created Man (2008a). Nonetheless, there has been a decline in the trust of citizens to the Church between 2007 and 2008 (Public Issue, 2008b: 26) mainly due to the scandals in which the clergy was involved.

As research in the field of secularization of the Greek Church is scarce (Demertzis, 2002b; Chiotakis, 2002) this study aims to offer an input to the existent research and come to useful conclusions about the social and political role of the Greek Church, as well as evaluate its secularization progress within the context of late modernity. In a

country like Greece, where the relationship between the Orthodox Church and the State is still taken for granted, how are the news where the clergy is involved covered by media? What does this say about the role of the Church within the contemporary society and in the broader context of the global secularization?

## **2. The Greek Orthodox Church in the secularisation context**

According to Norris & Inglehart “secularisation is a tendency, not an iron law” (2004:5). Therefore, it should be discussed within the contemporary cultural and social context. Moreover, the fact that societies around the world were transformed from agrarian to industrial and from industrial to postindustrial had an impact on the way people perceived religion and on how important it was to their lives.

As mentioned above, Greece was delayed into changing from agrarian to an industrial society which also affected the level of secularisation of the Greek Church; up to the present the society is not yet a postindustrial one as the rest of the western societies in Europe and the US, which means that neither has the secularisation progressed to the same extent as in those societies. The supply-side theory about secularization (2004: 7) applies to Greece in the sense that there are still powerful religious leaders and groups who play an important role in maintaining the greek orthodox congregation. Their powerful presence draws on the fact that Orthodox religion is the official religion of the greek nation since 1830s (Tsaliki, 1997: 30; Kokosalakis, 2007: 371) and therefore it prevented the development of religious pluralism within the society (cf Lipovatz, 2007: 25), which would maybe lead to further progress in secularisation.

As it happened in all western societies during their transition from agrarian to industrial, the development of a stronger State in Greece made it possible for citizens to get a better education, better health services and in general a better quality of life; as a result the human development and the feeling of economic security and social stability were the driving forces for the secularisation in the greek case.

In parallel, the Greek Orthodox religion as the predominant religious culture, was obliged to adapt and evolve to developments in the contemporary society in order to prevent the orthodox values from erosion and to maintain a strong sociopolitical role. Nonetheless, it has “stamped its mark” (Norris & Inglehart, 2004: 28) on the greek

society and has still a strong influence in the way Greeks perceive tradition and think within a social and cultural context (Kokosalakis, 2007:372) no matter the lower levels of religious participation (Public Issue, 2008a). Finally, several greek academics consider secularisation as the result of modernity and postmodernity and discuss it as the erosion of religious beliefs and values in a sociocultural context (Lipovatz, 2007:35; Kokosalakis, 2007: 371), which implies that the secularisation process is not interpreted positively for the greek case but is thought to lead to the erosion of the orthodox religious values. They mainly base their analyses to the Weberian theory about secularisation and less to theories about the socioeconomic and sociocultural changes in societies which lead to differences in the way people perceive religion and its meanings. I will now move on to discuss how the news selection is done and which are the characteristics of religious news or of news where the clergy is involved.

### **3. News selection and religious news' characteristics**

In order to present the findings of a research based on media texts' analysis it is important to mention a few things on how news are selected and which are in general the characteristics of the religious news.

John Fiske (2001) reads critically the theory of post-modernism and notes that television constructs reality to a certain extent and its discourse is formed into narrative forms (Baudrillard, 1981; Fiske, 2001): it produces a (TV) product that is structured in fragmented images, it contains dominant ideological meanings and is interpreted by active viewers who use their capitalist social, cultural and political background in order to interpret the media messages.

To my view the process of selecting news and the criteria that stories meet in order to be put into the media agenda are more than sufficiently explained from Fiske's perspective as according to his arguments they contribute to the construction of news stories as interesting and noticeable narratives.

Furthermore, I agree with Lance Bennett's labeling of news in that they are personalized, dramatized, fragmented and normalized (1999), as these are also the characteristics of Greek TV news which are by and large constructed on the basis of the American news broadcasting model (Papathanasopoulos, 1997).

Religious news' characteristics

As an indication of moving towards a communicational secularization, the Greek Church has increased its visibility in the media, adjusting itself to the requirements of the contemporary era. Moreover, the fact that it was always part of the public sphere attracts media attention and the public interest. News producers and journalists are aware of the public interest about the Church (Buddenbaum & Hoover, 1996: 138; Root & Bolder, 1966; Winston, 2007) and increase those stories' coverage; after all, these news stories will definitely catch the audience's attention (Demertzis, 2002a: 157, Public Issue, 2008a: 3, 4).

Reviewing the literature, one may notice that news where the clergy is involved are personalised -which means that they focus on persons rather than on institutions (Schippert, 2007; Winston, 2007: 971-972; Demertzis, 2002a: 158).

One can also notice that the coverage of religious stories is rather different from other topics' (i.e. political, social and financial) which is explained by the social, historical and political impact of the Church's role on the Greek society (Demertzis, 2002a: 144). Journalists take for granted that Church 'has the right and is expected to engage with' public affairs (2002: 157) and therefore, not only do they not question this right (Bantimaroudis, 2007; Silk, 1995; Williams, 2005: 228), but they also cover relevant topics rather subjectively (Demertzis, 2002a:161; Williams, 2005: 226).

Last but not least, another characteristic is the focus in the superior clerical level (Centre of Social Research in Media, 2005): even if the clergy is not involved, media address them frequently as experts or official sources<sup>4</sup>.

Up to this point I have discussed the theoretical fields within which this research is set and I will now move on to the analysis of the case study.

#### **4. Scandals with the Greek clergy involved, in the news: The Vatopedi Monastery Scandal**

During the last ten years, the visibility of individuals and institutions in the media has increased to a great extent (Bennett, 1999); greek news' turn to infotainment (Thussu, 2007)<sup>5</sup> gave scandals increased visibility; the case is the same for scandals involving the clergy as well. Some reasons why this happened are:

§ The close relationship of former Archbishop Christodoulos with the media and his interference in public affairs (Demertzis, 2002: 150 & 154)

§ Media's interest of religious stories combined with the Church's interest to maintain an active social and political role

§ A series of sex scandals involving the clergy came to light between 2004 and 2005 and were considered to be a recipe for success within the news market

Let me now move on to the discussion of the Vatopedi monastery scandal, present the research findings and discuss the conclusions.

The Vatopedi Monastery scandal is not the first scandal taking place in Greece and involving the clergy, but it's the biggest and most complex one. During September 2008 media brought to light a story about the State having given to the Vatopedi Monastery a big part of public property protected by the Natura project 2000 as land of environmental interest as well. The monastery has never paid in order to buy this property from the State, instead it used a non-existent real estate company in order to prove a purchase that has never been made. In this scandal, not only politicians from both the former socialist and that time's conservative government were involved, but also the abbot of the Vatopedi Monastery and a colleague of his- priest as well. It is important to note at this point that the majority of Greeks believe that Church is responsible for the Vatopedi scandal to a great extent (Public Issue, 2008a: 41), which is an important detail that media never mentioned. The scandal remained in the news agenda though from September until December 2008.

### **The Vatopedi Monastery scandal in the news**

As I have already mentioned, this study aims to examine the social and political role of the Greek Church within the society and evaluate its secularization process by examining the way media covered a scandal where clergy and politicians were involved.

Therefore, here are some emerging research questions which, if confirmed, will lead to useful conclusions:

1. News focus mainly on the persons involved, and less on the bodies that they represent; news producers will not report on Church's activity from a critical point of view, as this will disrupt their sensitive social and political relations.

2. Moreover the political angle of the scandal is highlighted against the religious; by highlighting the political angle of the topic media keep a distance from the discussion about the Church's independence from the State, a very sensitive political issue.
3. The journalistic stance towards the Church will be mentioned almost nowhere. Only scarcely are some views about the involved clergy mentioned, mainly from the public broadcaster.
4. The institution within the context of which the topic is discussed is a political or a judicial one and not a religious one, again due to the fact that journalists avoid to report critically on the affairs of the Greek Orthodox Church.
5. The news are framed conflictually only in a political level, that is between politicians or between politicians and the involved clergy, but not between the State and the Church, or between the Church's representatives.

### **Methods of research**

In order to examine the research questions, I applied the method of content and discourse analysis<sup>6</sup> in TV news of three national TV broadcasters. The analysis included news stories during September and October 2008, when the topic was continuously in the news agenda.

The broadcasters chosen for this study are NET (public broadcaster), MEGA and SKAI (private broadcasters)<sup>7</sup>: NET is a public broadcaster with the biggest ratings among the rest of the same category. MEGA is a private broadcaster with the highest ratings among private ones but of a more soft news nature in comparison to NET; finally, SKAI is the only 'hard news' private broadcaster. From the 36 news bulletins of the period of examination, a total of 427 news items were found and 48 of them were relevant to the scandal. The data was collected from both everyday and weekend evening news.

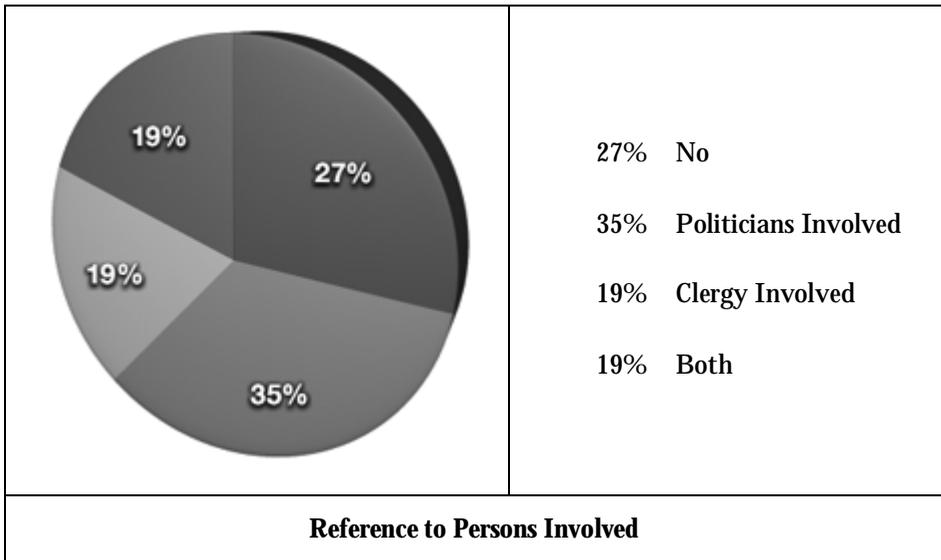
Finally, a guide of 99 variables was constructed<sup>8</sup> for the analysis, including the angle of the topic projected, the news story framing<sup>9</sup>, the news story type, the elements of the news report, the official representatives used as sources of information, as well as the journalist's view, tone and type of speech.

### Discussion of the findings

54% of the news items was found in MEGA, 27% in NET and 19% in ΣKAI: as noted above, 12% of the total number of news items during the time of examination referred to the scandal, which means that the topic was part of the news agenda on a daily basis.

### Research hypothesis 1: Reference of the Persons Involved

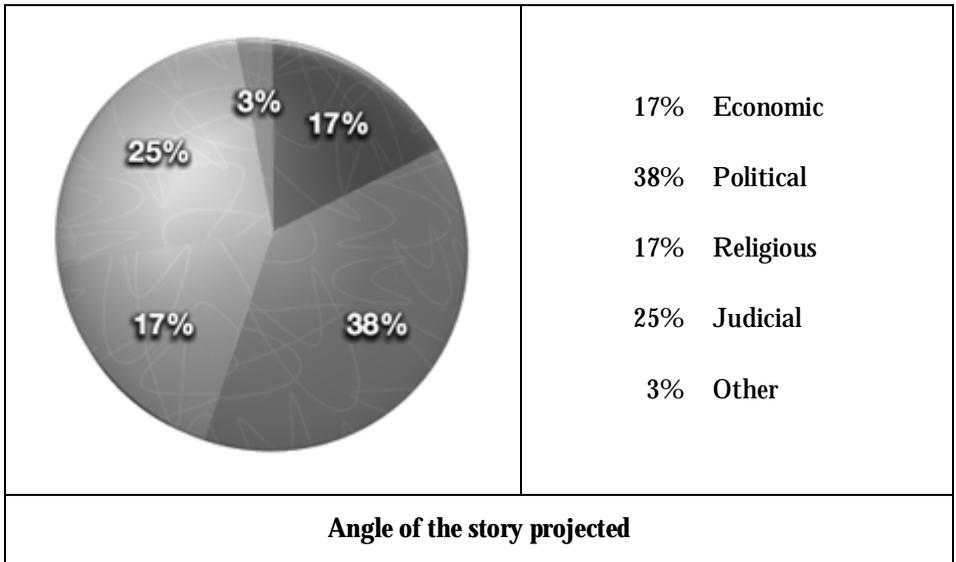
News are characterised of personalisation (Bennett, 1999: 105) and usually focus their reports and judgements on persons rather than on institutions. The analysis shows that news focused mainly on the persons involved in the scandal: the politicians involved were mentioned in most of the cases (36%) in comparison to the references to the clergy involved (19%); in many cases, politicians and the clergy are both mentioned in the same story (19%). Let me note that except from two cases, there was no reference to the Church in any other news item.



This first hypothesis is confirmed and it shows that journalists are interested in focusing on the political responsibilities of the politicians involved and on the illegal activity of both politicians and the clergy. The fact that no references were found about the Church implicates that the body has no responsibility for the illegal activity of the people who serve it.

**Research hypothesis 2: Angle of the topic projected<sup>10</sup>**

As shown in the following diagram, news mainly project the angle of the issue that think as the most important. The analysis showed that the political angle was more frequently projected (38%), followed by the judicial (25%) and then the religious (17%). The judicial angle of the story was frequently projected because the case was into the responsibility of the justice due to the illegal character of the actions of the persons involved.



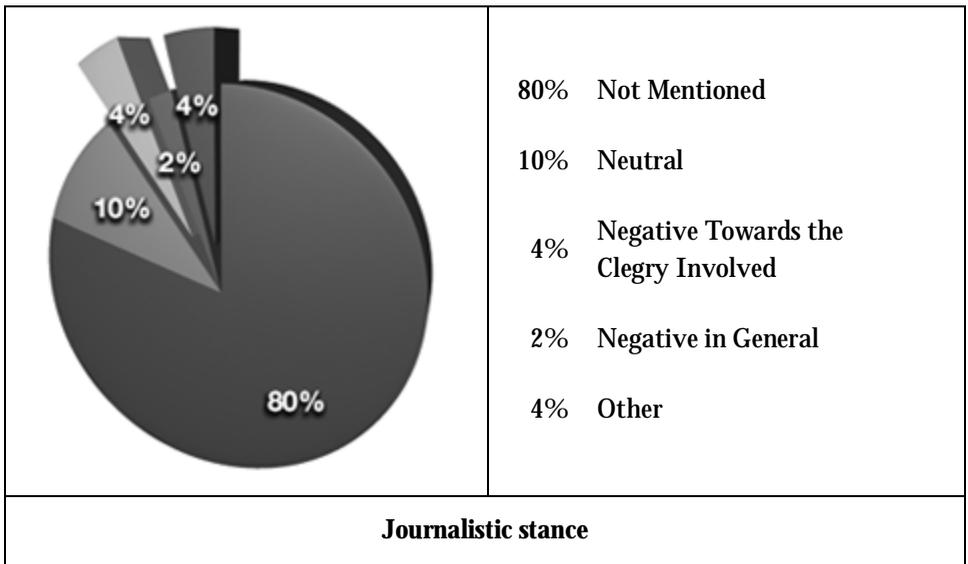
The projection of the political angle of the topic indicates that media are more interested in getting involved with the political affairs rather than the religious, as

political ones are more popular and of a conflictual nature which makes them more interesting for the audience.

### Research hypothesis 3: Journalistic stance

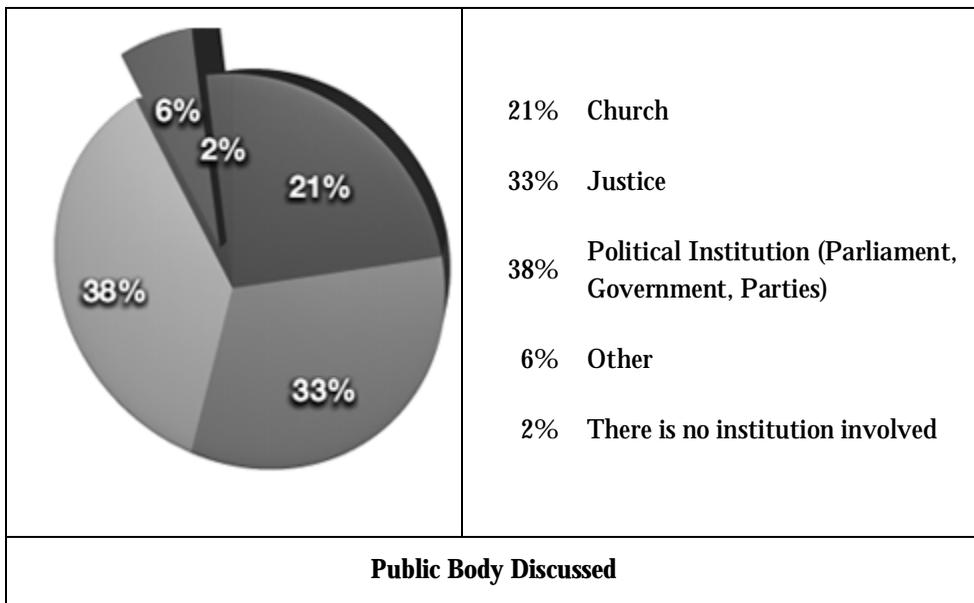
Usually journalists do not express their point of view directly, instead they prefer to make judgements about specific persons, the government or justice as public bodies and this is confirmed by other surveys as well (Centre of Social Research in Media, 2005). Therefore, my analysis showed that it is too rare to express an opinion - especially a negative one- about the involved clergy (4%) and of course there are no negative opinions about the Church.

In addition, as mentioned before, the analysis showed that in the majority of the news items, the Church is not mentioned. This further indicates that it's the persons who will be held responsible for the illegal activity related to the scandal and not to the body which they represent.



**Research hypothesis 4: Agent/institution within which the topic is discussed**

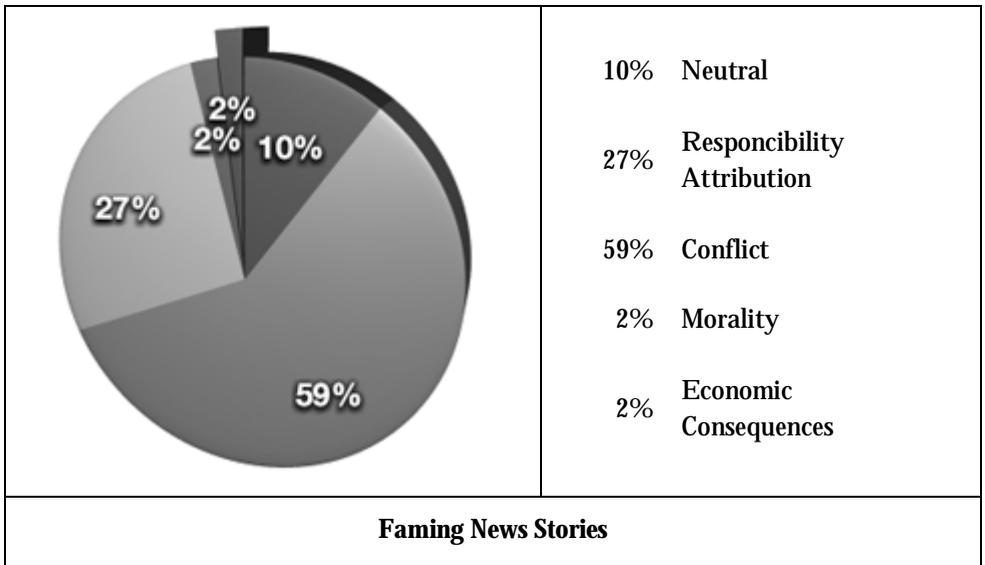
The topic is mainly discussed within the context of a political body (parliament, government, political parties) (38%), of a judicial body (33%) and of a religious one (Church) (21%). The projection of the political angle of the topic is positively correlated with the body within the context of which the topic is discussed, which indicates that journalists avoid to report critically on the Church and focus mainly on the political bodies which are involved in the story.



**Research hypothesis 5: News framing**

Framing measures the pictorial and verbal as well as the interpretational framework within which the topic is discussed. In order to examine this variable I applied a specific typology of news framing provided by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000). I found that news were mainly set within a conflictual framework (58%) and less frequently within a framework of attributing responsibility (27%) to specific persons,

as it has been proved that happens in general with the political news stories (Centre of Social Research in Media, 2005). This also indicates that the religious angle of the scandal is not framed differently; instead it is discussed as a political one, showing once more that journalists muddle the political and the religious angle for the following reasons: the political affairs are of greater interest for the media (Edelman, 1999:170, about the current issues on the news agenda which are set within a conflictual framework) and the public, and the journalists avoid to take part in the debate between the State and the Church.



The absence of morality issues and economical consequences frameworks reveals the intention of media to highlight conflicts between persons or between political parties, and to charge them with mainly political responsibilities (Tsaliki & Chronaki, 2008, about news 'naming and shaming' technique).

In that sense, media again escape from questioning the integrity of the Church, and along with the findings discussed until now it emerges that media recognize that Greek Church has a strong social and political role within the society and act accordingly.

Having presented the findings of this research and having confirmed the research hypotheses, I will now discuss the conclusions that came out of this analysis.

## 5. Conclusions

In this paper I chose to examine the secularization process in the Greek Church through the media coverage of a specific story; as media is the contemporary public sphere and a public arena where different social, political and cultural discourses have been elaborated, their coverage of religious stories or of stories where church's representatives are involved, reveals how religious institutions work and what kind of power does the Greek Church have both in terms of politics and within the society. Religious institutions have a strong influence especially on Greeks of older generations, those who haven't been well educated and those mainly living in rural or agricultural areas, where the values of tradition and the religion are still very strong.

What the research above shows in consistence with previous surveys is that Church is still an powerful institution with a strong presence in the political and social field: as the predominant religious culture for three centuries now, it still influences people's beliefs and values no matter the increased level of rationalization of the greek society after the empowerment of the greek State and the improvement of citizens' quality of life.

Having said that, media recognize how strong is still the Church's impact on the greek society -especially the elder generations- and avoid making judgements about its responsibilities or mistakes as a political and sociocultural body. This was revealed by the fact that there were almost no references to the Church but only to the clergy involved in the scandal, meaning that persons are those who will blame for their illegal activity and not the holy Church whose purpose is to protect the congregation and mediate God's will. Nevertheless, though many members of the clergy have been involved into illegal activities, they haven't been excluded from the Church which shows not only that there is limited or no punishment for those who serve it, but also that it hasn't been broadly covered by the media as the Church has an influential role to the news agenda setting.

The scandal presented in this paper has a religious angle as well, as the clergy involved acted illegally in order to increase Church's property and strengthen their

position within the hierarchies in the Church; therefore, moral issues are raised about the integrity of the people who serve as religious leaders, and the integrity of the Church which not only chooses these people but also protects them from legal punishment. This is an indication that Church still acts as a closed pressure group of people with important political and social power that can affect citizen's socio-economic well being.

Finally, as Demertzis argued, it is indeed proved that the secularization of the Greek Church exists only in a communicational level and not on a political and a sociocultural which means that it hasn't progressed yet the way it has already done in the western part of the world. If we also consider the absence of religious pluralism in the society - then the previous conclusion becomes even more clearer. Greece is still a society with strong traditional values in which religious values are included as well and it has not yet moved entirely into the postindustrial era; this explains sufficiently why Church has not moved towards secularization to the extent to which churches have moved in western Europe and the US and implies that as long as the State and the Church are dependent to each other, both the way to postindustrialism and to secularization are still long.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Agouridis talks about a political orthodoxy in Greece (2000:360)
- <sup>2</sup> Greece is still and industrial and not a postindustrial society
- <sup>3</sup> Up to the present the Greek Orthodox Church doesn't pay any taxes for her property
- <sup>4</sup> See Abdallah, A. (2005), "Post-9/11 media and Muslim identity in American media" in C. Badaracco (ed.) Quoting God: How media shape ideas about religion and culture, Waco TX: Baylor University Press, pp. 125
- <sup>5</sup> Several studies show that when on a pre-electoral period, media tend to increase information given to public and the infotaining coverage of news in parallel (Plios, 2006: 241)
- <sup>6</sup> This combined method of research is being used in the Centre for Social Research in Media for almost every research project taking place there.

- 7 The classification of news into hard and soft is based on whether a channel presents serious political, social, economical and cultural topics focusing mainly on the information itself, and less on news of a more soft- tabloid nature (Prior, 2003)
- 8 The guide constructed was tested in the 10% of the news items found and then it was revised and applied to all stories.
- 9 The variable examines if the angle of the topic highlighted is the political, the religious or the judicial one
- 10 The angle of the story projected is different from the agency within the context of which the story is discussed (i.e. the government, the parliament, the Church) because they usually represent different parts of the story. Therefore, the judicial angle of the story is maybe discussed within the political context.

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# Soroush, Sufi Hermeneutics and Legitimizing a Hybrid Muslim Identity

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## **Abstract**

Abdolkarim Soroush invites Muslims to religious pluralism by rhetorically weaving three different epistemologies (Kantian, Shari'a-based and Sufi). In doing so, he is epistemologically irresponsible, but nonetheless wins the game rhetorically by creating a world in which the Muslim identity can take on hybrid form. Soroush also reintroduces a medieval hermeneutic trend: considering Sufi readings as a legitimate *tafsir* (commentary) type.

## **Keywords**

*Hermeneutics, Identity, Sufism, Hybridity, Epistemology*

## Introduction

A wave of humanistic hermeneutic activity has taken hold among a new generation of Islamic thinkers across the Muslim world. This paper investigates one such thinker in Iran, Abdolkarim Soroush. Specifically, I investigate the trajectory of Soroush's rhetorical journey and the hermeneutic devices he uses to invite his audience towards the concept of religious pluralism. The first part of the paper argues that the most important hermeneutic device, what accounts for the final arbiter in the interpretive act for Soroush, is elevating Rumi's poetry to the status of *tafsir* or commentary. The second part of the paper, shows how Soroush's methodology, in elevating Sufi *tafsir*, indirectly invites Muslims to take on hybrid identities and in doing so, become key figures in the otherwise non-democratic interpretive act of *tafsir* (Qur'anic commentary). Before talking about the details, let me first talk a bit about Soroush and also what is meant by religious pluralism.

## Soroush

1960's and 1970's Iranian political theology wove revolutionary rhetoric by manipulating the symbolic martyrdom of the greatest of Shi'i warriors: Hussein ibn Ali, the grandson of the prophet Muhammad.<sup>1</sup> But while the 60's began with a trend towards the manipulation of those sources of Islam that lent themselves to symbolic reading, in effect a move away from the classical interpretation of the Qur'an (one *ayah* [verse] at a time) into the narrative manipulation of the symbolic, the 90s and 00s have witnessed yet another turn, this time away from the symbolic manipulation of text in the form of rhetorical narratives towards a systematic philosophical framework, the realm of foundational theory-building. The three main people engaged in this endeavor are Abdolkarim Soroush, ex-Ayatollah Mohammad Mojtahed Shabestari and Ayatollah Mohsen Kadivar.<sup>2</sup>

Abdolkarim Soroush, born Farajollah Hossein Dabbaq, is arguably one of Iran's most influential contemporary thinkers.<sup>3</sup> He spent his high school years in the famous Islamic '*Alaviye* school in Iran and obtained his doctorate in Chemistry from the University of London in 1979, while also attending philosophy and epistemology classes at King's College Chelsea Department of History and Philosophy. He had been

an integral part of the very influential student expatriate community during the years leading up to the 1979 revolution and his influential speeches from before and during the revolution became published in book or pamphlet form. After the revolution Soroush was put in charge of the university system's cultural revolution. In 1984, disenchanted with the destructive turn the Cultural Revolution had taken, Soroush abandoned his governmental post and dedicated his time to teaching and research. In 1991, he began publishing a series of controversial pieces about the compatibility of Mohammadi Islam (as originally conceived in the prophet's time) and the concept of "Velayat-e Faqih" or the "Rule of the Jurist." After having been stripped of his university position, banned from public speaking and surviving several attempts on his life by what are assumed to be government supported vigilante groups, Soroush left Iran for the West in 2002.

### Religious Pluralism

Soroush uses the issue of religious pluralism to highlight the problematic of the finality of *wahy* (revelation) and in doing so introduces two important hermeneutic innovations, the re-legitimization of Sufi *tafsir* and elevation of the non-expert reader of the Qur'an to an interpreting agent.

The discussion about religious pluralism has become global during the last 50 years. Most authors in this field work with three models: *exclusivism*, *inclusivism* and *pluralism*.<sup>4</sup> There seems to be some agreement on the concepts of exclusivism and inclusivism. *Exclusivism* is the view that one religion has it mostly right and all the other religions go seriously wrong. An exclusivist Jew or Christian would therefore consider Islam not as a continuation of the Abrahamic message but as a false religion. *Inclusivists* believe that every religion or sect carries some amount of the truth, of which the complete version is found in their own doctrine. *Pluralism* however has been subject to growing debate. To create more nuance when working with pluralism, recent works by Paul Knitter and Anthony, Hermans and Sterkens are useful since they sum up various theological trends and classify the Christian approaches into four models: *replacement*, *fulfillment*, *mutuality* (called *commonality pluralism* by Anthony, Hermans and Sterkens) and *acceptance* (called *differential pluralism* by Anthony, Hermans and Sterkens) and another category Knitter speaks of but does not categorize

called *relativistic pluralism* by Anthony, Hermans and Sterkens.<sup>5</sup> Knitter's *replacement* and *fulfillment* models coincide with the respective traditional definitions of exclusivism and inclusivism given above. The *mutuality* model, the first kind of pluralism Knitter speaks about, presents a kind of pluralistic encounter among religions based on underlying -- often amorphous -- commonalities. The person who best represents this model is John Hick. For Hick, religious symbols and metaphors represent particular religions rather than the Ultimate Divine Reality itself, which is the same no matter what the particular religion. This model therefore focuses on commonalities between religions and because of that Anthony, Hermans and Sterkens have named it *commonality pluralism*. "This model also tends to disregard the fact that common grounds are often identified from the perspective of one's own religious framework."<sup>6</sup>

The second Knitter model for pluralism, the *acceptance* model, is characteristic of the post-modern era and underscores that differences between religions are real and that their particularities are opportunities for reciprocal enrichment and growth. This model espouses the fact that 'the many' cannot be melded into one. It insists that if we seek to remove diversity as Hicks' system suggests we should, we will end up destroying the vitality of religions altogether. Knitter identifies three different perspectives in this model. 1) *Post-liberal cultural-linguistic perspective*: George Lindbeck who launched this trend, claims that religious experience is shaped by religious language. Our experience, Knitter suggests, is determined by the common religious language. Religions cannot claim to give us a clue about ultimate reality according this outlook, they only serve as a framework for understanding everything else by setting up a common language. 2) *Plurality of ultimate perspective* represented by S. Mark Heim holds that differences between religions are not just language-deep they reach into the very soul of religions. Difference in religions may also point to differences in the Divine Ultimate. Real differences between religions have the potential to teach us something really new. 3) *Comparative theological perspective*: represented by Francis X. Clooney and James Fredericks claims that the foundations for a theology of religions are to be found in dialogue rather than in theology. One must be committed to ones own religion but at the same time open to the fact that there might be truths to be found in other religions also. Comparative theologians, Fredericks claims, "are open to the tensions arising from 'double claims' "between our

commitment to the Christian tradition, on the one hand, and at the same time to the allure of other religious traditions.”<sup>7</sup> These three complimentary perspectives of the *acceptance* model underline the importance of diversity and tend to ignore underlying common elements. Because of this Anthony, Hermans and Sterkens prefer to call the acceptance model *differential pluralism*.<sup>8</sup>

As for the last category, which Anthony, Hermans and Sterkens call *relativistic pluralism*, Knitter only points out that “relativists are people for whom the notion of truth is either so broad, or so diversified, or so distant, that they can never trust themselves to know whether they, or anyone, really have the truth.”<sup>9</sup> In this model, all religions are held to be of equal value and significance, irrespective of common or different elements among them. Understanding this to be Rumi’s message, relativistic pluralism is the model Abdolkarim Soroush espouses.

### A Bird’s-eye View

The trajectory of Soroush’s discussion about religious pluralism begins with Kant. Soroush uses that part of Kantian epistemology which bases belief entitlement on scientific enquiry. But because he is accused of being Westoxified (a term used by Jalal Al-Ahmad and later by Ali Shari’ati in the ‘60s and ‘70s to describe their critical attitude towards the West and the idea of Western decadence) and because he cannot engage with the clerics using Kantian language, he moves into Reformed epistemology.

Reformed epistemology considers *religious experience* as a legitimate source of belief generation<sup>10</sup>. In Soroush’s case, reformed epistemology can be divided into the pragmatic strand (based on the *Shari’a*)<sup>11</sup> and the mystical strand (based on *Ma’rifa*).<sup>12</sup> Soroush begins with pragmatic Islam. He tries to extract legitimation for his pluralist views about other religions from within the *Qur’an* and the *Sira* (life of the prophet). But he cannot convince his audience. Most of Soroush’s discussions about the topic took place in public forums and audience participation allowed him to gauge the effectiveness of his methods almost immediately. When dabbling in *ijtihad* (religious interpretation) proves unsuccessful, Soroush goes back to his roots: Sufism.

### Soroush's Use of Kant

Soroush sets out to use Kant in order to justify religious pluralism. His use of Kant revolves around the concept of antinomies. Kant's antinomies of pure reason can be used to show why we are unable to effectively compare religions. To be able to prove that my religion has more truth content than yours, first I need to reach beyond the perspective of my personal beliefs into a vantage point from which the totality of all religions can be surveyed. This is equivalent to stepping out of the noumenal and into the phenomenal in order to judge the noumenal. But can we really judge the noumenal with the phenomenal? Kant separated these two worlds exactly because the noumenal cannot be studied with phenomenal tools. Therefore unlike what Soroush suggests an extra-religious study is also problematic. Comparing religions, an activity belonging to the phenomenal world, creates a Kantian antinomy. We are then confronted with the all too familiar moment where each opposing party holds steadfastly to their own beliefs about the divine, with not hope for any kind of real acceptance of the "other."

An example of just such a moment is the now famous debate between Soroush and Mohsen Kadivar printed in Salam newspaper in 1997.<sup>13</sup> Soroush and Kadivar end up speaking past each other because Soroush refuses to engage with Kadivar's arguments at an intra-religious level. Kadivar, who is familiar with Western philosophy, speaks from within his religious framework while Soroush refuses to step in and join him. Kadivar attacks Soroush for his dedication to religious pluralism in the face of divine wisdom. "Why do you need anything else" Kadivar asks, "when you have the word of God?" The antinomy is clearly visible and the picture it produces resembles the archetypal scientist set up against the unwavering theist. Ironically, in an effort to show how antinomies are the reason why we cannot judge between religions, Soroush himself becomes a victim of the classic Kantian antinomy. He tries to stay clear of engaging in theistic assumptions (even though he is a devout Muslim) while his opponent speaks only from within a religious framework. The discussion is an utter failure, except that it signals Soroush to change his tactics.

### From extra-religious arguments<sup>14</sup> to *ijtihad*<sup>15</sup>

In an interview with *Kiyan* magazine editor a year later (1998), Soroush changes his strategy.<sup>16</sup> Instead of arguing that the discussion about religious pluralism should be approached from an extra-religious stance alone, he decides to engage the religious establishment intra-religiously and dabble in *ijtihad*. This time Soroush wants to find support for religious pluralism within the religion itself.

In a seminal article on the matter he states,

all Abrahamic religions have been tampered with and because of that, none are pure or have the justification to claim exclusive knowledge.<sup>17</sup>

The essence of the religions sent from God (the Semitic ones) is divine and the same as absolute truth. But the problem is not with the pure form of these religions, it is with what they have become once humanity has had access to them. The Quran says:

Religiousness and piety are like murky water that run amongst people until the day of judgment when the dirt and the water are separated by God's judgment himself.<sup>18</sup>

If there is so much impurity does it not make sense to cease holding our religious convictions with the kind of firmness that invalidates the possible truth-value of other faiths? Soroush means to suggest that the exclusivist conviction that theirs is the *only* -- or the inclusivist confidence that there is the *best* -- road to salvation becomes untenable once we realize that the doctrine itself is not perfect and has been tampered with.

Soroush's second pragmatic reason for religious pluralism is inspired by one of the 99 Qur'anic names of God: *Hadi* or Guide. Soroush argues that exclusivism is indeed ungodly because by being an exclusivist we are denying God one of his attributes. How can "The Guide" for humanity choose only a minority of his children for salvation and abandon the rest?

The *Kiyan* editor is not happy with Soroush's attempts and near the end of the interview presents Soroush with the million dollar question: "What does one do with a believer who believes that *his or her* religion is true and that *other* religions are of less

value because the prophet and the Quran has indicated so? How can this person accept pluralism?” Soroush replies by saying that pluralism “is for the thoughtful and not imitators who are the majority of the believers. Since their approach is imitative they are not concerned about extra-religious judgments, hence their initial and final conception are one and the same. It is scholarly believers who are concerned about extra-religious views and judgments.”

This argument is less problematic than the Kantian one but fails nonetheless. Once again, we see Soroush stepping outside intra-religious dialogue however and into the extra-religious terrain. This is not problematic in itself. Qura'nic interpretation is closely intertwined with extra-religious knowledge. In fact *ijtihad* happens in order to contextualize the Holy word and the prophets way. But to promise justification for religious pluralism within Islamic texts, even if it is only for the intellectual elite (remember they do not have to be secular) and not specify what the argument is, especially not even refer to similar arguments made by Al-Ghazzali in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, is equivalent to saying I don't really have the answer. I am not suggesting that a textual interpretation that supports religious pluralism is impossible, I am merely suggesting that Soroush does not really provide us with one. In fact, Kadivar who recently joined the ranks of the pluralists has done much to interpret textual sources in a way he believes is truer to the humanist core of Islamic ethics.<sup>19</sup>

At the very end of the discussion, Soroush rather abruptly, as if irritated about this dabbling in intra-religious discussions, contends that “at the end of the day, debate about pluralism concerns Gnostic and not pragmatic religiosity.”<sup>20</sup>

### **Soroush moves into religious experience and Sufism**

In his groundbreaking article *Serat-haye Mostaqeem*, published in 1997-- the article that started the whole discussion -- Soroush gives ten reasons why he is a religious pluralist, five of which are inspired by Rumi.

According to Soroush's Rumi, religious diversity exists because the structure of reality is not simple. “The many true religions that exist do so because they are all needed to understand the complexity of this world -- that which is reality. If there weren't but a few limited truths and if these truths were not embedded in many layers and if the world we live in was not filled with the ineffable and the unexplainable then

perhaps one religion would have been enough.”<sup>21</sup> This is in direct contrast to the Qura’nic reasons for diversity in religion. According to the Qur’an the reason why divine truth was sent to humanity in stages (via the prophets) was because humans are on an evolutionary path of spirituality and what was given to them in each epoch was commensurate with what they had the ability to understand.

But maybe the most convincing support Soroush finds in Rumi for religious pluralism can be found in Rumi’s allegory of the camel. The story can be summarized thus: A man loses his camel and as a result spends his days searching for it. At times, he finds a sign of his lost camel and that encourages and reassures him that the camel can eventually be found. At other times, hearing news that is potentially negative makes him go weak in the knees. Another person, in imitation and without actually having lost a camel walks in the first person’s footsteps. Like him, the imitator tries to locate his camel by asking others. The true seeker and the false imitator continue for a while until finally the lost camel is reunited with its owner. But lo and behold, the imitator finds that next to the true seeker’s camel stands another camel, at which point he says:

Till I found it I was not seeking it; now the copper is overcome and gold overpowers it.

My evil deeds have become pious acts entirely – thanks (to God)! Jest is vanished and earnest realized-thanks (to God)! Since my evil deeds have become the means to (my) attaining unto God, do not, then, throw any blame on my evil deeds.<sup>22</sup>

“All roads” Soroush understands Rumi to be saying,

“the true and the false, both lead to guidance (*hedayat*) and deliverance (*nejat*). The mystic God will take any honest student of the righteous way by the hand and deliver them to the destination. The honest for sure, but even the dishonest who is nonetheless looking, is not left without her or his share and portion of divine mercy and pardon.”<sup>23</sup>

For him, nothing else can or should be said after Rumi has spoken on an issue. When one hits the wall of revelation, a wall that seems to guarantee the supremacy of the

Islam and its practitioners, and there seems to be nowhere else to go, as seems to be case in his discussions with Kadivar, in order to reconcile the needs of reality with the finality of scripture, Rumi becomes the ultimate arbiter. In as much as Soroush chooses a legitimate medieval (not modern) type of *tafsir*, Sufism, and chooses it over the Western hermeneutics (the method Shabestari uses) and what is practiced in Qom as pragmatic religion, he has taken a theoretical stance: Rumi is valid as a *mufassir* (commentator). But much of the work of the “creation of meaning”, I believe, is left to the reader in his work and in this sense Soroush’s work veers away from being a work of foundationalist theory-building.

### Ricoeur

In *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*, Ricoeur explains that the world of the text is the means by which the reader attains self-understanding. This self-understanding is achieved by appropriating the work through the “distanciating” effect of writing, which divorces the work from the author's intentions.<sup>24</sup> Ricoeur suggests that the text creates its own world and it is then up to the reader to inhabit that world, finding within it realities that explains her/his own particular situation.

By peppering his work with Kantian thought, Shari’a based arguments and Sufi poetry, Soroush creates a space where the reader has the opportunity to reconcile seemingly disparate ways of being (positivist, mystic and Islamist). As in real life, these seemingly incongruent ways of being are in tension with each other but I believe Soroush’s methodology points to a solution in grappling with this tension. I contend that the effect Soroush has on those with hybrid identities is to create a world in which the seemingly disparate ways of understanding the ineffable can coexist (Shari’a, Sufism and Kantian liberalism). When a reader sees these less than complimentary ways of being, intertwined, mirroring everyday life in the safe environment of a page and at least momentarily, apprehensions about being pluralistic in the makeup of the self gradually dissolve. In fact, this is how I believe Soroush invites the thinking Muslim to religious pluralism since none of his arguments whether they be through the Shari’a, Kant or Rumi are quite as powerful.

## Conclusion

Soroush fails to justify religious pluralism using Kant and pragmatic religion (*Shari'a*). However, I believe his Sufi justification is promising. Soroush is lifting Rumi to the level of orthodox *tafsir* or exegesis and using poetry in the same way one would use tomes of orthodox *tafsir*. Sometimes in the span of a single page, Soroush argues a point from each of the three different view points (Kantian, Shari'a-based and Sufi) but ultimately cinches the argument by quoting a pronouncement of Rumi's and in doing so ends the argument. This is one strand of his hermeneutic innovation. The other is allowing the reader to become part of his *tafsir*. Being Muslim and modern today means being immersed in unease and tension, grappling with a *weltanschauung* that remains as of yet unanchored in any convincing humanist Islamic alternative to Western choices. Soroush's works, specifically his methodology, points to a solution in grappling with this tension. Be with the tension, he seems to be telling us, mindful of being pulled apart but as if there is no problem to be solved. What I come away with from Soroush's work is not whether Islam and religious pluralism are compatible. The topic of religious pluralism in Islam remains more or less unresolved by his study. But the debate he began is suggestive of a possible modern interpretation of Islam in which, Sufism – many forms of which are at least theoretically averse to exclusivist and inclusivist tendencies, exemplified in the works of Rumi -- lives beside Kantianism and classical *ijtihad*. *Sufism* lives beside the other two epistemologies but eventually overpowers them, and yet, in tune with its pluralist, poetic and softly treading manner, only in the imagination of the reader.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> For further information look at Mahmoud Ayoub's "Redemptive Suffering in Islam", Mouton De Gruyter, 1978, Kamran Aghaie's "The Karbala Narrative: Shi'I Political Discourse in Modern Iran in the 1960s and 1970s", *Journal of Islamic Studies* 12:2 2001, Akbar Hyder's "Reliving the Karbala Martyrdom in South Asian Memory", Oxford University Press, 2006, David Pinault's, *Horse of Karbala: Muslim Devotional Life in India* (New York: Palgrave Press, 2000, Frank J. Korom's, *Hosay Trinidad* (Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press,

- c2003) and Vali Nasr's *The Shi'a Revival: How Conflicts within Islam will Shape the Future* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company 2006.
- 2 Mahmoud Sadri in "Sacral Defense of Secularism: Dissident Political Theology in Iran in Negin Nabavi ed. *Intellectual Trends in Twentieth-Century Iran*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003, chooses these three thinkers as representative of the Iranian intellectual spectrum.
  - 3 The information about Soroush is collected from the biography presented in Katajun Amirpur's "The Changing Approach to the Text: Iranian scholars and the Quran", *Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 41, No. 3, 337-350, May 2005.
  - 4 For further info see Race 1982,; Coward 1985; D'Costa 1986; Wilfred 1995; Sterkens 2001; Amaladoss 2003; Vermeer & Van der Ven 2004.
  - 5 Knitter, Paul F. "Introducing Theologies of Religion", Orbis Books, 2002.
  - 6 Anthony, Hermans and Sterkens, "Interpreting Religious Pluralism: Comparative research among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students in Tamil Nadu, India", *Journal of Empirical Theology* 18, 2, f3, page 157.
  - 7 Fredericks, James L. "Faith Among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions". Paulist Press, 1999, p169.
  - 8 Anthony, Hermans and Sterkens, "Interpreting Religious Pluralism: Comparative research among Christian, Muslim and Hindu students in Tamil Nadu, India", *Journal of Empirical Theology* 18, 2, f3, pg, 161.
  - 9 Knitter, P. "Introducing Theologies of Religion", Orbis Books, 2002, p.16.
  - 10 For more on Reformed Epistemology look at Wolterstorff, Nicholas, "Epistemology of Religion" in the *Blackwell Guide to Epistemology*, edited by John Greco and Ernest Sosa, Blackwell, 2005.
  - 11 Using the *Shari'a*, one knows the divine through divine laws as interpreted by experts instead of personal experience.
  - 12 In the experiential, Gnostic or mystical (*ma'rifatī*) epistemology, one knows the divine by experiencing it.
  - 13 Mohsen Kadivar is an ayatollah who has been very active in the reform movement in the last 15 years. After having resisted arguing in favor of religious pluralism from an extra-religious point of view, he published "Freedom of Religion and

Belief in Islam” in Mehran Kamrava’s edited volume entitled *The New Voices of Islam*, in 2006. In this article, Kadivar argues for an already extant pluralism but not a comparative theological one of which Knitter or Anthony, Hermans and Sterkens speak of. Kadivar is only interested in showing that through the hermeneutic tactic of “selectivity” we can choose verses that achieve an outcome closer inline with what the declaration of human rights dictates about religious pluralism.

- 14 Extra-religious knowledge comes from the social and physical sciences and the humanities.
- 15 Ijtihad is the process of making a legal decision by independent interpretation of the legal sources.
- 16 Soroush started publishing his works on pluralism in Kiyān starting in 1991. The Government shut the magazine down in 2001. The interview appears in the chapter “Truth, Reason, Salvation” in Soroush’s “Serat-haye Mostaqeem” (Straight Paths to God). All translations of Soroush’s work are my own.
- 17 “Truth, Reason, Salvation”, 56
- 18 “Truth, Reason, Salvation”, 57
- 19 Kadivar, Mohsen “Freedom of Religion and Belief in Islam” in Mehran Kamrava’s edited volume entitled *The New Voices of Islam*, in 2006.
- 20 Soroush, Abdolkarim, “Serat-ha-ye Mostaqeem (Straight Paths to God)”, Tehran, 1999, 243
- 21 Soroush, Abdolkarim, “Serat-ha-ye Mostaqeem (Straight Paths to God)”, Tehran, 1999, 26.
- 22 Rumi, Mathnavi Ma’navi, Book II, 3005-3008, trans. Reynold Nicholson, Gibb Memorial Trust, Cambridge UK, 1982.
- 23 Rumi, Mathnavi Ma’navi, Book II, 3005-3008, trans. Reynold Nicholson, Gibb Memorial Trust, Cambridge UK, 1982.31.
- 24 For further information look at Ricoeur, Paul. “From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II” trans. Kathleen Blamey, John B. Thompson, Northwestern University Press, 2007.

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# **The Semantic Potential of Religion in Habermas' Struggle for Modernity: Something's Missing**

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## **Abstract**

In the midst of the increasing contemporary, global divide between the sacred and the profane, the religious and the secular, faith and reason, believers and non-believers, this paper analyzes and critiques Habermas's contemporary work towards bringing about a reconciliation of this antagonism in a post-secular, modern society. In this paper, I critically analyze Habermas's most recent statements of the need for the universalistic and egalitarian semantic potential of religious myths, language, concepts, symbols, etc to be translated through the social process of what he terms an "institutional translation proviso," which thereby, according to him, would allow the alternative normative potential of religion that advocates for a more rational and reconciled future society to enter as a discourse partner into the realm of the modern

secular public and political spheres. I end the paper by offering a “friendly critique” of Habermas’ position – friendly in the sense that I agree with his recognition and incorporation of the critical religious semantic substance into his discourse ethics for the possible creation of a more reconciled future world. However, my critique stems from his lack of emphasis on the systematic, globalizing power of neo-liberal/neo-conservative capitalism and Western imperialism and the increasing horror it is producing. By means of his paradigm shift to the human potential of language, memory and recognition, through which he has developed his theory of communicative praxis, Habermas acknowledges but nevertheless brackets out the dominating socio-historical forces of the “negative,” which systematically undermine, colonize, infect and corrupt the very ideal process of discourse for which he advocates. It is my contention that the historical materialist critique, particularly that of the first generation of critical theorists [Horkheimer, Adorno, Benjamin, Marcuse] and its focus on the human potential of work and the concrete, revolutionary struggle for recognition, justice, equity, truth, autonomy in solidarity – all issues expressed by the Abrahamic, prophetic religions, needs to be incorporated into Habermas’s discourse ethics to make his inclusion of religion in the contemporary, secular discourse more socially, historically, and most important of all - humanistically relevant.

### **Keywords**

*Habermas, Abrahamic Religions, Sacred, Profane, Modernity*

### **Introduction**

Jürgen Habermas’ critical theory of religion is an important part of his entire theory of communicative action aimed at realizing the ideals of the bourgeois and Marxian enlightenment movements - what he calls the “unfinished project of modernity” – through the normative, social dynamic of discourse ethics founded upon and expressive of the differentiated logic of validity claims contained within the act of communication and language itself. The ideal goal of such communicative action is the socio-historical creation of unconstrained mutual understanding among individuals in an undistorted, consensually based, unlimited communication community – a democratic,

constitutional state and global community, wherein the universal, inter-subjective, epistemic and normative foundations of communicative action between individuals in the “life-world” as well as within the highly differentiated and complex social action systems and subsystems of modernity are no longer dominated or perverted by the particularized interests of power and wealth. The importance of religion, particularly its still unrealized semantic potential for human liberation and happiness, within the public sphere of the modern, post-secular society is the focus of this essay as it is expressed in the most recent work of Habermas. Due to the dialectical complexity and evolution of Habermas’ theory *in toto*, in which he approaches the substance of communicative action in many different ways and with many different “accents” (Peukert 1984:172ff), it is extremely difficult to understand his theory of religion without comprehending it within the context of his entire *oeuvre*. That such an undertaking is beyond the scope of this chapter is obvious. However, such a task has been critically addressed by other authors, particularly that of Rudolf J. Siebert (2010, 2001, 1994). In this essay, Habermas’ most recent expression of his critical theory of religion will be presented within the context of his refusal to abandon the project of modernity and enlightenment as well as his reconstruction of historical materialism in terms of his paradigm change from the one-sided, distortion of modernity through the prominence given to subjectivity within the philosophy of consciousness to that of an inter-subjective, linguistic paradigm of communicative action. The critique of Habermas theory of religion in the modern public sphere is also anchored in these key elements of his theory of communicative action.

### **Becoming Pious?**

On October 14, 2001, Jürgen Habermas, the second generation critical theorist, received the international Peace Prize of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association, in the famed St. Paul’s Church (Paulskirche) in Frankfurt am Main. In his acceptance speech on receiving the Prize, and as a response to the September 11, 2001 attacks against the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in the United States, Habermas (2003:101-115) addressed the accelerating antagonism in modernity between the religious and the secular, between faith and knowledge. Since then, the topic of religion in the modern, post-secular public sphere has been a central issue in Habermas’

recent work and interviews, including the much talked about January 19, 2004 discourse with Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, on the topic of “The Pre-political Moral Foundations of a Free State” (Habermas & Ratzinger 2006). Since then, many scholarly articles and critiques have been written about Habermas’ recent concern with religion prompting some to question whether he has turned to religion and theology as a corrective to his secular, philosophical analysis of the crisis of modernity (Arens 2009, Harrington 2007). It is interesting that a similar accusation was made against Max Horkheimer due to his increased focus on religion in his later works; that in the face of the *aporias* of the Enlightenment’s self-referential reason as expressed in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Horkheimer & Adorno 1972), *Eclipse of Reason* (1974a), *Critique of Instrumental Reason* (1974b), and other articles and interviews, Horkheimer had retreated into religion. I have shown elsewhere that Horkheimer never made such a retreat to religion nor did he become religious at any point in his career, as the emancipatory substance of religion was an essential element from the very beginning in the development of his Critical Theory (Ott 2001, 2007/2009; Siebert 2001, 2010). The same refutation can be said for Habermas: He has not forsaken the secularizing, unfinished project of Modernity or of the Enlightenment through any retreat to religion (Arens 2009). From the very beginning, Habermas’ work included a critical theory of society as an element of his developing theory of communicative action. Habermas even defended himself against this insinuation of his becoming religious during an interview, given in preparation for his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, by stating “*Ich bin alt, aber nicht fromm geworden*” – “I am old, but have not become pious” (Funken 2008:181-190). In terms of faith or piety, Habermas remains as “religiously unmusical” as Max Weber.

As it was with members of the first generation of the Critical Theory, e.g. Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Horkheimer, whom Habermas (1993:49) called not only the administrative director of the famed “Frankfurt School” but also the “*spiritus rector*” of the Critical Theory itself, the determinate negation or translation of the prophetic, eschatological, critical and emancipatory substance of religion into a modern, secular form in the historical struggle for a more reconciled future society has been a topic with which Habermas has and continues to wrestle in the continuing development of the formal and universal pragmatic of his Theory of Communicative Action. Although there is a definite methodological disagreement, if not “polarization”

(Honneth 1992:3-16), between the first and second generation critical theorists critique of the “crisis” of modernity, the socio-historical materialistic goal of negating the reification of modernity’s productive forces for the creation of a free, just, humane, reconciled, and peaceful future society has always remained the same. As will be expressed below, within the contemporary, globalizing socio-historical context of the capitalist social system failure leading to cybernetic “emergency” measures to protect vested corporate and national interests, the future relevancy and revolutionary potential of the critical theory of society and religion lies in dialectically uniting these two methodologies to overcome the supposed dark and pessimistic extremism of the first generation as well as the so-called “blue-eyed” idealism of Habermas for the creation of a dynamic, liberating theory and praxis in the struggle for “alternative future III – the reconciled, free and just society” (Siebert 2010, Appendices 3).

## Theodicy

As in all religions, great works of art, aesthetics, and philosophies, not to mention the experiences of billions of people in their everyday “life-world,” the cruel and ever-present problem of “theodicy” – the needless and horrifying sorrow, suffering and death of the innocent in nature and more disturbingly in modern society as well as the continuing, systemic escalation of barbarism - critically runs as a principal or underlying issue of concern through the entire complex, multifaceted, and dialectically interconnected work of Habermas. Habermas’ recent work on the dialectic between religion and secularity is a theoretical, materialist response to the theodicy of Modernity, as he seeks to mediate or show a “third way” to the dangerous reification of Modernity into two ideological, antagonistic and increasingly deadly world views: on the one hand, a Western styled “globalization” in the form of neo-conservative imperialism as well as the system and structures of neoliberal capitalism, and on the other hand, the rise of reactionary and retaliatory religious fundamentalism, which is as Habermas states a purely modern development directed against the years of perceived and all too real exploitation and domination of Third World – or “Peripheral” countries by a technologically superior Western civilization, which is said to have failed to realize the ideals of humanity (Habermas 2003:101-115; 2008b; Harrington 2007:45-61; Huntington 1996a, 1996b; Chomsky 1999; Harvey 2007, 2003;

Johnson 2000; Klein 2008; Ott 2007: Chap. 11; Petras 2001; Baumann 1998; Ahmadi-Najad 2006.)

According to Habermas (1991:158-169; 2003:102), the traditional, “strong,” comprehensive religious worldviews and their substantive, “logos” rationality have lost their credibility and disintegrated due to their inability to resolve the theodicy at the modern level of highly differentiated and rationalized action systems and their internal learning processes. The relevance of religion in the modern, secular world, however, is not thereby abstractly negated by Habermas. His theory of formal, universal pragmatics and of communicative action includes within its logic the possibility if not necessity for the inclusion of the determinately negated/secularly translated semantic potential of religion in the public sphere discourse of a post-secular society, which seeks understanding and consensus in the concrete, historical purpose of continuing the Enlightenment’s project of creating a constitutional democratic state. As Habermas states, this inclusion of the semantic potential of religion in the discourse of modernity is not a stratagem for the formal appeasement of the religious. It is rather an essential expression of the dialectical logic of communicative rationality itself that, through a reconstructed “geneology of reason,” understands the boundary between religious and secular reason to be “fluid” and thereby identifies the roots of secular reason in the birth of world religions during the “Axial Age” (Habermas 2003:101-115; 2005a, 2005b, 2006a:16-18; Jaspers 1953; Armstrong 2009, 2006; Eisenstadt 2000; Bellah 2005; Schwartz 1975; Parkes 1959). It is by means of his Theory of Communicative Action that Habermas seeks to address the escalating theodicy problem by continuing the “unfinished project of Modernity” for human liberation and sovereignty in a democratic constitutional society committed to the creation of a good and happy life for all. Habermas explains the historical evolutionary bases for this through his restructuring of historical materialism in terms of prioritizing the inter-subjective paradigm of communicative rationality over Marx’s use of the dualistic and authoritarian philosophy of consciousness and its paradigm of subjectivity.

### **Birth of Modern, Secular Society**

It has been well documented that the development of modern, secular society arose from the horror of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century religious massacres and wars, which

devastated Central Europe; e.g. the religious wars between Roman Catholics and Protestants/Huguenots in France from 1562-1598, expressed in the slogan "*Une foi, un loi, un roi,*" (one faith, one law, one king); the Thirty Years War's (1618-1648) decimation of the population in German cities by one third and by two-fifths in German rural areas, and the horrifying slaughter of the population in the principalities of the Holy Roman Empire, reducing it from 20 to 16 million. The secularization of the State was precisely what was needed in response to this religiously sanctioned terror. Slowly, after these wars, the European nations adopted the policy of religious toleration, wherein religious minority confessions were at first guardedly put up with or indulged (*Duldsamkeit*)<sup>1</sup> by the government and the established religious majority. This earlier behavioral understanding of tolerance or toleration of religious minorities gradually developed into the granting of legal recognition and eventually of equal rights for minorities to give public expression to their religious beliefs in organizational form. England took the lead in this development after its 1688 Glorious Revolution with John Locke's (1955) *Letter Concerning Toleration* of 1689. Here, Locke gave the first detailed moral argument for the separation of the secular and religious/salvation oriented realms. For Locke, questions of faith were "matters of conscience" and not matters that could be politically legislated. Acknowledging that Locke's concept of tolerance was directed toward intra-Protestant denominational relations and thereby excluded Catholics, atheists, and members of non-Christian religions, nevertheless, with this distinction, Locke (1955:48-49) laid the modern foundation for defining what "public reason"<sup>2</sup> is:

...the political society is instituted for no other end, but only to secure every [person's] possession of the things of this life. The care of each [person's] soul, and of the things of heaven, which neither does belong to the commonwealth nor can be subjected to it, is left entirely to every [person's] self.

According to Locke, who addresses the issue of religion from the perspective of Western European Christianity, every church, as a voluntary organization of individuals freely organized around agreed upon doctrines expressive of a universal or "logos" rationality, was free to organize, administer and to express its faith in its religious liturgy and actions *as long as* these practices were legal according to the civil law. A

church, and thus, religion, never had the right to any action that was against the secular law. In similar fashion, governments were not to interfere with any religious practice except when necessary to protect the public good. Governments were to assume a “neutral” position with regard to religion and refrain from supporting or enforcing any religious beliefs or practices via its power of law.

According to Habermas (2008b:5-6), with this post-Reformation and post-religious war pacification of society through the separation of Church and State, a “*modus vivendi*” – an agreed upon or accommodating way of living established between differing or even hostile people, groups, communities – was created in order for life to go on in a more peaceful manner. The result of this was that often the opposing religious sub-cultures ghettoized itself from the “other” – from other churches and even from society itself – and thus, remained alien to each other. This tolerating and accommodating *modus vivendi* approach to addressing the religious conflict, which created a needed socio-political restraint but no real reconciliation between the religions, was proven inadequate at least in principle through the development of the constitutional revolutions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In this revolutionary period, principles were created of a new, democratic political order based on the constitutional rule of law and participatory democratic will formation of the people. This new constitutional state developed in the framework of the *contractualist tradition* – which as Habermas (2003:108) states has its roots in the religious revolutionary way of thinking brought about during what Karl Jasper’s called the “Axial Age” (whose dynamic spirit, according to Habermas (2005a:158) is expressed in the First Commandment of the Jewish Decalogue) and the birth of the great world religions between 800BCE to 200BCE - that relies on “natural reason,” on public arguments to which all persons are to have equal access. However, now the justification of the secular state rested on the notion of a “*common human reason*” rather than a religious legitimation of God (Habermas 2006a:4). The constitutional state developed as a response to these religious wars through secularization and then by the democratization of political power. According to this new democratic political ideal, all sub-cultures – religious or not – were expected to subordinate themselves in terms of their doctrines, dogma, etc. to the more universal purpose of creating a political community in which all citizens could mutually recognize each other as members. Now, as citizens of a democratic state, the “demos,” people were understood to be the authors of the laws that were to be obeyed,

which grant them the right, as private citizens, “to preserve their identity in the context of their own particular culture and worldview” (Habermas 2008b:6). Habermas states that it is this new relationship in Modernity of a democratic government, civil society, and the self-maintenance of subcultures that is the *key* to correctly understanding the struggles between religion and secularity today.

### **The Modern Divide between the Religious and the Secular**

The modern divide if not antagonism between the religious and the secular, between God and the world, between reason and revelation, between faith and science, between believers and non-believers and its various historical consequences grew out of this secular response to the horror of these former religious wars. One of the dominant consequences of this cognitive and socio-historical bifurcation between the religious and the secular was the creation of the modernization/secularization theory that is rooted in the Enlightenment but was specifically formulated in functionalistic terms in the 1950’s and 1960’s (Berger 1999:2). According to Habermas (2008b:1), this modernization/secularization theory is grounded on three hypotheses:

1. Progress in science and technology promotes an anthropocentric understanding of the disenchanted world because the totality of the empirical world can now be causally explained.
2. The functional differentiation of social sub-systems: churches and religious organizations lose their control over and importance for law, politics, public welfare, education, science. Religion now restricts itself to its “*proper function of administering the means of salvation,*” turning religion into a private, spiritual, soul affair.
3. The socio-historical development from agrarian through industrial to post-industrial societies leads to higher levels of welfare and greater social security, resulting in the reduction of risks in life and a sense of increased existential security. This results in the loss of the need for a “higher power” to take care of people in the midst of socio-historical contingencies.

Habermas correctly states that these hypotheses as well as their historical socio-political development in terms of class antagonisms, of Western First/primary world

domination of Third/peripheral world global relations, etc. express a narrow Euro- and ethnocentric perspective.<sup>3</sup> This can be seen in all of these hypotheses but particularly in terms of the third hypothesis stated above, of the modern development of increased levels of welfare, social security, and reduced risks to life. The question must be asked, however, *for whom* has life become more secure and less contingent? The daily news reports in the United States of increasing job, benefits, and home loss for the working class contradicts this hypothesis (Damon 2009; Eckholm 2009; Goodman 2010; U.S. Department of Labor 2010). The class antagonism in modern, globalizing capitalist society and the increasing uncertainty of life for the masses of the working class, the “underclass,” the immigrants, *campesinos*, sweatshop slave laborers – most of whom are women and children whose work creates the profit for their masters – is glossed over and ideologically ignored with this hypothesis of “progress.”

This modernization/secularization process, experienced by many throughout the world as a form of Western, capitalist domination if not imperialism cloaked as “globalization,” has provoked powerful movements and theories of counter-secularization if not anti-modernization, often taking the form of religious fundamentalism (Fields 1991). Chalmers Johnson (2000) has described this anti-Western, anti-secular reaction through the term “*Blowback*,” which as he states was a CIA term first used in 1953 to describe the likelihood that U.S. overt and covert operations and interference in the domestic affairs of other people’s, particularly Third World countries would result in retaliations against Americans and the West at home and abroad. Already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Joseph Schumpeter (1976) spoke positively of capitalism’s dynamic as a force of “creative destruction.” In traditional societies, the so-called Third World or “peripheral” countries, the creative part of this capitalist destruction has not been as obvious as it has appeared to be in more advanced, secular Western societies. The secular, capitalist modernization that penetrates into these countries, often during times of natural or strategically created societal “shocks” to the social totality (Klein 2008) has often instigated social and cultural upheavals. The disintegration of the traditional, normative foundations of these societies produces enormous anomic confusion, fear, and anger, which produces a fundamental “shift in mentality” in these traditional societies: one of resistance and staunch reaction to the ideology and productivity of capitalist, secular modernity. Contemporary scholars, such as David Harvey (2003, 2007) and Naomi Klein (2008), have dropped the

“creative” adjective in describing the destructive process of globalizing capitalism to both the largest portions of humanity and to nature. This reaction has produced what some have called the return or resurgence of religion as a response directed fundamentalistically against “the perceived insults and injuries caused by a superior Western civilization” (Habermas 2006a:1). This fundamentalistic religious, retaliatory response against the experienced history of secular Western domination and disrespect literally exploded in the terror strikes against the symbols of Western capitalism and imperialism, i.e. the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon, headquarters of the United States Department of Defense in Arlington County, Virginia on September 11, 2001. For the religious terrorist who flew the planes and the organizations they represented, these buildings and what they housed were symbols of the “Great Satan.” This religious critique of the dialectic of the Enlightenment, and of the failure of liberalism and of secularism to realize its professed highest ideals of *Liberté, Egalité, and Fraternité* (freedom, equality, and solidarity) was also the substance of the Iranian President Ahmadinejad’s letter sent via the Swiss embassy to then President George W. Bush on May 9, 2006. The immanent critique of this political theological appeal to overcome the contradiction between professed personal religious faith – President Bush proclaims himself to be a “born-again Christian” - and antagonistic international actions by the United States was summarily ignored by the Bush Administration.

However, as Habermas (2003:102) states “fundamentalism is an exclusively modern phenomenon and *therefore, not only a problem of others.*” Religious fundamentalism is a response to the “time lag” between culture and society, between traditional and modern forms of society, between religion and secularity. It is interesting, therefore, to see a similar revival of the fundamentalist, evangelical, so-called religious Right that has occurred in the US, while it remains the dominant modern, capitalist society. Whereas in Third World countries, religion is becoming a force of resistance to the globalizing secular domination of the West, in the United States the rise of the religious Right has been a force for increased conservative social policies as well as heightened support for neoconservative U.S. superiority in the world. As reported in the PEW U.S. Religious Landscape Survey of 2008, devout and religiously active citizens in the U.S. have remained relatively constant over the past 6 decades. This is not the case in Europe. The neoconservative movements of religious renewal in the U.S. are

strengthening the political division of the West, particularly in the U.S., especially against progressive social policies: recognition of gay/lesbian marriage, abortion issues, abolition of death penalty, etc. Again, this is not the case so much in Europe, who, according to Habermas is walking the Enlightenment/secularization/modernization path alone now. Habermas (2008:2) states that secularized Europe, its Occidental form of reason, and the resulting secularization theory appears now to be the world wide anomaly, walking the *Sonderweg* – the non-normative, deviant “other way” in counter-distinction to the continuation of religion in society and politics.

### “Zero-Sum Game”

Habermas (2003:104) differentiates the historical meaning of secularization into two forms: 1.) secularization as “the taming” or replacement of religious authority, ways of thinking and forms of life by superior if not rational *equivalents*; and 2.) secularization as “unlawful appropriation” or expropriation/“stealing” and thereby, distortion if not destruction of religion by modernity. The first explanation sees secularization as a progressive historical movement in terms of the disenchantment of modernity, while the second understands secularization as part of humanity’s and history’s decline. According to Habermas, both of these understandings make the same mistake as they construct secularization as a “*zero-sum game*” between “the unbridled capitalist productive development of science and technology” and the resulting class inequalities and warfare and the conservative forces of religion and tradition. Even in the face of the contemporary growth of religious communities and their responses to the development of Modernity, Habermas (2008:3) still believes that the data globally supports the secularization hypothesis. Yet, for him, the weakness of the hypothesis lies in the imprecise use of the concepts “secularization” and “modernization.”

In modern society, the differentiation of functional social systems brought the religious communities and churches to confine themselves to “their core function of pastoral care” as they renounced their expertise in other areas of society. With this, as a corollary, the practice of faith also withdrew into a more personal and subjective realm. Yet, all of this reduction and withdrawal does not imply that religion as a whole lost its relevancy or influence in the political, cultural or personal life. For Habermas, the conflict between the religious and the secular as real as it has become, is

nevertheless artificial if not ideological as it ignores the socio-historical fact that religion continues to exist in the developing context of secular modernity. According to Habermas (2003:104), this conflict is inconsistent with the reality of a post-secular society as it ignores “*the civilizing role of a democratically shaped and enlightened common sense*, that is the third way or “party” in the midst of a modern development of “*Kulturkampf*,” which has the potential of realizing the ominous reality of the neo-conservative notion of the so-called “clash of civilizations” (Huntington 1996a; 1996b.)

### Unfinished Project

As is his entire Theory of Communicative Action *oeuvre*, Habermas’ critical theory of religion is to be understood within the framework of his philosophical defense of the modernity’s so-called unfinished project of Enlightenment. In his 1980 acceptance speech upon receiving the prestigious Adorno Prize from the city of Frankfurt, Germany for his outstanding contributions to the fields of philosophy, Habermas (1997:163) asked a fundamental question concerning the future of modernity in the face of its theodicy – the horror and destructiveness of its existing and globalizing antagonisms: “...*should we hold to the intentions of the Enlightenment, battered as they may be, or should we abandon the project of modernity?*” In the face of the reactionary attacks by post-Enlightenment, post-Modernity, *posthistoire*, neo-conservative, anarchistic philosophical and social theories as well as by religious fundamentalism against Modernity and the historical development of its humanistic ideals of liberty, dignity, equality, justice, happiness, solidarity, and peace as an expression of “the notion the infinite progress of knowledge and an infinite advance toward social and moral betterment,” Habermas (1997:159; 1987:1-22), as the first generation critical theorists before him, seeks to differentiate between and thereby defend an “authentic modernity” from its distortion into the existing one-dimensionality of an instrumentally and strategically colonized and kitsch filled “modernism.”

As Habermas (1987:chapters. 1-2) states, it was Hegel who first developed a clear understanding of the concept of modernity, of its dangers and its potentials. Already in 1807, as a critical development of the Enlightenment beyond its philosophic embodiment in Kant, Fichte, and Schelling, Hegel (1967) gave expression to the dialectical development of reason in modernity from the naïve and edifying “unbroken

immediacy” of a substantive rationality to its differentiation into the various forms of scientific knowledge. Such a self-differentiation or unfolding of reason from its mythic or ontological substantive form into its concrete scientific manifestations is, according to Hegel, the inner necessity of knowledge itself in the pursuit of truth. For Hegel (1967:70-71), through the philosophical and historical dialectical development of reason itself, the scientific form alone is the true shape in which truth exists. For Hegel, this dialectical development of reason in its inner, psychological life as well as in its concrete, lived external manifestation is the beginning of culture. Of course, for Hegel, the modern differentiation of reason into its various scientific forms and developments was not to lead into a catastrophic reification and antagonism between science and religion, reason and faith. Rather, through its own “immanent critique” of itself in scientific, philosophical form, reason would march with seven-mile boots on the cold path of its own necessity and push through the negativity of the extremism of both an immediate, religious substantive intuition of truth as well as the positivism of a non-substantive science of “what is” toward its fulfillment in Absolute knowledge. No matter whether one agrees with Hegelian philosophy or not, already at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Hegel described the contemporary, murderous crises into which Modernity has fallen, which has been described by neo-conservatives as an ensuing “clash of civilizations” (Huntington 1996a, 1996b, 2004; Harrison & Huntington 2000.)

According to Habermas (1991:162), in analyzing the development of an enlightened modernity a century later, as well as disavowing the dynamic of Hegelian dialectical logic, Max Weber also depicted modernity as the result of the differentiation of the substantive reason of religious and metaphysical world-views into three *distinct* rationalized and specialized areas, which were only formally connected. As Hegel before, so too did Weber see modernity developing out of the fog of religious world-views that could no longer answer the increasing theodicy problems of real life. According to Weber, there was an intrinsic relationship between modernity and the process of disenchantment and secularization that occurred in Western civilization through what he termed Occidental rationalism (Weber 1958:13-31; Habermas 1984:143-271). Because of this, the substantive, ontological reason of an obsolete religion now became differentiated into the secular value spheres of the self-sufficient “expert cultures” of science, morality, and aesthetics, which operate according to their own distinct forms of rationality and their inherent validity claims. In addressing

questions of knowledge, the realm of science and scholarship is determined by a cognitive, instrumental and strategic rationality; in addressing questions of justice, the realm of morality operates by a moral, practical, communicative reason, and in addressing issues of taste or beauty, the realm of art utilizes an aesthetic, expressive rationality. According to Habermas, it was the intention of the Enlightenment *philosophes* that the differentiation and development of reason in its various forms would become the property not only of the system “experts” but would be disseminated for the consciousness and praxis of the people in the everyday life-world. The principles of the bourgeois Enlightenment were not only to increase humanity’s scientific knowledge for the technical domination of nature via instrumental reason, but were also to enable the development of humanity’s self-reflective consciousness in the form of a liberated subjectivity, which would result in the progressive, socio-historical creation of a more moral, just, happy and peaceful society.

It is quite obvious that this has not (yet) happened. The Enlightenment’s utopic vision of the progressive development of reason in creating a good, just and peaceful society has come to a halt due to the bifurcation of reason itself into opposing, schizophrenic realms: that of the highly specialized and bureaucratized social “System” that functions by means of an instrumental and strategic rationality according to the interests and needs of the trans-national capitalist class, and that of the everyday “Life-World,” which is founded upon communicative reason. Habermas (1979:97) describes this development as the bourgeoisie becoming cynical and apathetic about its own foundational ideals and norms, which have thus been systematically marginalized as to their importance, as exemplified by the social sciences drift it not purposive move into positivism, “the myth of things as they actually are” (Horkheimer & Adorno 1972:x) and the jettisoning from its content of any binding normative content. The secularization of Western culture into these three expert realms was also accompanied by the secularization and thus, rationalization of Western societal structures in accordance with the modern development and need of the capitalist economic system and a bureaucratic state organization. With the modern development and specialization of reason into differentiated and self-sufficient expert cultures, the everyday life-world of the general public and thus, of the everyday layperson/worker “who is an expert in daily life” was and is endangered of becoming increasingly alienated from and dominated by the advancements of such cultural and societal

modernization (Habermas 1987:chapt. 1-2; 1991:166). Modernity's systematically rationalized and bureaucratized expert cultures, now cut free from the dialectically conceived current of historical tradition, which is *abstractly* not *determinately* negated as being antiquated and thus, irrelevant, became tools of the now dominant instrumental/purposive rationality's drive for increasing productivity, exploitation and domination in the service of the global capitalist class pursuit of ever increasing surplus value and not the development of a more reconciled future society. Such a visionary, utopian promise for and potential of Modernity was and still is contained in the critical cultural expressions of aesthetics, religion and philosophy – Hegel's notion of the Absolute Spirit; those areas of human creativity that are expressive of communicative rationality. Thus, a dual schism occurs in Modernity between the expert cultures and the development of human tradition from which these cultures have come, as well as between the highly specialized System and the general public Life-world. The traditional, religious and metaphysical substance, language, symbols, rituals, and structures that provided meaning and a sense of identity and security for the masses, have now been devalued and undermined by the development of secular Modernity, which has itself been overwhelmed by the advancing one-dimensionality of Western culture's instrumental and strategic rationality that "alters the relation between the rational and the irrational" (Marcuse 1964:247; 2001:81-93, 122-162). It is this purposive and mechanical reason that, in the terms of Horkheimer, Adorno, Benjamin, Marcuse (1964:10f) and Habermas (1987, 1975a), has been systematically and by artifice "*introjected*" into human beings by the colonization of the everyday life-world by the system of the existing social totality. Such a dialectic of Enlightenment that systemically reinforces the normalization of the irrational being reasonable, wherein "war is peace, freedom is slavery, ignorance is strength" (Orwell 1949), has the very real potential of turning possible *citoyens* – those who are conscious of and live and act for the *universal* well being of humanity – into becoming *bourgeois* – self-centered and self-serving individual monads, who understand freedom only in particularized, subjectivistic manner, i.e. for themselves, and who having thus dispensed with serving universal purposes "are without wisdom" and "incapable of either virtue or bravery" (Hegel 1979, 1974:209; Arribas 2000:213-219.) When such conscious or unconscious conformity to alienating system integration efforts fail or are rejected, it is often then that people return to the pre-modern, traditional, quasi-naturalistic forms of identity

and will formation. In both first and third world countries, such a delimitation of the Life-world from the developments of societal and cultural modernization becomes a seedbed for the development of reactionary, religious fundamentalism against the further development of Modernity

### **Crisis of Modernity**

Due to the cultural and societal domination of instrumental and strategic rationalization, modernity has fallen into multiple “states of emergency” to quote Benjamin (1969:257), or maybe better termed in light of the language of this essay, the *theodicy* in modern form has raised its horrifying and deadly Hydra-head once again. In the face of this modern theodicy, there are many who claim that modernity and its ideals have failed, particularly in its cultural form. Above all, it has been the neo-conservatives theorists, politicians and media commentators who blame the crises of modernity on the ideals of the cultural enlightenment; ideals which are used to critique the modern theodicy of the systematically caused human suffering, degradation, horror and death of modern “civil” society; ideals that are said to contaminate the modern mentality with inflated expectations of universal notions of humanity’s worth, dignity, and inherent right to life, liberty, equality, justice, happiness, as well as to the material rights to food, clean water, housing, education, work, health care – all things that neo-conservatives say the given social system, its productive forces, and the State cannot guarantee; cultural ideals that are said to undermine the authority of the status quo and its traditions, particularly that of conservative, authoritarian “civil” religion; ideals that are said to be exhausted and dead, yet still propagated by misguided intellectuals. While advocates of post-modernism, post-enlightenment, *posthistoire*, as well as of anarchism and of religious fundamentalism seek in various ways the cancellation of a failed modernity, the neo-conservatives seek the cancellation of the cultural/emancipatory enlightenment, which they say has become “crystallized,” while they advocate for ever-greater financing of the continued advancement of the instrumental and technical rational enlightenment. According to the neo-conservative theory, the bourgeois enlightenment’s ideals, which are still contained within critical aspects of cultural modernity, have become exhausted and are no longer relevant due to the proven success of the autonomous, self-sufficient, self-promulgating, and

automatic system modernization based on instrumental and strategic reason.

### **Failed “Melodies”**

The modern development of reason’s bifurcation and reification into schizophrenic antagonism between religion and secularity/modernity holds out the dangerous contemporary possibility for the realization of Weber’s prognostication that modernity will ultimately end in the “iron cage” of a capitalistically dominated, totally administered society or in the un-ending war society expressed in neoconservative’s terms as the “clash of civilizations,” the U.S. policy of an “unending war on terror,” etc. Efforts to mitigate if not overcome this increasing antagonism of modernity have not been very successful. According to Habermas (1979:97f), this is particularly so for the “melodies of ethical socialism” that have failed in their revolutionary efforts to historically negate and transcend the crisis of modernity through the creation of a more reconciled society. Habermas (1979:95-129, 130-177; 1987b:106-130) specifically applies this epitaph to Marx’s historical materialistic critique of capitalism as well as to the critique of the first generation of critical theorists, particularly that of Horkheimer and Adorno.

As Habermas (1979:96) states, “from the very beginning there was a lack of clarity concerning the normative foundations of Marxian social theory.” Historical materialism was supposed to be a “critical” social theory, which was grounded in Marx’s materialistic appropriation of Hegel’s logic. The logos-logic of Hegel expresses the fundamental dynamic of dialectics, being that of “determinate negation” and what has come to be known as “immanent critique:” critiquing the objective, system and structures of – in this case – society by the norms upon which they are established (Hegel 1967, 1969; Adorno 1973; Marcuse 1960; Antonio 1981). Dialectical critique holds the so-called “real” in account to its proclaim “ideal,” the form to the content, what is done to that which is said. This dialectic Marx applied not to only the dominant bourgeois theories of society but also to the everyday life experiences and reports of people, classes, and nations that contradicted the theoretically expressed values, e.g. life, liberty, happiness, equality, solidarity, which were also incorporated into the revolutionary democratic constitutions of the time.

However, according to Habermas (1979:95-129, 130-177), Marx made the mistake of remaining within and thus, utilizing the modern philosophy of consciousness and its dualistic paradigm of subjectivity translated into the very same instrumental and strategic form of rationality – with its emphasis on the human potential of work and technology - in his attack on the capitalist construction and domination of the socio-economic forces of production. As he states, such a method can explain the development of the crisis of modern social disintegration, but it cannot resolve it. According to Habermas (1979:145f), the possibility of such new forms of social integration appeal to the domain of a moral-practical knowledge and to its evolutionary learning process, a process that cannot be reduced to instrumental or strategic rationality. As he states, the advance or evolution of the productive forces that are created by these forms of rationality does not produce more justice, equity, righteousness, peace but only new forms of labor organization. In the face of the system created, destabilizing and horror-producing global crisis that endangers modernity, the possibility of securing new forms of social integration through the critical appeal to and reflection on society's values and norms -which provides the pace-making potential for the creation of social change in the operation of the new social productive forces - belongs to communicative rationality and action which is oriented toward reaching understanding and consensus formation based on universal validity claims. Habermas' theory of communicative action is his attempt to reconstruct the liberating critique of historical materialism and thereby continue the project of enlightened modernity in its work to create the liberal democratic constitutional state.

Through his transforming of the evolutionary learning theories of Piaget and Kohlberg into his theory of communicative action, Habermas opens the door for the inclusion of the “cognitive” or semantic potential of marginal social groups and their world views, e.g. religion, entrance into the interpretive system of society. As he states, this inclusion of the cognitive or semantic potential of differing worldviews into the modern secular discourse of the public sphere can possibly contribute normatively to the creation of a new principle of social organization. The ideal result of this would be the creation of a new level of social integration that determinately negates the former system crisis. It is as the existing society's marginalized, if not demeaned and forgotten, interpretive systems' “potential” that the “other” cultural, religious,

political world-views critique of the “crisis” and its accompanying narrative, visionary expression of an alternative future can be anamnesticly re-membered and allowed into the public discourse (Habermas 2005b; Metz 1997). This analysis of the development and purpose of Habermas’ theory of communicative action sets the stage for understanding his recent focus on religion in the public sphere.

### **Self-Reflective Religion/Self-Referential Politics**

Habermas (2005a:148-149) states that it was Christianity that set “the cognitive initial conditions for the modern structures of consciousness” as well as the range of motivations, expressed in Weberian terms in the development of capitalism. According to him, Christianity is deeply rooted in the normative self-understanding of modernity.

Universalistic egalitarianism, from which sprang the ideals of freedom and a collective life in solidarity, the autonomous conduct of life and emancipation, the individual morality of conscience, human rights and democracy, is the direct legacy of the Judaic ethic of justice and the Christian ethic of love. ... There is no alternative to (this legacy.) ... We must draw sustenance now, as in the past, from this substance.

According to Habermas, the modern reality known as globalization has not provided a new orientation or a new form of consciousness to this heritage. The neoliberal and neoconservative globalization of capitalism is the continuation of its original principle and purpose of ever increasing profit accumulation for the owners of capital. It has functioned according to the same normative self-understanding since the end of the eighteenth century. Habermas agrees with Weber’s analysis of Protestant Christianity, that religion and the Church served an important role as pacemaker for this mentality. However, religion and the Church no longer have such a leadership role in the globalization of trans-national capitalism and the modern form of communication. Habermas states that Christianity is greatly affected and challenged by the consequences of this new infrastructure, as are other forms of the Hegelian “objective Spirit,” e.g. the family and the State (Hegel 1971:241-291; 1967b).

According to Habermas (2005a:149; 2005b:293-301), for the Christian church to meet the challenges of capitalist, neo-liberal, transnational globalization it must “re-appropriate its own normative potential more radically” in terms of being non-paternalistic, non-ethnocentrically “ecumenical” and by becoming more polycentric as a world church, in terms of the political theologians Johann Baptist Metz’s (1998, 1997, 1995, 1983, 1981, 1980, 1979, 1973, 1968) and Jürgen Moltmann’s (1996, 1992, 1990, 1981, 1977, 1975, 1974, 1972, 1969, 1967) work, as well as the work of Hans Küng (2007, 2000, 1995, 1992, 1991; Küng & Homolka 2009; Küng, et al. 1986). Modern faith must become self-reflective/reflexive. It is only through such self-critique that it can enter into a “universe of discourse” delimited by secular knowledge and shared with other religions. Such reflexive religion can thereby become, in John Rawls terms, a “reasonable comprehensive doctrine.”<sup>4</sup>

As a reactionary response to the modern theodicy experiences of preventable, needless human suffering and death, religious fundamentalism’s return in practicing and promoting the exclusivity of pre-modern religious attitudes is a false answer to the epistemological and socio-political situation. According to Habermas (2005a:153), the “only convincing criteria for criticizing the miserable state of our economically fragmented, stratified, and un-pacified global society” is modernity’s normative values of egalitarianism and universalism. As he says,

*The monstrously brutal process of global social modernization since the fifteenth century” that has lead to the “‘modern condition’ is without any clearly recognizable alternative. ... There is no reasonable exit-option left to us from a capitalist world society today.*

The transformation of global capitalism now seems possible only from within, which is concretely playing itself out presently throughout the West through the nationalization of the banks and corporations due to the unfolding crisis of the capitalist system. According to Habermas, a form of self-reflective, self-referential politics is needed, which would aim at strengthening capacities for political action itself, and at reigning in an uncontrolled economic dynamic both within and beyond what still counts as the authoritative level of nation-states.

According to Habermas, in the face of the antagonism between the secular and the religious, the West must return to its own cognitive resources in the secularly sublimated or determinately negated Judeo-Christian heritage of self-reflection, of de-centering one's own perspective, of taking the role of the other, and of self-critically distancing itself from its own traditions. The West must understand itself as only one voice among many "in the hermeneutical conversation between cultures." According to Habermas (2005a:155), the encounter with "'strong' alternative traditions" – secularism in scientific, political, cultural forms, Islam in the form of its Sharia laws, etc – gives the West a chance to become more fully aware, in a non-defensive, non-ethnocentric way, of its own roots in the Judeo-Christian tradition. These strong, "other" cultures can be the spur to reflection for intercultural understanding. All participants in this global discourse must become aware of their own particular mental/cultural presuppositions before they enter the discourse. This call of the social philosopher Habermas is strikingly similar to the work of the Catholic theologian, Hans Küng, for the creation of a "new world ethic" expressive of the reciprocity of the Golden Rule (Küng 2000, 1991; Küng & Homolka 2009.)

### **Methodological Atheism**

Habermas seeks to resist and overcome the dangerous reification of the modern divide between the religious and the secular, believers and non-believers, faith and knowledge. He does this through his turn to a linguistic paradigm and its validity claims that focuses on the human potential of language, memory, recognition. Even with this paradigm change, however, Habermas is in complete agreement with the first generation of critical theorists, particularly with Adorno, who understood his own critique of reification in terms of the prohibition against making images – the *Bilderverbot* – of the second Commandment of the Decalogue. Habermas (2005a:159) states: "With this intention, if not in the means of realizing it, I am in complete agreement with Adorno." As did the first generation of critical theorists, so Habermas through his emphasis on the methodological atheism of his linguistic paradigm change also attempted to determinately negate the prophetic, liberating and eschatological substance of Judaism and Christianity into his theory of communicative action. Eduardo Mendieta (2002:2-11), who has written on and documented much of

Habermas' writing on religion takes this a step further by saying that Habermas also determinately negated into his work the critical tradition of Jewish utopian Messianism of the first generation of critical theorists. As will be seen, Mendieta's statement is open to serious debate.

Habermas has no objection to the claim that his conception of language and of communicative action oriented toward mutual understanding is rooted in the legacy of Christianity. For him, the dynamic of reaching understanding – the concept of discursively directed agreement which measures itself against the standard of intersubjective recognition, that is, the double negation of criticizable validity claims – in his terms nourishes itself from the heritage of a *logos* understood as Christian, one that is indeed embodied in the communicative practice of the religious congregations. His relation to a theological heritage does not bother Habermas, as long as the methodological difference of the discourses is understood; as long as philosophical discourse conforms to the distinctive demands of justificatory speech, which he calls a methodological atheism. By means of this method, any proclamations of unconditional meaning must pass the test of consensus formation through “the tribunal of justificatory discourse” (Habermas 2005a:162.)

Through his linguistic paradigm change and the discursive validity claim of “understandability,” Habermas expresses the need for the universalistic and egalitarian semantic potential of religious myths, language, concepts, symbols, etc to be translated so as to enter as a discourse partner into the realm of the modern secular public sphere. By means of his focus on and development of the dialectical linguistic paradigm, Habermas continues - albeit in a much less negative or “dangerous” form - the first generation of critical theorists, particularly Horkheimer's, Adorno's and Benjamin's, emphasis on the need for an *inverse theology*<sup>6</sup>; one that maintains in terms of Adorno (2005:136) that “Nothing of theological content will persist without being transformed; every content will have to put itself to the test of migrating into the realm of the secular, the profane.”

Through such translation of religious content, both believing and non-believing citizens have the possibility of fulfilling the normative expectations of the liberal role of citizens in the realm of the public sphere of a post-secular society. The possibility of mutual recognition and respect of the “other” can then likewise be created when certain cognitive conditions and the corresponding epistemic attitudes are agreed upon

and shared. Habermas (2006a:4) calls this procedure “the deliberative mode of democratic will formation.”

### **Ethics of Citizenship**

Based on the notion of a common human reason come those basic rights that free and equal citizens must grant each other if they wish to govern their co-existence rationally by means of positive law. For Habermas, this democratic procedure is able to legitimate the social organization by two principles: 1.) the equal political participation of all citizens, who not only are subject to the law but are the law’s creators, and 2.) the epistemic dimension of a deliberation that grounds the *presumption of rationally* acceptable outcomes. According to Habermas, these two principles explain the kind of political virtues the liberal state must expect from its citizens. These two principles of democratic will formation are the conditions for the successful participation of all citizen’s – believers and non-believers - in the democratic self-determination of the secular society/state and define the “ethics of citizenship ... citizens are expected to respect one another as free and equal members of their political community” (Habermas 2006a:5). When confronted by a political problem, citizens are expected to look for a way to reach a rationally motivated agreement – “*they owe one another good reasons.*”

According to the universalistic principles of the Enlightenment that focus on the deliberative and inclusive procedures of democratic will formation, these two causes of the religious and the secular, and thus, of believers and non-believers are to complement each other. It is by means of this universal democratic purpose that the notion of tolerance receives its dynamic substance that goes beyond a particularizing/compartmentalizing “modus vivendi” approach to life and society, whereby, in Habermas’s terms, each citizen – believer or non-believer - must mutually concede one another the right to those convictions, practices and ways of living that they themselves reject (cf. Marcuse 1969). This concession must be supported by a shared basis of mutual recognition that can overcome the dissonance and alienation of otherness. The basis of recognition is “the awareness ... that the other is a member of an inclusive community of citizens with equal rights, in which each individual is accountable to the others for his/her political contributions” (Habermas 2008b:7). The

constitutional state provides the legal framework for the self-governing of free and equal citizens by means of the use of public reason, which requires citizen's to justify their political statements, attitudes, actions before one another in light of a reasonable interpretation of valid constitutional principles. "Only those political decisions are taken to be legitimate that have been *impartially justified* in light of generally accessible reasons" (Habermas 2006a:5)

### **"Institutional Translation Proviso"**

Habermas recognizes the dialectical relationship between the separate entities of the state and the individual. Neither side can negate or subsume the other into itself. Thus, for Habermas, the secular state must not apply the institutional separation of church and state, religion and politics, faith and knowledge to the individual. For believers, such a requirement could produce an undue mental and psychological burden on the person. This would be an *asymmetrical* burden on the people of faith, since secular citizens are not required to perform a similar translation effort. The secular State must remain "sensitive to the force of articulation inherent in religious languages" – for its "semantic potential - in order to fairly search for "reasons that aim at universal acceptability" (Habermas 2003:109) The boundary between religious and secular reasons "are fluid." Both sides must be involved in determining these disputed boundaries, which requires both sides to take on the perspective of the other one.

Yet, every citizen must recognize that they live in a secular state, which is to exercise its political authority in an impartial manner. They must know and accept that only "secular reasons count" in the institutional political realm. Yet, according to Habermas (2006a:10), the only thing that is required of the faithful is the epistemic ability to *consider one's own faith reflexively from the outside* – by taking the role of the other – and thus, relate their faith to secular views. This is what he terms the secular "*institutional translation proviso*" that people of faith are to recognize, which prevents them from the schizophrenic requirement to split their identity into religious (private) and secular (public) parts. Religious people must be allowed to express their convictions in a religious language "if they cannot find secular 'translations' for them" (Habermas 2006a:10). Knowing that they are part of a secular state, wherein they are both the creators and subjects of the law, religious people can express themselves in

religious language and images, knowing also that the institutional translation proviso applies to their speech acts. They have to trust that their religious language will be correctly translated into secular form. Thus, for Habermas, the political use of private religious reasons is not proscribed since religious traditions, particularly the Abrahamic, prophetic religions have the ability to give voice to moral intuitions that give expression to the suffering of innocent victims – the theodicy problem.

Thus, religious materials of comprehensive world-views can be expressed in the discourses of the public sphere. However, the translations of religious material must take place before it reaches the political institutions, i.e., the *political* public sphere. According to Habermas, this is the only acceptable way for the truth content of religious contributions to enter the political institutional discourse. As Habermas states, this translation must be a cooperative task. Believers and non-believers must be involved in the translation effort. This requires that the secular, non-believers also, however, must open their minds to the possible truth content of the religious presentations. By means of such dialogues with people of faith, their religious reasons might well emerge in the transformed guise of generally accessible arguments.

### **Reciprocity of Expectations**

This discursive procedure of translation in mutual respect and recognition is what Habermas (2006a13) calls the “reciprocity of expectations among citizens,” who owe one another reasons for their political statements and attitudes. It is this that distinguishes a community integrated by constitutional values from a community segmented along the dividing lines of competing world views. This principle of reciprocity is violated when the religious citizenry and institutions are given an asymmetrical burden of having to learn and adapt to the dominant secular form of reason and thereby, translate their religious language into secular form. Secular citizens do not share this same responsibility.

The duty to ‘make public use of reason’ can only be discharged under certain cognitive preconditions. Required epistemic attitudes [ways of knowing] are the expression of a given mentality and cannot, like motives, be made the substance of normative expectations and political appeals.

Every 'ought' presupposes a 'can.' The normative expectations of an ethics of citizenship have absolutely no impact unless a required change in mentality has been forthcoming first...

(Habermas 2006a:13)

Secular citizens, who are expected to cooperate with their religious counterparts, must also be expected to perform a self-reflective transcending of a secularist self-understanding of Modernity.

Under the normative premises of the constitutional state, the admission of religious statements to the political public sphere only makes sense if all citizens can be expected not to deny from the outset any possible cognitive substance to these contributions – while at the same time respecting the precedence of secular reasons and the institutional translation requirement. ... An epistemic mindset is presupposed here that would originate from a self-critical assessment of the limits of secular reason.

(Habermas 2006a:15).

According to Habermas, in the absence of such cognitive preconditions, a public use of reason cannot be imputed to citizens. As Habermas states, this cognitive precondition for his ethics of citizenship, which is to be expected equally from all citizens – religious and secular, is expressive of all citizens undergoing a complementary learning process.

### **Complementary Learning Process of Believers and Non-Believers**

As has been stated, for Habermas, in any democratic order, all citizens must be included as equals in civil society. This is the expectation and demand of a constitutional state for an ethics of citizenship. Religious citizens and communities are expected “to appropriate the secular legitimation of constitutional principles under the premises of their own faith” (Habermas 2008:10). This requires a mutual interpretation and translation of both the secular constitutional ideals as well as the religious stories, images, symbols, etc. into their semantic potential. This requires a

shift from a traditional to a more *reflexive* religious consciousness and epistemic attitudes. This requires a *learning process* – a mutual, complementary learning process that can be fostered but not morally or legally stipulated or forced on others.

In a constitutional state, all norms that can be legally implemented must be formulated and publicly justified in a language that all citizens understand. The state's neutrality with regards to religion does not preclude the permissibility of religious utterances within the political public sphere. As Habermas (2008:11) states, "The 'separation of church and state' calls for a *filter* between these two spheres – a filter through which only 'translated', i.e., secular contribution may pass from the confused din of voices in the public sphere into the formal agendas of state institutions." Thus, the democratic state must not pre-emptively reduce the polyphonic complexity of the diverse public voices, because it cannot know whether it is not otherwise cutting society off from scarce resources for the generation of meanings and the shaping of identities. Both the religious and the non-religious citizens are called to a "higher," self-reflective political universal of democratic will formation and purpose that requires them to treat each other with mutual respect and recognition as citizens and human beings in the struggle to create a more reconciled future society. To treat the other with "disrespect" would be to revert to the level of a mere "modus vivendi," which destroys the other and the possibility of democracy itself.

### **Something's Missing**

As stated above, Habermas understands religion to be essentially obsolete in addressing the issues of modern, secular society. However, religion may nevertheless contain a still relevant "epistemic," "semantic potential" in a pre-modern, intuitive form, which can be ascertained for any possible contributions to the secular socio-political spheres of discourse only through its translation from its religious and thereby particularistic hermeneutical, "strong" ontological form into a secular, universalistic, normative expression according to the validity claims of language and the discourse ethics of communicative action in the agreed upon work of creating a democratic constitutional state. The standard by which the so-called semantic potential of religion is to be judged for such modern relevancy is the liberal Enlightenment's ideal notion of the democratic constitutional state and its universal conception of human rights and

norms, norms and rights - as Habermas acknowledges - that are rooted in the world religions of the Axial Age, particularly that of Judaism and Christianity in Western civilization. However, a question arises as to whether the semantics of religion can be fully, truthfully, comprehensibly and thus, meaningfully translated by the standard of such a political ideal? *Something's missing*.

This statement comes from Bertolt Brecht's (2007) 1930 epic drama/opera entitled *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*. In a 1964 public discussion between Adorno and Ernst Bloch (1988:1-17) on the topic of the contradictions of utopian longing, Bloch quoted Brecht's statement that "something's missing" and applied that critique to modernity and its historical development. According to Bloch, that "something" is *utopia*, the hope and longing for that which is other than what is, if not also for the totally "Other." I end this essay with this very same critique from Brecht and Bloch, that there is "something missing" in Habermas' theory of religion and its relevance in critically addressing the crisis or theodicy of modernity. There are many issues that could be addressed here, but I focus only on one: Habermas' lack of serious attention given to the revolutionary religious critique and call for the negation of the *negative*, of the "slaughter-bench" (Hegel 1956:21) and increasing barbarity of history – the modern theodicy, particularly in addressing its concrete, globalizing manifestations in neoliberal capitalism and Western imperialism.

***Religion and Theodicy:*** As stated in the introduction to this essay, the dynamic substance of all religions is expressed in how they address and resolve the concrete theodicy problem of the suffering of the innocent experienced in nature but especially experienced in society and history. The substantive importance of a religion rises and falls historically based on its ability to resolve the theodicy according to its historical place in the evolutionary learning process. As Siebert (1994:153; 2010) states, for Habermas, the mythical, religious-metaphysical world-views have disintegrated "because even their most sophisticated theological answers to the theodicy problem have fallen far behind the problem-consciousness of the modern everyday life-world." As Habermas (2003:114) states, his theory of communicative action in the modern context of a post-secular society "continues the work, for religion itself, that religion did for myth" in the attempt to salvage religion's "scarce resource of meaning." According to Habermas, the universal mode of "nondestructive secularization" is the method of translation that can recover that which has "almost [been] forgotten, but

implicitly missed,” namely, the sense of moral feeling, which has been expressed so far only by religious language. In a similar fashion, Mendieta (2005:2) states that Habermas’ modern, secular approach of methodological atheism is not the rejection but the dialectical sublation of the substance of the Judeo-Christian traditions. I agree with both of these statements at the formal, methodological level. However, what is missing in Habermas’ appropriation of religion into his theory is the *substantive* religious *outrage* expressed in the Abrahamic, prophetic religions at the crushing of the life and happiness chances of the *anawim* – the workers, the poor, the humble, the powerless – for the gain of the socially dominant. The Biblical texts and the Koran are filled with the condemnation of such exploitation, domination and murder. This prophetic, Messianic, and eschatological condemnation of such socially constructed horror and negativity and its moral demand that these conditions be negated in an *immediate* if not revolutionary manner (e.g. the story of the call of Moses and the Exodus (Exodus 3-15); the revolutionary task and action of Elijah – the “troubler of Israel” (1 Kings 18-19) and Jeremiah’s prophetic appointment over nations and kingdoms, “to pluck up and pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and plant” that which is new (Jeremiah 1:10), through John the Baptist’s demand to “bear fruits worthy of repentance” by acting immediately to negate the negativity of human need (Luke 3) to Jesus’ reference to his followers “to deny themselves and take up their cross and follow” him in living for the eschatological new creation of God and its righteousness by bringing the good news of liberation and redemption to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and to let the oppressed go free (Mark 8:34-38, Matthew 6:33, Luke 4:18-19) are completely missing in Habermas’ formal and ideal pragmatic. In the inner or immanent critique of the prophetic and eschatological texts is heard the demand that the theodicy be immediately addressed; that the cry of “*Hurry for me!*” is answered in the here and now. In Habermas’ theory, as important as it is in the struggle for a future reconciled society, the socio-ethical revolutionary substance of religion is pushed to the margins as it is leveled into becoming a possible contributing partner for the furtherance of the Enlightenment’s liberal political program.

*Religious “Ekstasis”*: As Karen Armstrong (2009:chapt. 1, esp. pgs. 8, 10) states, “Religion is hard work. Its insights are not self-evident and have to be cultivated in the same way as an appreciation of art, music, or poetry must be developed. ... Like

art, the truths of religion require the disciplined cultivation of a different mode of consciousness” – a mode of consciousness and praxis that inspires the hope-giving desire and motivation for otherness, transcendence, *ekstasis* (stepping outside the existing norm): for answering the theodicy question. It is precisely this mode of consciousness that the dominant if not victorious form of secular reason in its instrumental and strategic forms has labored so hard to expunge. How then is such an essential prophetic and eschatological dynamic of religion to be translated into modern secular form for inclusion in the public sphere discourse, when the needed consciousness for such translation is so systematically damaged if not missing?

Prior to his more mature expression of the theory of communicative action, Habermas (1997:167) stated this very concern of the capitalist domination of the societal productive forces and the resulting colonization of modern culture and the life-world.

Modern culture can be successfully linked back up to a practice of everyday life *that is dependent on vital traditions* but impoverished by mere traditionalism *only if* social modernization too can be guided into other, non-capitalist directions, and if the life world can develop, on its own, institutions that will lie outside the borders of the inherent dynamics of the economic and administrative systems.  
[Emphasis added by author.]

Habermas states that the possibility of such a change is not good, but the desire for such a change arises from within the Enlightenment itself due to its hijacking and perversion by capitalism. However, in similar fashion to the marginalization of the revolutionary substance of religion, it is just this historical materialist analysis of class struggle and the crisis of capitalism that is “displaced to the margins of intellectual discourse” by Habermas (Snedeker 2000:240) As an idealistic rational *formal* process, Habermas’ communicative ethics is almost irrefutable as an inter-subjectivistic paradigm for establishing rational, consensually derived decisions and forms of action. However, in the face of technological rationality, as the latest transmutation of the idea of Reason into the “profitable insanity” of “incestuous reasoning” (Marcuse 2001:158-159), whereby reason is no longer understood as the negation of the

domination and repression of humanity and nature but rather as submission to the facts of life of an increasing class dominated, “irrationally rational” bureaucratically controlled (totally administered) and militaristic society bent of defending and imperialistically extending globally the power of the capitalist elite, the rational structures of communicative action as theodicy are not strong enough by themselves to bring about this newness. They also become susceptible to and essentially already have been colonized, and thus dialectically inverted, into being tools of the oppressive status quo. Such a critique does in no way disqualify the validity claims of communicative action. They remain intact, at least at the theoretical level. What Adorno (1973:3) said concerning the present viability of philosophy, applies to the discourse ethics of Habermas’ theory of communicative action: The conditions for its realization have not yet materialized as the forces that prevent their realization are still in place, wounded – constantly self-wounded by their own contradictions, but nevertheless, still dominant.

To use Habermas’ own analogy, his communicative action theory is playing a completely other game than that of the capitalistically dominated game of chess, orchestrated to its own class advantage. Yet, in its present form, Habermas’ game reduces not only religion but also the historical/dialectical materialist social revolutionary purpose into the philosophical ideal of communicative praxis. As such, Habermas’ theory does not take seriously enough the horror of the negative and the need for its determinate negation. It does not take seriously enough the chasm between the ideal and real, between the inter-subjective praxis of creating consensus among people through discourse according to the principles of universal validity claims and the hard, cold, deadly reality of the existing authoritarian class system that distorts language and forms of communication, not to speak of culture itself into forms of domination and conformity to “what is.” The issues of the globalizing system and structures of domination, exploitation and the resulting suffering and horror of billions of people every day are glossed over in the attempt to find a paradigm “abstract” enough to apply to all socio-historical systems and thereby legitimate the “moral-practical” linguistic turn to communicative action as the dynamic for the reconstruction of historical materialism and as a type of secular process for the continuation of the relevant religious norms in the public sphere discourse. In this, the revolutionary teeth and thus, critical and liberating bite of historical materialism and of the prophetic religions – whose humanistic substance was dialectically incorporated

into its socio-historical critique and goal - is seriously dulled by Habermas' abstract system analysis and focus on universal pragmatics. Unlike the practical historical revolutionary goal of Marxism, and of the prophetic religions, Habermas' reconstruction of both historical materialism and of religion is too tolerant of the negative, too pragmatic – which is determined not so much by the “ought” of morality but by what is “possible” according to the established social system.

*The Future of the Critical Theory:* It is for this reason – and others – that Habermas' theory of communicative action – as an essential component of the revolutionary struggle for human enlightenment, liberation, redemption and happiness - needs to be incorporated dialectically with the first generation critical theorists determinate negation of historical materialism and religion in terms of negative dialectics, in order to allow their synergetic - in terms of Benjamin's (1969:253) image of the chess-playing automaton/historical materialism who will win all challenges with the assistance of the ugly hunchback/theology that has to keep out of sight - critiques of the existing crises of globalizing capitalism and Western Imperialism as well as their visions of an alternative, more reconciled, global human future to be more relevant and potent in the historical struggle. Communication aimed at not only consensual understanding and action, but also toward an alternative, reconciled social system has to break out of the control of the irrationally organized (instrumental and strategic) rational system of domination. Communicative action is certainly a part of this liberational struggle, but the class domination of the productive forces and relations will not be broken by discursive reason alone. In the name and for the life of those who have been and are suffering and dying due to the positivistically, scientifically rationalized irrationality of the globalizing capitalist system of exploitation and domination (Benjamin 1969:253-264), the system of production and distribution needs to be universalized in terms of political democracy and economic socialism. This means revolution, however a social revolution that incorporates the self-critical and consensus validity claims of communicative action as well as the dialectical morality of the Golden Rule. Both forms of the Critical Theory, that of the “earlier and undeniably more radical” first generation of Horkheimer, Adorno, Benjamin, Marcuse, et al. and that of Habermas, need to be dialectically united in the wrestling match with the negativity of Modernity. It is here that the critical theory of religion can be understood as a connecting bridge to not only the extremes within the theory itself, but even more so to determinately

negate the contemporary divide between the religious and the secular for the possible creation of a more reconciled, just, good, happy and peaceful future world.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See Habermas' explanation of the historical development of this term into legal state policy in "Religious Tolerance as Pacemaker for Cultural Rights" in Jürgen Habermas. 2008a. *Between Naturalism and Religion: Philosophical Essays*. Malden, MA: Polity Press, Chapter 9.
- <sup>2</sup> According to the burgeoning doctrine of liberalism in the economic and political domains of early liberal capitalism, reason, in its public or socio-political manifestation, was the method through which people's individual autonomy and their possessions, particularly those of capitalist class, were made legally secure against any external (particularly the working class) threats through the establishment of laws as well as their agencies of enforcement, which maintained and guarded the order of the status quo.

It is precisely this early, modern, "liberal" conception of reason in its secular form that has been systematically constructed into being an instrumental and strategic hand-maiden in the historical development of the various "stages" of capitalism – from its incipient liberal/market stage, through monopoly capitalism, to the present-day transnational-corporate/globalizing/"imperialistic" form. Today, the human and environmental costs of this development in the pursuit of ever-greater corporate class profits on the back of exploited and thus, ever-cheaper labor and natural resource costs have been tragically experienced and witnessed by so-called Third-World or "Peripheral" countries and the global working class. The neo-liberal, capitalist globalization policies, as advanced by Western dominant transnational corporations and banks, the International Monetary Fund (IMF and their "Structural Adjustment Programs" now renamed as "Poverty Reduction Strategy Policy") and the World Bank have resulted in not only the 1997 Asian market collapse – from which these countries have not yet recovered, but also the present (2007-?) global "Great Recession," resulting (as of December 2009 in the United States alone) in the official number of unemployed persons, at 15.3 million, and the unemployment rate at 10.0 %. As stated in the January 8, 2010 Economic

News Release: Employment Situation Summary, produced by the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the United States Department of Labor ([www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm](http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm)), these figures are double of what they were when the recession started in December 2007. The loss of jobs has resulted in over one million home foreclosures in the U.S., all the while corporate profits have reached their highest levels in five years (Damon 2009). This is coupled with the neo-conservative holocaust of an estimated 95,062 – 103,718 civilian deaths from violence due to the U.S. led coalition invasion, war and occupation of Iraq beginning on March 19, 2003 and continuing to the present (January 19, 2010) costing over \$700 billion, and an estimated 12,436 civilian deaths plus 1,596 coalition forces deaths in the Afghanistan war (Operation Enduring Freedom January 19, 2010) costing over \$250 billion.

- 3 See the short article on the two sides of the European spirit, only one of which is expressive of the instrumental, technological rationalism of domination and exploitation that is here expressed as Eurocentricism, by Johann-Baptist Metz, entitled “Freedom in Solidarity: The Rescue of Reason” in Johann-Baptist Metz and Jürgen Moltmann’s *Faith and the Future: Essays on Theology, Solidarity, and Modernity*. 1995. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, pp. 72-78.
- 4 The resistance against such work of becoming self-reflexive, or - from a religious perspective - becoming more faithful to the mystical and political *imitatio Christi*, was expressed to me by a parishioner during the last year my 25 years as an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ. During the last month of a very contentious last year (March 2001) of my 12 year pastorate at this particular church, a female parishioner told me that “we (the members of the congregation) don’t want to learn anything. We don’t want to change anything. We just want to sing our hymns and keep our traditions.” This women had her finger on the pulse of the established members of this congregation – and thus, those who financed the church’s operations - who were becoming increasingly threatened by the church’s programmatic socio-political implementation of the incarnational and thus, ethical and eschatological call of Jesus that “*if any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me*” (Mark 8:34). Another long time member of the church expressed this same sentiment when he said, “I joined this church years ago because all I had to do was come and sit in the

pew. Now, *you* want us to get up and do something. I don't like it!" In developing C.K. Chesterton's statement of people's fear of four words, "God was made human," Slavoj Žižek (2009:26) gives expression to, what I assert to be, the *unconscious* theological fear that lies behind these statements of church members in taking the incarnational–ethical–eschatological substance of the Christian *evangelion* too seriously. Theology is an element but not the primary issue here. Rather, the far more conscious and thus, driving fear expressed by these statements - a fear that cannot be reduced to mere subjectivism - to the private opinions of two church members since they express that which has become much more normative in the Western bourgeois church - is the fear of the faith's call to radical, revolutionary-world transforming historical *change* both at the existential and socio-economic-political levels. It is the fear of losing one's identity, position, security and thus "life," which has been created within the established social class antagonism of capitalism. The Judeo-Christian proclamation of the incarnational-in-breaking of God into history that calls for the abrupt end of the progressive continuum of history and its horror (Hegel 1956:21f; 1967a:808; Benjamin 1969:253-264, esp. #IX), through the liberational breaking-out of humanity from all forms of domination, exploitation, alienation, hopelessness, and fear for the purpose of creating "a real state of emergency" in the historical struggle for a more reconciled future society and ultimately for the New Creation of God – the very normative substance that Habermas states that the Christian church must "re-appropriate" – is precisely the religious semantics and truth that has been re-enchanted into a civil religion by the religion of capitalism (Benjamin 1996:288-291); a "pagan" religion of particularity and privilege that has colonized, evangelized, and thus, parasitically bled the Christian church of its universal, revolutionary substance.

- <sup>5</sup> For the meaning of this critical concept see: "Letter 27, Berlin 17 December 1934," "Letter 39, Hornberg, 2-4 August, 1935," and "Letter 25, 5 December 1934" in Adorno, Theodor W. 1999. *Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin: The Complete Correspondence, 1928 – 1940*. Henri Lonitz (Ed.) Nicholas Walker (Tr.) Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press; Adorno, Theodor W. 1973. *Negative Dialectics*. E. B. Ashton (Tr.), New York, NY: The Seabury Press, p. 207; Adorno, Theodor W. 1974. *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*.

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# Next challenge: Community Development and Superintelligence

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## Abstract

Artificial Intelligence has the potential to empower humans through enhanced learning and performance. But if this potential is to be realized and accepted the social and ethical aspects as well as the technical must be addressed. Superintelligence will be smarter than the best human brains in practically every field, including scientific creativity, general wisdom and social skills. So we must consider it an important factor for making decisions in our social life and especially in community development. There are some writers who neglect the positive role of Superintelligence to this process because of powerful private sector interests, but I think we must be optimist and change our ideas about new generation of Robots. We can teach them the human values and create friendly artificial intelligence which will develop our community in next decades. The most important problem will be the quality of representing the human values like freedom, liberality, tolerance, faith, certainty, and etc in the form of semantics.

## Keywords

*Community Development, Artificial Intelligence, Superintelligence, Friendly Artificial Intelligence*

## Introduction

Artificial Intelligence is all around us. Intelligent agents are widely used. The physical embodiment of agents, robots, are also becoming more widely used. Robots are used to explore the oceans and other worlds, being able to travel in environments inhospitable to humans. It is still not the case, as was once predicted, that robots are widely used by households. Expert systems are used by doctors to help with symptoms that are hard to diagnose or to prescribe treatments in cases where even human experts have difficulty. Artificial Intelligence Systems are used in a wide range of industries, from helping travel agents select suitable holidays to enabling factories to schedule machines. Artificial Intelligence is particularly useful in situations where traditional methods would be too slow. Combinatorial problems, such as scheduling teachers and pupils to classrooms, are not well solved by traditional computer science techniques. Many computer games have been designed based on Artificial Intelligence. It is likely that Artificial Intelligence will become more prevalent in our society. And whether or not we eventually create an Artificial Intelligence that is truly intelligent, we are likely to find computers, machines, and other objects appearing to become more intelligent—at least in terms of the way they behave.<sup>1</sup>

“And then We create out of the drop of sperm a germ-cell, and then We create out of the germ-cell an embryonic lump, and then We create within the embryonic lump bones, and then We clothe the bones with flesh - and then We bring [all] this into being as a new creation: hallowed, therefore, is God, the best of artisans!” [Al-Mu'minun:14]. The high position of human's creature in the world constitutes one of the religious thoughts bases. If human create Superintelligence in future, our belief to that reality will not change, because we consider Superintelligence as an effect of human mind and creativity and the law of causality proves that the existence of effect depends on the cause, so I believe that Superintelligence will not damage our life as we see in Hollywood films, but the values of human which organize our better intellectual life

must be programmed in Superintelligence, and with this approach we can solve the challenge between community development and Superintelligence, we can call it Friendly Artificial Intelligence.

### **Notion of Community Development**

Despite of widely usage of this broad term we can see large variety of concepts about it. The most people use it for constructional activities and their measurement about development is not far away from the altitude of buildings, their luxuries, quality of roads and etc. we can name this concept as constructive development. The others maybe consider the development as the improvement in these fields: quality of education, number of schools, universities, academies, and scientific centers. We can call this kind of development as scientific development. There are many applications and usages for this term in our conversations like economic development which depends on level of investments, and increasing the number of factories, or political development which depends on plurality of parties, newspapers, and many other things. This term applied to the practices and academic disciplines of civic leaders, activists, involved citizens and professionals to improve various aspects of local communities. Community development seeks to empower individuals and groups of people by providing these groups with the skills they need to effect change in their own communities. A defining feature of community development is that the work proceeds from the perspectives and interests of communities themselves, with an overall goal of the establishment of sustainable capacity and infrastructure to support on-going and future activities and engagement. Community development aims to re-shape relationships within and between communities and organizations, so as to strengthen the foundations for collective action and partnership working. This includes changing power relations as well as extending the reach of social networks.<sup>2</sup>

Three important elements were identified<sup>3</sup>:

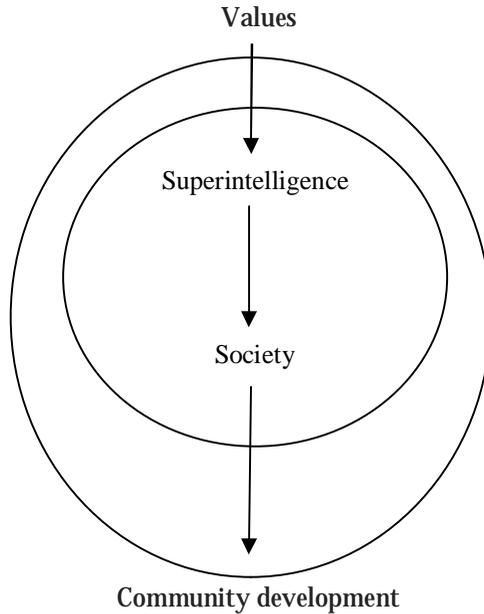
- § A concern with social and economic development.
- § The fostering and capacity of local co-operation and self-help.
- § The use of expertise and methods drawn from outside the local community.

Within this there does appear to be a certain contradiction. Community development emphasizes participation, initiative and self help by local communities but is usually sponsored by national governments as part of a national plan. While from one side it can be seen as the encouragement of local initiative and decision making, from the other it is a means of implementing and expediting national policies at the local level and is a substitute for, or the beginning of, local government<sup>4</sup>.

The focus on the social and economic, local and global, also helps to situate debates about community development - and the disillusionment with its achievements that was widespread in many Southern countries by the 1970s. Many governments, particularly in Africa, failed to provide adequate financial support but nevertheless extolled the virtues of self-help. Community development was soon recognized by the people to amount to little more than a slogan which brought few tangible benefits<sup>5</sup>.

**Community Development.** Community development was seen as emphasizing self-help, mutual support, the building up of neighborhood integration, the development of neighborhood capacities for problem-solving and self-representation, and the promotion of collective action to bring a community's preferences to the attention of political decision-makers.

Community developers must understand both how to work with individuals and how to affect communities' positions within the context of larger social institutions. "The process of developing active and sustainable communities based on social justice and mutual respect. It is about influencing power structures to remove the barriers that prevent people from participating in the issues that affect their lives. Community workers (officers) facilitate the participation of people in this process. They enable connections to be made between communities and with the development of wider policies and programs. Community Development expresses values of fairness, equality, accountability, opportunity, choice, participation, mutuality, reciprocity and continuous learning. Educating, enabling and empowering are at the core of Community Development. I think that community development is conscious social activity that contains the spiritual and material life of the society. We must give the high consideration to the role of human values, spiritual aspect of human being and his cultural and educational inquiries, and to the role of experts and community workers and politic leaders or officers in the community development. This chart illustrates the relationship between these elements:



Many things are said about community development and there is no need to mention them here. I want to emphasize on two important elements in my paper in this conference: community development and Artificial Intelligence, community development and values.

### **What are Artificial Intelligence, friendly AI, and Superintelligence?**

John McCarthy defines it as making intelligent machines especially intelligent computer programs by the science and engineering. It is related to the similar task of using computers to understand human intelligence, but AI does not have to confine itself to methods that are biologically observable.<sup>6</sup> Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the area of computer science focusing on creating machines that can engage on behaviors that humans consider intelligent. Intelligent agents can plan and adapt plans to respond to changes in circumstances; they can recognize what is significant in a situation; they can learn new concepts from old; they can interact and learn from their

environment; they can exercise aesthetic appreciation.<sup>7</sup> The ability to create intelligent machines has intrigued humans since ancient times and today with the advent of the computer and 50 years of research into AI programming techniques, the dream of smart machines is becoming a reality. Researchers are creating systems which can mimic human thought, understand speech, beat the best human chess player, and countless other feats never before possible. Find out how the military is applying AI logic to its hi-tech systems, and how in the near future Artificial Intelligence may impact our lives. Artificial Intelligence, or AI for short, is a combination of computer science, physiology, and philosophy. AI is a broad topic, consisting of different fields, from machine vision to expert systems. The element that the fields of AI have in common is the creation of machines that can "think". In order to classify machines as "thinking", it is necessary to define intelligence. To what degree does intelligence consist of, for example, solving complex problems, or making generalizations and relationships? And what about perception and comprehension? Research into the areas of learning, of language, and of sensory perception have aided scientists in building intelligent machines. One of the most challenging approaches facing experts is building systems that mimic the behavior of the human brain, made up of billions of neurons, and arguably the most complex matter in the universe. Perhaps the best way to gauge the intelligence of a machine is British computer scientist Alan Turing's test. He stated that a computer would deserve to be called intelligent if it could deceive a human into believing that it was human. Artificial Intelligence has come a long way from its early roots, driven by dedicated researchers. The beginnings of AI reach back before electronics, to philosophers and mathematicians such as Boole and others theorizing on principles that were used as the foundation of AI Logic. AI really began to intrigue researchers with the invention of the computer in 1943. The technology was finally available, or so it seemed, to simulate intelligent behavior. Over the next four decades, despite many stumbling blocks, AI has grown from a dozen researchers, to thousands of engineers and specialists; and from programs capable of playing checkers, to systems designed to diagnose disease. AI has always been on the pioneering end of computer science. Advanced-level computer languages, as well as computer interfaces and word-processors owe their existence to the research into Artificial Intelligence. The theory and insights brought about by AI research will set the trend in the future of computing. The products available today are only bits and pieces of what are soon to

follow, but they are a movement towards the future of Artificial Intelligence. The advancements in the quest for Artificial Intelligence have, and will continue to affect our jobs, our education, and our lives.

By a "Superintelligence" we mean an intellect that is much smarter than the best human brains in practically every field, including scientific creativity, general wisdom and social skills. This definition leaves open how the Superintelligence is implemented: it could be a digital computer, an ensemble of networked computers, cultured cortical tissue or what have you. It also leaves open whether the Superintelligence is conscious and has subjective experiences.<sup>8</sup>

### **Community Development and Superintelligence**

Expert means a person who has special skill or knowledge in some particular field. In this century the information is a main power in society, and the experts who owes this opportunity can influence on the society, and I think in the future instead of human experts we will face with expert system in Artificial Intelligence technology. It will be our challenge in future and I think we must give a high consideration to this problem for next decades. The new generation of computers will be able to do millions operations at a moment. Most AI work today does not require any philosophy, because the system being developed doesn't have to operate independently in the world and have a view of the world. The designer of the program does the philosophy in advance and builds a restricted representation into the program. We have been studying this issue of AI application for quite some time now and know all the terms and facts. But what we all really need to know is what we can represent human values in a formal manner. One conclusion from artificial intelligence research is that solving even apparently simple problems usually requires lots of knowledge. Properly understanding a single sentence requires extensive knowledge both of language and of the context. How can we as programmers represent the concept of fairness -in the human life as an important base for community development- in meaningful way for Supperintelligence. Consider what someone from another planet would make of a typical newspaper headline, knowing nothing of Earth politics and practices, and armed only with an English dictionary! Properly understanding a visual scene similarly requires knowledge of the kinds of objects that might appear in the scene. Solving problems in a particular

domain generally requires knowledge of the objects in the domain and knowledge of how to reason in that domain-both these types of knowledge must be represented. To represent knowledge in a meaning way it is important that we can relate facts in a formal representation scheme to facts in the real world. The semantics of a representational language provides a way of mapping between expression in a formal language and the real world.<sup>9</sup>

Knowledge of development is information about better social life for human and we can describe these terms and conditions by their properties. There are many ways to represent objects. These objects concern to development are complex objects and a complex object may be composed of many other objects. This is a kind of reductionism. The reductionism position is that the complex behavior of the mind may in principle be reduced to similar rules and laws which may be complex but which can be investigated and understood.<sup>10</sup> Cultural development, economic development, scientific development, and finally community developments depend on many wide areas of human knowledge and values which are accepted with all human beings and they will be presented in formal ways to be known by Superintelligence and these new creations will influence on our life.

We should be prepared for a change. Our conservative ways stand in the way of progress. AI is a new step that is very helpful to the society and its development. Machines can do jobs that require detailed instructions followed and mental alertness. AI with its learning capabilities can accomplish those tasks but only if the worlds conservatives are ready to change and allow this to be a possibility. I am not worry about how we can construct this powerful program which will be smarter than the best human brain, but I am worry about how we lead them to human values. I am worry about the worst of AI. There are so many things that can go wrong with a new system so we must be as prepared as we can be for this new technology. AIs are like children that need to be taught to be kind, well mannered, and intelligent. If they are to make important decisions, they should be wise. We as citizens need to make sure AI programmers are keeping things on the level. We should be sure they are doing the job correctly, so that no future accidents occur. AI is what Nick Bostrom calls an existential risk: "One where an adverse outcome would either annihilate Earth-originating intelligent life or permanently and drastically curtail its potential." In particular, most forms of unfriendly AI would constitute a "Bang" - "Earth-originating

intelligent life goes extinct in relatively sudden disaster resulting from either an accident or a deliberate act of destruction." Within Nick Bostrom's list of Bangs, sorted by probability, "badly programmed Superintelligence" is number four out of eleven<sup>11</sup>. Artificial Intelligence, as an ultratechnology, does not exist in isolation. There are other kinds of advancing technologies; nanotechnology, biotechnology, and nuclear technology, for example. Artificial Intelligence is unique among the ultratechnologies in that it can be given a conscience, and in that successful development of Friendly AI will assist us in handling any future problems. A "Friendly AI" is an AI that takes actions that are, on the whole, beneficial to humans and humanity. In a "~human" scenario ("near human", "approximately human-equivalent"), Friendly AIs would play ~human roles in the existing human economy or society. To the extent that Friendly AIs have power in the world economy, in human society, or in technological development, they can exert direct influence for good. For example, a Friendly AI working in nanotechnology can enthusiastically work on Immunity systems while flatly refusing to develop nanotechnological weaponry. The presence of Friendly AIs within a society - as an interest group with influence - will tend to influence that society towards altruism.

- § The presence of a Friendly AI within a political discussion - as a voice advocating a viewpoint - will tend to influence that discussion towards lack of bias. This holds especially true insofar if Friendly AIs have previously gained respect as fair, truthful, unbiased voices.
- § The presence of a Friendly AI within a political power structure - as a decision-maker - will lead to altruistic decisions being made. This holds especially true insofar if decisions which humans keep screwing up due to personal bias tend to get handed off to a Friendly AI.
- § The presence of a Friendly AI within a technological development process - as a researcher - will tend to accelerate defensive applications and economic applications ahead of offensive applications, and largely beneficial technologies ahead of more ambiguous ones.<sup>12</sup>

The requirements for FAI to be effective, both internally, to protect humanity against unintended consequences of the AI in question and externally to protect against other non-FAIs arising from whatever source are:

- § **Friendliness:** that an AI feel sympathetic towards community development in future, and seek for their best interests Conservation of Friendliness - that an AI must desire to pass on its value system to all of its offspring and inculcate its values into others of its kind.
- § **Intelligence:** that an AI be smart enough to see how it might engage in altruistic behavior to the greatest degree of equality, so that it is not kind to some but more cruel to others as a consequence, and to balance interests effectively.
- § **Self-improvement:** that an AI feel a sense of longing and striving for improvement both of itself and of all life as part of the consideration of wealth, while respecting and sympathizing with the informed choices of lesser intellects not to improve themselves. But there are authors<sup>13</sup> who consider the theory of Friendly AI is incomplete. They believe that there should be broader political involvement in the design of AI and AI morality and this will has a bad influence on community development. They also believe that initially seed AI could only be created by powerful private sector interests.

## **Conclusion**

If human create Superintelligence in future - and I think it will be possible, because in this moment we can produce Distributed Artificial Intelligence which can process faster than human brain- our belief to that reality will not change, because we consider Superintelligence as an effect of human mind and creativity and the law of causality proves that the existence of effect depends on the cause, so I believe that Superintelligence will not damage our life as we see in Hollywood films, but the values of human which organize our better intellectual life must be programmed in Superintelligence, and with this approach we can solve the challenge between Community Development and Superintelligence, we can call it friendly Artificial Intelligence.

Distributed Artificial Intelligence is concerned with the cooperative solution of problems by a decentralized group of agents. The agents may range from simple processing elements to complex entities exhibiting rational behavior.<sup>14</sup> There are so many things that can go wrong with a new system so we must be as prepared as we can be for this new technology. AIs are like children that need to be taught to be kind, well mannered, and intelligent.

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# **Religion and Social Theory in the Frommesque Discourse**

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## **Abstract**

In this article the role of religion in the sociology of Eric Fromm is investigated. The author is trying to locate the position of Fromm in terms of history of religions and how the Frommesque approach could strengthen the position of theorists who advocate a more active role for spirituality in the constitution of self and society. In addition, it is argued that the covenantal dimension of religion is not accessible to be caught but it is present to be realized and lived in the soul of man as this is the sole abode of religiosity.

## **Keywords**

*Frommesque, Religion, Social Theory, Sociology of Religion, Spirituality*

## Introduction

We may think that the process of defining is a simple act of semantic significance but the truth of the matter indicates otherwise. In other words, to define a concept is as important a scientific act as any other aspects of epistemological endeavors due to the fact that if one is able to define an object correctly it surely indicates that he has been able to conceive the “studied object” in a rounded fashion. To put it otherwise; it indicates that one has been able to delimit the boundaries of the object in a conceptual fashion within the mental parameters by turning the unknown dimensions into known aspects. Having said this, we need to turn to the question of religion and social theory as it has been conceptualized within Frommian point of departure as while being conscious about the indefinability nature of religion Fromm has attempted to define the social character of religiosity both historically and contemporaneously. In this essay we shall look at Fromm's view on religion and the modalities it may have taken in the course of history and in the bosom of modern society.

## The Role of Religion

Since the dawn of Enlightenment the majority of thinkers argued that the *Age of Reason* has begun and the sign of reasonability has been defined in contrasting terms vis-à-vis religion. In other words, the antonym of reasonability in the context of modernity has become religiosity as the opposite of religion within the context of Enlightenment paradigm has come to be that of reason. This binary opposition has not been confined solely to the lexical domain or conceptual realm of debates. On the contrary, here we are faced with an ontological issue that has far-reaching existential consequences for the constitution of self and society.

This mode of approaching the question of religion is not present in the Frommian sociology of religion as he views the question of religiosity (as well as art-awareness) in a totally different fashion by arguing that religion is part of a greater elementary forms of awakening human self into the deep-rooted modalities of human existence. In other words, Fromm discerns in the communal as well as individual life of human being a strong tendency towards two conflicting modalities of *routinization* and *vitalization*. The former forces us into a conformable standardization while the other compels us to

break the chains of conventionality by being more spontaneous. Fromm, unlike mainstream disciplinary thinkers, considers for religion a very fundamental function which is of vital significance for the sustenance of life as a human life in the world. What is that elemental function of religion?

Fromm believes that human life is constituted of certain essential realities that without the life cannot be qualified as a human *leben in the welt*. The role of religion is to awake us to the existence of these fundamental realities by breaking the patterns of routinization which would gradually reduce humanity into an automaton. However Fromm is not wholeheartedly giving to the idea that religion could sustain this positive function of awakening of the soul to the fundamental realities of existence as religion itself could become a new form of routine and the history of religions is a great witness to this tragic fact. (Fromm, 1955. p 144)

### **The indefinable definition of Religion**

A cursory look at the contemporary debates on sociology, anthropology, psychology, philosophy and history of religion and social theory would readily reveal the impossibility of defining religion in a disciplinary fashion which could be agreed upon by all concerned parties. In other words, to define religion one needs to realize an indefinable paradox that exists within the core of defining religion and that is the elusive feature of religiosity that is hard to catch and freeze in a conceptual fashion.

To put it differently; the caught unit which is conceptually frozen and defined is not what religion is in an existential sense but it is a reduced aspect of religiosity which could have discursive significance and demonstrable as an illustrative example of social contract but devoid of the spirit of religiosity. In other words, the covenantal dimension of religion is not accessible to be caught but it is present to be realized and lived in the soul of man as this is the sole abode of religiosity.

The question of religion has been seriously discussed by Fromm in almost all of his published works but there has been scant attention by sociologists, in general, and sociologists of religion, in particular, to particular approach of Fromm's complex sociology of religion that takes the very *lebenwelt* of human self as the context of debate. For example, the recent work by Richard K. Fenn on the *Key Thinkers in the Sociology of Religion* is a prominent case in this regard. The work is remarkable and

Fenn does great by looking at Durkheim, Freud, Weber, Parsons, David Martin, Bryan Wilson, Peter Berger, Luhmann, Geertz, Bloch and Catherine Bell as the key sociologists of religion but Fromm along Marx and Jung are eschewed very disbelievingly.

However this should not be counted as Fenn's chariness vis-à-vis Fromm and his importance as a sociologist of religion. On the contrary, this seems to be the state of affairs within sociology where even the sociological status of Fromm is not established, let alone his importance for the sub-discipline of sociology of religion.

In other words, the position of Fromm in terms of sociology of religion is less debated and undertheorized indeed. These are the tasks which students of sociology and social theory should work on in the near future as his position is not only of disciplinary importance but of great practical relevance for what could be termed as problems of *philosophy of life*. Fromm's view on religion is expressed in terms of the dialectics between *techne* and *episteme* which has profound theoretical and practical consequences for anyone interested in living a human life. But one may wonder how does Fromm define religion?

He refers to religion in its widest sense, i.e.

... as a system of orientation [that assumes] an object of devotion ... .

(1955. p 175)

However to understand Fromm's notion of religion one must take into consideration the dialectical character of his thinking which is present in all his works. Although he argues that religion consists of a system of orientation that assumes an object of devotion but each religion or any kind of religiosity is not beneficial for the formation of human character. On the contrary, there are various kinds of religiosities which are harmful as they thwart the free development of personality.

### **History of Religion: Separateness versus Union**

Fromm's humanistic reading of history of religion and the history of man in general and of individuals in particular moved him to a "normative historiography" which has not been debated within sociological context of debates. He believes that Man has an

essence and the essential configuration of human being has a double-edged basic makeup which could be defined as “separateness” and “union”. These two vectors could be employed in the existential historiography of human life both in the individual sense and collective fashion as well as historical context. Fromm argues that

... there are two ways of overcoming separateness and of achieving union. The [primary one we could] ... find in all primitive religions, and it is a way to return to nature, to make man again into a pre-human animal, as it were, and to eliminate that in man which is specifically human [i.e.] his reason [and] his awareness. This elimination is done in all sorts of ways ... [namely] ... by drugs, by orgies, or simply by identification with animals, by putting oneself in the state of an animal- especially in the state of ... a bear, a lion or a wolf.

(1994. p 75)

In other words, Fromm seems to suggest that in the history of religion which is the history of spiritual evolution of mankind, this is

... the attempt to overcome the sense of separateness by ceasing to be human and by regressing to the natural state in which man is a part of nature and in which he might become an animal.

(1994. p 75)

The second solution to overcoming separateness and gaining union seems to be possible through

... developing [of] specifically human powers of reason and of love to such an extent that the world [becomes] his home ... .

(Fromm, 1994. p 76)

Fromm argues that the paragon of this second approach appeared in the horizons

... in the period between 1500 B.C. and 500 B.C. in China, India, Egypt, Palestine, [Iran] and Greece ... . [In other

words, man] found oneness not by regressing but by developing [which enabled him] by becoming fully human he lived in a new harmony with himself, with his fellow men and even with nature.

(1994. p 76)

Fromm discerns an undeletable stream in the history of humanity which one could see

... [in the message] of prophetic messianism ... [in the system of] late-medieval religious thought ... [as well as in the thought of proponents] of eighteenth-century humanism ... [an essential message which] is still the essence of religious and spiritual thought ... [and that could be formulated as man's] ... task is to develop his humanity, and in the development of this humanity he will find a new harmony and hence the only way in which he can solve the problem of being born.

(Fromm, 1994. p 76)

### **Religion and the Character Formation**

Religion is of great value in the formation of character but the significant question is what kind of religion could play such a formative function?

Fromm believes that we have two broad kinds of religiosities, i.e. the authoritarian and humanistic religion. He believes that the authoritarian religion has a harmful effect, since it thwarts the free development of personality while humanistic religion will help a person to develop his human capacities to the fullest. The key words for Fromm are "reason," "love," and "productive work" as they are the basic ingredients for a fulfilling human life.

In other words, the character of a human person is shaped in an authentic sense when man realizes that there is

... only one solution to [the human condition]: for one to face the truth, to acknowledge his fundamental aloneness and solitude in a universe indifferent to his fate, to recognize that

there is no power transcending him which can solve his problem for him. Man must accept the responsibility for himself and the fact that only by using his powers can he give meaning to his life. If he faces the truth without panic he will recognize that: there is no meaning to life except the meaning man gives his life by the unfolding of his powers, by living productively; and that only constant vigilance, activity, and effort can keep us from failing in the one task that matters-the full development of our powers within the limitations set by the laws of our existence. Only if he recognizes the human situation, the dichotomies inherent in his existence and his capacity to unfold his powers, will he be able to succeed in his task: to be himself and for himself and to achieve happiness by the full realization of those faculties which are peculiarly his-of reason, love, and productive work.

(Fromm, 1947. Ch. 3)

### **Modern Religiosity and Ancient Modality**

By contrasting authoritarian religiosity and humanistic religiosity Fromm seems to suggest that we can further divide the authoritarian makeup into again two broad camps of “Humanistic Religions” and “Idoltrous Religions” and by *idolatry* he means

... that form of man's search for unity in which he returns to nature, to his own “animalness” ... . He submits himself to nature, to the work of his own hands (in the form of idols made of gold and silver or of wood) or he submits himself to other people.

(Fromm, 1994. p 17)

As aforementioned Fromm believes that idolatry

... is not the worship of certain gods instead of others, or of one god instead of many. It is a human attitude, that of the reification of all that is alive. It is a man's submission to

things, his self-negation as a living, open, ego-transcending being. Idols are gods that do not liberate; in worshipping idols, man makes himself a prisoner and renounces liberation. Idols are gods that do not live; in worshipping idols, man himself is deadened.

(1994. p 97)

On the other hand, we have the sociological concept of alienation which in Fromm's style is transformed into an aesthetic concept which

... expresses the same idea as the traditional concept of idolatry. [in what sense does this modern concept express the same idea as the traditional concept of idolatry?] ... [it could be argued that the] ... alienated man bows down to the work of his own hands and to the circumstances of his own doing. Things and circumstances become his masters, they stand above and against him while he loses the experience of himself as the creative bearer of life. He becomes alienated from himself, from his work, and from his fellow man.

(1994. p 97)

One may argue that in the idea of idolatry we had the worship of certain gods that people sacrificed their children but today these kinds of practice are considered to be repugnant manifestations of an idolatric past. In other words, modern man would refuse to worship

... Moloch, or Mars, or Venus ... .

(Fromm, 1994. p 97)

But based on the principle of similarity which Fromm established in terms of alienation and idolatry (i.e. reification of *life* and lebenization of *Res*) he believes that the modern man does not

... notice that he worships the same idols ... only under different names. Today's idols are the objects of a systematically cultivated greed: for money, power, lust,

glory, food and drink. Man worships the means and ends of this greed: production, consumption, military might, business, the state. The stronger he makes his idols, the poorer he becomes, the emptier he feels. Instead of joy, he seeks thrill; instead of life, he loves a mechanized world of gadgets; instead of growth, he seeks wealth; instead of being, he is interested in having and using.

(1994. p 98)

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# **Towards an Index of global tolerance: A quantitative analysis, based on the “World Values Survey” data**

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## **Abstract**

Our article starts from the assumption that the future of tolerance in the world – and especially the recipient countries of immigration – also has to do with the systematic fostering of a climate of the Enlightenment among the immigrant populations in the “North” themselves, and not just the mainstream political cultures of the immigration receiving countries. The idea that the immigrant communities in the “North” (i.e. the “developed countries”) must participate also actively in the climate of tolerance of overall society, and that they in turn must leave behind the often virulent racism, Anti-Semitism, Romaphobia and homophobia of their countries and or cultures of origin, is a clear consequence of our quantitative data and as such cannot be denied.

The data from the World Values Survey were used to project a scale of global tolerance. We propose to construct a non-parametric index of “global tolerance”, which combines the following WVS data with sufficient availability on the percentages per total population overcoming xenophobia and racism:

- § People that respondent would like to have as neighbors Neighbors: People of a different race (WVS A125)
- § Qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home - Important child qualities: tolerance and respect for other people (WVS A035)
- § Not saying: Jobs scarce: Men should have more right to a job than women (WVS C001)
- § People that respondent would like to have as neighbors Neighbors: Immigrants/foreign workers (WVS A129)
- § People that respondent would like to have as neighbors Neighbors: Neighbors: Homosexuals (WVS A132)

The country values are projected onto a scale from 0 to 1 – 0 the least tolerant country, 1 the most tolerant country, according to standard United Nations UNDP methodology. The results of this exercise are given in Table 1:

Now, if we assume that tolerance can be adequately measured by our index, then then the assumption is correct that global tolerance was most pronounced in the following political cultures:

- § Sweden [1999]
- § Netherlands [1999]
- § Iceland [1999]
- § Denmark [1999]
- § Canada [2000]
- § France [1999]
- § United States [1999]
- § Australia [1995]
- § Finland [2000]
- § New Zealand [1998]
- § Luxembourg [1999]

The World Values Survey also permits the calculation of global tolerance world ranks for the surveyed populations in the following predominantly Muslim countries:

- 40 Iran (Islamic Republic of) [2000]
- 48 Bosnia and Herzegovina [2001]
- 50 Pakistan [2001]
- 54 Kyrgyzstan [2003]
- 56 Albania [2002]
- 61 Morocco [2001]
- 63 Azerbaijan [1997]
- 64 Indonesia [2001]
- 65 Nigeria [2000]
- 67 Egypt [2000]
- 68 Algeria [2002]
- 69 Jordan [2001]
- 71 Bangladesh [2002]
- 72 Turkey [2001]

JEL-class.: C43, F15, F5, Z12

### **Keywords**

*C43 - Index Numbers and Aggregation; F15 - Economic Integration; F5 - International Relations and International Political Economy; Z12 - Religion*

### **On the quantitative methodology of this work**

This study uses an array of quantitative methods to come to terms with global values, global value change, and the position of Muslims in these changing global value maps.

Europe, confronted with a plurality of values, tries to come to terms with multicultural values. A behavioural revolution is beginning to be firmly established in the debate about “global Islam” and the future of the European continent. Ronald T. Inglehart, Mansoor Moaddel, and Thorleif Pettersson introduced the necessary

empirical elements into a value-laden debate, otherwise characterized by such terms as “leading culture” or “guiding culture”.

Absurd, as it may seem at first sight, there are hardly any international comparative data on values across cultures – if it were not for the “*World Values Survey*”. A generation of political scientists, headed by Michigan University’s **Ronald T. Inglehart**, studied global and Muslim values for more than two decades now and even made their data freely available on the Internet (<http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>). Their gigantic project, analyzing global values and global value change in now over 80 countries is based on advanced social survey methodology, and uses a questionnaire and sampling methods, which are unparalleled in the social science profession.

### **The northward migration of global intolerance? Towards a “Global Tolerance Index”**

Our short article starts from the perhaps politically absolutely incorrect assumption that the future of tolerance in the world – and especially the recipient countries of immigration – also has to do with the systematic fostering of a climate of the Enlightenment among the immigrant populations in the North themselves, and not just the mainstream political cultures of the immigration receiving countries. The idea that the immigrant communities in the North must participate also actively in the climate of tolerance of overall society, and that they in turn must leave behind the often virulent racism, Anti-Semitism, Romaphobia and homophobia of their countries and or cultures of origin, is a clear consequence of our quantitative data and as such cannot be denied.

The data from the *World Values Survey* can also be used to project a scale of global tolerance. To develop a statistical “yardstick” of discrimination and exclusion is absolutely important in Europe. In 1997, the EU-Member States approved unanimously the Treaty of Amsterdam. Article 13 of this Treaty granted the Community new powers to combat discrimination on the grounds of gender, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. Since the Treaty of Amsterdam came into force in 1999, new EC laws, or Directives that have been enacted in the area of anti-discrimination are the Racial Equality Directive, 2000/43/EC, and the Employment Equality Directive, 2000/78/EC. The Council Directive 2000/43/EC implements the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or

ethnic origin, and Council Directive 2000/78/EC establishes a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation.

To assess the totality of tolerance in Europe and in the world by global comparison, we now propose to construct a non-parametric **index of “global tolerance”**, which combines the following WVS data with sufficient availability on the percentages per total population overcoming xenophobia and racism:

- § People that respondent would like to have as neighbors Neighbors: People of a different **race** (WVS A125)
- § Qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home - Important child qualities: **tolerance and respect** for other people (WVS A035)
- § Not saying: Jobs scarce: **Men** should have more right to a **job** than **women** (WVS C001)
- § People that respondent would like to have as neighbors Neighbors: **Immigrants/foreign workers** (WVS A129)
- § People that respondent would like to have as neighbors Neighbors: Neighbors: **Homosexuals** (WVS A132)

The country values are projected onto a scale from 0 to 1 – 0 the least tolerant country, 1 the most tolerant country, according to standard United Nations UNDP methodology. The results of this exercise are given in Table 1:

<b>Table 1: Global Tolerance Index – the four different components and the final index</b>						
	overcoming racism	education for tolerance and respect	accepting gender empowerment	accepting foreign workers	accepting homosexual neighbors	Global tolerance index
Albania [2002]	0,597	0,717	0,331	0,783	0,161	0,518
Algeria [2002]	0,632	0,127	0,208	0,675	0,180	0,364

Argentina [1999]	0,971	0,499	0,645	0,947	0,775	0,768
Armenia [1997]	0,759	0,000	0,329	0,704	0,153	0,389
Australia [1995]	0,967	0,732	0,721	0,967	0,749	0,827
Austria [1999]	0,939	0,522	0,575	0,850	0,742	0,726
Azerbaijan [1997]	0,860	0,243	0,293	0,731	0,078	0,441
Bangladesh [2002]	0,000	0,510	0,171	0,000	0,950	0,326
Belarus [2000]	0,798	0,540	0,675	0,774	0,357	0,629
Belgium [1999]	0,798	0,785	0,737	0,757	0,823	0,780
Bosnia and Herzegovina [2001]	0,845	0,528	0,504	0,655	0,348	0,576
Brazil [1997]	0,996	0,249	0,014	0,983	0,733	0,595
Bulgaria [1999]	0,630	0,247	0,476	0,658	0,452	0,493
Canada [2000]	0,987	0,730	0,832	0,974	0,828	0,870
Chile [2000]	0,906	0,626	0,545	0,873	0,667	0,723
China [2001]	0,825	0,549	0,454	0,791	0,256	0,575
Czech Republic [1999]	0,895	0,331	0,698	0,738	0,800	0,692
Denmark [1999]	0,929	0,882	0,948	0,875	0,919	0,910
Dominican Republic [1996]	0,769	0,442	0,705	0,768	0,505	0,638
Egypt [2000]	0,085	0,367	0,000	0,384	0,996	0,366
Estonia [1999]	0,816	0,519	0,800	0,715	0,530	0,676

Finland [2000]	0,857	0,778	0,881	0,837	0,784	0,827
France [1999]	0,908	0,834	0,723	0,853	0,841	0,832
Georgia [1996]	0,899	0,129	0,269	0,870	0,217	0,477
Germany West [1999]	0,974	0,571	0,589	0,924	0,866	0,785
Great Britain [1999]	0,912	0,796	0,674	0,799	0,753	0,787
Greece [1999]	0,828	0,093	0,769	0,827	0,728	0,649
Iceland [1999]	0,991	0,814	1,000	0,992	0,920	0,943
India [2001]	0,432	0,336	0,329	0,447	0,707	0,450
Indonesia [2001]	0,535	0,322	0,424	0,416	0,445	0,428
Iran (Islamic Republic of) [2000]	0,686	0,240	0,237	0,890	0,991	0,609
Ireland [1999]	0,857	0,603	0,816	0,851	0,722	0,770
Italy [1999]	0,811	0,603	0,601	0,783	0,708	0,701
Jordan [2001]	0,747	0,429	0,126	0,421	0,000	0,344
Kyrgyzstan [2003]	0,770	0,388	0,415	0,732	0,329	0,527
Latvia [1999]	0,967	0,478	0,736	0,887	0,538	0,721
Lithuania [1999]	0,895	0,209	0,670	0,673	0,314	0,552
Luxembourg [1999]	0,945	0,673	0,677	0,909	0,811	0,803
Macedonia, Republic of [2001]	0,762	0,610	0,371	0,751	0,456	0,590
Malta [1999]	0,767	0,286	0,466	0,802	0,598	0,584

Mexico [2000]	0,816	0,503	0,590	0,817	0,547	0,655
Morocco [2001]	0,838	0,587	0,080	0,743	0,055	0,461
Netherlands [1999]	0,964	0,968	0,887	0,961	0,937	0,944
New Zealand [1998]	0,993	0,669	0,676	0,955	0,773	0,813
Nigeria [2000]	0,597	0,243	0,314	0,605	0,252	0,402
Norway [1996]	0,918	0,397	0,845	0,887	0,855	0,780
Pakistan [2001]	0,942	0,104	0,186	0,588	1,000	0,564
Peru [2001]	0,874	0,549	0,710	0,870	0,500	0,701
Philippines [2001]	0,728	0,265	0,161	0,802	0,760	0,543
Poland [1999]	0,788	0,719	0,505	0,675	0,439	0,625
Portugal [1999]	0,926	0,385	0,624	1,000	0,744	0,736
Republic of Korea [2001]	0,535	0,370	0,284	0,314	0,163	0,333
Republic of Moldova [2002]	0,877	0,669	0,410	0,748	0,213	0,583
Romania [1999]	0,686	0,224	0,501	0,712	0,337	0,492
Russian Federation [1999]	0,919	0,424	0,554	0,867	0,412	0,635
Serbia [2001]	0,948	0,365	0,606	0,918	0,501	0,668
Singapore [2002]	0,968	0,485	0,565	0,638	0,536	0,638
Slovakia [1999]	0,790	0,195	0,575	0,684	0,553	0,560

Slovenia [1999]	0,863	0,492	0,718	0,791	0,550	0,683
South Africa [2001]	0,695	0,583	0,595	0,565	0,530	0,594
Spain [2000]	0,870	0,649	0,720	0,872	0,850	0,792
Sweden [1999]	1,000	1,000	0,990	0,995	0,938	0,985
Switzerland [1996]	0,910	0,701	0,589	0,884	0,812	0,779
Tanzania, United Republic Of [2001]	0,795	0,798	0,596	0,768	0,247	0,641
Turkey [2001]	0,546	0,206	0,362	0,336	0,085	0,307
Uganda [2001]	0,773	0,190	0,504	0,837	0,227	0,506
Ukraine [1999]	0,884	0,388	0,635	0,808	0,332	0,609
United States [1999]	0,921	0,705	0,868	0,882	0,763	0,828
Uruguay [1996]	0,938	0,483	0,018	0,929	0,676	0,609
Venezuela [2000]	0,812	0,707	0,556	0,762	0,417	0,651
Viet Nam [2001]	0,571	0,442	0,477	0,529	0,608	0,525
Zimbabwe [2001]	0,750	0,676	0,578	0,721	0,324	0,610

Note: our own compilations from World Values Survey, waves 3+4, openly available at <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>

Now, if we assume that tolerance can be adequately measured by our index, then then the assumption is correct that **global tolerance was most pronounced in the following political cultures:**

- § Sweden [1999]
- § Netherlands [1999]
- § Iceland [1999]

- § Denmark [1999]
- § Canada [2000]
- § France [1999]
- § United States [1999]
- § Australia [1995]
- § Finland [2000]
- § New Zealand [1998]
- § Luxembourg [1999]

**The worst offenders, lacking a climate of tolerance, as operationalized by our Index, were:**

- § Turkey [2001]
- § Bangladesh [2002]
- § Republic of Korea [2001]
- § Jordan [2001]
- § Algeria [2002]
- § Egypt [2000]
- § Armenia [1997]
- § Nigeria [2000]
- § Indonesia [2001]
- § Azerbaijan [1997]
- § India [2001]

Among the 72 surveyed nations, the countries of the EU-27 had the following world ranks of global tolerance:

- 1 Sweden [1999]
- 2 Netherlands [1999]
- 4 Denmark [1999]
- 6 France [1999]
- 9 Finland [2000]
- 11 Luxembourg [1999]
- 12 Spain [2000]
- 13 Great Britain [1999]

- 14 Germany West [1999]
- 15 Belgium [1999]
- 18 Ireland [1999]
- 20 Portugal [1999]
- 21 Austria [1999]
- 23 Latvia [1999]
- 24 Italy [1999]
- 26 Czech Republic [1999]
- 27 Slovenia [1999]
- 28 Estonia [1999]
- 32 Greece [1999]
- 38 Poland [1999]
- 46 Malta [1999]
- 51 Slovakia [1999]
- 52 Lithuania [1999]
- 58 Bulgaria [1999]
- 59 Romania [1999]

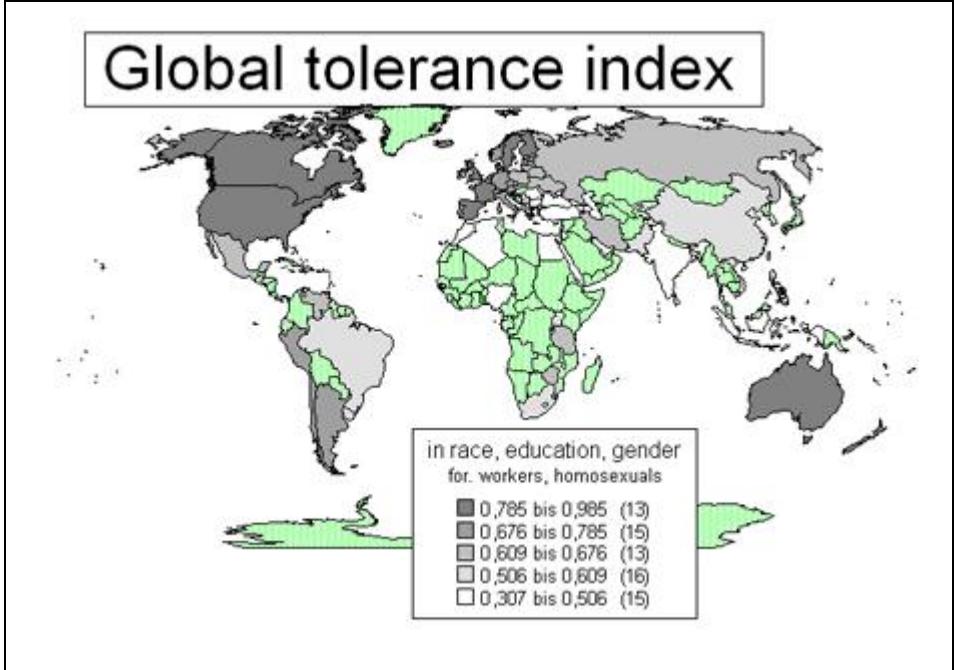
The World Values Survey also permits the calculation of global tolerance world ranks for the surveyed populations in the following predominantly Muslim countries:

- 40 Iran (Islamic Republic of) [2000]
- 48 Bosnia and Herzegovina [2001]
- 50 Pakistan [2001]
- 54 Kyrgyzstan [2003]
- 56 Albania [2002]
- 61 Morocco [2001]
- 63 Azerbaijan [1997]
- 64 Indonesia [2001]
- 65 Nigeria [2000]
- 67 Egypt [2000]
- 68 Algeria [2002]
- 69 Jordan [2001]
- 71 Bangladesh [2002]

## 72 Turkey [2001]

Our world maps further document these results:

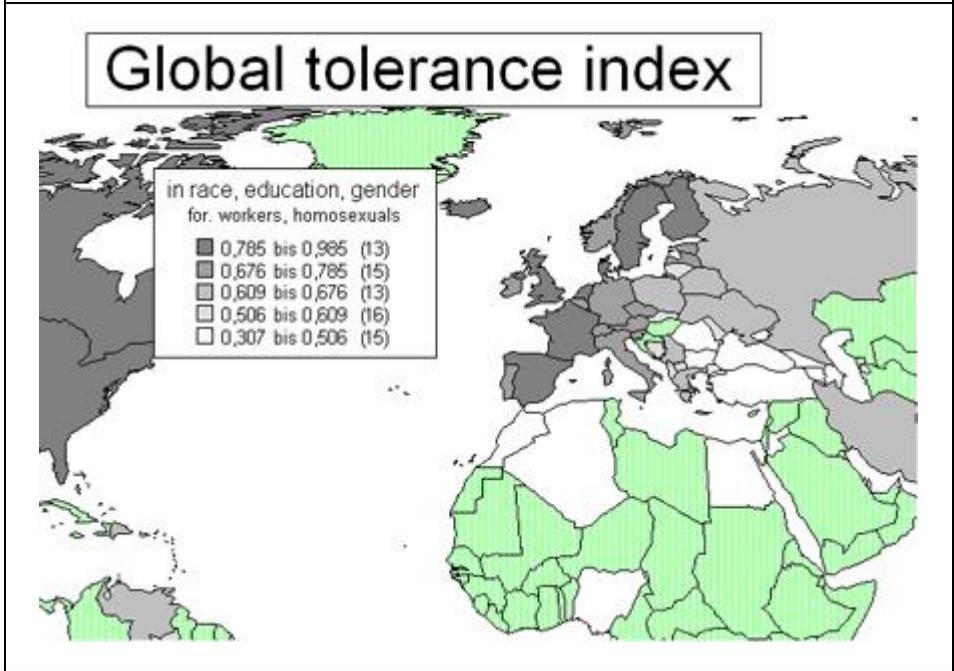
Map 1: Global tolerance – Continued...



Note: best combined World Values Survey country results for: People that respondent would like to have as neighbors Neighbors: People of a different race (WVS A125); Qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home - Important child qualities: tolerance and respect for other people (WVS A035); Not saying: Jobs scarce: Men should have more right to a job than women (WVS C001); People that respondent would like to have as neighbors Neighbors: Immigrants/foreign workers (WVS A129); People that respondent would like to have as neighbors Neighbors: Neighbors: Homosexuals (WVS A132). The indicators were combined according to the standard **UNDP non-parametric index technique**.

Explanatory note: “bis” is shorthand for “ranging from ... to”. Missing values for Hungary, Croatia, and large parts of Africa, and Western Asia.

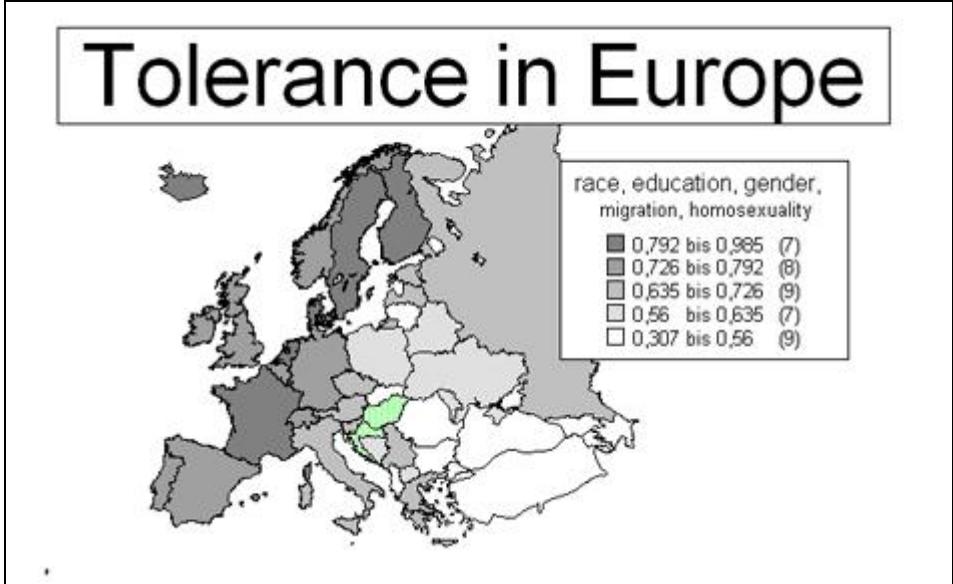
Map 1: Global tolerance (cont.) – Continued...



Note: best combined World Values Survey country results for: People that respondent would like to have as neighbors: People of a different race (WVS A125); Qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home - Important child qualities: tolerance and respect for other people (WVS A035); Not saying: Jobs scarce: Men should have more right to a job than women (WVS C001); People that respondent would like to have as neighbors Neighbors: Immigrants/foreign workers (WVS A129); People that respondent would like to have as neighbors Neighbors: Neighbors: Homosexuals (WVS A132). The indicators were combined according to the standard UNDP **non-parametric index technique**

Explanatory note: “bis” is shorthand for “ranging from ... to”. Missing values for Hungary, Croatia, and large parts of Africa, and Western Asia.

Map 1: Global tolerance (cont.)



Note: best combined World Values Survey country results for: People that respondent would like to have as neighbors Neighbors: People of a different race(WVS A125); Qualities that children can be encouraged to learn at home - Important child qualities: tolerance and respect for other people(WVS A035); Not saying: Jobs scarce: Men should have more right to a job than women (WVS C001); People that respondent would like to have as neighbors Neighbors: Immigrants/foreign workers(WVS A129); People that respondent would like to have as neighbors Neighbors: Neighbors: Homosexuals(WVS A132). The indicators were combined according to the standard **UNDP non-parametric index technique**

Explanatory note: “bis” is shorthand for “ranging from ... to”; countries with missing values are marked in green color

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# **The Qur'an as a Criterion for Hadith-Text Examination**

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## **Abstract**

Muslims rightly believe that the Qur'an and Sunnah (sayings and doings of the Last Prophet) are the most fundamental sources of Islamic thought, life, and civilization. Yet, they are not equal in terms of authenticity. The Qur'an is fully reliable without an iota of doubt. But Hadith literature contains both reliable and unreliable reports on the Prophet's (s.a.w.) sayings and doings. In order to check authenticity of Hadith and Sunnah as recorded in sources Muslim scholars have developed some criteria, which basically serve the purpose of authentication of chain of reporters (sanad). As for the text of reports, no serious efforts have been made by Hadith scholars. The Qur'an must be considered as a criterion to check the position of text of Hadith reports. If there is an uncompromising conflict between Hadith-text and the Qur'an, Hadith report must be rejected as fabricated and unreliable even though its chain of reporters appears

authentic. In this article ten Hadiths have been selected from al-Bukhari's and Muslim's famous works of Hadith for text checking using the Qur'an as criterion. The selected Hadith in this article are: (1) lies attribute to Prophet Ibrahim, (2) predetermination of human destiny, (3) Irrelevance of Man's deeds for entry into Paradise, (4) coercion in conversion to Islam, (5) Moses' power to delay his death, (6) Moses' condemnation of Adam's error, (7) time involved in the creation of the universe, (8) Transfer of Muslims' sins to Jews and Christians, (9) Eve as the root cause for women's infidelity, and (10) women as source of bad omen. The author sees the texts of these Hadith as in sheer conflict with one or the other statement of the Qur'an hence he suggest that these Hadith are unreliable. The objective of this research is not to discredit the contribution of great Muslim scholars; it is rather to investigate further into the authenticity of Prophet Muhammad's (s.a.w.) sayings and doings as compiled and recorded by Hadith scholars.

### **Keywords**

*The Qur'an, Sunnah, Hadith, Chain of Reporters, Hadith-Text*

### **Introduction**

Hadith examination is a very serious as well as delicate discipline under Hadith Studies. Its origin may be traced back to the chaotic situation consequent upon the assassination of the third Muslim Caliph, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan. During that period many sections of the Muslim society exploited the opportunity to promote their respective agenda, political, sectarian, spiritual, commercial, and material. In order to fully benefit from the situation they fabricated traditions in the name of the Prophet (s.a.w.). One may see that hundreds of thousands of traditions were concocted and attributed to the Prophet (s.a.w.). The currency of the fabricated traditions in the Muslim societies prompted Muslim scholars to rise to the occasion. They played their role in identifying the genuine traditions from the whole lot of traditions. To check the authenticity of traditions in the name of the Prophet (s.a.w.), several criteria were developed. These criteria were to mainly authenticate the chain of narrators, and not the text of reports. The most famous and widely acclaimed collections of traditions

that are considered authentic collections include Mu'atta' of Malik ibn Anas (d.179 A.H.), Sahih of Muhammad ibn Islama'il al-Bukhari (d.256 A.H.), Sahih of Muslim ibn al-Hajjaj al-Qushayri (d.261 A.H.), Sunan of Abu Da'ud (d.275 A.H.), Sunan of Muhammad ibn 'Isa al-Tirmidhi (d.279 A.H.), and Sunan of Ahmad ibn Shu'ayb al-Nasa'i (d.303 A.H.). These and other compilations of Hadith represent the authentication of Hadith only through the authentication the chain of narrators. No Hadith collections were ever compiled on the basis of authentication of both chain of narrators and text of reports. Some Muslim scholars like Abu xanifah (d.150 A.H.), al-Shafi'i (d.204 A.H.), Ibn al-Jawzi (d.597 A.H.), Ibn Qayyim (d.751 A.H.) suggested Hadith-text examination by applying certain universally established criteria. One such criterion as suggested is the Qur'an. Muslim scholars are almost unanimous over the position of the Qur'an vis-a-vis Hadith. According to them, in a situation of uncompromising conflict between a tradition recorded in the name of the Prophet (s.a.w.) and the Qur'an, the tradition will be rejected as unacceptable. Unfortunately, despite Muslim scholars' wish of Hadith-text authentication through the Qur'an, no serious step could be taken towards that effect. The present article represents a humble attempt to apply the Qur'an as a criterion to check the validity of some traditions recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim in their works of Hadith.

### **Understanding the Position of the Qur'an vis-a-vis Hadith**

People vary from one another in their approaches and angles while deciding about one thing or another. Such differences of views can be sorted out and settled only with the help of some universally established standards. In making judgment about the nature of *ahadith* scholars may differ from one another. In such situation the first criterion to be looked at is the *Qur'an*. It does not represent any human mind; it is revealed speech of Allah. It is in its own words "the criterion" (*al-Furqan*):

It was the month of Ramadhan in which the Qur'an was bestowed from on high as a guidance unto man, and a self-evident proof of that guidance, and as the criterion by which to discern the true from the false.

(2:185)

And it is He who has bestowed from on high the criterion by which to discern the true from the false.

(3:4)

Hallowed is He who from on high, step by step, has bestowed upon His servant the criterion by which to discern the true from the false.

(25:1)

It is a God-given criterion, which spells out what is right and what is wrong. As the *Qur'an* tells us, Allah revealed to the Prophet (s.a.w.) two things, the *Qur'an* and its *bayan* (interpretation):

Thus, when We recite it, follow its wording: and then, behold, its bayan (interpretation) will be upon Us.

(75:18-19)

*Hadith* and Sunnah of the Prophet (s.a.w.) serve undoubtedly as the interpretation of the *Qur'an*. Thus the Prophet's utterances and practices symbolize the *bayan*. In that case both the *Qur'an* and *Bayan* should complement each other. There should be perfect harmony between the two. If any component of *bayan* i.e. *Hadith* contrasts with the *Qur'an*, the tradition attributed to the Prophet (s.a.w.) may be forthrightly rejected as unacceptable. The Book of Allah is not only to guide but also serves as mediator in a situation of dispute. *Surat al-Nisa*: 59 reads:

O you who have attained to faith! Pay heed unto Allah, and unto the Apostle, and unto those from among you who have been entrusted with authority; and if you are at variance over any matter, refer it to Allah and the Apostle.

This *verse* exhorts the believers to make Allah and His Prophet as the judge in their disputed matter. Compilations of *Hadith* are not free from controversies in terms of contents. The *Qur'an* represents Allah's authority. The contents of *Ahadith* can be checked with the *Qur'an*. If there is no conflict between the two, *Ahadith* should be declared as authentic. In case of apparent conflict, traditions should be categorized as unreliable.

## ‘A’ishah’s Approach

The Prophet’s wife ‘A’ishah was repository of knowledge. She was consulted time and again by the people concerning the Qur’anic revelations, statements of the Prophet (s.a.w.), practices of the Prophet (s.a.w.), and Islamic law. She served as a teacher to the knowledgeable as well as the students, young and old, senior Companions and junior ones, women and men. She was approached for getting one or the other problem resolved not only after the Prophet’s (s.a.w.) demise but also during the Prophet’s (s.a.w.) own time. Abu Musa al-Ash’ari observes the position of ‘A’ishah among the Companions of the Prophet (s.a.w.) in these words:

Whenever we faced a problem concerning Prophetic tradition, we approached ‘A’ishah and we found the academic solution with her.<sup>1</sup>

Her approach to Hadith vis-a-vis the Qur’an will be found crystal clear from the examples quoted below.

The Prophet (s.a.w.) once said: “One, who was called to account (on the Day of Judgment), was punished”.<sup>2</sup> ‘A’ishah (d.57 A.H.) found it contrary to a Qur’anic statement (84:7-8: “*As for him whose record shall be placed in his right hand, he will in time be called to account with an easy accounting*”). She shared her concern with the Prophet (s.a.w.) who satisfied her by saying: That is the easy reckoning; but he who was questioned is bound to be doomed”.<sup>3</sup>

Here in this account ‘A’ishah’s concern shows that *Hadith* should not contradict the *Qur’an*. After the demise of the Prophet (s.a.w.), she commanded the respect of the Muslims not only as the mother of believers but also as a repository of knowledge. People used to contact her for understanding something or the other, particularly the matters related to the Prophet’s utterances.

She was asked this question: Is Ibn ‘Umar’s report—“the Prophet (s.a.w.) said: “They (the dead) hear what I say”—true? She, then, denied the authenticity of this report, presented what the Prophet really said (“They know what I say is true”), and in the end recited two *ayat*: 1) “*Verily, you cannot make the dead hear*” (27:80), and 2) “*You cannot make those hear who are in graves*” (35:22).<sup>4</sup> By quoting the *Qur’an* she

wanted to make it clear that the Prophet (s.a.w.) cannot say anything against the *Qur'an*.

When 'Umar was wounded seriously, Suhayb started crying. Upon this, 'Umar said: "Why are you crying for me? I heard the Prophet (s.a.w.) saying: Verily the dead is punished due to some of the cries its people make on it". After the death of 'Umar, this tradition was brought to the notice of 'A'ishah. She said: The Prophet (s.a.w.) did not say that, but what he said in this regard was this: "Verily, Allah increases the torment of the non-believer due to the cries of his relatives for him". She further said: The Qur'an should be enough for you in this matter. It says:

And no bearer of burdens shall be made to bear another's burden.

(6:164; 17:15; 35:18; 39:7; 53:38).<sup>5</sup>

'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas is reported to have viewed that the Prophet (s.a.w.) saw Allah twice. When this was brought to 'A'ishah, she forthrightly rejected the opinion and recited a verse from the Qur'an:

No human vision can encompass him, whereas He encompasses all human visions: for He alone is unfathomable, all aware.

(6:103).<sup>6</sup>

Abu Hurayrah's report of a Prophetic tradition was quoted to 'A'ishah: "Evil portents are in the woman, the animal, and the residence". She immediately corrected it saying: "The Prophet (s.a.w.) said: the people of the ignorance period used to say that the evil omens are in the woman, the animal, and the residence". She, then, quoted a Qur'anic verse to further confirm her stand:

No calamity can ever befall the earth and neither your own selves, unless it be in Our decree before We bring it into being.

(57:22).<sup>7</sup>

With regard to the temporary marriage (*mut'ah*) there was controversy among Muslims. Some favored to retain it and others considered it prohibited forever. When this issue was presented to 'A'ishah, she said:

Between me and you is the Book of Allah; it says: "And who safeguard their chastity, except with those joined to them in marriage bond or whom their right hands possess: for they are free from blame.

(23:5-6)

Hence one who desired other than whom Allah granted him in marriage or whom Allah gave him as his possession transgressed.<sup>8</sup>

### 'Umar's Stand

'Umar ibn al-Khattab (d.23 A.H.) once immediately rejected a statement attributed to the Prophet by Fatimah bint Qays, a female Companion, as unacceptable on the ground that it was against the *Qur'an*. Fatimah claimed that after she had been divorced three times by her husband, the Prophet (s.a.w.) judged that she had no right to alimony and lodging.<sup>9</sup> 'Umar's rejection of this Hadith was based on a *Qur'anic* statement (65:1 "*Do not expel them i.e. divorcees from their homes; and neither shall they leave unless they become openly guilty of immoral act*").<sup>10</sup>

### 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas' Attitude

Someone reported a statement of the Prophet (s.a.w.) putting ban on the meat of the domestic donkeys. 'Abd Allah ibn 'Abbas rejected the authenticity of the report on the basis a verse from the *Qur'an*:

Say: I find not in the message revealed to me any meat forbidden for one who wishes to eat it, unless it be dead meat, or blood poured forth. Or the flesh of swine—for it is an abomination—or what is impious on which a name other than Allah has been invoked.

(6:145).<sup>11</sup>

### **Abu Hanifah's Remark**

Nu'man ibn Thabit Abu Hanifah (d.150 A.H.) remarked in his treatise, "Al-'Alim wa al-Muta'allim" (The Knowledgeable and the Student) that it must be believed in that the Prophet (s.a.w.) never said anything unjust and never uttered and did anything against the Qur'an. He was of the view that any tradition in the name of the Prophet (s.a.w.) which was in clash with the Qur'an was to be rejected as false. He clarified that his rejection of a tradition was not the rejection of the Prophet's statement but that of one or the other narrator's lie attributed to the Prophet (s.a.w.).<sup>12</sup>

### **Al-Shafi'i's Observation**

Muhammad ibn Idris al-Shafi'i (d.204 A.H.) observed in his masterpiece, al-Umm that if a Hadith was in contrast with the Qur'an, it could not be from the Prophet (s.a.w.), even though it was narrated by authentic narrators. For that matter he quoted a Hadith of the Prophet (s.a.w.):

Hadith will, indeed, spread far and wide in my name; whatever thereof is in conformity with the Qur'an is genuinely mine; and whatever thereof clashes with the Qur'an is certainly not from me.<sup>13</sup>

### **Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyy's Comment**

In response to a tradition attributed to the Prophet (s.a.w.)—"the life of the world is seven thousand years and we are in the seventh millennium"—Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyy (d.751 A.H.) read a verse from the Qur'an:

They ask you about the Final Hour—when will be its appointed time? Say: the knowledge thereof rests with my Lord alone; none but He can reveal as to when it will occur. Heavy were its burden through the heaven and the earth. Only all of a sudden will it come to you". They ask you as if you were eager in search thereof: Say: The knowledge thereof

rests with Allah alone, but most men know not.

(7:187).<sup>14</sup>

### Relevant Examples

Certain examples are being given here below in which the texts of *Ahadith* will be checked against the *Qur'an*.

#### 1-Lies Attributed to Prophet Ibrahim (pbuh)

Al-Bukhari, Muslim and others have recorded a *hadith* on the authority of Abu Hurayrah:

“The Prophet (s.a.w.) said: Ibrahim (pbuh) never spoke lies except three lies”.<sup>15</sup> This tradition comprises an allegation against prophet Ibrahim (pbuh). The *Qur'an* exonerates him of this kind of allegations. It says:

And call to mind, through this divine writ, Ibrahim. Behold,  
he was a man of truth, a prophet.

(19:41).

The *Qur'an* reads:

And also mention in the Book Abraham: he was a man of  
truth, a prophet”.

(19:41)

It describes prophet Ibrahim (pbuh) as a paragon of truth (*siddique*), whereas the *Hadith* quotes some exceptions to this quality of prophet (pbuh). The Qur'anic word “*siddique*” to glorify Ibrahim (pbuh) means “perfectly truthfull”.<sup>16</sup> Al-Raghib al-Asfahani (d.502 A.H.) mentions four views concerning its meaning: 1) one in whose life truth dominates, 2) one who never speaks a lie, 3) one who is so much given to the truth that the occurrence of lie is impossible, and 4) one whose deeds correspond to his assertions.<sup>17</sup> In fact, prophet Ibrahim (pbuh) was a man of truth in all these four senses. In Arabic this form of any word signifies perfection.

If the *Hadith* mentioned above is considered authentic, *Qur'anic* statement proves meaningless. If the sanctity of the *Qur'an* is maintained, the above tradition will have to be classified as unreliable. Ibn Hajar al-'Asqalani (d.852 A.H.), one of the highly recognized commentators of al-Bukhari's *Hadith* work, *Sahih*, seems to be inclined towards maintaining the authenticity of the tradition in view. He quotes Ibn 'Aqil (d.513 A.H.) as having said that the situation faced by Ibrahim forced him to resort to making false statements, which according to him was quite logical.<sup>18</sup> Al-Qazi Abu Bakr ibn al-'Arabi (d.543 A.H.) approves this *Hadith* by saying that the position of Ibrahim (pbuh) as a prophet and friend of Allah required him to be openly with truth but he was allowed concession and he accepted it, and resorted to speak lies.<sup>19</sup> Al-Qurtubi (d.671 A.H.) tries to justify the *Hadith* by using the same argument as Ibn al-'Arabi developed.<sup>20</sup> Ibn al-Jawzi (d.597 A.H.) rejects the allegation of speaking lies to Ibrahim (pbuh) as unfounded. He says that what are attributed to Ibrahim (pbuh) as lies are not lies but equivocations (*ma'aareez*). In order to prove his point he advances several examples from Islamic history itself.<sup>21</sup> Yet, he remains short of declaring the *Hadith* as unacceptable.

Al-Alusi (d.1270 A.H.) does not find any problem in the authenticity of the report. He says that the mention of lies attributed to Ibrahim (pbuh) is metaphorical (*majaaz*), and not in its actual sense.<sup>22</sup> Metaphorical application of the word "lie" may not generally be considered a problem, but to use it for a prophet is certainly undesirable. Moreover it is not imaginable that Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) applied the word "*kadhib*" (lie) even metaphorically for the Prophet for whom the Qur'an uses the most honorable title "Siddique" (the most truthful).

Amin Ahsan Islahi (d.1997 C.E.) also seems to justify the authenticity of the *Hadith*. He says that the word "kadhib" has three connotations, lie, mistake, and double entendre; in the *Hadith* this word has been used in the sense of double entendre. He further argues that the word "*kadhib*" was used by Arab poets in that sense hence there may not be any problem in the report.<sup>23</sup> Even though the Arab poets and orators used the word "*kadhib*" in the sense of double entendre, it is hard to imagine that the Prophet (s.a.w.) used a word which had the potential to mislead the people, particularly when the Qur'an takes a very clear stand about the position of the great prophet, Ibrahim (pbuh).

Al-Fakhr al-Razi (d.606 A.H.) categorically declares the *Hadith* as a lie. He suggests that it is more appropriate to accuse the narrators of fabricating the lie than attributing the lie to the prophets (pbuh).<sup>24</sup> Syed Mawdudi (d.1979 C.E.) criticizes the approach of those who consider the *Hadith* in view as authentic. He says that these people keep the truthfulness of al-Bukhari's and Muslim's sources of information so much dear to them that they do not mind if a prophet stands accused of speaking lies. It is not reasonable, he argues, to attribute to Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.) such a gross statement merely on the ground that the chain of narrators of such tradition is not defective.<sup>25</sup> Syed Qu'ib is of the view that there is no need of referring to prophet Ibrahim's statements concerned, as mentioned in the *Qur'an*, as lies. These are not lies but satirical answer meant for the people.<sup>26</sup>

## 2-Predetermination of Human Destiny

Al-Bukhari, Muslim and others have included in their *Hadith* works a chapter on predestination (*kitab al-qadar*). All the reports recorded in it are to conform to the idea that everything in the life is predetermined. The first *Hadith* quoted in these sources is on the authority of 'Abd Allah ibn Mas'ud. According to this tradition the Prophet (s.a.w.) said: "Verily, the first structural form of everyone of you is gathered in his mother's womb for forty days, then it turns into a clot of blood (*'alaqah*) and remains like this for the same period, then it turns into lump of flesh (*muzghah*) and remains like this for the same period whereupon the angel is sent who breaths into it life, and is commanded to write its sustenance (*rizq*), life-span (*ajal*), whole life activities (*'amal*), and its end either as a condemned one (*shaqiyy*) or as a rewarded one (*sa'id*).

By the one except whom there is no deity but He! One of you indeed performs the deeds of the people deserving paradise until there is almost no distance between him and the paradise, he is then overtaken by the destiny (*al-kitab*); he consequently does the deeds of those to be condemned to the hell, and he enters it. And one of you performs the deeds of the condemned until there is a very little distance between him and the hell, he is then overtaken by the destiny and he starts doing good deeds, as a result of which he enters the paradise".<sup>27</sup>

According to this tradition, man is not free to think, choose and act; he is bound to do only what has already been fixed by the Creator. This concept of predetermination

is in stark contrast with the theory of examination as mentioned in the *Qur'an*. Around twenty two (22) times the *Qur'an* has reiterated the fact that man is being tested in various ways. Translation of such two verses are given here below.

Behold, We have willed that all beauty on earth be a means by which We put men to a test, to see as to which of them are best in conduct.

(18:7)

He Who created Death and Life, that He might test you, as to which of you is best in deed

(67:2)

These *Qur'anic* statements are crystal clear over the position of man on earth. He lives and acts here as an examinee. The concept of examination entails freedom of will to think, decide, choose and act. The *Qur'an* says that man is to the extent of his needs is free, whereas the Hadith quoted above denies this privilege to man; it binds him to the predestined plan.

The above tradition also contrasts with the concept of malleability of man. The *Qur'an* has used three phrases, “they might” (*la 'allahum*), “you might” (*la 'allakum*), and “he might” around 44, 68 and 3 times respectively. These phrases indicate that man is able to change if he wishes so. Three verses are being quoted here to bring the point home.

And we tried them with blessings as well as afflictions, so that they might mend their ways.

(7:168)

Thus Allah makes His messages clear to you, so that you might find the guidance

(3:103)

But speak to him in a mild manner, so that he might bethink of him or be filled with apprehension.

(20:44)

These assertions refer to man as a malleable creature. The feature of malleability does not allow one to think of man as bound and coerced by the destiny.

Here one might raise a question as to the meaning of *verses*, which apparently support the idea of predestination. It should be born in mind that those verses have been interpreted in a way that they appear to be in favor of fore-written destiny of man. This essay does not allow this debate. It might suffice to say here that no *verse* of the *Qur'an* contradicts another *verse*. There is a complete harmony among all the statements in the *Qur'an*. An interpretation of a *verse*, which goes against another *verse*, is not acceptable. A *mufassir* has a duty to interpret the *Qur'an* in a way that the entire *Qur'an* appears as an integral whole. Since a number of *verses* very clearly mention the idea of man's examination on the earth, no *verse* can ever be construed as speaking in favor of predetermination theory.

Most of the traditions recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim in their *kitab al-qadar* may not withstand any scrutiny in the light of the *Qur'anic* theory of man's examination and that of his malleability. What the above tradition declares and what the *Qur'an* explains are both poles apart. There may hardly be any way to effect compromise between them. That is why only one of them can be accepted as right. Naturally, the judgment will go in favor of the *Qur'an*.

Apart from this, the above tradition has an inner discrepancy. There are obviously two sections in the tradition, one informing about the process of predetermination, the other talking about the impact of predetermination on man's life and the end-result. In the first section, there is a reference to only one book (*kitab*) according to which man's life will be patterned. But in the second section, there is a reference to one more book according to which man, to some extent, is independent to decide and act. The book of destiny overtakes the man only after he enjoys his freedom for a certain period of time. Even this discrepancy may suffice to render the Hadith unreliable.

### **3-Entry into the Paradise: No Role of Man's Deeds**

Al-Bukhari, Muslim and others have recorded this *Hadith* on the authority of various authorities including Abu Hurayrah: The Prophet (s.a.w.) said: None of you shall ever enter the paradise due to his deed. Someone asked: Even you, O Prophet of Allah! The Prophet (s.a.w.) answered: Yes, even I, except that my Lord covers me with His

merc".<sup>28</sup> This statement seems to be contradicting the glad tiding given by the *Qur'an* that the sincere believers' good deeds will lead them to the paradise (7:43; 16:32; 52:19; 77:43). In both the periods of the Prophet (s.a.w.), *Makkan* and Madinan, revelations came assuring the believers and informing the non-believers that the success in this life and the hereafter depends on sincere faith and good deeds (2:25, 82, 277; 3:57; 4:57, 122, 173; 11:23; 14:23; 18:107; 22:14, 23, 50, 56; 29:58; 31:8; 32:19; 42:22; 47:12; 85:11 etc).

The *Qur'an* uses the term "jaza" (reward and recompense), when referring to believers' entry into the paradise (16:30-31). In 23:1-11 it has been clearly stated that the entry into the paradise is the real success (*falah*), which is guaranteed for those with good deeds. Verse 10:4 spells out that the promise of Allah is genuine, and the promise is that He will reward in the hereafter those with sincere faith and good deeds justly. Even the mercy (*rahmah*) of Allah is conditioned to faith and good deeds (45:30). Verse 9:111 announces that there is an agreement between the believers and Allah, according to which, the believers will sacrifice their wealth and lay down their life in the path of Allah, and Allah will grant them entry into the paradise. In short, the *Qur'an* recognizes the significance of good deeds, whereas the above Hadith denies the impact of good deeds.

Ibn Battal (d.449 A.H.), a commentator of al-Bukhari does not find any contradiction between the above tradition and the *Qur'anic* statement concerning the significance of good deeds. He says that the Hadith refers to the man's entry into the paradise and everlasting comforts therein, and the *Qur'an* (16:3 & 43:72) informs about the role of good deeds in determining the status of man therein.<sup>29</sup> This is mere surmise. It seems Ibn Battal really finds conflict between the *Qur'an* and the above tradition, but only in an enthusiasm of maintaining the sanctity of the tradition he comes up with this untenable idea.

Al-Karmani (d.786 A.H.), another commentator of al-Bukhari tries to justify the tradition in a different way. He claims that mere good deeds will not cause one to enter the paradise, as the paradise is not the recompense of deeds; entry into the paradise needs the mercy.<sup>30</sup> In this view there are two problems. First, the *Qur'an* itself declares unequivocally that Allah has bought from believers their life and wealth and in return He has reserved their places in the paradise (9:111). Second, it is true that there is a role of Allah's mercy but the role of man's deeds cannot be ignored. It is man's good

deeds, which make him deserve Allah's mercy (45:30). If Allah's mercy is conditioned with good deeds, how can one deny the contribution of man's deeds?

Al-Alusi (d.1270 A.H.) comes up with another argument to forge compromise between the two, the above tradition and the *Qur'anic* statement on the matter concerned. He says that the *Qur'an* refers to a general reason and the tradition discloses the real reason for the entry into the paradise.<sup>31</sup> He forgot to see that the tradition does not give any credit to good deeds at all.

The above tradition is forcefully used to condemn Mu'tazilite's stand that man will enter the paradise due to his deeds. They advance the *Qur'an* to support their view.<sup>32</sup> There is a possibility of the above tradition to have been developed with a view to silencing the Mu'tazalite scholars.

Moreover, the second part of the tradition, which mentions that even the Prophet (s.a.w.) will not be eligible for the entry into the paradise without the mercy of Allah, in a way seems to be degrading the position of the Last Prophet (s.a.w.). The Prophet's position is above board. His name is mentioned beside Allah. The question itself (even you, O Prophet of Allah?) is questionable. It may not have been raised by any of his companions who were well aware that the Prophet (s.a.w.) was already a sign of Allah's mercy (21:107).

#### 4-Coercion in Conversion to Islam

Al-Bukhari, Muslim and others have recorded this *Hadith* on the authority of 'Umar, Ibn 'Umar and Abu Hurayrah etc: "The Prophet (s.a.w.) said: I have been commanded to wage war (*qital*) against the mankind (al-nas) until they acknowledge (*shahadah*) that there is no deity but Allah; one who professed it (*la ilaha illa Allah*), his life and property are safe from me, except for the sake of justice, and his reckoning is on Allah".<sup>33</sup>

This tradition offers the idea of force in spreading Islam in the world. Ibn Hajar finds some problem in this report, yet he tries to interpret it in a bid to fend off the blame of coercion in Islam. He says that the word 'war' (*qital*) may also mean something else that can prevent war such as imposition of levy (*jizyah*) on non-Muslims; and the word '*shahadah*' signifies acceptance of Islam or enemy's subjugation, which could be achieved either by killing or by imposing levy or by treaty.<sup>34</sup> This interpretation may

not be tenable. The tradition as quoted above declares in an unambiguous manner that the prophet (s.a.w.) was bound to fight the people to force them to accept Islam, and in the case of people's rejection of this new faith he had to continue his war against them until their total submission to Allah. Al-Sam'ani (d.489 A.H.) sees in this tradition, among other things, obligation of *jihad* (war) against the non-believers.<sup>35</sup> He has rightly understood the import of the *Hadith*. But this *Hadith* is in quite contrast with certain *Qur'anic* injunctions.

There shall be no coercion in matters of religion. Distinct has now become the right way from the error.

(2:256)

If they turn away, we have not sent you as a guard over them: you are not bound to do more than deliver the message.

(42:48)

So, exhort them; your task is only to exhort: you cannot compel them (to believe).

(88:21-22).

These *verses* too obviously prohibit the use of force in conversion to Islam. All Islamic jurists hold that forcible conversion is under all circumstances null and void, and that any attempt at coercing a non-believer to accept the faith of Islam is grievous sin: a verdict, which disposes of the widespread fallacy that Islam places before the unbelievers the alternative of "conversion or the sword".<sup>36</sup> And this verdict of Muslim scholars is certainly based on the above *Qur'anic* precepts.

Here one might refer to certain *Qur'anic verses*, which exhort the believers to fight against the non-believers until the chaos (*fitnah*) comes to a finish and the religion becomes of Allah (2:193 & 8:39). It should be born in mind that these *verses* categorically refer to a situation where the enemy has initiated the war and the believers have to fight back in self-defense. The backdrop of the above two *verses* is that of the battles in which Madinah was invaded by the *Quraysh*. If these *verses* are read along with other *verses* preceding and succeeding, there will not arise any confusion whatsoever. It may be suggested here that the above tradition has also a

historical background confining the fight only against the non-believers of Makkah. There will, then, arise another problem. According to the tradition in view, the Prophet had to continue the war until the enemy accepted Islam. Historically, the enemies were in no war forced to enter the new faith.

Islam does have the principle of co-existence between believers and non-believers. The agreement between the Prophet (s.a.w.) and the Jews stands witness to it. The *Qur'an* commands the believers to interact justly and generously with the non-believers who have no clash with them (60:8). Although war is allowed against the enemy in certain circumstances but in case of Muslims' victory over the enemy use of force to convert the non-believers is in no way justified.

### 5-Moses' Power to Delay His Death

Al-Bukhari, Muslim and others have recorded this tradition on the authority of Abu Hurayrah: The Prophet (s.a.w.) said: The angel of death went to Moses and asked him to respond to his Lord's call to die. Moses, then, hit the angel's eye and knocked it out. The angel returned to Allah and complained: You sent me to such a servant of yours who does not want death; he gouged my eye out. Allah, then, returned to him his eye and asked him to check with Moses whether he wanted the life.....<sup>37</sup> This tradition, even after a cursory look, seems to be a story from Judeo-Christian traditions (*Isra'iliyyat*). It reminds of other stories in the Jewish sources, particularly that of wrestling between Yahweh (Jewish god) and Jacob, a prophet. According to this story, Jacob defeated his Lord in this fighting.<sup>38</sup> Some scholars have denied the authenticity of this tradition on the ground that it was not possible for Moses, a mortal being, to harm an angel. Ibn Khuzaymah (d.311 A.H.) calls these scholars as heresiarch (*al-Mubtadi'ah*).<sup>39</sup> He argues that the angel entered Moses' residence in the form of a human and Moses considering him an intruder, not knowing that he was an angel hit his eye and injured him. Had Moses, he maintains, recognized the identity of the angel, he would not have attacked him.<sup>40</sup> This line of argument represents his imagination and speculation. Moreover, it does not make any difference whether the angel appeared in the form of a human and entered the place of Moses; it is not possible for a human to harm an angel.

It is interesting to note that Al-Bukhari has basically recorded this report as a story related by Abu Hurayrah. He only in the end of the report observes that another chain of narrators consisting of, among others, Ma'mar and Hammam narrates it from Abu Hurayrah as the statement of the Prophet (s.a.w.). Even Muslim has quoted it first of all as a story told by Abu Hurayrah himself.<sup>41</sup> It seems more reasonable to consider this tradition as a story related by someone other than the Prophet (s.a.w.).

Even if the above tradition is considered statement of the Prophet, it may not be found justified. It goes against what the *Qur'an* says. The angel as reported in the tradition was that of the death. He approaches a human only at the time of his death. The *Qur'an* reiterates that time of death is divinely appointed; and that when it comes, there is no way for anyone to postpone it:

When death approaches one of you, our angels take his soul,  
and they never fail in their duty.  
(6:61)

To every people is a term appointed: when their term is  
reached, not an hour can they cause delay, nor can they  
advance it.  
(7:34; 10:49)

When their term expires, they will not be able to delay for a  
single hour, just as they will not be able to anticipate it.  
(16:61)

And to no soul will Allah grant respite, when the time  
appointed has come.  
(63:11)

In the above tradition Moses managed to postpone his death by retaliating against the angel of death. It is not imaginable that Moses did so. Al-Nawawi (d.676 A.H.), in a bid to prove the authenticity of the tradition, comes up with another idea that the angel of death did not approach Moses first time to cause him to die but to put the angel to test whether he is able to carry out his duty.<sup>42</sup> It is a far-fetched idea, which may not be proved either rationally or qur'anically. Here it appears that the ahl al-Hadith do not hesitate to use even unfounded arguments based on mere speculation (*al-zann*), which

cannot be the substitute of the truth (10:36). The truth is in the *Qur'an*, and not in the speculation developed by man.

### 6-Moses' Condemnation of Adam's Error

Al-Bukhari, Muslim and others have recorded this *Hadith* on the authority of Abu Hurayrah: The Prophet (s.a.w.) said: Adam and Moses argued. Moses said: 'O Adam! You are our father; you frustrated our hope and caused our expulsion from the paradise'. Adam said: You are Moses; Allah privileged you with His word and wrote for you with His own hand. Do you blame me for something Allah had predetermined for me forty years before my creation".<sup>43</sup>

In this report there are several things objectionable. First, Moses addresses Adam by name. It is not befitting for a prophet to address his father by his name. It runs counter to the principle of "*Ihsan*" (excellent treatment) given to all the prophets including Moses (2:83). Second, the son is not supposed to condemn the father for his error. If he is bound to refer to his father's mistake, he has to apply once again the principle of "*Ihsan*". Moses' words are very harsh and unbecoming of a pious son for a pious father. Third, why did Moses condemn Adam for something for which Allah had forgiven him? It is a well-known norm that after repentance the person concerned should not be reminded of his past errors. Fourth, why did Moses blame Adam? Did he not know that the Satan had lured Adam into infringing upon the limit? Allah has categorically mentioned that it was Satan who caused Adam to be expelled from the paradise. The *Qur'an* says:

O children of Adam! Do not allow Satan to seduce you in the same way as he caused your parents to be driven out of the paradise.

(7:27)

Since Moses received revelation, he must have been told about the role of Satan in Adam's expulsion from the Garden. According to Allah, Satan is to be blamed for that, not Adam. Yet, Moses blamed Adam. It is strange rather unbelievable.

While answering to the above observations, al-Maazari (d.536 A.H.), a commentator of Muslim's work, has referred to various interpretations.<sup>44</sup> One, a son may be allowed

on certain occasions to condemn his father. Yes, in certain circumstances the son may condemn the father, but what was the exigency that Moses found himself obliged to condemn Adam? One may not speculate about any need for that. Two, the law (*shari'ah*) of both Adam and Moses was different from each other hence no problem in a son's blaming his father. Since the parents-children relationship is a phenomenon from the time immemorial, Allah must have revealed to his prophets about the principles of that relationship. We have seen earlier that in Moses' law the concept of "*Ihsan*" was already there to govern the relationship of the two parties. Three, Moses blamed Adam who was already away from the world of responsibility; in the other-worldly life the blame is ineffective; it does not cause any problem to the blamed. Ibn 'Abd al-Barr (d.463 A.H.) thinks that Moses' blaming Adam was an exception to the rule that "none should be blamed for something against which he has already repented".<sup>45</sup> This is an oft-applied argument in a situation where there are no rational or moral arguments. It seems both al-Maazari and Ibn 'Abd al-Barr forgot to bring to their minds that in the hereafter no one will ever blame the other because it is a frivolous act (*laghwa*), which is an impossibility in the hereafter:

They will not hear in the paradise any vain discourse, but only salutations of peace.

(19:62)

They shall there exchange with one another a cup free of frivolity, free of sin.

(52:23)

No frivolity will they hear therein, nor any mischief.

(56:25)

No vanity shall they hear therein, nor untruth.

(78:35)

In a Garden on high, they shall hear no word of vanity.

(88:10-11)

Al-Tibi (d.743 A.H.) uses the above tradition to reject the views of jabarite school of thought, on the one hand, and condemn Mu'tazilite scholars, on the other.<sup>46</sup> It creates

suspicion about the genuineness of the tradition. It is not unlikely that the above tradition was fabricated in a bid to hit at others.

### **7-Time-Schedule of the Entire Creation Process**

Muslim has recorded a *Hadith* on the authority of Abu Hurayrah: “The Prophet took hold of my hand and said: Allah created on Saturday the earth, on Sunday the mountains therein, on Monday the trees, on Tuesday the misfortune, on Wednesday the light, on Thursday spread in it animals, and on Friday in the late afternoon He created Adam....”<sup>47</sup>

This report runs counter to the *Qur’anic* statement. It informs that the entire process of creation was accomplished in seven days, whereas the *Qur’an* refers to six-day process of creation of everything in the universe. Two such *verses* are being quoted here below.

Verily, your Lord is Allah who created the heavens and the earth in six days.

(7:54)

We indeed created the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them in six days.

(50:38)

This information is available in many other places such as 10:3; 11:7; 25:59; 32:4; 57:4. There is no way to effect compromise between the above tradition and the *Qur’an*. It is strange that Muslim’s commentator, Al-Nawawi (d.676 A.H.) has ignored this contradiction and passed by it without any comment. Did he not know about the *Qur’anic* time-schedule of the creation? If he was aware, why did he, then, keep mum on this report? It seems he demonstrated his prejudice in favor of what appears to be a statement of the Prophet reported through reliable reporters. If a *Hadith* appears to be contradicting the *Qur’anic* statement and there is no way of compromise between them, the tradition should be rejected as baseless.

## 8-Transfer of Muslims' Sin to Jews and Christians

Only Muslim has recorded on the authority of Abu Musa al-Ash'ari three traditions of the same theme.

1. "The Prophet (s.a.w.) said: On the Day of Judgment Allah will produce to every Muslim a Jew or a Christian, and say: This is your ransom".<sup>48</sup>
2. "The Prophet (s.a.w.) said: No Muslim dies but Allah consigns a Jew or a Christian to the hell in his place".<sup>49</sup>
3. "The Prophet (s.a.w.) said: On the Day of Judgment many Muslims will appear with as much burden of sins as mountains. Allah will forgive them for their sins, which He will place on Jews and Christians".<sup>50</sup>

Al-Nawawi, Muslim's commentator seems to be unable to advance any rationale for the above traditions. He, therefore, tries unsuccessfully to interpret them in a bid to maintain their sanctity. He is of the view that what Abu Hurayrah has reported from the Prophet (s.a.w.)—"For everyone there are two places reserved, one in the hell and the other in the paradise. If a believer enters the paradise, his place in the hell will be taken over by a disbeliever due to his disbelief"<sup>51</sup>—explains the above *Ahadith*. He means to say that Jews and Christians will enter the hell owing to their own sins and not because of the sins of Muslims. In order to strengthen his stand he derives an argument from another Hadith—"He who introduces an evil act will have to bear the sin of everyone who does it"<sup>52</sup>—that the non-believers will bear Muslims' sin due to their having introduced evil acts.<sup>53</sup> Al-Nawawi's arguments may hardly withstand a scrutiny. The above traditions clearly mention that Allah will transfer the Muslims' sin to Jews and Christians. The second tradition, which he has quoted to explain the matter does not say what he derives from it. He has taken only one part thereof and left another one thereof. According to this Hadith, the introducer of a sin will be burdened not only with his sin but also with the sin committed by others, the while the sin of others will not be commuted. The above three *Ahadith* are categorical in the transfer of Muslims' sin to Jews and Christians, who will be burdened with two categories of sins: 1) their own, and 2) Muslims'.

The above three *Ahadith* as recorded by Muslim alone are as such in gross contrast with the *Qur'anic* statement:

And whatever any human being commits rests upon himself alone; and no bearer of burdens shall be made to bear another's burden.

(6:164)

The *Qur'an* rejects the idea of transfer of one's sin to others, whereas the traditions spell out a totally different message. Al-Nawawi does feel very strongly about this contradiction between the *Qur'an* and Muslim's traditions, but suggests interpreting the latter so as to remove the conflict. As we have seen earlier, his attempt to make a compromise between the two apparently contradictory ideas has miserably failed, making it crystal clear that there is an uncompromising conflict between what the *Qur'an* says and what the traditions are conveying. It is interesting to note that when Abu Burdah (d.104 A.H.) quoted the above tradition concerning the transfer of sin to others, on the authority of his father, Abu Musa al-Ash'ari, Umayyad caliph 'Umar ibn Abd al-'Aziz (d.101 A.H.) was surprised and he asked Abu Burdah three times: Did your father really narrate it from the Prophet (s.a.w.)? He even asked him to take oath to that effect.<sup>54</sup> The fifth pious caliph's question seems to be genuine. It leaves an impact on the mind, creating a doubt about the authenticity of the traditions concerned. Although Abu Burdah took oath and confirmed that he heard the tradition from his father, the doubt about its authenticity, which emerged in the mind of 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz, remains in place.

### **9-Reference to Adam's Wife, Eve as the Root Cause of the Women's Infidelity to Their Husbands**

Al-Bukhari and Muslim have both recorded a tradition on the authority of Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet (s.a.w.) said: "Were it not for the children of Israel, the food would never get rotten and the meat would never putrefy; were it not for Eve, no woman would ever turn infidel to her husband".<sup>55</sup>

This tradition traces back the causes of two things, decay of food items and infidelity of woman. The cause of putridity of food stuffs, as mentioned in the above tradition, is related to the children of Israel. The cause of women's infidelity to their husbands, as indicated in the above tradition, is connected with the mother of mankind, Eve. It stems from here that the foods were not rotten before the time of children of Israel. Al-

Nawawi quotes some scholars anonymously as saying that when the children of Israel stored the special food items, *al-mann wa al-salwa*, defying the instruction for not doing that, the foods got rotten; and the decay of food from then continued.<sup>56</sup> This line of argument raises several questions. First, was the storing of food items so serious offence that the entire humanity was subjected to forbear the suffering? Second, why was the entire mankind punished because of the belligerence of Israel's children? Third, why was the scope of food items' decay expanded from *al-mann wa al-salwa* to all kinds of food stuffs? Fourth, were the elements in the foodstuffs that are vulnerable to decay not available in the foodstuff before the children of Israel? It does not seem easy to answer to these genuine questions.

The Qur'an has mentioned the blessings of Allah upon the followers of Moses. One such blessing appeared in the form of special food items, *al-mann wa al-salwa*. We find their mention at three places, 2:57; 7:160; and 20:80. At these places and other ones where the case of children of Israel has been mentioned, one may find the mention of various offences children of Israel committed and also the punishment in commensurate with those sins. None of these descriptions contain any reference to the defiance of Jews by storing the heavenly edibles. The Qur'an reiterates time and again that the major sins cause the displeasure of Allah. Storing the food item does not constitute from any angle a major crime. Apart from that, it is not mentioned in the genuine sources (the Qur'an and Hadith literature) that the children of Israel had been forbidden from storing the food.

The Qur'an makes it clear that the punishment is only for the sinful and not for others who did not commit the sin:

And if anyone earns sin, he earns it against his own soul: for Allah is full of knowledge and wisdom.

(4:111)

According to the Qur'an, the burden of someone will not be placed on someone else:

Every soul draws the meed of its acts on none but itself: no bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another.

(6:164)

These are eternal principles of justice as decreed by Allah. There was no way to burden the entire humanity with the burden of the children of Israel. If they committed something wrong, only they deserved the chastisement, and not others.

The putrid nature of edible items is not the manifestation of some nation's crime but it is natural trait of the animate and inanimate beings on the earth. If the foodstuffs were free from putrefaction before the children of Israel were punished, the edible items would not have been alterable even in the stomach. In that case, the digestion system of man must have been different. As a matter of fact, man is created with certain elements in his body. In order to maintain the physical health man needs water, carbohydrates, vitamins, proteins, minerals, irons etc. These nutrients are supplied by the vegetables, fruits, water, lintels etc. These stuffs are vulnerable to decay because the nutritious elements are by nature like that. Man's digestion system demands that the stuffs taken in must be of putrid nature otherwise nothing would get digested and man would never be able to take anything. There might be no evidence to prove that before the children of Israel the animals when died would not putrefy at all. If it was so, the man would not have been able to take meat and digest it. The concept of death is a reality from time immemorial. The death of food was and is its decay hence the decay of the edible stuffs must have been in place right from the day Adam and Eve stepped into the earth.

The second message of the above report is that the mother of the entire mankind, Eve was responsible for man's expulsion from the paradise because she duped Adam into taking the forbidden fruit. It cannot be true. The Qur'an presents the case of Eve in a different manner:

Then did Satan make them both slip from the Garden and  
get them both out the state in which they had been

(2:36)

As it is obvious from this statement, Satan tricked both Adam and Eve into taking the forbidden fruit. It was not the case as claimed by al-Nawawi. He brings the interpretation advanced by al-Qazi that Satan persuaded Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, and Eve, then, did the same to Adam who took the fruit against the instruction of Allah.<sup>57</sup> The report goes against the Qur'anic statement hence unacceptable.

Al'Ayni puts his understanding of the statement concerning the role of Eve as reported in the above tradition: "She invited Adam to eat the fruit of that tree".<sup>58</sup> Ibn Hajar explains the role of Eve in this way: In this statement there is a reference to Eve's persuasion of Adam due to which Adam took from the forbidden tree. Khayanah (violation, infidelity) on the part of Eve means that she accepted what was presented to her by Satan in a beautiful manner; and she presented that idea to Adam in an attractive way.<sup>59</sup>

Both these comments made by al-'Ayni and Ibn Hajar represent classical example of ignoring the Qur'an in a bid to authenticate tradition recorded by al-Bukhari. Had they looked even cursorily at the Qur'anic statement (2:36), they would never have believed what they did. As the Qur'an puts it, it was not Eve who forced Adam to do wrong but it was Satan who persuaded Adam and also Eve. Why should, then, Eve be blamed for what she did not commit at all.

Most probably, the statement as reported in the above tradition was made by some teacher while making the interpretation of the verse 2:36; and later on it was by mistake reported as that of the Prophet (s.a.w.). It was not possible for the Prophet (s.a.w.) to say something which was in contrast with the Qur'an. The bible does blame Eve for causing Adam to deviate from the command of God. It is to be born in mind that the currently available Bible does not represent the original revelation from God; it is totally corrupted; its adherents have modified it to the extent of damaging its purity. There is a very clear conflict between the statement of Bible and that of the Qur'an. The truth is with the Qur'an, not with the Bible.

The above report is a source of humiliation to women. Is it only wife who turns disloyal to the husband? Does the husband not do the same to the wife? Why, then, to blame wife alone? Infidelity on the part of either man or woman is not because of Eve's or Adam's error, but because Allah created man with that capacity. The Qur'an says:

By the soul and Him who perfected it in proportion; He,  
then, inspired to it its right and wrong.

(91:7-8)

If a woman and man commit sin against each other, it is because they have its innate capability. It is man's freedom of thought, choice and action that he/she does, at times, wrong and, at some other times, right.

### 10-Woman, House, and Animal: Sources of Evil Luck

Al-Bukhari, Muslim and others have recorded a tradition on the authority of ‘Abd Allah ibn ‘Umar which confirms the woman, animal, and house as evil portents. The tradition in the words of Muslim is: The Prophet (s.a.w.) said: If the ill-luck was true, it should be in the horse, woman, and house.<sup>60</sup> Al-Khattabi tries to interpret the report mentioned above in his own way. He says that the evil portent in house is its insufficient space to live and also its bad neighbor; that in the woman is her impudent tongue and her inability to conceive and give birth; and that in the horse is its being unfit for the war”.<sup>61</sup> It is nice to say that but the wording of the tradition does not allow this kind of interpretation. It is very clear from al-Khattabi’s interpretation that he wanted to remove the doubt about the authenticity of al-Bukhari’s recorded tradition. Otherwise he does see problem in the statement reported in the tradition. Ibn Hajar adopts the same approach; he quotes various views which strengthen the idea of position of woman as a source of evil omen. But he himself is of the view as expressed by al-Khattabi.<sup>62</sup>

If evil omen is really what al-Khattabi and Ibn Hajar say, why is it, then, confined to only women? To these two scholars, evil omen of woman signifies her abusive language and inability to conceive. Are these two problems only in women and not in men? There is no denying the fact men are also of the same nature; they also use abusive and offensive language; they may also be incapable to impregnate their wives due to the non-functional position of their sexual prowess. But the tradition does not refer to men as evil portents. Why is it so?

Can one imagine that the Prophet (s.a.w.) condemned women as evil portents? It is not possible at all. The Qur’an came down to him; he was fully aware of the position of evil portent. The Qur’an says:

Whenever good came to them, they said: “Ours is this”. And if evil afflicted them, they ascribed it to evil omen connected with Moses and those with him. Be informed! Verily, their evil omen are with Allah but most of them know not.

(7:131)

This verse puts it clearly that evil omen is nothing but people's own superstition. Actually, when the people are afflicted with one or the other painful experiences, they immediately try to identify the factor for the pain and generally put the blame on something or some place or some human as the source of bad luck. They forget that their suffering whatsoever was not due to any source of bad luck on the earth but it was because of the divine law according to which both the happiness and the distress befall man. It is this message which has been conveyed in the verse (7:131).

Verses 36:18-19 read:

They said: We see evil omen from you: if you cease not, we will surely stone you, and a painful torment will touch you from us. The Messengers said: "Your evil omens be with you! (Do you call it evil omen) because you are admonished? Nay, but you are a people transgressing all bounds.

In this statement of the Qur'an we find repudiation of the evil omen idea. It is non-existent; it is actually people's suffering and their ignorance about its cause that they develop the superstition concerning evil omen.

When this tradition was brought to the notice of 'A'ishah, she corrected the report that the Prophet (s.a.w.) said: "Arabs of the ignorance period and the Jews used to say that woman, house, and animal were the sources of bad luck". 'A'ishah even made the observation that the reporter of the tradition did not hear the first part of the Prophetic statement.<sup>63</sup> Ibn Hajar finds the report narrating 'A'ishah's comment defective due to some defect in the chain of narrator. But when he finds himself before some authentic reports narrating 'A'ishah's observation, he makes a judgment that 'A'ishah's interpretation is a far-fetched idea in relation to so highly authentic tradition recorded by al-Bukhari. While negating the approach of 'A'ishah, he says that the Prophet (s.a.w.) should not have made it as a news about the ignorant people.<sup>64</sup>

It seems that the only concern of Hadith commentators is to insist and maintain the authenticity of traditions recorded in this or that book at any cost. Ibn Hajar should not have been so daring to denounce what 'A'ishah said. If 'A'ishah's observation is taken into consideration, the problem in the tradition is resolved without any hitch.

## Conclusion

As the Qur'an itself spells out, its position is as the criterion to judge the position of anything including the traditions attributed to the Prophet (s.a.w.). When some traditions recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim were subjected to scrutiny in the light of the Qur'anic statements and spirit, these traditions appeared problematic. Justice demands that these traditions, even though they are authentic from the angle of chain of narrators, should be declared as unacceptable. Muslim scholars owe a great duty to authenticate the compendia of Hadith by using the Qur'an as a criterion.

## Note

- 1 Al-Tirmidhi, Muhammad ibn 'Isa, Sunan (Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, Beirut, 1995), vol. 5, kitab al-Manaqib, Hadith no. 3892.
- 2 Al-Bukhari, Muhammad ibn Isma'il, *Sahih* (Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, Beirut, 1400 A.H.), vol. 1, kitab al-'Ilm, Hadith no. 103.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Muslim, *Sahih with al-Nawawi's Commentary* (Dar al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, 1997), vol. 3, kitab al-Jana'iz, Hadith no. 2151.
- 5 Al-Zarkashi, Badr al-Din, *Al-Ijabah* (edited by Sa'id al-Afghani, al-Maktab al-Islami, Beirut, 1980), pp. 67-68.
- 6 Ibid. pp. 85-86.
- 7 Ibid. p. 104.
- 8 Ibid. p. 139.
- 9 Muslim, op. cit., vol. 5, kitab al-Talaq, Hadith nos. 3681-3704.
- 10 Ibid., Hadith no. 3694.
- 11 Al-Qurtubi, Muhammad ibn Ahmad, *Al-Jami' li Ahkam al-Qur'an* (Dar al-Kutubb al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 2000), vol. 4, part 7, p. 77.
- 12 Al-Dumayni, Misfir Ghuram Allah, *Maqayis Naqd Mutun al-Sunnah* (Self published by the author, Riyadh, 1403 A.H.), p. 287.
- 13 Ibid. P. 297.
- 14 Ibn Qayyim, Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr, *Al-Manar al-Munif fi al-Sahih wa al-Da'if* (ed. 'Abd al-Fattah Abu Ghuddah, Maktab al-Ma'ibu'at al-Islamiyyah, Halab, n.d.), p. 80.
- 15 Al-Bukhari, op. cit., vol. 2, kitab al-Anbiya', Hadith nos. 3357-3358; Muslim, op. cit., vol. 8, kitab al-Faza'il, Hadith no. 6097.

- 16 Ibrahim Mustafa and others (editors), *Al-Mu'jam al-Wasit* (Al-Maktabah al-Islamiyyah, Istanbul, n. d.), p. 511.
- 17 Al-Asfahani, al-Raghib, *Al-Mufradaat fi Gharib al-Qur'an* (Dar al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, 1998), p. 280.
- 18 Ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Bari* (Dar al-Salam, Riyadh, 2000), vol. 6, p. 473.
- 19 Ibn al-'Arabi, Abu Bakr, *Ahkam al-Qur'an* (Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 1996), vol. 3, pp. 262-263.
- 20 Al-Qurtubi, Muhammad ibn Ahmad, *op. cit.* vol. 6, part 11, pp. 198-200.
- 21 Ibn al-Jawzi, 'Abd al-Rahman ibn 'Ali, *Zad al-Masir fi 'Ilm al-Tafsir* (Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 2002), vol. 3, part 4, pp. 266-268.
- 22 Al-Alusi, Al-Sayyid Mahmud, *Rooh al-Ma'aani* (Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabî, Beirut, 1999), vol. 9, part 17, pp. 85-87.
- 23 Islahi, Amin Ahsan, *Tdabbur-e-Qur'an* (Taj Company, Delhi, 1997), vol. 5, pp. 162-163.
- 24 Al-Razi, Fakhr al-Din, *Mafatih al-Ghayb* (Dar Ihya' al-Turath al-'Arabi, Beirut, 1997), vol. 8, p. 156.
- 25 Mawdudi, Abul A'la, *Tafhim al-Qur'an* (Idara Tarjuman al-Qur'an, Lahore, 1997), vol. 3, pp. 167-168.
- 26 Syed Qutb, *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an* (Dar al-Shuruq, Cairo, 1996), vol. 4, p. 2387.
- 27 Al-Bukhari, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, kitab al-Qadar, Hadith no. 6594; Muslim, *op. cit.*, vol.8, kitab al-Qadar, Hadith no. 6665. The translation given is of the tradition as recorded by Muslim.
- 28 Al-Bukhari, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, kitab al-Marza, Hadith no. 5673, and kitab al-Riqaq, Hadith no. 6464; Muslim, *op. cit.*, kitab Sifatt al-Munafiqin, Hadith nos. 7042-7054. The words of the tradition quoted above are from Muslim.
- 29 Ibn Hajar, *op. cit.* vol. 11, kitab al-Riqaq, p. 357.
- 30 *Ibid.* p. 358.
- 31 Al-Alusi, *op. cit.*, vol. 7, part 14, p. 502.
- 32 Ibn Hajar, *op. cit.* vol. 11, p. 358; Ibn 'Atiyyah, *Al-Muharrar al-Wajiz* (Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 2001), vol. 3, p. 391.
- 33 Al-Bukhari, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, kitab al-Jihad wa al-Siyar, Hadith no. 2946; Muslim, *op. cit.*, kitab al-Iman, Hadith nos. 124-130.
- 34 Ibn Hajar, *op. cit.* vol. 1, p.105.
- 35 Al-Nawawi, Muhy al-Din, *Al-Minhaj:Sharh Sahih Muslim* (Dar al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, 1997), vol. 1, p. 160.
- 36 Muhammad Asad, *The Message of the Qur'an* (Dar al-Andalus, Gibraltar, 1980), p. 58.

- 37 Al-Bukhari, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, kitab Ahadith al-Anbiya', Hadith no. 3407; Muslim, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, kitab al-Faza'il, Hadith no. 6101.
- 38 The Bible, Genesis, 32:22-32.
- 39 Ibn Hajar, *op. cit.*, vol. 6, p. 538.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Muslim, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, Hadith no. 6100.
- 42 Al-Nawawi, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, p. 128.
- 43 Al-Bukhari, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, kitab al-Qadar, Hadith no. 6614; Muslim, *op. cit.*, vol. 8, kitab al-Qadar, Hadith nos. 6684-6689. The translation given there is based on the report according to Muslim's report no. 6684.
- 44 Ibn Hajar, *op. cit.*, vol. 11, p. 622.
- 45 Ibid. p.621.
- 46 Ibid. p. 623.
- 47 Muslim, *op. cit.*, vol. 9, kitab Sifat al-Munafiqin, Hadith no. 6985.
- 48 Ibid. kitab al-Tawbah, Hadith no. 6942.
- 49 Ibid. Hadith no. 6943-6944.
- 50 Ibid. Hadith no. 6945.
- 51 Ibn Majah, *Sunan* (Dar al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, 1997: along with the commentary of al-Sindi), vol. 4, kitab al-Zuhd, Hadith no. 4341.
- 52 Muslim, vol. 4, kitab al-Zakat, Hadith no. 2348.
- 53 Al-Nawawi, *op. cit.*, vol. 9, pp. 87-88.
- 54 Muslim, vol. 9, kitab al-Tawbah, Hadith no. 6943.
- 55 Ibid. vol. 5, kitab al-Riza', Hadith no. 3663; al-Bukhari, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, kitab Ahadith al-Anbiya', Hadith no. 3399.
- 56 Al-Nawawi, *op. cit.*, vol. 5, p. 301.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 Al'Ayni, Badr al-Din, '*Umdat al-Qari* (Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, Beirut, 2001), vol. 15, p. 291.
- 59 Ibn Hajar, *op. cit.*, vol. 6, p. 444.
- 60 Muslim, *op. cit.*, kitab al-Salam, Hadith nos. 2225-2226; al-Bukhari, *op. cit.*, vol. 4, kitab al-Tibb, Hadith no. 5753.
- 61 Al-'Ayna, *op. cit.*, vol. 21, p. 406.
- 62 Ibn Hajar, *op. cit.*, vol. 6, pp. 75-78.
- 63 Al-Zarkashi, *op. cit.*, pp. 103-104.
- 64 Ibn Hajar, *op. cit.*, vol. 6, p. 76.



# | **Book Reviews**



**Yoginder Sikand, ed., *Madrassa Reforms—Indian Muslim Voices*, Mumbai: Vikas Adhyayan Kendra, 2008. 163 Pages.**

What exactly needs to be reformed in the present system of madrasa education? Why? How? And, equally importantly, who should take on the responsibility for this? These are issues that are being hotly debated today in the media, in policy-making circles and also among Muslim scholars, including the ulema of the madrasas themselves. Because in India most ulema write in Urdu, their voices are not heard outside a narrow circle of Urdu readers, who are almost wholly Muslim. Consequently, their views on the entire gamut on issues related to the question of madrasa reforms generally go unheard of in the so-called Indian 'mainstream' media. This book, a collection of interviews by Yoginder Sikand with almost two dozen Muslim scholars, mostly ulema and graduates of madrasas, highlights the little known and even less understood ongoing debates within Muslim circles about the reform of traditional madrasa education. As the noted Islamic scholar-activist Asghar Ali Engineer rightly remarks in his preface to this work, 'The book will help dispel many myths about madrasa education in India'.

The scholars whose views are contained in this book, in the form of in-depth interviews, represent a variety of schools of thought. They include two graduates of the Dar ul-Ulum Deoband, two from the Nadwat ul-Ulema, Lucknow, one Firanghi Mahali, three from an Ahl-e Hadith background, four from institutions associated with the Jamaat-e Islami, and two leading Shia ulema, besides some Islamic scholars who have not studied in madrasas themselves but who write extensively on Islamic issues, including on the madrasas. Most of these scholars are well-known figures in the field of Indian Muslim scholarship. They include Maulana Salman Husaini Nadwi of the Nadwat ul-Ulema, the Lucknow-based Shia scholar, Maulana Kalbe Sadiq, the Jamaat-e Islami scholar and noted Islamic economist, Muhammad Nejatullah Siddiqui, Maulana Muhammad Fazlur Rahim Mujadiddi, the rector of the Jamiat ul-Hidaya, Jaipur, one of India's most innovative madrasas that combines traditional Islamic and modern education, the noted Deobandi scholar and senior leader of the All-

India Milli Council, Maulana Asrar ul-Haq Qasmi, the prolific Delhi-based writer Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, and the editor of the official organ of the Deoband madrasa's Old Boys Association, Maulana Waris Mazhari. Other noted India Muslim scholars interviewed in this book, but who are not themselves trained ulema, include Professor Akhtar ul-Wasey, Head of the Department of Islamic Studies at the Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, Zafar ul-Islam Khan, editor of the popular Delhi-based Muslim fortnightly *Milli Gazette*, one of the few Indian Muslim magazines in English, and the well-known Mumbai-based Islamic scholar Asghar Ali Engineer. In addition, the book also contains lively interviews with half a dozen young graduates of madrasas who have also studied in universities and who are now working in capacities other than as traditional ulema, including in such fields as documentary film-making and journalism. In this sense, the book departs from much of the existing writings on madrasas, which tend to focus almost exclusively on just one or the other school of Islamic thought and on traditional ulema who have little or no exposure to alternate forms and systems of education.

Despite the fact that most of these interviewees have received a traditional madrasa education, they are all unanimous about the need for reforms in the madrasas— not just in the curriculum, but also in such aspects as methods of teaching, administration, fund-raising, and relations with the wider, including non-Muslim, society as well as the state. They thus indicate that, contrary to what is often imagined, there is indeed a growing recognition among a number of Indian ulema today that madrasas do indeed need to reform. In addition, these voices indicate that the ways in which this agenda of reform is construed by the ulema are diverse.

A major demand on the part of these scholars is that madrasas should introduce at least a basic modicum of 'modern' subjects, particularly social sciences and English, in their curriculum. They offer various arguments for this. Some stress that Islam does not recognise any strict division between religion (*din*) and this world (*duniya*). Indeed, they argue, in Islam this world is regarded as the arena where religion and religious commitment must be played out, and that it is a 'field' for the Hereafter. This means, therefore, that Islam advocates a comprehensive understanding of knowledge, including of issues pertaining to this world. In other words, they suggest, introducing a basic modicum of 'modern' sciences and subjects in the madrasa curriculum would actually assist in practically expressing this Islamic understanding of knowledge.

Others argue that by providing madrasa students with a working understanding of 'modern' subjects and languages they would be in a better position, as would-be ulema, to give appropriate guidance to Muslims, to deal with issues of contemporary concern, to counter more effectively challenges to Islam and to express Islam in terms more intelligible to people today. At the same time, there seems to be unanimity on the point that the 'modernisation' of the madrasas in terms of curricular change must be carefully controlled, and that it must not result in the total 'secularisation' of the institution, for its basic purpose is, after all, to train religious specialists.

In addition to the inclusion of basic 'modern' subjects, the scholars interviewed in this book also call for revision of certain existing texts generally used in Indian madrasas, particularly for what are called the 'rational' or 'ancillary' subjects such as philosophy and logic. They must be replaced, they say, by texts that reflect contemporary intellectual trends and challenges. Likewise, some of them argue that several texts, written centuries ago, that are still used for the teaching of fiqh or jurisprudence, a major concern of the madrasas, must be revised, replaced or expanded, so that students are made aware of contemporary issues of jurisprudential concern. Reforms in teaching methods are also forcefully advocated. The inordinate stress on rote memorisation is critiqued as is what is felt to be the intellectually debilitating atmosphere in many madrasas, where discussion, debate and independent thinking are frowned upon. Modern, student-centric methods of teaching are advocated, and several scholars call for the setting up of madrasa teachers' training centres, there being, as yet, no such institution in the entire country despite the fact that in India today madrasas number in their thousands.

Several of the scholars whose voices are highlighted in the book also call for reforms in the ways in which madrasas perceive or relate to the outside world: to fellow Muslims, including Muslims of other sects, non-Muslims, women, and to the state. Some of these scholars are very critical of the stance of many traditionalist ulema in this regard, and advocate reformulating perspectives on these matters in accordance with their more inclusive and socially progressive understanding of Islam. In other words, they advocate alternate Islamic theological and jurisprudential perspectives on these issues of considerable concern and debate today. While some of them believe that reforming the madrasas is solely the responsibility of the ulema of the madrasas themselves, and are suspicious of state intervention, others call for madrasas to work

together with agencies of the state and with well-meaning non-Muslims, including secular NGOs, in order to improve the conditions in the madrasas.

This book makes a very valuable contribution to our understanding of madrasa education in India, particularly concerning the issue of madrasa reforms. It is thus indispensable reading for all those interested in the subject. It well deserves to be translated into local languages, most specially Urdu, so that it can benefit the ulema as well.

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**M.L.Bhatia, *The Ulama, Islamic Ethics and Courts Under the Mughals—Aurangzeb Revisited*, New Delhi: Manak Publications, 2006. 255 Pages. ISBN: 81-7827-158-3**

Berated as a villain and a fiercely anti-Hindu fanatic by his Hindu critics and lauded as a champion of Islam by his Muslim admirers, the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb was actually far more complex a person than either camp makes him out to be. In a refreshing attempt to humanise his image, this book seeks to discuss Aurangzeb's religious policies by setting them within a broader political framework. Rather than being solely guided by religious beliefs, the book shows that Aurangzeb's religious policies were a result of a complex interplay of personal as well as political factors. In this way, the book provides a far more nuanced picture of the Emperor than what both his vehement critics and his passionate backers present.

Far from causing a radical break with Mughal precedent, Bhatia argues, Aurangzeb's religious policies, in particular his attitude towards the orthodox Sunni ulema, represent, in many senses, a continuation of it. As before, under Aurangzeb, sections of the ulema received generous royal support, and they, in turn, proved to be a major ideological pillar for the regime. Although Aurangzeb was certainly more generous with his patronage of the ulema than several of his predecessors, he did not allow them to dictate state policies. Though they were given prestige, the ulema remained, in the final analysis, subservient to the state and lacked an effective independent voice to enforce their views. While Aurangzeb sometimes sought their advice on matters of the shariah, he often dispensed with their views altogether, preferring his own opinions to theirs. As before, the shariah, in the sense of fiqh or historical Muslim jurisprudence, remained only one, although in some spheres major, source of law under Aurangzeb, and it was often supplemented, even supplanted, by imperial edicts and customary laws, some of which were directly in contravention of the shariah as the 'orthodox' Sunni ulema viewed it.

Bhatia supplies numerous instances to substantiate this argument. Aurangzeb's imprisonment of his own father and murder of his brothers, which brought him to power, were, of course, just two of these instances, but there were others as well. When the imperial qazi refused to read the khutba in his name, Aurangzeb had him summarily dismissed, and, later, when the Shaikh ul-Islam refused to supply him with a fatwa legitimising his plans to invade the Muslim kingdoms of the Deccan, he caused him to meet with the same fate.

Yet, at the same time, Bhatia acknowledges that Aurangzeb did take certain other steps that were, so he believes, calculated to win the approval the 'orthodox' ulema. One of his major achievements in this regard was to commission the compilation of a code of Hanafi law, named after him as the Fatawa-e Alamgiri, the collective work of several ulema. Bhatia opines that in itself this did not represent a major development in Islamic law as it was simply a digest of secondary sources by earlier ulema for the guidance of qazis or judges, and, despite it, qazis continued to hand out judgments according to their own understanding and interpretations of the shariah.

Other measures taken by Aurangzeb, viewed as either a result of his religious zeal or an effort to win crucial ulema support, included the selective destruction of Hindu temples, the imposition of the jizya on Hindus, the resumption of some tax-free grants to Hindus, the curbing of certain rituals at Sufi shrines and so on, all of these passionately backed by leading sections of the court ulema. Bhatia argues that some of these

measures were only half-heartedly introduced and implemented. Thus, typically, cases of temple destruction occurred not in times of peace but in regions that had been newly conquered or where Aurangzeb had sent his forces to put down rebellions led by Hindu chieftains. At the same time as Aurangzeb forbade the construction of new temples, he is also said to have granted tax-free lands to some temple establishments and to have instructed his officials not to harass the priests who were in-charge of old temples.

Likewise, Bhatia points out, it was only twenty-two years after his ascent to the throne that Aurangzeb decided to impose the jizya on the Hindus, and this may have actually been a response to the outbreak of rebellions of the Marathas, Sikhs, Jats and others. Certain classes of Hindus, including government officials, were exempted from the *jizya*, while, at the same time, Aurangzeb made arrangements for the *zakat* to be collected from Muslims. Bhatia writes that 'It is also stated that long before jizya was

imposed, Aurangzeb had ordered the abolition of a number of unauthorised taxed which placed heavy burden on the Hindus' (p.52). He admits that one of the aims of imposing the *jizya*, as the court ulema saw it, was to degrade the Hindus, and this naturally caused considerable ill-will and resentment among them. That the financial aspect of the *jizya* was not seen by the ulema as equally important as its symbolism is reflected in the fact that the total collection from the *jizya* was only slightly more than the money spent on collecting it, with much of the money collected going into the pockets of corrupt officials. And as for the resumption of tax-free land grants to Hindu priests and yogis, Bhatia writes that this was only a temporary measure in the wake of Hindu-led rebellions and that when these subsided the edict was allowed, for all practical purposes, to lapse.

Much of this book is devoted to a detailed discussion of the elaborate hierarchy of court ulema under Aurangzeb. Starting from the Shaikh ul-Islam and the chief imperial qazi in Delhi, this carried all the way down to the local level, including the vast chain of muhtasibs or censors of public morals. These ulema were, in effect, government employees, paid in cash as well as in the form of tax-free lands by the state. They manned the courts, acted as conduits for information to the Emperor and also served as an important source of legitimacy for the regime.

But was this elaborate hierarchy of religious specialists, trained in the shariah, truly able to function in the manner that is made out by pro-Aurangzeb propagandists? Bhatia opines that the system was riddled with corruption and inefficiency. May qazis were indeed upright but many others were not, and some used their position to extort money from the public. The muhtasibs were charged with enforcing Islamic laws and morality, but were often unable to do so, particularly when it came to local Muslim elites, many of who were given to a life of wanton luxury, including usury, drinking and music, which the 'orthodox' Sunni ulema condemned. Bhatia writes that numerous Sufis protested against the harshness of the muhtasibs, particularly on the issue of banning music. Despite the ulema's insistence on the strict following of Islamic jurisprudence in matters related to revenue collection, the traditional revenue system remained intact. Likewise, local caste panchayats, even among local Muslim convert groups, continued to be allowed to function and decided disputes on lines that sometimes contravened the shariah as the court ulema understood it. Despite stern opposition from the 'orthodox' ulema, partly for what these ulema saw as some of their

unwarranted beliefs and practices but also because of jealousy owing to their mass support, popular Sufis, including those who preached the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* or the 'unity of existence' and sought to stress the oneness of Hindus, Muslims and others, continued to flourish. Furthermore, the 'orthodox' ulema, Bhatia writes, were unable to present a united front, often at odds with each other and riddled with internal jealousies and rivalries.

In other words, Bhatia argues—critiquing both those who demonise as well as eulogise Aurangzeb for his religious policies—in the face of the various political and other constraints that Aurangzeb was confronted with, 'the idea of an Islamic state under Aurangzeb remains no more than a mere fiction' (x).

Clumsy grammar and frequent repetitions mar the book, as do unnecessarily long sections that could easily have been presented in a more concise fashion. Yet, this book excels as a rare, balanced portrayal of a much-discussed but still little-understood figure.

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