

MUSLIM CONTRIBUTIONS TO WORLD CIVILIZATION



EDITORS: M. BASHEER AHMED, SYED A. AHSANI, DILNAWAZ A. SIDDIQUI
INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT

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Edited by

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THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ISLAMIC THOUGHT
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FOREWORD



The International Institute of Islamic Thought (IIIT) in cooperation with the Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS) has great pleasure in presenting this small volume highlighting Islam's intellectual legacy to world civilization.

Islam's brilliant contributions to science, art, and culture, are a timeless and precious heritage, which should be historically preserved for future generations. The great achievements of Muslim scholars are rarely if at all acknowledged in formal education, and today their identity, origins and impact remain largely obscure. This collection of papers aims to give readers a brief introduction to the intellectual history of Muslims and the contributions that eminent Muslim scholars have made in certain specific fields of knowledge including basic and applied physical and biological sciences, medicine, legal and political theories and practices, economic and financial concepts, models, and institutions, etc. It does not include Muslim contributions to several other fields like language and literature, fine arts, and architecture, which call for a separate volume on the subject.

The preservation of civilization necessitates a better understanding, sharing, and recognition of our common human heritage. Given today's widespread negative stereotyping and falsely generated misunderstanding of Islam and Muslims, the publication of these papers on "Muslim Contributions to World Civilization" is vital to help repair the wrong that is being perpetrated and restore the historical truth, which is being distorted.

The IIIT, established in 1981, has served as a major center to facilitate sincere and serious scholarly efforts based on Islamic vision, values and principles. Its programs of research, seminars and conferences during the

last twenty four years have resulted in the publication of more than two hundred and fifty titles in English and Arabic, many of which have been translated into several other languages.

The AMSS (USA) was founded in 1972 to provide a forum through which Islamic positions on various academic disciplines can be promoted. The AMSS has based its activities on the belief that the development of Islamic thought is vital for the prosperity of the Muslim world and for the continuity of the Islamic intellectual heritage. Since its development in the USA a number of other similar associations have been established in the UK, France, Germany, and India.

We would like to express our thanks to Dr. Dilnawaz A. Siddiqui who throughout the various stages of the book's production cooperated closely with us. We would also like to thank the editorial and production team at the London Office and those who were directly or indirectly involved in the completion of this book: Hagga Abugideiri, Linda Barto, Sylvia Hunt, Shiraz Khan, Maryam Mahmood, Sohail Nakhoda and, Riyadh al-Yemany. May God reward them, the authors, and the editors for all their efforts.

Rabi^c II 1426
June 2005

ANAS AL-SHAikh-ALI
Academic Advisor
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PREFACE

THE PRIMARY GOAL of this volume is to give readers a brief introduction to the intellectual history of Muslims and their contributions to civilization. Civilization itself developed long before the nineteenth century and, since time immemorial, many peoples have woven the fabric, each making its own unique contribution. This book highlights the contributions that Muslim scholars made in the various fields of human endeavor, including science, technology, philosophy, and the political and social sciences from 700 to 1500 AC. These breakthroughs went on to constitute a firm foundation for progress in the Near East, North Africa, and Spain, eventually leading to the European Renaissance during the middle of the second millennium and beyond. The preservation of civilization necessitates a better understanding, sharing, and recognition of our common human heritage.

Given today's widespread negative stereotyping and media-generated misunderstanding of Islam and Muslims, the publication of the topic "Muslim Contributions to World Civilization" is vital to repair the wrong that is being done and restore the historical truth, which is being distorted. Mainstream Western history concerning the advancement of knowledge acknowledges the work done by Greek and Roman scholars until around 300 AC and then conveniently jumps to 1500 AC, the age of the European Renaissance, with very little mention of the stunning and far-reaching social, political, and scientific developments which took place from the eighth to the sixteenth century AC. Morowitz, a historian, describes this phenomenon as "History's Black Hole." "The impression given is that the Renaissance arose phoenix-like from the ashes – smoldering for a millennium – of the classical age of Greece and Rome."¹ This is a myth that gives an extremely distorted view of history. An adequate knowledge of the contributions of Islam and Muslims to civilization helps to counteract the

widely propagated contemporary false image of Muslims in the West as being violent, barbaric and anti-civilizational. To understand the high and breathtakingly enlightened culture of the Muslim “Golden Age” is to understand the positive part that Muslims played, and indeed, continue to play in the development of advanced human society.

During the height of the Islamic period, from 700 to 1500 AC, the world witnessed a major development in the arts and sciences. As a result of the extent of the rapidly expanding Islamic empire, Muslim scholars inherited the knowledge of nearly all of the other hitherto major civilizations: ancient Egyptian, Babylonian, Greek, Persian, and Indian. Caliphs and scholars made massive efforts to translate these sources into Arabic. Many important scientific and philosophical treatises were thus preserved from extinction. Not only did the Muslim scholars learn and preserve the knowledge of antiquity, but they also made their own critical observations and original research, thus adding a vast treasure of new scientific knowledge in the fields of philosophy, astronomy, history, mathematics, chemistry, and the medical sciences, to name but a few.

As Muslim intellectuals, it is our responsibility to research and publish this original work and to disseminate as widely as possible the great historical legacy of these giants of their time so that the world does not forget them, but recognizes and honors their contributions to science, knowledge, and civilization. Several nationally known scholars and authorities on the subject have contributed to this project by analyzing various aspects of Muslim scholars’ contributions to human civilization. The project covers a wide range of subjects, including Muslim contributions to the political system, social sciences, humanities, jurisprudence, medical sciences, and especially the impact of Islam on the West.

AbdulHamid AbuSulayman eloquently stresses that Islam and Christianity, two of the greatest religions of the Abrahamic legacy, have made significant contributions to human civilization. At this juncture when our world is akin to a global village, an understanding of the common origins of all faith communities, especially of the two largest ones, is absolutely necessary to restore humankind to its senses. One important method of achieving this aim is to tackle and solve the problems created by a distorted and volatile history. A measure of desperately needed cross-cultural harmony can be accomplished by a better understanding of the contributions that numerous scholars and followers of these great religions have made

throughout history. Recognition of their sincere dedication to pristine spiritual, moral, and ethical values and an emulation of their legacy can certainly help to achieve the worthy goal of global peace and justice.

Syed Ahsani's article outlines the Islamic political system with a case study of al-Māwardī's Paradigm. Following Western domination of the Muslim countries, Islamic thinkers have reacted on three different levels to comparative political systems. First, the apologists have advocated the adoption of the Western model of democracy. Second, the Traditionalists, on the other hand, have argued that this policy would lead to secularization, thus compromising Islamic values. Lastly, the moderates have stressed the middle-of-the-road position benefiting from Western learning as the lost heritage of Islam, yet at the same time observing the fundamentals of Islamic Shari'ah.

These divisions are not new: they existed in the Abbasid period when the Mu'tazilites rationalists gave primacy to reason. The rise of Philosophy under Caliph al-Ma'mūn inspired fear among religious scholars that Revelation might be threatened by Reason, which gave rise to two kinds of reaction: *Ahl al-Ḥadīth* or the Traditionalists, who totally rejected reason, and the Asha'rites, who put limits on it to save Revelation from being rejected. Māwardī, a Muslim intellectual, criticized the established practice that Shari'ah (Islamic Law) by itself was a sufficient yardstick for justice. His greatest contribution was the introduction of the concept of political justice into the Shari'ah.

Dilnawaz A. Siddiqui in his chapter titled, "Middle Eastern Origins of Modern Sciences," traces the roots of an explosion of knowledge which took place in the entire Muslim world from the late Umayyad era through the Abbasid era and into the fifteenth century. He attributes this unprecedented phenomenon to the Divine injunctions contained in the Qur'an that Muslim men and Muslim women should study the books, that is, the Qur'an, and the universe, each in light of the other. In other words, that it was one's Islamic duty to enhance continually one's understanding of all of God's creation. The acute consciousness of their duty enabled Muslims to strike a balance between reason and Revelation. The Islamic principle of monogenesis inspired them not only to benefit from the collective wisdom of all times and climes but also to create a societal order characterized by open access to all levels of knowledge for all of humanity, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, or national origin. This

climate of social equality engendered and disseminated a spirit of universal brotherhood, leading to creative and innovative ways of learning, including the scientific method of observation, and thus to the evolution of various disciplines of knowledge. His chapter deals with Muslim contributions to the humanities, mathematics, basic and applied natural and social sciences, and also gives in tabular form the names, dates, and significant works of the major Muslim scholars of the eight centuries covered.

In Chapter 6, M. Basheer Ahmed's "Contributions of Muslim Physicians and Other Scholars from 700 to 1600 AC," highlights the fact that Muslim scholars were at the cutting edge of scientific development during that period. As leaders of this knowledge, they thus exercised a profound influence over the history of humankind. He points out that their works were of the highest quality, demonstrating the hallmarks of good science: experiment, observation, rationality, objectivity and professionalism. Their works demonstrated superbly the absence of a conflict between faith and science, a division that continued to dog the Christian world until secularization freed the thinking of its scientists from Church dogma. The scientific legacy of the Muslims laid the foundations for the progress of science and technology in Europe in the second millennium. Europe had hitherto been languishing in what is now termed the "Dark Ages," and it is by no means an exaggeration to state that it was Europe's encounter with Muslims and Muslim civilization that became the engine of the European Renaissance. The works of Muslim scholars were widely used as textbooks in many European universities until 1600 AC. The Arabic texts were translated into Latin and other European languages. The universities of Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Spain, Iran, Córdoba, Cairo, etc. became the major teaching centers of the world, where students flocked from all over Europe to study. Famous physicians, like al-Rāzī (Rhazes) and Ibn Sīna (Avicenna) had their encyclopedic works on medicine taught in European universities until the sixteenth century. As Briffault, a historian, writes: "what we call science arose as a result of new methods of experiments, observation and measurements which were introduced into Europe by Muslims. Modern science is based on the most monumental contribution of the Islamic civilization."² Ahmed briefly describes the work of several physicians in that era.

Louay M. Safi, an intellectual who has had the opportunity to experience both Muslim and non-Muslim cultures, points out in Chapter 2,

“Overcoming the Religious-Secular Divide: Islam’s Contribution to Civilization,” that the future of human civilization is directly linked to our ability to learn from the historical experience of both Islamic and Western civilization. He writes,

Although Islamic and Western civilizations appear to be far removed from each other at the level of structure and organization, both seem to share a common commitment to the universal values of social justice, equality, common good, social welfare, political participation, religious freedom, and a host of other common principles and values. Western civilization has perfected the structural elements of social life so as to allow a better integration of the above universal values into social organization. Western successes were, however, achieved by overcoming two major historical forces that are peculiar to the West: feudalism and organized religion. This fact has contributed to the erosion of the very moral basis in which Western Renaissance is rooted – Enlightened religiosity... a political order rooted in Islamic norms shares with the modern secularist orders its desire to liberate the body politic from narrow religious and cultural interpretations. Unlike the secularist order, the Islamic political order, however, encourages the fostering of moral values in accordance with the overall scheme of moral autonomy.

In Chapter 4, “Intellectual History of Euro-American Jurisprudence: and the Islamic Alternative,” Peter M. Wright compares and contrasts the contemporary legal systems prevailing in Europe, the Americas, and in the former European colonies with the principles of Islamic Shari‘ah. He asserts that the Western legal systems have “evolved in specific historical contexts and cultural milieus. Nevertheless, they share certain common presumptions that are rarely articulated or exposed to critical scrutiny.” Wright’s chapter might be a beginning in the process of articulating in a cogent manner common presumptions behind current European legal structures. It is an “attempt to constructively engage them through a comparative study of a rival legal system such as may be found in accepted principles of Islamic Shari‘ah.”

In Chapter 7, Mohammed Sharif discusses “The Feasibility of an Islamic Economic System in a Modern Economy”. He points out that the modern economic system has become complex and is becoming more so, to the extent that its problems are almost intractable. He states that this is so only because it denies one very important aspect of human life, namely,

the soul (spirit) and that it seeks to direct the whole system toward a fierce competition to gain as many material possessions and as much power as possible. The secular modern society creates many problems and is absolutely ill-equipped to deal with them. The only thing it does is to enact more and more laws with stringent punishment for violation, but to no avail; the allure of material possession and power is much too great to keep the aspirants to material success from violating the laws. In contrast, the Islamic system is simple and straightforward enough for everyone to understand. Moreover, its spiritual guidance is persuasive enough to make humanity abide by its Divine injunctions, which are universally beneficial. It gears society towards creating and maintaining the environment for both the material and spiritual upliftment of all members of society. If the Islamic system is applied, it can successfully eliminate the problems of the complex modern economy in straightforward and simple ways and can lead to economic development, rather than growth.

Abdel-Hameed M. Bashir continues the subject of an Islamic economic system in his, "Islamic Financial Institutions in the USA: Viability and Prospects." Islam is the first religion to introduce an interest-free lending system. The Islamic financial system, based on participation and risk-sharing, offers a viable remedy for the world debt crisis. Under Islamic modes of financing, the lender is expected to share part of the risk in investing. Accordingly, Islamic financing encourages active participation and asserts that money borrowed is not entitled to a reward. Thus the system of shared risk is expected to reduce the possibility of financial crises and to be more fair and equitable. Hence, Muslims are encouraged to abide by the tenets of Islam and not to deal with interest because of the great torment that awaits those who practice usury. Therefore, it is imperative for Muslims in the West in general, and the United States in particular, to establish financial institutions that provide them with interest-free choices.

Multiple factors were responsible for the eventual decline in scientific progress in the Muslim world. They included the foreign invasion of Baghdad by the Mongols, the invasion of Syria and Palestine by the Crusaders, and the loss of Muslim Spain, resulting in the demise of the world's renowned teaching and research centers. Subsequently, two parallel systems of education were developed, namely, the Shari'ah, the science of Islamic jurisprudence, and *al-'Ulūm al-'Aqliyyah*, natural science and

technology. The new schools which came into being as a result, *madāris* (sing. *madrasah*), discouraged the teaching of science and technology and focused only on theology, and the spiritual and ritual aspects of Islam. These were the major reasons for the disincentive amongst the new Muslim generation to acquire new knowledge and conduct scientific research. Religious fanaticism, narrow-mindedness, and a lack of tolerance finally resulted in the marked lack of progress in this area.

Science does not belong to a particular ethnic or religious group. It is an evolutionary process that will continue to progress fuelled by contributions from different races and groups. We hope that this book will become a source of inspiration for all Muslims, especially the young, to make their own scholarly stamp on history and the development of human civilization.

M. BASHEER AHMED

PROLOGUE

THE HISTORY of the advancement of knowledge in Europe and the United States acknowledges the work done by Greek and Roman scholars until around 300 AC and then picks up the trail again in 1500 AC – the beginning of the Renaissance. There is very little mention of the history of social, political or scientific development during the period 300–1500 AC. Morowitz describes this phenomenon as “History’s Black Hole,” that the Renaissance somehow arose like a “phoenix” from the “ashes,” which had been smouldering for a millennium since “the classical age of Greece and Rome.”¹

In reality, during the height of the Islamic period from 700 to 1500 AC, the world witnessed a major development in the arts and sciences. Muslim scholars learned from the scholarly works of the Greeks and Romans, and saved them from extinction by translating them into Arabic. They also critiqued and improved them, and finally passed them on to posterity, thus facilitating the ushering in of the European Renaissance. Europe was in a dire state, for scientific, medical, academic, and scholarly work had virtually stopped for one thousand years. One of the main reasons for this stagnation was the anti-intellectualism of Church dogma. Most of the work done by Greek and some Roman scholars had remained dormant during this interregnum. The burning of the great library of Alexandria in 390 AC by fundamentalist Christians resulted in the loss of a vast amount of classical heritage.

Muslim scholars not only gave new life to these works but also made their own observations and original research, adding to this legacy a vast treasure of new scientific knowledge in the fields of philosophy, astronomy, history, mathematics, chemistry, and the medical sciences. The contributions of Muslim scientists show the highest quality of scientific development in the Muslim world. Their original research work and brilliant contributions proved that philosophy, sciences, and theology could be

harmonized as a unified whole and that Islam did not subscribe to any contradiction between true faith and tried and tested science.

To give a brief overview: Arab Muslims transmitted the zero from India to the world; Leonardo Da Vinci studied the Arabic numeral system and introduced it to Europe; algorithm (algorism) was invented by al-Khawārizmī in the ninth century, and Abū al-Wafā developed trigonometry. Ibn al-Haytham developed optics, proving that rays pass from objects into the eye, and wrote about optic illusions, binocular vision, mirages, rainbows, and halos. Jābbir ibn Ḥayyān prepared sulphuric acid and classified chemicals in the eighth century. Paper-manufacturing technology was brought by Muslims in the ninth century and spread to the Middle East and Europe, leading to an expansion in the publication of books. The Muslim scholar Ibn Khaldūn is credited with founding the discipline of sociology. Al-Idrīsī, who lived in Sicily, compiled a book on medieval history and the geography of Europe, producing 70 maps of the world. Al-Bayrūnī and Ibn Baṭṭūṭah were famous travelers and historians, whose scholarly works are still regarded as pioneering contributions to history and geography.

The best Islamic hospitals were several centuries in advance of European hospitals. In teaching methods, they exerted a strong influence, and the Arab practice of taking students on ward rounds in the hospitals attached to the medical schools has been rediscovered many times from medical schools in Salerno to Sir William Osler at the end of the nineteenth century in Canadian, British, and US schools. The Arab teaching methods have remained part of the standard system of medical studies in Western medical schools.

In medicine, Ibn al-Nafīs al-Qarshī of Damascus charted and explained the circulation of blood, three centuries before William Harvey discovered the same; al-Rāzī differentiated between measles and smallpox; and al-Ṭabarī realized that tuberculosis was an infection. In Spain, al-Zahrāwī invented surgical instruments, removed cataracts, and perfected many surgical procedures. Ibn Zuhri started suturing wounds with silk thread.

It was in pharmacology that Muslim physicians made the most lasting contribution. They not only discovered many herbal drugs but also perfected many of the techniques of chemical extraction that we know today, including filtration, distillation, and crystallization. In seventeenth cen-

tury England, the great work of systematizing drugs, *The Pharmacopoeia of the London College of Physicians* (1618), was illustrated with portraits of a few great scholars and these included Hypocrites, Galen, Avicenna (Ibn Sīna), and Mesuë (Ibn Zakariyyah bin Masawayh).

Muslim physicians undertook and accomplished the monumental task of producing the first classical medical textbooks in a format which would be recognizable to medical students even today. These textbooks were based as much on original Greek works as on the new scientific data gathered by Muslim physicians. The most famous academicians and scholars who helped in producing such works were al-Rāzī (Rhazes, 932), al-Zahrāwī (1013) and Ibn Sīna (1092).

Muslim scientists and scholars introduced scientific knowledge to Europe at a time when Europe was enveloped in what is known as the “Dark Ages.” Muslim scholars were the leading lights of scientific development between 700 and 1500 AC, and exercised a profound influence upon the history of humankind. Their scientific legacy laid the foundations for the progress of science and technology in Europe in the second millennium. Indeed, these scholars played a vital role in the evolution of human civilization and served as the true harbingers of Europe’s Renaissance. Their works were used as textbooks in many European universities until 1600 AC. The works of Muslim scholars in Arabic were translated into Latin and other European languages and students flocked from all over Europe to study at the universities of Baghdad, Spain, Syria, Cairo, and Iran, which became the major teaching centers of the world. The writings of famous physicians, like al-Rāzī and Ibn Sīna’s encyclopedic work on medicine, were taught in European universities until the sixteenth century. Morowitz further states that history as taught in the United States is presented as having a cultural black hole in the Middle Ages. This is a myth that gives a very distorted picture and a very historically inaccurate view.

George Sarton (1947),² dealing with Muslim scholars, wrote that during the period 750 to 1150 AC the contributions of Muslim scholars were unmatched in their brilliance and included such intellectual giants as al-Rāzī, al-Fārābī, Ibn al-Haytham, al-Khawārizmī, Ibn Sīna, al-Bayrūnī and Ibn Khaldūn. Briffault writes:

What we call science arose as a result of new methods of experiments, observation and measurement which were introduced into Europe by Arabs. Modern science is the most momentous contribution of the Islamic civiliza-

tion, which was made accessible to all regardless of gender, race, caste, creed, or national origin.³

The first regional conference of the Association of Muslim Social Scientists was held in Dallas, Texas in June 2001, on the theme “Muslim Contributions to Human Civilization.” The objective of the conference was to introduce to both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences the great contributions that Muslim scientists and scholars have made to humankind. Human civilization was not developed in the nineteenth century or in 400 BC, nor is it the exclusive preserve of a particular group of people. Many people have woven the fabric of human civilization since time immemorial. It is like constructing a building to which every nation and ethnic group have contributed their share of materials and expertise. This particular conference highlighted the scholarly and scientific knowledge of Muslims in the Middle Ages, which led to the eventual Renaissance of Europe and the rise of the West to its present heights. Its preservation lies in a better understanding, sharing, and recognition of our common heritage.

Several nationally known speakers and authorities on this subject participated in the conference. Presented in this book is a selection of papers presented at the conference, covering a variety of subjects such as the Islamic contributions to political science, economics, physical and biological sciences, humanities, jurisprudence, medical science, and the impact of Islam on Western thought in general. During the conference, other subjects were also covered. We hope to publish another set of proceedings covering these subjects at a later date.

I

What the West has Learned from Islamic Civilization

ABDULHAMID ABUSULAYMAN

GIVEN THE CONTEMPORARY social and political climate in the world, it is more significant now than ever before to discuss the contributions of Muslims to civilization, with a view to building bridges of appreciation and understanding among peoples of various cultures and ideologies. A computer search for the need for cross-cultural understanding yields 306,000 web pages.¹

Having spread all over the world as faith communities, the inheritors of the Abrahamic tradition of monotheism have had the greatest influence on human history.² At this juncture of history, when the whole world is like a village, it is of immense importance to work together toward mutual understanding of the common grounds, common goals, and common dedication to the spiritual as well as the moral aspects of life to restore humankind to its senses. The aim is to bring about lasting peace with justice, by resolving problems created by the distortion of history. If there is any way to make real peace in this world, people of the Abrahamic faith trio have a special role to play.³

While Christianity and Islam have been behind most of human accomplishments, it is also owing to the distortion of these two faiths that we have faced and are still facing the stupendous problems of global proportions. Christianity with its message of peace and tolerance was distorted so much so that it justified ruthless imperialism and its injustices throughout its colonies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Indeed, it was a distortion of that great religion and its spirit. It also gave birth to nationalism, where human beings emphasized only differences that

conveniently served the opportunists as a basis for hatred and wars. Its propaganda also contributed to the distortion of Islam and Muslims. Islam came to elevate the human civilization out of the Dark Ages to new heights, and created a new civilization by advanced empirical and experimental sciences as well as by enhancing an awareness of the need for human unity based on the concept of monogenesis.⁴

The lasting spiritual light of Islam immensely impressed people of other faiths so as to change not only their religious beliefs but also their customs and even their languages. It was unprecedented in human history. Northern Arabia, North Africa, and East Africa were not Arabic speaking, which they later became. It was the imprint of these pioneers at a time of darkness, which built the strong foundations of the new civilization, leading to Europe's Protestant revolution (the Reformation), the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment. Deliberate distortions of history have covered up contributions of Islam and Muslims to human civilization.⁵ Regrettably, Muslims themselves have little or no idea about their own spiritual light, which has now lost its luster. Consequently, the Muslim people are making little or no significant contribution to the field of modern science today.

To bring genuine peace to this global village, we need to revive the pristine purity and spirit of monotheistic equality and justice for all. We have to ensure that these spiritual values are back in power to bring human beings to their senses. Although the United Nations declared that war was illegal, there were more wars in the world between 1950 and 2000 than ever before. So it is not mere words but also the spirit that brings people together to appreciate one another. The whole idea of Islam, and before that of Christianity, is to bring human beings to this universal spiritual message, to make them identify with one another as creations of the One and Only God (SWT),⁶ to serve the good cause in this world, and to achieve eternal happiness in the Hereafter.⁷

In reviving the real values of Christianity, Islam made it clear that human beings are created from a single source (soul). The differences among peoples and the creation of peoples and tribes should not be allowed to lead to conflicts or to seek superiority. Humankind should interact (the Qur'anic word *yata'arrafa*) because, if we are all the same or identical, there is no meaning to or method of interaction. When we differ in a positive sense, however, we will interact to contribute to social, eco-

nomic, and political justice. It is a law of nature for the positive-negative and the male-female to interact to mutual benefit.

Islam does not deny that there are different colors or different languages, yet this is not a cause for determining superiority or inferiority of individual and groups. It is to bring to humankind the wonders of God in creation. So it is a positive phenomenon. According to both Islam and Christianity, justice and personal responsibility are central.⁸ We must always do justice to everybody, even to our enemies. What Islam brought forth was religious freedom. Whenever there was a war for the sake of Islam, it was only to bring people their freedom. Whoever agrees to that, shares the goal of peace. Whoever denies human beings the freedom of their own convictions and religion should not be allowed to do so.

In this global village, we need to have the philosophy of peace and freedom to identify and appreciate one another in practice. Real freedom means to be able to do the right thing, and not to do the wrong thing. Freedom without ethics, without values, without a worthy cause, is a curse upon humankind, it is the destruction of civilization. That is where the role of all genuine faith communities comes in: to serve the Divine cause to facilitate life and lend real meaning to it with love, conviction and mutual acceptance.

The Association of Muslim Social Scientists (AMSS) represents the cream of the Muslim communities in the United States. It is the first time, I believe, that there has been an immigration of Muslim intellectuals to this free, influential, and open society. It is the duty of the Muslims in this country, with their intellectual and financial resources, to reform their culture by removing from it all the wrong things which have developed within the Muslim communities. They need to bring back the real values of Islam, and to bring back this kind of moral sense of justice and responsibility.⁹ To contribute to this country of theirs and to its people, they ought to unite to serve the good cause of balancing the spiritual and material benefits to humankind.

It is a mission for this Muslim community to seize this opportunity of freedom and resourcefulness to cut the shackles of oppression by dictatorships, to rethink their religion and their culture, and to restore the true light and spirit of the common cause of justice. They also need to work together with their fellow human beings for the benefit of the United States and the world. This country can serve as a vital force for the peace

and the prosperity of the whole of humankind, or, with the misuse of its resources, it can become a source of destruction. The power is great, yet it urgently needs strong self-control and proper spiritual guidance. It is up to these faith communities and their cooperation that they can fulfill the mission of peace with justice. It is their duty and an opportunity which they cannot afford to lose. They need to work together for the benefit of humankind, *inshā'Allah*.

Overcoming the Religious-Secular Divide: Islam's Contribution to Civilization

LOUAY M. SAFI

LANGUAGE is a powerful dimension of social existence and interaction. It facilitates communication among individuals, and helps create agreement and consensus. It is, as such, an essential tool for advancing both knowledge and society. Nevertheless, language can be also a source of antagonism, misunderstanding, and confusion, and therefore has the power to undermine social harmony and to close the human mind. The impact of language on thinking and behavior is particularly noticeable when communication and exchange take place across cultures. Under such circumstances, the question of commensurability becomes relevant. The question can be posed as thus: Can peoples with different historical experiences have a meaningful exchange of ideas, given the fact that understanding the meaning of a term presupposes an experience of a sort of the object to which the term refers? The relationship between knowledge and experience gives rise to a series of questions with regard to understanding the grand concepts of “religion,” “secularism,” and “liberalism,” and the way each relates to the others. Such terms are not easily and fully interchangeable across cultures and civilizations, and misunderstanding results from extrapolating one’s experience across cultures. Thus, superimposing the experience of a historically determined being on another – be it an individual or a community – is bound to stifle or even destroy the latter’s chance to develop and mature.

While realizing the above difficulty, I do believe that scholars in general

and Muslim scholars in particular are duty-bound to explore meaning across cultures and civilizations, and to stimulate the exchange of ideas and experiences. As a Muslim intellectual who has had the opportunity to experience both Muslim and Western cultures, I do think that the two cultures stand to benefit greatly by learning from each other. I do also think that the future of human civilization is directly linked to our ability to learn from the historical experiences of Islamic and Western civilizations, and our willingness to build on the accomplishments of both.

Although Islamic and Western civilizations appear to be far removed from each other at the level of structure and organization, both seem to share a common commitment to the universal values of social justice, equality, common good, social welfare, political participation, religious freedom, and a host of other common principles and values. Western civilization has perfected the structural elements of social life so as to allow a better integration of the above universal values into social organization. Western successes were, however, achieved by overcoming two major historical forces that are peculiar to the West: feudalism and organized religion. This fact has contributed to the erosion of the very moral basis in which Western Renaissance is rooted – Enlightened religiosity.

Islam, on the other hand, is a tremendous spiritual force in search of modern forms. Historically, Islam is credited with building an outstanding world civilization in which science and religion, and the secular and religious, worked in harmony to advance human life. Can Islam play a similar role in restoring the moral core to modern life and arresting the increasingly immoral and irrational tendencies of the post-modern world? Many Muslim intellectuals would answer this question in the affirmative. The challenge of course is to reinstitute Islamic values and ethos into modern forms. However, for that to happen, Muslim scholars must reconceptualize the various spheres of knowledge and society in relation to Islam and its fundamental principles and underlying ethos. The efforts advanced in this chapter fall within the framework pointed out above, for I will focus, in particular, on the notions of religion, secularism, and liberalism.

My basic argument is that a political order rooted in Islamic norms shares with the modern secularist orders its desire to liberate the body politics from narrow religious and cultural interpretations. Unlike the secularist order, the Islamic political order, however, encourages the fostering of moral values in accordance with the overall scheme of moral autonomy.

I conclude by emphasizing the priority of the institutions of civil society over those of the state, and the inevitability of invigorating inter-communal action to ensure the autonomy of both the individual and community, and to limit the power of the modern state.

RELIGION-POLITICS INTERPLAY

Although a deep understanding of the interaction between the political and religious spheres requires a systematic and elaborate examination of their meaning, I will limit my statement to delineating their boundaries and identifying a few areas of friction between the two.

Religion refers to those aspects of life which relate to the determination of the total meaning of existence. It is concerned, in particular, with three grand questions about human existence: its origin, its purpose, and its destiny. Although the above three questions can be raised from a philosophical point of view, the religious response to them is distinguished from the philosophical by the degree of conviction that one enjoys over the other. That is to say, a religious conclusion to these grand questions is not only supported by rational arguments, but by emotional attachment as well. This difference gives religion an advantage over philosophy in that it makes religiously based convictions a better springboard for action. It is a fact of history that people with deep religious convictions are willing to endure greater difficulties and make greater sacrifices in pursuit of their religious ideals than those whose attachment to their ideals is based on purely rational demonstration.

Paradoxically though, religion's source of strength is also its source of weakness. It is always easier to dissuade people from erroneous convictions when the latter are based on theoretical arguments rather than religious convictions. Although shared religious convictions can create more harmony in the public sphere, the possibility of interpersonal and inter-communal conflicts are bound to increase in multi-religious societies.

The question that we need to address here is not whether religion and politics stand in a conflictual or harmonious relationship, but rather how and under what conditions religious commitment can strengthen and improve the quality of social life.

DEGREES OF SECULARISM

Politics is about organizing the public sphere, that is, regulating action and deciding direction. As such, both the convictions and interests of a people influence public regulations. In its drive to develop a social order in which religion and politics strengthen one another without suppressing individuality and creativity, Europe went through two interrelated processes: religious reformation and secularization. Reformation entailed a struggle to liberate the individual from the control of religious authorities, viz. the Catholic Church. Secularization consisted of the liberation of the state from control by particular religious groups, so as to ensure that public policy was based on rational arguments, rather than religious injunctions.

However, although religion ceased to have a visible influence in the public sphere, it continued to be an important force in shaping public policy and public life. This is true because rational arguments about the nature of public order have to start from a transcendental understanding of the meaning of public life and social interaction. The notions of right and wrong, good and evil, and the tolerable and the intolerable are the result of both religious conviction and political compromise.

It is important to realize that secularization is a multi-faceted phenomenon. One facet of secularization, and the one that was initially intended by its early advocates, is the separation of State and Church. However, because it was achieved by negating history and tradition, it gradually led to the “death of God,” the erosion of religious values and convictions in Western society by the turn of the twentieth century, and to the “death of man” at the dawn of the twenty-first century. The secularism of the post-modern age is ruled by the ideas of self-interest, self-indulgence, and excess.

THE ORIGIN OF SECULARISM

Secularism refers to complex and multifaceted attitudes and practices that cannot be easily captured in a brief description or rendered into a simple definition. While one may find certain similarities between modern secularist attitudes and practices and those which existed in pre-modern societies, it is fair to say that secularism as we know it today is a modern phenomenon that grew in the modern West, and later took root in different societies.

In its essential sense, secularism denotes a set of notions and values whose aim is to ensure that the state neither engages in promoting specific religious beliefs and values, nor uses its powers and offices to persecute religion. To prevent state officials from using their political authority to impose a narrow set of religious attitudes and values on the larger society, and to prevent the use of religious symbols to provoke strife among religious communities, Western intellectuals embarked on a project that aimed at separating political authority from religious affiliation. To that end, the Enlightenment scholars embraced a set of concepts and principles, and used them as the basis for reconstructing modern European consciousness. The new political ideology advanced by Enlightenment activists and thinkers emphasized concepts such as equality, freedom of conscience and conviction, and the supremacy of law, all of which were advocated by the Religious Reformation that put an end to the ancient regime of Europe.

The underlying socio-political morality advocated by the pioneers of the secular state in Europe was derived from the religious tradition delineated by the religious reformists of fifteenth-century Europe, though argued in rational terms and common-good logic. Early advocates of the separation of State and Church, such as Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau, had no intention of undermining religion, or faith in the Divine, but rather predicated their reformist ideas on the notion of God and civil religion. Descartes, for instance, argued: “the certainty and truth of all knowledge depends uniquely on my awareness of the true God, to such an extent that I was incapable of perfect knowledge about anything else until I became aware of him.”¹ Similarly, Rousseau, while critical of the way religion was traditionally taught and practiced, recognized the need, even the necessity, of religious commitment and faith for the modern state to function properly. He therefore identified a number of “dogmas,” and argued for their inclusion in the “civil religion” that he advocated:

The existence of an omnipotent, intelligent, benevolent divinity that foresees and provides; the life to come; the happiness of the just; the punishment of sinners; the sanctity of the social contract and the law – these are the positive dogmas. As for the negative dogmas I would limit them to a single one: no intolerance.²

Even Kant, who limited the notion of truth to empirical experience and

labored to set morality on a rational foundation, insisted that “without a God and without a world invisible to us now but hoped for, the glorious ideals of morality are indeed objects of approval and admiration, but not springs of purpose and action.”³ However, by denying the possibility of transcendental truth, and as a result of the relentless attack on the authority of revelation as a source of ethical and ontological knowledge, secularist scholars have been able to successfully marginalize religion and undermine morality. The efforts to ground morality in utility and cost-benefit calculation, rather than truth, have proved to be counter-intuitive and futile, and have given rise to egoism and moral relativism.

There were, of course, intellectuals who have less sympathy for religion, particularly among the French. Nevertheless, they did not represent the general sentiments of the great majority in Europe. Although the French revolution displayed a clear anti-religious sentiment, it was not, as Nietzsche was to discover later, directed against religion *per se*, but against organized religion, represented primarily by the Catholic Church. “Modern philosophy, being an epistemological skepticism, is,” Nietzsche argued, “covertly and overtly, anti-Christian – although, to say this for the benefit of more refined ears, by no means anti-religious.”⁴

The original secularist sentiment was, therefore, rooted in the religious Reformation; more specifically, it was rooted in the Protestant revolt against religious hierarchy and centralized religion. Secularism was not originally intended as a way to separate religion from society or religious consciousness from political action, but only to isolate the state from the Church structure and to separate religious and political authorities.

The tone started to change, however, a century later among progressive European intellectuals, who saw in religion a negative force whose elimination, they believed, was essential for further emancipation and progress. Karl Marx, while agreeing that the secular state had successfully neutralized religion and banished it from the public sphere, still saw a great danger in religious life. This was because, he argued, secularism reduced religion to a private matter only in so far as the state was concerned. However, the privatization of religion gave it in effect more influence in the organization of civil society. Even in the United States, where religion has been domesticated and individualized to the greatest extent, it continues to divide society into distinct religious communities, thereby allowing for the formation of internal solidarity with a clear bearing on

economic life. Religion, Marx further thought, was an instrument in the hands of privileged classes to justify social misery and economic inequality. In *The Jewish Question*, Marx had the following to say about the need to emancipate humanity from religion:

The decomposition of man into Jew and citizen, Protestant and citizen, religious man and citizen, is neither a deception directed against "citizenhood", nor is it a circumvention of political emancipation; it is political emancipation itself, the political method of emancipating oneself from religion. Of course, in periods when the political state as such is born violently out of civil society, when political liberation is the form in which men strive to achieve their liberation, the state can and must go as far as the abolition of religion, the destruction of religion. But, it can do so only in the same way that it proceeds to the abolition of private property, to the maximum, to confiscation, to progressive taxation, just as it goes as far as the abolition of life, the guillotine.⁵

Nietzsche, like Marx, condemned religion as a negative social force responsible for preserving the meek and the weak, and hence weakening the human race. By praising poverty and glorifying the taming of the natural instinct, Nietzsche insisted, religion contributed to delaying the refinement of the human species. By giving "comfort to the sufferers, courage to the oppressed and despairing, a staff and support to the dependent," Christianity, he contended, "preserved too much of what ought to perish."⁶ Unlike Marx, who saw religion as an obstacle to achieving universal equality, Nietzsche's rejection of religion in general, and reformed Christianity in particular, was anti-democratic, directed against the egalitarian spirit it promoted, and hence against its failure to promote the order of rank, a hierarchical social order which he believed to be both intrinsic to humanity and desirable for social life.⁷

RELIGION AND THE STATE IN MUSLIM SOCIETY

Many Muslim intellectuals insist today that Islam is an integral part of the state. The state in a society committed to Islam, they stress, is by definition an Islamic state since political authorities are bound to Islamic Law, which has a direct bearing on constitutional law. This has created confusion about the nature of the Islamic state, and has given rise to apprehension on the part of modernist scholars, who fear that remarrying Islam and the state is bound to give birth to theocracy.

The confusion is, of course, not limited to outside observers and commentators who tend to extrapolate in their analysis from the historical experience of Western society, but also affects those who advocate the formation of a political state on the basis of Islamic values. The difficulty arises from the efforts to combine the principle of popular government with that of a state bound by the rules of Islamic Law. This confusion is, in my opinion, the result of equating the political structure of the Ummah with the political structure of the state, and consequently, confusing the functions of the Shari'ah with those of the state. This confusion is not restricted to obscure works. Rather it is found in the works of influential contemporary Islamic thinkers. In his book, *Nazariyat al-Islam wa Hadyihi*, Sayyid Abu al-Ala al-Mawdudi, for one, points out two kinds of objectives to be assigned to the Islamic state: negative objectives "like deterring the aggression and preserving the freedom of people and defending the state,"⁸ and positive objectives such as "banning all forbidden things which have been condemned by the Qur'an."⁹ Mawdudi concludes by affirming the totality of the state's objectives on the basis of the comprehensiveness of the Shari'ah objectives.

He writes:

Obviously, it is impossible for such a state to limit its framework, because it is a totalitarian state encompassing the whole human life, and painting every aspect of human life with its moral color and particular reformist programs. So nobody has the right to stand up against the state and exempt himself from the liability by saying that this is a personal matter, so that the state does not intrude. In brief, the state encompasses the human life and every area of civilization according to its particular moral theory and particular reformist program. So, to some extent, it is similar to the communist and fascist state. But despite this totality the Islamic state is free from the color that dominates the totalitarian and authoritarian states of our age. Thus the Islamic state does not curtail the individual freedom nor has it much room for dictatorship or absolute authority.¹⁰

The above statement reflects the state of confusion that we have just pointed out. In a single paragraph the author characterizes the Islamic state as totalitarian, likens it to the communist and fascist states, and stresses that no one has the right to stand up against the state and resist its intrusion into personal life. He then contradicts himself, two sentences later, denying that the Islamic state may curtail individual freedom.

Certainly the assertion about the totalitarian character of the state is the result of mixing state functions relating to the Shari‘ah’s legal dimension with the functions of the Ummah concerning moral and educational dimensions. The distinction between these two kinds of objectives is, thus, of vital importance to prevent the state from imposing on the general public a normative order based on a narrow interpretation of the law. The Islamic state, it should be emphasized, is not an institution devoted to advancing the interests of the Muslim community, but a political system based on universal principles, and one committed to maintaining peace, security, and welfare for all citizens, irrespective of their doctrines, religions, nationality, race, or gender.

As will be shown below, the Islamic system in the past did not lead, nor should it lead in the future, to imposing a narrow and limited concept or a particular opinion on society. This is because the principle of religious and doctrinal plurality has been considered, since the very inception of the Ummah, a cardinal political principle. Here the Qur’anic verses, both the Makkan and Madinan, clearly stress the centrality of the principle of religious freedom in the Islamic concept.

Lately, there has been concern about the relationship between religious commitments and the exercise of power among the ranks of Islamists. Mainstream Islamic groups have been gradually moving away from the concept of a centralized Islamic political order envisaged by early leaders, such as Hassan al-Banna and Taqiyyuddin al-Nabhani. Leaders of the major Islamic movements in Egypt, Jordan, Pakistan, Syria, Turkey, and Tunisia, to name a few, have come out openly in favor of a democratic, pluralistic political system, in which freedom of speech and association is guaranteed for citizens, regardless of their political orientation or religious affiliation.¹¹

THE FORMATIVE PRINCIPLES OF THE MADINAN STATE

The notion of the Islamic state advanced today by populist writers is, as I have tried to show above, a mixture of the nationalist structure of the modern state with the communal structure of historical Shari‘ah. The concept of the state that emerges as a result is in complete contradiction to the nature and purpose of the polity founded by the Prophet, (SAAS)¹² or developed historically by successive generations of Muslims. A quick

review of the guiding principles of the first Islamic polity reveals the disparity between the two. The principles and structure of the early Islamic polity are epitomized in the Covenant of Madinah (*Ṣaḥīfat al-Madinah*), which formed the constitutional foundation of the political community established by the Prophet.¹³

The Covenant of Madinah established a number of important political principles that, put together, formed the political constitution of the first Islamic state, and defined the political rights and duties of the members of the newly established political community, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, and drew up the political structure of the nascent society. The most important principles included in this Covenant are as follows:

1. The Covenant declared that the Ummah is a political society, open to all individuals committed to its principles and values, and ready to shoulder its burdens and responsibilities. It is not an exclusive society, whose membership rights and security are restricted to a select few. The right to membership of the Ummah is specified in: (a) accepting the principles of the Islamic system, manifested in the commitment to adhere to the moral and legal order; and (b) declaring allegiance to the system by practical contributions and struggle to actualize the objectives and goals of Islam. Thus, allegiance and concern for public good are the principles determining the membership of the Ummah as defined by the first article of the document: "This is a Covenant offered by Muhammad the Prophet, [governing the relations] among the believers and the Muslims of Quraysh and Yathrib [Madinah], and those who followed, joined, and labored with them."¹⁴
2. The Covenant delineated a general framework that defined individual norms and the scope of political action within the new society, but preserved the basic social and political structures prevalent then in tribal Arabia. The Covenant of Madinah preserved tribal structure, while negating tribal spirit and subordinating tribal allegiance to a morally based legal order. Since the Covenant declared that the nascent political community is "an Ummah to the exclusion of all people," it approved a tribal division that had already been purged of the tribal spirit epitomized by the slogan "my brethren right or wrong," subjecting it to the higher principles of truth and justice. The Covenant therefore

declared that the emigrants of the Quraysh, Banū al-Ḥārith, Banū al-'Aws, and other tribes residing in Madinah, according "to their present customs, shall pay the blood wit they paid previously and that every group shall redeem its prisoners."¹⁵

Islam's avoidance of the elimination of tribal divisions can be explained by a number of factors that can be summarized in the following three points:

(a) The tribal division was not based merely on politics but also social differentiation, thus providing its people with a symbiotic system. Therefore, the abolition of the political and social assistance provided by the tribe before developing an alternative would have been a great loss to the people affected.

(b) Apart from its being a social division, the tribe represented an economic division in harmony with the pastoral economy prevalent in the Arabian Peninsula before and after Islam. The tribal division is the ideal basis of pastoral production, for it provides freedom of movement and migration in search of pasture. Any change in this pattern requires taking the initiative to change the means and methods of production.

(c) Perhaps the most important factor that justified the tribal division within the framework of the Ummah after the final Message had purged the tribal character of its aggression and arrogance, is the maintenance of the society and its protection from the danger of central dictatorship. Such a situation might arise in the absence of a secondary social and political structure and the concentration of political power in the hands of a central authority.

Hence Islam adopted a political system, based on the concept of the one Ummah, as an alternative to the divisional tribal system, while upholding the tribal division now cleansed of its aggressive elements. Islam left the question of changing the political structure to the gradual development of economic and production structures. Although Islamic Revelation avoided any arbitrary directives aimed at immediate abolition of the tribal division, it criticized openly tribal and nomadic life.¹⁶

3. The Islamic political system adopted the principle of religious tolerance based on the freedom of belief for all the members of society. It conceded to the Jews the right to act according to the principles and

rulings in which they believed: “The Jews of Banū ‘Awf are one community with the believers. The Jews have their religion and the Muslims theirs.” The Covenant emphasized the fundamentality of cooperation between Muslims and non-Muslims in establishing justice and defending Madinah against foreign aggression. “The Jews must bear their expenses and the Muslims their expenses. Each must help the other against anyone who attacks the people of this Covenant. They must seek mutual advice and consultation.” It prohibited the Muslims from doing injustice to the Jews or seeking revenge for their Muslim brothers against the followers of the Jewish religion without adhering to the principles of truth and goodness. “To the Jew who follows us belong help and equality. He shall not be wronged nor shall his enemies be aided.”¹⁷

4. The Covenant stipulated that the social and political activities in the new system must be subject to a set of universal values and standards that treat all people equally. Sovereignty in the society would not rest with the rulers or any particular group, but with the law founded on the basis of justice and goodness, maintaining the dignity of all. The Covenant emphasized repeatedly and frequently the fundamentality of justice, goodness, and righteousness, and used various expressions to condemn injustice and tyranny. “They would redeem their prisoners with kindness and justice common among the believers,” the Covenant stated. “The God-conscious believers shall be against the rebellious, and against those who seek to spread injustice, sin, enmity, or corruption among the believers; the hand of every person shall be against him, even if he be a son of one of them,” it proclaimed.¹⁸
5. The Covenant introduced a number of political rights to be enjoyed by the individuals of the Madinan State, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, such as (a) the obligation to help the oppressed, (b) outlawing guilt by association, which was commonly practiced by pre-Islamic Arab tribes: “A person is not liable for his ally’s misdeeds;” (c) freedom of belief: “The Jews have their religion and the Muslims have theirs;” and (d) freedom of movement from and to Madinah: “Whoever leaves is safe, and whoever stays in Madinah is safe except those who have wronged [others], or committed sin.”¹⁹

RELIGION AND THE STATE
IN HISTORICAL MUSLIM SOCIETY

Adhering to the guidance of Revelation, the Ummah respected the principle of religious plurality and cultural diversity during most of its long history. The successive governments since the *Rāshidūn* period preserved the freedom of faith and allowed non-Muslim minorities not only to practice their religious rituals and proclaim their beliefs, but also to implement their religious laws according to an autonomous administrative system. Likewise, the Ummah as a whole respected the doctrinal plurality with both its conceptual and legal dimensions. It resisted every attempt to draw the political power into taking sides with partisan groups, or into preferring one ideological group to another. It also insisted on reducing the role of the state and restricting its functions to a limited sphere.

Anyone who undertakes to study the political history of Islam will soon realize that all the political practices which violated the principle of religious freedom and plurality were an exception to the rule. For instance, the efforts of the Caliph al-Ma'mūn to impose doctrinal uniformity in accordance with the Mu'tazili interpretations, and to use his political authority to support one of the parties to the doctrinal disputes, were condemned by the 'alims and the majority of the Ummah. His efforts to achieve doctrinal homogeneity by suppression and force eventually clashed with the will of the Ummah, which refused to solve doctrinal and theoretical problems by the sword. This compelled al-Wāthiq Billāh, the third Caliph after al-Ma'mūn to give up the role assumed by his predecessors and abandon their oppressive measures.

Obviously, Muslims have historically recognized that the main objective of establishing a political system is to create the general conditions that allow the people to realize their duties as moral agents of the Divine will (*Khulafā'*), not to impose the teachings of Islam by force. We therefore ascribe the emergence of organizations which aim to compel the Ummah to follow a narrow interpretation, and which call for the use of the political power to make people obedient to the Islamic norms, to the habit of confusing the role and objectives of the Ummah with the role and objectives of the state. The Ummah aims to build Islamic identity, to provide an atmosphere conducive to the spiritual and mental development of the individual, and to grant him or her the opportunity to fulfill his or her role in

life within the general framework of the law. Meanwhile, the state makes the effort to coordinate the Ummah's activities so as to employ the natural and human potential and possibilities to overcome the political and economic problems and obstacles that hinder the Ummah's development.

Differentiating between the general and particular in the Shari'ah and between the responsibilities of the Ummah and the state, is a necessity if we want to avoid the transformation of political power into a device for advancing particular interests. We must also ensure that state agencies and institutions do not arrest intellectual and social progress, nor obstruct the spiritual, conceptual, and organizational developments of society.

DIFFERENTIATING CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE STATE

Historically, legislative functions in Muslim society were not restricted to state institutions. Rather, there was a wide range of legislation related to juristic efforts at both the moral and legal levels. Since the major part of legislation relating to transactional and contractual relations among individuals is attached to the juristic legislative bodies, the judicial tasks may be connected directly with the Ummah, not with the state. It must be emphasized that the differentiation between civil society and the state can be maintained only by dividing legislation into distinct areas that reflect both the geographical and normative differentiation of the political society.

The importance of the differential structure of the law is not limited to its ability to counteract the tendency to centralize power, which characterizes the Western model of the state. Rather, it is also related to guarantees extended to religious minorities. The Islamic model should maintain the legislative and administrative independence of the followers of different religions, for the sphere of communal legislation does not fall under the governmental authority of the state. On the other hand, the majoritarian model of the democratic state deprives religious minorities of their legal independence, and insists on subjugating all citizens to a single legal system, which often reflects the doctrinal and behavioral values of the ruling majority.

The early Muslim community was cognizant of the need to differentiate law to ensure moral autonomy, while working diligently to ensure equal protection by the law of fundamental human rights. Thus early jurists recognized that non-Muslims who have entered into a peace covenant with Muslims are entitled to full religious freedom and equal protection by

the law of their rights to personal safety and property. Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī states in unequivocal terms that when non-Muslims enter into a peace covenant with Muslims,

Muslims should not appropriate any of their [the non-Muslims'] houses and land, nor should they intrude into any of their dwellings. [This is because they have become party to a covenant of peace, and because on the day of [the peace of] Khaybar, the Prophet's spokesman announced that none of the property of the covenanter is permitted to them [the Muslims]. [It is also because they [the non-Muslims] have accepted the peace covenant so as they may enjoy their properties and rights on a par with the Muslims.²⁰

Similarly, early Muslim jurists recognized the right of non-Muslims to self-determination, and awarded them full moral and legal autonomy in the villages and towns under their control. Therefore, al-Shaybānī, the author of the most authoritative work on non-Muslim rights, insisted that the Christians who entered into a peace covenant (*dhimma*) – hence became *dhimmis* – had all the freedom to trade in wine and pork in their towns, even though this practice was considered immoral and illegal among Muslims.²¹ However, *dhimmis* were prohibited to do the same in towns and villages controlled by Muslims.

Likewise, early Muslim jurists recognized the right of *dhimmis* to hold public office, including that of a judge or a minister. However, because judges had to refer to laws sanctioned by the religious traditions of the various religious communities, non-Muslim judges could not administer law in Muslim communities, nor were Muslim judges permitted to enforce Shari'ah laws on the *dhimmis*. There was no disagreement among the various schools of jurisprudence on the right of non-Muslims to be ruled according to their laws; they differed only over whether the positions held by non-Muslim magistrates were judicial in nature, and hence the magistrates could be called judges, or whether they were purely political, and therefore the magistrates were indeed political leaders.²² Al-Māwardī hence distinguished between two types of ministerial positions: *plenipotentiary* minister (*wazīr tafwīḍ*) and executive minister (*wazīr tanfidh*). The two positions differed in that the former acted independently from the Caliph, while the latter had to act on the instructions of the Caliph, and within the limitations set by him.²³ Therefore, early jurists permitted

dhimmis to hold the office of the executive, but not that of the *plenipotentiary* minister.²⁴

However, while early Shari‘ah Law recognized the civil and political rights and liberties of non-Muslim *dhimmis*, its rules underwent drastic revision, beginning in the eighth century AH. This was a time of great political turmoil throughout the Muslim world. It was during that time that the Mongols invaded Central and West Asia, inflicting tremendous losses on various dynasties and kingdoms, and destroying the seat of the Caliphate in Baghdad. This coincided with the Crusaders’ control of Palestine and the coast of Syria. In the West, the Muslim power in Spain was being gradually eroded. It was under such conditions of mistrust and suspicion that a set of provisions attributed to an agreement between the Caliph ‘Umar and the Syrian Christians were publicized in a treatise written by Ibn al-Qayyim.²⁵ Although the origin of these provisions is dubious, their intent is clear: to humiliate Christian *dhimmis* and to set them apart in dress code and appearance. Their impact, however, was limited, for the Ottomans, who replaced the Abbasids as the hegemonic power in the Muslim world, continued the early practice of granting legal and administrative autonomy to non-Muslim subjects.

ISLAM, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND THE STATE

The modern state emerged to foster individual freedom from arbitrary rule, and to ensure that the members of the political society assumed full control over public institutions. To do so, the modern state found it necessary to free public institutions from the control of all exclusive groups, including organized religions. However, despite the clear desire of the pioneers of the secular state to replace religious morality with civic virtue as the moral foundation of the state, secularism gradually developed anti-religious tendencies, leading to the steady erosion of the moral consensus. The continual erosion of morality and the rampant corruption in modern politics threatens to turn the state into an instrument in the hands of corrupt officials and their egoistic cronies.

This has prompted calls for the return of religion and religiously organized groups into the political arena. Nowhere are these calls louder and clearer than in Muslim societies where Islamic values have historically exerted great influence on the body politic. Unfortunately, the reunion envisaged by the advocates of the Islamic state is often presented in crude

and simplistic terms, for it fails to appreciate the great care that was taken by the early Muslims to ensure that the state incorporated, both in its objectives and structure, the freedom and interest of all intra- and inter-religious divisions.

This calls upon Muslim scholars to engage in new thinking that aims at redefining political principles and authority. In doing so, Muslim scholars should be fully aware of the need to transcend the historical models of political organizations in Muslim society. Political structures and procedures adopted by early Muslim societies are directly linked to their social structures, economic and technological developments, and political experiences. While historical Islamic models provide a mine of knowledge for contemporary Muslims to utilize, any workable formulation of the modern Islamic model of the state that is true to Islamic values and ethos must emerge from fresh thinking that takes into account the structure of modern society.

Islamic political thought, I believe, can make a profound significant contribution toward reclaiming the moral core of social life and preserving religious traditions, without sacrificing the principle of freedom and equality promoted by the modern state. The hallmark of Islamic political experience is the limitations that historical Muslim society was able to place on the actions of rulers, and the presence of a vigorous and robust civil society. Many of the functions that the secular state assumes today were entrusted to civic institutions, including education, health, and legislation. The state was mainly entrusted with questions of security and defense, and was the last resort in questions relating to dispensation of justice. This understanding of state power would potentially free religious communities from intervention by the state and state officials, who tend to enforce their religiously based values and notions on the members of society, including those who do not share with them some of those values and beliefs.

The notions of individual freedom and equality are intrinsic to Islamic political thought, and those principles require that individuals have the basic civil liberties offered by the modern state. However, by freeing civil society from the heavy hand of the state, and by extending individual liberties to the community and recognizing the moral autonomy of social groups, social and religious groups under the Islamic conception of law (Shari'ah) would have the capacity to legislate their internal morality and affairs in their communities. While the new sphere of freedom acquired

under this arrangement would allow for differentiation among citizens, equality would have to be maintained as the criterion of justice in the new area of public law, and in access to public institutions – that is, in matters relating to shared interests and inter-communal relations.

MUSLIM CONTRIBUTIONS TO WORLD

CIVILIZATION

Islam's brilliant contributions to science, art, and culture, are a timeless and precious heritage, which should be historically preserved for future generations. The great achievements of Muslim scholars are rarely if at all acknowledged in formal education, and today their identity, origins and impact remain largely obscure. This collection of papers aims to give readers a brief introduction to the intellectual history of Muslims and the contributions that eminent Muslim scholars have made in certain specific fields of knowledge including basic and applied physical and biological sciences, medicine, legal and political theories and practices, economic and financial concepts, models, and institutions, etc.

The preservation of civilization necessitates a better understanding, sharing, and recognition of our common human heritage. Given today's widespread negative stereotyping and falsely generated misunderstanding of Islam and Muslims, the publication of these papers on "Muslim Contributions to World Civilization" is vital to help repair the wrong that is being perpetrated and restore the historical truth, which is being distorted.



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Astronomers working in Istanbul

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