THE INCOHERENCE OF ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM: ARAB ISLAMIC THOUGHT AT THE END OF THE 20TH CENTURY

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THE decline of the appeal of secular (particularly socialist and Marxist-Leninist) ideologies in Arab countries has contributed to the emergence of Islam as a credible ideology, the motifs of which are all drawn from the Arab/Islamic heritage to which people can relate. Since the 1970s, Islam has emerged as the one political ideology that has not been tried and exhausted. Its distance from the actual political process represents its greatest advantage at a time when all ruling ideologies are perceived as bankrupt. The ideology of the Baath, for example, has become a symbol for cruelty and injustice, while socialism evokes images of corrupt state-run enterprises. The mood of acute disillusionment and despair that prevailed among Arabs following the June 1967 War was dispelled partially by the victory of the 1979 Islamic revolution in non-Arab Iran. Arabs do not want to duplicate the political recipe of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, which is the product of the Shi'i Twelver Imamate tradition, but they have been impressed by the success of religious mobilization in Iran.

The emergence of Islamic fundamentalism[1] also is intertwined with the popularly-induced process of democratization. For a long time, the issuance of a

1. The term "Islamic fundamentalism" is used throughout this article to refer to all those movements and groups that aspire to the complete application of Islamic laws, as interpreted by leaders of the movements, in society and the body politic. Other terms, like Islamists, Islamic movements, or the Islamic situation (*al-halah al-'Islamiyyah*), which is now favored by many fundamentalists, are inappropriate because they allow the fundamentalists to monopolize the Islamic adjectives for themselves. Many secular Muslims consider themselves as Islamic as the fundamentalists. It is true the term was coined to refer to a particular Protestant theological trend in the United States, but fundamentalism (*'usuliyyah* in Arabic) in the Islamic context refers to the attempt to return to the *'usul* (roots or fundamentals).

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fatwa (religious edict) in Arab countries has been controlled rigidly by undemocratic governments that are eager to obtain religio-political legitimacy through the "Islamization" of their policies and deeds. The exploitation of Islam for political purposes is not new but can be traced back to the time following the death of the Prophet, when his companions competed against one another using Muhammad's legacy as their weapon. In time, it became standard practice for the political authority to seek legitimization through the religious authority, institutionalized as a government-salaried clergy.[2] The post-1970 emergence of Islamic fundamentalism represents popular protest against discredited and salaried clerics. Islamic fundamentalism has allowed Muslim activists to choose their own religious leaders without relying on government-appointed clerics. The emergence of fundamentalist leaders in villages, towns, and city neighborhoods "democratized" the religious decree-issuing process, providing individual Muslims an opportunity to seek advice from any leader whom he/she chose. This undermined the credibility of establishment Islam and threatened the governmental sponsorship of institutional interpretations of Islamic texts.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALIST THOUGHT: CLASSICAL ISLAM VERSUS MODERN ISLAM

The methods by which Islamic fundamentalist groups compete for political legitimacy are not original; they are borrowed from early Islamic history. The method of *takfir* (declaring the infidelity of adversaries), which is popular among contemporary fundamentalists, was perfected by a Kharijite sect known as the Azariqah.[3] The Azariqah considered all other Muslims unbelievers who could be killed without sin.[4] Takfir increasingly is used today by Arab governments and Islamic opposition groups in their wars in Algeria and Egypt. As a method of intimidation against other Muslims in matters of jurisprudence, takfir actually was rejected by some of those early *'ulama'*, whom contemporary fundamentalists regularly quote. For example, Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali rejected the application of takfir judgment on issues relating to "errors in the origins of the Imamate, and its conditions and requirements."[5] He also stated in *'Ihya' 'Ulum ad-Din* that suspecting belief is unbelief itself.[6] Ibn Taymiyyah, who is favored by

2. For example, traveling in Egypt in the late-twelfth century, Ibn Jubayr noted the presence of between 8,000 and 12,000 mosques with their own salaried preachers. The sultan was paying a minimum of five Egyptian dinars per month to every preacher. See Ibn Jubayr, *Rihlat Ibn Jubayr* (The Travels of Ibn Jubayr) (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1959), p. 17.

3. See Muhammad al-Shahrastani, *Kitab al-Milal wa-n-Nihal* (Book of religious and philosophical sects) (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1923), pp. 89–91.

4. W.M. Watt, *Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh Press, 1968), pp. 55–6.

5. See Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Faysal at-Tafriqah bayna-l-'Islam wa-z-Zandaqah* (The Decisive Criterion in the Distinction between Islam and Zandaqah) (Cairo: n.p., 1907), p. 15.

6. Cited in Fahmi Huwaydi, *Al-Qur'an wa-s-Sultan* (The Quran and the Sultan) (Cairo: Dar ash-Shuruq, 3rd ed., 1991), p. 107.

all modern fundamentalists, said in *Al-Fatawa Ash-Shar'iyyah* that takfir is the first *bid'ah* (innovation) in Islam.[7] Among contemporary Islamic fundamentalist leaders, Rashid al-Ghannushi of Tunisia has condemned the weapon of takfir publicly.[8]

The basic issue that splits Islamic groups and governments centers on whether one undisputed interpretation of Quranic text should be imposed. Hasan at-Turabi calls for the introduction of one fundamentalist paradigm (*manhaj 'usuli*), presumably based on one view of Islamic laws.[9] In Saudi Arabia and Sudan, it is obligatory for Muslim citizens to follow the particular interpretations of *sharia* (religious law) that are endorsed by the governments. For Islamic fundamentalist groups, all those Muslims who do not share their view of Islamic laws are dismissed as infidels. Those Muslims who favor secular governments are called apostates by fundamentalist Muslims, who urge the classical Islamic punishment for apostasy—death—against them. The influential, mainstream Islamic thinker, Muhammad al-Ghazali, stunned secularists in Egypt when he endorsed on Islamic grounds the murder of Faraj Fuda for espousing secularism, testifying in court that Fuda's secular views made him automatically a *murtadd* (an apostate).[10]

Differences in interpretations of religious texts are, of course, neither new nor peculiar to Islam. The reported *hadith* (authenticated traditions) of Muhammad, in which he said that "my community will not reach a consensus erroneously," have led Muslims to strive for one view of the meaning of religion in their lives. The difficulty in applying Islamic tenets lies in the phraseology of the Quran. Egyptian writer Taha Husayn once remarked that in Arabic there are three forms of writings: poetry, prose, and the Quran. The Quranic language lends itself to different—sometimes divergent—interpretations. The attributes of God in the Quran produced a variety of schismatic tendencies in Islamic history. The meanings (literal and hidden) of those attributes have confused Muslims for centuries. 'Ali ibn Abi Talib realized the consequences of the peculiar Quranic language when he described it as *hammalu awjuh* (literally, multi-faced, subject to multiple interpretations). He urged his followers not to use the Quran as a weapon with which to fight the Kharijites because he knew the Quran could be used against him, as it was by the Umayyads.

One of the most widely used slogans by Islamic fundamentalists is, ironically, "no governance except that of God," which is borrowed from sura Yusuf, ayat

7. Cited in *ibid.*

8. Rashid al-Ghannushi, *Hiwarat ma'a Qusayy Salih ad-Darwish* (Dialogue with Qusayy Salih ad-Darwish) (London: Khalil Media Service, 1992), pp. 24–5.

9. Hasan at-Turabi, *Tajdid 'Usul al-Fiqh al-'Islami* (Renewal of the Fundamentals of Islamic Jurisprudence) (Jeddah: Ad-Dar as-Sa'udiyyah, 1984), pp. 10–13. Typically, at-Turabi does not specify how to arrive at the *'usuli* paradigm. He tends to write in generalities, which is not unusual in the literature of contemporary Islamic fundamentalism.

10. On the controversy of al-Ghazali's testimony in court in the case of Fuda, see *Al-Hayat*, August 18, 1993.

40: "Verily governance (*al-hukm*) only rests with God."[11] This slogan was first used by the Kharijites in their wars against the caliphate of 'Ali. Although the Kharijites are stigmatized in Islamic fundamentalist literature, their slogans and tactics have been useful in modern fundamentalism's arsenal for war against its many enemies. To Hasan al-Banna, whose writings have shaped modern Sunni Islamic thought more than any other writer—with the possible exception of Abu al-'Ala' al-Mawdudi—the choice is simple: if the Muslims do not apply God's orders, they will be living in *jahiliyya* (age of ignorance) society, even if they fulfill the requirements of the five pillars.[12] For *al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya* (the Islamic Group) in Egypt, divine rulership is regarded as an article of faith because no human being has the right to legislate.[13] The leader of the uprising in Mecca in 1979, Juhayman al-'Utaybi, saw no contradiction in espousing the slogan of the Kharijites while considering them infidels.[14] The general mufti of Saudi Arabia (who also serves as chairman of the Council of Senior 'Ulama'), the ultra-conservative Shaykh 'Abd-ul-'Aziz bin Baz, considers the refusal to apply solely Quranic laws to be unbelief itself.[15]

GLORIFICATION AND DISTORTION OF ISLAMIC HISTORY

Generations of Muslims have been inculcated with a version of Islamic history that conformed to the religio-political interests of the clerical establishments and the ruling regimes. This version of history has not undergone much change since the establishment of the Islamic empire, because governments ruling in the name of Islam incorporated into religion itself those "facts" of history that they wanted. In effect, to question the facts of history is to question the very legitimacy of the faith.

Stigmatization of Jahiliyya

The ideological stigmatization of jahiliyya discouraged the study of the pre-Islamic era except to exaggerate the ills of a period that ended with the advent of Islam. Life in jahiliyya is still mysterious and knowledge among Muslims about it inevitably passes through the prism of Islamic apologetics. Any study of

11. In the edition of Sayyid Qutb's *Ma'alim fi-t-Tariq* in the possession of this writer, that ayat was identified mistakenly as ayat 84 of the same sura. See the edition of the same title (Dar Dimashq, n.d.), p. 142.

12. Hasan al-Banna, *Majmu'at Rasa'il al-'Imam-i-sh-Shahid Hasan al-Banna* (The Collection of Letters by the Martyr Imam Hasan al-Banna) (Beirut: Dar al-Andalus, 1965), p. 142.

13. 'Umar 'Abd-ul-Rahman, *Kalimat Haqq* (A Word of Truth) (Cairo: Dar al-'I'tisam, 1985), pp. 28–9.

14. Rif'at Sayyid Ahmad, ed., *Rasa'il Juhayman al-'Utaybi* (The Letters of Juhayman al-'Utaybi) (Cairo: Maktabat Madbuli, 1988), p. 72.

15. The fatwa of Shaykh bin Baz was published in *Ad-Da'wah*, no. 916; reprinted in Shaykh 'Abd-ul-'Aziz bin Baz, et al., *Fatawa Islamiyya* (Islamic Fatwas), vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Qalam, 1988), p. 73.

jahiliyya that does not fit into the Islamic apologetic perspective is dismissed as anti-Islamic. Contemporary Islamic movements and Arab governments ruling through the political exploitation of Islam fear to challenge the classical vision of jahiliyya. It is impossible to understand Islam as a religion and as an outlook without understanding life in jahiliyya because—despite the claims of Islamic apologists—Islam incorporated many elements from jahiliyya times, including the very practice of the pilgrimage to Mecca.

There have been few attempts by Muslim scholars to shed new light on jahiliyya times. Fatima Mernissi investigated pluralism in jahiliyya society and compared the status of women before and after Islam without being influenced by the taboos of Islamic apologists.[16] She found evidence of a marketplace of ideas in the polytheistic context of jahiliyya society.[17] Similarly, Sulayman Bashir attempted to offer some methodological remarks to contribute to the re-examination of Islamic history.[18] The application of rational, critical standards in the study of Islamic history will deprive advocates of Islamic apologetics of the myths that have been incorporated into the body of Islamic studies in Arab countries.

Suppression of Unpleasant Facts about Caliphs

Advocates of the Islamic utopia have tended to exclude in their accounts of Islamic history some of the basic facts and events that were reported in the classical sources of Islamic history. Classical sources were far less defensive about Islam and Muhammad than modern advocates of Islamic apologetics. Assassinations, torture, oppression, and *fitan* (plural of *fitnah*, sedition or civil war) have been deleted conveniently from the modern accounts of Islamic history. The fitnah of early Islam, which is the name used by early Muslims to designate the civil war under 'Uthman, the third rightly-guided caliph, largely has been ignored by modern scholars, even though classical sources did not gloss over that period. Although it is true that Taha Husayn wrote about that period, his work was primarily literary in nature,[19] as noted by Hichem Djait, author of the only full study of the major fitnah of early Islam.[20]

Muslims tend to be largely ignorant about the unpleasant facts of Islamic history before and after the death of Muhammad because the methods of assassination and torture used under Muhammad and the various caliphs are omitted from the school curricula of most Islamic countries. There is still no

16. Fatima Mernissi, *Islam and Democracy* (New York: Addison-Wesley, 1992).

17. Mernissi relied on Abi al-Mundhir al-Kalbi, *Kitab al-Asnam* (Book Idols) (Cairo: Dar al-Kutab, 1924).

18. Sulayman Bashir, *Muqaddimah Fi-t-Tarikh-i-l-Akhar* (An Introduction to the Other History) (Jerusalem: Markaz ad-Dirasat al-'Arabiyyah, 1984).

19. See Taha Husayn, "Al-Fitna-l-Kubra" (The great civil war), in Taha Husayn, *Islamiyyat* (On Islam) (Beirut: Dar al-Adab, 1967).

20. Hichem Djait, *La Grande Discorde: Religion et politique dans l'Islam des origines* (Religion and Politics in Original Islam) (Paris: Gallimard, 1989).

scholarly biography of the Prophet in Arabic. Few Muslims know that when Muhammad heard of the anti-Islamic poetry of Ka'b Bin Zuhayr—before his conversion—he said: "he who finds Ka'b should kill him."[21] Nevertheless, the early biographies of Ibn Ishaq and Ibn Hisham were less burdened with taboos and ideological restrictions than are contemporary Islamic biographies of the Prophet.[22] An Iraqi writer has researched the subject of torture and assassinations in Islam.[23] His findings dispel the image of benevolence and mercy that is attributed to early Muslim rulers and fighters.

The personal lives of caliphs—who often showed very little concern for Islamic religious obligations and taboos, according to information available in classical sources—are distorted to glorify the entire Islamic past. The past, after all, is the ultimate utopia in contemporary Islamic fundamentalist thought. This makes the fundamentalist movement, like the Arab nationalist movement, a nostalgic one that aspires to recreate the past in the future. The nostalgic feature of contemporary Arab Islamic thought can be found in the references to the ostensible "golden age" of Islam in the literature of Islamic fundamentalism. For 'Allal al-Fasi, the actuality of all lofty ideals was practiced in early Islamic history.[24] In the words of Abdallah Laroui, "lorsqu'on étudie l'état arabo-islamique du passé, le grand danger est de s'installer dans le normatif" (In studying the Arab-Islamic state of the past, one faces the high risk of projecting it normatively).[25] This nostalgia does not entirely explain the rise of fundamentalism. The underlying causes of the rise of fundamentalism are based on real socioeconomic factors, although the articulation of the Islamic Idea (to use the Hegelian language) is phrased in romantic language. The appeal of the distant past stems from the unattractiveness of the present. The past is presented through a paradigm that distorts the nature of government in Islamic history, in which the caliphate is seen as the model of ideal government.

No Distinction between Mulk and Khilafah

The version of Islamic history that has been adopted by contemporary Islamic fundamentalists does not recognize the distinction between the religiously-legitimized system of the caliphate and the kingships that dominated for most

21. Abu-l-Faraj al-Isfahani, *Kitab al-Aghani*, vol. 15 (Book of Songs) (Cairo: Bulaq, 1868), p. 149.

22. The best biography of Muhammad is still Maxime Rodinson, *Mohammed*, trans. by Anne Carter (New York: Vintage Books, 1974).

23. Hadi al-'Alawi, *Min Tarkih at-Ta'dhib fi-l-'Islam* (From the History of Torture in Islam); and *Al-'Ightiyal as-Siyasi fi-l-'Islam* (Political Assassinations in Islam) (Damascus: Markaz al-Abhath wa-d-Dirasat al-'Ishtirakiyyah fi-l-'Alam-i-l-'Arabi, 1987).

24. 'Allal al-Fasi, *Maqasid Ash-Shari'a-l-'Islamiyyah wa Makarimuha* (The Aims and Virtues of Islamic Sharia) (Rabat: Ar-Risalah, 1979).

25. Abdallah Laroui, *Islam et modernite* (Islam and Modernism) (Paris: Editions La Decouverte, 1987), p. 15.

of Islamic history.[26] While governments in Islamic history traced their origins to the divine mission of Muhammad, modern Islamic fundamentalists accept the Islamic credentials of Islamic dynasties, including lately the Ottoman Empire, to embellish the picture of rulership under the banner of Islam. However, as early as the 14th century, Ibn Khaldun clearly distinguished between *mulk* (kingship) and *khilafah* (caliphate), and he analyzed the gradual transformation of governments in Islam from caliphates to kingships.[27] The elimination of the distinction between the two forms of government was the product of the cooptation of clerical leaders by dynasties and governments to legitimize the policies and deeds of rulers. The coopted clerics provided religious sanction to the decision-making process in Islamic history. The rulers were rendered a valuable service by their loyal clerics, who made the stability of government a necessity of faith. People were—and still are—told that political authority, far from being a societal convenience, is a divine obligation, in the absence of which the fulfillment of religious obligation remains incomplete.

The Notion of Hukm in Islam

Much of the ideological arsenal of modern—and past—Islamic movements centers on the references to *hukm* (authority) in the Quran.[28] Contemporary Islamic fundamentalists insist that hukm in the Quran clearly establishes the totality of the Islamic obligation. They stress that the separation between the realm of God and the earthly realm is impossible in Islam, because the Quran covers all facets of life, including the realm of politics and governments. Ironically, this cliché about the impossibility of separating "church" and state in Islam also has been a staple of classical Orientalist works on Islam. Fundamentalists cite sura 5, verse 40 on the application of the hukm of God as evidence for the religious obligation of an Islamic government.

The concept that the Quran calls for political authority has been challenged. 'Ali 'Abd-ul-Raziq and Egyptian jurist Muhammad Sa'id al-'Ishmawi have traced the lexicographic origins of the word hukm and refuted persuasively the notion of a political commandment in the Quran.[29] The word hukm in classical Arabic did not have the modern political connotation; it was used to refer to judgment, and the word *hakam* (as a noun) is still used in Arabic for "referee." Thus, the word was used in the Quran several times to refer to the role of a fair arbitrator. In one instance the meaning is clear: "make thee an arbitrator of what is in dispute

26. See the classic T.W. Arnold, *The Caliphate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1924).
27. Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddimah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani, 1983), pp. 735–39.
28. See, for example, sura Al-Ma'idah, ayat 44.
29. See Muhammad Sa'id al-'Ishmawi, *Al-'Islam as-Siyasi* (Political Islam) (Cairo: Sina, 1989), pp. 37–40. The themes and insights from this important work were covered with less originality in Nazih Ayubi, *Political Islam* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

between them."[30] N.J. Dawood, the translator of a standard English edition of the Quran, renders hukm as judgment (5:40): "Judgment (hukm) rests only with God."[31] This linguistic discussion is crucial because the association of the word with a political arrangement constitutes the foundation of contemporary Islamic fundamentalist argumentation.

The Question of Church and State: Is the Imamate Obligatory?

Imamate here refers to the term used in classical works of Islamic jurisprudence in discussion of political power and its relationship to religion. Literally, imamate means the political order headed by the imam. It denotes the notion of a religio-political order in which the "rules of Islam" prevail. The concept rejects separation of political and religious power, and in modern terminology refers to the anti-secularist tendencies of Islam. Advocates of the theories of imamate preach the fusion of "church" and state. As noted above, classical Orientalists and Islamic fundamentalists agree over the incompatibility of Islam and secularism. They argue that Islam, unlike other religions, leaves no room for a separation of "church" and state because Islam is an all-encompassing religion that has opinions, requirements, and obligations covering every facet of life. In reality, Islam is no different in this regard from, say, Jewish *halachic* laws that also cover all facets of life. Furthermore, Christian fundamentalists argue that the Bible covers all aspects of life for Christians.[32] Whether any religion should govern all facets of life is not determined by the belief system but by the believers themselves.

To be sure, the Quran has some specific commands in the areas of *'ibadat* (methods of worship) and *mu'amalat* (transactions), but the vast majority of Quranic verses are quite general in nature, dealing with ethical questions and with God's relationship to the believers. Nevertheless, the argument, which has been transformed into an article of faith, that in Islam the "church" and state are one, needs to be challenged. The argument has proved to be useful for governments ruling in the name of Islam—and all Arab governments today rule in the name of Islam, to one degree or another—and it has proved useful for Western polemics against Islam because it stresses the unusual standards of Islam and its presumed incompatibility with Western democracy. In reality, Islam, or more specifically the Quran, has little, if anything, to say about politics, notwithstanding the

30. Sura An-Nisa', ayat 65.

31. N.J. Dawood, trans., *The Koran: With a Parallel Arabic Text* (London: Penguin Classics, 1990).

32. Charles Butterworth reminds Westerners that the Bible (Rom. 13.1–2) contains injunctions that are not unlike what is in the Quran, including the verse: "for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. . . . " See Charles Butterworth, "Political Islam: The Origins," in Charles Butterworth and I. William Zartman, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science: Political Islam* (November 1992), p. 27.

command to "obey God, the Prophet, and those in charge."[33] The question of "church," or an ecclesiastical authority or priesthood, is moot in Islam, because Muhammad made clear that the believer needs no mediator between him/her and God.

The support for the notion of the obligatoriness of the imamate is derived from a variety of hadith sources, not all of which are equally reliable, even by the standards of hadith science. The approach of Islamic fundamentalists to the hadith has been highly selective. Those elements of hadith, regardless of whether they are *sahih* (sound by the measure of hadith science), that support the position of fundamentalists are regularly quoted, while others that do not support their cause go unmentioned. The authoritative *Sahih* of the traditionalist Abu al-Husayn Muslim (d. 875) reports an incident that is akin to the Biblical verse that was used to reconcile Christianity with secularism. As reported in the *Sahih* of Muslim, Muhammad once suggested to a group of people to pollinate palm trees. When the conditions of the trees deteriorated, Muhammad was surprised that members of the group to which he rendered his advice followed his opinion blindly, regardless of its wisdom. He said to them: "Maybe it would have been better for you to refrain from doing it [from pollinating]. . . . I am but a human being like you. If I ordered you in matters dealing with your religion, follow the orders; and if I ordered you to do something based on my opinions, remember that I am but a human being."[34] In the *Musnad* of Ibn Hanbal, the Prophet (in the same incident) is supposed to have said: "what is of your earthly matters is for you [to decide on], and what is of your religion is for me [to decide on]."[35] In yet another source, the Prophet said: "You are more knowledgeable in your earthly matters."[36] This hadith could be used to support an argument in favor of Islamic compatibility with secularism. Muhammad distinguished between his opinions (*ra'y*) that were not divinely inspired, and revelation (*wahy*) itself. His followers were at liberty to ignore his opinions if they felt they were not based on revelation. Fortunately for early Muslims, Muhammad's military opinions, for example, were often ignored.

Ironically, the same theological authorities that often are cited by contemporary Islamic fundamentalists in support of their theory of the obligatoriness and essentiality of imamate were, in fact, clear about the secondary nature of imamate in Islamic jurisprudence. Al-Ghazali stated: "the fundamentals of faith are three: belief in God, belief in his messengers, and belief in the hereafter, and all else are *furu'* " (branches).[37] Ibn Khaldun said on the imamate: "the misconception of the

33. Sura An-Nisa', ayat 59.

34. *Sahih Muslim*, vol. 7 (Cairo: Matba'at Muhammad 'Ali Subayh, 1963), p. 95.

35. Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, *Musnad al-'Imam Ahmad 'Ibn Hanbal* vol. 6 (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1969), p. 123.

36. This same hadith appeared in the collections by Muslim, Ibn Hanbal, and Ibn Majah. It was attributed to Talhah bin 'Ubayd al-Lah, 'A'ishah, Anas bin Malik, Rafi' bin Khadij, and Abi Qatadah. See Muhammad 'Amarah, *Al-'Islam wa-s-Sulta-d-Diniyyah* (Islam and religious authority), no. 4 (Cairo: Dar ath-Thaqafah al-Jadidah, Qadaya Islamiyyah, 1979), p. 112.

37. Al-Ghazali, *Faysal at-Tafriqah bayna-l-'Islam wa-z-Zandaqah*, p. 15. See also his *Al-'Iqtisad fi-l-'I'tiqad* (The Concision in the Belief) (Cairo: Subayh, n.d.); also cited in Muhammad

Imamiyyah [sect] lies in the belief that the imamate is a pillar of religion, as they claim, while it is not so. It is a public interest that is left to the views of people."[38]

The essentiality and obligatoriness of the imamate (as an Islamic state dedicated to the exclusive juridical application of sharia) have been accepted by contemporary Islamic thinkers. Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb succeeded in focusing their political agitation and mobilization behind the goal of establishing an Islamic political order. The idea that Islam accepts the separation of state and "church" is the product of ignorance, argued al-Banna,[39] who viewed the designation of Islam as the state religion in some Arab countries as purely cosmetic, because the state was not governed exclusively by sharia and because the constitutional stipulation did not "stop politicians and leaders of political bodies from corrupting 'the Islamic taste' in the minds of people, and from corrupting the Islamic outlook in the consciousness. . . ."[40] Al-Banna asserted that the very religion of Islam assumes the presence of an Islamic government as "a pillar of the social order."[41]

Muhammad 'Abd-ul-Salam Faraj, the author of *Al-Faridah al-Gha'ibah*, which inspired radical Muslim activists throughout Egypt, misused—at least in the opinion of Muhammad 'Amarah, who is quite sympathetic to the cause of Islamic fundamentalists—a fatwa by Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328) to discredit a political order that is not based entirely on sharia. Faraj believed that the reluctance of Muslims to be governed by purely Islamic laws placed them into *dar al-kufr* (an abode of unbelief), the struggle against which, of course, is not only permissible but obligatory.[42] The Islamic pronouncements of Islamic governments and their allies in the clerical establishment, and the declared dedication to the application of sharia become unimportant to Faraj, and to others in the radical camp of Islamic fundamentalism, as long as the interpretations of sharia differ from the interpretations of activist Muslims.

Given the popularity of Ibn Taymiyyah in the writings of modern Islamic fundamentalism, it becomes necessary to investigate the opinions of Ibn Taymiyyah first hand, without relying on secondary interpretations by Faraj and others. Because the classical Arabic of many of the medieval Islamic texts is inaccessible to most Muslim activists today, the assumptions and conclusions of their leaders often are taken at face value. In reality, the centrality of the imamate, or its secondary status, was a point of contention in Sunni-Shi'i polemics. Sunni theologians clearly disagreed with the Shi'i elevation of the imamate in the

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'Amarah, *Ad-Dawla-l-'Islamiyyah: Bayna-l-'Ilmaniyyah wa-s-Sulta-d-Diniyyah* (The Islamic state: Between secularism and religious authority) (n.p., n.d.), p. 210.

38. Ibn Khaldun, *Al-Muqaddimah*, p. 376.
39. See Hasan al-Banna, *Majmu'at Rasa'il al-'Imam-i-Shahid Hasan al-Banna*, p. 358.
40. Ibid., p. 359.
41. Ibid., p. 358.
42. See Muhammad 'Abd-us-Salam Faraj, *Al-Faridah al-Gha'ibah* (n.p., n.d.), pp. 7–8; as cited in Muhammad 'Amarah, *Al-Faridah al-Gha'ibah* (Missing Obligation) (Beirut: Dar al-Wahdah, 1983), pp. 18–19.

hierarchy of religious obligations. Ibn Taymiyyah, for example, considered the difference between a *mu'min* (believer) and a *kafir* (unbeliever) to lie in the profession of belief in God and his messenger. In response to Shi'i theses, Ibn Taymiyyah said: "belief in God and his messenger is more important than the question of the imamate, and this is necessarily known in the religion of Islam. The kafir does not become a believer until he attests that there is no God but God, and that Muhammad is the messenger of God."[43] The notion that the imamate is the most important dictate in religion is a "lie and even *kufr*" (unbelief).[44] The imamate, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, "is not one of the five pillars of Islam, nor is it one of the six pillars."[45] Yet, the essentiality of the imamate has superseded the essentiality of the *shahadah* (profession of faith in God and the acceptance of Muhammad's mission) in the literature of contemporary Islamic fundamentalists.

ATTACK ON REASON

The political literature of modern Islamic fundamentalists manifests a fear of reason. Apparently, reason poses a threat to the loyalty and devotion of the unquestioning believer and member of the political group. Yet, the classical Islamic scholars held divergent views about the role of reason in relationship to faith. The case of al-Ghazali, who engaged in debates with the philosophers, is instructive. The view that al-Ghazali wrote his famous *Tahafut al-Falasifah* to attack reason was once accepted by some Orientalists,[46] but is now rejected by experts on Islamic philosophy.[47] Al-Ghazali explained in the beginning of his work that he undertook his task using reason and logic to refute the arguments of the philosophers.[48] It is the logical consequence of the utilization of reason that was in dispute between al-Ghazali and his ideological foes.[49] Al-Ghazali and many other jurists could not ignore the praise of reason in the Quran, the hadith, and in the legacy of Arab literature. Nevertheless, some jurists frowned upon the use of reason because it was seen as a threat to faith and a counterforce to revelation. Thus, the saying *man tamantaqa faqad tazandaqa*, "he who uses logic becomes an atheist."

There are several references in the Quran that urged the believers to use reason. The phrase "will you not use reason" appears, for example, in sura

43. Ibn Taymiyyah, *Minhaj as-Sunnah An-Nabawiyyah*, vol. 1 (The Course of the Prophet's Sunna) (Beirut: Maktabat Khayyat, n.d.), p. 48.

44. Ibid.

45. Quoted in Muhammad 'Amarah, *Ma'rakat al-'Islam wa 'Usul al-Hukm* (The Battle of "Islam and the Fundamentals of Government") (Cairo: Dar Ash-Shuruq, 1989), p. 205.

46. Goffredo Quadri, *La philosophie arabe dans l'Europe mediévale* (Arab Philosophy in Medieval Europe) (Paris: Payot, 1947), p. 125.

47. See the introduction by Victor Shalhat, ed., in Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazali, *Al-Qistas al-Mustaqim* (The Balance Scale) (Beirut: Al-Matba'ah al-Kathulikiyyah, 1959), pp. 23–6.

48. Al-Ghazali, *Tahafut al-Falasifah* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers) 6th ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1980), p. 85.

49. See Karim 'Azqul, *Al-'Aql fi-l-'Islam* (Reason in Islam) (Beirut: n.p., 1946).

Al-'Anbiya',[50] and the hadith contains the saying "the foundations of one's action is one's mind." Another hadith states: "heaven is made of one hundred ranks, ninety-nine of which are reserved for the people of reason and one for the rest."[51] 'Ali, like other major personalities of early Islam, also praised reason as "the richest of the riches."[52] Abu Bakr described reason as "the one thing without which our conditions would have been like animals, crazies, and children."[53] Al-Jahiz stated that reason is "the representative of God in man."[54] Classical Arab poets sang the praises of reason abundantly. The doyen of the Arab poets/philosophers, Abu al-'Ala' al-Ma'arri, said it best: "Other opinions lie, there is no imam, except reason, guiding day and night."[55]

The celebration of reason in the Islamic/Arab heritage differs markedly from the denigration of reason that characterizes contemporary Islamic fundamentalist literature. The former shaykh of al-Azhar University, 'Abdul-Halim Mahmud, whose writings are read widely by devout Muslims, was a passionate advocate against reason.[56] In one of his many books, he said: "If people are left to their mind's [reason], in those issues they will inevitably disagree and disunite into many sects, and they will be in conflict. . . . "[57] In another instance, Mahmud, whose views carried juridical weight—at least when he was at al-Azhar—insists that reason has no choice but "surrender, submission, subjugation, or, in a more accurate expression, prostration in adoration,"[58] presumably to religious dogmas. Reason, which was celebrated in earlier Islamic works, is suspect in Mahmud's eyes because "reason failed in finding a mental criterion to measure truth and falsehood in the world of spirits. It also failed in inventing a decisive yardstick to distinguish between truth and falsehood in the transcendental realm. The method of Aristotle has failed, and so has the method of Descartes."[59]

Commenting on school curricula, Tunisian fundamentalist Rashid al-Ghannushi calls for excising from philosophy classes in Arab schools all references to the rationalists of Arab/Islamic civilization, including the study of the Mu'tazilites,

50. See sura Al-Anbiya', ayat 10. See also, sura Ibrahim, ayat 33.

51. This hadith was reported in Shihab ad-Din bin Muhammad Abshayhi, *Al-Mustatraf fi Kull Fann Mustadhraf* (The Novelties in Every Elegant Art) (Beirut: Dar al-Qalam, 1981), p. 41. One section of the book is devoted to the subject of reason. See p. 40 of *ibid.*

52. Luwis Shaykhu (Louis Cheikho), *Majani al-Adab*, vol. 2 (Chrestomathy of Literature) (Beirut: Matba'at al-Aba' al-Yasu'iyyin, 1901), p. 69.

53. Fahmi Huwaydi, *Al-Qur'an wa-s-Sultan*, p. 50.

54. Ibid.

55. Abu al-'Ala' al-Ma'arri, *Al-Luzumiyyat*, vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar Sadir, 1961), p. 66.

56. Huwaydi, in *op. cit.*, p. 47, mistakenly said that one chapter in a book by Mahmud is devoted to the attack of reason. There is no such chapter in the book in question. See 'Abd-ul-Halim Mahmud, *As-Sayyid Ahmad al-Badawi* (Cairo: Dar Ash-Sha'b, 1969). Mahmud attacked reason in other works, as well. See note 57.

57. Al-'Imam 'Abd-ul-Halim Mahmud, *Al-'Islam wa-l-'Aql* (Islam and Reason) (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, n.d.), p. 18.

58. Ibid., p. 21.

59. Al-'Imam 'Abd-ul-Halim Mahmud, *Qadiyyat at-Tasawwuf: Al-Madrasah Ash-Shadhiliyyah* (The Sufi Cause: The Shadhiliyyah School) (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1983), p. 419. On the same subject, see also, Al-'Imam 'Abd-ul-Halim Mahmud, *Fatawa al-'Imam 'Abd-ul-Halim Mahmud* (The Fatwas of Imam 'Abd-ul-Halim Mahmud), vol. 1 (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1981), p. 84.

Ibn Rushd, Ibn Sina, and the Ash'arites. Instead, he urges the study of modern Islamic polemicists, like Hasan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, and Muhammad Qutb.[60] The weekly publication of *Hizbullah* in Lebanon states: "If reason is separated from *shar'* (Islamic jurisprudence), it fails to attain knowledge of the rules of human life. . . because reason is only slightly rich in itself."[61] The mufti of Saudi Arabia, Shaykh bin Baz, sees the effect of reason as a "great evil." He believes the *ahl al-kalam* (theologians) brought harm to the Muslims because they used reason. The very translation of Greek philosophy was "great evil" too, because it led to deviation from the texts, which alone enjoy the quality of infallibility.[62]

TAQLID AND TRIPLE TAQLID

Nowhere is the *ta'til* (cancellation) of reason more pronounced than in the theological concept of *taqlid* (emulation). The subject of taqlid in classical theological debates centered on the permissibility, or lack thereof, of having ordinary believers imitate the manners and methods of worship of a religious scholar. The proliferation of political organizations issuing fatwas throughout the universe of contemporary Islamic fundamentalism reinforced imitation, because the individual member of a particular group—regardless of whether the group was Sunni or Shi'i—automatically emulated the spiritual guide of the group, whose manners and style of worship (and very lifestyle) was considered religiously ideal.[63] However, this process of taqlid is not based on old Islamic practices, nor is it rooted in the works of classical theologians. What characterizes modern Islamic fundamentalism today is triple taqlid. The individual member of an Islamic group today is emulating the spiritual guide of the group, who, in turn, is imitating a religious scholar from the classical period, who, in turn, was imitating the Prophet, along the lines of the *sunna* (authenticated practice). The opinions of classical theologians on taqlid most probably are unknown to many Islamic activists.

The classical theologian Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah, a favorite of contemporary Islamic fundamentalists, saw in imitation cancellation of the benefit of the mind.[64] He considered the blind obedience to one man unauthorized and harmful. Jalal ad-Din as-Suyuti stressed that *salaf* (predecessors) and *khalaf* (successors) had forbidden taqlid and detested it. He viewed *'ijtihad* (religiously approved

60. See Rashid al-Ghannushi, *Maqalat* (Articles) (Paris: Dar al-Karawan, 1984), pp. 13–14.

61. *Al-'Ahd*, November 27, 1992, no. 440, p. 19.

62. From a fatwa of Shaykh bin Baz, reprinted in full in Bin Baz, et al., *Fatawa Islamiyyah* (Islamic Fatwas), vol. 1 (Beirut: Dar al-Qalam, 1988), pp. 25–6. All quotations in this paragraph are from this source.

63. This writer was in the presence of the spiritual guide of a major Islamic party in the Middle East when members came to ask for his opinions on matters dealing with worship and life. Following the guidance and practice of a spiritual leader is called *taqlid*.

64. Huwaydi, *Al-Qur'an wa-s-Sultan*, p. 44.

interpretation) as the alternative that Muslims are ordered to practice.[65] As-Suyuti cited Ash-Shafi'i in opposition to taqlid, and one authority, who stated that there was no difference between "a led animal and a human being engaging in taqlid."[66] Ibn Hazm considered taqlid to be *haram* (religiously impermissible).[67] Opponents of taqlid were not expressing their views out of personal preference, but were convinced that the prohibition of taqlid was stipulated in the Quran, as in Al-'A'raf, verse 3: "Only follow what was revealed to you from your God."[68] Al-'Imam Ash-Shukani was very committed to discrediting taqlid. To him, it was an unacceptable *bid'ah* (innovation). He explained that the four imams of the four (Sunni) schools of jurisprudence were firmly against it.[69] Imam Al-Jawini even prohibited judges from following any other authority except their 'ijtihad.[70] Even in Shi'i Islam, taqlid, which in Twelver Shi'ism refers to the emulation of a major *marji'* (authority) of jurisprudence, is not unlimited and unrestricted. Emulation of a dead person, regardless of his prominence and devoutness, is impermissible.[71] Some Shi'i scholars reject taqlid in questions dealing with fundamentals (*'usul*) of religion.[72] Even the stature of Khomeini does not qualify him, after his death, to become a source of emulation.

The incompetence of most contemporary Arabs in classical Arabic increases the reliance on clerics for interpretation of Quranic and other religious texts. The public educational systems produce students who can not decipher the classical texts. Clerics, whose training in Arabic philology is a requirement for their religious education, use their superior linguistic skills to impose their interpretations on their followers. Knowledge of classical Arabic would eliminate the role of mediators between the individual and the texts, as Muhammad Arkoun and King Hasan II often have argued.

CONCLUSION: ISLAM AS THE SOLUTION

The program of Islamic fundamentalists, those working within the political system trying to attain power through electoral means—in the rare cases where it

65. Jalal ad-Din as-Suyuti, *Ar-Radd 'Ala Man Akhlada Ila al-'Ard* (A Response to Whomever Rested in the Ground) (Cairo: Mu'assasat Shabab al-Jami'ah, 1985), p. 99.

66. 'Ibn 'Abd-ul-Barr al-Maliki al-Andalusi, *Jami' Bayan al-'Ilm* (Collection of Eloquent Science), vol. 2 (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1978), p. 114.

67. Ibn Hazm al-Andalusi, *An-Nabdhah al-Kafiyah* (The Sufficient Summary) (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani; and Cairo: Dar al-Kitab al-Misri, 1990), p. 86.

68. See also, sura Al-Baqarah, ayat 170 and sura An-Nisa', ayat 59; cited in *ibid.*, p. 87.

69. See Al-'Imam Muhammad bin 'Ali Ash-Shukani, *Al-Qawl al-Mufid fi Adillat al-'Ijtihad wa-t-Taqlid* (The Beneficial Saying in the Evidence of 'Ijtihad and Taqlid) (Kuwait: Dar al-Qalam, 1976), pp. 43–5. On Shukani's methodology in jurisprudence, see Sha'ban Muhammad Isma'il, *Al-'Imam Ash-Shukani wa Manhajuhu fi 'Usul al-Fiqh* (Imam Shukani and His Methodology in the Fundamentals of Jurisprudence) (Dawhah, Qatar: Dar Ath-Thaqafah, 1989).

70. Imam Al-Jawini, *At-Ta'liqat 'ala Matn al-Waraqat* (Commentaries on the Texts of Papers) (Riyadh: Maktabat al-Haramayn, 1983), p. 98.

71. Rida as-Sadr, *Al-'Ijtihad wa-t-Taqlid* ('Ijtihad and Taqlid) (Beirut: Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani, 1976), p. 121.

72. See *ibid.*, p. 230.

is possible—and those operating in the underground, often is articulated through the invocation of the oft-repeated slogan: "Islam is the solution." The promise of the slogan has not hurt their cause because the despair and the desperation of youths allow Islam, as an ideology, the opportunity to have a chance, and it promises the lure of the unknown. If the fundamentalists come to power, it is unlikely that those Muslims who want better socioeconomic standards will be satisfied by the mere promises of slogans.

It is fair to say that Islamic fundamentalist programs—if one can call them that—suffer from ambiguity. The leaders of Islamic fundamentalist groups insist that the Quran has all the answers.[73] An examination of the program of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) in Algeria reveals that fundamentalists talk about considering the issues, but rarely address them with specific proposals.[74] For example, on administrative reforms, the FIS calls for "reforming the administrative organizations to run things and to guarantee the operations of services and the insurance of rights, and to eliminate the obstacle of bureaucracy."[75] On the crucial issue of the role of the International Monetary Fund, the FIS says only that there is a "need to reconsider the relationship with the IMF."[76] The Islamic fundamentalists can afford the generalities that are embodied in their platforms because their credibility and effectiveness will not be tested until they assume power in one or more Arab country.

This is not to say that there are no specific suggestions and ideas in the literature of Islamic fundamentalists. The specificity can be found in the areas of *'ibadat* (matters of worship). There are detailed instructions for believers on how to perform prayers; in addition, the sanctions for violations of the fasting day and all facets of sexual and social life are covered. For example, Shaykh bin Baz wrote an entire book on the religious inappropriateness of photography and videos. He assured believers that photographers are damned and will suffer more than others in hell.[77] Bin Baz describes in great detail the manners in which Muslims are allowed to look, or are prohibited from looking at, or shaking hands with, women, particularly non-Muslim women.

Sunni and Shi'i magazines and newspapers show an interest on the part of Muslims in shaping their lives completely according to the opinions of 'ulama',

73. Shaykh Muhammad Husayn Fadllalah told this writer: "We do not need a program; the Quran is the program." His statement was in response to a question posed to him about the need for agricultural programs in South Lebanon. See As'ad AbuKhalil, "Ideology and Practice of Hizballah in Lebanon: Islamization of Leninist Organizational Principles," *Middle Eastern Studies* 27, no. 3 (July 1991), pp. 390–403.

74. All quotations are from Yafa li-d-Dirasat, *Ath-Thawra-l-'Islamiyyah fi-l-Jaza'ir: An-Nass al-Kamil li-l-Barnamaj as-Siyasi li-Jabhat al-'Inqadh al-'Islamiyyah* (The Islamic Revolution in Algeria: The Full Text of the Political Program of the Islamic Salvation Front) (Cairo: Yafa, 1991), p. 15.

75. Ibid., p. 13.

76. Ibid., p. 23.

77. Shaykh 'Abd-ul-'Aziz bin Baz, *Al-Jawab al-Mufid fi Hukm at-Taswir* (The Useful Response in the Judgment of Photography) (Jeddah: Dar al-Mujtama', 1987), p. 4.

whom they respect and emulate. Even *Al-Liwa' al-'Islami*, which is published by the ruling party in Egypt, tries to compete with opposition fundamentalists in the area of Islamic ideologization, and features the same preoccupation with non-economic and non-political issues. One issue of the magazine, for example, published the view of its shaykh-in-residence, 'Abd-ul-Munsif Mahmud, that every person has a satanic companion with him/her at all times, regardless of whether the person is virtuous or a sinner.[78] In another article, Shaykh Mahmud provided a graphic description of the various levels of the fire of hell.[79] In response to a letter from a female reader, the shaykh legitimized female genital mutilation (unfortunately still known as "female circumcision"), citing the jurisprudent authority of al-Shafi'i, who believed that "female circumcision" is obligatory. The Saudi-supported Islamic journal, *Al-Muslimun*, which circulates internationally, is preoccupied with similar matters. One issue claimed that the voice of the woman is *'awrah* (pudendum), which should be suppressed in the presence of men.[80]

The attention to the subject of Islamic fundamentalism should not overlook the similarities it shares with fundamentalist ideas in Judaism and Christianity. One can find in Jewish and Christian fundamentalism the same intolerant, exclusivist message that one finds in Islamic fundamentalism. All three forms of fundamentalism assert that women have attained more power and freedom than they deserve, and seem to manifest an obsession with women's issues. Similarly, "the other" religion does not fare well in the literature of any of the three fundamentalist movements. Islamic fundamentalism promises non-Muslims treatment as People of the Book. While Muslims can take pride in the historical toleration of Jews and Christians under Islamic rule, that toleration usually translated as the absence of physical extermination, which was the threat Jewry faced under Christian rule. In addition, even though persecution of Jews and Christians in Islamic history was rare, discrimination and vilification was rather consistent. The record of Christian and Jewish fundamentalism is not any better. In fact, Maimonides' recipe for the treatment of non-Jews under Jewish rule is far worse than the prescription of Khomeini for the treatment of non-Muslims under Islamic rule.[81] Maimonides' views still influence contemporary Jewish fundamentalism. The record of Christianity, as far as the treatment of Jews or the issue of slavery are concerned, is too fresh in the historical memory to need reciting. It can be concluded that the solution to the minority problem in the Arab world does not lie in the recipe of Islamic fundamentalism. There is evidence that the rise of Islamic fundamentalism has already compounded the minority problem, and

78. See *Al-Liwa' al-'Islami*, March 7, 1991, p. 6.
79. Ibid., p. 7.
80. *Al-Muslimun*, February 14, 1992.
81. See chapter six in *Hilkhot Melakhim*, cited in Yehoshafat Harkabi, *Israel's Fateful Hour* (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), p. 152.

non-Muslims, such as the Copts in Egypt, feel— rightly—more threatened than ever.

The analysis of the thought of Islamic fundamentalism in the West often reflects hostility toward Islam. There are people and governments in the West, especially in the United States, who do not hide their sympathy for Christian or Jewish fundamentalism, and yet preach secularism to Muslims. This selective secularism is intended to undermine the appeal of a religion that is viewed by governments in Israel and the West as threatening. Furthermore, the anti-democratic components in Islamic fundamentalist thought should not be used to deprive any party or movement from winning an election. Western scholars, journalists, and governments supported the 1992 coup d'etat in Algeria that canceled the results of a seemingly fair and honest election because the Islamic fundamentalists were victorious. Support for democracy should not be qualified in cases where one does not like the choice of the public. The alternative of an anti-democratic military dictatorship in Algeria, judging from the mini-civil war that has ensued since the coup, does not look more promising. There are those in the West who will use—and have used—the situation of Islamic fundamentalism in the Arab world to preach the incompatibility of Islam and democracy.[82] The desire for freedom and equality is an innate human desire that eventually will lead to the democratization of the Middle East region. The seizure of power by Islamic fundamentalists, whether by peaceful electoral means or by violent means, will only lead to the eventual demise of the movement because it has not formulated credible programs to address the acute socioeconomic and political problems afflicting the Arab world.

The logical fallacies and contradictions that characterize contemporary Islamic thought do not affect the political discourse among Muslims only, but they shape the individual Muslim's understanding of his/her religion. The need for a fresh review of the place of sharia—as well as the very meaning of sharia at the end of the 20th century—in one's life requires a break from the transmitted version of Islamic history. The nostalgia of the Islamic past, which makes the future unappealing, can only be eliminated once the myths and taboos of Islamic history are discarded. In criticizing the agendas and programs of Islamic fundamentalist groups, one must look critically at the impact of the exploitation of Islam by ruling groups. Contemporary fundamentalists draw for their propaganda on the vast body of myths contained in official curricula and Islamic propaganda. In other words, ruling governments in Arab countries unwittingly have supplied their domestic enemies with the ideological arsenal with which they attack those governments.

82. The literature on this subject is quite abundant. See the publications of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. See also, Bernard Lewis, "Islam and Liberal Democracy," *The Atlantic Monthly* (February 1993), pp. 89–98.

Moreover, the critique of the demands for the immediate—or the later—application of sharia is not necessarily synonymous with unbelief. To be sure, the intellectual revival of the region has to rely on toleration of free thinking, including ideas of unbelief. Furthermore, the Arab renaissance, when it comes that is, will have to elevate the status of man/woman at the expense of that of "God." The morality of the goal of applying sharia in the 21st century has to be questioned if one aspires to a society based on freedom and real equality. The very promises and programs of Islamic fundamentalists do not bode well for the future of the region, regardless of whether one is Muslim or non-Muslim. The ability of Islam to cope with the changing needs of the population of the region rests on its ability to revitalize itself to escape the dogmatism of Islamic scholasticism.