

Islam Resurgent?

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Are we witnessing a revival of Islamic fundamentalism? This is an interpretation suggested to many people by a host of recent events and developments: the fate of Mr. Bhutto, Pakistan's former prime minister;⁸⁴ the applications of Quranic laws, with certain spectacular excesses, in Libya and Saudi Arabia; the leading role played by the Shi'ite ayatollahs in Iran's vast opposition movement; the vigor of the anti-Kemalist reaction in Turkey; anti-Coptic troubles in Egypt, the Maschino Affair in Algeria, . . .⁸⁵ and so on.

A revival of fundamentalism? "It has never lost its sway," sighs one nominal Muslim in exile from the Muslim world, a woman who could not tolerate the dead weight of social constraint imposing religious observance and, above all, conformity with traditional customs, in her own country. There are many others in her position. Does this not seem to confirm the strong reputation for fanaticism which has clung to Islam since the nineteenth century, in European eyes? In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries Islam was well known for its tolerance. Before that, if Islam as an ideological and political enemy was detested, the piety of its followers was, to a degree, admired. The priests made good use of this to shame the Christians for their halfheartedness.

Where God Is Not Dead

The facts are there, and they are real enough. But are they part of a trend, whether broken or continuous? Are they linked to the essence of Islam and hence destined to indefinite renewal? Or is this trend perhaps not what it seems? Is it, as the ideologists and apologists of the Third World suggest, just an insidious campaign mounted by "imperialism"—elusive but

omnipresent—to bring into disrepute an element in the forefront of the developing world? These are questions that need to be answered. I shall base my argument and my examples on the central domain of Islam: the Arab countries, Turkey, and Iran.

There are many different things at stake. But equally, there are common factors and common trends that link them. What links them for Europeans is the common appeal to religious tradition and religious regulations, even when by European standards they have nothing to do with that tradition. This is why many people have borrowed the label of *intégrisme* from recent Catholic history.⁸⁶ The term is relatively appropriate if we are talking about the desire to use religion to solve all social and political problems and, simultaneously, to restore full obedience to dogma and ritual.

Such an appeal is plausible enough in the House of Islam [*Dar al-Islam*] because Muslim societies still have social foundations of a type characterized as “traditional” (albeit too summarily, but this is not the place for a fuller analysis). This term means, among other things, that religious law remains the supreme authority in the eyes of the masses, even if in practice they neglect or by-pass it. Practices which have other origins are legitimized by being linked, in a derivative and artificial way, to religious law. The weight of social constraint, imposing conformity and punishing transgression, has remained considerable.

Its Primordial Character

From the beginning these Muslim societies have differed from traditional Christian societies. Christianity, at the outset a small, isolated sect within a vast and powerful empire, gradually succeeded in becoming a force to be reckoned with in that empire, and then in becoming adopted by it as the state ideology. But it always had to coexist with the state and its juridical, social, and cultural structures, which plainly had other origins.

In contrast, Islam has never ceased to be in some sense *intégriste*. Born in a society where each elementary group and tribe had political functions and formed a micro-state, the community of the faithful, if it wished to survive and grow, had to assume such functions too. God himself, in the Quran, gave that community not a comprehensive code, it is true, but at least certain precepts of social organization.

These precepts were supplemented with multiple traditions of various origins, borrowed from the different nations and peoples whom the Muslims conquered. But they were all legitimized through being linked, directly or indirectly, with the word of God, in accordance with the fundamental principle

that the law of Islam was responsible for the whole shaping of the social order. No such copyright, or even underwriting, has ever been attributed to Jesus regarding Roman or Germanic law, the Scottish feud or the Corsican vendetta, or the economic and philosophical thought of Aristotle. But copyright of this kind has been attributed to the Prophet of Allah, thanks to the immense body of *hadith*, or traditions, which became more or less codified in the ninth century A.D.

The passage of time only accentuated this initial divergence. Certainly, whatever the extent of its realm, religion remained for a long time the primary ideological authority and the object of widespread popular belief, as much in the Christian as in the Muslim world. Both suffered serious erosion as far back as the Middle Ages because of the multiplicity of schisms and of associated tendencies to challenge the religious leaders—the men of religion linked to power—sometimes even crossing the boundaries of the prevailing religion. But this evolution, which continued and grew in Christian countries, was only brought to a halt within Islam in the eleventh century by the vigorous Sunni reaction, whose success was favored by the internal evolution of Islamic societies and by changes in their situation vis-à-vis the outside world.

Thus loyalty to the faith remained strong. The calm monopoly of truth left little room for doubt. For a long time in the Sunni world, the few remaining tolerated sects became closed communities, like the other monotheistic religions, with no wish to proselytize and hence tolerable as minorities, as if they were some sort of established foreign caste. The conversion of Iran to Shi'ite Islam in the seventeenth century stabilized the principal heresy, giving it a state base and dominance in its own domain. As in Europe at this time, the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* maintained the established order.⁸⁷

Thus for a long time Islam experienced none of the challenges to its "ecclesiastical" institutions, its dogma and ritual, which were so marked and so deeply rooted in Europe. The masses were not deeply affected, to the point of abandoning religion, by the "disenchantment of the world" which industrialization produces.⁸⁸ The Islamic world has not witnessed the death of God following the death of the angels and demons, and the general disbelief in miracles, including those which are regularly renewed in the common rite. Pietist moralism, attributing misfortune and misrule to the lack of faith and consequent immorality of rulers, has not on the whole yielded either to this general disbelief or to an extension of the ideology of moral freedom affecting every level of society.

On the contrary, belief has always been reinforced by an old obsession: the constant dread of a great shift toward a rival religion, existing at the very heart of Muslim society and at the same time finding vital support outside.

The Christians, assured of an ideological monopoly in their own world (with the exception of the tiny Jewish minority, which had no external support and presented little risk of spreading its spiritual contagion), have seldom had cause to fear that an infidel army from without would join forces with its accomplices within. This fear, present in Islam early in the Middle Ages and reinforced by the Crusades and the Mongol invasion, could only grow in the face of stronger and stronger aggression by Europe's imperial powers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It reached paroxysms that can only be compared either with Catholic paranoia in the nineteenth century in the face of the increasing decline of religion (supposedly inspired by the Jewish-Protestant-Masonic conspiracy, led by Satan) or with the analogous fears and obsessions felt by the communist world.

A Period of Political Occultation

As elsewhere, a universalist faith, a particular national identification of the community of believers (in colonial Algeria, as in Poland or Ireland), a supra-national identification of Muslims as Muslims—each of these has reinforced the other in varying degrees of emphasis which have assured the permanence of general loyalty to the ancestral belief.

Industrialization and a degree of modernization have had the effect of pushing limited sections of society toward skepticism, religious liberalism, and freedom of behavior, beneath the theoretical umbrella of an Islam reinterpreted in this light, or of a vague deism, or even atheism. But the conversion of these people to such Westernizing trends has reinforced the attachment to Islam, in its most rigidly traditional form, among the larger masses. The poor, driven to the limit of famine or wretched subsistence, direct their anger and recrimination against the privileges of the rich and powerful—their ties with foreigners, their loose morality, and their scorn of Muslim injunctions, the most obvious signs of which are the consumption of alcohol, familiarity between the sexes, and gambling. For them, as Robespierre put it so well, atheism is aristocratic: and so is that "subatheism" which is (supposedly) betrayed by the slightest ungodliness or departure from orthodox morality. These are not, as once was the case here, old-fashioned priests or pious old maids railing against short skirts and kisses on the cinema screen; but angry crowds who indiscriminately attack shops selling luxury goods, hotels where the rich and the foreigners get their drink and debauchery, and (sometimes) the places of worship of "heretics" or non-Muslims.

If there is an apparent revival of fundamentalist Islam, it is because we

are witnessing—provisionally perhaps—the end of an epoch in which the crystallization of such attitudes (a process briefly described above) has been partially hidden from view.

Throughout a whole era, beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century, the elites of the Muslim world have been seduced by new ideologies. First, secular nationalism of the type that developed in Europe after a long evolution and that offered the most suitable answer to the ideological exigencies of the region. Later, to a greater or lesser extent, this nationalism was colored by socialist ideals, and socialism in a universalist form even emerged at certain points.

These Muslim elites succeeded in channeling the feelings and aspirations of the masses into these ideologies, transforming them into support for political mobilization. One must notice, however, that the masses reinterpreted these ideas in their own way. It happened that foreign domination was the work of infidels and that the exploiters were infidels or else one's fellow countrypeople in the pay of infidels. No one in the lowest social strata, where nothing had shaken the faith in Islam, could fail to notice this. Nor could skilled and perceptive leaders fail to add this singularly effective weapon to their arsenal of strictly national and social means of mobilization.

However, the masses, being inundated with propaganda, were little by little conditioned to formulate slogans of the modern sort. Members of the popular classes were, moreover, genuinely influenced by these ideas. In areas of the Arab East where there were religious minorities, the national and social struggle was often waged jointly by Muslims, Christians, and even (until quite recently) Jews. In Turkey, a prestigious national leader, who scarcely concealed his basic lack of belief, could draw a large following and carry out militantly secular measures.

In Iran, certain elements, even outside the elite, could be seduced by a nationalism which celebrated the glories of Iran in the Zoroastrian era and which considered the conversion to Islam a mere cultural and national regression brought about by barbarous Arab conquerors (and Sunni, too!).⁸⁹ In the Maghreb, emigrants proletarianized in France were exposed in large numbers to the influence of a social climate that linked militancy with (at the very least) indifference toward religion.

None of these modernizing tendencies has been forgotten. But they have all lost part of that power to arouse enthusiasm which gave them supremacy and relegated religion to the status of an auxiliary, everyday morality, and which at the same time could call into question practices and dogmas at variance with modern ideologies and the ideology of modernization.

Politics According to the Quran

Marxist-inclined nationalism of the Nasserist variety, identifying the basic enemy not as the foreigner per se, nor as the infidel, but as "imperialism," has not managed to achieve any great success. Its alliance with the supposed coalition between the oppressed of the world and the self-styled socialist states has by no means allowed it to get the better of the Israeli challenge. It has been called into disrepute by the policies of the new class in power, scarcely more seductive than those of its predecessors. This nationalism was, in part, the heir to Westernizing Jacobin liberalism. The mobilization which it preached was to remain secular and multiconfessional. But the struggle against Israel had already made it almost impossible to include Jews in this. The prevailing reactions of the Christians in Lebanon have reinforced the old fears arising from both the Crusades and the historical links with imperialist Europe, to make all Christian Arabs increasingly suspect.⁹⁰ The realities of national independence have proved less exhilarating than the slogans that mobilized the masses in the cause of liberation.

Nowhere, moreover, has this type of nationalism resulted in an escape from economic dependence and underdevelopment. The only achievements of the great Arab nation in the field of power politics and national prestige have been the work of the oil potentates—the most fundamentalist and conservative of Muslims—in selling their oil with the haggling of skilled businessmen and technocrats (but whose kaffiyahs, agals, and abayahs enable them to be associated with Bedouin tradition).⁹¹ As for the ideal of the united Arab nation, it has grown ever harder in the face of the evident development of regional nationalisms (Egyptian, Algerian, Moroccan, and so on) to maintain that its realization is hampered only by the "plots" of Israel and "imperialism."

A Muslim Nationalism

In Turkey, as in Iran, it has become difficult to direct the nation's hatred against a Muslim enemy, even if the three main peoples of the Middle East are always ready to denigrate each other. The anti-Arab ideology of part of the Turkish and Iranian nationalist elites does not exert enough leverage—as an irredentist territorial conflict might—to arouse the serious mobilization of populations which are indifferent to the pre-Islamic glory of the celestial Turks of Orkan, or of Cyrus and Khosroe.⁹² The perceived enemies are still non-Muslim: the atheist Russians, who oppress the Turkic and Iranian Muslims of Central Asia, and whose hidden hand is everywhere suspected;

Christian Europeans and Americans, who clearly manipulate local leaders, imposing their will through financial and technological supremacy, sapping and corrupting Islam by means of their impious morality, their debauchery and drunkenness. Last but not least, their bad example regarding the equality of the sexes, if not indeed female domination (may my feminist friends forgive me—it is simply that it often looks that way from the outside), gives the indigenous women dangerous ideas.

Thus pure nationalism becomes more and more strongly a Muslim nationalism, a nationalizing Islam. The exceptions are the ethnic minorities that consider themselves oppressed by other Muslims, such as the Kurds, or those Arabs most sensitive to Palestinian irredentism and the Israeli challenge: Syrians, Iraqis, and above all Palestinians; among the latter the significant participation of Christians in the Palestinian movement strengthens the reluctance to give a purely Islamic coloring to the ideology of struggle.

As for socialism, in those states where a regime claiming to be socialist has been established, it has not been slow in making its heavy, oppressive character felt and in demonstrating its deficiencies of all kinds—even if it has also achieved positive results. External models are no more encouraging, as becomes increasingly clear, especially in those countries which have been slow to respond to post-Stalinist demystification. The exceptions are provided by elements of the working class, in places where they are of some importance, and by certain intellectuals or semi-intellectuals who were formerly inspired by the Marxist spirit and who remain under its spell, either through faith, misty vision, ignorance, or hardening of the arteries.

The same disappointments have made themselves felt in Europe. Here, too, the desperate desire to find an outlet for unchanneled fervor has sometimes provoked a return to the old, indigenous, local, national religion. But here Christian belief, for all the mystical or devotional individualism of the quest for salvation, or of organized charity, scarcely offers opportunities of mobilization which is at the same time uplifting and specific. On the one hand are parties and movements which are conservative or boringly gradualist, and reactionary movements whose program of restoring the City of God is hardly convincing when they revere one whose kingdom was not of this world and who rendered unto Caesar what was Caesar's. On the other hand, progressive or revolutionary movements, largely comprising (and in any case initiated by) unbelievers, are tendencies to which Christians can only subscribe when also inspired by other motives.

In the Islamic countries, by contrast, the appeal of the national religion is for many people accessible, stimulating, credible, and alive. Islam, as I have said, has not suffered either internal erosion or the challenge which has

gradually sapped Christianity's power of attraction. It has been kept intact among people whose daily culture it has provided and whose aspirations and humble ethics it has sanctified. Throughout the epoch which has witnessed the prestige of nationalism and socialism, the idea has been propagated that Islam defended and incorporated the same values that they did. But it became more persuasive to fight for such ideals under the banner of Islam than to tie oneself ideologically to foreigners whose motives were suspect—as was the case with Marxist-inclined nationalism as well as with socialism.

Even outside the Muslim world, Islam has acquired the prestige of being, now and in the past, unflagging in the forefront of the resistance to a Christian Europe which was expansionist, proselytizing, and imperialist; or simply of being in the vanguard of the anti-European struggle. But henceforth the enemies who direct the greatest hatred against them are the Europeans and the Americans, and the Europeanized strata of the societies at the periphery of the capitalist world. Thus all these enemies can be identified as either non-Muslims, anti-Muslims, or their fellow travelers. It would appear that in the furthest recesses of the House of Islam there may be an awareness of this worldwide polarization, that Islam proudly receives the title of universal champion of good against evil without ever yielding to anyone the banner of the avant-garde.

Muslims make themselves different images of Islam according to the social strata to which they belong, the sort of education they have received, their political affiliation, and even their individual temperaments. But everywhere the dominant, almost unchanging image is of Islam as guardian, guarantor, surety, and protector of traditional morality. Analogous to the image that Christian fundamentalism makes of Christianity—the image of Christianity that it alone (or almost alone) conceives—this image is almost universal in Muslim society. Christian faith is sometimes a fundamentalist faith in a tradition rigidified at a certain period, sometimes a faith which, while rooted in the message of Jesus, is not afraid of the constant revision of tradition. Publicly professed examples of such revisionism are rare in Islam: the message of the founding father is (for the moment) more difficult to extricate from the dead weight of tradition.

Fondness for the advantages of tradition is partly responsible for the male tribe's religious faith, which cuts across political beliefs and classes. As with Latin Catholicism in the past, for example, religious tradition can be exploited in order to dominate the sex which males unquestioningly consider weak and subordinate, even if the vengeance awaiting them in hearth and home, and in the conjugal bed, often deters them from taking full advantage of it. Without

needing opinion polls, rulers and would-be rulers were well aware of these inclinations among their people and took good account of them.

Qaddafi and Others

Some leaders genuinely want to translate into reality the social and political precepts of Islam, having learned at school that such precepts existed and were alone capable of building a harmonious society. Such were the leaders who established the Saudi state and such, today, is Libya's Qaddafi.

When put to the test by taking office, most of these leaders are (or become) convinced—depending how far their ideological intoxication has conditioned them to reject the lessons of reality—that they cannot achieve very much in this spirit. They end up discovering how right Nasser was when he declared that he failed to see how anyone could govern a state solely with the laws of the Quran. From that moment they realize that they are disappointing those who have come to expect great things from the application of Quranic law. In order to maintain a broad consensus among their subjects, they must concentrate essentially on symbolic measures—on what I would call Muslim “gesticulation”—and on the visceral faith in a Muslim identity whose various springs and sources I have in part outlined.

In sum, the problem is not fundamentally different from that faced, for example, by the Soviet leaders. Stalin and Khrushchev, each in his own way, were highly expert in Marxist “gesticulation.” But the depth and breadth of belief in the virtues of Marxism were much less great; the Gulag policies have largely discredited it; the symbolism of Marxism is much less rich; the rationalism of its doctrine is far less metaphysically satisfying; and other beliefs, however clandestine and persecuted, have always been available to the Soviet peoples.

Almost alone, Qaddafi ingenuously pursues his project for a Muslim state, by definition free and egalitarian and (also in the name of Islam) opposed to American plutocracy. Persistently he theorizes and refines, straining to specify the right methods in his Green Books and his Libyan policies. Besides the sneers of professional cynics and the cold comfort of those of his countrypeople who have the means to enjoy their pleasures abroad, he earns the frowns of clerics who are shocked by his novel interpretations, his rejection of codified tradition, and his criticism of bigots and hypocrites.

Much more numerous among Muslim leaders are and were those who, whatever the depth of their personal conviction, have known all along that they could carry out only a few of Islam's ideals. They knew that they must

govern essentially with nonreligious prescriptions and could hope for, at most, a superficial and limited moral and religious transformation.

They have resigned themselves to achieving little and—for all the world like cynical manipulators only after their own power—have reaped their reward with a more or less clear conscience. They have all realized that they must at least hold Islam and its functionaries in some respect. Or they can go further and get good results through Islamic “gesticulation.” The building of a mosque can put a gloss on certain unsavory aspects of reality.

Besides the leaders, there are the would-be leaders and, in the sole case of Turkey—where there is at least a recurring, if not peaceful, alternation of power—a third category: those who govern from time to time and, when out of office, can at least stay in business without having to go underground.

Political parties and groups all display a minimum of respect for Islam. Those who are most suspected of being against religion—previously the communists—have shown the most zeal in displaying their respect for performing painful feats of reconciliation (but not, after all, more painful than for the French Communist Party in identifying itself with Joan of Arc). However, in the midst of this chorus of reverence, certain groups are prominent by their insistence on the defense of Islam.

Authentically Religious Groupings

The Turkish Democratic Party is one. Its leaders seem on average neither more nor less devout than their Republican counterparts, but they draw on the religious faith of the peasant masses in order to combat the attenuated Kemalism of the Republican Party and the Westernizing modernism which has spread among the military, the technocrats, and elsewhere.

Apart from this type of demagoguery, there exist groups which are authentically religious in the sense that their leaders, whether sincerely or not, declare that they want to construct a Muslim state. One could make fine distinctions about the sincerity of such leaders' faith, the image they project of this Muslim state in relation to their social origins, to their culture and temperament, and to the degree of radicalism in their practical politics—often going to the extreme of terrorism. Here, moreover, these sects can benefit not only from international example, but from a specifically Islamic tradition, that of the medieval sect of Hashishiyin—those fedayeen who bequeathed to European languages the word “assassin.” Some in all sincerity seek power in order to apply Islam, while others choose Islam as an instrument with which to gain power. But in politics such distinctions are only of occasional importance. The results are often the same.

One of these groups is the vast clandestine movement of the Muslim Brotherhood. The extent of its membership is unknown, but the fluctuating numbers of its sympathizers are certainly considerable. It is hard to ascertain the different trends which run through the ranks of this organization. But the dominant trend is certainly a type of archaic fascism. By this I mean a wish to establish an authoritarian and totalitarian state whose political police would brutally enforce the moral and social order. It would at the same time impose conformity to religious tradition as interpreted in the most conservative light. Some adherents consider this artificial renewal of faith to be the first priority, while others see it as a psychological aid, sweetening the pill of reactionary social reform.

There also exist similar movements, for example in Turkey, to the right of the Democratic Party. But it is in Iran that there is something more akin to a religious party. Its strength has been all too apparent in recent months.

Between Archaism and Modernity

The phenomenon of the political influence of the Iranian *ulama* (the men of religion), who constitute a sort of religious party, has astonished everyone. The apologists, whether Muslim or pro-Muslim, and those who come fresh to the problem in an idealistic frame of mind⁹³—as is usual with questions of religion (of even of ideology, to judge from the French “new philosophers”)—are quick to attribute this, at least in part, to the nature of Shi’ite doctrine. But it is more complex than this. It is true that the foundations of Shi’ite doctrine, in the first centuries of Islam, were elaborated among opposition groups stubborn in challenging the legitimacy of those in power. The ideology preserved this imprint. But doctrines are always susceptible to interpretation. There is never a shortage of theologians and theoreticians capable of reversing doctrine at the dictates of changing circumstances. (With regard to Islam, see Cahen 1977.)

As Nikki Keddie has admirably demonstrated, it was the evolution of the respective strengths of the state and the leading *ulama* that shaped the growing power of the latter in Iran and, in contrast, the decline of their power (a power which could also be doctrinally founded) within Sunni Islam. (See especially Keddie 1962; Keddie 1966; and Keddie 1969.) The Safavid dynasty (1500–1722), which converted Iran to Shi’ite Islam, cooperated with Shi’ite *ulama*, which it had to import from Arab countries. Their interdependence was given a theoretical base. But, roughly speaking, the state gradually lost its power later on, while the advantages conceded to the *ulama* were institutionalized, legitimized, and strengthened. The struggles of the eighteenth century

enhanced the flexibility of doctrine and the independence of judgment of each *'alim* (the singular of *ulama*), based on foundations which were medieval. Their financial autonomy and security, assured by the Safavids, could not be shaken by weak governments that were afraid of opposition. Their leaders knew how to increase their power by choosing to stay outside the frontiers of the kingdom, near holy sanctuaries.

The apparently paradoxical alliance between the men of religion and the secular reformers or revolutionaries was formed in the nineteenth century, in opposition to the Qajar dynasty's concessions to the West, and cemented during the "constitutional revolution" of 1905–1911. The two parties were already afraid of modernization from above, which in their eyes could only augment the authoritarian power of a dynasty supported by foreign powers. The religious leaders above all dreaded the consequences for their autonomous power of the secularizing implications of modernization. The secular modernizers within the opposition feared the strengthening of absolute power. Both groups directed their struggle against domination by powers which were both foreign and infidel. The alliance won the vote for the Constitution of 1906, a compromise between the two tendencies, which greatly limited the power of the shah. The religious leaders, shocked by the institution of civil tribunals alongside religious tribunals, and by the whole idea of interconfessional equality, as well as other measures, were for the moment appeased by the insertion of an article stipulating that no law could contradict sacred law—which was to be determined by a committee of mujtahids (the most learned *ulama*). (See the penetrating analysis of the constitution in Ann Lambton 1965.)

The alliance was broken off in the second phase of the revolution, after most of the *ulama* had discovered its underlying dangers. But some of them continued to participate in the revolutionary coalition.

The strengthening of authoritarian power under the two Pahlavi monarchs, since 1925, has resulted in the renewal of the alliance. The modernizing democratic nationalists, shocked by the foreign policy of the shah, by the degree of repression and the blatant profiteering, have rediscovered, as they did under the last of the Qajars, the advantages of alliance with the *ulama*. The latter, sharing the general dislike of these same policies, and adding to it their fear of modernization and Westernization, are able to tap this dissatisfaction, enjoying as they do the veneration of the crowds and the impregnability of the pulpit—rather as the Polish clergy do.

An Islamic Government?

The events of 1978 are the result of the escalation set in motion by the Ayatollah (literally, “sign”—i.e., proof—“of God,” the honorary title of the most important mujtahids) Khomeini as early as June 1963, when he publicly compared the shah to Yazid, the Umayyad caliph who ordered the murder of Hussein, grandson of the Prophet. His imprisonment, with some thirty other ulama, caused large-scale demonstrations, from which, this time, the secular nationalists dissociated themselves. The subsequent repression resulted in at least a hundred deaths.

As they had done in the past, the ulama could give the word for the establishment of an Islamic state (and it could gain acceptability by virtue of what we have said above). In the restoration of the 1906 Constitution they saw, above all, in addition to the limitation of the shah’s authoritarianism, that one crucial article, never applied in the past, which could put legislation under their control.

So there came into being a provisional alliance against one form of despotism which usually numbered among its members people dreaming of another form of despotism. Similarly in Egypt, between 1952 and 1954, the Muslim Brothers joined the communists and the liberals, led by Naguib, in calling for the return to a parliamentary system. In both cases a hated brand of authoritarianism was to be overthrown in order to set up a regime in which the people could be mobilized in the cause of another brand of authoritarianism. I am not saying that the Iranian ulama are all authoritarian. Their political views are probably diverse and in many cases characterized by a notable fluidity and naïveté.

Since they have difficulty in applying and defining programs setting out concrete measures, political leaders, as I have said, have recourse to symbols—whether they proclaim them, demand them, or actually put them into effect. The vexing thing for their image in the West is that these symbols are archaic. This is the other side of the coin, the price to be paid for the advantage gained by including in a political program a few precepts taken from the Quran regarding social organization, and many others to be found in the Tradition.

In the Christian world one can call for a minimum (revisionist) fundamentalism by invoking the holy texts only so as to prohibit divorce and contraception. Some Catholic fundamentalists, unwilling to reinterpret their traditions to this extent, want the Latin liturgy and the cassock to be restored. This certainly gives grounds for complaint! But, by contrast, the minimum

Muslim fundamentalism, according to the Quran, requires the cutting off of a thief's hand and the halving of a woman's inheritance. In returning to tradition, as the men of religion require, anyone caught drinking wine must be whipped, and an adulterer either whipped or stoned. A spectacular piece of archaism indeed—though perhaps a little less spectacular, it is true, than the symbolism of orthodox Judaism. But then, the latter is often impossible to put into effect and, when it is, affects only a tiny community and thus startles fewer observers.

Will the future see any great change in this situation? It does not look like it. Certainly the panacea of Islamic government may be discredited in future among larger sections of Muslim society. Whatever may be said in Islamic countries or elsewhere, neither Islam itself, nor Muslim tradition, nor the Quran provides any magic guarantee either of fully satisfactory government or of social harmony. Islam is confined to offering precepts regarding only limited sectors of social life, legitimizing certain antiquated types of social and political structure, at best achieving small improvements, and, like all universalist, and some other, religions, it encourages people (beneficially moreover) to wield power and wealth with charity and moderation.

A Spiritual Enrichment

Muslim government in itself means nothing. A ruler can declare the state to be Muslim by satisfying certain minimal conditions which are easily fulfilled: the proclamation of adherence to Islam in the constitution; the institution, or reinstatement, of archaic laws; conciliation of the ulama (which is easy among Sunnis, more difficult among Shi'ites). But over and above this minimum, the scope is vast. The term can cover different, even diametrically opposed, regimes. Governments can make mutual accusations of the betrayal of the "true" Islam. Nothing is easier or more dangerous than this time-honored custom of dubbing your adversary an "enemy of God." Mutual recriminations, often incorporated in contradictory fatwas (legal consultations) issued by obliging authorities, are hardly designed to strengthen one's confidence in a state's supposedly Islamic character.

At any rate, is it not possible for one of these states to be genuinely Muslim and to inject some spiritual enrichment into the government of human affairs? Some people hope so, or say they do, whether militant revolutionaries because Muslim, or vice-versa, or else Europeans convinced of the vices of Europe and hoping to find elsewhere (why not in Islam?) the means of assuring a more or less radiant future.⁹⁴

It is astonishing, after centuries of common experience, that it is still necessary to recall one of the best-attested laws of history. Good moral intentions, whether or not endorsed by the deity, are a weak basis for determining the practical policies of states. The best example is undoubtedly the weak influence of Christ's nonviolent anarchism—however often it may be invoked in writing, and revered, and memorized—with regard to the behavior of Christian states (and, for that matter, of the majority of their subjects). Muslim spirituality may exert a beneficial influence on the style of practical politics adopted by certain leaders. It is dangerous to hope for more.

Islam, according to its followers, is still superior to Christianity in demanding less of human virtue, in resigning itself to society's imperfections and prescribing or justifying repressive laws to deal with them. But in so doing, it can be said, it encourages people to expect more from these legal structures. Power can only disappoint. But it will disappoint the more if it promises more, if it pretends to be endowed more than any rival with the power to satisfy. This disappointment can only recoil on the doctrine which made use of it. If the magic potion is ineffective, one loses confidence not only in the sorcerer but in sorcery itself.

Waves of disenchantment may thus spread within the Muslim world as they have within Christian society. It is indeed unwise that so many regimes have declared themselves Islamic.

Spiritual malaise of this kind can already be detected among many of the people who have left Muslim societies and are free to express their disenchantment once they are outside. Heavy social constraint resulting from a stifling moral piety is, moreover, an important factor in the (noneconomic) emigration from these countries. The women are especially bitter. In Paris they have recently been declaiming their hatred of Islam—a hatred which owes nothing to "imperialism." One might say they are wrong to link Islam proper—the spiritual force of its gospel—with particular oppressive laws which are only contingent upon it. This is true. But who made the link before they did, and who continues to do so?

This is as pertinent inside Muslim countries as outside, but it is much more difficult to express such feelings from within. Industrialization, as it slowly develops, and the seductive forces of the way of life in secularized countries—as seen on film and television—will probably increase the challenge not only to regimes but to the religion which they have taken up as their banner, as long as this religion is still invoked to justify repression.

Under the pressure of such disaffection it is quite possible that, one day, the men of religion will present a rather more modern, concrete, and

persuasive form of Islam. There might then develop a leftist Islamic ideology—and not simply an Islam challenging a particular regime—just as a leftist Christian ideology has developed. This will perhaps be slow in coming. Certainly, loyalty to a community long under attack, communal “patriotism” with its customary paranoia and narcissism, and pride in leading the Third World will still play their part. But this may not always be so.

For the moment, this leftist Islam is quite far off. One must make do, at best, with an Islam which retrospectively legitimizes anti-American, anti-Western postures, while exerting pressure to maintain an archaic moral order. One can call this “left-wing” if one wishes. Among their opponents, the shah and his followers are now (for tactical reasons) discovering “Islamic Marxists.” They are not entirely wrong insofar as the implicit ideology of the Third World revolt has let both the people and a wide variety of intellectuals adopt or rediscover militant aspects of Marxism. Some people do so by presenting such tendencies as part of the “essential” Islam. They are wrong, but these are nevertheless universal tendencies which were present in medieval Islam. If they make reference to Islam, it is often to enable them to combine the politically progressive with social reaction.

It is this combination of the modern-revolutionary with the social-archaic that characterizes Qaddafi, who almost alone after coming to power has maintained the vitality of militant rebellion. For their part, the Saudi rulers combine the technologically modern with the politically and socially archaic, and their anxious ulama on the Right reproach them for it as Qaddafi does from the Left. Mixtures of this type are unstable, as are alliances between the men of religion and socialists or liberals, at least until the former have brought their outlook up to date. We shall probably see the alliance broken off once again in Iran (and elsewhere), as it was in 1907.

But humankind continually poses problems which it cannot solve, or poses them in terms which make them insoluble. Renewed despair is echoed by renewed hope. One will always find imperfections in existing regimes, whether seen in the light of “true” Islam or of “true” Marxism. For a long time to come, the attempt will still be made to correct “errors” by returning to the lost fundamentalism of hallowed tradition. There is still a future for Muslim fundamentalism—and for the fresh recoveries and fresh challenges that lie ahead of it.