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3. Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy," *American Political Science Review* 53 (1959): 69–105.

4. For empirical evidence, see Larry Diamond, "Economic Development and Democracy Reconsidered," *American Behavioral Scientist* 15 (March–June 1992): 450–99.

5. Talcott Parsons, "Evolutionary Universals in Society," *American Sociological Review* 29 (June 1964): 339–57.

6. See my *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), esp. pt. 2; and "Capitalism and Democracy: The Missing Link," *Journal of Democracy* 3 (July 1992): 100–10.

7. See especially Karel van Wolferen, *The Enigma of Japanese Power* (London: Macmillan, 1989).

8. On this subject see Barbara Geddes, "Challenging the Conventional Wisdom," *Journal of Democracy* 5 (October 1994): 104–18; and Minxin Pei, "The Puzzle of East Asian Exceptionalism," *Journal of Democracy* 5 (October 1994): 90–103.

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4

MUSLIMS AND DEMOCRACY

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The past is often held to weigh especially heavily on Muslim countries, particularly as regards their present-day receptivity to democracy. I do not dispute that past history has had an overwhelming and decisive influence in shaping the contemporary features and attitudes of Muslim societies. But the past that is most relevant today is not, as is commonly thought, the early centuries of Islamic history, but rather the nineteenth-century encounter of Muslims with the modernizing West.

It is widely believed that the key to understanding contemporary Muslim societies is to be found in a structure of beliefs and traditions that was devised and implemented at (or shortly after) the moment at which they adopted Islam. This view, often labeled as "Muslim exceptionalism," holds that these societies are, as Ernest Gellner has elegantly put it, permeated by an "implicit constitution" providing a "blueprint" of the social order.[1] This view has been subjected to intense criticism by a number of scholars, but it still influences dominant attitudes in academia and, with much more devastating effects, in the media.

This theory rests on two assumptions: first, that the past is ever-present and is much more determining than present-day conditions; and second, that the character of Muslim societies has been determined by a specific and remote period in their past during which the social and political order that continues to guide them was established. This past has allegedly acquired such a strong grip that it can—and does—channel,

limit, or even block the effects of technological, economic, or social change. In other words, for Muslims alone a remote past has defined, forever and without any possibility of evolution, the ways in which fundamental issues are perceived and addressed. The ultimate conclusion lurking behind these considerations is that, due to the overwhelming presence and influence of that particular part of their past, the societies in question are incapable of democratization. In other societies history may take the form of continual change, but in Muslim ones history is bound to repeat itself.

Apart from the many other criticisms that have been directed against this set of views, it should be emphasized that it is not based on any solid historical knowledge about the way in which this "implicit constitution" was shaped and implemented or imposed. Some of its proponents refer to a normative system that was never really enacted: They invoke the model of the "rightly guided" caliphate, which lasted, at most, for about three decades after the death of the Prophet. Many others cite instead the social order that prevailed during the Middle Ages in societies where Muslims were a majority or where political regimes were established in the name of Islam. In both of these versions, however, the power of this past to determine the present remains, by and large, mysterious. It is simply taken for granted, with no explanation given about why the past has had such a far-reaching and pervasive effect in these societies. To understand how the belief in these misconceptions was born and came to influence contemporary attitudes so powerfully, we must turn to a particular moment in modern times—the beginning and middle of the nineteenth century.

A Tenacious Misunderstanding

The earliest intellectual encounters between Muslims and Europeans in modern times took the form of sharp confrontations. Jamal-Eddin Al-Afghani (1838–97), one of the first and most prominent Muslim thinkers and activists in the struggle against despotism, became famous for engaging in a controversy against European secularists. He acquired a high reputation, especially for his efforts to refute European critics of religion in general and of Islam in particular. An essay that he wrote in reply to Ernest Renan bore the title *"Ar-Rad 'ala ad-Dahriyin"* ("The Answer to Temporalists"). He used the term *Dahriyin*, which literally means "temporalists," to refer to secularists. The word itself, which is of Qur'anic origin, had originally been applied to atheists. Al-Afghani attacked the positivist ideologues of his century, who were deeply convinced that religion was responsible for social backwardness and stagnation and that scientific progress would soon lead to its disappearance. Through his choice of terminology, Al-Afghani implicitly equated these nineteenth-century positivists with the seventh-century

opponents of the Prophet. For Muslim readers, this formulation defined the terms of a large and enduring misunderstanding. From then on, secularism was seen as being intimately related to, if not simply the same thing as, atheism. The confusion was taken a step further when, some decades later, other Muslim authors wishing to coin a term for secularism, and either ignoring Al-Afghani's choice of the term *Dahriyin* or feeling that it was inappropriate, chose *ladini*, which literally means nonreligious or areligious.

These initial choices of terminology gave birth to the opposition in the mind of Muslims between, on the one hand, the system of belief and the social order that they inherited and lived in, and on the other, the alternative adopted by the Europeans. Although the term *ladini* was replaced later by another, *'ilmani* (this-worldly), the bipolar opposition between the two views was already deeply entrenched. The feeling that has prevailed since then among Muslims is that there is a strict and irreducible opposition between two systems—Islam and non-Islam. To be a secularist has meant to abandon Islam, to reject altogether not only the religious faith but also its attendant morality and the traditions and rules that operate within Muslim societies. It therefore has been understood as a total alienation from the constituent elements of the Islamic personality and as a complete surrender to unbelief, immorality, and self-hatred, leading to a disavowal of the historic identity and civilization inherited from illustrious ancestors. It is worth noting that the vast majority of Muslims in the nineteenth century, even those who were part of the educated elite, lived in total ignorance both of the debates going on in Europe about religion and its role in the social order and of the historical changes reshaping European societies. They were not aware of the distinction between atheism and secularism. The consequences of this misunderstanding still profoundly shape the attitudes of Muslims today.

Thus secularism became known to Muslims for the first time through a controversy against those who were supposed to be their "hereditary enemies." The original distinction within Christianity between "regular" and "secular" members of the clergy,[2] which was the initial step in the long evolution toward the establishment of a separate secular sphere, had no equivalent in the Muslim context. Hence the choice of a term for the concept of secularism was decisive. In the latter part of the nineteenth century and early in the twentieth, the confrontation with the colonial powers, thought to be the carriers and defenders of a mixture of aggressive Christian proselytism and of the new secularism, played an important role in strengthening this dualism. In the diverse conflicts that local populations waged to defend their independence, identity and religion became intimately fused. The oppositions between local and intruder, between Muslim and European, between believer and secularist were, in one way or another, conflated. The resulting polarization came

to dominate all attitudes and approaches to questions related to religion, politics, and the social order.

One of the most striking consequences of this evolution is that Islam now appears to be the religion that is most hostile to secularization and to modernity in general. Yet intrinsically Islam would seem to be the religion closest to modern views and ideals, and thus the one that would most easily accommodate secularization. "The high culture form of Islam," writes Ernest Gellner, "is endowed with a number of features—unitarianism, a rule-ethic, individualism, scriptualism, puritanism, an egalitarian aversion to mediation and hierarchy, a fairly small load of magic—that are congruent, presumably, with requirements of modernity or modernisation."[3] In a similar vein, Mohamed Charfi observes that, on the level of principles, Islam should favor individual freedoms and the capacity for religious choice. The historical developments noted above, however, caused Muslim societies to evolve in the opposite direction—toward the loss of individual autonomy and total submission to the community and the state.[4]

This evolution gave birth at later stages to such dichotomies as "Islam and the West," "Islam and modernity," "Islam and human rights," "Islam and democracy," and others of the sort, which set the framework within which critical issues are addressed, whether in popular, journalistic, or even academic circles. This framework has imposed a particular way of raising questions and building conceptions, imprisoning attitudes in predefined and static formulas.[5] Muslim exceptionalism seems, therefore, to reside in the ways we raise questions about these matters. Although many studies on religion and its influence in the social and political spheres are undertaken in what were formerly referred to as Christian societies, nobody today poses the issue of "Christianity and democracy" in the same way that this question is formulated with respect to Islam. The fact that we still ask questions such as "Is Islam compatible with democracy?" shows how strong this polarization has become. It also shows that a dynamic was established, enabling the polarization that emerged in the nineteenth century to replicate itself as it extends to new fields or expresses itself in new terms.

From Settlement to System

This polarization, which still determines the type of questions that can be asked, rests on two main prejudices: The first is that Islam is a "system," and should be treated as a structure of rules. The dubious character of this assumption has been clearly pointed out by the eminent scholar of comparative religion Wilfred Cantwell Smith: "[T]he term *nizam* [or] 'system,' is commonplace in the twentieth century in relation to Islam. This term, however, does not occur in the Qur'an, nor indeed does any word from this root; and there is some reason for wondering

whether any Muslim ever used this concept religiously before modern times. The explicit notion that life should be or can be ordered according to a system, even an ideal one, and that it is the business of Islam to provide such a system, seems to be a modern idea (and perhaps a rather questionable one)."[6] Once Islam has been defined in this way, it can be used to assess whether other new or alien concepts can be accommodated within it and to decide the degree of their compatibility with its presumed and predefined content. This stance, however, reflects a particular attitude toward religion, not a particular feature of Islam. In fact, as Leonard Binder has observed, any of the monotheistic religions, if adopted in this manner, can lead to similar conclusions: "In the light of modern liberal democratic thought, Islam is no more, nor any less democratic than Christianity or Judaism. All three monotheistic religions, if proposed as constitutional foundations of the state, and if understood as providing an ineluctable authority for the guidance of all significant human choice, are undemocratic or nondemocratic."[7]

The second prejudice is more insidious. It is based on the confusion of Islam as a religion with Islam as a civilization. This confusion is deeply entrenched, again because of prevailing linguistic usages both in Arabic and in European languages. For Islam, no distinction has been drawn comparable to that between "Christianity" and "Christendom." The same word was, and still is, used to refer both to a set of beliefs and rituals and to the life of the community of believers through time and space. Only recently, thanks to the work of historian Marshall G.S. Hodgson, has the necessity of drawing a sharp line between Islam and "Islamdom" been recognized as essential for explaining key phenomena in the history of Muslims.[8] Islamdom, in its golden age, was a social and political order built on norms adopted from Islamic sources but specifically adapted to the conditions of the time (only at a later stage were these formulated as explicit rules). This enabled Muslims in the Middle Ages to create and maintain a world civilization attuned to the circumstances of the era.

Muslims at that time lived within polities bound by *shari'a*, yet did not consider the political regimes to which they were subjected to be in conformity with Islamic principles. The rulers were considered to be legal but not really legitimate. Even though they were not fully legitimate, they had to be obeyed, but only to avoid a greater evil, the *Fitna* (the great rebellion or anarchy). For premodern societies of Muslims, the political model remained the early caliphate, which was not bound by *shari'a*, since *shari'a* had not yet been devised. The ideal was a kind of "republican" regime, where caliphs are chosen by members of the community rather than imposed by force, and where the behavior of rulers is clearly dedicated to serving the community instead of satisfying their personal ambitions. Nonetheless, Muslims came to understand that it was no longer possible to implement the fully legitimate system of

Khilafa rachida, the virtuous or rightly guided caliphate, that the republican ideal was out of reach, and that they had to accept the rule of despots. They could, however, limit the extent of the power accorded to autocratic rulers by invoking *shari'a*, to which a sacred character had come to be attributed. In this way, at least some degree of autonomy from the political authorities, and minimal protection against arbitrariness, could be attained. This is what one may label the "medieval compromise" or "medieval settlement." The sacralization of *shari'a* achieved through this process led to another far-reaching consequence: Ever since, Islam has been seen as a set of eternal rules, standing over society and history, to be used as a standard for judging reality and behavior.

In fact, *shari'a* was never a system of law in the sense in which it is understood nowadays. As was noted by Fazlur Rahman: "Islamic law . . . is not strictly speaking law, since much of it embodies moral and quasi-moral precepts not enforceable in any court. Further, Islamic law, though a certain part of it came to be enforced almost uniformly throughout the Muslim world (and it is primarily this that bestowed homogeneity upon the entire Muslim world), is on closer examination a body of legal opinion or, as Santillana put it, 'an endless discussion on the duties of a Muslim' rather than a neatly formulated code or codes."[9]

What happened in the nineteenth century was the transformation of the medieval settlement into a system in the modern sense of the word. The duality of fact and norm was inverted, as *shari'a*-bound societies were confused with fully legitimate Muslim communities and deemed to be fully realizable through voluntary political action, whether of a peaceful or violent character. We see therefore how the confusion between a "model" and a historical system could arise and spread among Muslims at a time when they were confronted by the challenge of modern ideas. The typical attitudes of premodern Muslims had been based on a sharp distinction between the norm (of the virtuous or rightly guided caliphate) and the actual conditions (including the implementation of the *shari'a*) under which they lived. In the face of this duality, people adopted an attitude of resignation, accepting that the norm was, at least temporarily, out of reach. By contrast, some modern Muslims have elevated the actual conditions and rules under which their medieval forefathers lived to the status of a norm, and decided that they too have to live by these rules if they are to be true Muslims.

This has led to the contradictions of the present day: Secularization has been taking place for decades in Muslim societies, yet prevailing opinion opposes the concept of secularism and everything that comes with it (like modernity and democracy). As a historical process, secularization has so transformed life in Muslim societies that religion, or rather traditions built on religion, no longer supply the norms and rules that govern the social and political order. In almost all countries with substantial communities of Muslims, positive law has replaced

shari'a (except with regard to matters of "personal status," and more specifically the status of women, where the traditional rules generally continue to be maintained). Modern institutions—nation-states, modern bureaucracies, political parties, labor unions, corporations, associations, educational systems—have been adopted everywhere, while traditional institutions are, at best, relegated to symbolic roles. Similarly, prevailing conceptions and attitudes of everyday life are founded on modern rationality and on doctrines influenced by science and philosophy rather than on traditional or premodern worldviews. Most Muslims now have come to accept the "disenchantment of the world," and this has profoundly transformed expectations and models of behavior within their societies. The evolution from the premodern attitude, combining resignation toward despotism with millennial hopes, to the typically modern combination of sharp political determination and desire for this-worldly progress, is clearly a visible consequence of these very changes, that is, of the secularization that has actually been going on in Muslim societies.

Secularism, however, continues to be rejected as an alien doctrine, allegedly imposed by the traditional enemies of Muslims and their indigenous accomplices. Islam is seen as an eternal and immutable system, encompassing every aspect of social organization and personal morality, and unalterably opposed to all conceptions and systems associated with modernity. This creates an artificial debate and an almost surrealist situation. The changes that are evident in the actual lives of individuals and groups are ignored, while ideological stances are maintained with great determination. Secularists and, more generally, social scientists are often pushed into adopting defensive positions or withdrawing altogether from public debates. Frequently they feel obliged to prove that they are not guilty of hostility toward religious belief, morality, and the achievements of Islamic civilization.

As Mohamed Charfi has pointed out, the policies adopted by some modern states under the influence of nationalist ideologies are partly responsible for this state of affairs. The education systems in many Muslim countries have taught Islam not as a religion, but as an identity and a legal and political system. The consequence is that Islam is presented both as irreducibly opposed to other kinds of self-identification or of social and political organization and as commanding certain specific attitudes regarding political and social matters.[10]

Attitudes Toward Democracy

We saw that, as a consequence of the inversion of norms that occurred in Muslim societies during the nineteenth century, the traditional rules and usages grouped under the emblem of *shari'a* were transformed into a system and elevated into norms that define the "essence" of being Muslim—that is, simultaneously the ideal status and the

specific identity of Muslims. Thus *shari'a*-bound societies are now equated with "truly" Islamic societies. Implementing the *shari'a* has become the slogan for those who seek a "return" to Islam in its original and pure form, which is held to embody the eternal truth and ultimate pattern for Muslims.

What could the status of democracy be in societies that have evolved in this manner? One first must perceive the difference between a question posed in this way, which attempts to interpret the actual evolution of particular societies and their prevailing conceptions, and the kinds of questions frequently asked by fundamentalists and by some scholars, such as: "What is the status of democracy with regard to Islam?" This latter formulation posits Islam as a system that one can use to evaluate everything else.

One can discern two possible answers to the question of democracy as I have posed it. The first accepts the strict identification between Islam and *shari'a*-bound systems, and thus rules out any possible future for democracy in this particular environment. The second identifies democracy itself with a kind of religious faith or "mystical ideal." As Tim Niblock has noted: "The Middle East related literature purveys a romanticized conception of the nature and characteristics of liberal democracy. This occurs not through any explicit description of liberal democracy, but precisely through the absence of any analysis of the concept and its practical application. The concept hovers, like a mystical symbol, in the background of the discussion on democratization in the Middle East, with an implied assumption that liberal democracy constitutes an ideal polity where the common good is realized by means of the population deciding issues through the election of individuals who carry out the people's will."[11]

There even appears to be a certain trend toward adopting this second attitude. More and more fundamentalists accept the idea that Islam is not opposed to democracy; some argue that by embracing the principle of *shura* (or "consultation"), for example, Islam has always favored the kind of relationship between rulers and ruled that democracy entails. Democracy may even end up being described as a Western adaptation of an originally Islamic principle. Many fundamentalists are prepared to go as far as possible to support democracy—with the notable reservation that it should be maintained only within the limits set by *shari'a*. A "guided democracy" is the system envisioned by many fundamentalists and traditionalists of different sorts. Iran may be considered as a case where this kind of doctrine has been implemented. In addition to institutions common in all democracies, like elected parliaments and executives, it also has a high council of experts and a religious guide who are entrusted with ensuring that the laws and decisions made by democratically elected bodies are in conformity with religious principles and rules.

This shows how much popularity, or rather prestige, democracy enjoys within contemporary Muslim societies. The renowned contemporary philosopher Mohamed Abed Jabri has said that democracy is the only principle of political legitimacy which is acceptable nowadays in Muslim societies, whatever their religious beliefs and attitudes may be. "Revolutionary" alternatives that postpone the implementation of democracy until other conditions are realized no longer seem to be acceptable to the masses.[12] This support for democracy reflects in some cases a realistic recognition that it responds to the needs of contemporary societies, that it is indeed the only alternative that really works and makes possible the peaceful and rational management of public affairs. In many other cases, however, this newly favorable reception of democracy arises from its being viewed as another utopia.[13] While this may have certain immediate advantages, especially in contexts where democratic systems are in place or where democratization is under way, it may also encourage attitudes that are harmful to the longer-range prospects for democratization. For it may lead to democracy's being seen as an alien or unattainable ideal, and thus strengthen the idea that the Islamic alternative is more workable and better adapted to the conditions of Muslim societies. In other words, democracy may be treated in the same way as other modern ideologies, such as nationalism and socialism, that recently enjoyed a brief ascendancy in some Muslim countries. Both nationalism and socialism were indeed endowed with a quasi-religious aura; they were adopted as ultimate worldviews and total beliefs, and considered as magical remedies to all the ills and problems of society. This kind of approach would only deepen the initial misunderstanding on the part of Muslims of both secularization and democracy. The result would be to strengthen the view that Islam and democracy represent two irreducibly separate and opposing outlooks, even if some mixture of Islam and democracy were to be envisaged and tentatively implemented.

Replacing Democracy with Its "Building Blocks"

What might be an appropriate strategy for democrats in this situation? For those who are convinced that democracy is not a new religion for humanity, but that it provides the most efficient means to limit abuses of power and protect individual freedoms, enabling individuals to seek their own path to personal accomplishment, there can be a variety of approaches. The most effective ones avoid the reified and "utopianized" version of democracy, either by highlighting such concepts as "good governance" or by supporting some of the "building blocks of democracy," that is, conceptions and systems that are linked to or part of democracy.

Replacing highly prestigious and, at the same time, highly contentious notions with terms that refer to easily understood facts and ideas is neither a retreat from conceptual clarity nor a defeatist position. A few years

ago Mohamed Abed Jabri was bitterly attacked by a large number of Arab intellectuals for proposing to replace the slogan of secularization with such notions as rationality and democratization. Secularization, he contended, had become a charged issue for Arab public opinion because it was understood as being more or less equivalent to Westernization; its actual contents, however, such as rational management of collective affairs and democracy, could hardly be rejected once they were understood and accepted in their true meaning. In a similar vein, Niblock has observed: "Focusing on the 'big' issue of democratisation has detracted from the attention which can be given to a range of more specific issues which affect populations critically. Among these are the level of corruption, the effectiveness of bureaucratic organisation, the independence of the judiciary, the existence of well-conceived and clearly-articulated laws, freedom of expression, the respect given to minorities, attitudes to human rights issues, and the extent of inequalities which may create social disorder."[14]

In order to avoid a new and devastating misunderstanding that would present democracy as an alternative to religion and make its adoption appear to be a deviation from religious rectitude, it is essential to renounce quixotic confrontations and to accept some "tactical" concessions—especially when the use of appropriate terminology can bring greater clarification without sacrificing substance. Niblock's suggestion, stressing the importance of specific issues relevant to democracy, is one possible strategy, and it is certainly of real usefulness for the cases at hand. Yet it represents an external point of view, one that seems to be directed primarily at politicians and decision makers who attempt to influence political change in Muslim countries from the outside. It does not take into account the attitudes of Muslims themselves, and especially the need to foster their real acceptance and support of democracy. For this purpose, a more "conceptual" approach is required, one that would help present democracy in terms understandable and acceptable to Muslim publics, and thus bridge the gap between a "mystical" representation and a more realistic comprehension. It would answer the need for analytical terms that can clarify the conceptions and adjust the expectations of Muslims regarding democracy, and that can encourage the kind of *political* support that is equally distant from mythical or ideological fervor on the one hand, and egotistical or individualist attitudes on the other.

This approach, which should be understood not as an alternative but rather as a complement to the one proposed by Niblock, aims at clarifying the issue for a specific public that is influenced by particular worldviews and has expectations of its own. Finding the right terms is not easy. Interpretations of democracy and democratization are so rich and diverse that it may be difficult to reach a consensual view on the subject. All such interpretations, however, seem to point to some basic features as being essential conditions for achieving real democracy. It is possible

to underscore at least three such conditions that seem to be required for the particular case of contemporary Muslim societies: 1) the updating of religious conceptions; 2) the rule of law; and 3) economic growth.

1) The *updating of religious conceptions* should be understood not in terms of the Reformation that occurred in sixteenth-century Christian Europe, but rather as the general evolution of religious attitudes that has affected Christians and Jews (except within limited circles of fundamentalists) since the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries and achieved its full effects only in the early decades of this century. The Reformation is a singular event in history, linked to a particular environment and to specific conditions. It cannot, as some observers are suggesting nowadays, be "replicated" in the context of another religion and under twentieth-century conditions.

There is, however, another process of change in religious attitudes that, although it first occurred in one particular environment, is of more universal scope and significance and seems to be related to modernization in general. This process leads the majority of the population to give religious dogmas a symbolic truth-value, and to consider religious narratives as contingent, historical manifestations or expressions of the sacred that are amenable to rational understanding and scientific scrutiny. Religious dogmas and narratives no longer define, in a monolithic way, people's ideas about the world and society, nor do they determine the views that believers are supposed to be guided by in their social and political interactions. This kind of "disenchantment" may discard the literal meaning of sacred words and rituals, but it maintains (and probably reinforces) the overall ethical and moral teachings. Religious attitudes are no longer defined in terms of a combination of strict observance of rituals and the adoption of premodern views, but rather as an informal but deeply felt adherence to principles of morality and a commitment to universal values. Faith becomes a matter of individual choice and commitment, not an obligation imposed upon all members of the community.

An evolution in this direction has proceeded quite far among Christians and Jews, but has made only limited headway among Muslims. The reification of Islam that began in the nineteenth century is the most important obstacle to such progress. Thus it is significant that a number of contemporary Muslim thinkers agree that new attitudes toward religion are now required both by a scrupulous interpretation of sacred sources and by modern conditions. Their teachings imply a strict separation between the sacred message of Islam and Muslim attempts to implement it in the course of history, including the political systems and legislation created in the "golden age." The Egyptian theologian Ali Abderraziq, for example, proposed to consider the early caliphate created by companions of the Prophet not as a religious institution but as a political one, amenable to critical scrutiny in the same way as any normal human institution.[15] Fazlur Rahman and Mohamed Mahmoud Taha suggested a

tempered and modernized attitude toward revelation.[16] Mohamed Talbi and Mohamed Charfi introduced and defended a clear distinction between religious principles and the legal prescriptions devised in order to implement them.[17] This trend (if one can so label a collection of otherwise unrelated thinkers who come to similar conclusions) has received little coverage in the media. Its influence has also been restricted by the educational policies of modern states and by intimidation on the part of the fundamentalists.

2) The *rule of law* is a notion that expresses something that Muslims have longed for since the early phases of their history, and have felt to be part of the message of Islam. Muslim travelers to Europe in the nineteenth century were struck by Europeans' adhesion to rules and rule-bound behavior. This made some of them think that these societies were "Muslim" without being aware of it, as Islam was clearly identified with law-abiding attitudes. Fundamentalists claim that the only way of satisfying this aspiration for lawfulness is by implementing *shari'a*, which they present as the sole remedy for the arbitrariness and abuse of power common in most "Muslim" states. This argument can be countered by showing that the modern concept of "rule of law" is clearer, more operational, and easier to monitor, and thus that the dichotomy of "Islam (or rather *shari'a*) vs. despotism" trumpeted by fundamentalist propaganda is not the whole story. Experience has revealed that law-abidingness is rather a feature of truly modernized societies, where individuals feel that they have a voice in the making of public decisions.

3) *Economic growth* here refers to the idea of continuous progress, which is a basic component of modernity, replacing the messianic hopes and political resignation dominant in premodern societies with the voluntarism and this-worldly resourcefulness of modern times. Democracy, as an expression of the free will of the citizens, cannot thrive if no collective will is allowed to surface or to have a say about the changes that society is compelled to undergo. It is the direct and visible expression of what Alain Touraine called modernization (in contrast with modernity)—that is, the process through which societies take control of their own affairs, mobilize their forces and their resources, and seek to determine the course of their destiny.[18] Economic growth offers the prospect of an improvement in the conditions of life, which seems to be required in every modern society, and all the more so in "developing" ones. No prospect of democratization can be envisaged if no economic growth is actually taking place.

Toward a Universal Rule of Law

It seems obvious that democracy cannot be exported, much less imposed on peoples who are not prepared to accept it and to mobilize themselves to implement it. If great numbers of Muslims today invoke

religion rather than democracy as the alternative to despotism, and others consider democracy itself (at least implicitly) as a kind of new religious belief, this is not because of some special characteristics either of Islam or of Muslims. It is rather because of the particular historical circumstances that I have tried to explain. Muslim confrontations with European colonial powers in the nineteenth century gave birth to some great and lasting misunderstandings, as a result of which Muslims have rejected key aspects of modernity (secularization and, to some degree, democratization) as an alienation and a surrender of the historical self to the "Other."

For those who believe that "civilizations" are hard-core realities that last throughout history and that have distinctive and irreducible features, such polarization is understandable, being the "normal" course of history. It should therefore be treated as such, and the appropriate behavior would be to prepare to defend one's own civilization against alien ones in the unavoidable confrontations of the future.

For those, however, who believe that modern history has, for better or worse, put an end to the separate life of different cultures, there can be convergent paths to establishing social and political systems that promote individual freedoms, human rights, and social justice. These convergent paths point to the crucial importance of the international context and especially of the ongoing relationships between established and would-be democracies.

The fact that democracy has been adopted only in some countries (where it defines the ways their interests are promoted) and not in others creates an asymmetry. The collective interests of some communities, and not of others, find a channel for their expression, and therefore for the promotion of their particular national interests. The moral values that prevail within these communities will not prevail in their relationships with others. This asymmetry will fuel deeper antagonism between nations and greater resentment from those who are weaker. It is therefore time to call for a universal rule of law, where law is not considered only as a means for defending selfish national interests, but is respected for its own sake in a "Kantian" way.

We are living, much more than did our ancestors of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, in a deeply integrated world. Some form of a "universal rule of law," creating a new balance between the selfish interests of nations and universal principles, would ease the evolution we are seeking. It would help to define a framework—political, cultural, and economic—that is truly compatible with democratic ideals on the scale of humanity, and favorable to their wider acceptance.

NOTES

1. "Islam is the blueprint of a social order. It holds that a set of rules exists, eternal, divinely ordained, and independent of the will of men, which defines the proper ordering