

In this chapter we will look at the main questions confronting Islamic political thought today. Despite the role of radical Islamists in day-to-day politics and public discourse, the most interesting and original developments have come from Modernists and Reformists. We will start with democracy and constitutional theory. This leads into the issue of religion and politics, and this in turn to the sources of valid political argument. How does one interpret the Qur'an? We examine the view that it is an ethical rather than a political document. If one adopts this view, it is relatively easy to align Islamic thought with liberty, toleration and human rights. Finally, we look at economic justice and the role of the Muslim Community in international affairs.

## CONSTITUTIONAL THEORY

Muslim constitutional thought has always revolved around the three poles of leadership (or caliphate), law (the Shari'a) and the community of believers. Muslim political theory today is almost always democratic. 'Mainstream Islamism has in principle accepted the compatibility of the shari'a and democracy' (Feldman 2008: 119). The Islamic Council of Europe has stated (1980-1) that 'political power ... is neither valid nor exercisable except by and on behalf of the community through the process of (shura). No-one is authorised to ... rule by personal discretion'.<sup>1</sup> They see political participation as both a right and a duty (an expression of hisba).<sup>2</sup>

Islamists continue, nonetheless, to emphasise the importance of leadership alongside shura (consultation). There is an 'incessant quest for a charismatic chief' (amir), who would rule by virtue of his personal qualities. And 'the more radical the party, the more central is the figure of the amir. Such a person would be a religious as well as a political leader' (Roy 1994: 43-4).

### *Rule by one: the Caliphate*

Anyone who has studied the history of Islamic political thought cannot help being struck by the overwhelming preference for rule by a single inspired, enlightened or otherwise outstanding individual. (Afghanistan was perhaps a salutary example of this: the monarchy held the tribes together, and once that went, they fell apart (Choueiri 1997: 175; Roy 1994: 158-61).) In the past this

usually spun out in the form of dynastic monarchical government. Alternative forms and practices have only come onto the agenda in the Islamic world since, and one is forced to conclude because, it became subject to Western influence. (Of course, something broadly similar might be said about other non-European political cultures.) One-man rule, whether in the form of hereditary monarchy or rule by one individual in the name of a principle, party or common interest ('dictatorship'), remained remarkably common throughout the twentieth century, especially in the Arab world. It is not infrequently remarked that Westernising, or pro-Western, regimes have tended to be of this type: for example, the erstwhile Shah of Iran, Mubarak in Egypt, even perhaps Mahathir in Malaysia. Significant exceptions to this are Indonesia and Turkey.

### *Rashid Rida*

Here one may refer back to the man who did so much to lay the foundations of Islamism. The 'alim Rashid Rida (near Tripoli, Lebanon 1865–Cairo 1935) wrote his *On the Caliphate (Al-khilafa)* (1922–3)<sup>3</sup> after the abolition of the Sultanate while the question of the Caliphate was still under consideration. Rida started out as a disciple of 'Abduh; he travelled widely. At first, he pinned his hopes for religious reform on the Young Turks. Disappointed with them, he turned to pan-Arabism (1911–12); he supported the Arab Revolt and, when the Sharif of Mecca declared himself Caliph (1916), Rida supported him. He welcomed the first stages of the Turkish revolution: whereas Western civilisation 'is in our time doomed to ruin' – the lesson of 1914–18 had been learned – the Islamic (sic) government in Turkey, 'which has shown the most brilliant gifts in the arts of war', could achieve something positive 'if [it] wants to promote a Muslim reform'. He was, once again, disillusioned by the abolition of the Caliph's political powers.

This, and the prospect of the abolition of the Caliphate itself, prompted his *Al-khilafa*. Here he reopened the question of the institutional structure of Islam. Rida had adopted the approach of al-Afghani and 'Abduh that the 'gates of individual judgment (ijtihad)' should be reopened; that we should 'return to sources' (Gardet 1981: 352). Like modernists from Khayr al-Din to Gökalp, he distinguished between those parts of the Shari'a that deal with what is divine and unchanging, and those parts that deal with social conduct: these may be adapted according to the utility principle (maslaha) (Hourani 1983: 344). The ulema, he had said, instead of upholding 'tyrannical autocracy', should have embraced parliamentary constitutionalism long ago (in Choueiri 1997: 46).

But now events made him wary of relinquishing the priority of the Sunna: in *al-Khilafa* he cautioned that redevelopment of social morality must be based exclusively on the Shari'a 'which is the basis for all human legislation'. The Caliphate, he argued, certainly is necessary, and it certainly does cater for the worldly as well as the religious interests of Muslims. Indeed, in true Sunni fashion, he insisted that the Caliph is specifically not a religious leader in the sense that he cannot decide questions of Religious Law. He is a worldwide leader, but in the modern world he would not supplant existing states. He is to

preside over Muslim states and Muslims living under 'foreign rule' in a kind of confederation or 'commonwealth'. So the Caliph's political powers are also practically non-existent. The sort of thing he could do was to look after those concerns in which existing governments (he claimed) 'exercise no control': such as 'the organisation of religious education ... and laws of personal status'. Rida cited the papacy as a model for what he had in mind (Kerr 1966: 184–5). While the Caliph was not himself a judicial, far less a legislative authority, he might 'in political and judicial matters pertaining to government ... give preference to certain conclusions of *ijtihād* over others, after consulting the Learned ('*ulama*) among the "people who bind and loose" [sc. leaders of the Islamic community], particularly if he himself is not a qualified *mujtahid*'. Above all, he should take on the task of supervising the redevelopment of the *Shari'a* on social questions.<sup>4</sup> In other words, he gave the Caliph an updated role of moral leadership, religious guidance and exhortation.

On the question of the constitution of the Caliphate, Rida's debt to modernism became obvious, but, once again, he diluted modernism with a strong dose of Muslim constitutional tradition. Election and consultation are basic principles of original Islam only abandoned by the Umayyads; for 'true obedience is due only to God, and coercive power has been entrusted [sc. by God] to *the social body of the community*'.<sup>5</sup> Rida took the view that 'all that the [European] laws possess that is good and just has long since been laid down by our *shari'a*'.<sup>6</sup> This enabled him to decide on grounds of traditional Muslim criteria just how far he wanted to go towards popular sovereignty in the Western sense. In Kerr's words, *shura* (consultation) became 'the hallmark of [Rida's] political theory ... in the fields of election, constitutional interpretation, administration, and legislation' (1966: 163, 172).

Now, as it turned out, Rida assigned all of these functions to 'the people who bind and loose (*ahl al-hall wa 'l-'aql*: see above, p. 85)'. These notables or prominent citizens are not elected, just recognised. Rida equated them with 'the people ('*umma*)' (Kerr 1966: 163) in the sense that their choices and decisions constitute the choices and decisions of the people. It was, once again, partly by such an equivalence between a self-selected representative body and the whole community that representative constitutionalism had started in Europe (Black 1979: 184–7). But here Rida was obviously watering down the theory of popular sovereignty as stated by Islamic modernists, presumably because of the secularising tendencies of the Turkish National Assembly.

Whom exactly he meant by 'the people who bind and loose' is problematic. Perhaps he meant acknowledged leaders of local communities whose decisions would automatically command respect (Kerr 1966: 161–3); that was one traditional meaning of the term. Sometimes he seems to be referring to '*ulama* capable of exercising individual judgement (*ijtihād*) – in other words, *Mujtahids*. It is tempting here to see a parallel with Shi'ite thought: the 'reopening of *ijtihād*' could have given Sunni '*ulama* the same status as Shi'ite *Mujtahids*. One of Rida's ambitions was to found a college for the training of such new religious scholars. In other words, he wanted to update religious structures and practices in order to implement traditional values more effectively in the

modern world. And his constitutional views left open the possibility of direct participation by the 'ulama, or at least the better educated among them, in social and political leadership.

What was different about Rida seems to have been the revised relative weight given to European and Islamic traditions, namely, his appeal to Islamic sources excluding, or at least ignoring, Western influence. Once again, Islamic theory had something in common with Plato: Rida was advocating constitutional rather than representative government. It is not surprising that he was read by 'the traditional elite and the educated or half-educated Muslim public' more than in governmental and Westernised circles (Gardet 1981: 350-1).

### *Democracy*

The principles of popular sovereignty and also of the rule of law<sup>7</sup> are supported by the great majority of Islamic thinkers, 'fundamentalist' as well as modernist; but only in very general terms. What precisely they mean by these, and how they would see them being implemented, is often less clear. This is precisely the crux of the matter.

Only the very naive would fail to recognise that ideas like democracy and the rule of law easily acquire a somewhat different meaning in a Muslim context. This is because they have been domesticated, among Islamists in particular, into the Islamic thought-world. That is to say, not only are 'the people' invariably (if not always quite explicitly) Muslims (of this more later), but their scope of action, like that of the caliphs and sultans of old, is always demarcated by the Shari'a. The Tunisian Rached Gannouchi sees Islam as improving upon Western-style democracy by underpinning it with a proper moral code (Tamimi 2001: 103).

This gives a very different set of political priorities. Human rights, liberties, the rule of law and democratic procedures are all interpreted in this light. As far as democratic procedures are concerned, the same might also have been said of inhabitants of the Christian West up to a couple of centuries ago (one might be tempted to say, until it ceased being in a full sense the *Christian West*). But human rights, liberties and the rule of law have become fundamental and incontrovertible principles in Western society (however often they are neglected in practice, particularly in the treatment of outsiders). This, I would contend, is due not so much to Christianity but to ancient classical Stoicism and similar philosophies which have for centuries permeated Western culture.

Secondly, the legislative scope of parliament is limited by the Shari'a for the obvious reason that this is a divinely legislated code (e.g., Maududi in *EI* 6 :873b). The Sudanese Islamist Hasan Turabi (1932- ), who was for a while a leading figure in the government of Sudan, believes that 'an Islamic order of government is essentially a form of representative democracy'. But he goes on to qualify this in a remarkable way:

an Islamic government is not strictly speaking a direct government of and by the people; it is a government of the Shari'a ... but in a substantial sense, it is popular government since the Shari'a represents the convictions of the

people and, therefore, their direct will. This limitation on what a representative body can do is a guarantee of the supremacy of the religious will of the community. (in Esposito 1983: 244; and Euben and Zaman 2009: 216).

This is a fairly typical statement. It obviously could have the effect of removing real authority from democratic elections. It also reinterprets the Western idea of democracy in a Rousseauist direction.

The crucial question is who determines what the Shari'a is. This was not always as debatable as it is today. For it was precisely part of the modernist agenda that the Shari'a as currently interpreted has become inadequate and is in need of reform. This was picked up on enthusiastically by Islamists. But today there is 'uncertainty about identifying who is in charge of specifying the meaning of the shari'a' (Feldman 2008: 13).

One of the most important developments in Muslim political theory has been to pass this function over to the elected legislature; much as a 'Western' regime might pass over the function of specifying, say, human rights. This has been done by dictators (Sadat of Egypt and General Zia of Pakistan, for example), 'moderates' such as the present would-be governments of Iraq and Afghanistan, and is endorsed by many Islamists as well. Sadat 'inserted the provision that the shari'a was the source for all legislation' into the 1980 constitution of Egypt (Zubaida 2003: 153). In the modern Islamist view, an Islamic democracy must, in Feldman's words, 'make "Islamic Shari'a" a [or perhaps the] source of positive law' (2008: 113).

This is (as Feldman points out) an original approach: Muslims are 'adopting an experimental approach of *democratising* the shari'a by calling on the legislature to draw upon it in passing laws' (2008: 12). 'The mainstream Sunni Islamist position is that a democratically elected legislature should draft and pass laws to incorporate the content of Islamic law'; when necessary, it should use its discretion to decide how best to legislate in accordance with Islamic values (Feldman 2008: 119–20). This is written into the 'constitutions' of Iraq and Afghanistan, since these 'prohibit the legislature from passing any law that violates core tenets of Islam' (Feldman 2008: 121). Some say that a parliament would thereby be exercising the function of legal interpretation known as *ijtihad* (Zafar in Kurzman 1998: 71). Feldman argues that this provides a type of judicial review; indeed, it amounts to a '*constitutionalisation* of the shari'a' (2008: 12, 121).

Islamists emphasise the need for representatives to be properly qualified, that is, to have certain moral and intellectual qualities that are regarded as desirable on religious grounds.<sup>8</sup> (One finds a somewhat similar idea in John Stuart Mill and T. S. Eliot.)<sup>9</sup> In practice, this can lead to the subordination of elected governments to a self-appointed religious elite (as in Iran). Naturally, such arguments qualify popular sovereignty, and the authority of elected representatives, by the sovereignty (*al-hakimiyya*: absolute rulership) of God (Ayubi 1991: 66). (In theory, again, all theists would agree.) What this might mean in practice seems entirely unpredictable.

Islamist constitutional thought is characterised by a remarkable lack of specifics. 'Fundamentalists' tend to dismiss any detailed discussion of

constitutions and governmental procedures – the stuff of practical politics – as ‘futile arguments about mere technicalities’. ‘One may search the manifestoes of the Muslim Brethren or the Iranian clerics for a detailed description of what an Islamic *state* or an Islamic *economy* should look like, but such a search will be in vain’ (Ayubi 1991: 42). The Muslim Brethren said they would leave the ‘specifics’ to ‘time, place and the needs of the people’ (in Mitchell 1969: 245). For Qutb, ‘the form of government ... based on the principles of Islam is not of vital importance. In theory, it is a matter of indifference ... whether the Islamic state has a republican or other form of government’. For him ‘the goodness of the state does not depend on its institutions but ... on its underlying principles’ (Moussalli 1992: 162–3). This is partly due to an implicit belief that moral principles and the virtue of those in power are what really matter; that, once these are settled, everything else will fall into place (see Roy 1994: ix, 45, 62). Qutb thought that, once the heart is freed from human subjection and subjected to the governance of God alone, everything will be all right (Moussalli 1992: 163, 200; Binder 1988: 177). ‘This aversion to discuss concrete politics ... has become the hallmark of contemporary Islamic radicalism.’ (Choueiri 1997: 154). V. S. Naipaul captures this well in his record of interviews, conducted just after the 1979 revolution, when expectations were at their highest and the fundamentalist project at its peak:

This late twentieth-century Islam appeared to raise political issues. But it had the flaw of its origins – the flaw that ran right through Islamic history: to the political issues it raised it offered no political or practical solution. It offered only the faith. It offered only the Prophet, who would settle everything – but who had ceased to exist.<sup>10</sup>

The result is that, when people speak of popular sovereignty and the rule of law, one often cannot be clear what is meant, nor indeed to what extent it is a rhetorical device.

#### RELIGION AND POLITICS

Underlying all this is the relationship between religion and government, religion and politics. The conflation of religion and the state has almost always been a characteristic of Muslim civilisation and belief (see Black 2008: ch. 1). The great icons of Muslim legal–theological tradition, such as al-Mawardi and Ibn Taymiyya, vigorously reasserted the unity between the religious and the political very much against the grain of their own times. The unity between the religious and the political has been, and still is, the stuff of rhetoric, whether it is put into practice or not.

Even the modernising reformists of the late nineteenth century did not as a rule argue for a separation between Islam and the state. Rather, they argued that the political implications of Islam were not what they had seemed to be; they were, in fact, more in line with current views of political rectitude in Europe. One could look back, beyond all the obfuscations of the entire ‘medieval’ period (by which they meant from around 660 to their own times),

to a pristine Islamic polity enshrined in the Prophet's Medina and in the first decades of Islam. Such a view continues to be widely held today.

During the latter part of the twentieth century, the Islamic political project underwent, as we have seen, a radical change. Islamists began to argue that a comprehensive and precise blueprint for an Islamic state, quite different from anything that could be found in the recent past or at any time since early Islam, could in fact be discerned in the founding texts of Islam, if one looked hard enough. This was the message of al-Maududi and Qutb. It continues to inspire the more radical Islamists today. What they want above all is a state that will implement the Shari'a, as they understand this. This is, of course, the programme of al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

Others, however, have gone in the opposite direction, arguing that the Prophet did not lay down any form of government, had indeed no political agenda: he was a purely religious leader – as Jesus was. This would point to a separation between religion and state. This seems first to have been suggested by none other than the celebrated 'Abduh. For him, 'political organisation is not a matter determined by Islamic doctrine but is rather determined from time to time according to circumstances, by general consultation within the Community' (in Kerr 1966: 148).

#### *'Abd Al-Raziq*

In 1925 Shaykh 'Ali 'Abd al-Raziq (1888–1966) published *Islam and the Roots of Governance* (*al-Islam wa Usul al-Hukm*).<sup>11</sup> This was in part a defence of the Turkish National Assembly's attempt to separate religious and political authority, 'a justification of the Turkish Revolution' (E. Rosenthal 1965: 85–6; Binder 1988: 135); it was also a response to Rashid Rida (see above, p. 325). Like Rida, 'Abd al-Raziq was a disciple of 'Abduh, but he had also studied at Oxford. He was now a senior member of al-Azhar University, an authoritative centre of Sunni learning.

'Abd al-Raziq argued that Islam did not lay down 'a precise order of government' (Butterworth n.d.: 4). He argued, as argue it he must – being a Muslim and an 'alim – by reinterpreting the data of Islamic revelation: Muhammad did not set out to establish a state and Islam did not lay down any particular political system. Here 'we meet for the first time a consistent, unequivocal theoretical assertion of the purely and exclusively religious character of Islam' (E. Rosenthal 1965: 86). In this he was following the spirit of Western Biblical criticism, in the sense that he was prepared to countenance the possibility that prevailing tradition had radically misinterpreted its own sources. 'Abd al-Raziq's reply to Rida was that 'Islam has nothing to do with the Caliphate as the Muslims understand it'. The rules which the Prophet did lay down concerned spiritual matters, such as prayer and fasting, and rules appropriate for his particular culture, for people 'in a simple state with a natural government' (in E. Rosenthal 1965: 96, 98). 'All of those apparently political actions, even warfare, are means for the Prophet to establish the religion and promulgate his religious call' (Butterworth n.d.: 15).

'Abd al-Raziq thus took the modernist argument – that the social norms of the Shari'a could be changed because they derived from specific historical circumstances – an important stage further. The Caliphate itself was the product of history, an institution of human rather than divine origin, a temporary convenience; and therefore a purely political office with no religious meaning or function. The universality of Islam lay not in its political structure, but in its faith and religious guidance. 'Abd al-Raziq's aim was, nonetheless, like that of all modernists and most reformers, to enable Islamic countries to develop politically so that they could 'compete with other nations' on equal terms (E. Rosenthal 1965: 98–9).

This meant that constitutional forms can be remoulded from top to bottom. In political matters we should be guided by reason and experience.

All political functions are left to us, our reason, its judgements and political principles. Religion ... neither commands nor forbids [such things], it simply leaves them to us so that in respect of them we have recourse to the laws of reason, the experience of nations and the rules of politics. (in E. Rosenthal 1965: 98)

Muslims have 'absolute freedom to organise the state in accordance with [existing] intellectual, social and economic conditions' (in Binder 1988: 131). Despite their knowledge of Plato and Aristotle, Muslims had hitherto failed to develop political science, because the study of different constitutions would have constituted a threat to the power of their kings.

'Abd al-Raziq argued that the Prophet did have a special 'force (quwwa)' in order to enable him to carry out what was a unique mission. This force was, however, peculiar to Muhammad, and – the crucial point – it was fundamentally different from the political power (hukm al-salatin) of a governor, king or sultan.<sup>12</sup> In Muhammad's case, it was not so much that politics was separate, but that it was subsumed under a 'higher', 'wider' power to 'rule over the affairs of body and spirit ... [and] the administration of this world and the hereafter' (in E. Rosenthal 1965: 100). This unique power of the Prophet was more effective than ordinary governmental power because it was voluntary rather than coercive. The kind of leadership he attributed to the Prophet resembled the kind which Christian theologians usually attribute to Christ.

This was astute and very original. *Islam and the Roots of Governance* was immediately condemned by the authorities of the al-Azhar University; 'Abd al-Raziq was thrown out, and dismissed from his position as a Religious Judge. Most Muslim politicians do, indeed, as a matter of fact, for the most part conduct their affairs *as if* politics were separate from religion. This is also implicit in much Sufi thought and practice. It is a view widely held among secular-minded Muslims (Zubaida 2003: 178).<sup>13</sup> But it is relatively unusual for anyone to state it openly – as a principle. It is the view held by Jabri (Filali-Ansari 2009: 162; below, n. 14). The Egyptian Farag Fuda (1945–92) was assassinated by radical Islamists as an 'apostate' for stating this opinion (Zubaida 2003: 176).

One could say that 'Abd al-Raziq sought to close the gap between rhetoric and practice. The only other way to close the gap between rhetoric and practice

is by a some form of political Islam; unless, of course, one chooses not to close it at all, which had long been the preferred option of practical men.

But was 'Abd al-Raziq's interpretation of the Prophet's mission plausible? It is open to obvious criticisms on grounds of historical evidence (Gardet 1981: 357, Butterworth n.d.: 19). Current scholarship still indicates that Islam, unlike Christianity, had from the start a political and military component (see above, Chapter 1). It is, therefore, peculiarly difficult to separate religion from politics by appealing to the Qur'an and original Islam.

#### HERMENEUTICS

To reconcile the separation of religion and state in terms compatible with Islamic doctrine required a much more fundamental change in the way one approached the very sources of religious knowledge: namely, in the interpretation of the Qur'an. It required reassessment of what counts as a political argument. All political argument by and among Muslims has at some point to be articulated in terms of the Qur'an (and possibly the hadith – the other base of tradition (al-sunna)). The hadith and sunna could, as we have seen, be radically reinterpreted. But this was more difficult in the case of the Qur'an. To question its veracity or authenticity was, and is, of course, to declare oneself an unbeliever. Any other ideas or methodology (appeals to empirical data, for example) have at some point in the discussion to be demonstrated to be not out of step with what God revealed to the Prophet Muhammad in that text. To say that this constrained political argument would be an understatement. Even today, Muslim thinkers often look like those sixteenth-century astronomers who thought they had to explain the data of the heavens while 'saving' the Ptolemaic system, by constructing ever more complicated ellipses. This hermeneutic issue is, in my view, the really decisive one (Black 2010).

#### *Maslaha (the common good)*

'Abduh (see above, p. 288) adopted one new approach to the sources of Islam by arguing that the Qur'an should be read entirely in the light of the overriding principle of *maslaha* (the common good). 'Abduh (like the Young Ottomans before him) saw *maslaha* as, among other things, utility in the contemporary Benthamite sense: that which is socially useful and will promote the well-being of all in the community. 'Abduh argued that the whole purpose of morality and law was to promote the common good. This was not altogether new; al-Ghazali (see above, Chapter 9) had taught that God's overall purpose in revealing the Shari'a was to benefit humankind (Johnston 2007: 94). It was in the light of this overriding principle of the common good that the prescriptions of the Shari'a should be adapted to modern conditions (Operis 2007).

Al-Fasi (1910–74), a leading figure in the independence movement in Morocco, brings out the radical implications of this hermeneutical approach, saying that (in Johnston's words) 'the objectives of the Shari'a are not just a secondary source in the jurists' toolbox but rather at the heart of the Shari'a, on

a par with the texts themselves' (2007: 95). The philosopher Mohamed Abed Jabri<sup>14</sup> makes it clear that '[i]f *maslaha* ... is the ultimate criterion for legislation, then the sacred text should be read in a totally different way' (Filali-Ansari 2009: 168).

This use of the concept of the common good, then, was one way of radically expanding the scope of *ijtihad* (individual reasoning). As Jabri sees it, '*ijtihad* would adopt a single principle as the ground for all precepts and commandments and would, therefore, be based on what really transcends time and space: the common good of all men' (Filali-Ansari 2009: 168–9).

### *The Qur'an as an ethical, not a political document*

But a yet more fundamental revolution in Qur'anic hermeneutics was undertaken by Mahmud Muhammad Taha. Taha had studied engineering at the University of Khartoum and worked as an engineer. He became a spiritual leader and a republican activist; he was executed by President Numeiri in 1985 (under pressure from conservative and Islamist groups) (Cooper *et al.* 2009: 105–7).

Taha proposed a fundamental reinterpretation of the whole career of the Prophet, and of his teaching. As is well known, Muhammad began his prophetic career at Mecca, and then, under pressure from pagan opponents, moved to Medina. There he established the first independent, self-governing Muslim community. Some parts of the Qur'an were composed during the earlier 'Meccan' period, others during the later 'Medinan' period. Whenever there were differences in emphasis, it was traditionally held that the later verses 'abrogated', that is, overrode, the earlier ones.<sup>15</sup>

Taha interpreted the distinction between these two phases in the Prophet's career in the opposite way. He said that the *former* phase of the revelation to Muhammad was the fundamental one; while the latter (Medinan) phase (and, of course, the whole subsequent development of the *sunna*) was a secondary adaptation to the needs of the time. All the political and pugnacious elements of Islamic theory – along with all the detailed prescriptions of Muslim law – were contained in this second – and inferior – stage. The first phase was superior because it represented what Muhammad had originally wanted to proclaim; while the second stage represented behavioural strategies forced upon Muhammad and his companions by the exigencies of events. Today the time is right for a return to the first, original phase of Muhammad's message. An-Na'im, Taha's most articulate follower, summarises his views as follows:

Islam ... was offered first in tolerant and egalitarian terms in Mecca, where the Prophet preached equality and individual responsibility between all men and women without distinction on grounds of race, sex or social origin. As that message was rejected in practice ... some aspects of the message changed in response to the socioeconomic and political realities of the time. (in Taha 1987: 21; see also pp. 46–7, 125, 167)

Taha was not a secular thinker. He believed that he had attained his insights under divine guidance following a period of 'rigorous ... prayer, fasting and

meditation'; in An-Na'im's words, 'his vision of the future of Islam was God-given' (An-Na'im in Taha 1987: 4). This 'second' (that is, revised, original) 'message of Islam' would 'towards the end of time, when circumstances are suitable', generate a new community of true Muslims, indeed a 'new civilisation' (Taha 1987: 149–50). At that point, 'consensus will replace force, justice exploitation, freedom oppression, and intelligent community awareness selfish individual drives' (Taha 1987: 162). Taha was revered by his followers as a spiritual teacher (*ustadh*). Under his leadership, the Sudanese Republican Party (known as 'the Republican Brothers'; but women played a prominent role) became a vehicle for the spread of his ideas (An-Na'im in Taha 1987: 4–5; Cooper *et al.* 2009: 107).

The implications of Taha's approach have been developed by Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im (1946– ), also born in the Sudan and also, like Taha, a one-time engineering student at the University of Khartoum. An-Na'im now works from Emory University in the United States. His most recent book (2008) is the only work I know by a Muslim which makes a contribution to political philosophy as such, rather than seeking to accommodate or refute certain Western ideas with a patchwork of quotations from the Qur'an.

This does, indeed, look like a Muslim equivalent of the Reformation in Christian Europe: it reverses a way of thinking that goes back to almost the beginning of the faith. In doing so, it deprives the traditional bearers of authority of their monopoly of interpretation (Islamism also does this but for different reasons). An-Na'im urges the responsibility of believers to exercise *ijtihad*, which he equates with 'civic reason', on their own behalf (An-Na'im 2008: 15). This is, of course, completely anti-legalist, that is (as Taha himself observed), it moves Islam away from Judaism and towards Christianity (1987: 123). This revolutionary hermeneutic step taken by Taha and An-Na'im suggests that the same kind of historical and textual analysis can legitimately be applied to the founding text of Islam as Christians have been applying to the New Testament.

Of course, such an approach is wide open to subjective interpretation. But the point for us here is that it enables Muslims to discuss politics and the state without constantly having to defer to the Qur'an on every single point. Without this, political thought among Muslims is in danger of becoming a collectively 'private language' of no interest to anyone who does not believe that what we need to know about human affairs begins and ends with the Qur'an.

This move facilitates a fundamental and far-reaching change in Islamic political thought, possibly the most far-reaching there has ever been. For the first time, it gives the textual, Qur'anic initiative to humanitarian modernisers and liberal reformers. It becomes far easier to put forward a modern, liberal (and/or socialist) agenda within Islam. To say that the Qur'an is an ethical rather than a political text has repercussions on practically every aspect of political thought. Taha held that the texts that are cited in support of 'jihad, slavery, capitalism, gender inequality, polygyny' all come from the Medinan period, and are for that reason not applicable today (Mahmoud 2009: 117).

The principles held to have been enunciated by the Prophet at Mecca are none other than principles of ethics applicable to all human beings and known

in all cultures – more or less the equivalent of natural law in the Western tradition. As An-Na'im says, '[the] principle of reciprocity, or the Golden Rule, is the ultimate cross-cultural foundation of the universality of human rights' (2008: 24). Islamists, by contrast, argue that it is the Shari'a which determines what is rational and natural (Griffel 2007).

However, this same view has been put forward by several other Muslim thinkers without the benefit of Taha's methodology. 'Abduh, for example, revived the opinion of some earlier Muslim philosophers that humans can, in principle, know good and evil by reason alone, though most fail to do so in practice (Kerr 1966: 125–32). Mohamed Talbi of Tunisia (1921–) sees

in the Qur'an certain universal, axiomatic truths. These are, for the most part, social and ethical truths which ... transcend time and place and thus provide an absolute moral guidance for humanity, everywhere and at any time ... all human beings *know* these values and principles through a special innate human nature (fitra) ... Justice [and other basic spiritual values] originate *in the human mind* where it is within the basic structures. (Nettler 2009: 131, 133, 140, in Nettler's words)

Similarly, al-Fasi held that people from all backgrounds agree on 'the need for justice, truthfulness, loyalty in covenants, and compassion for the less fortunate', on equality of opportunity and equality before the law: 'the only difference between various faiths and cultures arises in how these standards should be applied' (Johnston in Amanat and Griffel 2007: 97–8). In other words, the fundamental message of the Qur'an is, once again, about ethics rather than about politics.

This may chime in with a somewhat widespread attitude among Muslims. The Egyptian judge Muhammad Sa'id Al-Ashmawi (1932–) emphasises the ethical aspects of the Shari'a rather than its legal prescriptions. In the case of duties to other people (mu'amalat), there are only 'a few broad principles of guidance and a limited number of injunctions'; the specific prescriptions of the Qur'an and tradition for the most part fall into the category of duties to God (ibadat) (in Kurzman 1998: 15). Al-Ashwami thinks, therefore, that

the application of the general injunctions of the shari'a to the multifarious details of human life ... have been left to the discretion of the body of conscious Muslims ... God expressly left to humans the work of regulating the details and the freedom to review them. (in Kurzman 1998: 15, 51)

#### THE SECULAR STATE

Next, it makes it very much easier to accept the separation of religion and state. All the texts that advocate the use of coercive force or compulsion of any kind in order to promote religion derive from the Medinan period (when, one could say, they were needed) (Taha 1987: 126, An-Na'im 2008: 158). They may, therefore, be overridden by the more fundamental moral principles proclaimed during the earlier (Meccan) phase.

In his most recent work, *Islam and the Secular State* (2008), An-Na'im goes further and argues the case for a secular state *on religious grounds*. For only if the state is devoid of religious bias will Muslims (and others) be able to believe in and practise their faith entirely voluntarily, which is the only way any religion can be genuinely practised and believed in (2008: 4, 268, 276). Shari'a principles cannot 'by their nature and function' be enforced by the state' (An-Na'im 2008: 2). Furthermore, only a secular state can 'mediate relations between different communities (whether religious, anti-religious or nonreligious) that share the same political space' (p. 41).

An-Na'im is, therefore, completely opposed to the project of an Islamic state (2008: 2, 4, 20, 41, 268, 276). This is reminiscent of Jinnah, the first President of Pakistan, who in his address to the Constituent Assembly on the eve of independence (1948) emphasised that the new state was not to be a Muslim state, but a state in which both Muslims and others would feel free in the practice of their religion: 'you are free to go to your ... places of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion ... that has got nothing to do with the business of the State ... We are starting with this fundamental principle that we are all equal citizens of one state.' In fact, the very opposite has happened in Pakistan. Al-Maududi's view has pretty much triumphed.

But An-Na'im distinguishes government or the state itself from politics – the process of policy-making. He argues that it is appropriate, indeed, desirable that religious principles should play a full part in political discourse; Muslims should argue their corner just as holders of other beliefs or convictions do. 'The principle of secularism ... includes a public role for religion in influencing public policy and legislation'. But this is always 'subject to the requirement of civic reason' (An-Na'im 2008: 38). Otherwise put, 'the influence of religion in the public domain is open to negotiation and contingent upon the free existence of the human agency of all citizens, believers and unbelievers alike' (p. 268). By 'civic reason' he means a process of reasoning 'open and accessible to all citizens', which can be 'publicly debated and contested by any citizen'. 'The rationale or purpose of public policy or legislation must be based on the sort of reasoning that most citizens can accept or reject' (pp. 7, 85). This is similar to Habermas' notion of public discourse (p. 100).

If the ethical principles of the Qur'an are ones which humans of whatever persuasion may hold, one has to ask what, if any, contribution Islam or any other religion can make to political discourse or practice? An-Na'im's answer is that a secular society needs religion to provide 'a widely accepted source of moral guidance' and to promote social discipline (p. 41). 'Abduh had argued, in the tradition of the *falasafa* (see above, p. 59), that humans may know what is right by their own efforts, but can be *motivated* to do good only by religion. Religious faith, then, would give people a cosmological<sup>16</sup> and emotional basis for ideals such as fraternity and equality. (This appears also to have been the position of Leo Strauss.)

*Liberty, rights, toleration*

Liberty as a social and political value<sup>17</sup> has entered Islamic political thought only during the last 150 years or so, and as a result of European influence. The progress of liberal values depends, partly though not wholly, upon a separation between religion and state. But for both traditional Islamic thinkers and fundamentalists, the function of the state must include enforcement of religious values in public life; this is stated time after time as the state's most serious, indeed, many would say, its only duty. Fundamentalist manifestoes regularly 'include, *a priori*, a detailed account of the moral precepts that the public is to observe collectively and that are to be overseen authoritatively, especially in the area of sex, women and the family' (Ayubi 1991: 42) (on this last point, one may compare Roman Catholicism). Al-Maududi provides another example of this:

a state which does not take interest in establishing virtue and eradicating vice and in which adultery, drinking ... obscene literature, indecent films ... immoral display of beauty, promiscuous mingling of men and women, co-education, etc., flourish without let or hindrance, cannot be called an Islamic State. (in Ahmed 1987: 93)

Equality, on the other hand, has been emphasised in Islam, past and present, more than it has in Christian and Western thought. But, of course, this meant equality among male Muslims. This raises the question of human rights in an Islamic state or in a state with a Muslim majority. Zubaida observes that 'Islam has no specific doctrine of human rights'. Muslims have, however, endorsed the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948), and found it to be fully compatible with Islamic doctrine; indeed, they have claimed that Islam got there first.<sup>19</sup> But, once again, the real issue is how rights are applied *in detail*; and, of course, *to whom*. The greatest deficiency of Islamic political practice, and to a large degree theory, today is a widespread reluctance, often outright refusal, to grant equality of civil and political rights to women and to non-Muslims.

On the whole, the greater the influence of traditional Islam, or of fundamentalism, the more restricted women are, and the more difficult is the situation of non-Muslims, especially non-theists. To be sure, many modernists – but among Islamists only the Sudanese Hasan al-Turabi (1932–) – have championed equality for women in marriage, including monogamy and an equal right to divorce; and equality for women in education.<sup>20</sup> (One should remember that in many European countries until recently, divorce was extremely difficult for both men and women.) A pupil of Abduh argued (1899), along the same lines as Ibn Rushd, that Muslim civilisation had declined because of the servile status of women, who were consequently unable to fulfil their role of forming 'the morals of the nation'. Oppression in the home, this writer said, is the basis of oppression in the state: 'freedom and respect for personal rights' are found where 'the status of women has been raised to a high degree of respect and freedom of thought and action' (Hourani 1983: 164–8).

Rashid Rida, on the other hand, defended traditional Muslim Law on relationships between the sexes (E. Rosenthal 1965: 72–3). The Muslim Brethren envisaged greater equality: women could be educated and go out to work; but women's political rights 'should be left in abeyance until both men and women are more educated' (Mitchell 1969: 257).

Most, but not all, Islamists oppose social, and in particular educational, equality for women. Al-Maududi, for example, strongly reaffirmed the traditional segregation and subordination of women, and their exclusion from political life; he even defended four wives and child marriages (Ahmed 1987: 108–9). Qutb's defence of differential treatment was more moderate and less specific than al-Maududi's (*Social Justice*, p. 50). Shari'ati seems to have found this a difficult topic: he wanted women to be separate but equal; but he favoured their participation in public life (Keddie 1981: 220–1). Many modernists, however, do champion social equality, including equal educational opportunities, for women (Mernissi 1987).

Al-Maududi also upheld the traditional view that non-Muslims could not be full citizens; they were merely 'protected persons' (provided that they paid the requisite special tax: *jizya*). Anyone who abandoned Islam was liable to the death penalty (Ahmed 1967: 72–5).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights finds widespread support among Muslims. Muslims find it relatively easy to extend toleration to other monotheists (since this can be seen as implicit in the Qur'an). Ali Bulaç (writing in a Turkish context) seems to want to revive an egalitarian version of the *dhimmi* system: different ethnic and religious communities could operate as self-moderating associations, which 'will express themselves in self-defined cultural and legal standards'; pluralism in this sense is part of the divine will (since 'human knowledge is limited') (Denli 2006: 90–2).

The Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights (1981) goes further. It extends toleration to people of all religions: 'every person has the right to freedom of conscience and worship in accordance with his [sic] religious beliefs' (in Kamrava 2006: 18; Kurzman 1998: 64). The influential Egyptian religious leader al-Qaradawi, in a discussion of social welfare provisions, advocates equal treatment for non-Muslims:

Islam provides a 'social guarantee' ... which covers all people of a society, Muslim and non-Muslim. It would not be just if a person in Muslim society were to suffer from hunger, or if he were deprived of clothing, medical treatment or accommodation. It is incumbent upon a Muslim society to provide for its citizen's needs, regardless of his [sic] religion. (1985: 8)

While this makes no mention of freedom of religious expression, it does imply a basic level of toleration. Al-Qaradawi also supports freedom of political debate and freedom for opposition parties (Johnston 2007: 110). But, since there is no mention of atheists and agnostics, one cannot be confident about what *their* fate would be under the kind of regime envisaged by the authors of the Universal Islamic Declaration of Human Rights, or by al-Qaradawi and others.

Ali Allawi (an Iraqi Shi'ite but non-sectarian; he won a (contested) majority

of seats in the last election) would confine '[t]he right ... to freedom of expression' to those who 'seek to find or to advance the cause of truth' (2009: 198). This is very ambivalent and could be interpreted in all sorts of ways.

Again, the Moroccan liberation thinker al-Fasi professed belief in 'global human values' and urged cooperation 'with all people of good will in the world, without regard for their backgrounds or orientations, as long as they hold to ... the belief in free thought, independent reasoning, the dignity of the human person' (in Johnston 2007: 88–9). But, when in power, he took action against certain Baha'is, which almost resulted in their execution (p. 101).

All of those we have looked at so far seem to me to imply, even if only by omission, significant reservations about freedom of expression and toleration for non-Muslims, whether they believe in one god or many, or in no god at all. They all seem to be unaware of the main arguments of Mill's *On Liberty* (e.g., that today's 'error' should be tolerated because it may be tomorrow's truth). This is further reflected in the recent attempt by the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (which represents fifty-six mainly Muslim states) to get the UN's Human Rights Council to define 'defamation of religion' as an infringement of liberty. The kind of effect this could have on the ground is shown by one particularly horrific (and doubtless unusual) incident. In September 2009, 'a young Pakistani Christian was accused of throwing part of the Koran down a drain. It seems that his real crime, however, was affection for a Muslim woman. A mob torched a church and many Christians had to flee' (*The Economist*, April 2010, p. 58).

We can now appreciate the full moral and intellectual impact of the hermeneutic approach advocated by Taha and An-Na'im. An-Na'im's concept of the secular state gives freedom and toleration to believers and unbelievers of all stripes. Indeed, An-Na'im applies one of Mill's arguments for freedom of expression to religious discourse with specific reference to Islam.

Since it is impossible to know whether or not Muslims would accept or reject any particular view until it is openly and freely expressed and debated, it is necessary to maintain complete freedom of opinion, belief, and expression for such views to emerge and be propagated. The idea of prior censorship is therefore inherently destructive and counterproductive for the development of any Islamic doctrine or principle. (2008: 30, 136)

But even without Taha's methodology, Talbi seems no less sincere in his advocacy of freedom of expression for all. He sees religious liberty as (in the words of one scholar)

fundamentally ... an act of respect for God's sovereignty and for the mystery of God's plan for humanity, which has been given the terrible privilege of shaping entirely on its own responsibility its destiny on earth and hereafter. Ultimately, to respect humanity's freedom is to respect God's plan (Kamrava 2006: 117)

Humanity is fragmented and varied in its outlooks; this pluralism makes mutual respect and dialogue the natural path to pursue (Nettler 2009: 135–6).

Individuals and groups should recognise the views of others as being of equal value to their own. Intolerance is tantamount to a dangerous and damaging negation of the other (Nettler 2009: 134–5, 145).

The methodology of Taha and An-Na'im also puts the discourse of human rights on a different plane. Muslims have to see that 'the other person with whom they must identify and accept as their equal in human dignity and rights, includes all other human beings, regardless of gender and religion' (An-Na'im 1996: 180). The principle of reciprocity stipulates equal rights for all citizens, be they Muslim or non-Muslim, female or male (1996: 136). Taha himself was particularly insistent upon 'equality between men and women'. He saw this as 'the universal rule of Islam' (1987: 62). Here, for the first time perhaps, we have Muslim political thinkers giving equal civic rights to unbelievers (and not just 'People of the Book'). If ethical awareness is common to all human communities, all human beings are on the same moral footing regardless of their religious affiliation. Everyone can be seen to have the same rights and duties. It removes the basis for distinguishing between the moral capabilities of Muslims and non-Muslims. It therefore removes a fundamental objection to giving them equal political rights.

The importance of these ideas can hardly be exaggerated. The us–them distinction had dominated Muslim political thought from the outset almost to the present, and still does among many Islamists.

#### ECONOMIC JUSTICE

'The political language of contemporary Islamists is dominated by the term "justice"' (Feldman 2008: 113). While economic hardship and the perceived injustice of massive inequalities between a wealthy elite, who tend to be secular and pro-Western, drives recruitment to Islamism, Islamists themselves have very little to say about economic policy. This is all of a piece with their lack of attention to constitutional detail.

Modern Muslim writers, including Islamists, tend to identify Islam as a middle way between capitalism and state socialism (or Communism).<sup>21</sup> Islam upholds the right to private property, though this is a trust from God (who is the ultimate owner). One should never take interest on loans (*riba*; usury). Few theorists have any time for state ownership, and none (with the exception of Taha) for communism. However, opinion polls conducted recently in seven Muslim-majority countries did find that support for 'the implementation of the *shari'a* as the sole legal foundation of the state' was 'associated with support for one or more of the following economic reforms: greater government responsibility to provide for everyone, equalisation of incomes, or increased government ownership of business' (Davis and Robinson 2007: 152).

Islam emphasises the responsibility of individuals to uphold (in the words of Chandra Muzaffar, 1947–, a Malaysian political scientist) 'the dignity of labor [and] the utilization of natural resources for the benefit of all' (in Kamrava 2006: 229). A cooperative view of the productive process is implied by Muhammad Natsir (1908–93) from Indonesia, when he says that 'Islam

considers both employer and worker as factors of industry each having his own function, responsibility and share, each of the same importance in the process of producing the commodities which society needs' (in Kurzman 1998: 64b).

Everyone should give a significant proportion of their wealth to provide for the less well-off (zakat). Social welfare is frequently emphasised as an up-to-date form of zakat. In Qutb's view, everyone, including the unborn, has a right to health care and to equal educational opportunities; and, if the community does not provide these, the state should (Moussalli 1992: 180, 189).

Thus, Islamic teaching has more in common with social democracy than with socialism. Muhammad Iqbal, writing in India in the 1930s, thought that the main problem that would face a new Muslim state would be poverty, and that 'for Islam the acceptance of social democracy in some suitable form and consistent with the legal principles of Islam is not a revolution but a return to the original purity of Islam' (in Ahmad 1967: 163). This combination of social welfare and private property brings Islamic thought close to the views of Aristotle, John Locke and the modern Roman Catholic Church.<sup>22</sup>

Some, however, do refer to Islam as 'socialist'; but this can be a rhetorical device, and is not usually meant to include state ownership. The Muslim Brethren referred to provision for the poor as 'Islamic socialism' (*EI* 3: 1070a-b; Choueiri 1997: 50-1); but they insisted on the inviolability of private property rights. Similarly, the Prime Minister of Pakistan said (1949): 'Islamic socialism ... means that every person in this land has equal rights to be provided with food, shelter, clothing, education and medical facilities' (in Choueiri 1997: 52).

In the 1950s and 1960s 'Arab socialism' became the official ideology of secular regimes in Egypt, Syria and Iraq (all of which persecuted Islamists, notably the Muslim Brethren). By Arab socialism was meant redistribution of wealth plus an extension of state ownership. The conception of the state as economic provider with a monopoly of key resources, centrally managed on behalf of the population, could be seen as arising out of the tradition of patrimonial monarchy.<sup>23</sup> Under Nasser, the al-Azhar University was prepared to endorse 'Islamic socialism', indeed, to proclaim Muhammad as 'the first socialist' (Choueiri 1997: 78; *EI* 4: 125a). But when Bhutto tried to introduce a statist version of Islamic socialism in Pakistan in the 1970s, many 'ulama condemned it as anti-Islamic (Ahmed 1987: 217). Socialism also became the official ideology of Algeria (1962), South Yemen, and somewhat later Sudan and Libya (1969).<sup>24</sup> (Qaddafi (r.1969-) made his own socialist interpretation of Islam the official state doctrine of Libya (Esposito 1983: 140-5).)

The only recent Muslim thinker to support the common ownership of 'the means and sources of production' was Taha. He believed that the ultimate goal of communism was part of 'the second message of Islam'. 'Islam's original principle is the common or joint possession of property amongst the slaves of God, so that each one takes according to his needs, the basic needs of a traveller [passing through this life to the next]' (1987: 167, 138). He derived this from the Prophetic principle of zakat ('when they ask you what to give away, say all that you do not need': Q. 2:219: 156). But An-Na'im does not mention this aspect of Taha's thought.

## INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

All parts of the world under Muslim rule (the *dar al-Islam*: house of Islam, that is, of peace) were traditionally conceived as a unitary socio-political order in which the same worship, rites, ethics and law ran without boundaries. All Muslims, from Spain to Sind, had the same rights and duties. Within the 'umma there were in theory no international relations in the usual sense. Indeed, there were (in theory at least) no independent states, far less self-governing nations.

*Nation*

The idea that 'nationality' (whatever that is) can or should be the basis of civic identity, so common in Europe, was completely alien to Islam. The idea of the nation-state, along with other European political ideas, entered the Islamic world in the nineteenth century. Egyptian and Turkish writers began to proclaim love of one's country (*watan*) as a positive virtue.<sup>25</sup> Tahtawi (1801–73) held that people of the same homeland had similar obligations towards one other as members of the same religion (Hourani 1983: 79). Lutfi al-Sayyid (1872–1963, also an Egyptian) associated universalism (the idea that 'the land of Islam is the *watan* (homeland) of all Muslims') with Islamic (that is, Ottoman) imperialism; it was out of date and should be replaced 'by the one faith consonant with the ambition of every Eastern nation that has a defined *watan* ... the faith of nationalism (*wataniyya*)'.<sup>26</sup> The question of the nation-state was immensely complicated by Arab nationalism,<sup>27</sup> because there was never a practical prospect of a pan-Arab state.

Many Islamic modernists, however, saw nationalism as divisive and 'incompatible with Islamic universalism'.<sup>28</sup> For Islamists, on the other hand, 'the satan of racist and national fanaticism' (al-Maududi in Choueiri 1997: 102) is pure *jahiliyya* (pre-Islamic ignorance). Qutb said that Arab nationalism, so dear to his tormentors, glorifies 'the inferior and brutish bonds [of race]' (in Choueiri 1997: 104). The more self-consciously Islamic one is, the less inclined one is to endow the nation-state with any moral authority. The ideal of a *watan* was, rather, appropriated for the Islamic 'umma as a whole (Enayat 1982: 115). It is perhaps no coincidence that it was Christians who did most to promote the ideology of Arab nationalism (Vatikiotis 1971: 165).

According to Muslim tradition, until all recognise and worship the one god and implement his revealed law, there will be a fundamental division between the House of Islam and the house of conflict (*dar al-harb*). The relationship between these was conceived as one of 'permanent war'; (Khadduri 1955: 354; Gardet 1981: 96). There could be a truce but not peace. Muslims had a 'collective obligation' to conduct aggressive war in order to convert or subordinate non-believers. There were, however, rules of war (Khadduri 1955: 353–9; Lambton 1981: 208–14). This was far removed from any theory or practice of international relations as these are conceived today.<sup>29</sup>

The idea of any legitimate human community other than the 'umma has not been widely accepted among Muslims. Thus, the idea of 'the international

community' is in a certain tension with the idea of the *Muslim* community. (Yet the Qur'an says: 'Men were a single 'umma. Then they became disunited' (Q. 10:20; cf. 5:53, 11:120, 16:95, 42:6).) Hardly any Muslim thinkers attach any significance to the concept of humanity (*insaniyya*).<sup>30</sup> There are Muslims and there are non-Muslims.

I think Piscatori (1986, esp. chs 3–4 and pp. 72, 89) is wrong to conclude, from the fact that Muslim-majority states today tend to conduct their foreign affairs much as other states do, that the existence of nation-states is therefore compatible with Islamic thinking, indeed, endorsed by it. This ignores the distinction between the existence of a practice and the conviction that such a practice is right. It also ignores any discrepancy between the views of elites and the views of the mass of the population. There have indeed often – usually perhaps – been some differences between what jurists and religious teachers have said and the way that diplomats and statesmen have acted. There is, indeed, a general tendency for religious rhetoric on occasion to move in a different sphere from everyday life. But this is not to say that religious teaching is irrelevant to the way Muslim-majority states conduct their affairs today, any more than it is to their domestic policies. It is a latent force, which may be brought into play.

Some thinkers have begun to perceive that, in international politics as in other areas, traditional Shari'a teaching needs to be updated in order to comply with its own underlying principles. This has led some to accept in general outline the moral principles which are commonly supposed to inform the international order today: the equal sovereignty of nation-states; the attempt to build collective security through inter-state and supra-state bodies; and to resolve inter-state conflicts by arbitration, mediation and diplomacy, with force as a last resort, to be exercised only under the auspices of the UN (Hassan 1981: 200). The Malaysian academic AbuSulayman, for example has argued (1993) in Qur'anic terms for the abandonment of military jihad, and for a new world order based on the unity and equality of humankind.<sup>31</sup>

Here, too, the hermeneutic of Taha comes in: An-Na'im is able to argue that advocacy of warfare and aggression against non-Muslims in the name of Islam comes from the Medina period, and therefore should be abandoned today (1996: ch. 6, 'Shari'a and Modern International Law', esp. pp. 144ff.).

Islamists, by contrast, put forward a quite different, indeed, a revolutionary, view of international order. This was, in particular, the view of the Iranian Shi'ite Ali Shari'ati (see above, p. 312) and, after the revolution in Iran, ayatollah Khomeini (Enayat 1982: 153–8). Khomeini linked Third World grievances to the Shi'ite revolution itself. In his view, the existing international order sanctions, indeed, promotes widespread oppression of the poor and weak by the arrogant, strong and wealthy. This was an adaptation of neo-Marxist anti-imperialism and dependencia theory.<sup>32</sup> ('Arab socialism' had previously taken over the Marxist antipathy towards 'Western imperialism'.)

But this view also has roots in Islamic tradition: for capitalism and the superpowers, read unbelief and the Roman and Persian empires; among the oppressed, include all Muslim countries; and for the vanguard of the prole-

tariat, read the Shi'ite clerics and other activists, such as al-Qaeda. In actual fact, all of these ideas were present long ago in numerous Mahdist and other sects. What they have in common with Marxism, and what distinguishes them both from conventional Western attitudes to international relations, is, once again, the idea of an ongoing struggle between the righteous (believers, oppressed) and the unrighteous (unbelievers, capitalists); plus a readiness to resort to militant methods, or at least military rhetoric.

The Shi'ite version of this vision adds the Return of the Twelfth Imam (or the appearance of his representative). This gives the whole project added emotional appeal. Here we can see how the collapse of the socio-economic aspirations inspired by liberal capitalism, Nasserite *étatisme* and the 'Arab socialist' version of Marxism, has given space and weaponry to an ideology of the oppressed. This expresses an ancient and unbroken line of monotheistic social activism and militaristic piety in contemporary language. Those who hold these views deny the relevance of state boundaries – as does traditional Islam. Rather, the world constitutes 'the home of all the masses of people under the law of God' (as Khomeini put it). Through the Islamic revolution, humanity will be liberated from domination by the superpowers; 'government of the meek will be established ... the way will be opened for the world government' of the Twelfth Imam (Dawisha 1983: ch. 2).

A very different version of radical internationalism has been proposed by the South African Farid Esack in his *Qur'an, Liberation and Pluralism: an Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression* (2006). Esack argues in favour of inter-faith universalism, based upon a common religious endeavour on the part of all oppressed peoples. He redefines 'Muslim' to include 'all who uphold justice and compassion' (Bennett 2005: 66, 229). He makes 'the option for solidarity with the poor and oppressed' the touchstone of true religion (Esack 2006: 202). The Prophet himself (according to the Indonesian Muhammad Natsir) was 'a revolutionary leader' who aimed at 'the abolition of every form of *exploitation of man by man* and the *elimination of poverty and misery*' (Kurzman 1988: 59–66). This is similar to the way that some Christian 'liberation theologians' have interpreted the message of Jesus.

In recent decades we have heard a great deal more about Islamism than about moderate or liberal reformism. One has the impression that Muslim public opinion has shifted in its favour, partly because it is so vocal – and sometimes threatening – but also because of the manifest failures of secular regimes. In response, even secular governments have taken steps to extend the scope of the Shari'a, and sometimes to connive in the oppression of religious minorities, for example in Egypt and Pakistan. Supposedly secular Turkey has had a mildly Islamist government since 2000. Islamism has made massive inroads in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Reformist intellectuals, on the other hand, have been threatened, sometimes killed; many have lost their jobs or 'been put on trial and imprisoned, often on trumped-up charges' (Kamrava 2006: 23). Despite this, there is, as we have seen, a great deal of intellectual activity on the reformist wing, and more original

thinking than among Islamists. The reformists' problem is that they lack institutional support. One example of something like a reformist mass movement are the schools set up by the Turkish Sufi thinker Fethullah Gulen in Turkey and central Asia (Kamrava 2006: 23, 105ff.); however, a court case was brought against him and he now lives in the United States (*Time*, 26 April 2010, pp. 34–9). Reformists may find it easiest to communicate and express their opinions over the internet (see Kamrava 2006: 21). And yet recent events belie this. In several parts of the Muslim-majority world, where young people are able to express themselves, they are clamouring for freedom of speech, free elections and government under the law. Challenges to unaccountable quasi-hereditary governments have been made in the name of values which come mostly from the West. This is clear in the revolutions now going on in North Africa and the Middle East. There is nothing un-Islamic about this. Even many of those who want to have the Shari'a implemented by government think that this should be achieved by majority vote in a freely elected assembly. Does extreme Islamism, then, owe its power to the disabling of other forms of dissent by authoritarian regimes?

The political thought of Muslims has been significantly changed by encounter with the West. A new chapter in the history of Islamic political thought has begun.

## NOTES

1. Salem Azzam (ed.), *Islam and Contemporary Society* (London: Longman, 1982), p. 260; Bruno Etienne, *L'Islamisme radical* (Paris: Hachette, 1987), pp. 355, 358. See also al-Qaradawi in Feldman (2007: 112).
2. Azzam, p. 260; Etienne, p. 359. On Islam and democracy see Gudrun Kraemer, 'Islamist Notions of Democracy', in Beinun and Stork (eds) (1997: 71–82); Fazlur Rahman, 'The Principle of Shura and the Role of the Umma in Islam', *American Journal of Islamic Studies* 1 (1984), pp. 1–9; Enayat (1982: 129–38); Gardet (1981: 331–43).
3. On him see Kerr (1966: 159–85); E. Rosenthal (1965: 66–84); Enayat (1982: 69–83); A. Hourani (1983: 222–44); Gardet (1981: 350–5); *EI* 8: 446–7.
4. Gardet (1981: 353–5); Kerr (1966: 165); Lewis (1968: 159).
5. In Gardet (1981: 353). Compare the views expressed by the Turkish National Assembly (1922), Kerr (1966: 181–2).
6. In Gardet (1981: 352); a similar approach was taken by some early Christian thinkers to pagan philosophy ('Whatever things were rightly said among all men, are the property of us Christians': Justin Martyr, second century, in Etienne Gilson, *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1955), p. 13).
7. Feldman makes the point that 'The call for an Islamic state is ... first and foremost a call for ... a legal state that would be justified by law and govern through it' (2008: 9).
8. See Rashid Rida in Gardet (1981: 128–31), Enayat (1982: 136); and the Muslim Brethren in *EI* 3: 1070b.
9. J. S. Mill, *Representative Government* (first published 1851, ch. 7); T. S. Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (London: Faber & Faber, 1939).