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ISLAM AND SECULARIZATION

The improper uses of *laïcité* in contemporary France do not relieve us from the need to confront the underlying question of the relationship among dogma, religious history, and secularization. That there is a specifically Christian element in the history of the construction of the state and of secularization in the West is obvious. The question is to determine whether this model is universally valid, that is, whether, lacking the experience of the institutions that the West has known, real secularization is possible; the second problem is to determine whether other forms of attaining secularization have been experienced in Islam; finally, we have to investigate whether, even in the absence of any real internal process of secularization, it is possible to borrow forms developed elsewhere or whether secularization requires a reformation of Islam.

Is *Laïcité* Christian?

What is specific to Islam, and what is applicable to any religion, at least the major Western monotheistic religions? Many criticisms

directed toward Islam are, in fact, in no way particular to it. There are no *laïc* religions, at least not among major revealed monotheistic religions. By definition, a revealed monotheistic religion claims to speak the truth, to have something to say about all human actions and conduct. As Cardinal Ratzinger always maintained when he was head of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, there is in fact *one* truth.[1] Every believer thinks that God's law is superior to human law and that a parliamentary majority cannot decide what is true: the Catholic Church has never accepted legislation authorizing abortion. *Laïcité* in this sense does not have to do with shared values but, as I have noted, with the acceptance of shared rules of the game, which is not the same thing. Here, it means that the church has rejected violent or illegal forms of opposition to legislation that it nonetheless considers unacceptable. However, even though *laïcité* is now politically accepted, many Christian and Jewish religious dignitaries have alluded to its limits: Archbishop Lustiger, Pastor de Clermont, and Chief Rabbi Josef Sitruk have all protested against the law "on *laïcité*" (the prohibition on students wearing the veil in school) and have not hidden their discomfort at the strengthening of measures excluding religious signs from the public square.[2] The idea that religion cannot be confined to the private sphere is shared by all major religions.

Nevertheless, when the aim is to point to the specific nature of Islam, the emphasis is placed on the fact that Christianity has accepted the principle of *laïcité* (because, as Jesus says in the Gospel, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" [Matthew 22:21]). But this is to commit the methodological error that has probably most polluted the debate: to move constantly from the theological level to the level of political or even religious practice. When a theologian or a pope refers to Matthew in blessing *laïcité*, there is nothing more Catholic, but the existence of the verse has never guaranteed either secular practice or a theology of *laïcité*. The *Syllabus* written by Pope Pius IX in 1864 expresses a total rejection of *laïcité* as

we understand it today (proposition 55 identified by the pope as an erroneous statement: "The Church should be separated from the State and the State from the Church"). When the church finally accepted the secular republic, this was not because a commission of theologians had spent years rereading the Gospels but because the Vatican drew the political lessons from the inescapable advent of the republic and adapted to it (commissions serve only to provide philosophical arguments to justify decisions already made for political reasons). Monsignor Lavigerie's toast to the republic in Algiers in 1890, which signaled the Vatican's acceptance of the republic, was not the work of a theologian but the act of a true politician. The fact that thereafter, with the establishment of Christian Democracy, the majority of the Catholic electorate and clergy entered into the realm of *laïcité* is a good thing that has more to do with social developments and the political practice of believers than with the reference to Matthew. The acceptance of *laïcité* finally had consequences for the political participation of Catholics (Christian Democracy), the presence of the church in the world (Catholic movements such as the Jeunesse Ouvrière chrétienne [Young Christian Workers]), and ecclesiology (worker priests, the nature of the priesthood, the role of the laity), as well as for theology (liberation theology, humanism, and so on). Vatican II was a consequence of the changes brought about by secularization and *laïcité* and embodied an attempt to respond in a positive, coherent, and global way, even if that induced a conservative reaction that in any event, apart from the reactionary supporters of Monsignor Lefebvre, could not undo the past but merely look at it with different eyes. The connection between internal changes in the church and secularization was made after the fact: theological reform is not a condition for the acceptance of *laïcité*. As for secularization, it is happening in any event, even if it may often be deplored.

But this reasoning is not enough to put Islam and Christianity in the same boat; it simply shows that it was not the church that

fostered *laïcité* but that the resistance it offered was based on political reasons, in a conflict over power legitimated by theological references. The question is to determine whether the conflict between the church and the modern world could have been resolved following a defeat of Catholic thought in open warfare or whether Christianity did not contain the premises of a theology accepting a dual register: the two kingdoms, earthly and heavenly. Which would amount to saying that political pressure returned the church to the truth of a Gospel message that it had forgotten in its fascination, if not with the exercise of secular power itself, at least with control over it. Did Christianity, despite itself and despite the church, not help to establish the domain of secularization and *laïcité* that we know today?

Marcel Gauchet defines Christianity as the "religion of the exit from religion,"[3] which means not that the church accepted or even supported the secularization of society but that the theological matrix of Christianity allowed for secularization by postulating a center of transcendent power, the state, on the basis of which society could be thought of in nonreligious terms. Secularization does not mean the end of transcendence but the establishment of a nontheological transcendence, in a sense of a secularized religion. It was indeed by going through the sanctification of the state (because it was sanctioned by God) that a certain form of Christianity was able to help legitimate the autonomy of the political sphere. It was Christian writers who theorized the separation of church and state in the Middle Ages, as well as the autonomy of the political and its possible right to control the religious sphere. When William of Ockham (ca. 1285–1349) justified the control of the state over the church, he did so not as a member of the laity (he was a monk) but because he saw in the sovereign an expression of divine will. Law is first of all an expression of will: positive law, the law of the state, does not need to reflect any supposed natural morality; it is foundational, just as the divine will is creative. Hence it was not just the theory of the two kingdoms but the patterning of the

earthly kingdom on the heavenly kingdom that made it, in turn, possible to marginalize the religious sphere, because what was secularized was in fact the divine itself. The political space of the West was born out of a Christian religious matrix, the new autonomy of which was theorized against the church as an institution, but by thinkers and agents who were themselves Christians, such as the jurists who patiently defined a state of laws starting from the patrimonial state of the actual sovereign while also recovering the tradition of Roman law. The debate between the two orders arose within the realm of Christian thought. In short, while *laïcité* bars the state from getting involved in dogma, we nonetheless have to raise the question of the religious origins of *laïcité*, origins that in fact frequently reappear. We can push the argument further: the sanctification of the state enabled it to cast the church outside the political realm. The sacred status of the state and its legal order, in this view, are the transposition in the temporal realm of a transcendence defined by religion. The consequence is that there is no true *laïcité* without a strong state: the political domain is at the heart of the process of secularization.

It can thus be said both that *laïcité* was constructed against the Catholic Church (about which historically there is no doubt) and that Christianity made *laïcité* possible. In this sense, we can assert that Protestantism is more modern because, by rejecting the concept of an institutionalized church, it removed the political obstacle to secularization.

Even if we accept the Christian origins of the modern state (and for countries in the Roman law tradition, this seems established fact), that raises several questions: Is passage through the modern transcendent state a necessary condition for the establishment of an autonomous order of the political? Does the fact that a given model arose in a precise religious and historical context make it thereby specific and not exportable to other cultural realms? How does the connection between the order of the religious and the order of the political operate?

Is Muslim Dogma an Obstacle to *Laïcité*?

Defining Islam, or any religion, as a precise body of dogmas presupposes a choice both of texts and of interpretations. Any critic of Koranic theology sets himself up as a theologian and thereby enters into the field of his own critique. I will not enter this theological debate, except to make two remarks. First, to define Islam as a body of closed norms and Muslims as making up a community excluding membership in any other group is precisely to adopt the fundamentalists' definition of Islam. This is a reference to an imaginary Islam, not to the real Muslim world, and the fundamentalists are made into authentic representatives of Islam, even if this means speaking with benevolent condescension about the poor liberals who cannot make themselves heard. This is also the source of the exasperation with modern fundamentalists, such as Tariq Ramadan, accused of dual language precisely because they translate this fundamentalism into modern discourse. But at the same time, since talk about dogma is part of the debate, we have to take it into account.

There are, broadly speaking, two opposing schools in contemporary polemics about Muslim dogma. First, there are those who think that Islamic dogma is fundamentally an obstacle to secularization, as it is to the establishment of *laïcité*. The arguments are familiar and circle around three points:

1. In Islam, there is no separation between religion and the state (*din wa dawlat*).
2. Sharia is incompatible with human rights (particularly women's rights) and with democracy (because the law of God is imposed on man).
3. The believer can identify with only the community of believers (*umma*) and hence has no knowledge of the political society of citizens (except to think of the other—that is, the non-Muslim—as a *dhimmi*, or protégé).[4]

Two conclusions are possible: either a theological reformation is necessary, or Islam is not reformable and hence Muslims are definitively barred from modernity as Muslims. This second view is supported by most Islamic fundamentalist movements, which in fact believe, on the one hand, that Islam is a totalizing and inclusive system and, on the other, that it is inviolable, not only with regard to dogma and sharia (that is, general principles) but also in the *fiqh* (concrete application of sharia).

In both cases, we are dealing with what I would call the essentialist position, consisting of seeing in Islam a fixed and timeless system of thought. Critics of Islam and Muslim fundamentalists are mirrors of each other, and each corroborates the other in the view of Islam that they share, merely with the signs reversed. This position is, of course, supported by the paradigm of revelation in Islam: it took place following a noteworthy unity of time (twenty-three years), of place (Mecca and Medina), and of agent (the Prophet Muhammad), unknown to the two other Abrahamic religions.

Countering this approach are reformist, liberal, or simply moderate Muslim thinkers and theologians, who rely on the abundant theological and philosophical debates in Islam at the time of the Umayyad (661–750) and Abbasid (750–1258) dynasties—for example, the rationalist Mutazilite school (whereas, by definition, fundamentalists think of this period as the one when Islam was corrupted by Greek philosophy). These thinkers are, of course, spread over a wide range of opinions, ranging from conservative moderates, theologically very orthodox but very flexible with regard to the possible consequences of dogma in political, social, and cultural fields, to real reformers, who think that the theological question must be reexamined.

Orthodox liberals use the classic techniques of exegesis and jurisprudence (*tafsir* and *hadith* [interpretation of the text and quotations of the sayings and deeds of the Prophet]) and the tools developed by the major legal schools (reasoning by analogy, consensus of scholars, reference to the public welfare, objection to anything

that might create a *fitna* [dissension among Muslims], and so on). They have a body of references much larger than that of the fundamentalists, who stick strictly to the corpus of the Koran and the Sunna (*hadith*), but they do not call into question the validity of that corpus. From the same texts, they derive different conclusions, obviously much more open than those of the fundamentalists. They have, for example, challenged the indiscriminate call for jihad, or for revolt against the established government, even if that government is neither Islamic nor even Muslim. They do not necessarily adhere to so-called Western values, but they do not systematically pose the question of the Islamic character of those values. In a word, everything that is not explicitly against Islam is acceptable. Renunciation of the idea that there is a specifically Islamic political form is taken for granted.[5]

This school is, of course, not very dynamic (although some writers, such as the Syrian Sheik Bouti, have developed original thinking on bioethics in the light of Islam). It involves passively absorbing an imposed modernity by declaring it not contrary to Islam but not giving it an Islamic character or attributing value to it. This school goes along with secularization, ratifies *laïcité*, but it does not promote a new religious approach. In this category are found all the court clerics, muftis of the republic, and imams of the great official mosques, from Turkey to Morocco, from Paris to Cairo.

Another approach consists of relying on a certain form of casuistry that enables the development of a de facto compromise while preserving principles: This is the approach, for example, of the Conseil Européen de la Fatwa (European Council of the Fatwa), coming, like the Union des organisations islamiques de France, from Muslim Brotherhood roots, based in London, which defends the concept of a "*fiqh* of the minority"—that is, a jurisprudence specific to Muslims living as a minority that would authorize exemptions from a certain number of rules (for example, allowing a bank loan for the purchase of a house). Another form of this de facto but not de jure secularization is the position of Tariq Rama-

dan on the moratorium affecting corporal punishment: the norm is not abolished, but it is not practiced. In neither case is it a matter of reformism but rather a practical adaptation that amounts to accepting de facto secularization, hence dissociating religion, society, and politics. An approach of this kind maintains orthodoxy while enabling the believer to live in a society governed by *laïcité*. This is a practical response that dissociates the ideal from the real. But, more deeply, it clearly signals a renunciation of establishing the ideal in the real, even though one may dream of the day when Islam will appear as the solution for the majority of the people. We have survived other varieties of millenarianism.

Reformism in Theology

In parallel with these empirical improvisations, there has appeared a new and truly reformist school, which refuses to enter into the casuistry of the ulema, moderate or fundamentalist. These new theologians (in Iran, they speak of *kalam-i no*, or new theology) have often broken with the traditional ulema and rarely come from madrasas (many of them have had a secular and often a scientific education). The common point among reformists is the idea that the message of the Koran must be separated from its concrete embodiment in a given history and place. For them, jurisprudence (*fiqh*) was constructed on patriarchal cultures and gave shape to a sharia that had at the outset been much more open and various. Islam has to be separated from culture (the Iranians have no hesitation in saying "de-Arabized") and not adapted to a new one. This is the position of new theologians such as Arkun, Soruch, Kadivar, Abu Fadl, and Abu Zayd.[6] Sharia is presented as the matrix of a meaning that the traditional ulema later fossilized into rigid law (*fiqh*). That range of meaning must therefore be reopened, and we must be wary both of particular cultures and of being captured by the established authorities. Government power

is not seen as a defender of Islam but, on the contrary, as the origin of its fossilization, because it instrumentalized Islam to perpetuate the established order: democratization thus goes hand in hand with theological openness. Reformism assumes the separation of the political from the religious, less to save politics from religion (as in France) than to save religion from politics and restore freedom to the theologian and the simple believer alike. *Laïcité* is in this view neither the conclusion of a theological argument nor an affirmation of the supremacy in law of secular authority but a methodological principle to improve ways of rethinking religion. Islam has to be disentangled from politics.

The Iranian Abdul Karim Soruch therefore logically defends the need for what he calls the "contraction of religion" (*qabz-e din*), which is in fact a withdrawal of religion from the political sphere but also from traditional society, where it serves primarily to justify social conservatism. The state must be separated from religion: this is indeed a politically *laïque* position. But in this instance *laïcité* precedes secularism. Soruch, like many American Protestants, defends the separation of church and state but wants civil society to remain a religious society. He therefore is reluctant to use the term "secularization": he thinks religion can still play a role in society, which he defines as "religious civil society" (*jame'e-ye madani-ye dini*), an interesting example of *laïcité* without secularization, recalling the program of the American Puritans. Religion here is on the side of resistance to the institutionalization of power: it is not the state that liberates the citizen from religion, as in the French *laïque* tradition, but religion that liberates the citizen from the omnipotence of the state.[7] But how is it then possible to reconcile religious civil society and democracy, since the believer relies on a divine norm? We have to assume that a citizen will act as a believing person, but inwardly, with no coercion emanating either from the state or from a clergy but also without imposing on others what he considers to be the divine norm: the absolute character of faith goes hand in hand with the pluralism of opinions, which means

that if a majority of citizens stop conducting themselves as believers, then society has been definitively secularized, because there is no authority to impose faith on the citizen.

This view may be compared with the Calvinist conception of the Puritans, in which the polity (the city-state of Geneva or Boston) is in fact managed by the citizens as a body, with no specifically religious institution seizing control of the state. This lack of institutionalization means that, when the process of the decline not of faith but of the millenarian illusion gets under way, we find ourselves in fact in a secularized democratic world (where some laws, such as the prohibition of adultery, may linger on). Soruch very logically advocates the abolition of the clerical safeguards contained in the constitution of Islamic Iran (the concept of *vilayat-i faqih* [regency of the doctor of the law], which defines the position of the Guide of the Revolution, as well as the Council of Guardians, charged with verifying the Islamic character of laws and electoral candidates, which amounts to censoring the popular will). This is also, interestingly enough, the perspective adopted by the elements grouped together as the Christian Right in the United States, which, however dogmatic it may be, sees elections as the sole source of political legitimacy. The fact that this religious view, designating a liberal in Iran and a conservative in the United States, is the antithesis of French philosophical *laïcité* is beyond question, and it shows that that philosophy holds no monopoly on the establishment of a democratic arena.

Other reformers have opened different paths, since by definition the assertion of the freedom to conduct theological criticism goes hand in hand with pluralism. I will not consider here the diverse analyses of these writers, who, according to Rachid Benzine,

show that beneath religious discourse there often lie hidden questions and strategies that have to do with culture, anthropology, and political interests. All these thinkers advocate an end to the ideological and practical use of the sacred texts. The Koran has no

authority to answer all contemporary questions. It is neither a legal code nor a treatise on political science. The questions of democracy, *laïcité*, human rights, equality between men and women, must be approached independently of the text of the Koran.[8]

This amounts to making the Prophet a man of his time (which is, in fact, perfectly consonant with the strict monotheism of Islam, for which only God is absolute), rejecting the dogma of the uncreated Koran (which was, in any event, imposed only belatedly by the most rigorous schools like the Hanbali) and therefore using the conceptual tools of modern criticism (linguistics, history, sociology, comparative studies, and so on). It also amounts to turning to reason and personal interpretation, subject to criticism by one's peers.

In every example of this reformism, the legal norm is transformed into an ethical value and can no longer be subject to rigid codification or implemented by the state. The question of the compatibility of sharia with modern law is no longer pertinent, because sharia is no longer defined as a legal code (in fact, the very concept of *fiqh* disappears). Value wins out over the norm, meaning over the word, the spirit over the letter.

This program is very clear, and it is obvious that an Islam of this kind is not only compatible with *laïcité* and secularization but is working toward the latter and justifies the former.

For obvious reasons, I will not consider the question of the acceptability of this reading of Islam. A reformist and liberal Islam exists from the very moment that qualified Muslims set it out in their writings. They are, of course, challenged by other theologians, intellectuals, or activists, but it is not up to Islamologists of court, academy, or cocktail party to distribute good and bad marks from the outside. We simply register the fact that there can be a liberal Muslim theology.

Nevertheless, the problems posed by theological reformism are of two orders: What is its public? Is it a necessary condition for Islam to turn out to be compatible with *laïcité* and democracy?

Presented in those terms, the argument amounts to betting everything on the victory of the liberals over the fundamentalists or else to considering that the liberals have been structurally defeated because they have no audience. It is clear, for reasons I have detailed in *Globalized Islam*, that the forms of religiosity that drive present-day religious revivalism, in all religions, are far from being liberal.[9] The corollary is thus that a forceful policy to foster *laïcité* would lead to promoting this reformist Islam to the detriment of other forms of the religion (fundamentalist, conservative, traditionalist). Once again, the unspoken thought of *laïcité* is indeed interventionism in theology.

But the major problem with this approach is that it gives a privileged place to dogma, without explaining in what way the dogma of a religion is relevant to its relation to the political world and without asking how it operates to produce concrete conduct. The relations among fundamentalism, *laïcité*, and secularization are much more complex (for example, the much-discussed *ijtihad* [right of interpretation] is not in itself a sign of liberalism, since both Saudi Wahhabis and Iranian ayatollahs recognize it, if under supervision). Finally, to undertake a policy of promoting reformist thinkers in the current context, when Muslim identity is tinged with a strongly anti-imperialist hue, would often amount to giving them the kiss of death. It is considered good form in the West to decorate, appoint, and value "good" Muslims, even though it is not clear whether the purpose is to add to their prestige in Muslim countries or, on the contrary, to emphasize their isolation the better to stigmatize the fanaticism and obscurantism of Muslim societies.

A theological reformation makes sense only if it turns on cultural, social, and political issues perceived by those involved. Not all of Martin Luther's ideas were very new, but his stroke of genius was to turn them into a manifesto (ninety-five clear and distinct theses) posted in public, which could circulate because of printing technology and whose political and social implications were immediately

understood. In this sense, Luther is closer to Khomeini than to John XXIII. The Islamists have better understood the link between religion and politics than the reformers. Everything suggests that the reformers will have a retroactive influence; that is, they will provide a language in which to think about changes that will have taken place for other reasons.

We therefore also have to look for the roots of secularization in the underlying trends of Muslim societies. The approach of historians and anthropologists consists of investigating the way in which Muslim societies have concretely posed the question of the religious environment in which they exist.

De Facto Forms of *Laïcité*:
History and Societies of the Muslim World

Historians and anthropologists point out that Islam has, in fact, experienced secularization, from both the political and the sociological point of view. The dogma is rich and complex enough to be pulled in different directions; it is also a skillful construction, often very political (largely influenced by history and the choices of monarchs), the diversified development of which opened many paths and fostered debate among enough divergent schools for it to be possible to find what is appropriate. All authorities in Islam were secular in the sense that they were not determined by religious criteria. Except for the period of the Prophet, there was never a theocracy. Sultans, emirs, generals, and presidents took power (and continue to take it) following perfectly temporal processes (force, dynastic succession, coup d'état, or even election) and were content with negotiating their legitimacy with a body of more or less domesticated ulema, to which they conceded control over personal status, reserving positive state law (*qanun*, a Greek word, clearly indicating that the borrowing is acknowledged). The ulema, moreover, developed a whole theory of respect for established au-

thority (including non-Muslim authority), both to guarantee the survival of Muslim society and to avoid *fitna*—that is, the division of the community.[10] A frequently repeated commonplace according to which Islam prohibits Muslims from remaining under a non-Muslim government is false: once again, this depends on the interpreters. It is not an accident that "hard" interpretations, like that of Ibn Taymiyya, are now fashionable in radical Islamic circles, but other equally authorized interpretations exist—for example, in the thought of Tariq Ramadan, which, whatever hesitations it may provoke, is in fact a theory of the legitimacy and practice of a minority Islam. The fact that, for many ulema, this authorization is an expedient or that, for Tariq Ramadan, the ideal would be reached on the day when non-Muslims converted is not a difficulty: the eschatological hope for the triumph of the true religion is inherent in monotheism, Christian or Muslim. The important thing is the definition of a rule of the game respected by everyone in the temporal realm. Everyone is free to dream of revolution, the abolition of capitalism, the coming of the Mahdi or of Christ on earth. Whether you live as an owner of the world or merely as a tenant, the important thing is to respect the terms of the lease.

This political secularity also finds an echo in the strength of nonreligious social structures in Muslim societies. Traditional societies, whatever the validity of the term, are organized according to anthropological rationales (tribalism [*asabiyya*], that is, any form of group solidarity based on consanguinity and marriage connections), codes of behavior, and customary laws in which Islam plays a small role. In southern Egypt, cradle of the radical Gama Islamiya, the *thar*, or traditional vendetta, claims many more victims than does religious violence and is practiced identically among Coptic Christians and Muslims; the appeal to sharia has never managed to do away with it. The Taliban in Afghanistan never managed to replace the tribal code of the Pashtun tribes from which they came (*pashtunwali*) with sharia, whose values are very different (contrary to what is often said, it is not certain that the tribal code is

more favorable to women, because it bars their inheriting, requires that a childless widow marry her dead husband's brother, and uses women as a medium of exchange to end vendettas). The colonial powers, from French Morocco to British India, clearly saw and used the anti-Islamic possibilities of custom. Finally, Islam spread through very varied geographical areas, which implies a very wide diversification of Muslim societies (including variations in the status of women); it is possible to speak of varieties of cultural Islam, which demonstrates its great capacity to adapt to different cultures and political systems but also shows that Islam in itself is never the explanation for a social reality.[11]

Full application of a sharia caught between customary law and positive law was never anything but an ideal, or even a political slogan, which incidentally explains why the various fundamentalist groups have been primarily opposition movements. But the way in which sharia is produced, even if its application is in fact limited, also shows that it tends precisely to emancipate itself from political authorities: produced by a body of specialists, following rules that vary from one school to another but that are all based on casuistry, deduction, analogy, and the like, by definition it never takes into consideration the will of the sovereign. By postulating the existence of an autonomous legal space, sharia paradoxically strengthens the autonomy of the political sphere. The tradition of the ulema comes closer to defining a form of civil society than of theocracy, because it escapes from central state control, as long as it does not interfere with the state's prerogatives.

As Olivier Carré points out, if Islam is also concerned with the temporal world, this is because it is affected by that world: the sovereign intervenes much more in religion than the converse; ulema are easily domesticated, scholarship corrected, and censorship applied.[12] The relationship goes in both directions, as quietist Iranian religious figures understood when they asked for a separation of state and clergy: the absence of a distinction between state and religion secularizes religion more than it makes politics religious.

Until the contemporary period, secularization in Muslim countries had taken place routinely, with no tension between secular and religious authorities (except in Iran in the twentieth century, but precisely because Iran has a form of church that does not exist in the Sunni world). In western Europe, conversely, the very nature of power was shaped by that tension. In this sense, Islam never had a theocratic ideal, neither in terms of institutions (the clergy before Khomeini never demanded power) nor even in terms of law: the possible institution of sharia as state law does not in itself define an Islamic state, as all advocates of political Islam have said, from Saïd Qutb to Khomeini.

De facto secularization has also affected Muslim populations, but there has been a refusal to apply to Islam the basic principles of the sociology of religion, which is concerned with the concrete conduct of the believer. This sociology arose from the study of the Christian populations of Europe, and it showed how the changes in the conduct of believers (among other things, the phenomena of de-Christianization) had nothing to do with changes in dogma: the reasons religious observance declined in Beauce but remained constant in Rouergue had nothing to do with theological debate. The same thing is true of Islam: there is an entire realm and process of secularization that has nothing to do with changes in dogma. Of course, the fascinating and complex question remains as to the relationship between theological debate and the sociology of social actors—for example, between the capitalist ethic and Protestantism (Max Weber), between family structure and predestination (Emmanuel Todd).[13] But one thing is certain: there is never any causality (Protestantism creating capitalism, or capitalism giving rise to the Reformation).[14]

Once again, reference to the diversity and secularization of real Muslim societies does not completely resolve the problem, even if it shows that there is a de facto compatibility among Islam, secularization, and *laïcité*. For this diversity and this history have been challenged by political Islamism and the modern forms

of fundamentalism. Islamism, which turns Islam into a political ideology, contests the fact that there was ever a truly Islamic state and takes up a modern analysis of the state to try once again to theorize the absence of separation between the religious and the political on the basis of an ideological agent. We are brought back to the question of the state.

Laïcité: Offspring of the Divorce of Church and State

Laïcité in the West was built, above all, on a confrontation between the emperor and the pope, the king and Rome, the republic and the church—that is, between two institutions. The American counter-example is not really to the contrary: it was against the established status of the Church of England they had fled that the Founding Fathers decreed the separation of church and state, which in no way meant a separation of religion from politics (because of the importance of civil religion). Hence the American form of separation was put into place in response to a European complex of problems.

The question of *laïcité* in the Western world is not so much one of the relationship between the sacred and the profane, because in the end both fields lay claim to the same sense of the sacred. *Laïcité à la française* was unable to find a footing in the Muslim world for lack of the two agents that engendered it: a sanctified state and an ecclesiastic institution in competition not for temporal power but for the hierarchical organization of the temporal world according to the terms of a sacred space. This explains why when Mustafa Kemal Atatürk imported the Jacobin state into Turkey, along with all its apparatus of legitimacy (nationalism, school, myth of the unitary nation), he had no need to exclude the clergy, because they did not constitute another center of legitimacy: he merely turned them into state employees.

Moreover, the institution and sanctification of the Western state are, as I have discussed, inseparable from the state's assumption

of a religious matrix in order to establish itself. Law is founded on the will: of God, of the sovereign, of the political body. Particular or general, the will is sacred. In this case, the state is the bearer of values: republican values are positive. The combat between church and state is stronger (even when both share the same faith) the more they rely on the same image of legitimacy, an identical space for the construction of society. At bottom, there is no *laïcité* without a strong state. As I have mentioned, it was in fact the sanctification of the state that made possible the emergence of a secular space. Religion is here the condition for secularism, by its passage through the realm of politics.

In Sunni Islam, there is neither church nor sanctification of the state. Power is contractual, not because of the will of the people but because it is contingent: the sultan or the emir takes power by force and keeps it by a more or less explicit contract with the ulema (as long as he defends Islam abroad and advocates sharia domestically, he is legitimate); victory or defeat is the sign of only divine approval or divine indifference. Power is never transcendent or sacred. Neither is it the source of *the* law. The state in Islam has always been weak, less for the reasons given by Montesquieu (despotism of a single man) than, on the contrary, because civil society enjoyed resilience made stronger by two phenomena: *asabiyya* and sharia. Strong power does not mean a strong state.

But if the state and *laïcité* are thus closely associated, Islam would have to go through the experience of the modern strong state, and not the despot. Democracy would be possible only after the establishment of a modern state. This is why there is constant discussion of the Turkish model. Islam is said to have missed history's train, and, for many, only a harsh pedagogy can enable it to catch up on all the stages, which justifies both certain forms of colonialism (protectorate, for example) and support of secular authoritarian regimes (President Ben Ali in Tunisia) and military interventions leading to more or less lengthy periods of supervision (Iraq after the 2003 American intervention).[15]

The discussion then shifts from secularization to the question of the state, which is not at all surprising, since we have seen the extent to which, in the European and especially the French tradition, any reflection about democracy and *laïcité* is inseparable from the question of the state. Does the fact that a paradigm is the product of a particular history mean that it does not have universal value? Or do the historical conditions that produced it have to be repeated (speeded up and hence giving rise to violence and misunderstanding) for it to be adopted?

The Political Imagination of Islam:
Is There a Muslim Political Culture?

Far from tracing a continuity over fourteen centuries of history, Islam is very flexible, establishes no *ex ante* model, and adapts to different political systems. The systematic reference to a Muslim political culture, however, suggests that there is an invariant, imaginary configuration of power that structures the relationship of the Muslim with the political realm and is now resurfacing in the difficulty of integrating the model of the modern state and democracy.

How can we think of the return of the religious otherwise than as a form of archaism? Archaism presumes the persistence of a way of thinking, momentarily masked by modernity but returning like a founding repressed element, like the truth of an identity in search of itself. The attempt is always made to define in these terms a religious invariant, dogma, mentality, or culture that would explain the different answers each society provides to the questions of social order, political forms, economic practices, the relationship to space, and the definition of the self.

The underlying problem remains the same: How does a religion operate in the social and political realms? How does it determine the conduct of believers? One can, of course, reason in terms of mentality: the believer has internalized the norm according to

which there is no difference between state and religion; hence he cannot manage to adapt to *laïcité*. But why would the believer have internalized that norm and not another? What is the relationship between a norm and a practice? Did the Christian prohibition of adultery diminish the number of times it was committed in the Christian world? Certainly not, even though it helped to create a market of guilt, which was handled, moreover, with a great variety of responses and devices. The norm is thus not innocent, but it never operates directly.

A religious norm functions as a social or political norm only because it is adopted, reformulated, and expressed by mechanisms that all presuppose the intervention of other authorities (and other systems of norms): law and the political order but also forms of religiosity that vary over time and space. Dogma exists only through rereading and implementation—that is, in a form of religiosity. In this book, I have developed my view that the principal agent in the establishment of what is known as *laïcité* was the political order, not dogma. *Laïcité* is established by political means, and that holds for Islam, whereas secularization is instituted by changes in the believer's forms of religiosity.

It is therefore very important to see how religious conceptions are expressed with respect to integration into the world, social program, and relationships to society and territory. What counts for us is not the content of dogma in itself but its formulation in relation to the believer's integration into the world. This integration is not abstract. Even if the believer considers himself the guardian of a faith and a vision of salvation that is valid in every time and place, it is obvious that he expresses it in a particular context. It is impossible to understand anything, for example, of theological disputes at particular moments in history (say, the fifth and sixteenth centuries for Christianity) if they are considered to be timeless.

It is possible, of course, to speak of a political imagined world of Islam—that is, of recurring theories of power among ulema and thinkers—but what is striking is that they are never put into

operation. They have never helped define a type of political system, except when they left the juridical realm to move into that of ideology (Khomeini), and this is a modern phenomenon. What dogma defines is not a political system but a political imaginative vision, which of course depends on interpretation. The dominant political vision today, among Islamists as well as neofundamentalists, is that of the time of the Prophet. But this political vision is not a transmission of the past (why would it have taken Muslims fourteen centuries to notice that only the Prophet's model of the polity is legitimate?). Bringing up to date the originating past is, as so often, an attempt to appropriate a form of modernity.

Take the example of the constant confusion of Islamists with neofundamentalists.[16] For the former, re-Islamization will come through the state; for the latter, through personal piety. They all nevertheless share the same political vision: the idea that the ideal Muslim society is the one that existed at the time of the Prophet. But this paradigm never operates directly. Many ulema and more modern writers have spent pages defining the conditions required to become a caliph, but no one has ever seriously gone in search of that caliph: the theme has now been taken up by political sects (like Hizb-ut-Tahrir, a semiclandestine party now established in London that recruits among young Muslims of the second generation), following a rationale that no longer has anything to do with traditional Islamic law (the caliphate of Hizb-ut-Tahrir is embodied in fact by the party itself, not by an individual: this conception of the party as a political actor in itself is a legacy of Marxism).[17]

If one may, in fact, establish a list of what would make up the foundation of Islamic political vision (the caliphate, the absence of separation of religion and politics), it can be seen that these paradigms operate through the intermediary of a legal or an ideological elaboration. A religious dogma never has a direct effect in politics. It operates only if it is adopted, expressed, and redefined by a political ideology, a legal elaboration, or a mechanism of power, all of which depend on a precise political situation (we shall see how

the Islamic state is, in fact, an ideological elaboration specific to the twentieth century).

But some writers, such as Samuel Huntington (and dominant opinion), envisage a direct link between dogma and political system, a link supposedly materialized by a culture: Muslim or Arab-Muslim culture. In short, even if it is thought that Muslim societies are subject to a process of secularization, Islam nevertheless marks their political culture and indeed the cast of mind of individual agents, just as secularized Europe remains deeply Christian. The holistic vision of Islam is thus thought to survive in the political ideologies of the Middle East (with pan-Arabism merely the secularization of pan-Islamism), and the difficulty of thinking about autonomous political institutions and of conceiving of the citizen independently of his clan ties or his affective fusion with the community are seen as the sign of the persistence of an Arab-Muslim culture stubbornly resistant to the establishment of the modern state.

From the outset, I have reiterated the same question: What allows us to say that dogma determines the conduct of believers? For fundamentalists and born-again Christians, the answer seems obvious: the believer himself decides to put forward the prescriptions of dogma. For a Muslim identified sociologically, one who does not feel the need to set forth his faith explicitly, we turn to the concept of culture, which is supposed, in addition, to operate to explain why a society is determined by religion, although that religion is explicit nowhere in either law or institutions.

In short, culture is seen as the agent that enables religion to shape a society and also to shape a mentality. This is the underlying concept behind the notion of the "clash of civilizations": civilizations are in essence religious, even when they are secularized. One cannot escape from religion, and culture is the mediator between religion and society: it is what is left of religion when faith is lost. Secularization is therefore the persistence of the religious phenomenon without the sacred. This is consonant with analyses that consider French *laïcité* to be an inverted form of religious transcendence.

There are thus two scenarios that confine Islam to its insular-ity: secularized religion expressed in culture and fundamentalist religion expressed directly in the demand for theocracy. Even when one no longer believes, one remains a Muslim. The fear of communitarianism is more easily understood, because the Mus-lim sociologically defined thereby becomes by definition perme-able to any religious reactivation of the culture of religious ori-gin that he bears within: fundamentalism is thus always seen as an extension of the culture of origin. True *laïcité* would then require the renunciation of any referent for identity other than political citizenship.

The problem with the kind of analysis that claims to explain culture by means of religion is that the founding religious element can never be isolated as such: the so-called Arab-Muslim culture derives, in fact, more from the anthropology of Arab societies than from Islam in itself. It introduces a false continuity (from pan-Islamism to pan-Arabism) that leaves borrowings out of ac-count (for example, pan-Arabism is a form of ethnic nationalism, on the model of the pan-Germanism earlier developed in Europe; similarly, the Islamic state derives from a modern vision of the ideological state). In fact, Muslim culture is an imaginary con-struction made up of elements of dogma, historical paradigms, sociological characteristics, and ways of thinking, all unified un-der the name of culture. The term "culture" is redundant: Islamic or Muslim culture is presented as the invariant in every possible variety of Muslin society. You generally find in it only what you have put there in the first place. Besides, even if cultures have a religious basis (I will not discuss that point here), some paradigms (like the state or democracy) can very well become autonomous and be exported: the question, then, is whether a political model can be implanted in a new context, and there are no grounds for assuming incompatibility. But we still have to determine wheth-er the acquisition of this new model presupposes going through

the historical sequence that brought it into being. The context of deterritorialization (immigration, for example) has dissociated the political models used from their cultures of origin. The great mistake of the use of culture as a basis for social analysis, with respect to the religious question, is that it sees fundamentalism as the reactivation of the religious dimension of a traditional culture, whereas modern fundamentalists are, on the contrary, participants in a process of the loss of cultural identity. It is the return of the religious that calls into question the link between culture and religion, in a way that is perhaps more radical than the slow processes of secularization.

It is indeed the question of globalization that is at issue in every case: the universalization of legal and political models and/or the universalization of modes of religiosity relatively independent of the theological content of religions. I have referred to the debate about Protestantism and capitalism: we can see very clearly how a new work ethic was established in the framework of capitalism but also how it was exported not only to Catholics but to Muslims (for example, in the form of the Müsiad, a Turkish syndicate bringing together small enterprises strongly imbued with a work ethic).[18]

The question then becomes to determine whether these two forms of globalization come together, whether, contrary to the rather provincial view of French universalism, the development of new models of state and society (specifically civil society) and the development of individualistic and culturally unattached forms of fundamentalism do not go hand in hand. In a word, globalization may foster the development of religious fundamentalism while weakening the kind of state that made *laïcité* possible. And this is probably what is happening.

A subsidiary question is to find out whether this is desirable. But to answer otherwise than by pious *laïque* hopes, we have to examine the dynamic processes in operation.

The Parenthesis of the Islamic State
and the Establishment of a Space for *Laïcité*

The entire history of the Muslim world shows that power was, in fact, secular and never sanctified. And it is the re-Islamization in the twentieth century that has called into question the balance between politics and religion, by means of a rereading of Islam (Islamism, neofundamentalism) that obviously presents itself as a return to the sources but is in reality an ideological inflection of religion. When they insist on the need to return to the time of the Prophet, Islamists and neofundamentalists alike are the first to say that no political formation in the Muslim world ever corresponded to a true Islamic state. The question of the state is, indeed, a very modern question.

It was constituted on the basis of two models. The first is the adoption of a secular and authoritarian state apparatus of a European type, following the model of enlightened despotism in the nineteenth century (Muhammad Ali in Egypt), then with Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and Reza Shah in the twentieth, in the form of regimes of a socialist or fascist type (single party, charismatic leader, large role for the security services and the army), from Nasserism to the Algerian Front de libération nationale to Baathism. These models of authoritarian *laïcité* were never able to incorporate democracy, except in Turkey. The second model is the Islamic state, the product in fact of a transformation of Islam into a political ideology, largely under the influence of European political philosophies in which it is the state that shapes society.

In the case of authoritarian secular states, the popular demand for an Islamic state appears precisely as a protest and a quest for authenticity on the part of society, especially when these states have lost their anti-imperialist and nationalist legitimacy (Egypt after Nasser, Algeria after Boumediene). The rejection of *laïcité* is a rejection of the regime and the hope that any future regime will be under

the control of a law beyond that of men and will hence exclude corruption and personal power. This is not a matter of the protest of a traditional society but, on the contrary, the expression of a desire to reappropriate the state by a new generation arising out of state transformation: students, urban populations, technocrats.

I have already studied the aporia of the Islamic state.[19] Suffice it to say that its definition, by Abul Ala Maududi, Khomeini, or the Muslim Brotherhood, is not drawn from sharia or the political traditions of the Muslim world but represents, in fact, an Islamic reading of modern political concepts (state, revolution, ideology, society), hence precisely a reflection on the autonomy and prevalence of the political sphere, using ideology as a mediating concept: the Islamic state is not only a state that recognizes sharia as state law but one that makes religion a state ideology. In a state of that kind, like Islamic Iran, religion does not define the place of politics but the converse. The only place where an Islamic state has been instituted is Iran, and this is probably not an accident because the country contains the two power centers: church and state. Moreover, it has been shown how the Islamic revolution in fact helped to further bring society under state control.[20] But, most important, it is starting from this configuration that the question of *laïcité* can really begin to be addressed by considering the separation between the body of producers of knowledge and religious norms and the managers of the state.

The ascendancy of ideology is nothing but the return of politics, the affirmation of the supremacy of the political over traditional religious law. But the effect of an Islamic regime of this kind is always its opposite: accelerated secularization with, for Iran, a decline in religious observance and, for Afghanistan after the defeat of the Taliban, a depoliticization of Islam. Alongside reformers in Iran, traditionalist clerics also call not for secularization (they insist that civil society must be religious) but for separation of church and state, in order to save the church. The position of Ayatollah al-Sistani in Iraq, although it is in line with the constant attitude of the higher

Iraqi Shiite clergy throughout the twentieth century, should also be understood in the light of the failure of the Islamic revolution in Iran: Sistani does not want an Islamic state that would undermine the very foundations of religious legitimacy, and he therefore refuses to get involved in the details of everyday politics.

The question is thus not that of the persistence of an Islamic culture but of the sudden appearance of new ways of religion becoming ideological and of new forms of religiosity in the framework of the modern nation-state.

Islamic revolutions thus lead to the establishment of a de facto *laïcité* because, by excessively politicizing religion, they make it lose its role as a recourse and induce traditional clerics and new believers alike to dream of a spiritual arena outside politics. What then remains in power is no longer a religion but a political-clerical apparatus that uses the moral order to conserve its position of power. In that case, the return of religious feeling takes place beyond politics, outside official religion, indeed outside orthodox Shiite Islam: the return of Sufism, syncretism, interest in Christianity, not to mention, of course, atheism. The politicization of religion ended up by separating religion from politics. The demand for democracy can finally be *laïque*.