

# **Dance or Wrestling Match?**

**Religion and Politics in Europe, the U. S., and Egypt**

**by**

**Robert D. Lee  
Colorado College**

**February, 2002**

Politics and religion offer two sets of constraints on human behavior, two (or more) organizational structures capable of mobilizing support or dissent, two (or more) understandings of authority. The religious sphere always threatens subversion of the political because it can invoke an absolute standard of judgment by which all political action can be criticized. It also offers potential reinforcement to a political sphere in need of grounding its authority in something more solid than human volition. The state has normally sought to exploit the religious sphere, or at least neutralize its capacity to disrupt, and the religious sphere has normally sought to protect itself by sharing state power or, alternatively, negotiating its freedom of action.

Political stability depends upon consistency in the dynamic interplay of religion and politics. Where there is consistency in the relationship—perhaps one could speak of a dynamic equilibrium—neither realm seeks to undermine the role of the other, although religious organizations may seek to affect political outcomes, and political figures may appeal to religious belief and look to religious organizations as vehicles of support. A dynamic equilibrium does not necessarily imply complete separation nor does it exclude the possibility that the two spheres may be closely intertwined. It does not imply that the two spheres are in any sense equal in weight. It does conflict with the notions that religion ceases to be a factor in politics as a result of a secularization process inherent in modernity, that democratic stability ends contention between the spheres, and that equilibrium can be achieved according to a single, secular model.

Modernization understood as industrialization, urbanization, increased mobility, improved communication, rising standards of health and rising literacy rates has shaken both the religious and political spheres. Contrary to theory, however, modernization has not produced a uniform, universal secularization of society and government.<sup>1</sup> Rather, these changes have generated a crisis of authority and legitimacy in which the political sphere has attempted to manipulate the religious in an effort to sustain its authority, and the religious, itself transformed by modernization and by state efforts to manipulate it, has sought to subjugate and even overthrow political authority. Neither effort has proven entirely successful; violence and repression continue to mark the interactions of the political and the religious, especially in the Muslim states. Why is this so?

I will argue that what is happening in Egypt and much of the Islamic world is not a product of Islam *per se* or a product of conditions peculiar to the Third World today. It is not a struggle of tradition and modernity, nor a struggle best described as secular vs. religious. Islamist forces seeking a redress of the balance between politics and religion rarely seek a return to a golden past, and “secularists” generally do not seek to banish religion from a role in society and government.<sup>2</sup> Rather, the struggle can readily be compared with what happened in Europe and America from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, where political and religious spheres struggled to achieve

equilibria acceptable to all. The result was not a single model of relations between religion and politics but a plurality of them.<sup>3</sup> The result came not from Protestant theology or the play of inevitable social forces but as a product of pushing and hauling between state and religious organizations. The “twin tolerations”—toleration by religious authorities of an autonomous political order, toleration by a political order of individual belief and multiple religious organizations<sup>4</sup>—emerged from several iterations of conflict and compromise. The shape of religion came to reflect the peculiar political circumstances of each state as much as politics came to reflect the peculiar religious character of each society.<sup>5</sup>

From the perspectives of individual believers or religious authorities, success or failure in shaping political outcomes depends upon the political opportunity structure of the moment. The nature of political institutions and the legal structure of a country conditions the ability of religious groups to function, to recruit members, to rethink theology, and to mobilize for political action. Opportunities will be greater where power is more dispersed both vertically horizontally.<sup>6</sup> Short term variations in political climate, such as defeat in war or international campaigns for human rights, may also affect their power and influence. Thus, the political opportunity structure comprises (relatively) fixed and variable elements.

From the perspective of the state, the religious sphere constitutes a set of opportunities and threats to be exploited and/or neutralized. Those opportunities and threats vary with the unity and coherence of the religious sphere, with the flexibility of doctrine, and with the breadth and scope of religious organization. One component of the religious opportunity structure also depends upon the moment. The atmosphere in which Mustafa Kemal built the modern Turkish state permitted actions that seem inconceivable in the modern Middle East. The subjugation of al-Azhar attempted by Nasir in the 1950s and 1960s would be unthinkable in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, as the Egyptian regime seeks the help of Al-Azhar in protecting itself from radical Muslim violence. Heightened literacy and attention to mass communications have helped raise sensitivity to both religious issues and political questions, which now seem intertwined much more thoroughly than they did 50 years ago.

### **The Secularization Model**

The secularization “model” proposed by modernization theory and embraced by Attaturk appears dead.<sup>7</sup> The model comes from positivist 19<sup>th</sup> century sociology. The word secular initially served to distinguish the profane clergy, those who lived and functioned in the world at large, from those who were cloistered. The contemporary designation of some religions as more secular than others reflects that usage. Weber’s arguments about the Protestant reformation, echoed in Ronald Inglehart’s contemporary theory of modernization, take Luther’s notion of “calling” and, more especially, Calvinism’s subsequent emphasis on the importance of enhancing life in this world as a step toward the secularization of religion. The Arminianism characteristic of Methodism may have rendered it uniquely suitable to the American setting; good works outweigh in importance the particulars of belief. America may remain highly devout, but its religion is relatively “secular.”<sup>8</sup>

By this same measure, the resurgence of Islam in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century constitutes a secularization of religion. Whether one takes the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt or the

Association of Reformist Ulama in Algeria, whether one focuses on the ideology of the Ayatollah Khomeini, Abu al a-al Mawdudi, or Sayid Qutb, the thrust has been toward an Islam as a religion of this world; Islam as a recipe for life, for society, for economics, and for politics. It is the worldly activities—inciting, organizing, mobilizing, publishing, broadcasting, fighting—and a theology to justify and legitimate those activities that characterize the contemporary Islamist movement. The general argument is that social and political change must occur in a context defined by Islam and not by secular Western theory. Western secularism is the enemy, but, if that is the frame of reference, Islamization then constitutes a secularization of Islam.

Such terminology does not seem helpful. To use America, where religion remains a stronger force in people's lives than it does in Europe, or to speak of the Islamist movement, which has generated heightened religiosity in many countries, as examples of the secularization of religion seems more confusing than it is enlightening.<sup>9</sup> To argue in these ways, apparently to rescue secularization theory, is to cast aspersions on the quality of American (secularized) religion and/or the genuineness of conviction lying behind the (secularizing) Islamic revival. Should "true" Muslims be killing each other in the name of Islam? Should "true" Christians be more concerned about the social appeal of a church than about their own spiritual condition? To say that a religion has become increasingly "secularized" seems to suggest that it is self-destructing. Yet secularized religions also seem, by virtue of their adaptation to the world, to be unusually tenacious and strong.

Scholars also use the term secularization to describe not religion itself but society as a whole. Society becomes secularized as it becomes more differentiated. Religion becomes one sphere of activity among many; the power of supernatural explanations gives way to cause-effect analysis of an increasing proportion of human activity.<sup>10</sup> It is in this sense that secularization becomes a synonym of rationalization in the Parsonian theory of modernization. The shift from tradition to modernity requires, by this way of thinking, a diminishing emphasis on truth defined by revelation and intuition and increasing reliance on scientific rationality.

Such thinking emerges from European sociology of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, driven as it was by positivist conviction and religious skepticism. The sociologists themselves bear witness to the secularization of the European mind in that period.<sup>11</sup> With the inevitable triumph of science, religion would lose its hold on society, and the changes in society would reverberate through the economy and the polity, causing modification of individual behavior. Religion as an anchor of traditional behavior looked like a brake on progress, an "opiate of the people," an obstacle to be overcome. Mustafa Kemal absorbed these lessons in positivism and applied them in the new Turkey.

Such thinking now to be a product of the European mood of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and of European politics. The identification of the Catholic Church with the Ancien Régime, its subsequent support for empire and monarchy, and its reluctance to accept republican institutions conditioned all scholarship of the period. The Italians united their country by taking Rome and defeating the Papacy. On the continent as a whole, republicanism assumed an anti-clerical bent, and authoritarianism found support and comfort in religion. The idea of secularization thus represented not just an observation but an ideological program for the liberalization and democratization of Europe.<sup>12</sup>

The American experience never fit well into the secularization model. The religious dissenters who crossed the Atlantic and established colonies were scarcely traditionalists. Their Puritan heritage impelled them toward achievement in the world and toward democratic political arrangements, which they took to be a way of improving God's world. They ultimately accepted a republic in which there would be no established Church not out of indifference to the purposes of the republic, and certainly not out of hostility, but in order to permit religious liberty and the continuation of republican government at the local level. The resulting autonomy of denominations, sects, and cults enabled all men of religion to support the government and to pursue their interests within it.

Tocqueville explained the success of American institutions in terms of the Puritan heritage and the religiosity of most Americans. As long as religion kept Americans in line, government would not need to use coercion to do so. Religious discipline served the state, and Protestant preachers taught democracy. "[Tocqueville] did not see the resemblances between the stump preacher and the stump politician, and the implication of their common stock of salvatory rhetoric."<sup>13</sup> The Catholic Church never threatened as it did in Europe. Instead, the republic itself became a kind of church built on a creed of liberty, equality, and freedom of conscience writ large in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. [source?] Far from hostile to religion, the creed reflected principles emerging from the natural rights tradition, itself deeply influenced by modern Christian thought as well as the Greek and Roman traditions. By the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century many American religious groups embraced a theology of providence: God had chosen America for the realization of his designs for the human community. American theology itself took a decidedly democratic turn. The will of the majority, God-fearing citizens, turns out to be God's will.<sup>14</sup>

As Huntington has observed, the challenges came not from critics of the creed but those who faulted its implementation. He notes that the founding itself, the campaign for abolition of slavery, the Reform Era, and the turbulence of the 1960s and 1970s all coincided with periods of religious revival. Religious fervor fueled the abolitionist movement as it drove the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s and the Right-to-Life movement of the 1970s.<sup>15</sup> The dis-establishment of religion in America has created a somewhat chaotic mixture of denominations, sects, and cults that periodically challenge the prevalent understanding of the creed but have, overwhelmingly, supported the liberal-democratic arrangements that permit the cacophony.<sup>16</sup>

America has become more diverse. Catholics, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, and other groups do not share the Puritan heritage that Tocqueville deemed critical to democratic discipline. One can no longer assume even tacit consent to elements of Christian belief. The principles that seemed "self-evident" to the Founders may no longer be self-evident, and hence, though adherence to the Creed (Huntington's version)<sup>17</sup> remains virtually unanimous, the rationale for adherence may have dissolved in the melting pot. No fig leaf---Bellah's concept of "civil religion" or Marty's "general religion"<sup>18</sup>---can cover the foundational exposure. Positivism has not and cannot supply scientific certainty to replace the certainty of conviction from which American democracy emerged. Diversity potentially threatens the foundational logic of the American Republic but diversity has not substantially reduced the proportion of Americans who go to Church or profess belief in God. Atheists and agnostics remain a small minority.

The proponents of secularization take America to be the exception to the rule, or they write off American religiosity as mere facade. Inglehart puts the Scandinavian countries in the

upper right-hand corner of his graphic, high both on his index of secularization and high on the index of post-modern values. His arrow suggests that getting rich means moving in that direction, or rather, to follow his logic more closely, it is to suggest that cultural values represented on the secularization index spur economic development.<sup>19</sup> Rising prosperity ultimately produces a younger generation committed to liberal, participatory values more than the are committed to the acquisitive values of the earlier generations. As societies embrace these values more thoroughly, the very cultural propensities for economic growth represented on the secularization index softens. The capitalist system slows down.

Inglehart still seems wedded to the notion that religion must disappear if a country is to become thoroughly modern, but that has not happened in the United States. His graph could also be interpreted as meaning that there is considerable variety among countries in the way they mix “traditional” and “modern,” “acquisitive” and “post-bourgeois” values. Huntington’s claim that Inglehart’s graph, which shows some regional groupings, reinforces his claim that civilizations remain identifiable and distinct seems as exaggerated as the claim that all countries are moving in the same path.<sup>20</sup>

What’s missing from Inglehart’s analysis is a political variable. Northern Europeans find themselves together in the upper right-hand corner for identifiable political reasons; they have reached understandings about the relationship of religion to politics that reflect histories very different from that of the United States or any of the rest of the world. The relative religiosity of Americans reflects a different path of political development. Politics shapes religion as much as religion shapes political development.

The graph puts the United States much closer than Europe to the rest of the world (Ex-Communist Europe appears especially anomalous in the upper left hand corner.) in terms of its mix of values. But there is nothing in Inglehart’s data that demonstrates the universality of either the American or the European model of modernity. Inglehart assumes that cultural values are relatively more enduring than political attitudes; hence, a person’s position on the traditional-secular scale presumably conditions political behavior. The same assumption holds for most research on religion and politics in the United States: How does religion and religiosity affect voting behavior? How does religiosity affect a legislator’s willingness to entertain religious lobbies? To favor certain legislation? The dependent variable is usually policy outcomes.<sup>21</sup>

The assumption about the relative stability of religious beliefs and activities makes more sense for short-term analysis than for developmental studies. Islamist movements in the Arab world have, for example, changed the attitudinal landscape in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and, most markedly, since 1967. These movements have, moreover, grown and prospered at different rates and at different times according to political conditions in the various Arab states. The concept of a single undifferentiated Islam cannot account for the variety of religious attitudes and activity affecting politics in these countries. A developmental analysis must look first at the ways in which politics has affected the structure of religious belief and activity and then at the ways in which religious organizations and attitudes have affected politics. The transformation in Egypt from the Nasir period, when repression kept the Muslim Brothers underground or in jail, to that of Sadat shows that even a decade can produce notable changes in the religious configuration of a country. These changes resulted from alterations in the political opportunity structure from Nasir to Sadat as well as from the psychology of defeat that prevailed in the Arab world after

1967. Of course, the renewed growth of the Brotherhood and its offshoots conditioned, in turn, Egyptian politics. Cause and effect run both directions.

### **The Structure of Religious Threats and Opportunities**

Much of the writing about religion and politics has focused on religion as a cause of economic, social and political development or the lack thereof. Does Islam promote or retard economic development? Is it inherently authoritarian and inconsistent with democracy? Does Islam inherently promote political violence? Many studies have now demonstrated that there is no necessary connection between Islam and authoritarianism, Islam and underdevelopment, or Islam and violence. Muslims behave in a variety of ways within a single political system and among political systems. The political influence of the Islamic establishment in Saudi Arabia bears little relationship to that of the Islamic establishment in Egypt, Turkey, Iran, or Morocco.

Politics is the best explanation of temporal and geographic variation. At some initial moment, political leaders must assess the religious makeup of their country and decide how they can best cope with the threats and opportunities it affords. They face countries that are homogenous or heterogeneous, multivocal or univocal in their religious traditions. All religions propose notions of authority; lord, master, law, judge. All religions propose notions of the Good, and since government must inevitably align itself with the Good (or at least pretend to do so), it cannot be indifferent to religious conceptions of authority and general welfare. Sunnism, the predominant strain of Islam, has embraced a set of *hadiths* encouraging believers to obey secular authority, but other versions of Islamic theology, including radical ideologies constructed within Sunnism, have served to undermine secular authority. The mix of religious ideologies thus constitutes one dimension of religious threats and opportunities.

Political leaders must also evaluate the political potential of religion as organization. Governments everywhere take note when citizens come together in groups, and there is probably no purpose that brings more people together more regularly in the United States or in the Muslim world than religious activity. Islam puts considerable emphasis on collective observance. Praying simultaneously at designated moments of the day, wherever one might be, promotes a sense of togetherness among believers. Some Muslims, especially male, go to the mosque to pray on Friday, hearing sermons that necessarily touch on moral, ethical, and (if the political realm permits it) explicitly political topics. Sufi Shaykhs bring together circles of believers to perform rituals and reinforce each other's faith or intervene to settle village conflict. Lay organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood build their clientele by organizing Qur'anic study groups, controlling student or professional associations, or establishing medical centers. Ulama bring together students in mosques and mosque-universities to pass on their knowledge of religion and religious law. Ramadan is an undertaking of the whole Muslim community. For one country, Saudi Arabia, the *hajj* constitutes the mother of all gatherings, an enormous opportunity but also an enormous risk, as the Saudis discovered when post-revolutionary Iran sent pilgrims to contest the legitimacy of Saudi leadership. All religious groups, some more hierarchical than others, wield potential political power that political leadership can ill afford to ignore.

Finally, political leaders must assess the religious condition of their country in terms of the beliefs of individual citizens. How many care and to what degree about their religious beliefs? To what extent can political authorities reinforce their position invoking religious justifications for what they do? To what extent are citizens literate and capable of thinking about their religion, understanding scriptures for themselves, evaluating the interpretations of those who speak to them or write about religion? To what extent do citizens follow a set of “traditional” practices that go unthought and unexamined and are therefore beyond rational discussion?

Religious ideas constitute threats or opportunities insofar as significant numbers of individuals embrace them. Gilles Kepel has proposed that a radical Islamist movement can succeed in overthrowing a contemporary Muslim state only if it can sustain an appeal to two critical groups: the pious bourgeoisie, on the one hand, and the young, unemployed disaffected youth of the exploding urban areas, on the other. Khomeini’s extraordinary success in Iran resulted from his ability to appeal both to the *bazaar* class, alienated by the Shah’s authoritarianism and preference for multinational business, and to the urban masses left out of the new prosperity that swept Iran. As an *‘alim* with a theory of Islamic government, he brought the pious bourgeoisie along, and with some social theory borrowed from Ali Shariati, he seduced the militant youth. No other Islamist movement has succeeded in mustering both groups simultaneously. In Egypt, Algeria, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere, governments have been able to hold or regain the loyalty of the pious bourgeoisie and then repress the militancy of any youth.<sup>22</sup>

Political leaders must thus assess the mix of religious ideas, the structure of religious organizations, and the appeal of these ideas and organizations to various segments of their population. They must assess the threats and opportunities offered them by the ever-changing religious configuration of the country. Machiavelli saw the Christianity of his day as a hindrance to his prince since it tended to divide rather than unite communities. He regretted the unavailability of Roman religion, where the state organized the worship of the gods, and the gods helped remind citizens of their duties to the state. Whether religion unites or divides, whether it is theologically authoritarian or democratic, organizationally hierarchical or fragmented, whether it commands a broad following or a narrower one (as in modern Europe), no leadership can afford to ignore the structure of religious opportunities afforded by the country in question.

When the British took Egypt, they saw danger in the power of the religious establishment, for its control over education in a society that was overwhelmingly illiterate. To cultivate modern citizens, and to weaken the hold of the ulama, the British created state primary schools to teach not just reading, writing, and arithmetic but also religion. The idea was to create both a new public order and a new moral order by replacing the kuttab schools of the ulama.<sup>23</sup> It was a political decision, one that has been retouched but not overturned by the governments of independent Egypt. Both primary and secondary schools in Egypt devote a heavy portion of their curricula to the teaching of Islam and Christianity (for Copts) in a way deemed supportive of the state. One result is the creation of a population that is increasingly literate, increasingly aware of what it means to be a Muslim rather than a Christian (or vice versa), and increasingly capable of reading scripture and religious publications as well government propaganda. From a political perspective, this continuing set of political decisions has transformed the religious configuration of Egypt today. “Contemporary educators—inspired by the historical insistence that religious education further ‘moral’ and not merely ‘ritual’ ends—transform the sacred texts of the Islamic tradition into systematic, socially and politically useful products for mass socialization.”<sup>24</sup>

When Gamal abd al-Nasir seized power in the coup of 1952, he already confronted quite a different configuration of religious threats and opportunities than that found by the British after their occupation of the country in 1881. Hasan al-Banna had since the 1920s succeeded in creating a lay organization called the Muslim Brotherhood. He established schools and associations, propounded a new theology comports both elements of mysticism and practicality, attacked the ulama as lackeys of colonialism and backwardness, and generated among many Egyptians that the Brotherhood alone represented the future and well-being of Egypt. As the “liberal” regime in Egypt lost its last semblance of legitimacy, the Brotherhood emerged as the most potent political force in Egypt.

Abd al-Nasir welcomed the Brotherhood’s support of the revolution but then decided to disband the organization after a Muslim brother purportedly attempted to assassinate him in 1954. The leaders went to jail, and the organization could not function legally in Egypt as long as Nasir was alive (1970). By silencing the prime critics of Al-Azhar and the official religious establishment, he had less need of their help in defending the regime itself against religious critiques. He continued longstanding government efforts to take control of waqf land, fundamental to the autonomy of the ulama, and to put preachers on the government payroll. By the late 1960s, al-Azhar had become little more than a mouthpiece for the regime. Yet the constitution embraced Islam as the religion of the state, and the regime continued to permit the teaching of religion in the schools—in fact, it restored the teaching of religion in the first two years of primary schools—in an effort in an effort to link the nation and national holidays with religious values.<sup>25</sup>

Nasir apparently evaluated the religious opportunity structure as one that could be dominated by a combination of education (public schools), force (the Brotherhood) and political control (the ulama). (Al-Azhar became a branch of the state.) But his actions, together with events largely beyond his influence, altered the structure of religious threats and opportunities in Egypt. For one thing, neither Arabism nor Arab Socialism produced satisfactory economic or political results. As these secular ideologies lost credibility, religious ideas regained attractiveness. What is more, Nasir imprisoned Sayyid Qutb but not prevent him from writing a massive commentary on the Qur’an which he propounded a revolutionary variant of Sunni Islam. Qutb said all sovereignty rested with God; no human being could legitimately exercise sovereignty over another.<sup>26</sup> All existing Muslim governments were thus illegitimate, he said, and it was especially clear that the absolutism of Nasir conflicted with Qutb’s conception of God’s absolute authority. Nasir unintentionally made Qutb a martyr by ordering him hanged for his ideas, published as a book called *Milestones*<sup>27</sup> in 1966. The Arab defeat of 1967, for which Nasir also bears some responsibility, sealed the failure of Arab Socialism and raised questions that Qutb’s brand of Islam seemed to answer: Why had the Arabs failed? Because they had deserted their faith. When Sadat took power, the configuration of religion in Egypt looked different than Nasir had found it in 1952.

Nasir had seen the Muslim Brotherhood, its organization and its ideology, first as an ally (from 1952 to 1954) and then as pure threat, but Sadat took power in Egypt in 1970 without a solid political base. He regarded Nasirists (leftists, socialists) as the greatest threat to his power, and thus settled upon a decision rendered famous by his assassination at the hands of Islamists in 1981 to liberate the Muslim Brothers and to frame political objectives in Islamic terms. This decision, clearly a product of political calculation, further changed the makeup of religion in Egypt. Some fragments of the Brotherhood inspired by Qutbian writings soon took to the hills

and began to attack the regime for its inauthenticity. The Brotherhood as a whole decided to abide by the regime's rules for legal activity and dedicated itself to generating a set of social services, often with government support, that won praise in many quarters for their efficiency. A burgeoning set of publications trumpeted Islam as a recipe for all aspects of life, from brushing one's teeth to evaluating public policy. The regime sometimes confiscated publications or censored them but generally acquiesced in one fact: all political issues came increasingly to be framed in religious terms. Secularists naturally began to see (and feel) threats where the regime had seen opportunities.

Political leadership necessarily views religion as a set of opportunities, constraints, and dangers. Some would distinguish between leadership that acts out of "sincere" religious conviction and leadership that feigns religious commitment to cultivate the support of religious groups and elements in a society. For example, Peter Berger sees a difference between "political movements that are genuinely inspired by religion and those that use religion as a convenient legitimator for political agendas based on non-religious interests."<sup>28</sup> Stephen Carter has called the sincerity of Ronald Reagan's commitment into question. "He was a member of a faith, but he was not, in any practical sense, a member of a faith community."<sup>29</sup> Miles writes as if it is possible to inspect consciences and discern which political leaders use religion and those who practice what they preach.<sup>30</sup> While every person is entitled to evaluate any leader's "sincerity"---a trait that acquired importance and value in the 20<sup>th</sup> century---I know of no technique that would permit a political scientist to resolve such an issue. One political leader may feign indifference to religion; another may feign religiosity. No political leader can afford to genuinely inattentive to the rewards and dangers that lurk in religious ideas and religious organizations.

Ignoring religious groups, appealing overtly to some groups, invoking religious symbols and language, asking religious groups for assistance in performing public functions, favoring tax exemption for religious groups, framing issues in religious terms, denying that religious beliefs are relevant to public policy---these are but a sample of attitudes political leadership may take. To deny that religion has any place in politics constitutes one position, but it does not constitute indifference to religion.

### **Political Opportunity Structure**

If politicians dare not ignore the religious question, religious groups and movements cannot ignore the political opportunity structure of their society. The term "opportunity" suggests variability, as in the expression "opportunities may arise. . . ." But the expression is used in the literature on social movements to include both relatively stable, long-term components (political structures, legal order, predominant cleavages) in a society and short-term elements (such as shifts in political climate, internal or external; trauma or crisis; breakdown of structures and cleavages.)<sup>31</sup> The political opportunities of religious groups vary enormously from one society to another, and within each society from one time period to another.

The long-term component differentiates one society from another. That component would include the legal (constitutional) status of religion, the geographical shape of institutions (centralized or decentralized), the concentration or dispersion of power among branches, and the political culture (attitudes toward religion, nature of political cleavages.) The short-term

component of the political opportunity structure would include swings in the climate of opinion occasioned by either national or international events, the changing structure of political cleavages, and political events such as the transfer of political authority from one party or leader to another.

The disestablishment of religion in the United States frees religious groups from political intrusion, except for the leverage that tax exemption may create. When groups or individuals break the law (or appear to do so), invoking religions as a reason for do so, the government may intervene, as in the case of the Berrigan brothers in the Vietnam era or with the Branch Davidians in the 1990s. Such intervention necessarily generates dissent and controversy, because it seems to infringe upon the right of the individual to speak freely and practice his religion as he wishes. In general, the disestablishment of religion has left religious groups free to divide and multiply without end, making the United States one of the havens for sects and cults, and left them all free to influence voting behavior, mobilize followers for political causes, speak out on issue of conscience. Outbursts of idealism in the United States seem invariably to involve many with deep religious commitments.<sup>32</sup>

The dispersal of political authority in the United States between states and federal government, among levels of state and local government, and among branches of the federal government has probably contributed to the fragmentation of religious groups and also augmented the political opportunities available to all of them. Churchmen serve as civic leaders, and civic leaders protect the interests of local churches and sects. Cults find remote havens in the West where locals treat them with indifference, or even admiration, and higher levels of government tend to leave them alone, even when defiance may be implicit. Religion colors the politics of school board elections in some parts of the country..

The political culture of the United States favors the use of religion in politics. The high level of church attendance and prevalence of the belief in God makes it useful for politicians to invoke the name of God and to appear at religious services. Television evangelists and groups such as Focus on the Family find pockets of support and pockets full of willing money in every part of the country. The percentage of followers in most areas is small, but the national numbers look impressive and can be translated into political clout. Religious radio stations and bookstores abound. Automobiles sport Christian symbols.

Stephen Carter finds prejudice against the open invocation of religious belief in political discourse in *The Culture of Disbelief*. He elaborates an argument that liberalism must not merely tolerate the expression of views anchored in religion; it must welcome them. If those on the Left currently deplore the invocation of religion for political purposes, it is partly because the Right has captured the religious vote since *Roe vs. Wade* in 1973. In the 1960s, in contrast, the Left found no fault with the role of religious organizations in the Civil Rights Movement. Carter says the separation clause. “. . . does not mean . . . that people whose motivations are religious are banned from trying to influence government, nor that the government is banned from listening to them.”<sup>33</sup>

Social movements discover greater political opportunity when old cleavages no longer suffice to express political differences. They also thrive when political institutions lose legitimacy by virtue of poor performance and scandal. The abolitionist movement, the reformers of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s all benefitted from such

short-term conditions. In Italy, the fall of the Berlin Wall ended the relevance of the old rivalry between Communists, who changed their name, and Christian Democrats, who melted away in caldrons of corruption. The Northern Leagues responded successfully to these conditions.<sup>34</sup> In the American case, social movements drew upon religion as a motive force, whereas in Italy, where the Catholic Church had been deeply committed to the struggle against Communism, protest carried a more secular image.

The long-term political opportunity structure in other liberal democracies differs from that of the United States. In Italy, for example, the Catholic Church initially tried to exert political influence by opposing the newly created republic and urging believers not to participate or even to vote. The Church ultimately altered its position and then found itself bypassed and blindsided by the emergence of a political party identifying itself with Christianity.<sup>35</sup> By collaborating with Mussolini in the Lateran Accords, which made the Catholic Church an official part of the state and a partner in public education, the church further enhanced its political position but also left itself exposed to those who found Mussolini and the Lateran Accords objectionable. The defeat of fascism and the challenge of Soviet Communism created fresh political opportunities for the Church after World War II. Willingly or unwillingly it hitched its fortunes to those of the Christian Democratic Party, and it suffered politically for all the travails of that party. The Church and Christian Democrats failed to win national referenda in the 1970s on two issues the Church considered vital: divorce and abortion. It also had to accept modification of the Lateran Accords and a reduced role in state education.

In Machiavelli's day the Church had its party in every city-state (Guelphs) and could use the rivalry of the city-states to its advantage. Today the unitary, relatively centralized Italian state offers a structure less amenable to manipulation, although Christian Democrats in their heyday were able to control cities and regions, while the Communist party dominated in others. Religion in Italy means Catholicism; Protestants, Muslims, Jews, and other groups tend to get ignored in a country where government and politicians, insofar as they are attentive to religious questions, think in terms of the Roman Catholic Church. From the perspective of the Church and other religious movements, the political opportunity structure of Italy, though open and democratic, must appear inhospitable.

When scandals wrecked the Christian Democratic party in the 1990s, and the breakup of the Soviet Union ended that Communist threat that had helped keep the DC alive, the Church faced a political opportunity structure that looked bleak. Few Italians go to church, compared with Americans. Few say religion is important to them in daily life. The long identification of Church with the Italian state now seems to have translated into a distance between religion and politics.

The political opportunity structure in Italy differs significantly from that in England or Germany, France and Scandinavia, and in all these countries the balance seems decidedly more secular than the dynamic equilibrium achieved in the United States. The existence of an established church in England and the presence of churchmen in the House of Lords renders religion much less likely as a vehicle for opposition than it is in the United States. The clash in France between a dominant central government and a dominant hierarchical religion left a residue of ideological *laïcisme*, which might be termed radical banishment of religion from public life.<sup>36</sup> Muslims confront an atmosphere that is relatively inhospitable to any public display

of religious conviction, but those who have become citizens have access to the democratic process and can make voices heard in local elections.

The opening to religious influence of the political opportunity structure in Egypt has come not from significant alteration in the authoritarianism of the regime. While the Muslim Brotherhood was at one point permitted to elect a small delegation to the national assembly, it has subsequently been barred from forming a political party. The government party continues to dominate the assembly and presidential elections. But Islamists, starting in the assembly, began to achieve political influence through election to offices in student organizations and professional associations. They have a strong following in the corps of teachers, who teach the young about religion among other things in the public schools. Parts of the Egyptian bureaucracy seem to cooperate with the Brotherhood-associated agencies engaged in a whole variety of public services. And the government's willingness to tolerate a religious press has given the Islamists a public voice, which often turns out to be political. The wearing of various sorts of modest dress (by women) and beards by men turns out to be one way Islamists remind others of their presence in public life.

Militant Islamist groups rendered the Egyptian political system vulnerable to moderate Islamist claims by virtue of their attacks against tourists and police stations. The government needed the support of the Brotherhood, even though some officials suspected the Brotherhood of secretly aiding the radicals, to help assure citizens of the state's loyalties to Islam while it engaged in repression of the militants. With the ulama of Alzhar largely discredited as a result of their subservience to the state, Brotherhood denunciation of the radicals was vital to the policy of the regime. This need for Brotherhood support made political opportunities available to the Brotherhood and its associated organizations that were much more extensive than the regime might otherwise have been willing to accord. In the resulting tension between the Egyptian state and the Brotherhood, the ulama of Alzhar themselves found new political space.<sup>37</sup> The Brotherhood looks to their pronouncements as indication of state sympathy to Islamist positions, and the state needs the ulama as an authority capable of moderating Islamist demands.

Stability might be defined as the willingness of both political actors and religious groups to accept the legal-constitutional arrangements that bind them. Both sides will seek short-term advantage by exploiting those arrangements as the circumstances of the moment permit but neither will seek long-term change in the relationship. For example, the religious right in the United States seeks a constitutional amendment to ban abortion but does not seek a constitutional amendment to establish an official religion or to erect a Council of Guardians entrusted with protecting the moral values of the country. The Catholic Church in Italy has accepted the demise of Christian Democracy, probably with a combined sense of dismay at its diminished standing and of relief from its longstanding inability to separate itself from a political party it could never thoroughly control. The Church has not reverted to its 19<sup>th</sup> century strategy of banning Catholic participation in politics nor has it mounted a fresh campaign to seize full temporal control of the Italian government. Relieved of the burdens of the past, including Christian Democracy, the Church and religious minorities may be freer to play Italian politics than before.

Democratic stability is, of course, different from mere stability. Many early European states achieved stability between Church and State before the emergence of liberal democratic institutions. Authoritarian churches supported authoritarian states. In England, however, relative stability achieved under the Tudors eroded under the Stuarts, as complaints about arbitrary rule

mixed with objections to the Popish sympathies of the Stuarts. The Revolution settled nothing, and the issue re-emerged with the Restoration. Amidst the chaos Hobbes argued that no government could assure order, and therefore liberty, without having full control over the earthly church, while Locke proposed that the religious and political domains could be thoroughly separated; government could afford to tolerate multiple religions that minded their own business. As Britain shifted from absolute monarchy to parliamentary monarchy, it stuck closer to the Hobbesian conception that the state must remain firmly in control of religion. The United States, which had collected English dissenters, followed Locke in this and other ways. In both places the stability of the relationship between the political and religious domains achieved after the Glorious Revolution survived the transition from liberalism toward liberal democracy.

In Europe the old equilibria gave way to new forms of balance, not because religion disappeared in a wave of secularism or because a secularizing Calvinism swept all before it, but because religious discord threatened political well being, and religious groups themselves embraced tolerance as a lesser evil. An equilibrium suitable to democratic stability emerged in Catholic as well as Protestant countries. In the Netherlands, which was a multi-confessional society in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, elites were “most interested in maintaining [their] political and spiritual freedom of choice together with unhindered opportunities for trade and transportation.”<sup>38</sup> They could not afford the costs of imposing “counter-remonstrant Calvinism” on an important Catholic minority. The state identified with Calvinism but the state was weak, and its “weakness . . . was the best guarantee of a multi-confessional, genuinely tolerant society.”<sup>39</sup> Such a development should not be confused with a sharp differentiation of religious and political functions of the sort that characterized 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe.

Even in 19<sup>th</sup> century Belgium, democratic stability emerged as much from the actions of religious forces as from the efforts of those who opposed them. A Liberal shift toward anticlericalism in the 1860s generated a nasty choice for the Church: to adopt the Ultramontane argument that a true Christian society meant utter union of civil and religious spheres—opposing the constitutional regime and risking Liberal retaliation in the [probable] case of defeat—or to side with conservatives in the electoral contests to defeat the Liberals. Kalyvas writes: “The striking fact is that neither the Church nor the Conservatives had in mind the future of liberal institutions when they engaged in the process. . . .”<sup>40</sup>

The politico-religious equilibria achieved in Europe under the pressures of industrialization and democratization reflected a pushing and shoving among religious forces and between religious forces and the respective states. Toleration came from intense religious competition. Dominant, hierarchical churches accepted democratic states as a lesser evil than political marginalization. Politicians embraced religious alliance and support when it helped them at the polls, and pushed for secularization when the Church resisted democratic trends. Protestant states may have moved more quickly, but doctrine seems to be a poor predictor of behavior. Rather, adaptation to a changing intellectual climate and to evolving political circumstances led to the reformulation of theology consistent with toleration, liberalism, and democracy.

Secularization gained strength as an ideology in countries such as France and Italy, where the Church lagged in accepting a new equilibrium between religion and politics. Secularization understood as the differentiation of functions between political and religious authorities occurred everywhere, as governments assumed greater responsibility for education and general welfare.

Secularization understood as increasing reliance on science and mistrust of supernatural explanation, where scientific explanation sufficed, also gained everywhere. But to characterize the new European societies with a single word, “secular,” is to overlook the role of religious actors in forging the new equilibria and to ignore the variation of relationships between religious and political spheres characteristic of contemporary Europe. The current efforts of national governments and the European community to adapt to the increasing Muslim presence on the continent serve as a reminder that religion has not disappeared from political consideration.

The notion of dynamic interaction between religion and politics makes it problematic to argue that democratic institutions grow out of a strong civil society. Strong religious organizations may serve to strengthen civil society, but it is the political opportunity structure that enables them to do so. For the opportunity structure to shift in favor of religious actors, politicians must see potential benefit in the support of religious leaders, organizations, and ideologies. The centrality of religious activity to any civil society and to every polity, whatever the dominant ideology, serves to re-emphasize the impossibility of separating the civil society from the political realm. A strong civil society cannot create democratic political stability if the two are not distinct, nor can a weak civil society be blamed for authoritarianism, if there is no complete separation. Politics structures civil society as much as civil society structures politics, and, by the same token, politics structures religion as much as religion structures politics.

### **Egypt as an Example Dynamic Interaction**

The forces of modernization have disrupted the power relationship between the political and religious spheres in much of the Third World. Some governments have sought to reduce their reliance on religious authorities in order to promote changes. Some religious groups have begun to oppose governments in the name of authenticity. Meanwhile villagers have moved to the city, where they have come in contact with people of other sects and faiths. The spread of universal education has put their children in schools, where religion is taught. Communication has put everyone in closer touch with each other and the rest of the world, and the result is greater reflection about both the nature of religion and the nature of politics. Religion has, moreover, proved to be one of the great mobilizers of human energy not just for war but for the construction of a new society. Many countries are feeling their way toward new equilibria that would satisfy the new conceptions of politics (cries for liberalization and democratization) and fresh conceptions of religion (worldly, participatory, reflective).

#### ***From A Political Perspective***

Political authorities in Egypt started to modify the balance in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century under Muhammad Ali. Since then political leaders have consistently sought to harness religion as a means of enhancing their legitimacy and state control over society. The campaign has had three consistent goals:

- 1) To take education out of the hands of ulema. The state became the principal purveyor of instruction about Islam with the intent of using Islam (and Christianity) to cultivate modern citizens. The state gradually diminished and finally abolished the financial autonomy of the

clerical class by nationalizing waqf land. The greatest Islamic university in the country (and perhaps in the Sunni world), Al-Azhar became a state institution under Nasir.

2) To assert state control over religious resources and institutions. The takeover of *waqf* served not just to undermine the autonomy of religious educational institutions but to advance the long-term objective of bringing all mosques under state control and make all preachers employees of the state.

3) To enhance state ability to interpret Islam. The creation of Dar al-Ifta' in 1895 constituted a step in that direction. Its chief officer, the mufti, usually issued several hundred fatwas a year—non-binding opinions about the way Islamic scriptures applied to contemporary circumstances.<sup>41</sup> With the abolition of the shari'a courts in 1955, and with them the post of chief qadi, the mufti and the shaykh ul-Azhar became the two principal Islamic authorities in Egypt. Both are on the government payroll.<sup>42</sup>

The French invasion of Egypt in 1898 overturned Mamluk rule, and the disappearance of the Mamluks militias left ulama in powerful positions of leadership in the highly fragmented society. The balance had already been undone when Muhammad 'Ali took over and began building a new, more modern state. It would be hard to argue that a new, stable relationship has ever been achieved. Just when state power appeared overwhelming, the Muslim Brotherhood emerged to denounce both the state and its religious employees, the ulama, as representatives of secularism and colonialism. The Brotherhood represented a new phenomenon, a lay organization that demonstrated instantly that the *connubio* between state and ulama did not control Egyptian Islam. After 1952 Nasir sought a strong-armed solution to push the genie back into the bottle by banning the Brotherhood and jailing its leaders. The "solution" lasted only as long as he did; the long-term search for stability based on state domination of religious education, doctrine, and organization had failed.

Education probably is the principal reason for failure of that 200-year initiative. In most of the colonial world, imperial powers sought to educate locals to be good citizens and local defenders of imperial power. Instead, they trained nationalists. It is not surprising that state efforts to educate Muslims to be good citizens should produce Muslims who are less obedient than expected. Islam became an object of study. Muslims learned to read texts for themselves and to think about why they are Muslims and what sorts of Muslims they want to be. This is the process scholars call objectification.

The state also sought to functionalize religion. Schools taught that Islam means keeping bodies and teeth clean. It means valuing education. It means supporting law and order. It means fighting Israel.<sup>43</sup> These efforts to make Islam relevant to medicine, banking, household maintenance, and every other facet of life weakened the control of the ulama and, indirectly, the authority of the government to define and control it. If there is an Islamic way to do medicine, then doctors will necessarily have something to say about it. If Islam affects banking, then the views of economists will have relevance. The broader the application of religious teaching, the more difficult the task of the Islamic establishment in maintaining control.<sup>44</sup>

The question of dress codes serves to illustrate functionalization and objectification. For some Muslims in Egypt, there is no conflict between Western dress and maintenance of the faith, but many younger Muslims, particularly women, have decided that the modesty enjoined by

Islam requires them to wear the *higab*, “modest dress.” For some, the *higab* must be simple; for others it can be stylish. For some it must include not just a scarf but a veil. Some justify their choice as making them comfortable in crowded, modern settings, working with men, holding jobs, being thoroughly modern, even though their mothers may see them as reaching toward the past. Some see their mode of dress as a sign of membership in Islamist organizations and, hence, a symbol of political choice. For others it appears to be a reflection of personal conscience. Women may hear the views of government-subsidized ulama speaking on the question of dress, but they are listening to other voices and then deciding for themselves what Islam means.

From a political perspective, objectification and functionalization have transformed the structure of religious threats and opportunities in Egypt. The pluralization of religious authority necessitates a new strategy. The heightened religiosity now visible in Egypt makes it impossible for the government to reverse course by eliminating religious instruction in the schools, outlawing dress that evokes religious commitments, slashing the funding of the al-Azhar system, and removing any mention of Islam from the Constitution. Such actions would be tantamount to political suicide. But government efforts to control Islam by manipulating the Dar al-Ifta and al-Azhar have become both more important and less effective, because these voices are now but two among many, and the legitimacy of the establishment has been eroded by a track record of bending to political pressure. Yet, for now at least, it is not possible to justify any policy whatsoever without demonstrating its compatibility with Islamic principles. More than ever, Egyptian society looks to Islam to define what is good and right, and government must, of course, stand for (or appear to stand for) what is good and right.

The existence of groups dedicated to the forcible overthrow of the existing government, which they view as utterly corrupt and without moral principles, further complicates the question. The government has sought to repress these groups, Jama'a and Islamic Jihad, and has perhaps succeeded in doing so, though at considerable cost.<sup>45</sup> Springborg reports that there were 20,000 political prisoners in Egypt in 1997, many of them held in new facilities far out in the desert.<sup>46</sup> Torture was common. But to imprison and torture Islamists without losing all credibility the government needed simultaneously to demonstrate its good faith. That meant accommodating some non-revolutionary Islamist demands, launching a propaganda war through the religious press, and according somewhat greater autonomy to the ulama. Gerges writes:

Ironically, mainstream Islamic activists compete effectively with the state, which uses a similar discourse, for the hearts and minds of disenfranchised Egyptians. Throughout the 1990s, mainstream Islamism appeared to appropriate the social agenda and issues of public morality. Welfare politics and the promise of moral rejuvenation of society fueled the drive of the mainstream Islamist movement for mobilizing the lower class strata.<sup>47</sup>

Only by restoring the credibility of the religious establishment could the regime protect itself, but to be credible the establishment (Al-Azhar, Dar al-Ifta) must be someone autonomous, credibility could only come from autonomy, and autonomy meant the ability to differ with Mubarek's government. Hence, in 1994, when the shaykh al-Azhar denounced the Conference on Population and Human Rights held in Cairo for its views on birth control, the President could only grimace.<sup>48</sup>

## *From a Religious Perspective*

These developments changed the political opportunity structure in Egypt. The reformulated, law-abiding Muslim Brotherhood, once considered the enemy, became a necessary component in political stability. Hence, the regime moved toward greater tolerance of Brotherhood publications and funding of institutions and charities dominated by the Brotherhood. It watched as Islamists gained control of student organizations and professional syndicates<sup>49</sup>, and it authorized the Brotherhood to ally itself with other political parties to seek seats in the People's Assembly. Such actions conformed to the goal of liberalization and democratization originally announced by Sadat and then endorsed by Mubarek. But the Brotherhood has been refused the right to establish its own political party, presumably because it might offer serious challenge to the NDP, which remains the dominant, government-controlled party in an essentially one-party system. The government cultivates the Brotherhood to maintain legitimacy but declines to democratize and thereby compromise the authoritarian hold it is trying to preserve.

Viewed from the perspective of religious movements, the political opportunity structure changed in Egypt with the Arab defeat in 1967, which discredited Arab Socialism, and the succession of Anwar al-Sadat, who liberated the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood, jailed by Nasir, to help defend himself against Nasirists. Sadat vowed to open the Egyptian economy to foreign investment, and to make the political system more liberal and more participatory. All these changes redounded to the benefit of religious groups, some of them committed to work within the system and some hidden from view in order to strike violent blows against it. The Brotherhood worked through clinics, schools, study groups, welfare agencies, insurance agencies, and businesses to heighten religiosity and increase its clientele.<sup>50</sup> Sadat's trip to Jerusalem in pursuit of peace, seen as betrayal by many Islamists, still further improved the climate for religious recruitment as did the Iranian revolution at the end of 1978 and the beginning of 1979. The assassination of Sadat showed the Islamists could infiltrate even the army, foundation of the Egyptian state ever since 1952.

Islamists framed political issues in new ways. The assassin of Sadat justified his actions by referring to ideas originally developed by Mawdudi and Qutb, who distinguished between Muslims and "true Muslims," a state dominated by Muslims and an Islamic state, policies reflective of Western values and interests and those consistent with Islamic principles. Implementation of the shari'a emerged as the most consistent and insistent demand of Islamist groups both within Egypt's borders and beyond. The Egyptian constitution, which in 1971 said the sharia was "one source of legislation" was changed by 1981 to read "the principal source of legislation," and that phrase still did not satisfy Islamists, who argued that the shari'a should be the only source of legislation. That still leaves open the question of who should decide what constitutes the shari'a: Is it a set of principles to be adapted to every context and generation? Is it a code developed over the centuries that is universal? Does *taqlid* prevail over *tajdid*, or *tajdid* over *taqlid*?

The shift in frame has moved general debate in a direction that favors Islamists. "Secularists" find themselves on the defensive. Muhammad Sa'id al-'Ashmawi, for example, argues that Egypt complies with Islam's requirements for government: it honors the principles of anchored in the Shari'a, which must be reinterpreted through fiqh in every generation. "His is an Islamic modernism with such a high degree of flexibility that it is hard to distinguish from

secularism in practice,” writes William Shepard.<sup>51</sup> A study of “secular” women in Egypt revealed a variety of attitudes toward religion, most of them positive, none of them outright hostile except toward certain versions of the Islamist program.<sup>52</sup>

With the application of coercion against al-Jama‘a and Islamic Jihad, the government seems to have won the battle against those using religion as a rationale for overturning the regime, without necessarily having solved problems underlying the violence. For example, government neglect of the South, an underlying condition of the revolt, has probably not ended.<sup>53</sup> Nor has unemployment among educated youth, overcrowding of schools, miserable living conditions for those newly arrived in urban areas, corruption of government officials, or growing economic inequality. The cost of repression must be measured not only in human lives but in terms of government concessions to Islamist pressures on several fronts. In its efforts to stamp out al-Jama‘a and Islamic Jihad, the government has sought to convince mainstream Muslims of its pious intent, and it has done so by acquiescing in the Islamization of Egyptian society.

Acquiescence has meant reversal of a trend begun in the time of Muhammad Ali at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Faced with the need to polish its Islamic credentials, the regime has sought to cultivate the good will and support of the official Islamic establishment, starting with the Al-Azhar University and the Dar al-Ifta’. Both depend on state funding and had earned the contempt of Islamists, who saw them as sellouts to secularism. Now the State needs the support of the Islamic hierarchy and the legitimacy that comes from a measure of autonomy. Acquiescence has meant tolerance of political critiques couched in religious terms and efforts to counter those critiques with official and semi-official propaganda designed to demonstrate the pious intent of the regime. What might once have been a disagreement among ulama teaching at al-Azhar has become a public debate. Acquiescence has also entailed acceptance of Brotherhood participation and even domination of voluntary associations, many of them benevolent in character. And, finally, acquiescence in the re-Islamization of Egyptian society has jeopardized the position of the Coptic minority. Some of the most virulent outbreaks of radicalism have occurred in Middle Egypt and have taken the form of attacks on Copts.

If Gerges and Kepel<sup>54</sup> are right that Egypt has vanquished the threat of Islamic takeover, it nonetheless remains to be seen whether the current relationship between religion and politics will be stable. The forces associated with the Muslim Brotherhood continue to press for democratization that would give them the right to form a political party or parties and the right to win seats in fair elections to the national assembly.<sup>55</sup> They would clearly prefer adjustment of the relationship. The Copts, fearing that the instability of the current relationship will produce further government concessions to the Islamists and further erosion of their position, also have a stake in modification of the status quo. The government, anchored as it is in the military and in the secular tradition, demonstrates suspicion of Islamist ambitions and Islamist enthusiasm for democracy. The current balance of forces depends heavily on the coercive capacity of the government to curb militant Islam, to protect Copts, and to set limits on the political activities of all groups outside the confines of the governing party. Coercion may preserve a semblance of stability as long as it is overwhelming but it also generates resentments and dissent. Egyptian “stability” that is fraught with multiple dissatisfactions and dependent on coercion.

## Conclusions

How and why have some political systems succeeded in reconciling religious constraints on individual behavior, grounded in revelation, with democratic political arrangements founded upon the idea of popular sovereignty? Secularization of society and secularization of religion have been the predominant response to that question. The peculiar nature of Protestantism, constitutes another answer. Even more than Catholicism, Islam and Christian Orthodoxy constitute obstacles to the implementation of liberal thought, whereas Protestantism constitutes a religion that shaped its own demise as a political force. In one case the explanation lies in the effects of a single, universal process of modernization, which produces a secularization of religion and society. In the second instance, the explanation emphasizes a cultural component. What the Christian countries have achieved may not be possible elsewhere.

These are inadequate explanations for what has happened in the West and what is currently happening in the rest of the world. Eickelman writes: “The secular bias of modernization theory has had a significant role in deflecting attention away from the role of religious practices and values in contemporary societies, particularly in the Muslim majority world.”<sup>56</sup> Theories of cultural determinism overplay the uniqueness of the process by which the “twin tolerations” were achieved in the West. Protestantism was not in the beginning and, therefore, essentially liberal and democratic. Many Catholic countries have joined the liberal-democratic camp. Muslim states are already at many different points on the road to liberalization and democratization.

The argument advanced here is that a process of dynamic interaction between the political and religious spheres offers a better account of developments in the West as well as a coherent explanation for what has been happening in countries such as Egypt. Such an account accepts variation in outcomes among Western countries and does not imply that the modernization process leads inevitably toward a diminishing role for religion in the society. Such an account avoids dubious distinctions between Islam and Christianity as factors in the transition toward democracy, and avoids assumptions that there is one Christianity or one Islam, everywhere exerting its positive or negative influence.

Every political system—its leaders, its structures, its ideologies—must take account of a set of opportunities and threats offered by the religious structure of the country. Individual beliefs and practices, a set of religious organizations, and a set of religious ideologies may be said to constitute that structure. The opportunities lie in generalized support for the system, or even support for individual leaders or policies. The potential threats lie with organizations and ideologies that challenge the legitimacy of leaders or of the system as a whole. To maximize the opportunities and minimize the threats, political leaders may seek to change the hand they have been dealt by trying to alter any and all aspects of the religious structure. The establishment or dis-establishment of religion would constitute one, perhaps the most spectacular, such effort.

At the same time, religious organizations and their leaders necessarily confront a political opportunity structure, stable in some respects and changing in others. Those leaders must decide how and where their interests differ and where they coincide with the interests of the political leadership. To advocate revolution in the name of an Islamic State would be one extreme

decision; to accept dis-establishment (and consequent relativization of any particular version of religious truth) in return for special tax status and the freedom to organize and speak out on all political issues would be another.

Modernization has triggered a pluralization of ideology, organization, and individual attitudes in Egypt and many other Muslims countries. Scholars have noted that the resulting changes in civil society may open the way toward democratic development.<sup>57</sup> But the changes in the structure of Islam in Egypt depend not just on the modernization process but the nature of political opportunities in that country, and the reaction of political authorities, in turn, reflects the changing religious realities. The dance in Egypt differs from the dance in Iran or Saudi Arabia.

When will the dance between political and religious systems of control cause religious actors to tolerate each other as valid players in return for freedom of action within a political system they cannot fully control? When will political actors will come to understand that long-term stability depends less on coercion and more on integration of a multiplicity of religious and secular actors who are loyal by virtue of their consent? What sort of incentives can be used to transform religious actors into supporters and defenders of democracy? What sorts of religious activities can serve to induce political actors to proceed in that direction?

Marcel Gauchet has argued that Western democracies have, by pushing religion from the public realm, deprived states of their sacred character. Only individuals harbor notions of the Good and can impart truth value to policy, but government can only reflect and collect voices. Its acts can never rise above the will of all to become the general will. Religion, though banished from the public sphere, remains strong and the State, incapable of incarnating the sacred, turns out weaker as a result.

This formulation already breaks with the standard account of secularization. With Gauchet, there is regret, not celebration, that the state has been deprived of the imprimatur of Truth and Right that it perhaps requires, if it is to be an effective tool for collective action. There is a hint here that the West must reassess the relationship between religion and politics, if it wishes to regain a sense of public purpose. The suggestion may be misleading, if taken to mean that diminishing authority of a state deprived of its sacred character afflicts all liberal-democratic societies in exactly the same way.<sup>58</sup>

For an audience in the contemporary Muslim world, Gauchet portrays twin horrors: a state hobbled by a lack of sacred status, and a religious structure deprived of any public role. As elites in Egypt pursue negotiation between the religious and political, they seem conscious of these twin horrors and eager to avoid them. It is difficult to imagine long-term stability in the relationship between religion and politics that is not founded in popular sovereignty and some form of democracy, and it is difficult to imagine long-term stability where the state does not enjoy some form of religious support and sanction. But Western experience suggests that there is no patented process for getting there and no singular formula for regulating the relationship between religion and politics. Perhaps further research can illuminate commonalities in the processes of negotiation between the religious and the political that have given rise to idiosyncratic solutions.<sup>59</sup>

## Notes

1. See Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) for an argument that the world is moving in a single direction described by modernization theory.
2. Nadjé Al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2000, Chapter 4.
3. See David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), who argues for the importance of three variables: “whether society is Catholic, whether or not there is a monopoly of religion, and whether or not the ‘frame’ of society is set up through conflict against external or against internal oppressors,” p. 17.
4. Alfred Stepan, *Arguing Comparative Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 213. Stepan asks, “. . . What are the minimal boundaries of freedom of action that must somehow be crafted for political institutions *vis-à-vis* religious authorities, and for religious individuals and groups *vis-à-vis* political institutions?”
5. On the interplay of religion and politics in a European context, see Peter Blicke, “Social Protest and Reformation Theology,” in Blicke, Hans-Christoph Rublock, and Winfried Schulze *Religion, Politics, and Social Protest: Three Studies of Early Modern Germany* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1984), pp. 4-23; David C. Leege, “Toward a Mental Measure of Religiosity in Research on Religion and Politics,” in Ted G. Jelen, ed., *Religion and Political Behavior in the United States* (New York: Praeger, 1989), pp. 45-64. [Leege writes: “Only a thoroughly Americanized sociology of religion would, as Lenski (1963) did, treat the religious factor as an *independent* variable,” p. 46. Geographical communities tended to determine religion even in the United States.] And, especially, see David Nicholls, *God and Government in an ‘Age of Reason’* (London: Routledge, 1995) and *Deity and Domination: Images of God and the State in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (London: Routledge, 1989).
6. Hein-Anton Van der Heijden, “Political Opportunity Structure and the Institutionalisation of the Environmental Movement,” *Environmental Politics* 6:4 (Winter, 1997), 25-50; Van der Heijden, “Environmental Movement, Ecological Modernisation and Political Opportunity Structures,” *Environmental Politics* 8:1 (Spring, 1999), 199-219; David S. Meyer, Suzanne Staggenborg, “Movements, Countermovements, and the Structure of Political Opportunity,” *American Journal of Sociology* 101:6 (May, 1996), 1628-1660; and Ray Raka and A. C. Korteweg, “Women’s Movements in the Third World: Identity, Mobilization, and autonomy,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 25(1999), 47-71; Gary Marks and Doug McAdam, “Social Movements and the Changing Structure of Political Opportunity in the European Union,” *West European Politics* 19:2 (April 1996), 249-278.
7. Peter Berger has argued that the secularization theory articulated in the 1950s and 1960s was “essentially mistaken.” Events have not fulfilled predictions. Berger, “Secularism in Retreat,” *National Interest* 46 (Winter, 1996-97), p. 2.
8. George Armstrong Kelly, *Politics and Religious Consciousness in America* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1984), especially Chap. 3.

9. David Martin has long argued for dropping the term “secularization” altogether because it is ideological, internally incoherent, and ignores inconvenient. See “The secularization issue: prospect and retrospect,” *British Journal of Sociology* 42(3) 1991, p. 466, and his *The Religious and the Secular* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969, Chapter 1. Bryan Wilson is also devastatingly critical of the term. See his, “The Inherited Model,” in Philip E. Hammand, ed., *The Sacred in a Secular Age* (Berkeley: University of California, 1985).
10. Karel Dobbelaere, “The Secularization of Society? Some Methodological Suggestions,” in Hadden and Shupe, eds., *Secularization and Fundamentalism Reconsidered: Religion and the Political Order*, Volume III, (New York: Paragon House, 1986), pp. 27-44.
11. Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1975) embraces this concept.
12. For a version of this argument, see Jeffrey K. Hadden, “Desacralizing Secularization Theory,” in *Secularization and Fundamentalism Reconsidered: Religion and the Political Order*, Volume III, ed. Hadden and Anson Shupe (New York: Paragon House, 1986), pp.3-26.
13. Kelly, *Politics and Religious Consciousness in America*, p. 47.
14. Nicholls, *Deity and Domination*, Chap. 5.
15. Samuel P. Huntington, *American Politics: The Promise of Disharmony* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), Chap. 5.
16. Graham-Wooton, “Religious pluralism in the United States: its nature and political significance.” in Ehrlick, Stanislaw and Graham-Wooton, eds., *Three Faces of Pluralism: Politico, Ethnic, and Religious* (England: Gower, 1980).
17. Huntington, *American Politics*, Chap. 3.
18. Kelly, *Politics and Religious Consciousness in America*, Chap. 7.
19. Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Post-Modernization in 43 Societies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, ) p. 93.
20. Samuel P. Huntington, [see Huntington article used for IPE.]
21. For example, Frederick C. Harris, “Something Within: Religion as a Mobilizer of African-American Political Activism,” *The Journal of Politics* 56:1 (February, 1994), 42-68; James L. Guth and John C. Green, “God and the GOP: Religion among Republican Activists,” in Ted G. Jelen, ed., *Religion and Political Behavior in the United States* (New York: Praeger, 1989), pp. 223-241; David Yamane, “Faith and Access: Personal Religiosity and Religious Group Advocacy in a State Legislature,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 38:4 (December, 1999), 543-551; Kenneth D. Wald and Samuel Shye, “Religious Influence in Electoral Behavior: The Role of Institutional and Social Forces in Israel,” *Journal of Politics*, 57:2 (May, 1995), 495-507; Lawrence C. Mayer and Roland E. Smith, “Feminism and Religiosity: Female Electoral Behaviour in Western Europe,” *West European Politics* 8:4 (October, 1985), 38-49; Yochanan Peres, “Religious Adherence and Political Attitudes,” *Sociological Papers*, ed. Ernest Krausz and Gitta Tulea, Volumes 1 and 2, 1992-93; Carol A. Cassel, “Voluntary Associations, Churches,

and Social Participation Theories of Turnout,” *Social Science Quarterly* 80:3 (September 1999) 504-517.

22. Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: Expansion et déclin de l’islamisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000), Chap. 6, for a discussion of Khomeini, but Kepel pursues the theme throughout the book.

23. Gregory Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work: Education, Politics and Religious Transformation in Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), Chap. 2.

24. Starrett, p. 129.

25. Starrett, p. 79.

26. Sayyid Qutb, *In the Shade of the Qur'an*, trans. M. Adil Salahi and Ashur A. Shamis. London: MWH London, 1979.

27. Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (New Delhi: Islamic Book Service, 2002).

28. Berger, “Secularism in Retreat,” p. 8.

29. Stephen L. Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), p. 98.

30. William F. S. Miles, “Political Para-theology: Rethinking Religion, Politics, and Democracy,” *Third World Quarterly* 17:3 (September, 1996), 525-535.

31. See note 6.

32. Huntington, *American Politics*; Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief*.

33. Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief*, p. 106.

34. Mario Diani, “Linking Mobilization Frames and Political Opportunities: Insights from Regional Populism in Italy,” *American Sociological Review* 61 (December, 1996), 1053-1069.

35. Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Rise of Christian Democracy in Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), Chaps. 1 and 2.

36. See Kepel, *Jihad*, pp. 306-308.

37. Steven Barraclough, “Al-Azhar: Between the Government and the Islamists,” *The Middle East Journal*, 52:2, Spring 1998, p. 249.

38. Heinz Schilling, *Religion, Political Culture and the Emergence of Early Modern Society* (Leiden: EJ Brill, 1992), p. 372.

39. Schilling, 380.

40. Stathis N. Kalyvas, “Democracy and Religious Politics,” *Comparative Political Studies* 31:3 (June 1998), p. 13.

41. Jakob Skovgaard-Petersen, *Defining Islam for the Egyptian State: Muftis and Fatwas of the Dar al-Ifta* (Leiden: Brill, 1997), Introduction.

42. Skovgaard-Petersen, Chap. 6.
43. Starrett, *Putting Islam to Work*, Chap. 5.
44. Starrett, p. 186.
45. Fawaz A. Gerges, "The end of the Islamist Insurgency in Egypt?: Costs and Prospects," *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 4 (Fall 2000), pp. 592-612.
46. "Reports of torture and mistreatment of prisoners are routine. New high-security prisons have been built in remote desert areas specifically to house prisoners held on 'security-related' matters." Robert Springborg, "Egypt: Repression's Toll," *Current History* 97:615 (January 1998), p. 33.
47. Gerges, p. 599.
48. Tamir Moustafa, "Conflict and Cooperation Between the State and Religious Institutions in Contemporary Egypt," *IJMES* 32(2000) p. 13.
49. Ninette S. Fahmy, "The Performance of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Egyptian Syndicates: An Alternative Formula for Reform," *Middle East Journal* 52:4 (Autumn 1998), 551-562.
50. Sana Abed-Kotob, "The Accommodationists Speak: Goals and Strategies of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt," *IJMES*, 27(1995), 321-339.
51. William E. Shepard, "Muhammad Sai'd al-'Ashmawi and the Application of the Shari'a in Egypt," *IJMES* 28(1996), p. 52.
52. Nadjé Al-Ali, *Secularism, Gender and the State in the Middle East*.
53. Mamoun Fandy, "Egypt's Islamic Group: Regional Revenge?" *Middle East Journal* 48:4 (Autumn 1994), 611-625.
54. Gerges, "The End of Islamist Insurgency in Egypt?," Kepel, *Jihad*, Chap. 6.
55. Abed-Kotob, "The Accommodationists Speak," p. 331.
56. Dale F. Eickelman, "Islam and the Languages of Modernity," in *Daedalus*, p. 119.
57. Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 159ff.
58. Marcel Gauchet, *La religion dans la démocratie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998).
59. Can the struggle be seen as a form of contentious politics and can some of the ideas generated by Doug McAdam, Sidney Arrow, and Charles Tilly apply? See their *Dynamics of Contention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).