

Islamists as Modernizers?

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Modernization theory finds patterns in Western development and suggests that these patterns constitute a model for the world. It predicts the eventual emergence of a prosperous, liberal, homogenous world, as the wheel of history propelled not by the Marxist dialectic but by the liberal dedication to progress flattens all in its path. At the other extreme, theories of difference and particularity, emphasizing “primordial” cleavages that divide human beings, produce a scenario of cultural war and civilizational clash. Theories of authenticity, for example, emphasize the uniqueness of historical experience and slice the human species into bits without providing the glue to put it back together again.

Neither a scenario of homogeneity nor a scenario of immutable cultural division appears plausible. The eradication of cultural differences has not occurred in the most advanced Western nations; in fact, ethnic, linguistic, and religious differences may play a more significant role in Western politics than they did 50 years ago, as a result of the modernization process that was supposed to level them. Immigration has carried diversity into countries that had little. Groups have found the means and the motives to bring old claims of diversity to bear on modern problems. On the other hand, the Huntington’s assertion that world politics, despite the effects of globalization, may turn on enduring civilizational allegiances seems farfetched in an age when individual, group, and national identities appear anything but fixed.

The Iranian Revolution dealt a fierce blow to modernization theory as it was applied to the Middle East. Rather than the “new middle class” leading Iran toward democracy,¹ Iran went with a clerical class toward original solutions based in Iranian and Islamic culture. What followed was an outpouring of literature on the Islamic revival, much of it echoing Islamist claims of original approaches to economics and politics. Islamists denounced modernization theory as ethnocentric, and Western social science, already rocked by the attacks of dependence theory, backed away from ideas that no longer garnered consensus either at home or abroad.

While theorists of modernization retreated, social change proceeded largely as before. Despite the “mea culpas” of modernization theorists for their failure to anticipate an Islamic revival, and despite the vociferous denunciations of social scientific determinism on the part of Islamists, neither economics nor politics underwent radical transformation in theory or in practice. Islamic banking did obstruct economic development. The Islamic State in Iran created new institutions but also legitimated Western-inspired political practice. Everywhere social

mobilization continued (sometimes fostered by Islamist movements, as with the Shi'a in Lebanon), and everywhere the demand for political participation increased. The modernization hypothesis, though seriously flawed in several respects, appears very much alive. Economists, merchants, planners, politicians, all seem to proceed as if they know where they are headed.

A major flaw in modernization theory is its treatment of religion. The renewed interest in religion around the world and especially among Muslims flies in the face of the secularization hypothesis. One of the most cogent contemporary exponents of modernization theory, Ronald Inglehart, predicts that the Islamic revival will not outlast oil reserves in the Middle East.² Interestingly enough, Turkey is the only Muslim country included in his study of 43 societies. He pronounces Western excursions into fundamentalism aberrant and insignificant. He proclaims the centrality of religion to culture, and the centrality of culture to economic and political development. Yet he finds religious developments of the past thirty years to have no profound meaning for the development of either East or West.

The problem, then, is that modernization theory continues to explain much of what continues to occur in Muslim societies, even though it fails to account for the renewed prominence of religion. If the truth value of the theory rides on the secularization hypothesis, the theory deserves to be neglected. If, on the other hand, the secularization hypothesis represents a distortion of the Western experience and a non-essential, even contradictory, element of the model, then a revised version of the theory might still account for contemporary developments. While even the revised account might not be palatable to either Islamists or diehard secularists, to partisans of either cultural confrontation or cultural relativism, it might, by reopening the possibility of analogy between European and non-European experience, also permit a renewal of dialogue and a redimensioning of claims about cultural divergence.

Inglehart argues, following Weber, that a cultural shift in Western Europe triggered the growth of capitalism. He fails to observe, however, that the shift involved the secularization of religion and the sacralization of economic and social behavior. It was subsequently the deep penetration of political life by religion that fostered the need for tolerance and the sacralization of political institutions through which participation could be maintained and religious strife prevented. As others have argued, the French pattern of hostility between church and state was rare. The American example demonstrates the utility of religion in cementing fundamental values, legitimating institutions, and fostering competition.

I will argue that the principal characteristic of the Islamic revival in the Middle East is the secularization of Islam and the sacralization of society in ways that parallel the European experience. The theorists of revival from the time of Hasan al-Banna to that of Ruhollah Khomeini have sought to convince Muslims of their own responsibility for the history of their world. God is in retreat; Muslims have taken charge. While Islamists have protested Western materialism and the determinism of Western social science, they have in fact helped legitimate the general course of modernization including its penchant for democracy. The plurality of voices emerging to speak for Muslims creates the need for tolerance. Tolerance does not

necessarily emerge when it is needed, but the European example suggests that it comes out of conditions of religious fervor, not from conditions of pre-existing of secularism.

“Secularism” in the West

No name is more linked with modernization theory and the secularization hypothesis than that of Max Weber, the German sociologist. Weber argued that modernization meant the gradual replacement of religiously defined norms with legal-rational rules devised by human beings. He also contended, however, that the great drive toward capitalist accumulation in the West began with the Protestant reformation, which deflected human beings from monasticism toward worldly asceticism. Luther himself thought that the pursuit of material gain could only result in the impoverishment of others. Weber portrays him as preaching obedience to authority and acceptance of things as they were, but “worldly duties were no longer subordinated to ascetic ones.”³

From Calvinism came an even more pronounced emphasis upon the separation of human beings from God. No individual could know God or be certain of election for eternal life. No amount of prayer, ritual, song, or good works could assure salvation. The only way to testify one’s faith was in service to the world, whose purpose was the glorification of God. God had provided both the Golden rule and guidelines for the social organization of the world. “This makes labour in the service of impersonal social usefulness appear to promote the glory of God and hence to be willed by him.”⁴ According to Weber, the Calvinist identified true faith with “a type of Christian conduct which served to increase the glory of God.” God helped those who helped society by helping themselves.

This decisive cultural shift in Western Europe constituted a sacralization of society and a secularization of religion. Far from a rationalization of society, it was the identification of the irrational with secular behavior and purposes, especially but not exclusively with the accumulation of wealth. Protestant princes also sought to bolster their claims to authority by virtue of their contributions to the social organization God had ordained. By the seventeenth century England was awash in the claims and counter claims of religiously inspired groups seeking to reshape the polity. Hobbes invoked absolute authority on the basis of a contract struck in the name of worldly peace to counter such problems. He assumed the sovereign would do his duty to God by keeping order according to the “natural law” of God’s making. Locke invoked religion more explicitly to legitimate a state based on natural law and the principle of tolerance. Both presumed the application of religious norms to society, not a separation between religion and politics.

The American founding reflected the Lockean vision in this as well as other ways. The colonies grew from religious groups seeking to implement God’s will on earth. As they came together to proclaim their independence, they did so in the name of “self-evident truths” whose origin is not difficult to discern, so closely are they linked with natural rights theory and the Judeo-Christian tradition. While the founders accepted Locke’s dictates about tolerance and

foreclosed the possible identification of the state with any single creed, they imagined a republic consistent with principles discernible in nature. With God in further retreat from the world, human beings were left to do His bidding. While not all the founders were believers, believers rallied to the republic. Politicians did (and do) their best to identify the state with God's work.

Martin Marty calls the American pattern "controlled (ambiguous) secularism."⁵ He contrasts it with the "formal and unrelenting attack on gods and churches" more characteristic of continental Europe in the 19th century. He finds the American pattern quite different, even from England, "where "God and churches were increasingly ignored and men made fewer systematic attempts to replace them." He calls the English pattern "mere secularity" and the Continental model "maximal secularity." In America, by way of contrast, "There was no demise of religion."⁶ Religion adapted itself to secular life. Religion, he says, continued to speak more and more of this kingdom rather than the next and to acquiesce in a vision of the state not just as doing God's purposes but as acting as God. (Perhaps this helps explain the correlation Inglehart finds among the 43 states he studied between patriotism and the strength of belief in God.)⁷ Religion in America, though operating within a box established by the political system, underwent continuous change to solidify its place in a changing world.. "Denomination, parish, missionary movement, benevolent societies, Sunday School, revivalism—all these are what is meant by the term 'new forms' for the age of industrialism and political democracy, for conquest of the frontier and confrontation of the cities."⁸

John Locke himself, in his "Essay on Toleration," acknowledge that churches and churchgoers had every right to deliberate about public matters and to make their views known. To be sure, any religious group that challenges the civil peace can be pursued by civil authorities. For Locke, the problem is that church figures have sought to use state authority for their own purposes, and state authority has sometimes intervened in religious matters. "Whereas if each of them would contain itself within its own bounds—the one attending to the worldly welfare of the commonwealth, the other to the salvation of souls—it is impossible that any discord should ever have happened between them."⁹ But that arrangement, however utopian, does not prohibit the state from building its legitimacy on widely accepted religious symbols and does not prohibit the mobilization of citizens in the name of religious principles to influence elections or policy.

The ambiguity of American "secularism" appears at several levels. At the level of the Constitution, the place of religious belief in sustaining American institutions is undeniable though to difficult to reconcile with the constitutional separation of Church and state. The Supreme Court continues to wrestle with the problem. At the level of the individual, church attendance remains high relative to other Western countries, religious groups garner enormous support, and "secular humanism" often seems on the defensive, although Americans also appear less hesitant to express disbelief. The society as a whole continues to endow symbols with mythic authority; modern means of communication, far from destroying the mythic, have enhanced those elements. New technologies appear to have enhanced the political power of religious groups.

Marty identifies secularization with qualities of religion rather than society. “What is often called ‘secularization’ is not simple secularization; it is a complex of radical religious changes, in which people act and think religiously in ways which differ from those of the past and from those meanings conveyed by the symbols to which they adhere.”¹⁰ That definition fits the changes wrought by Luther and Calvin as well as those continuing to affect American society. The secularization of religion means the progressive revalorization of worldly activities in religious terms.

Ellul denies that secularization means the desacralization of society. The sacred, he says, is not a category of religion. Rather, religion is “one possible rendition of the sacred.”¹¹ Christianity arrived to desacralize the ancient world but it then became the new standard. As a result of the Enlightenment, science, philosophy and finally politics came to dominate the sacred. Now technology is the desacralizing force, which then becomes the new sacred. While old symbols are constantly destroyed, new ones emerge to “link this new world to the deepest roots of one’s being, and which restore the sacred to its imperial position. . .”¹²

The dependence of modern societies on myth to shore up economic, legal, social, and political systems casts doubt on the Weberian identification of rationality with modernization. Ellul writes: “All facets of the modern religions bring into prominence the deeply irrational character of modern man. He is not scientific, reasonable, rational, involved in tangible and demythicized matters, devoid of illusions—indeed not!”¹³ And perhaps the greatest of myths to which modern subscribe is the myth of progress. We have seized upon history to make it serve us better. For Ellul, Christianity has debased itself by hooking itself to that myth by arguing that human beings make history for the glory of God. The result is a sacralization of fundamentally secular economic, political, and social activity.

Those Western thinkers who have questioned the myth of progress, with its insistence on Western rationality, have themselves exalted the irrational. For Rousseau, the sentiment of being oneself meant radical rejection of not just the irrationalities of traditional society but the emphatic rejection of the rationally ordered society, which alienated the individual. Nietzsche called rationality a trap from which the true human being could escape only by exercise of the will. For him, it was easy to expose the West for its irrational attachment to logocentrism and, at the same time, to embrace myth as the only possible salvation from the ravages of history. For Heidegger, as for many other critics of modernity, being takes precedence over becoming, and the understanding of being stretches us to the very limits of rationality and perhaps beyond.

To deal with such towering figures of Western thought within the classic formulation of modernization theory is difficult or impossible. Their critique of modernity and the rational-legal order on which it is based puts them close to a Christian writer such as Kierkegaard. But if they are harbingers of post-modernity, one is inclined to put Iqbal, Shariati, Arkoun, and even Qutb in the same camp. Recent exponents of the Islamist movement in Turkey share many of these same postulates.¹⁴ The question is whether such arguments are to be regarded as modern or postmodern. None of these writers would abandon the tools of rationality. None would

imagine, on the other hand, that a world without myth (religious or not) would be a thinkable place to live.

It may make sense to regard 19th and 20th century European thinkers as antimodern or postmodern, but if we do so it does not make sense to treat Islamist movements in the Middle East as pre-modern in their stance against modernity. It makes more sense to rethink the secularization hypothesis and to recognize that modernization as a set of patterned interactions among politics, economics, and culture is necessarily reflective of existing myth, religious and non-religious. It is also productive of mythical renewal. The secularization hypothesis as originally formulated does not discriminate between the Western experience and that of the Muslim Middle East. It does not contribute to an understanding of modernization in either context.

“Sacralization” in the East

The concept of secularization defined as a “complex of radical religious changes, in which people act and think religiously in ways which differ from those of the past and from those meanings conveyed by the symbols to which they adhere”¹⁵ does apply to Muslim countries of the Middle East in the twentieth century. Even in the nineteenth century the ulema of Iran began to edge toward a position of political involvement. In the Tobacco Revolution and then again in the Constitutional Revolution, some of the Iranian ulema entered the political arena in favor of reform. In Algeria, the Association of Reformist Ulama founded modern schools and began to help Algerians rethink their political identity. The emergence of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, under the lay leadership of Hasan al-Banna optimized the new this-worldly emphasis of Islam. The thought of persons such as Muhammad Iqbal and Abul Ala Mawdudi supported the trend.

After World War II, in a period seemingly dominated by secular ideologies such as nationalism and socialism, thinkers such as Sayyid Qutb, Ali Shariati, and Ruhullah Khomeini laid groundwork for the further secularization of Islam, a secularization that emerged clearly after the Six-Day War. Radical and less radical Islamic figures emerged from prison in Egypt to work at politics from within the system or from the outside. In Lebanon, a Shi`i movement led by an *`alim* galvanized the south and demanded the transformation of Lebanese political life. Then came revolution in Iran and the effort to establish an Islamic state. Everywhere in the region—albeit to different degrees, sometimes with government blessing and sometimes without—Muslims acted to change their world by establishing schools, charities, hospitals, nurseries, political parties, and guerrilla groups. Even Turkey, despite its ideological commitment to the secular state, has been affected.

This transformation of Islam depends upon a set of ideas that emerge in thinkers such as Iqbal, Qutb, Shariati, and Khomeini. God recedes into the background and becomes unknowable. (“The Essence Itself is something that lies totally beyond the reach of man, and even the Seal of the Prophets, the most knowledgeable and noble of men, was unable to attain

knowledge of the Essence. The sacred Essence is unknown to all but Itself.”¹⁶) Hence, human beings are on their own, equipped only with the Word of God (“Our real and basic approach would be to find out what type of practical life [the] Qur’an demands of us. What is that concise concept of the universe and life which [the] Qur’an wants us to establish?”¹⁷) and the example of the Prophet, who was not content with Islam as theory but converted into a practical reality. The world is God’s place. It is sacralized. “There is no such thing as a profane world. All this immensity of matter constitutes a scope for the self-realization of spirit. All is holy ground. As the Prophet so beautifully puts it: ‘The whole of this earth is a mosque.’”¹⁸

Like the Prophet, Muslims must do God’s work on earth. (“ . . . Man is a representative of God in the universe as well as His trustee.”¹⁹) Muslims must strive to implement God’s instructions, contained in the Qur’an, to construct an Islamic community on earth. (“It is our duty to create a favorable social environment for the education of believing and virtuous individuals, an environment that is in total contradiction with that produced by the rule of *taghut* and illegitimate power.”²⁰) These writers call upon Muslims not just to believe but to act in emulation of Muhammad. They must act to create a modern society according to Islamic principles. (“Once a man has become a true human being, he will be the most active of men. He will till the land, but till it for God’s sake. He will also wage war . . .”²¹). Islam is about making a better world. (“If a Muslims shows no concern for the affairs of his fellow Muslims, he is not a Muslim—the Prophet (upon whom be peace) state this in a tradition—even if he constantly says, ‘La ilaha illa Llah.’”²²

Each writer insists that he merely interprets the most fundamental idea of the religion, that Islam has always meant concern about the here and now; that Islam was about the pursuit of justice in this world, that it always encouraged the good life; that it never, unlike Christianity, insisted upon other-worldly asceticism; that it put human beings squarely in charge of their own fate; that it opposed monarchy and clericalism; that it always stood for learning and improvement. Their insistence on these points may be appear unremarkable, but the effect has been thoroughly remarkable. Muslims have been energized in the pursuit of worldly goals; they have been pushed toward the sacrifice of their time, their wealth, and even their lives in the name of a better community on earth.

Like Iqbal before him, Shari’ati drew a direct analogy between the Protestant reformation and the redirection of Islam he sought to promote. Iqbal wrote: “We are today passing through a period similar to that of the Protestant revolution in Europe, and the lesson which the rise and outcome of Luther’s movement teaches should not be lost on us. A careful reading of history shows that the Reformation was essentially a political movement. . . .”²³ Shariati says an enlightened person “should begin by an Islamic Protestantism similar to that of Christianity in the Middle Ages, destroying all the degenerating factors which, in the name of Islam, have stymied and stupefied the process of thinking and the fate of the society, and giving birth to new thoughts and movements.” Such a movement would, in his view “unleash great energies and enable the enlightened Muslims to” use the resources of existing society to create “energy and movement;” to generate a sense of social responsibility; to bridge the gap between elites and masses; to take

the religious weapon away from those who use it to enhance personal power; to launch a religious renaissance that will pave the way to cultural independence, “returning to and relying on the authentic culture of the society;” and to “eliminate the spirit of imitation and obedience” and replace it with a “critical revolutionary, aggressive spirit of independent reasoning (*ijtihad*).”²⁴

A broad set of worldly behaviors has acquired fresh and enhanced legitimacy. Some of these behaviors resemble “traditional” behaviors. For example, many younger women whose mothers dress in European style have begun to wear various versions of modest, Muslim dress. Yet such dress, far from forcing women back into traditional roles, appears rather to legitimate their presence and participation in education, the modern economy, and even public life. The separation of women and men in the workplace in Saudi Arabia, invoked in the name of tradition, serves the purposes (perhaps inefficiently) of a modern society. “Islamic banking” honors the traditional ban on usury without seriously disrupting modern finance. Religious programming dedicated to the preservation of tradition constituted the price for ulema acceptance of television in Saudi Arabia. The result is legitimation of the electronic medium.

In Iran, the creation of an Islamic Republic occasioned rethinking of the secularization hypothesis in the West. Some interpreted government of the *faqih* as a throwback to tradition, rather than as an original creation of Ruhollah Khomeini from bits and pieces of the Shi’a tradition. Critics tended to focus on institutions such as the Council of Guardians and on the role of the *faqih*, somehow neglecting the blessing necessarily conveyed by the Islamic Republic on an elected presidency and an elected *majlis*. The constitution identified Islam with elections, and the clerical class further legitimated the institutions by dominating elections and debate. While not all of the clerical class accepted Khomeini’s new, secular tack, the politicking and debate on public view in the *majlis* has identified Islam with a plurality of answers and positions.

What is most striking about Iran is not the originality of the regime or the originality of its economic and social policies but rather the degree to which Islam has been used to authenticate a constitution, a war, an elected presidency, and an assembly created in the European-inspired Constitutional Revolution. Some policies inherited from the shah and then rejected by the name regime, such as birth control, have since been reinstated. Life in at least some villages, which remained relatively impervious to the modernization policies of the shah, appears affected in only superficial ways by the new regime.²⁵ Regime representatives have sought to convince villagers that they cannot be true Muslims, as long as they practice magic. It will be interesting to see whether the Islamic Republic succeeds at modernization in areas where the imperial regime failed. Leonard Binder writes: “It is difficult to resist the temptation to argue that, after two decades, the native optimism of those observers who placed the Iranian revolution within the framework of Crane Brinton’s revolutionary stages, and those who predicted that the revolution would be structure by the long-term processes of modernization, have been justified by these recent events.”²⁶ He was referring to the elections that brought President Khatami to power.

The secularization of Islam in the Middle East has produced a sacralization of political,

social, and economic activities. To attack the leaders of the state becomes a religious duty for some; hence, to defend itself, the state must cloak itself more thoroughly with religion. In Egypt, the ulema of Al-Azhar, once intimidated by Nasser's power, have re-emerged as an autonomous political force, drawn into the political battle by the state's need for legitimacy.²⁷ Twenty years ago economic planners had nothing to say about Islam, and Al-Azhar seemed to have nothing to say about planning.²⁸ Suddenly no decision can be taken without regard for the views of the Brotherhood and other Islamic activists, whose support for the government is a key to keeping the radicals at bay. But the conservative Islamist groups look to Al-Azhar for leadership; the government needs the support of Al-Azhar for legitimacy.²⁹ As a result, al-Azhar, which only a few years ago appeared a mere appendage of the government, suddenly enjoys leverage once again. Al-Azhar wields secular power, and government policy has become increasingly sacralized.

Islamist activity has energized society and politics within the nation-state framework. While the Ayatollah Khomeini, in the immediate aftermath of revolution, urged all Muslims to accept his leadership, neighboring states read his appeal as fresh act of Iranian imperialism. The result has not been recreation of the universal umma but a legitimation of the Iranian nation-state, a creature of European political conceptions and Reza Shah's armies. Iqbal, Mawdudi, Shariati, Khomeini, Qutb, Bennabi, Al-Ghannouchi—none to my knowledge has explicitly defended the nation-state as a political unit uniquely suited to the needs of an Islamic state. Yet the political movements built from these fonts have, by dedicating themselves to the capture and maintenance of secular power, reinforced the nation-state framework.

In Pakistan, Iran and the Sudan, one might speak easily of the sacralization of the nation-state. In Algeria and Turkey, ruling elites resist the legitimation that Islamist support might provide. Elites in both countries appear attached to a French version of secularism, in which there must be complete separation between religious authority and the authority of the state. Arkoun makes a convincing case that Mustafa Kemal embraced a particularly harsh version of French *laicism*, one which does not represent the British experience, much less the American.³⁰ It is perhaps not surprising that French-speaking, French educated elites in Algeria have, like the Turks, seen the Islamist movement as pure threat. Both the dominant forces in Turkey and Algeria would rely entirely on secular myth to bolster the state, if they could. In some sense, however, the Islamists continue to solidify their respective nation-states by their opposition to current governments and policies within existing political boundaries. They are “participating” in politics, albeit in ways that may often be destabilizing.³¹

The question debated even before Manfred Halpern raised the specter of neo-Islamic totalitarianism is whether Islam will dampen political modernization in the Middle East or whether it will eventually help legitimate a liberal, competitive party system. The answer necessarily lies in the future, but recent studies cast considerable doubt on the thesis of an unchanging political culture, hostile to democratic development. The Islamist movement reflects an objectification of Islam, a modern consciousness of religion as one aspect of life among others, a consciousness of Islam as a distinct set of beliefs, a reflection about what Islam ought to

be.³² Thanks to modern communications, the process of objectification has progressively involved more and more voices. Thinking about the nature of Islam, and the duties it imposes, has spread far beyond the ranks of the ulema. It has become much harder to deny that there are multiple interpretations of the great texts and multiple incarnations of the historical Islam, as various individuals and groups seek to implement their version of Islamic faith. Professional groups, benevolent associations, student groups, women's prayer circles—these and other phenomena have come to help animate civil societies in many Middle Eastern countries.³³ Vigorous public debate in Iran, which immediately after the revolution struck some observers as a fulfillment of Manfred Halpern's predictions about neo-Islamic totalitarianism, suggests possible movement toward greater openness and tolerance.³⁴ The country whose recent history most exemplifies the contemporary Islamist movement now looks more like a democracy than any of the more secular, Muslim states in the area, except for Turkey.

Modernization East and West

The modernization paradigm, suitably reconsidered and revamped, looks better than it did twenty years ago. Shorn of its simplistic hypothesis about secularization (and its dichotomous treatment of tradition and modernity), it accounts more accurately for general trends in Middle Eastern countries than an alternative emphasizing Middle East exceptionalism. The current period may well be remembered as one in which a significant cultural shift in Muslim countries, occasioned by the emergence of Islamist movements, pushed individual Muslims toward a greater emphasis on this-worldly achievement in social, economic, and political terms. This cultural shift, accompanied by changes in social organization including improved education, may well foster economic growth.³⁵ In addition, increased prosperity and cultural shift may well be generating a propensity for democracy that modernization theory predicts.³⁶

Inglehart regards the Islamist movement as a blip on the radar screen that will soon disappear. He continues to hold to the secularization hypothesis embedded in Weber's approach and, following him, that of so many others. Yet the objectification of religion, the breakdown of the old division between the City of God and the City of Man, the commitment of religious energies to the building of a better world, the characteristics of the Protestant reformation that Inglehart sees as critical engines of modernization in Europe are also characteristics of the Islamic resurgence of this century. Inglehart finds religion a key to culture and repeatedly argues that culture is eminently mutable in the long run. Yet he neglects the possibility that religious developments in the Islamic world constitute the sort of cultural change he thinks is critical.

One could object that Weber emphasized the Calvinist transformation of religious asceticism into worldly asceticism. Calvinists showed particular enthusiasm for identifying their spiritual welfare with the acquisition of material wealth. Writers from Iqbal to Qutb have argued that the materialism of the West is repugnant to Muslims. They have tended to see modernization arguments, either liberal or Marxist, as anchored in assumptions about the materialistic tendencies of human beings, which they would wish to see subordinated to spiritual values. Yet these writers also remind their readers that Muhammad sought a prosperous,

harmonious, unified society. I find in their work no opposition to entrepreneurship and acquisition in the name of building an Islamic society.

The Islamist perspective conforms more closely to Luther's idea of "calling" than to Calvinist formulations. Weber wrote that Luther placed heightened value on the

fulfillment of duty in worldly affairs as the highest form which the moral activity of the individual could assume. This it was which inevitably gave every-day worldly activity a religious significance, and which first created the conception of a calling in this sense. . . . The only way of living acceptably to God was not to surpass worldly morality in monastic asceticism, but solely through the fulfillment of the obligations imposed upon the individual by his position in the world. That was his calling.³⁷

Da`wa, a word frequently translated as "call," figures prominently in Islamist movements everywhere. Mawdudi attacked the secularist materialism characteristic of both Marxism and liberalism but he did not attack the idea of material improvement. Islam makes "man's material life into a 'thoroughly spiritual venture.'"³⁸ The Islamists, like the Protestants, vehemently oppose a separation between religious and secular matters. They say that religious standards must infuse social life, and it follows that rewards reaped in the pursuit of God's work through the exercise of one's "calling" should be regarded as signs of righteousness. Muhammad provided for the material and spiritual well-being of his community. Khomeini argued for the government of the *faqih* precisely because God would never have left the Shi'a without leadership to superintend the earthly well-being of his community until the hidden Imam reappears, as claimed in the Twelver theory of occultation.

Not a student of Islam or the Middle East, Inglehart dismisses the Islamist movement as a temporary reversion to traditional values. His views, like many of those expressed in the 1970s and 1980s, reflect belief in the secularization hypothesis, even though his own data show wide variation in the degree of societal secularization among the more prosperous countries of the world. He suggests that societies such as the United States, where belief in God and church-going behavior remain widespread, will eventually join the more progressive states of northern Europe in greater secularism. Now, it may be that the Islamist movement gained force in Iran partly by virtue of the rapidity (or unevenness and inequity) of changes wrought by modernization under the shah. The movement surely gathered steam in Egypt and elsewhere from many of the more educated, modern elements of the population who found Western secular materialism, its products for cinema and television, its standards of dress and interaction repugnant. The theorists of modern Islamism from Iqbal to the present start not from an analysis of the Qur'an but from a dissection of modern society and the thought on which it depends. One could maintain that they start from modernism in order to defeat it.

I find much less evidence for that proposition than for the idea that the Islamist movement is a purveyor of modern values. Inglehart argues that a cultural shift toward an emphasis on

achievement together with structural changes in the society—a greater emphasis on education, a growth of voluntary associations—help trigger more rapid economic growth. Religion is a key element in culture, and religion in the Muslim Middle East is undergoing a transformation that both alters the value structure and fosters the growth of voluntary associations. It is probably too early to attempt a judgment about its overall impact on education, whether it will reduce the modernist component, whether it will reverse the trend toward the inclusion of girls, whether it will reduce academic freedom or promote it. It seems unlikely, however, that a movement urging its followers hear the call, seize the reins of power, and transform the world will ignore the potential of modern education any more than they have ignored the benefits of modern communication.

Inglehart links democratic stability to levels of trust in the political culture and levels of perceived well-being. He thus affirms, as have many others, that economic improvement increases the chances for democratic political arrangements. Inglehart adds, however, that culture mediates the relationship between economics and politics. The theory of civil society points in roughly the same direction. Economic development and social mobilization foster a growth in associational life that can help build the sort of trust and habit that contribute to democratic growth. Plurality in economic life and in associational life tends to lead toward plurality in political life.

The Islamist phenomenon has produced plurality at several levels. If Muslims are to be judged by what they do rather than what they believe, then they will clearly be differentiated. If this world is in the hands of believers who must try to do God's will as best they can, without having any privileged access to God, believers will necessarily proceed differently. While each group may believe it constitutes the "true Muslims" as opposed to all others, the belief in a monopoly of truth becomes more difficult to maintain. While one group can conceivably seize power and impose its views, the opposition will also invoke Islam. Islam has become the language of politics.³⁹ If the Christian case is an example, then tolerance of non-Muslim groups will probably be easier to achieve than tolerance of Islamic diversity. In any case, recognition and tolerance of plural viewpoints has become a necessity.

The sort of tolerance implied in Arkoun's view of Islam may nonetheless be a long way off. For him, Islam is all that it is ever been in thought and practice, together with what it might have been or might be. He would make every outcropping of Islam a separate object of study, in the hope of providing a general picture all Muslims could embrace as true. That truth would then be the foundation upon which authentic institutions could be built. Arkoun has argued, in general, that contemporary Islamist movements oppose such a vision by virtue of their insistence on exclusive truth. Secular forces in Algeria, Tunisia and elsewhere tend to argue that the Islamists, like fascists and then communists, talk the talk of tolerance and democracy only to win power. Once in power they would inflict their exclusivist, authoritarian views on others.

The question, though, is whether contemporary Islamism is moving the Middle East in a direction that denies that patterned interactions among politics, economics, and culture posited by

modernization theory or whether it is reinforcing those patterns. I am arguing for the proposition that the Islamist movement, with its commitment to spiritual and material reform, is bringing Islam toward the direct embrace of the myth of progress, a myth that has been foreign and secular in the minds of many Middle Easterners. Culture is changing, and the future is open-ended. The evidence for a rough-hewn parallelism with Europe outweighs the case for difference.

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NOTES

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4. Weber, pp. 108-109.
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6. Martin, p. 101.
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8. Marty, p. 110.
9. Locke, p. 58.
10. Marty, p. 108.
11. Jacques Ellul, *The New Demons*, trans. C. Edward Hopkin (New York: Seabury, 1975), p. 50.
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13. Ellul, p. 148.
14. See Haldun Güllalp, "Globalizing postmodernism: Islamist and Western social theory," *Economy and Society* 26:3 (August, 1997), pp. 419-433.
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39. See Eickelman and Piscatori, Chapter 1.