

# Religion and American Foreign Policy

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Jack Miles

The 11 September attacks put religion on the American agenda in a new and urgent way. More narrowly, 11 September would seem to have put the Muslim religion on the agenda in the form of Islamist terrorism. Yet the Bush administration has declared war not on Islamist terrorism but on terrorism *tout court*. To be sure, it may be tactically wise for the administration to mention Islam only in passing and speak instead, as Attorney General John Ashcroft did on 19 February 2002, of freedom as a sacred cause transcending religious division:

This is not a conflict based in religion. It is a conflict between those who believe that God grants us choice and those who seek to impose their choices on us. It is a conflict between inspiration and imposition; the way of peace and the way of destruction and chaos. It is a conflict between good and evil. And as President Bush has reminded us, we know that God is not neutral between the two.<sup>1</sup>

But it would seem essential for the administration to reckon at least privately with the fact that its enemy defines the war, to quote Osama bin Laden in late September 2001, as 'Islam's battle in this era against the new Christian-Jewish crusade led by the big crusader Bush under the flag of the cross.'<sup>2</sup>

To put this difference another way, the American 'war on terrorism' clearly does not entail any action against the Tamil Tigers of Sri Lanka, the ETA of Basque Spain, the Real IRA of Northern Ireland, or any other non-Islamic form of terrorism. De facto, it is only Islamic terrorism that threatens the United States, and the American government has acted accordingly. But can this uniquely threatening form of terrorism be effectively engaged without engaging the terrorists' declared motivation?

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A serious effort to understand the religious dimensions of the Islamist attacks must begin, paradoxically, with the history of religious warfare among Christians. After the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, religion virtually ceased to be a motive for warfare across national borders in the Christian West, despite continuing intense religious differences and severe religious persecution within national borders. After Jan Sobieski's defeat of the Ottoman Turks at the gates of Vienna in 1683, Christian-Muslim warfare faded as well – at least warfare of a sort that might rally Christians across national lines.

From the Muslim side, this marked the beginning of a long and humiliating retreat that did not, however, entail any conceptual break with religious war corresponding to Westphalia's famous *Cuius regio eius religio* ('the sovereign determines the religion'). When Christian Russia took over Muslim Central Asia; when Christian Britain took over Muslim South Asia; when Christian Bulgaria, Serbia and Greece took over the Muslim Balkans; when Christian France took over Muslim North Africa; and so down the long list, these defeats were still construed on the Muslim side as defeats for Islam in an unfinished war of religion. Then were laid the foundations for an immense historic misunderstanding that has continued to the present moment, for in Western eyes these victories were not construed as victories for Christianity but rather as victories for the affected nations as nations. Think, for example, of Lord Byron dying for Greece: Byron would not have died for Christianity. When a more-than-nationalist agenda was admitted during the nineteenth century, it was 'civilisation' or, at most, 'Christian civilisation' rather than mere Christianity. True, the Western powers continued to swathe themselves in explicitly Christian imagery at moments of national solemnity down to the end of the First World War (anyone who doubts this should visit the recently restored mosaics in the Gedächtniskirche on the Kaiserwilhelmstrasse in Berlin). Yet it matters that even in that very war, Germany was demonised as 'the Hun' – as cultural barbarian, in other words, rather than as religious infidel. This shift matters because as the Western powers projected their own ever more secular nationalism upon the rest of the world, they assumed that if a counter-attack were ever to come from defeated Turks, Arabs or Punjabis, it would come in the name of a nation rather than of a religion.

But this is not what has happened. Al-Qaeda is a Muslim power but not a nation. That point can scarcely be stated too often or too emphatically. Its key support comes not from Arab governments, which fear it for good reason, but from a widespread, albeit thin, stratum of Muslim society. Terrorism may be equally immoral as practiced by a religious sect like al-Qaeda, by a criminal cartel like the Mafia, and by an irredentist movement

like the ETA, but it is not equally threatening in all three cases. But the working assumption of this essay is that such differences do indeed matter.

In *A Peace to End All Peace*, David Fromkin blames much of the instability of the modern Middle East on British and French overestimation of Arab nationalism and underestimation of Muslim religiosity.<sup>3</sup> The comparable error in our day would be to assume that there must be government sponsors of al-Qaeda, so that to eliminate one is to eliminate the other. That assumption reflects an a priori disbelief that a religion, relying only on its own social resources, can ever generate a grave challenge to a world power. But religion can do that. It has done it before. It can do it again.

The sweet dream of American political thought – reborn in each generation, it seems – is that cultural factors like religion will shrink into insignificance as blessed pragmatism finally comes into its own. After the fall of the Soviet Union, many were eager to go beyond religion and announce that even secular ideology would no longer be a cause for war. But something close to the polar opposite has now occurred. The West is confronted with an extra-national, religiously self-defined entity with something ominously like a nation's power to make war.

Al-Qaeda is a novelty because it is a throwback. It is not that the West has never faced anything like it before. It is just that the West has not faced such a thing for a very long time – not, in fact, since before the United States came into political existence. Novelties sometimes fade quickly, but we cannot yet know whether this one will do so. Communism remained ideologically and militarily potent for the better part of a century. All we know of Islamist terrorism at this point is that its end is not in sight.

Given a virulent challenge of potentially long duration, how is the United States to respond? If religion constitutes all or much of al-Qaeda's reason for attacking the United States, should the United States call attention to this religious motive in framing its continuing campaign against al-Qaeda? How much, if anything at all, should the United States say about al-Qaeda's claim to be, in effect, the only true form of Islam? Need we care how many accept that claim? Is a dismissive phrase enough, or will a more extended refutation and a counter-campaign eventually prove necessary? Just as important, how much, at such a juncture, should the United States say to the world about how religion is handled under the American Constitution and how, specifically, the Constitution affects the status of Christianity and Judaism, the numerically dominant American religions?

In a 2002 interview in *New Perspectives Quarterly*, Samuel P. Huntington described al-Qaeda as an 'extensive, transnational terrorist network'.<sup>4</sup>

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Huntington had pointedly observed to the interviewer, Nathan Gardels, that Osama bin Laden is an outlaw expelled from his own country, Saudi Arabia and, later, Sudan. The Taliban, which supported him, was recognised by only three of 53 Muslim countries in the world. All Muslim governments except Iraq – but including Sudan and Iran – condemned his 11 September terrorist attacks. Most Muslim governments were at least acquiescent in the US strategy to respond militarily in Afghanistan.

Huntington went on, however, to note that despite widespread official condemnation, bin Laden had extensive popular support in the Muslim and, especially, the Arab world and that ‘just as he sought to rally Muslims by declaring war on the West, he gave back to the West its sense of common identity in defending itself’.<sup>5</sup>

Huntington was quite right in this assertion. Paradoxically, 11 September was a stroke that simultaneously split apart the Muslim *umma* and knit together the Western international community, weakening the one and strengthening the other, much against the intentions of the suicidal hijackers themselves. Eighteen months later, unfortunately, the invasion and occupation of Iraq have had the opposite effect, splitting apart the West and knitting together the *umma*, at least temporarily.

‘Appropriately’, Huntington said to Gardels, endorsing the Bush administration’s first counter-terrorist efforts, ‘the US thinks of its response not as war on Islam, but as a war between an extensive, transnational terrorist network and the civilized world’. But rather than engage the state of Islam as in any way a policy issue in itself, Huntington – resisting repeated invitations from Gardels – was content to regard Islamically motivated terrorism as simply intolerance intensified. In this, he was altogether typical of his profession. But as the 11 September attack mushrooms before our eyes into a global conflict in which Huntington’s ‘extensive, transnational terrorist network’ invokes Islam in every engagement, the profession’s understandable reluctance to ‘talk religion’ seems increasingly ill-considered.

The Bush administration’s response to 11 September, like Huntington’s response to Gardels, is much in the American grain. Americans, by and large, would surely have been made exceedingly uncomfortable by a president who saw fit to take sides in a Muslim debate, sorting out the ideological underpinnings of Islam as differently understood by mainstream Islam and by al-Qaeda.

And yet if the outcome of a contest between contending Muslim ideologies or theologies bears heavily on whether or not there will be continuing traumatically violent attacks on the United States, then does this contest not merit a good deal of American attention, even at the level of policy? At a comparable moment in the struggle with militant

communism, the American foreign-policy establishment certainly did not hesitate to engage its opponent intellectually. It was judged crucial in the 1950s to distinguish carefully and publicly between democratic socialism as practiced by several of America's most important allies and undemocratic socialism as practiced by the Soviet Union. Had that distinction not been made, some of our friends might have thought themselves our enemies, and our enemy would not have understood the basis for our enmity. Numbing as the Cold War 'theology' may seem in retrospect, it had much to do at the time with winning an international battle for hearts and minds. Now, the rallying of Muslim allies and the isolation of the Islamist enemy would seem to call for an analogous effort, particularly so if the enemy can only be isolated by close police cooperation with Muslim countries. Granting that the making of theological distinctions is not a task that falls exclusively or even principally to the US president, it may nonetheless be an urgent task and properly part of any American diplomatic response to the Islamist threat.

Where should such an intellectual engagement begin? The term 'Islamism' has been coined to refer to an Islam reformed or, perhaps better, mobilised to function as a superior ideological and sociological alternative to communism, capitalism, nationalism and such other -isms as have attracted modern Muslims. In his recent book *Terror and Liberalism*, Paul Berman sees the Egyptian Quranic scholar Sayyid Qutb as at once the Calvin of this Muslim reformation and the Marx of its attempt to transform Islam into a totalitarian ideology. Berman proposes that while responding militarily to al-Qaeda and its ilk, the West, and above all, the United States, must respond ideologically to Sayyid Qutb and his ilk. But this, in turn, means taking Qutb and the inner intellectual drama of Islam itself with a new seriousness.

Qutb reads the intellectual history of the world as a drama in which, in effect, Jews, Christians and Muslims are the only actors of consequence. Secular modernity is simply Christian error writ large. The Western divorce of science from faith, the core flaw of modernity as he understands it, continues and exaggerates Christianity's earlier, fateful sundering of body from spirit. Muslims would not suffer from this essentially Christian spiritual disease – this 'hideous schizophrenia', as Qutb calls it – if Western imperialism had not infected them with it. The promise of Qutb's Islamism, then, is, in the first instance, the liberation of a Muslim spiritual recovery and, in the second, a counter-imperialism or jihad that will rescue the rest of the world from the *jahiliya* or ignorance of expansionist secularism.

Qutb gives bold Muslim expression, Berman says, to something 'that every thinking person can recognise, if only vaguely – the feeling that human

nature and modern life are somehow at odds'. Perhaps Qutb can be ignored as deviant and ultimately marginal, though his thinking has venerable Muslim precedent. But if Qutb's way of engaging this modern dilemma and al-Qaeda's way of applying his ideas threaten to become dominant within the Muslim world, then the challenge – not just within that world but also within ours – must be to formulate and propagate a better response to the same dilemma. And who is to do this? Berman writes:

The followers of Qutb speak, in their wild fashion, of enormous human problems, and they urge one another to death and to murder. But the enemies of these people speak of what? The political leaders speak of United Nations resolutions, of unilateralism, of multilateralism, of weapons inspectors, of coercion and non-coercion. This is no answer to the terrorists. The terrorists speak insanely of deep things. The antiterrorists had better speak sanely of equally deep things. Presidents will not do this. Presidents will dispatch armies, or decline to dispatch armies, for better and for worse.

But who will speak of the sacred and the secular, of the physical world and the spiritual world? ... Philosophers and religious leaders will have to do this on their own. Are they doing so? Armies are in motion, but are the philosophers and religious leaders, the liberal thinkers, likewise in motion? There is something to worry about here, an aspect of the war that liberal society seems to have trouble understanding – one more worry, on top of all the others, and possibly the greatest worry of all.<sup>6</sup>

One knows whereof Berman speaks. Everything has been said, to quote a French sage, but nothing has been heard. The reservoir of available political thought in the West may be hugely impressive in the abstract, but it has not been tapped very well for anything approaching practical policy. In governmental relations between Western nations and nations of Muslim majority, whether nominally secular or floridly religious, religion has been passed over in the usual, agreed upon silence in favour of more mundane matters.

The trouble is that diplomatic relations are in this regard a poor representation of social relations, for a powerful stratum of Muslim society is evidently in the mood not just to talk tough about religion but also to join tough talk to lethal action. If what is called for after 11 September is a response that reaches societies and not just states, then introducing religion into policy discussion at the state level alone – difficult as that may be in itself – may not suffice.

A force that in the long run may have more impact on Muslim cultures than anything undertaken by the State Department is the experience and, tacitly, the example of Muslim subcultures flourishing in Western countries. The American Muslim subculture, though not the largest, may be the best integrated and most prosperous in the West, a fact that the State

Department has recently and quite appropriately sought to advertise. But leadership from that quarter will take time to mature, even with more encouragement than it now receives.

Meanwhile, if a serious and mutually revealing kind of cultural exchange between the West and the Muslim *umma* is to be launched in the interest of a peaceful and mutually beneficial kind of coexistence, state auspices of any kind may not be the best auspices for it. Dissident Muslim intellectuals, to be sure, deserve in principle the same official welcome, shelter and support that dissident Eastern European intellectuals deserved and received during the Cold War. Does anyone doubt that a line of intellectual descent can be drawn between Czeslaw Milosz's *The Captive Mind* in the 1950s and the Polish Solidarity movement in the 1980s? But unofficial auspices, or what is sometimes called public diplomacy, may be more promising at this point than official diplomacy. When Milosz defected, it was not the CIA but the University of California at Berkeley that provided him employment, and was it not better thus for the future of his dissent? It was not Milosz's ambition to go from the employ of one side in the Cold War to the employ of the other. Dissident Muslims typically offer a critique of both sides in the conflict that has now succeeded the Cold War. If their character as dissident *intellectuals* is to be respected, then what is called for is not simple recruitment but conversation in as many extra-governmental forums as possible.

It is instructive at such a juncture to recall that the most effective intellectual leaders during Eastern Europe's liberation from communism did not see themselves as mere dissidents. They were not communists, of course. But just as Gandhi called on his followers to be affirmatively Indian rather than to be merely and trivially anti-British, so Adam Michnik, Vaclav Havel and others of their generation did not want their political agenda to be reduced to something so puny as anti-communism. In his new book *The Unconquerable World*, Jonathan Schell lays great stress on this Eastern European form of Gandhian *satyagraha*, quoting a famous saying of Jacek Kuron to Poland's Solidarity: 'Don't burn down Party Committee Headquarters; found your own'.<sup>7</sup>

The lesson of the 'velvet revolutions' for the United States in its confrontation with Islamism is both cautionary and salutary. Though a larger accommodation of religion in American international policy may well facilitate a superior response to Islamism, the wrong *kind* of accommodation can only too easily degenerate into a response in kind. Wherever Islamist violence has emerged, it has tended, in the first instance, to provoke counter-violence and escalation.

*American Muslims may be the best integrated in the West*

Thus, in India, those who want to respond to Islamist terrorism originating in Pakistan by reasserting the secularity of the Indian state have steadily been losing power to Hindu religious nationalists of India's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). 'Muslims are cancer to this country', BJP leader Bal Thackeray said in a speech quoted in a recent issue of *The New Yorker*; 'Cancer is an incurable disease. Its only cure is operation. O Hindus, take weapons in your hands and remove this cancer from the roots!'.<sup>8</sup>

In Israel–Palestine, the progressive Islamicisation of the once-secular Palestinian liberation movement has prompted an attempt to turn Israel from a secular into a confessional state or, to coin a term, from a Jewish state into a 'Judaist' one. After the 1967 Six Day War, David Ben Gurion, a secularist then out of power, favoured giving the West Bank and the Gaza Strip back to the Palestinians. In June 2003, Ahuvial Nizri, a Judaist settled in the tiny West Bank outpost of Givat Assaf, told the *Los Angeles Times*: 'We believe this land is ours. It's written in the Bible that it is ours, and it's hard to argue with the Bible'.<sup>9</sup>

Bal Thackeray and Ahuvial Nizri have in common with Osama bin Laden that they believe themselves engaged in a religious war. As for the United States, consider the announcement in early 2003 of a special programme at a Christian college near Los Angeles under the title 'God vs. Allah: Who Will Win?' Topics to be discussed included the following:

- Was the war against terror predicted in the Bible, and who will win?
- Does the present conflict in the Middle East mean the end of the world is near?
- When will God make wars cease, as He has promised, and nations build ploughshares instead of swords?
- What do Bible prophecies, written thousands of years ago, say about Islam versus Christianity, and how that conflict will affect our lives and the lives of our loved ones?<sup>10</sup>

The Bush administration's careful abstention from any such inflammatory Christian rhetoric as well the president's own rare but still helpful gestures toward Muslim groups in the US have to be balanced against diplomatically consequential Christian activism beyond the beltway. During the Ottoman era, the United States insisted upon and received from Istanbul a grant of extra-territoriality for Christian missions staffed by Americans. If most Americans have forgotten this partnership between the American state and the Gospel, it should not be assumed that Muslims living in the territory of the former Ottoman Empire have forgotten as well. Nor should it be assumed that Christian missions even today would not seek or accept such protection were it offered and at

least one strategically placed American military officer would seem predisposed to offer it.

Lieutenant General William G. 'Jerry' Boykin, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's deputy undersecretary for intelligence, has told Christian groups around the United States – often speaking in uniform – that radical Muslims hate the United States 'because we're a Christian nation ... and the enemy is a guy named Satan'. Of a 1993 confrontation with a Somali warlord, he once said 'I knew that my god was a real god and his was an idol'. The *Los Angeles Times* quotes 'a top US official ... travelling in the Middle East when news of Boykin's remarks broke': 'It was the worst day of my life. It confirmed [the Muslims'] conspiracy theory that the war on terrorism is really a war on Islam'.<sup>11</sup>

The Bush administration has dissociated itself from Boykin's views only in the briefest and mildest terms, and he retains his highly sensitive position, one whose success would seem to depend on Muslim cooperation. Pentagon sources characterise him privately as 'indispensable', and some of President Bush's right-wing Christian constituents have been vociferous in support of him. If his immunity is a clue, then what impends for American diplomacy may be an unholy identification of Christianity with American power at a moment when what is most called for is an emphatic distinction between the two in the context of a major new effort at public diplomacy.

Though the present moment, with American influence at a low ebb both in the West and in the Muslim *umma*, does not seem at all an apt one for such an effort, Americans would be ill-advised not to begin. On the one hand, the United States badly needs to infuse new vigour into its own practice of freedom of religion and its own commitment to the First Amendment. On the other, American international policy requires public and vigorous support for those abroad who favour the same combination of non-establishment and free exercise that Americans practice domestically.

'The problem is that we always want them to look like us', comments one CIA veteran with extensive experience in Afghanistan and the Middle East. 'In all the countries I've lived in, I never saw one that could afford American democracy. We're going to have to get a lot smarter than to just say, "Get a copy of the *Federalist Papers* and the Constitution, and you're going to be okay".<sup>12</sup> We do need to be smarter than that, and we need as well the saving grace of humility. 'Power always thinks it has a great soul', John Adams wrote, 'and vast views beyond the comprehension of the weak'.<sup>13</sup> But when all such cautions have been registered, we must recognise that democracy is more like soccer than it is like American football: it is a world game. I vividly recall the polite but unmistakable indignation of Kim Dae Jung, years before he came to power, at the notion

that his was an authoritarian culture that could not realistically aspire to democratic governance. If the question is how to respond effectively to the appeal of terrorist Islamism, we need to recall that other Muslims have ever been its first targets, for total control is the condition of its operation. Accordingly, no long-term offensive against its religiously motivated terrorism will be more effective in the long run than the promotion of freedom of religion in the very nations where it most actively recruits. Regrettably, the United States has yet to make a gesture comparable in its awareness of this dynamic to the Nobel committee's presentation of its Peace Prize to Iranian human-rights activist Shirin Ebadi.

Is it realistic to promote freedom of religion in Muslim countries? Well, realists predicted in 1975 that the Helsinki Accords would be violated, and the realists were right. But realism had its limits then, and it has them still. The various Helsinki Accords monitoring groups, despite their early ineffectiveness, were a seed well planted. They took root and became a kind of government-in-waiting as communism was inexorably overtaken by its own internal contradictions – a very Marxist outcome. Democracy in Eastern Europe is scarcely imaginable without the Helsinki Accords monitoring groups. May we not imagine, then, an Islamic equivalent of the Helsinki Conference? Imagine, if you will, a Sarajevo Conference on Muslim Pluralism.

The encouragement of free trade and free elections – which is to say, of the American model in commerce and politics – has long been unabashed American policy. American international policy has included no comparably unabashed encouragement of freedom of religion. Yet worldwide freedom of religion is arguably an even more pressing American national interest than free trade. The ideologues of al-Qaeda regard freedom of religion – that is, the separation of political from religious power – as the mother of all sins, the vice that enables all other vices. Accordingly, militant Islamism, acting in what it considers the defence of Islam and of virtue, has been prepared to take violent action to prevent the spread of this freedom, crushing Muslim diversity no less than religious diversity beyond Islam. The United States, even as it addresses such other legitimate Muslim grievances as injure the cause of peace, should make freedom of religion the first item on its diplomatic agenda – not a dream endlessly deferred but the most urgent and practical first order of business.

It is an oft-repeated truism that democratic capitalist states do not make war on other democratic capitalist states in the pursuit of political or economic power. This can be expanded to include religion: societies in

## *Imagine a Sarajevo Conference on Muslim Pluralism*

which there is freedom of religion do not make religious war on other religiously free societies. It must be stressed, though, that the unit of comparison here is not the state but the society. But how does a state engage a society about the society's religion? State-to-state diplomacy, even as it touches upon religion, is well enough understood. Informal society-to-society diplomacy or 'public diplomacy' is equally well understood; religious delegations undertaking people-to-people missions are increasingly familiar. But asymmetrical, state-to-society diplomacy with religious reform as its target is virtually without precedent in the modern West.

Whence the great difficulty that has attended the attempt of the Coalition Provisional Authority to reform Iraqi society by establishing for it, through the US-backed Iraqi Governing Council, a political system that will safeguard the freedom of religion that Americans regard as *conditio sine qua non* for democracy. Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani wants elections before a constitution is in place that would determine how elections should be conducted. His Shi'ite followers are the majority in Iraq; and to the extent that democracy equals majority rule, his demand on their behalf is for democracy. But the Sunni Arab minority rightly fears that its erstwhile Shi'ite victim is poised to become its oppressor, while Kurds, Christians and Turkomens have comparable but even more intense fears of their own. Only in the Balkans did the fall of communism present challenges comparable to these; and the Balkans, where the fall of communism was anything but a velvet revolution, may be our best contemporary Western clue to how freedom of religion may arrive in Muslim countries that now lack it.

Yet, we may take heart that the Muslim world, at this point in time, may be almost as exhausted from internecine warfare as the West was just after the Thirty Years War. That grim and blood-drenched moment in Western history was, paradoxically, the moment when a great cultural liberation was accomplished in the West. Western freedom of religion may have been rationalised by the later brilliance of the Enlightenment, but the necessary condition for it was the misery that followed the West's wars of religion and the mood of revulsion and surfeit that these wars created.

By a similar paradox, the brutally lengthy religious wars that have wracked the Muslim world in recent decades in Afghanistan, in Algeria, in Saudi Arabia after the Shi'ite attack on Mecca in 1979, in Egypt after the Muslim Brotherhood's assassination of Anwar Sadat in 1981, in Iran after the Islamic Revolution, in Iraq during the Sunni reprisals after the first Gulf War and elsewhere may have fostered a new readiness to find somehow a Muslim path to at least Muslim pluralism. This much and no more would already be a Muslim Westphalia. It can scarcely have escaped

all Muslim notice that every one of these bloody conflicts has reflected the determination of some Muslims to establish a fusion of religious and political power at the expense of all other Muslims. Michael Scott Doran writes in *Foreign Affairs*:

Radical Sunni Islamists hate Shi'ites more than any other group, including Jews and Christians. Al-Qaeda's basic credo minces no words on the subject: 'We believe that the Shi'ite heretics are a sect of idolatry and apostasy, and that they are the most evil creatures under the heavens'.<sup>14</sup>

Shi'ite radicals offer a matching hatred. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini came to power calling for the overthrow of the House of Saud and an end to Wahhabi control over Mecca and Medina.

Muslim intellectuals never tire of pointing out that the Muslim past was more pluralist than is the Muslim present. Perhaps sheer exhaustion may do more than Western intervention to make the Muslim future more like that Muslim past. But might leadership for a revival and rationalisation of pluralism emerge in part from Western Muslims protected and supported by Western non-Muslims?

It might do so if the Westerners keep their own history in mind, for the fatal dream of the restored caliphate closely matches another fatal and seemingly immortal dream that finally did die – namely, the Caesaro-Papist dream of the West in the various sword-and-cross forms it took over the centuries. Until the end of the Thirty Years War, it seemed that the West would die at its own hand rather than surrender this dream. But once the dream was in fact surrendered, it seemed a nightmare from which all had blessedly awakened. If al-Qaeda represents, in cultural terms, a return to the first decades of the seventeenth century, when its latter-day prophets were flourishing, then let us be bold enough to think ahead to the middle and the end of the seventeenth century as we imagine futures and conjure up diplomacies.

The West and the United States are not synonymous, a fact that Europe is recalling just now with a vengeance, and one that Americans have their own reasons to remember. And yet the American disestablishment of religion, coupled as it is to a guarantee that all religions may be freely exercised in that country, is the fruit of a common Western history, a matter that Kevin Phillips recently documented exhaustively in his book *The Cousins' Wars*.<sup>15</sup> Each Western nation, as each has differently uncoupled political power from religious authority, has a slightly different lesson to impart. Belgium, Canada, Germany, France, even, latterly, Northern Ireland – these and many others may rightly claim a turn at the podium. I would claim no more than this for the distinctive American way of dealing politically with religion but also no less.

The ultimate goal of an American international policy on religion must be to make all religions equally secure in every nation, thus to ensure that no nation shall (or need) threaten any other nation's religion or religions. This happy state of affairs must not only obtain, it must be *seen* to obtain, for perceived danger provokes war, while perceived security preserves peace. Support, then, must be rallied not just for the practice of the freedom of religion but also for the inculcation and public celebration of the practice. Freedom of religion is not the default position of culture any more than flight is the default position of an airplane. Freedom of religion, on the contrary, is a craft kept aloft in a culture only by constant and highly self-conscious maintenance. Government cannot do all the necessary work, but it can do some of it.

When the Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988, a Palestinian professor of modern Arabic and Hebrew literatures at Berkeley, Professor Muhammad Siddiq, commented in the *Los Angeles Times Book Review* that Mahfouz was not just the greatest but also the first novelist in the Arab world.<sup>16</sup> In the West, fiction as what W.H. Auden called 'feigned history' occupies a midpoint between falsehood and truth – between fantasy or pure fabrication, on the one hand, and factual report, on the other. Siddiq was pointing out that Arab literature had only lately, in the person of Mahfouz, recognised this midpoint.

Siddiq's comment made sudden sense for me of the baffling accusations made by so many Muslims – not just Arab Muslims – that Salman Rushdie had told lies about Muhammad in his novel *The Satanic Verses*. Perhaps what was true of Arab culture was true to some extent of all Muslim culture. Western commentators as well as Rushdie himself, at first, had greeted this charge of outright mendacity with a shrug and a smile: 'Come now, can a novel lie?' But on a mental map in which there is no middle kingdom between truth and fabrication, a story that is not – like a fable – a transparent and total invention must necessarily be a deceptive report, and its author cannot be other than an outright liar.

Secularity is, like fiction, a middle kingdom. It lies between religion and irreligion, between belief and unbelief. Those who occupy this middle kingdom may seem, to those who recognise no such realm, to be necessarily irreligious unbelievers – enemies of religion as Rushdie seemed an enemy of truth. Such thinking is personified by Sayyid Qutb. An effective counter-offensive against his kind of thinking will involve demonstrating that secular man, although free in principle to be an enemy of religion, is not inevitably such. Once secular society prohibits the prohibition of religion, which is what American society does through the 'free exercise' clause of the First Amendment, not only is it not necessarily anti-religious, it is necessarily *not* anti-religious. The United

*The United States is not a religious threat*

States is proof that a secular state can govern without prejudice a vibrantly religious society. Our sworn opponent may not so much have rejected this truth as failed to grasp it in theory or observe it in practice.

If all diplomacy contains some element of pedagogy, it is on this point that the pedagogy of Western diplomacy ought just now to be concentrated. The United States with its colossal arsenal is, empirically, a threat to the world. No power so heavily armed can fail to be perceived as a threat. But not the threat that we are perceived to be in the Muslim world: we are not a religious threat. This is a point that American diplomacy, unofficial as well as official, must learn how to make, but Americans must first perhaps make this very point to themselves with a new insistence.

Islam and the West do not, in the end, divide the world between them. China is another world. So is India. Yet large as they are, India and China do not aspire to turn all the world's people into Indians or Chinese. Islam and the West – the Christian West and now the secular West – have historically had just such aspirations. Each aspires to be not a guest, not even an honoured guest, at the multi-national banquet but alone in the role of host.

This being the case, if a reconception of the place of religion in American international policy can foster peace between these two historically aggressive actors alone, then the dividend in peace for the world as a whole may be large indeed.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> 'Prepared remarks of Attorney General John Ashcroft, National Religious Broadcasters Convention, Nashville, Tennessee', 19 February 2002. <http://www.usdoj.gov/ag/speeches/2002/021902religiousbroadcasters.htm>
- <sup>2</sup> Osama bin Laden statement, broadcast by Al-Jazeera and reported by the Dubai bureau of the Associated Press on Monday 24 September 2001.
- <sup>3</sup> David Fromkin, *A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Owl Books, 1989).
- <sup>4</sup> 'Osama bin Laden Has Given Common Identity Back to the West', *New Perspectives Quarterly*, Winter 2002, pp. 5–8.
- <sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>6</sup> Paul Berman, 'The Philosopher of Terror', *New York Times Magazine*, 23 March 2003. See also Chapter 3, 'In the Shade of the Koran', and Chapter 4, 'The Hideous Schizophrenia', in Paul Berman, *Terror and Liberalism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2003) as well as Chapter 2, 'Ibn Taymiyya and His Children', in Daniel Benjamin and Steve Simon, *The Age of Sacred Terror* (New York: Random House, 2002). In sharp distinction from these views is Graham Fuller who sees Islamism as far more pluriform and pragmatic. He argues in *The Future of Political Islam* (New York: Palgrave/Macmillan, 2003), p. 193, that 'political Islam cannot properly be considered as an alternative to other ideologies such as democracy, fascism, socialism, liberalism, and communism. It cannot be put anywhere clearly on an ideological spectrum. It is far more useful to see it as a cultural variant, an alternative vocabulary in which to dress any one of these ideological trends ... Islamism is therefore not an ideology but a religious-cultural-political framework for engagement on issues that most concern politically engaged Muslims'. For Fuller, a thinker like Sayyid Qutb represents one, but not the only, form that Islamism can take.
- <sup>7</sup> Jonathan Schell, *The Unconquerable World: Power, Nonviolence, and the Will of the People* (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Hold and Company, 2003), p. 200.
- <sup>8</sup> Larissa MacFarquhar, 'Letter from India. The Strongman', *The New Yorker*, 26 May 2003, pp. 50–57.
- <sup>9</sup> Alissa J. Rubin, 'Tiny Israeli Outposts Loom Large on Mideast Road Map', *Los Angeles Times*, 6 June 2003.
- <sup>10</sup> Chapman University, Orange, California, 25 May 2003. The programme was promoted as 'a special live edition of the popular talk-radio show, *Christian Questions*, with talk show host, Ric Suraci, of 980 AM WSUB, New London, Connecticut'.
- <sup>11</sup> William M. Arkin, 'A General Bind for Rumsfeld. What to do when an extremist subordinate is also "indispensable"?' *Los Angeles Times*, 26 October 2003; Johanna Neuman, 'Boykin Furor Bedevils President. Arab world seethes at general's linking Islam with Satan. And Bush's response angers his base', *Los Angeles Times*, 23 November 2003.
- <sup>12</sup> The speaker is Milton A. Bearden, quoted in Susan Sachs, 'How to Rig a Democracy', *New York Times*, 30 June 2002.
- <sup>13</sup> Quoted by Jack Beatty, 'In the Name of God', *The Atlantic Monthly*, 5 March 2003.
- <sup>14</sup> Michael Scott Doran, 'The Saudi Paradox', *Foreign Affairs*, January–February 2004, p. 46.
- <sup>15</sup> Kevin Phillips, *The Cousins' Wars: Religion, Politics, & the Triumph of Anglo-America* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).
- <sup>16</sup> Muhammad Siddiq, 'Naguib Mahfouz and the Rise of the Arabic Novel', *Los Angeles Times*, 27 November 1988.