

**SAMIR AMIN**

**EUROCENTRISM**  
**Religion, Philosophy of enlightenment,**  
**Marxism in a global perspective**

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## Part One

# MODERNITY AND RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATIONS

## I. MODERNITY

### Reason and emancipation

There are two periods in history the impact of which was decisive for the formation of the modern world.

1. The first of these periods involves the birth of modernity. It is the period of the Enlightenment (the European XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries) which is also, fortuitously, that of the birth of capitalism. I will summarize their significance in the following two propositions:

The first concerns the definition of modernity, which is the assertion that the human being, individually and collectively, can and must make his own history. An assertion which marks a break with the dominant philosophy of all previous societies – in Europe and elsewhere – based on the principle that God, having created the universe and mankind, is the « legislator » of last resort. The ethical principles based on this divine legislation are, naturally, formulated by and through historical transcendental religions or philosophies, thereby opening the door to various interpretations through which the social realities in permanent transformation are expressed. Reason is then often, but not always, invoked to serve these interpretations, but then it remains subject to the duty of « reconciling faith and reason ». The new assertion which defines modernity is freed from this obligation, without necessarily losing interest in the question of faith. The new assertion closes one chapter, but opens another with its own problems : the freedom which human beings give themselves must be defined in its turn. History, if it no longer operates as a force exterior to humanity, must be explained by other « laws » the discovery of which is the object of a new set of sciences the constitution of which becomes both possible and necessary : those of mankind and society. Reason is called on once again in the search for these objective determinants of the movement of societies. The new freedom which modern humanity gives itself therefore remains subject to the constraints of what is thought to constitute the logic of social reproduction and the dynamics of the transformation of societies.

The second concerns the bourgeois character of modernity as expressed by the thinking of the Enlightenment. Emergence of capitalism and emergence of modernity constitute the two facets of one and the same reality.

The thinking of the Enlightenment then offers us a concept of reason indissolubly associated with that of emancipation without which the phrase « mankind makes his history » would have no meaning. Yet; the emancipation in question is defined and limited by what capitalism demands and allows. The view expressed by the Enlightenment nevertheless proposes a concept of emancipating reason which it claims to be trans-historic, whereas an examination of what it is in fact will demonstrate its terribly historic nature.

The most systematic fundamental expression of this view is that formulated by Adam Smith, in qualifying it unfortunately as « utilitarianism », a doubtful but spontaneous term in the tradition of British empiricism. In this vision of the human world, society is conceived as an assembly of individuals ; and that is a vision which breaks with the tradition of the orders of the Ancien Régime. It is therefore undisputedly an ideology liberating of the individual ; once again one of the dimensions of modernity. This individual is moreover naturally endowed with reason. The social order which must guarantee the triumph of this emancipating reason – and thus the happiness of human beings – is then pictured as a system of “good institutions”, to use the term in use up to now in American social thought. This system is based in its turn on the separation, in social life, of the political domain from the economic domain. The “good institutions” which must ensure the management of political life

through reason are those of democracy guaranteeing individuals' liberty and legal equality. In the management of economic life reason imposes the choice of contractual freedom (in other words the « market ») as the basis of the relations of exchange and of the organization of the division of labour between the « individuals » of which society is constituted. And the healthy working of the economy requires in its turn the protection of property, henceforth considered as a sacrosanct value in a « good society ».

So emancipating reason is expressed in the classical triptych : liberty, equality, property. A formula which is that of the successive early revolutions of the United Provinces and the English « glorious revolution » of 1688, before being adopted more systematically by the American revolution and then by the French revolution in its first phase.

The constituent elements of the triptych are considered to be « naturally » harmoniously complementary to each other. And up until now, the assertion that there is an equals sign between « market » and « democracy » has remained a corner stone of bourgeois ideology.. The conflict which has on the contrary, in reality, ceaselessly opposed the extension of democratic rights to all citizens, men and women, bourgeois and proletarians, propertied or property less to the unconditional defenders of the « market » is straight away dismissed from the debate.

Adam Smith and Enlightenment thought certainly had the intuition that the « good society » system – rational and liberating for future eternity – which they proposed encountered some difficulties. But they skated rapidly over these. The « invisible hand » that guaranties the triumph of reason in the management of economic life too often appears as an « unpredictable » hand, thereby throwing into question the ability of human beings to really make their history as modernity requires. And the guarantee of liberty, of equality and of the safety of property implies that the « visible fist » of the State complete the work of the invisible hand of the market.

The emancipating reason of the Enlightenment does not exclude, but on the contrary implies, that room be made for an ethical principle. Here reason is not instrumental, but inseparable from the liberating objectives and means of which the triptych summarizes the fundamental ethical elements.

Ethics associated with the thinking of the Enlightenment may or may not be of religious inspiration. God is present for those who credit him with being the cause of the need for emancipation to which human beings aspire. He disappears when this aspiration is only seen to be « natural ». The difference is slender.

The contemporary version of bourgeois emancipating reason, made fashionable with all the insistence that media popularization allows - that of the egalitarian liberalism of John Rawls – provides strictly nothing new because it remains prisoner of the liberty, equality, property triptych. Challenged by the liberty/equality conflict which the unequal division of property necessarily implies, so called egalitarian liberalism is only very moderately so. Inequality is accepted and legitimized by a not very « reasonable » feat of acrobatics, which borrows its pseudo concept of « endowments » from popular economics. This is a highly platitudinous observation : « individuals » (society being the sum of individuals) are endowed with diverse fortunes (some are – by chance ? – powerful heads of enterprise, others have nothing). These unequal “endowments” nevertheless remain legitimate as long as they are the product (inherited obviously) of the work and the savings (of ancestors). So one is asked to go back in history to the – mythical - day of the original social contract made between equals, who later became unequal because they really wished for it, by the inequality of the sacrifices to which they consented. I do not think that this way of avoiding the questions on the specificity of capitalism even deserves to be considered elegant.

But if falsely egalitarian liberalism is offered insistently as an ideological alternative to the disarray of present day society, it is because the front of the stage is no longer occupied by utilitarianism (from which so-called egalitarian liberalism is scarcely distinguishable), but by the excess represented by right wing libertarian ideology (the extreme right in fact). This ideology substitutes the diptych of

« liberty-property » for the Enlightenment's triptych, definitely abandoning the idea of giving equality the status of a fundamental value. The Von Hayek version of this new extreme right wing ideological formula renews with that of its inventors, the XIXth century « liberals » (Bastiat and consorts) who are at the root of the excess, starting as they did from a flaunted aversion to the Enlightenment, responsible for the French revolution.

In the right wing libertarian version, ethics disappear because human beings, if they make their history properly, are authorised to make it by behaving as if they were in the jungle : they are not responsible for the consequences of their acts, in particular inequalities they deepen, which are even welcome. Yet without responsibility there are no ethics. It matters little then that some, many even, of these right wing libertarians claim to be « believers » - Christians to be precise. Their religion is in reality amoral and thereby tends even to become a simple social convention, hardly more than the expression of "community" singularity. This is perhaps a possible interpretation of religion; but it remains questionable to say the least.

2. The second decisive period opens with Marx's criticism of the Enlightenment's bourgeois emancipating reason. This criticism opens a new chapter of modernity, which I call modernity critical of modernity.

Emancipating reason cannot ignore this second moment of its deployment, more exactly of the start of its redeployment. After Marx, social thinking can no longer be what it was before. What I wrote above about the criticism of the Enlightenment's emancipating reason – my second observation – could certainly not have been written without Marx. Marx is inescapable.

Emancipating reason can no longer record its analyses and propositions under the triptych of « liberty, equality, property ». Having taken the measure of the insoluble conflict which opposes the holding of capitalist property to the deployment of equality between human beings, emancipating reason can only delete the third term of the triptych. And substitute for it the term of fraternity, which is stronger than « solidarity », proposed here and there by some today. Fraternity then obviously implies the abolition of capitalist property which is necessarily that of a few – a minority, the real dominating and exploiting bourgeois class – which deprives the others – the majority – of access to the conditions of an equality worthy of the name. Fraternity then implies the substitution for this form of exclusive and excluding property a new form, that of social property, exercised by and on behalf of the whole social body. Social integration would then operate through democracy, the inescapable demand no longer for the sole management of political life in the narrow sense of the term but that of social property. Integration by democracy would substitute itself for the partial and naturally unequal integration operated within the limits of the respect for capitalist property, that is to say exclusively by the « market », to use the language of the dominant vulgate.

"Liberty, equality, fraternity" – the slogan was not invented by Marx, as everyone well knows. The French revolution, as all great revolutions, was ahead of its time and projected itself far ahead of its demands. It was thus both a bourgeois revolution (and it stabilised belatedly on this basis) and a more advanced break through, which it experienced as a popular revolution and which can be interpreted today as starting the socialist criticism of the bourgeois system. Just as the two other great revolutions of modern times - the Russian and the Chinese – project themselves into a plan for a communist society far ahead of the immediate demands and possibilities of their societies.

The « popular property » which the French revolution thought it could and must guarantee was that of millions of peasants and craftsmen ; and it declared the « market » it protected must be authentically open and competitive, excluding the monopolies and unearned income they produced. But this popular property was already being threatened both on its right and on its left. On its right by the bourgeoisie composed of the big entrepreneurs and capitalists who are symbolized by those famous « two hundred families » owners of the Bank of France. On its left by all the disinherited of the towns (proletarians and precarious paupers) and the country (poor and landless peasants). The convulsions of the French revolution occupy the whole XIXth century up to its end, from which point the « Republic » stabilises,

adopting the revolution's slogan, but after having crushed the Commune and emptied the term of fraternity of its original content, substituting for it what can be expressed in and by belonging to the « national » community.

All the ambiguities, contradictions and divergent interpretations of « French ideology » constitute the web of this history, up to the present. And it is these ambiguities which a brutal return to the formula guaranteeing the supremacy and the safety of bourgeois property is seeking to get rid of today.

Bourgeois reason re-established and on its feet, is no longer, can no longer be liberating. Moreover it stands on only two feet: liberty and property. Henceforth Bastiat and Von Hayek, who show their open antipathy to any idea of giving the slightest importance to equality, are the real representatives of a degenerate reason, which is no longer even that conceived by the Enlightenment. And as long as this bourgeois reason reduced to liberty and property is the reason of “American ideology”, the retreat – the abolition in thought of the French revolution, and of course the Russian and the Chinese revolutions – is nothing other than the expression of what is essentially meant by the Americanization of the world.

This bourgeois reason, henceforth shorn of any liberating ambition, inevitably becomes instrumental, short, hollow, irresponsible reason (and so without ethical basis).

The full expression of this non-emancipating reason is deployed in the « economic » field, moreover defined by its inventors and defenders as a « pure science » (« pure economics »). I will very briefly mention here the criticisms that can be made elsewhere of this truncated rationality. Firstly the fact that it never succeeds in establishing by logical consistent arguments (in the broadest sense of the term) the correctness of its fundamental proposition : that the free market produces a “general optimum equilibrium”. Secondly that it persists in refusing to reflect on the reasons for its failure, which stem from its unreal conception of society, reduced to the sum of the individuals composing it.. On the contrary it attempts to escape from the confusion in which it is installed by strengthening its initial axiom (the individual constitutes the exclusive cell of which society is constituted) by inventing these famous « anticipations”. But their integration into the “economic reasoning” aggravates the chaos and only leads to one possible conclusion : that the market moves from disequilibrium to disequilibrium without ever tending to equilibrium (a conclusion reached by Marx and Keynes long ago). The icing on the cake that the term of “social optimum” wished to be disappears in its turn. That's no problem: pure economics gives up this ambition without which however the emancipation of the human being – the good of the Enlightenment and Adam Smith – loses its sense. The human being is declared irresponsible like the market through which he expresses himself. The pure economics cynics dare to think and say so, and they should be thanked for their courage. The market can produce three billion “useless” human beings, a growing proportion of the « poor » in the richest countries, that does not matter. It is, it seems, “rational”. Reason, which is destroying the alienated and / or excluded human being, nature (that the so called rational but always short term economic calculation implies) and entire societies (therefore human cultures), not only gives up being liberating, but agrees to fulfil the functions of a demolition enterprise for humanity.

Other defenders of bourgeois reason hesitate to join the camp of cynicism and/or Americanization in which the real world system is engaged. So called egalitarian liberalism to which I referred above applies itself to trying to save something from the wreckage. This current of contemporary bourgeois thought, symbolised by Rawls, which some even think can be qualified as « left wing » ! ignores Marx and places itself ahead of him. Its failure is stinging, as is shown by its retreat into the chaos of the theory of the inequality of « endowments » (of individuals) which obliges it to go back to day one of the original social contract.

I do not know if the « culturalist » adversaries of the real world and of the trends of its evolution called « Americanization » by some and « westernization » (general) by others can be described as “rational”. Confronted by the threat of “Americanization” some therefore defend the sole « cultural values », without throwing into question the general trends of the system, as if reality could be sliced

like a salami, in order to keep “a morsel for tomorrow”. Others having previously confused capitalism and « The West », forgetting the decisive reality of the former in favour of the gratuitous and false assertion of an eternal « West », think they can transfer the confrontation from the terrain of social reality in permanent movement to the heaven of an imaginary trans-historic cultural universe for all.

The heterodox mix of this hotchpotch – the pure economics of imaginary markets, plus the falsely egalitarian liberalism, plus the wild trans-historic culturalist imaginings – pompously sets itself up as « new » thinking, so called « post-modernist » thinking. The criticism of bourgeois modernism having been erased and reason having given up being liberating, has contemporary bourgeois thought then become anything but a system which has had its day ?

Dangerous senility, and danger strengthened by the rallying to the principle of irresponsibility. Dangerous senility because the system has reached a stage characterized by the monstrous power of its destructive capacities. Destruction of the human being, of nature, of whole societies I said above. Emancipating reason must reply to this challenge..

### 3. Reason is liberating or it is nothing.

The concept of reason thus implies more than the development of a set of mental procedures which enable the understanding of the relations between objects and phenomena to progress. Given that this understanding of the relations is also that of the measure of their degree of necessity, which is only absolute – or almost so – in situations of extreme banality without great interest. The deployment of science – knowing more but also and especially knowing the limits of what is known – then allows the degree of freedom from which humane action can benefit to be situated, the possible and effective alternatives to be defined. But also that there is uncertainty to be recognized (few absolute certainties) and as far as possible its margin to be judged.

This set of procedures does not in itself constitute reason, even if many researchers in the so called natural or human sciences can, as a first approximation, not only rely on them (it is necessary), but be satisfied with them, content themselves with them. All living beings – and particularly the higher animals – implement methods of action and choices during their lives which show a certain degree of this type of understanding – the understanding of relations, at least in its first stage..

Reason demands more. Because emancipation supposes responsibility, without which the options between different possibilities have neither bearing nor sense. Whoever says responsibility says ethics, the principles of which can not be evacuated from of a reflection which wishes to be scientific.

The principles of the ethics in question can be those that a-theistic (and a fortiori a-religious) universalist humanism has inspired, from the Enlightenment (and even before) to Marxism and up to the present. But they can just as well be those of a deist universalist humanism, even religious in the sense that it falls into a particular religious tradition, Christian or other. It is highly probable that these streams converge towards the same great river. The example which comes immediately to mind is that of the liberation theologians whom I interpret as being believers for whom being Christian is not to stop at Christ but to go on from him.. There might be other religious interpretations (Islamic, Buddhist and others) or non-Western philosophic (in the sense that their ancestor is not the « Hellenism » common to the people of the Christian and Muslim worlds) which see the light in this future common to all humanity which is to be built. It is in this sense, and in this sense only that so called cultural diversity (in the absence of a better term) is, more than to « respect” (“tolerate” is a pejorative term – something which is not liked is “tolerated”), to wish to see deployed in all its potential richness. I distinguish this diversity – turned towards the construction of the future in the tradition of emancipating reason – from the false diversity of the specificities inherited from the past of which the culturalists make trans-historic invariants (which they are not) and hang on to them neurotically.

To return to the challenge with which emancipating reason is confronted today, is to invent effective means which may enable us to progress towards well defined ends, to advance in the direction of

emancipation from market alienation, to move away from practices which destroy the potential of nature and life, to converge towards the abolition of gigantic so called « development » (material) disparities that the polarizing expansion of global capitalism inevitably produces.

For me, Marxism is the effective instrument which enables both the challenges to be analysed and the strategies to be defined that are capable of changing the world in the directions specified here. Provided also that it is taken into account that Marx only started the reflection and the action in this direction. In other words we define ourselves as starting from Marx and not as stopping at him.

The questions to be settled, in theory and practice, are complex and in their entanglement does not allow any unilateral solution which ignores the conflicts between the different constituent elements of the challenge. I will choose one example, because it seems to me to constitute the major dimension of the challenge on the global scale. The gigantic centre/periphery contrast which capitalism has constructed must be deconstructed. That will certainly require some development of the productive forces in the peripheries of the system, which it must be recognized risks relegating the other dimensions of emancipation to the second rank. The contradiction is in the reality. Some people hope to surmount it by abolishing one of its terms. In persisting to ignore 80% of humanity, by being satisfied with saying that they must first “go through the capitalist stage”, without taking into account that the polarization immanent to this system will never allow them to “catch up”. By ignoring all the other dimensions of emancipation to the exclusive advantage of the prior development of the productive forces. Emancipating reason, among others in its living Marxist formulation, must be able to combine the two contradictory terms of the challenge. .

## II. MODERNITY AND INTERPRETATIONS OF RELIGIONS

### 1. The flexibility of religious interpretations

Modernity is based on the demand for the emancipation of human beings, starting from their liberation from the shackles of social determination in its earlier traditional forms. This liberation called for the abandoning of the dominant forms of legitimating power – in the family, in the communities within which ways of life and production are organized, in the State – based up to then on a metaphysics, generally of religious expression. It therefore implies the separation of the State and religion, a radical secularization, which is the condition for the deployment of modern forms of politics.

Will secularization abolish religious belief ? Some Enlightenment philosophers who placed religion in the realm of absurd superstitions thought and hoped so. This perception of the religious phenomenon found a favourable ground for expansion in the XIXth and XXth centuries among the working classes acceding to political consciousness. If only because the working class left (and the organic intellectuals who expressed its ideologies) in practice came up against the conservative options of all organized Christian religious hierarchies, Catholic, Protestant or Orthodox. Anti-clericalism became frankly synonymous with anti-religion and, because of this, gained ground all over Europe, naturally in different degrees depending on the circumstances of the evolution of the ideological, political and social struggles. French society in particular counted among the most receptive to the new anti-clericalism – atheism -, for reasons which stem from the legacy of its Revolution’s radical character. Soviet ideology took over this fundamental atheism and integrated it into its conception of dialectical materialism.

Nevertheless another reading can be made of Marx. The often cited phrase (« religion is the opium of the people ») is truncated, what follows lets it be understood that the human being needs opium, because he is a metaphysical animal, who cannot avoid asking himself questions about the meaning of life. He gives what answers he can, either he adopts those religion offers him, or he invents them himself, or else he avoids worrying about them. .

In any case religions are there, are part of the picture of reality, even constitute an important dimension of it. It is therefore important to analyse their social function, that is to say in our modern world their articulation with what constitutes the modernity in place – capitalism, democracy, secularity. In what follows I will try to do this for the domain of the three so called religions of the Book. It will be seen that the religions in question have been subject to successive interpretations which have enabled them to survive, to adapt to gigantic social transformations and to accompany them.

The success of Christianity in this domain, which accompanied the modernity which arose in Europe (need it be recalled ?), gave rise to a flourishing of “theories” which do not convince me. The most common – which has become a sort of common ground generally admitted, without arousing the slightest critical questioning – is that Christianity bore within itself this exceptional evolution. The « genius of Christianity » is thus reconstructed as one of the myths – alongside others (the Greek ancestor among others, « Indo-European » racism etc) – from which the « European miracle » is explained (the fact that modernity was invented there and not elsewhere). The most extremist ideologies of this Eurocentrism adopt an idealist theory of history according to which capitalism is the product of this evolution of religious interpretation . I propose a systematic criticism of this theory in *Eurocentrism* (published in this work).

And the most extremist of the extremists reserve this genius creator of capitalist modernity for the Protestant Reformation. The famous thesis of Max Weber can be recognized here. It is, even less convincing in my opinion than what I call the « Christianophilia » of Eurocentrism. .

The arguments which Weber advances in this respect are confused, despite their apparent precision. They are moreover perfectly returnable ; analogous to those previously advanced to explain the backwardness of China by Confucianism, then fifty years later to explain the take –off of that country by the same Confucianism ! Superficial historians had explained the success of the Arab civilisation of the Middle Ages by Islam, while contemporary journalists, even more superficial, explain the stagnation of the Arab world by the same Islam. « Culturalism » has no possible univocal response to any of these great historical challenges. In fact it has too many, because it can prove any formulation and its opposite.

As a counterpoint to these ideas – forced, false, but on which the dominant world ideology feeds – I propose the following theses:

(i) Modernisation, secularism and democracy are not the products of an evolution (or revolution) of religious interpretations, but on the contrary, these interpretations have adjusted, with more or less felicity, to their demands. This adjustment was not the privilege of Protestantism. It operated in the Catholic world, in another manner certainly, but no less effectively. In any case it created a new religious spirit freed from dogmas.

(ii) In this sense the Reformation was not the « condition » for the flowering of capitalism, even if this thesis (of Weber) is widely accepted in the societies it flatters (Protestant Europe). The Reformation was not even the most radical form of the ideological rupture with the European past and its « feudal » ideologies – among others its earlier interpretation of Christianity. It was on the contrary its primitive and confused form..

(iii) There was a « Reformation of the dominant classes », which resulted in the creation of national Churches (Anglican, Lutheran) controlled by these classes and implementing the compromise between the emerging bourgeoisie, the monarchy and the great rural land owners, brushing aside the threat of the working classes and the peasantry who were systematically repressed. This reactionary compromise – which Luther expressed and Marx and Engels analysed as such – enabled the bourgeoisie of the countries in question to avoid what happened in France : a radical revolution. So the secularism produced in this model has remained tentative up until now. The retreat of the Catholic idea of universality which the establishment of national Churches manifests fulfilled a sole function : to further establish the monarchy and strengthen its role as an arbiter between the forces of the Ancien Régime and those represented by the rising bourgeoisie, strengthening their nationalism



and delaying the advance of the new forms of internationalism that socialist internationalism would later propose.

(iv) But there were also reform movements that took hold of the lower classes, the victims of the social transformations caused by the emergence of capitalism. These movements which reproduced old forms of struggle - those of the millenarianism of the Middle Ages – were not ahead of their time, but behind it in relation to its demands. So the French revolution – with its popular secular and radical democratic mobilisation – had to be awaited, then socialism before the dominated classes could learn to express themselves effectively in the new conditions. The protestant sects in question lived on fundamentalist type illusions. They created a favourable ground for the endless reproduction of « sects » with apocalyptic visions that can be seen flourishing in the United States. .

(v) There were not only “positive” adjustments, with the renovated religious interpretation opening the prospects for social transformation. There were also involutions, the religious interpretation becoming in its turn an obstacle to social progress. I will give as examples some forms of North American Protestantism.

(vi) Positive and/or negative adjustments are not the monopoly of Christianity. Islam has experienced positive adjustments in the past and at present is experiencing an involution analogous in many respects to that of the American protestant sects in question. Judaism also. And I would add (as the reader will find explained in *Eurocentrism*) that this concerns the great Asian ideologies and religions as well.

(vii) That these adjustments can be positive or negative pleads in favour of an interpretation of historical materialism based on « under determination ». I mean by this that each of the various levels of reality (economic, political, ideological) conceals its own internal logic and because of this the complementary nature of their evolution, which is necessary to ensure the overall coherence of a system, does not define in advance a given direction of a guaranteed evolution.

## **2. Judaism, Christianity, Islam, one or three religious metaphysics?**

The three above mentioned religions claim that they are monotheistic and are proud of it. They even claim that they are the only one of this kind and for that reason scorn all other religions which were not supposedly able to conceive God as an unique abstract and universal divinity, and were consequently “primitive” and “inferior”.

Furthermore the three religions claim the exclusivity of having been “revealed” by God. Yet this is also of course the case for any other religion. The revelation of God and the sacred quality of the religion are thence synonymous. But the distinction between the religions based on the Book and the others should then be regarded as pure ideological contempt.

The kinship between the three religions based on the Book is an historical fact. The three religions have a book of faith in common the Bible of the Jews (what the Christians call the ancient Testament), although this Bible appears with very distinctive features in the Jewish and the Muslim religion, each religion claiming of course that only its version is the right one, that is to say the one which has been really revealed. Catholics and Protestants however accept the Jewish versions of the Bible, the former the corpus of the Jews of the Diaspora, the latter the one of the Jews of Jerusalem. This kinship could very well be explained by the very matter of fact of the proximity of the birth place of the three religions. Jesus Christ has lived in Palestine near the Jewish community of the country and may be among them. Islam was born in a nearby country which was pervaded by the faith of the Jews and the Christians, defied by them and especially by the Christianity of the civilised countries which almost encircled them, from Byzantium to Ethiopia.

In itself this kinship does neither preclude nor imply a priori the basic unity of the metaphysics of these religions. In order to take this problem and find an answer it will be necessary to gauge the meaning, whether it is fundamental or just casual, of the common stem of these religions. How far has

it influenced the metaphysical choices and the social common experience of the groups of peoples who have chosen one of these three religions?

All peoples on this Earth explain their creation and their place in the universal order there of by a mythology. All of them assume the role of the elected people whose mythology is the one and only true explanation of the creation. Their gods are therefore the only real ones; all other people are mistaken or have been misled. At the very beginning all gods are seen as different and as being the specific representation of one people. Nevertheless, even at an early stage in history there has been several lucid minds who have put in perspective those mythological accounts of creation and the specificity of those gods. One of the first healthy reaction was to accept the plurality of the various revelations of truth through religion (each people believes in his own truth, but it is the same albeit expressed in different languages) and thence to accept the equivalence between the different gods. This reaction encouraged a syncretic approach which is to be found for instance in the Roman empire, which melted together peoples from various origins as we can see it operating in contemporary Africa. On the other hand it is more and more a proven fact that mythologies have substantially borrowed from each other. The advances in archaeology, in history and excavations have led to the discovery of so called root-mythologies like the one which relates the Floods in the Middle East or the myth of Gilgamesh.

Therefore the Jews are not the only people who proclaim themselves to be chosen. All of them have done so. Do the Jews go on believing in their being chosen? I doubt it strongly. In the social reality of our time, the vast majority of the Jews, even those who are true believers, know that they are but ordinary human beings, even though, because of the Diaspora, Jews have been inclined, in order to survive, to bring out their particularities, that is to say their religious persuasion. But they are by no means the only people who have done that.

Our modern society has somewhat achieved much progress since two thousands years, even though the very idea of progress is no more fashionable to day, in some circles. Many fellow human beings, even though they maintain a strong commitment to their faith, have to some extent relativised their religious convictions. They are probably more tolerant not only in their behaviour but, and that is distinctly more important, in their intimate respect of the beliefs of others.

Because of progress, the mythologies dealing with creation have been undermined. They are no longer articles of faith like they were earlier. Many fellow citizens of the earth, who once more have not given up their faith, have come to terms with the idea that those mythologies are no more than that, mythologies, that are to be considered as stories with an educational purpose, even though, or precisely because, they are deemed to have been inspired by God Himself. Therefore the Bible of the three main religions or the mythology of the Bororo or Dogons are set on the same footing: their role is to be a sacred text in which the belief of one or more peoples are rooted.

On the other hand monotheism is by itself a strictly theological idea.

To say that there is only one God does not amount to much. It is not obvious nor is it obviously untrue. Monotheism is probably more widely accepted than the followers of the deep formal cleavage between monotheistic religions and those religions they would have us believe, are polytheistic, would believe. Many of those who are in most cases only the multifarious expressions of one and the same supernatural power was to be regarded as one and the same.

Furthermore it may be asked whether those who proclaim themselves monotheists are in fact such. All religions, the major ones included, refer to supernatural forces other than God. Himself, angels, demons, djins and so on. They proclaim that some human beings are inspired by the Deity, saints or prophets who have propagated the word of God. The three religions of the Book counterbalance God by Satan, even though they confer more power to the former. Before and after the religions of the Book, the same dualistic conception of the supernatural prevailed, such as in Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism and others. And in Christianity the unity of God, who encompassed three Beings

(Father, Son, Holy Spirit) is not explainable, feeding the debate between monophysitic Christians and others and contributing to mitigation of the dogma of monotheism. How is it possible, then, to distinguish the Word of God from those of His Son or His Prophets? From a metaphysical point of view, they are one and the same thing.

No doubt these three religions of the Book have enhanced more than other religions this monotheistic feature of their own, just as they rationalised to a certain extent some of their constitutive ethical and organisational parts. One is then tempted to draw a parallel between this religious evolution and the evolution of the societies of the ancient Middle East, which led them to give up the tribal organisation and create a state superstructure. But if this mutual adaptation of the religious basis to the political organisation is credible; it is not, historically speaking, the only one possible. Other societies which were not a lesser stage of development, have followed other ways: in China prevailed a non religious metaphysic, Confucianism, and in India another belief, allowing the people to invent a variety of religious forms.

Thought it may appear shocking to some, I would like to add that these three religions as the others have matured at times when the temptation of syncretism was great. Some learned researchers have discovered that those religions, have borrowed from others: Christianity has taken up parts of the ancient Egyptian creeds, Judaism has retained some parts of the beliefs of the ancient orient (Baal among others), and Islam has done the same with beliefs stemming from the Arabic peninsula. If you go deeper into the fabrics of those religions in matters regarding the rites, the alimentary taboos and other such articles of faith, the borrowing is even more blatant. But no man of faith will find those facts shocking: for him, they would only prove that God has inspired human beings during the whole course of their history even before his own religious persuasion was revealed.

Among the three religions of the Book, the proximity between Judaism and Islam is the most obvious. The learned have with very good arguments put forward that Islam is to a large extent an Arabisation of Judaism. Not only because its precepts, its law and its rites are to a large extent similar to those of Judaism but also, and that is more fundamental, because Islam shares with Judaism a common view of the relationship between society and religion. The Arabisation of Judaism started before the delivery of the message of the prophet of Islam. In history as well as in the Koran you can find mention of those Hanifs who recognised Abraham without declaring themselves as being Jews. In this respect Islam has presented itself as the religion revealed to humanity from the very origin in as much as it was revealed to Adam himself. Islam would have, according to that, always existed even before it spoke through its Prophet Mohammed. But was either forgotten or misunderstood by some peoples (polytheism) or only partially understood by the others (Jews and Christians).

It is easier then to understand how important Muslim participate in a curious dispute. There are many writings, which are not regarded as heretic by the authorities, which are the self proclaimed defender of Islam, tending to prove that Abraham was not a Jew but an Arab. This demonstration presents itself as scientific based on archaeological findings in Mesopotamia, and linguistic etymology is invoked. For those who read the Bible like a mythology among others, this question has no meaning. You can't correct a mythology, you don't look for the real figure who hides behind its mythological representation.

It is easier to understand then why owing to that thesis of the Arabisation of Judaism. Islam does not refer to the Bible of the Jews as such. The Bible had to be revised and corrected.

Islam appeared in concordance with the political unification of the Arab peninsula, and a number of Arab historians have derived from that fact that monotheism, which replaced the plurality of tribal deities, was the vehicle of the formation of the Arab nation, since recognising the same God meant also submitting to the same political power. Of course the Arabs already knew Christian and Judaic monotheism. Had they opted for Christianity they would have run the risk of becoming dependent of Byzantium, which dominated the region and which was their major fear. Opting for a form of Judaism liberated them from that risk, Judaism not being associated with any State power. The Arabs were

therefore much attracted by appropriating Judaism through a particular reading of its Scriptures, and therefore considering it not as the religion of a particular semitic people, the Hebrews, but as the religion revealed to their Arab (also Semitic) ancestors.

On the other hand the historical circumstances under which Christianity and Islam grew, were very different. Islam was constituted in the entire integrity of its dogmas inside an homogenous close circle, the one of the Arab tribes of Mecca and Medina. Therefore it had to reflect the main characteristics of those groups to the point it was uncertain at the beginning whether it would become an universalistic religion. In the first times of the Arab conquest beyond the peninsula, it was a common practice that the Arabs kept their religions for themselves and allowed other peoples to keep their own. If this practice had gone on, Islam would have remained an exclusively Arab religion. However two circumstances contributed to the opening of Islam to an universalistic vocation: first, large segments of the conquered nations converted to Islam; second the Arabs welcomed these conversions. Christianity in contrast developed in the cosmopolitan world of the Roman empire where a Hellenistic culture prevailed. Furthermore its development was slow. It was therefore marked from the very beginning by this multicultural and multiethnic environment which contributed strongly to its universalism.

I will make a last remark. Is monotheism really a wonderful advance in the history of thought, a qualitative progress? There are plenty of devious minds (but when you say devious you could as well say perverted, inspired by the Devil) who draw a parallel between this unique God (who is represented in the popular picture lore, if not in the purified vision of the learned, as an old man with a white beard, which symbolises His wisdom and authority) and the patriarch of the patriarchal system, the autocrat of the power systems. In this imagery, which adequately reflects what is actually experienced, it is obvious that the wise old male is closer to God than a woman or a youth. This projection in the sky legitimises the patriarchal order and the autocracy which prevails on earth, as well as it eliminates the feminine deities, always important in non monotheist religions. Those devious minds will add that this only and all powerful God deprives them, poor bastards, of all power. For with numerous Gods, who were competing with each other and clashed, you may call for help the one who is best provided to help you and in the Greek way jeer at the one who aggravates you. Is it a coincidence that the Greek democracy is polytheistic? Is it a coincidence as well whether in the areas which will later be dominated by the major religions – Christianity and Islam in this case – this democracy disappears? But it may be objected that the power which adopts a non religious metaphysic in China and a religious pluralism in India was also nothing but autocratic.

### **3. Religion and Society: the risk of theocracy**

Religions are not only metaphysics. They are major expressions of the social reality as well. Metaphysic and social functions mix and determine each other in a moving historical dialectic. The possible specificity of their expression at the metaphysical level are hence closely linked to the major features of the social systems in which they are enclosed and which they influence.

For those willing to answer the above mentioned question, that is whether the three major religions of the Book are basically one or multiple, it may be useful to analyse their respective conceptions of historical time.

Judaism believes in the end of times. When the Messiah comes who shall organise on the earth His Realm, that is to say a society at last just and happy, eternity will begin and time will end. The man of faith does not believe that human strivings can bring about this just world before the ascribed end of times. However the Messiah has not yet come. Therefore we are still awaiting the end of times.

Islam on this major issue has adopted a completely different stance. The prophet has indeed organised on this earth, in Medina, a just society. To this extent and although he has been named himself the Prophet, even though he is the last one and though there won't be any Prophet after him, this Prophet may be considered as what the Jews call Messiah for he is the one who establishes the Realm of God on this earth. I am aware that this interpretations of Islam and of the time of the Prophet is not the only who prevails among Muslims. Many Muslims and not only a minority of them who would like to be

regarded as learned, have never said, and don't say now that the structure of the Medina society should be reinstated. They underline that from this for ever bygone time you can only derive general lectures, moral values, examples and inspiration. Nothing more. There is one obvious reason to that: the Prophet is not here anymore and nobody has the authority to replace him. How then adapt those principles to the ever changing reality of time? A large space opens up for debate, for various opinions. This relativistic view of Islam has in fact prevailed in the history of Muslims. But it is only a view which can be rejected. Just as truthful might be the converse idea, owing to which the social organisation established at the time of the Prophet is the only valid one, ends history, and should for this reason also be invoked, reproduced or reinstated if society has drifted away from it. This may be fundamentalism since this view tends to come back to the origins. It exists and has always existed. It is today advocated by many. But it becomes center stage, prevails or seems to prevail only in particular circumstances which should be then closely scrutinised. The main issue is that this conception of religion places future in the past. The end of time began fifteen centuries ago and history stopped at this moment. What may have happened since then in real history is of little or no importance since this history does not provide Muslims who agree with this view of their religion no lesson worth heeding.

Christianity has adopted a third view of this question of the end of time, a view which separates it from Islam and Judaism and endows it with its specificity as well as a metaphysical interpretation of the world as a power which partakes in the modelling of social reality. But to bring out this difference, I must proceed to the analysis of the above mentioned social reality.

Judaism is not only an abstract form of monotheism, it was as well as structuring form of an historical society, the society of Jews in Palestine and this partially, the inspiring and structuring principle of the Jewish communities of the Diaspora.

The real history of the Jews in Palestine is not well known. Considerably less than the history of the other communities of the region, may be because those communities were stronger and more advanced and have left more written testimonials than the Jews. But what is precisely known is that Judaism has edited a very precise Law which goes into every detail. Not only some general principles, such as the Tables of Moses, which were, it seems, inspired by other religions, but furthermore a whole set of rules which give their framework to the individual, the family and social life of the Jews. Laws who settle everything in the field of personal rights, of matrimony, divorce, filiation and heritage. All those laws are fully part of religion, of the holy and hence difficult if not impossible to modify. These laws and rules extend to the penal system and set some brutal, if not savage, retribution for some crimes (the hurling of stones at adulterous women for instance). Those rules themselves considered as holy. Furthermore the whole social life is regulated by a dense net of rites: circumcision, formal interdiction of working on the day of Sabbath and extensive alimentary prohibitions.

May be this all embracing formalism regarding law, rules and rituals, has been instrumental in preserving the Jews of the Diaspora from being "contaminated", assimilated, by other cultures, or converted to other forms of religion. That it may be one of the reason of the hostility directed towards them (but explanation is by no means an excuse!).

What is certain however is that such a social involvement of religion does not allow a laic conception of society to develop. It produces only a theocratic concept of power, which the Jews did not implement only because they were living in the Diaspora. For, owing to this conception, political power is not allowed to produce laws; it may only interpret those laws which God has established once and for all. Nowadays one tends to call theocratic a form of power structure which operates through a religious caste who claims it has a monopoly on power because it is the only one which knows the laws that are admissible, whether this caste is called synod, church or anything else, or may be has no name at all. This narrowing of the word is inappropriate: theocracy means power of God and for practical purpose of those who claim they speak in His Name. Theocracy is in this respect opposing modernity if under this name one refers to the basic concept of modern democracy, owing to which human beings may establish freely their laws and are therefore responsible for their historic development.

The Jewish law is not, as it seems, very explicit regarding the organisation of the power structure, public law as we say now. Contrary to the more evolved states of the region – the Egypt of the Pharaohs, achemenidean and later sassanidean Iran, Mesopotamian countries, Greece and Rome which worked out very detailed models for the political and administrative structure of society (and it matters little in this respect whether those societies were democratic or not), Jews have kept to more primitive forms of political organisation which does not define exactly the limits of the power of Kings or Judges. But this very vagueness is one more argument in favour of theocracy. The power of God does not care about a precise outline of legislation...

Long forgotten among the Jews owing to the Diaspora, this natural propensity to theocracy was due to emerge once again in the framework of the contemporary Jewish state. Only those who don't want to see Judaism as a social organisation with a religious basis will be surprised.

In all those respects Islam offers a rigorous parallel with Judaism

Islam has regulated, in exactly the same manner, in details, and in its holy text, all the aspects of individual law. It did the same as regards the penal code, as harsh and formal as the penal code of the Jews (once more even in the provisions the similarity is perfect: thus adulteresses should be stoned...). It provides for the same rituals, circumcision, alimentary prohibitions, prayer at fixed times (not at any time) and in a unique repetitious form (which excludes any personalisation). Therefore one has to deal with a body of rules and practices which hold society together tightly and leave little or no space to innovation or imagination. It matters little here that all this might have appeared or might still appear insufficient for the most demanding believers. In historic Islam, Sufism opens its doors for them and permits them the delightful enjoyment of non ritualised mystics.

Yet Jews and Muslims alike others are practical people. They need a business law to complete the personal laws. They borrowed it consequently from the environment. Muslims gave an Islamic tinge to the practices and laws they discovered in the civilised area they conquered; on this level Islamic law translates sometimes literally Byzantine law. They gave it Islamic clothing but it is only a clothing.

Muslims like Jews don't have a sophisticated public law. This is not regarded as a handicap, for the same reason as among the Jews. Yet it was necessary to fill up this gap and they did it by inventing the caliphate (which is posterior to Islam as professed by the Prophet) and by introducing the administrative Byzantine and sassanidean institutions. The conceptual vagueness surrounding the absolute power, which it is impossible to define as it lies only in the hand of God, will therefore never allow to go beyond pure and simple autocracy.

Autocracy and theology go along. For who can speak in the name of God, if not to make the law, (nobody is entitled to that) but to enforce the law? Interpret it or compensate for its lack? The Caliph or his representative, the Sultan, will do that without further ado. And the people will regard him as the shadow of God in this word, although the doctors of faith are cautious not to say so.

In this respect power in Islamic countries was always theocratic even though in practical terms this feature is toned down by the fact that it is not wielded by a special caste of religious men. The states where Muslims live can only be Islamic. In order to change this rule in the only Islamic countries which decided to become laic (Turkey and the former Soviet Central Asia) it was necessary to officially and forcibly break with Islam. Those countries may decide to the rule of Islam, but that is another story.

At this level, the contemporary political Islam is not an innovator. It only goes further, and it would like to transform these theocratic "soft" states, contaminated by the surrounding modernity, into theocratic states in the strong sense of the word, that is to say, give the entire and absolute power to a religious cast, almost a Church, like in Iran or the Azhar in Egypt, which would have the monopoly of the right to speak in the name of "the" law (of God), to purge the social practice of all, which, in their

eyes, is not authentically Islamic, in the law and in the rites. Instead, that means that if that cast cannot impose itself as the sole holder of Islamic legitimacy, then anybody can pretend it – that is to say, in practice political leaders or whosoever. That is the permanent civil war, like in Afghanistan.

At its beginnings Christianity avoided theocracy, then it went that way until the Christian peoples moved away from it later.

At the time of his foundation Christianity does not seem to break up with the Jewish heritage as far as the end of times is concerned. The announcement of the Last Judgement and that of the Messiah has most certainly an eschatological purport which has been underlined in the Apocalypse for instance. It is certainly the reason why in the history of Christianity there have been numerous messianic and millenarian movements.

Yet because of the very nature of his message, Christianity is actually a departure from Judaism. This departure is fundamental since what is so dramatically expressed in the history of Jesus Christ is obvious: the Realm of God is not on this earth and never will be. The reason the son of God was defeated on the Earth and crucified is obvious: His Father God never intended to establish His Realm on this Earth, the everlasting Realm of Justice and happiness. But if God does not intend to substitute Himself to His Creatures to settle their problems, they must assume this responsibility themselves. The end of time is no longer conceivable and Christ does not proclaim it as established whether now nor in the future. But in this case He is not the Messiah as announced by the Jews and Jews were right not to recognise Him as such. The message of Jesus Christ may then be interpreted as a summon to human beings to be the actors of their own history and if they act properly, that is if they let themselves inspire by the moral values which he enacted by his life and death, they will come closer to God after whom they have been created. This interpretation has eventually prevailed and given to modern Christianity its specific features which bases on a lecture of the Scriptures which enables us to image the future as the ultimate coming together between history as developed by human beings and the Realm of God as the final instance beyond history. The very idea of the end of times as brought about by an intervention from outside history has vanished.

The departure extends then to the whole area which was till then under the way of the holy law. Arguably Jesus Christ takes care to proclaim he has not come to this earth to upset the Law (of the Jews). This is in accordance with his core announcement: he did not intend to change ancient laws in order to replace them by better ones. It is man's concern to put these laws to trial. Jesus Christ will himself set an example by putting in question one the most harsh and the most formal penal laws that is again the hurling of stones at the adulterous wife. When he says that those who never sinned should throw the first stone, he opens the debate. What if this law was not just, what if its only purpose is to hide the hypocrisy of the real sinners? Christians will then give up the Jewish laws and the Jewish rituals: circumcision disappears, the rules of law adapt to the diversity of the situations all the more so because in its expansion beyond the Jewish world proper Christianity must adapt to different status and rituals, but by so doing does not enforce a Christian law which does not exist. For instance the alimentary taboos are no longer implemented.

On a more theoretical level, Christianity acts the same way. It does not break openly with Judaism, since it refers to the same holy Scripture: the Bible. But it adopts it without criticism: neither is it reread or corrected. But by doing so it deprives the Holy Book of its strength and one might say of its scope. It is one holy scripture among others and more important are the new scriptures specific to Christianity – the Gospel. Moreover the morals of the Gospel (love they fellow creature like themselves, forgiveness, justice...), are substantially different from those of the Ancient Testament. Additionally the Gospel are not precise enough to found a positive law regarding personal rights or a penal law. From this point of view those texts radically break with the Torah or the Koran.

Legitimate power and God (Give Caesar what belongeth to Caesar) can no longer be confused. But this precept cannot be pursued when after three centuries of prosecutions the rulers change their persuasion and become Christians. But even before, when Christians secretly founded churches to

defend their faith and later when the Emperor himself became their armed protector a new law is worked out, a law which claims is Christian. First of all on the level of personal rights. What is a Christian family? This concept had to be defined. It will take time, there will be set-backs and a final agreement will never be reached. Because those taking part in the process recognise in fact only different previous laws. Slowly however those new laws will be recognised as sacred: the canonical law which is different for the western and oriental Catholic Churches and the juridical forms of the different Orthodox and Protestant Churches are the end of this slow process.

As far as the organisation of the power structure is concerned, the relationship between power and religion, the same fluctuations and evolution towards sacralisation can be observed. The churches which had been created after the model of clandestine political parties (as we would say today) remain as churches after Christians have taken up power. Although they had been democratic, be it only to be close to their followers, they must now depart from this feature. They integrate themselves into the power structure, go at some distance from the worshippers because from now onward they have to exert a control on them on behalf of the political power. The political power on the other side does not allow itself to be subservient to the churches. It maintains its own rules of dynastic inheritance, it institutionalises the requirements of the new system which is feudal in the Western world due to the romano barbaric mixture and imperial in the Eastern part of the former roman empire and subjects the churches as much as possible to its own requirements. The melting between those two institutions proceeds further however and exactly as the Caliph, the Lord and the King acquire a quasi divine quality.

The Christian world becomes a kind of soft theocracy led by a coalition of priests and by lay people who, however, proclaim themselves exactly as religious as the priests. The same has happened in the Islamic world; but when in the Christian part of the world, the bourgeois revolution will put into question the eternity of the social establishment, which allegedly is founded on Christian principles allegedly intangible themselves, when this revolution opens the doors to modernity and invents the new democracy, however limited its implementation was, when the Enlightenment declares that men (and not women at this time!) are the main actors of their history and must choose their laws and have the right to strike them down, the defenders of the old order rebuke this mad ambition of liberating mankind of all bonds. It is then easy to understand that Joseph de Maistre as a typical representative of the France of the Restoration can rant against democracy as a nonsense, a dangerous and criminal dream because God only is the lawmaker and God produced the laws which the only duty of mankind is to implement without going out of its way to invent new ones. Ayatollah Khomeini or Sheik El Azhar could just as well have written those lines! It is of no importance that at the time when Joseph de Maistre writes, at the beginning of the XIXth Century, nobody knows anymore what exactly those laws are which God established for the Christians. The Tables of Moses? Or, more prosaically, all those Roman, German and Slavic traditions, which were in that respect very little Christian, which are at the core of those European and allegedly Christian societies.

When Joseph de Maistre writes it is however too late. European societies have got used to making their rules themselves without referring to Christian principles, which are nevertheless put forward here and there but without great emphasis nor rigidity. Those societies are faced anyway with other problems that lead them to act this way. The theocratic risk belongs for ever to the past.

#### **4. The Reformation, the ambiguous expression of Christianity's adaptation to modernity**

- The Reformation is an extremely complex movement both in its doctrinal religious dimensions and in the scope of the social transformations which accompanied it. It was deployed in very different European terrains, in some of the centres the most advanced in inventing capitalism (the United Provinces, England) and in backward regions (Germany, Scandinavia). It is dangerous, in these conditions, to speak of "Protestantism" in the singular..



On the dogmatic level all the great reformers have called for a « return to sources » and among other things, have, in this spirit, rehabilitated the Old Testament which Catholicism and Orthodoxy had marginalized. I developed above the idea that Christianity had in effect been constituted not in continuity with Judaism but in rupture with it. The use, which is current today, of the term « Judeo-Christian », popularized by the expansion of a particular Protestant view (peculiar to the United States for the most part), implies a reversal in the vision of the relations between these two monotheistic religions, to which the Catholics (but still not yet the Orthodox) have belatedly rallied without much conviction, but rather through political opportunism.

The call for a « return to sources » is a method that is almost always found in movements that identify themselves with religion. But in itself it means almost nothing, the interpretation of the sources in question always being decisive. In the Reformation, the fragments of ideologies and value systems expressed on this religious ground retain all the hallmarks of primitive forms of reaction to the growing capitalist challenge. Certain aspects of the Renaissance had gone even further (Machiavelli is one of the most eloquent witnesses of this). But the Renaissance deployed on Catholic land (Italy). And the management of some Italian cities as real commercial companies controlled by a syndicate of the richest shareholders (Venice is their prototype) established a still more clear cut relationship with the first forms of capitalism than the Protestantism/capitalism relationship was to be. Later the Enlightenment which deployed in Catholic countries (France) as well as in other Protestant countries (England; Netherlands and Germany) was situated more in the secular tradition of the Renaissance than in that of the religious reformation. Finally the radical character of the French revolution gave secularity its full force, deliberately leaving the terrain of religious re-interpretations to place itself in that of modern politics, which is largely the product of its invention.

It can then be understood that, depending on historical circumstances, the Reformation was able to end either in the establishment of national churches in the service of the Monarchy/Ancien Regime/emergent upper middle class compromise, or in the retreat of the dominated classes into sects developing apocalyptic visions.

Catholicism, for long more rigid when confronted with the challenge of modern times, thanks to its hierarchical structure, also finished by opening up to the re-interpretation of dogmas, with finally no less remarkable results. I am not surprised, in these conditions, that the new progress in religious interpretation – I mean that which liberation theology represents today – has found fertile ground for reflection among Catholics rather than among Protestants. Obviously Weber's thesis has not of much value !

- There is also a fine example of involution in the religious interpretation associated with the Reformation.

The protestant sects which were obliged to emigrate from XVIIth century England had developed a very particular interpretation of Christianity, which was not shared by either the Catholics or the Orthodox, nor even – at least not to the same degree of extremism – by the majority of European Protestants, including of course the Anglicans, dominant in the ruling class of England.

This particular form of Protestantism established in New England was going to be summoned to mark American ideology with a strong stamp up until the present day. Because it was to be the means by which the new American society would go off on the conquest of the continent, legitimating it in terms drawn from the Bible (the violent conquest by Israel of the promised land repeated ad nauseam in North American discourse). Afterwards the United States was to extend their project of undertaking the task « God » ordered them to accomplish to the entire planet because the American people sees itself to be the “chosen people” – synonymous in practice with *Herrenvolk*, to adopt the parallel Nazi terminology. We are really at this point today. And that is why American imperialism (and not the « Empire ») is destined to be even more savage than its predecessors (who did not claim to be invested with a divine mission to the same degree at least).

- In any event, whether it is a case of Catholic or Protestant societies, one school or another, I do not allow the religious interpretation a decisive independent role in the organisation and the functioning of the true dominant power.

The past does not become « atavistic transmission » by force of circumstances. History transforms peoples and religious interpretations, even when they persist in apparently “ancient” and frozen forms, are themselves the subject of revision of their articulation to other dimensions of social reality.

That is because the subsequent paths of Europe on the one hand and the United States on the other have been different, that, Catholic or Protestant, European societies and United States society have divergent political cultures today.

Political culture is the product of history envisaged over the long term, which is of course always particular to each country. On this level, the history of the United States is marked by particularities which contrast with those characterising history on the European continent: the founding of New England by extremist Protestant sects, the genocide of the Indians, Negro slavery and the deployment of “communitarianism” associated with successive waves of migration in the XIXth century ..

The “American revolution” so appreciated by many of the 1789 revolutionaries and today vaunted more than ever, was only a limited war of independence without social consequences. In their revolt against the British monarchy the American colonists wanted to transform nothing in economic and social relations, but only to no longer have to share their profits with the ruling class of the mother country. They wanted the power for themselves not to do anything different from what they were doing during the colonial period, but to continue doing the same thing with greater determination and profit. Their objectives were above all the pursuit of the expansion to the West, which implied among other things the genocide of the Indians. The maintenance of slavery was also not questioned. The great leaders of the American revolution were almost all slave owners and their prejudices in this respect were unshakeable.

The successive waves of immigration also played a role in the strengthening of American ideology. The immigrants were certainly not responsible for the misery and oppression which caused their departure. On the contrary they were the victims. But circumstances – that is to say their emigration – led them to abandon the collective struggle to change the common conditions of their classes or groups in their own country, in favour of adhering to the ideology of individual success in the host country. This adherence was encouraged by the American system which it suited perfectly. It delayed the development of class consciousness, which, scarcely had it started to develop, than it had to face a new wave of immigrants which frustrated its political crystallization. But simultaneously, the migration encouraged the « communitarianisation » of American society, because « individual success » does not exclude strong insertion into a community of origin (the Irish, the Italians etc), without which individual isolation would risk being unbearable. Yet here again the strengthening of this dimension of identity – which the American system retrieves and flatters – is done at the expense of class consciousness and the formation of the citizen. Whereas in Paris the people got ready “to capture the sky » (here I refer to the 1871 Commune), in the United States gangs constituted by successive generations of poor immigrants (Irish, Italians etc) killed each other, manipulated in a perfectly cynical way by the ruling classes.

Protestant Europe – England, Germany, the Netherlands, Scandinavia – shared in the beginning some fragments of an ideology similar to that of the United States, transmitted by the « return to the Bible », although certainly in attenuated form, without comparison to the extreme forms of the sects which emigrated to New England. But in the countries in question the working class succeeded in raising itself to a proven class consciousness, which the successive waves of migrants had sterilized in the United States. The emergence of workers parties made the difference ; in Europe it imposed combinations of liberal ideology and value systems (equality among others) which are not only foreign to it, but even conflicting. These combinations naturally had their particular histories which were

different from one country and from one time to another. But they preserved the autonomy of the political sphere in the face of the dominant economic sphere.

In the United States, there is no workers party, there never has been. The communitarian ideologies could not constitute a substitute for the absence of a working class socialist ideology. Even the most radical of which, that of the black community. Because by definition communitarianism falls into the framework of generalized racism which it fights on its own ground, but no more.

The combination specific to the historical formation of United States society – dominant « biblical » religious ideology and absence of a workers' party – finally produced a still unparalleled situation, that of a de facto single party, the party of capital.

Today, American democracy constitutes the advanced model of what I call “low intensity democracy ». Its functioning is based on a total separation between the management of political life, based on the practice of electoral democracy, and that of economic life, ruled by the laws of capital accumulation. What is more, this separation is not subject to radical questioning, but is rather part of what is called the general consensus. But this separation annihilates all the creative potential of political democracy. It castrates the representative institutions (parliaments and others), made impotent in face of the « market », the dictates of which it accepts.

The American State is thus in the exclusive service of the economy (that is to say of capital of which it is the exclusive faithful servant, without having to concern itself with other social interests). It can be so because the historical formation of American society has blocked the development of political class consciousness, of a real citizen's consciousness, among the working classes.

In Europe in contrast, the State has been (and can become again) the obligatory crossing point for the confrontation of social interests, and, thereby encourage the historical compromises that give a meaning and a real significance to democratic practice. If the State is not constrained to fulfil this function by the class struggle and political struggles which remain independent from the exclusive logics of the accumulation of capital, then democracy becomes a derisory practice, which it is in the United States.

American ideology, like all ideologies is « eroded by time ». During the « calm » periods of history – marked by strong economic growth accompanied by social spin-offs judged to be satisfactory – the pressure the ruling class exercises on its people weakens. From time to time then, according to the needs of the moment, this ruling class “re-inflates” American ideology by means which are always the same: an enemy (always external, American society being decreed good by definition) is designated (the Evil Empire, the Evil Axis) allowing the “total mobilisation” of all means intended to annihilate it. Yesterday it was communism, allowing, the cold war to be engaged and Europe to be subordinated by Mac Carthyism (forgotten by pro-Americans). Today it is “terrorism », an obvious pretext, (the 11 September so much resembles the Reichstag fire), that gets the ruling class's true project accepted: to ensure the military control of the planet.

5. But let's not be mistaken. It is not the fundamentalist ideology with religious pretensions that is in the driving seat and imposes its logic on the real holders of power – capital and its servants in the State. It is capital that alone makes all the decisions that suit it, then conscripts this ideology into its service. The means used – unparalleled systematic disinformation – are then effective, isolating critical minds, subjecting them to permanent unbearable blackmail. In this way the government is able to manipulate without difficulty an “opinion” maintained in its foolishness.

## **5. From the debate of the past –reconciling Faith with Reason – to the modern debate – making social power laic**

To proclaim that God is the supreme law maker is a beautiful theory but with no or little practical feasibility. Muslims and Christians will experience that in their area where their religion prevails.

Highly civilised societies of the Muslim or European Middle Ages alike, had to solve a major antinomy: how conciliate Faith, or more precisely their religion which is the foundation of the legitimacy of political power in their own society and Reason which they need every day and not only to solve the petty technical problems of everyday life but furthermore to found new laws and rules in order to face the new arising challenges.

Muslims, Christians and Jews in the Diaspora would resolve this problem in the same way, by the same methods (the Aristotelian scholastic) – which are neither Jewish, nor Christian, nor Islamic, but Greek! – and with the same brilliant results. The avant gardists, Ibn Rochd among the Muslims, Saint Thomas Aquini among the Christians, or Maimonide among the Jews in Islamic lands, would go even further. They did know to put dogmas into a relative perspective, interpret the holy texts as well of necessary, to soften their insufficiencies, to substitute the textual reading by the image of the educating example. The most daring ones would be condemned later on as heretics (which was the case of Ibn Rochd) by the conservative interpreters at the service of the powers. But it does not matter. European society in rapid movement develops in fact along the prescriptions that the avant gardists recommend, while the Muslim world which refused to do this, enters from that fact onwards into decline from which it could not as yet recover. Ghazali, the spokesperson of Islamic Conservatism, the enemy of Ibn Rochd, becomes the definitive reference in all matters – up to this day – for the “revolutionary” Ayatollahs of Iran as well as for the conservatives of El Azhar or Saudi Arabia.

Starting from the Renaissance but especially since the Enlightenment the European Christian West leaves behind the old debate in favour of a new beginning.

The issue is not anymore to reconcile Faith and Reason, but Reason and Emancipation. Reason took its independence, and it does not negate that there could exist a field which would be reserved for Faith, but it does not interest itself anymore for it. Henceforth, the task is to legitimise the new needs; the liberty of the individual, the emancipation of society, which takes up the risk to invent its laws, to mold its own future. Modernity resides precisely in that qualitative rupture with the past.

This new vision implies neatly and full laicisation, that is to say, the abandonment of the reference to religion or to any other meta social force in the debate about the laws. The different bourgeois societies would go more or less far, in this domain as well in others, according to circumstances. The more radical the bourgeois revolution is, the stronger is the affirmation of laicism. The more the bourgeoisie makes a compromise with the forces of the old regime, the less pronounced is laicism.

Modern Christianity has adapted to that profound social transformation. It had to re-interpret itself because of it, it had to renounce its ambition that its law rules, it had to accept to inspire the souls of its believers in liberty and in competition with its adversaries. A beneficial exercise because it had the effect that Christians discovered the dwindling of laws attributed to God by their ancestors. Modern Christianity became a religion without dogmas.

Whatever might have been the advances produced by the attempts to reconcile Faith and Reason, it is nonetheless necessary to recognise their limits. In effect, the advances among the Muslims and the Jews were bogged down in the old problematic, and then after left in benefit of a return to the orthodoxy of the origins. On the contrary, in the western Christian world, these very advances perhaps could have prepared – without necessarily having known it – their own overtaking. How can one try to explain such a miscarriage among the ones and such a success among the others, who would become the inventors of modernity? The materialist tradition in history has given priority to social

development and supposed that the religions – in their quality as an ideological instance – would end up interpreting themselves to satisfy the necessities of the movement of reality. This research hypothesis is certainly more fertile than its opposite, according to which the religions would constitute dogmatic given entities, given one and forever, with invariable trans-historic characteristics. This second hypothesis – which at present is sailing strong – prohibits all reflection on the general movement of the history of humanity taken as a whole and trapped in the affirmation of the “irreducible difference among the cultures”.

But the materialist hypothesis does not exclude the reflection on the reasons why certain evolution of religious thought took the way here and not there. Because the religious instance – like any other instance constituting the social reality (the ideology, the politics, the economy) is moving in its own logic. The logics of each of these instances can facilitate their parallel evolution, assuring the acceleration of social change, or enter in conflict resulting in abstracting it. In that case which of those logics shall prevail? It is impossible to predict it, and it is in this under determination that the liberty of societies rests, where the choices make the real history characterised by the submission a particular instance to the logic imposed by the evolution of another.

This last reflection – and the hypothesis of under determination which I submit – will permit us perhaps to advance in the response of the question posed here<sup>1</sup>.

Judaism and Islam have constituted themselves historically by the affirmation that society (Jewish or Muslim) is a society where the true King is God. The principle of “hakiyama” reintroduced by the Muslim fundamentalists of our age, do nothing but reaffirm this principle, with the most extreme force, to draw all possible conclusions. In addition, Judaism and Islam give their original Holy Scripture (the Torah and the Koran) the strongest possible interpretation: not a word is superfluous. To the point where men of religion in both cases have always expressed strongest reservations against any kind of translation of the text, Hebrew and Arabic respectively. The Jewish and Muslim people are the people of the exegesis. The Talmud among the Jews, the Fiqh among the Muslim don't have their equivalent in the reading of the Gospels.

That double Judeo-Islamic principle explains without doubt many of the visible aspects of what were the Jewish or the Muslim societies. Because the Holy Scriptures can be read as collections of laws, or even, of Constitutions (Saudi Arabia proclaims that the Koran is the political constitution of the State) including all the details of everyday life (the law of persons, penal law, the liturgies) inviting the believer to “renounce his own will to submit himself integrally to that of God” as it was often repeated in writing, imagining this life, as it should be regulated in all details like in a monastery.

The conciliation between Faith and Reason has therefore developed within the limits imposed by this double principle, equally with the Muslim Ibn Rochd as with his Jewish contemporary Maimonide. And in both cases the traditionalist reaction brought back here the talmudic exegesis recommended by Judah Halevy, there the return to the Kalam of Ashari and Ghazali ( two important fundamentalist Muslim thinkers). In both cases it will be proclaimed henceforth that certainly rests in Revelation and not in Reason. The page of philosophy among the Muslims and the Jews was turned. Accompanying the stagnation, later the decline of Muslim societies, this miscarriage of religious reform was balanced in both cases, by the accentuation of the formalistic and ritualistic interpretation of the religion. The compensation for such a form of impoverishment was found in both cases in the development of mystic sects, Muslim Sufis and Jewish Kabalists, who by the way largely borrowed their methods from traditions coming from India.

If Christianity finally became more flexible, and if, from that point onwards, the locking within the horizons of the conciliation between Faith and Reason could be broken, that was possible, at least partially, for the reasons which were spelt out above: because Christianity did not propose to establish

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<sup>1</sup> I have developed this concept of « under determination » in history in « Spectres of Capitalism, a critique of Intellectual Fashions », Monthly Review Press, New York 1998, Chapter 3.

the Kingdom of God on Earth, because Gospels did not erect a positive system of laws. Now one can also comprehend the following paradox: even that the Catholic Church was strongly organised and had an official authority which could impose its interpretation of the religion, she did not resist the assault of the new problematic separating Reason and Faith, and it was Christianity which gave itself to adapt to the new emancipatory conception of Reason, while the absence of such an authority in Islam after the prophet and in Judaism after the destruction of the Temple and the dispersion of the Sanhedrin could not prevent the maintenance of the orthodoxy of origins.

The Jews of the Diaspora on European soil could not but be affected by these radical transformations and the new conceptions about the relationship between society and religion.

Moises Mendelsohn attempts, then, in the XVIIIth Century to undertake this step and make in Judaism a revolution analogous to the one in which Christian society is engaged. By interpreting freely the Torah, not anymore as an obligatory legislation, but only a source of inspiration which everybody can do according to his desire, Moises Mendelsohn engages himself on the way of laicisation of society. The very evolution of European society contributes to facilitate this assimilation of the Jews, whose community is declared dead by the French Revolution which only recognises citizens, eventually of Israelite confession. From there the risk was great that Jewry disappears progressively in the indifference, which the Israelite bourgeoisie of Western and Central Europe shared with all its class and comprising its fractions of Christian believers.

The persistent anti-Semitism – for all types of religious or simply political reasons – especially in Eastern Europe, did not let the Reform triumph in Judaism as in the populations of Christian origin. A counter – reformation was then designed, which developed in the ghettos, and took the shape of Hassidism, permitting the Jews to find a compensation for their inferior status shouldering their humiliation for the love of God.

The culture of the modern world is not “Christian”, and neither it is “Judeo-Christian”, as it is henceforth written in the contemporary media. That last expression has by the way strictly speaking no sense at all. How can one explain then its frequent usage? Very simply, according to my view. Christian Europe was strongly anti-Jewish (one could not say anti-Semitic because the reference to a pseudo “race” had substituted religion only in the late XIXth Century ) for reasons whose discussion would be beyond the framework of these reflections. After anti-Semitism led to the horrors of Nazism, Europe, becoming aware of the dimension of its crime, adopted the expression of “Judeo-Christian” in a sympathetic and laudable intention to eradicate its anti-Semitism. It would have been more convincing to recognise directly the decisive contributions of so many “Jewish” thinkers to the progress of Europe. The hyphens are used here because simply modern culture is not Christian, nor Judeo-Christian: it is bourgeois. The criterion is removed from the field dominated by the old debate (to reconcile Faith – a religion – and Reason) to situate itself on a terrain which ignores religion. Modern thinkers henceforth are fundamentally not Christian, nor Jewish, they are bourgeois, or beyond, socialist, although they might be of Christian or Jewish origin. The bourgeois civilisation is not the creation of Christianity, or Judeo-Christianity. Inversely, it were the Christianity and the Judaism of the Jews of Western Europe which adapted themselves to the bourgeois civilisation. One expects that Islam would now be the next to make it. This is the condition that the Muslim people participate in the making of the world and that they don’t exclude themselves.

### III. POLITICAL ISLAM

Modernity is based on the principle that human beings create their history individually and collectively and that, to that effect, they have the right to innovate and to disregard tradition. Proclaiming this principle meant breaking with the fundamental principle that governed all the pre-modern societies, including of course that of Feudal and Christian Europe. Modernity

was born with this proclamation. It had nothing to do with rebirth; it was simply a question of birth. The qualification of Renaissance that Europeans themselves gave to history in that era of history is therefore misleading. It is the result of an ideological construction purporting that the Greek-Roman Antiquity was acquainted with the principle of modernity, which was veiled in the “Middle Ages” (between the old modernity and the new modernity) by religious obscurantism. It was the mythical perception of Antiquity that in turn paved the way for Eurocentrism, whereby Europe claims to go back to its past, “to return to its sources” (hence, the Renaissance), whereas in fact, it is engineering a break with its own history.

### **1. The European Renaissance and the Arab Nahda**

The European Renaissance was the product of an internal social process, the solution found to contradictions peculiar to the then Europe through the invention of capitalism. On the other hand, what the Arabs by imitation referred to as their Renaissance – the Nahda of the 19th Century – was not so. It was the reaction to an external shock. The Europe that modernity had rendered powerful and triumphant had ambiguous effect on the Arab world through attraction (admiration) and repulsion (through the arrogance of its conquest). The Arab Renaissance takes its qualifying term literally. It is assumed that, if the Arabs “returned” to their sources, as the Europeans would have done (that is what they themselves say), they would regain their greatness, even if debased for some time. The Nahda does not know the nature of the modernity that enhances Europe’s power.

This is not the place to refer to different aspects and moments marking Nahda’s deployment. I will just state briefly that Nahda does not forge the necessary break with tradition that defines modernity. Nahda does not recognise the meaning of secularism, in other words, separation between religion and politics, the condition to ensure that politics serves as the field for free innovation, and for that matter, for democracy in the modern sense. Nahda thinks it can substitute for secularism an interpretation of religion purged of its obscurantist drifts. At any rate, to date, Arab societies are not adequately equipped to understand that secularism is not a “specific” characteristic of the western world but rather a requirement for modernity. Nahda does not realise the meaning of democracy, which should be understood as the right to break with tradition. It therefore remains prisoner of the concepts of autocratic State; it hopes and prays for a “just” despot (al moustabid al adel) – even if not “enlightened” and the nuance is significant. Nahda does not understand that modernity also promotes women’s aspiration to their freedom, thereby exercising their right to innovate and break with tradition. Eventually, Nahda reduces modernity to the immediate aspect of what it produces: technical progress. This voluntarily over-simplified presentation does not mean that its author is not aware of the contradictions expressed in Nahda, nor that certain avant-garde thinkers were aware of the real challenges posed by modernity, like Kassem Amin and the importance of women’s emancipation, Ali Abdel Razek and secularism, and Kawakibi and the challenge posed by democracy. However, none of these breakthroughs had any effects; on the contrary, the Arab society reacted by refusing to follow the paths indicated. Nahda is therefore not the time marking the birth of modernity in the Arab world but rather the period of its abortion.

Since the Arab States have not yet embraced modernity, whereas they bear the bunt of the daily challenge, Arabs still accept to a large extent these principles of autocratic power, which maintains its legitimacy or loses it in fields other than its non-recognition of the principle of democracy. If it is able to resist imperialist aggression – or to give that impression --, if it is able to promote a visible improvement of the material living conditions of many, if not all, the autocratic power enjoys guaranteed popularity even if it now appears as an enlightened

despotic power. It is also because Arab societies have not embraced modernity that the latter's brutal pompous refusal presented as the sole ideological theme placed at the centre of the Islamic project can find a favourable echo as powerful as it is known to be (cf. Political Islam later on).

Beyond this non-modernity principle, the autocratic power therefore owes its legitimacy to tradition. In some cases, this could refer to a tradition of national and religious monarchy like that of Morocco (in which case the specific feature consists in the fact that no Moroccan political party questions the eloquent motto of this monarchy – Allah, The Nation, The King) or of a tribal monarchy in the Arabian Peninsula. But there is another form of tradition – the one inherited from the Ottoman Empire dominant in the territory between Algeria and Iraq, and therefore influencing the largest segment of the Arab world – which I describe as the tradition of “Mameluke power”.

What is it about? It is about a complex system that associated the personalised power of warlords (relatively structured and centralised, or otherwise scattered), businessmen and men of religion. I emphasise men, since women are obviously not allowed to assume any responsibilities. The three dimensions of this organisation are not merely juxtaposed; they are actually merged into a single reality of power.

The Mamelukes are men of war who owe their legitimacy to a certain concept of Islam that places emphasis on the opposite of Dar El Islam (Muslim world – a community governed by the rules of peaceful management) / Dar El Harb (an extra-Muslim world, the place for the pursuit of Jihad, “Holy War”). It is not by chance that this military concept of political management was fabricated by the conquering Seldjoukide Turks and the Ottomans, who called themselves “Ghazi” – conquerors and colonisers of Byzantine Anatolia. It is not by chance that the Mamelukes' system was built from the era of Salah El Dine, liberator of the Lands occupied until then by the Crusaders. Populist powers and contemporary nationalists always mention the name of Salah El Dine with respectful admiration without ever considering or making any allusion to the ravages of the system from which it originated. At the end of the Crusades, the Arab world (which became Turkish-Arab) entered into a military feudalisation and isolation process reflecting a decline that put an end to the brilliant civilisation of the early centuries of the Caliphate while Europe was beginning to discard feudalism and preparing to embark on the invention of modernity and move on to conquer the world.

In compensation for this service as protectors of Islam, the Mamelukes gave the men of religion monopoly in the interpretation of dogmas, of justice rendered in the name of Islam and in the moral civilisation of the society. Relegated to its purely traditional social dimension – respect for rites being the sole important consideration – religion is absolutely subjugated by the autocratic power of men of war.

Economic life is then subject to the mood of the military-political authority. Whenever possible, the peasantry is directly subjected to the whims of this ruling class and private property is jeopardised (the related principle being indisputably sacralised by the fundamental texts of Islam). The proceeds of trade are no less tapped.

The Mameluke ruling class naturally aspired to the dispersion of its autocratic power. Formally responsible to the Sultan-Caliph, the Mamelukes took advantage of the long distance then separating them from the capital (Istanbul) to personally exercise full powers



within the radius of the land under their control. In areas with an age-old tradition of State centralisation, such as Egypt, there have been successive attempts to discipline the whole military corps. It is not by chance that Mohamed Ali established his centralised authority by massacring the Mamalukes, but only to re-establishing a military–real estate aristocracy under his personal authority from that time onwards. The Beys of Tunis tried to do likewise on a more modest scale. The Deys of Algiers never succeeded in doing so. The Ottoman Sultanate did so in turn, thereby integrating its Turkish, Kurdish and Armenian provinces of Anatolia and its Arab provinces of historic Syria and Iraq under an authority “modernised” that way.

Just modernisation? Or just a modernised autocracy? Enlightened despotism? Or just despotism? The fluctuations and variants are situated in this range, which does not usher in anything making it possible to go beyond.

Certainly, the typical autocratic model of Mameluke had to reckon with the numerous and diverse realities that always defined the real limits. Peasant communities that took refuge in their fortified mountains (Kabylians, Maronites, Druzeans, Alaouites, etc.), Sufi brotherhoods almost everywhere and tribes obliged the dominant authorities to reach a compromise with and tolerate the rebellious groups. The contrast in Morocco between Maghzen and Bled Siba is of a similar nature.

Have the forms in which power was exercised in the Arab world changed so much to justify the assertion that those described here belong to a distant past? The autocratic State and the related forms of political management certainly exist to date, as will be seen later. However, they are beset with a profound crisis that has already curtailed their legitimacy, as they were increasingly incapable of meeting the challenges posed by modernity. Some of the testimonies in this regard are the emergence of political Islam, overlapping political conflicts as well as the resumption of social struggles.

## **2. Contemporary political Islam**

The fatal error lies in thinking that the emergence of mass political movements identified with Islam is the inevitable outcome of the rise of culturally and politically backward people who cannot understand any language other than that of their quasi-atavistic obscurantism. Unfortunately, such an error is not only widely circulated by the dominant simplifying media; it is also echoed in the pseudo-scientific discourses on eurocentrism and awkward “orientalism”. Such views are based on the biased assumption that only the West can invent modernity, thereby confining Muslims in an immutable “tradition” that makes them incapable of apprehending the significance of the necessary change.

Muslims and Islam have a history, just like those of the other regions of the world. It is a history fraught with diverse interpretations concerning linkages between reason and faith, a history of mutual transformation and adaptation of both society and its religion. However, the reality of this history is denied not only by eurocentric discourses but also by the contemporary movements associated with Islam. In fact, the two entities have the same cultural bias whereby the “specific” features ascribed to the different careers of their own peoples and religions are allegedly intangible, infinite and trans-historical. To the Western world’s eurocentrism, contemporary Political Islam solely opposes an inverted eurocentrism.

The emergence of movements claiming to be Islamic is actually expressive of a violent revolt against the destructive effects of the really existent capitalism and against its attendant

unaccomplished, truncated and deceptive modernity. It is an expression of an absolutely legitimate revolt against a system that has nothing to offer to the peoples concerned.

The discourse of the Islam proposed as an alternative to the capitalist modernity (to which the modern experiences of the historical socialisms are clearly assimilated), is political by nature, and by no means theological. The “fundamentalist” attributes often ascribed to Islam by no means correspond to this discourse, which, moreover, does not even allude to Islam, except in the case of certain contemporary Muslim intellectuals who are referred to in such terms in western opinion more than in theirs.

The proposed Islam is in this case the adversary of every liberation theology. Political Islam advocates submission and not emancipation. It was only Mahmoud Taha of Sudan who attempted to emphasise the element of emancipation in his interpretation of Islam. Sentenced to death and executed by the authorities of Khartoum, Taha was not acknowledged by any “radical” or “moderate” Islamic group, and neither was he defended by any of the intellectuals identifying themselves with “Islamic Renaissance” or even by those who are merely willing to “dialogue” with such movements.

The heralds of the said “Islamic Renaissance” are not interested in theology and they never make any reference to the classical texts concerning theology. Hence, what they understand by Islam appears to be solely a conventional and social version of religion limited to the formal and integral respect for ritual practice. The Islam in question would define a community to which one belongs by inheritance, like ethnicity instead of a strong and intimate personal conviction. It is solely a question of asserting a “collective identity” and nothing more. That is the reason why the term “Political Islam” is certainly more appropriate to qualify all these movements in the Arab countries.

Modern political Islam had been invented by the orientalist in the service of the British authority in India before being adopted intact by Mawdudi of Pakistan. It consisted in “proving” that Muslim believers are not allowed to live in a State that is itself not Islamic – anticipating the partition of India -- because Islam would ignore the possibility of separation between State and Religion. The orientalist in question failed to observe that the English of the 13th Century would not have conceived of their survival either without Christianity!

Abul Ala Al Mawdudi therefore took up the theme stipulating that power comes from God alone (*wilaya al faqih*), thus repudiating the concept of citizens having the right to make laws, the State being solely entrusted with enforcement of the law defined once and for all (The Shariah). Joseph de Maistre had already written similar things accusing the Revolution of inventing modern democracy and individual emancipation.

Refuting the concept of emancipatory modernity, Political Islam disapproves of the very principle of democracy – the right of society to build its own future through its freedom to legislate. The Shura principle is not the Islamic form of democracy, as claimed by Political Islam, for it is hampered by the ban on innovation (*ibda*), and accepts, if need be, only that of interpretation of the tradition (*ijtihad*). The Shura is only one of the multiple forms of the consultation found in all pre-modern and pre-democratic societies. Of course, interpretation has sometimes been the vehicle for real changes imposed by new demands. However, the fact remains that by virtue of its own principle – denial of the right to break with the past – interpretation leads into deadlock the modern fight for social change and democracy. The parallel claimed between the Islamic parties – radical or moderate, since all of them adhere to

the same “anti-modernist” principles in the name of the so-called specificity of Islam – and Christian-Democrat parties of modern Europe is therefore not valid, strictly speaking, even though American media and diplomatic circles continue to make allusion to the said parallel so as to legitimise their support of possibly “Islamist” regimes. Christian-Democracy is an element of modernity of which it upholds the fundamental concept of creative democracy as the essential aspect of the concept of secularism. Political Islam refuses modernity and proclaims this fact without being able to understand its significance.

Hence, the proposed Islam does not deserve at all to be qualified as “modern” and the supporting arguments advanced in this regard by friends of “dialogue” are extremely platitudinous: they range from the use of cassettes by its propagandists to the observation that these agents are recruited from among the “educated” classes – engineers for instance! Moreover, these movements’ discourse solely reflects Wahabite Islam, which rejects all that the interaction between historical Islam and Greek philosophy had produced in its epoch, as it merely turned over the unimaginative writings of Ibn Taymiya, the most reactionary of the theologians of the Middle Ages. Although some of his heralds qualify this interpretation as “a return to the sources”, it is actually a mere reference to the notions that prevailed two hundred years ago, notions of a society whose development has been stalled for several centuries.

The contemporary Political Islam is not the outcome of a reaction to the so-called abuses of secularism, as often purported, unfortunately. It is because no Muslim society of modern times – except in the former Soviet Union – has ever been truly secular, let alone appalled at the daring innovations of any atheistic and aggressive power. The semi-modern State of Kemal’s Turkey, Nasser’s Egypt, Baathist Syria and Iraq merely subjugated the men of religion (as it often happened in former times) to impose on them concepts solely aimed at legitimising its political options. The beginnings of a secular idea existed only in certain critical intellectual circles. The secular idea did not have much impact on the State, which sometimes retreated in this respect when obsessed with its nationalist project, thereby causing a break with the policy adopted by the Wafd since 1919, as testified by the disturbing evolution inaugurated even at the time of Nasser. The reason for this drift is perhaps quite obvious: whereas the democracy of the said regimes was rejected, a substitute was found in the so-called homogeneous community, with its danger obviously extending to the declining democracy of the contemporary Western world itself.

Political Islam intends to perfect an evolution already well established in the countries concerned and aimed at restoring a plainly conservative theocratic order associated with a political power of the “Mameluke” type. The reference to this military caste that ruled up to two centuries ago, placed itself above all laws (by pretending to know no law other than the “Shariah”), monopolised profits from the national economy and accepted to play a subsidiary role in the capitalist globalisation of that era – for the sake of “realism” – instantly crosses the mind of anyone who observes the declined post-nationalist regimes of the region as well as the new so-called Islamic regimes, their twin brothers.

From this fundamental point of view, there is no difference between the so-called “radical” movements of Political Islam and those that wanted to appear “moderate” because the aims of both entities are identical.

The case of Iran itself is not an exception to the general rule, despite the confusions that contributed to its success: the concomitance between the rapid development of the Islamist

movement and the struggle waged against the Shah who was socially reactionary and politically pro-American. Firstly, the extremely eccentric behaviour of the theocratic ruling power was compensated by its anti-imperialist positions, from which it derived its legitimacy that echoed its powerful popularity beyond the borders of Iran. Gradually, however, the regime showed that it was incapable of meeting the challenge posed by an innovative socio-economic development. The dictatorship of turbaned men of religion, who took over from that of the “Caps” (military and technocrats), as they are referred to in Iran, resulted in a fantastic degradation of the country’s economic machinery. Iran, which boasted about “doing the same as Korea”, now ranks among the group of “Fourth World” countries. The indifference of the ruling power’s hard wing to social problems facing the country’s working classes was the basic cause of its take-over by those who described themselves as “reformers” with a project that could certainly attenuate the rigours of the theocratic dictator, but without renouncing, for all that, its principle enshrined in the Constitution (“wilaya al faqih”), which constituted the basis of the monopoly of a power that was therefore gradually induced to give up its “anti-imperialist” postures and integrate the commonplace compradore world of capitalism of the peripheries. The system of Political Islam in Iran has reached deadlock. The political and social struggles in which the Iranian people have now been plunged might one day lead to the rejection of the very principle of “wilaya al faqih”, which places the college of the men of religion above all institutions of the political and civil society. That is the condition for their success.

Political Islam is in fact nothing other than an adaptation to the subordinate status of the compradore capitalism. Its so-called “moderate” form therefore probably constitutes the principal danger threatening the peoples concerned since the violence of the “radicals” only serves to destabilise the State to allow for the installation of a new compradore power. The constant support offered by the pro-American diplomacies of the Triad countries towards finding this “solution” to the problem is absolutely consistent with their desire to impose the globalised liberal order in the service of the dominant capital.

The two discourses of the globalised liberal capitalism and Political Islam do not conflict; they are rather complementary. The ideology of American “communitarianisms” being popularised by current fashion overshadows the conscience and social struggles and substitutes for them, so-called collective “identities” that ignore them. This ideology is therefore perfectly manipulated in the strategy of capital domination because it transfers the struggle from the arena of real social contradictions to the imaginary world that is said to be cultural, trans-historical and absolute, whereas Political Islam is precisely a communitarianism”.

The diplomacies of the G7 powers, and particularly that of the United States, know what they do in choosing to support Political Islam. They have done so in Afghanistan by describing its Islamists as “freedom fighters” (!) against the horrible dictatorship of communism, which was in fact an enlightened, modernist, national and populist despotism that had the audacity to open schools for girls! They continue to do so from Egypt to Algeria. They know that the power of Political Islam has the virtue – to them – of making the peoples concerned helpless and consequently ensuring their compradorisation without difficulty.

Given its inherent cynicism, the American Establishment knows how to take a second advantage of Political Islam. The “drifts” of the regimes that it inspires – the Taliban for instance – who are not drifts in any way but actually come within the logic of their programmes, can be exploited whenever imperialism finds it expedient to intervene brutally,

if necessary. The “savagery” attributed to the peoples who are the first victims of Political Islam is likely to encourage “islamophobia” and that facilitates the acceptance of the perspective of a “global apartheid”-- the logical and necessary outcome of an ever-polarising capitalist expansion.

The sole political movements using the label of Islam, which are categorically condemned by the G7 powers, are those involved in anti-imperialist struggles – under the objective circumstances at the local level: Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Palestine. It is not a matter of chance.