



# Inside Islam

Anne-Marie Delcambre

Marquette

# INSIDE ISLAM



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by

Anne-Marie Delcambre



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Anne-Marie Delcambre, holds doctorates in law and in Islamic Civilization. She is Professor of Arabic at the Lycée Louis-le-Grand, Paris. Her other books include:  
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## Introduction

Called upon to comment on the terrorist attack in the United States on September 11, 2001, Salman Rushdie declared, in an article printed in the *New York Times*<sup>1</sup> concerning the statement: ‘That has nothing to do with Islam!’ : “Numerous are the world leaders who repeat that theme, in part in the praiseworthy hope of avoiding that innocent Muslims themselves become victims of reprisals in the West... The problem with this necessary denial is, that it is proffered too readily and that it is, to a large extent, incorrect. If that has nothing to do with Islam, what is then the reason for all these manifestations of support for Osama Ben Laden and Al Qaeda, which have occurred throughout the entire Muslim world? ... Of course ‘that has something to do with Islam’! It remains to be seen, however, exactly what that means.”

It has, in fact, become politically and religiously correct to distinguish, on the one hand, Islam presented as a religion of peace and tolerance and, on the other hand, that which is presented as an extremist distortion of it: Islamism, qualified variously as ‘political’, ‘Islamic terrorism’, or ‘Fundamentalism.’ Thus, ‘Islamism’ would be a disease of Islam,<sup>2</sup> Islam as a religion, of course, having nothing at all to do with the attacks perpetrated and vindicated by Muslims throughout the world, such as those which followed the war in Iraq!

This distinction, even if it is made with the very best of intentions, indeed, from a desire not to dramatize matters or to facilitate dialogue, is not helpful to the debate. The first indiscreet question to be raised regarding Islam is, in fact, this: are Islamic Fundamentalists ‘normal’ Muslims, or are they ‘deviant’ Muslims, perhaps even ‘sick’ Muslims? Abdelwahab Meddeb comes



close to a courageous response to the question when he writes: "The letter of the Qur'an, when it is interpreted literally, can fit perfectly in the space defined by the Fundamentalist project; it may be adopted by anyone who wishes to utilize it within the narrow confines of its own boundaries."<sup>3</sup> Put more simply, anyone who wishes to be faithful to the letter of the text, to follow the literal reading of the Qur'an, can find therein justification of military, indeed, even terrorist, actions. The problem is posed by the very nature of Islam, because it is absolutely impossible for it to distance itself from its own fundamental texts.

One cannot maintain eternally the pretense that the Qur'an contains only verses of peace and tolerance, that the Prophet of Islam had never called for vengeance, had never caused blood to be spilled. At the risk of shocking people, one must nevertheless have the courage to say that Fundamentalism is not the sickness of Islam. It is, rather, the very nature of Islam. It is the literal, global and total understanding of its founding texts. The Islam of Islamic Fundamentalists is quite simply juridical Islam that is faithful to the norm. Thus, even were one to succeed, as is to be desired, in suppressing what is known as militant Fundamentalism, in stopping terrorist attacks and in putting all militant Islamic Fundamentalists behind bars, there would remain, always and everywhere, the Fundamentalism that is widely diffused in Islamic society, which, in fact, is nothing other than the desire for the total and literal application of the Qur'an and the Sunna (Tradition). This Fundamentalist Islam worries non-Muslims all the more in that they know little about it. It is common to hear: 'Islam is a warlike religion', 'Islam requires women to wear the veil', 'Muslims do not like dogs', 'Islam forbids images and statues', 'Islam is against modernity', 'Islam detests the West'... These widespread notions continue to be current because, unfortunately, they contain a large dose of truth. But one does not dare admit it, paralyzed by the fear of going against the current, or of passing for racist, or even of being considered a proponent of extreme political theories.

At the risk of shocking many Muslims and non-Muslims, for example partisans of an Islamic-Christian dialogue, where the uncomfortable questions are never truly addressed, I believe that it is necessary to confront these interdictions that are difficult for us to understand and accept.

The almost total ignorance of Islamic law, by political scientists as well as by Muslims themselves, leads to dangerous misunderstandings. The fundamental Islamic texts constitute a three-storied edifice: the Qur'an is the first level, the prophetic Tradition (Sunna) is the second, and Islamic law (*fiqh*) is the third. These levels are interconnected, and all proclaim the same message. When a Muslim reads something in the Qur'an, he finds it explained in the Sunna by an example of the Prophet, and he finds the regulations concerning it in the treatises of Islamic law. All of these fundamental texts have long since attained an a-historical, eternal status, according to which they are considered valid for all times and all places. It is only the scholars of Islam who have precise knowledge of the texts of the Qur'an, of the Tradition, and of Islamic law. The pious Muslim certainly possesses an Islamic culture, but he does not always know very well whether a particular injunction is to be found in the Qur'an, in the Sunna, or only in Islamic law. For him, it is often a culture that he has acquired by osmosis.

Such Islamic culture has very little to do with the brilliant, artistic, Arabo-Muslim civilization, created above all by the cultural contributions of conquered peoples, such as the Byzantines and the Persians. In other words, the arts and sciences that flourished in the land of Islam are, in large part, foreign to the religion of the Arabs at Medina in the VIIth Century. On the contrary, however, Islamic law, which is the basis of Islamic culture, is based entirely on the Qur'an and the Sunna. One must take the trouble to examine the catalogue of Islamic prohibitions in order to understand the weight of the yoke imposed on the Muslim male, and which is even heavier for the female believer. It is forbidden to the woman to show her hair,

her arms, her legs, her hips, to make love outside of marriage, to wed a non-Muslim, to wear men's clothes, to wear a wig, to file her teeth, to have recourse to magic, or to try to discover the future. It is forbidden to the man to be homosexual, to wear women's clothes, as transvestites do, to be a sculptor, to draw, to wear silk garments or gold jewelry, to play a musical instrument, to engage in games of chance, to seek to know the future, to practice magic, to loan money with interest, to manage a credit union, to be an insurance agent... and, of course, for the man as well as for the woman, it is forbidden to insult one's religion, to blaspheme, to commit adultery, to bear false witness, to steal, to defraud, to be a bandit, to abandon Islam, to wear a cross, to drink alcohol, to eat pork, to eat meat from an animal that was not ritually slaughtered... One can continue thus practically without end, to arrive at an impressive number of prohibitions. Some legal experts say seventy, but according to others there are many more prohibitions. It is not a question of an amusing game, which could be called: "you may... you may not (*yajûz*... *la yajûz*)", as Muslim children play, but rather of moral and legal injunctions, the infringement of certain of which, when Islamic law is applied, may lead to the amputation of a hand, and, in the case of a repeat offence, the amputation of a foot (for stealing), or may incur flogging or even stoning to death (for the adulterous woman). Islamic law is obviously not compatible with human rights, but it is nevertheless an integral part of Islam. Indeed, it is its very essence.

Let us be clear. This book is not an exhaustive study of Islam, nor is it meant to be a general presentation of Islam, such as we have provided elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> The originality of its approach is that it focuses on the prohibitions of Islam. For the sake of pedagogical clarity, in twenty-three short chapters we address the questions that arise for those who no longer tolerate equivocal language and who want to know what the texts actually say. Thus, the reader will be able to discover, that between these Muslim texts, which are thirteen or fourteen centuries old, and the recent

Islamic Fundamentalist actions reported in the media,<sup>5</sup> there is, indeed, a connection. What we must hope, however, is that the deadly message of some of these fundamental texts may be neutralized by the life-instinct and the desire for development and evolution of the Muslim peoples themselves.

To conclude, may I express my thanks to my editor for his remarks offered while reading the galleys of this book.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> From: *Courrier International*, no. 575, November 8, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Abdelwahab Meddeb, *La maladie de l'Islam*, Editions du Seuil, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>4</sup> *L'Islam*, La Découverte, 1990.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. *Courrier International*, no. 575, November 8, 2001.



## Muhammad, the Ideal Model?

**I**t is surprising to note the difference that exists between the negative image of the prophet Muhammad held by non-Muslims and the more than positive image of the same prophet held by the faithful of Islam. Saint John Damascene, the famous Syrian theologian of the VIIIth century, considered Muhammad to be a false prophet: "He went around saying that a Scripture was revealed to him by heaven." If, in the Christian West, Muhammad is described as deceitful, barbarous, demonic, plundering, bloodthirsty, stupid, bestial, arrogant, it is doubtless due to his very numerous marriages, but also due to his military expeditions, in which he spilled blood, attributed to himself prisoners of war for his own use, and took his part of the spoils.

In her book on Islamism,<sup>1</sup> Martine Gozlan does not hesitate to say, that there are two Muhammads. There is a Muhammad fascinated by the example of Jesus, attracted to prayer, capable of tenderness and gentleness, and then there is a Muhammad, that of Medina, who at times shows himself to be vindictive, cruel, swaggering: "No analysis of Islam can ignore this duality." The prophet had two faces. Now, in fact, Muslims especially honor the Muhammad of Medina. According to a hadith: 2 "Islam belongs to Medina as a serpent to its lair." It is true as well that it was in fact at Medina that Islam as a religion was organized. It was there in particular that Muhammad appeared as a triumphant political and military figure. The entire edifice of political Islam, with the Caliphate, the whole juridical and practical organization of the community in the different aspects of daily life, have as model the period at Medina, from 622 to 632.

If some Muslims believe they are free to “liquidate” the impious, it is not only because the Qur’an contains verses that are extremely ruthless regarding the enemies of Allah, but also because the Prophet himself gave the example by at times inciting his partisans to assassinate people for the good of the community. The biography of Muhammad by Ibn Ishâq relates a number of episodes where one sees that no concessions to any sensibilities were allowed when it was a question of combating the enemies of Islam. Political assassination is considered equivalent to a military campaign.

The first biographies of Muhammad, such as those by Ibn Ishâq and Ibn Hisham, were never in any way reticent in reporting episodes in which the Prophet ordered blood to be spilt. But since 1950, with Egyptians such as Haykal and ‘Aqqad, modern ‘Islamic’ biographies take account of western opinion, the biographers themselves being westernized Muslim intellectuals. So they seek to justify the political actions of the Prophet, never failing to quote the judgment of Lamartine, who considered Muhammad to be above the great figures of humanity. Even Muslim biographers who write in the XXIst century, such as the Lebanese Salah Stétié, still feel themselves obliged to present a biography acceptable for western opinion, so they pass over in silence, or at any rate attenuate, the political assassinations ordered, or at least encouraged, by their prophet!

In the collective unconscious of the non-Muslim, Muhammad contrasts with Jesus, chaste and non-violent. The western imagination is incapable of associating spirituality with images of violence, revenge, and sensuality. A prophet who admits loving women and perfume above all, and who allows massacres—even if he also loves to pray—has little chance of winning over a mentality formed by centuries of Gospel tradition. The example of a Mahatma Gandhi or of a Dalai Lama are accepted by the West because they incarnate a universal spirituality that values non-violence and compassion. Muhammad will always

encounter great difficulty in being accepted by non-Muslims as an authentic man of God.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Gozlan, Martine, *Pour comprendre l'intégrisme islamiste*, (Understanding Islamic Fundamentalism.) Albin Michel, "Espaces libres", 1995.

<sup>2</sup> A *hadith* is a tradition concerning Muhammad, something he said or did.  
*Translator's note.*





## 2

### Islam and War

**J**ihâd, usually translated as “holy war”, has become the stake in a theological debate. The majority of the westernized Muslim intellectuals wish to avoid any mention of its war-like aspect, and retain only the etymological meaning: “struggle against one’s own passions.” But for Muslim fundamentalists, on the contrary, *jihâd* is indeed combat, a war. So what should we think? All over the world, movements described as ‘terrorist’, and who define themselves as Muslims, speak of *jihâd*. They advocate an armed struggle in the name of the Qur’an, in order to create an Islamic state. Why should we hide this? *Jihâd* is a concept contained in the Qur’an.<sup>1</sup> If this word has also been used to designate the struggle against one’s impulses, in a purely moral and spiritual sense, at Medina *jihâd* did indeed have the meaning of ‘war’, of ‘combat.’ In this case, it is no longer a question of a moral and spiritual meaning. As the Egyptian writer Saïd Al-Ashmawy puts it:<sup>2</sup> “The term goes beyond the simple moral sense to include the individual and collective struggle against the pagans of Mecca.” There are two meanings of the word *jihâd*, however one cannot deny that, throughout the history of Islam, it has been the material and warlike meaning that has been by far the most important. At Medina, from 624 to 630, we witness a glorification of the *razzia*, the armed attack, and, in parallel with this phenomenon, we find its justification and regulation in Qur’anic revelation.

The obligation of holy war is certainly stated in the Qur’an. It is the subject of 250 verses out of 6,235. Thus, in Sura 4, v. 74, we find: “So let those who sell the present life for the life to come fight in the Way of Allah. Whoever fights in the Way

of Allah and is killed or conquers, We shall accord him a great reward.” Sura 4, v. 95: “Those of the believers who stay at home while suffering from no injury are not equal to those who fight for the Cause of Allah with their possessions and persons...” And one could find many more such verses. In Sura 2, v. 190, we find: “And fight for the Cause of Allah those who fight you...”, v. 191 “Kill them wherever you find them and drive them out from where they drove you out. Sedition is worse than slaughter...” It is certainly at Medina that the concept of *jihâd* as a holy war was established. The late Fr. Antoine Moussali, who was privileged with an admirable knowledge of literary Arabic, and who possessed a thorough knowledge both of Islam and Christianity, remarks: “Contrary to what Jocelyne Cesari affirms in her excellent book: “*Need we fear Islam?*”, in the Qur’an it is the sense of ‘holy war’ that outweighs the sense of interior *jihâd* (the struggle against oneself). The difference between the great *jihâd* (the struggle against oneself) and the minor *jihâd* (holy war) goes back to the IX<sup>th</sup> century and the end of the first wave of Islamic victories.”<sup>3</sup>

Even today, in 2003, the Islamic university of Al-Azhar, in Egypt, preaches war.<sup>4</sup> This prestigious institution has prepared a *fatwa*<sup>5</sup> declaring the necessity for the Muslim nation to possess nuclear arms. Sheik Alaa Ashanawihi, member of the council of legal opinions at Al-Azhar, believes that: “All Arab and Muslim countries must acquire the most modern arms, in order to hold their head high and to defend their honor.” On the internet site Islam Online, based in Qatar, one can read the *fatwa* of the Jordanian academic, Dr. Abdel Aziz Hrayyez: “Muslim countries must strive to acquire chemical and other weapons, so that the infidels respect this nation, and that they may not join forces against the Muslims.” But why should one be surprised? The Qur’an does not forbid war, Muhammad never forbade Muslims to take up arms, and Muslim law does not forbid recourse to armed force. Why should we expect Al-Azhar to speak the same language of peace as Pope John-Paul II? Contrary to what some

Muslims would like to believe, such as the Egyptian Sharaf al-Din, who “regrets that the supreme Islamic authority of Cairo has abandoned the message of religion”, the message of Islam is not that of the Gospel. So why does Nabil Sharaf al-Din think that Al-Azhar does not teach in conformity with the religious message of Islam?

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Lagartempe, Laurent, *Petit Guide du Coran* (A Concise Guide to the Qur'an), Consep, 2003, p. 299.

<sup>2</sup> Saïd Al-Ashmawy, *L'islamisme contre l'Islam*, La Découverte, 1989.

<sup>3</sup> Moussali, Antoine, *Judaïsme, Christianisme et Islam. Etude comparée*. Editions de Paris, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> *Courrier International*, June, July, August, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> *Fatwa*: an authoritative opinion in islamic jurisprudence. *Translator's note*.



### 3

## Islam and Political Assassination?

**I**n order to explain the terrorist attacks committed by Muslims, one usually recalls the famous sect of the Assassins,<sup>1</sup> which attempted to destabilize Sunni Islam by practising political assassinations. But why refer to this Ismaeli Shiite sect? One could just as well cite the example of the assassinations carried out by the *azraqi* Kharejites.<sup>2</sup> However, that still doesn't explain the terrorist attacks of Muslim fundamentalists close to Wahhabism,<sup>3</sup> who are Sunnites attached to the juridical aspect of Islam, and who are violently opposed to the secret, esoteric interpretations of Ismaeli Shi'ism! What one doesn't have the courage to say is, that assassination and martyrdom are justifiable, and indeed justified, solely on the basis of the fundamental texts of Islam, the Qur'an and the Sunna. Thus, in Sura 3, v. 169, we read: "And do not think of those who were killed in the Way of Allah as dead! Rather they are alive with their Lord, well provided for." Those who carry out terrorist attacks believe themselves to be martyrs, who will live with their Lord. In addition, to judge by the conduct of the Prophet at Medina, political assassination is perfectly licit. It suffices to refer to the chronicle of Tabari or to the biography of the Prophet to discover this. Here is how Tabari describes some of these assassinations, after the battle of Badr, which was a stunning victory for the Muslims, and which seems to have been the result simply of a clever maneuver:<sup>4</sup>

"There was a woman by the name of Asmâ bint Marwan. She composed verses that were particularly insulting to the prophet of Islam. When Muhammad learned of these poems, he said aloud: 'Is there no one who will get rid of the daughter of Marwan for me?' Now there was present a man, member of the clan of the

poet, 'Omayr Ibn 'Adi. He had not been at Badr, which was a good reason for him to prove his zeal. That very night, he entered her quarters. She was sleeping with her children, the youngest of which, still a suckling, was lying asleep on her breast. He pierced her through with his sword, and the next day went to see the Messenger of God. He said: 'Messenger of God, I have killed her!', and the latter answered: 'You have assisted God and his Messenger, ô 'Omayr.' 'Omayr asked: 'Will I have to suffer something because of her, Messenger of God?' He answered: 'Two goats would not lock horns for her!' 'Omayr returned to his clan, where, that very day, there was great emotion because of the daughter of Marwan. She had five sons, and revenge could be required. 'Omayr addressed his clan: 'O Banû Khatma! I have killed the daughter of Marwan. Plot something against me, but do not make me wait.' [This phrase is a quotation from the Qur'an.] And no one moved." The chronicler continues: "This was the first day on which Islam showed its power among the Banû Khatma." The stratagem had succeeded. This exploit of 'Omayr is placed among 'the expeditions of the Prophet' by Muslim chroniclers.

The following month, the centenarian poet Abou 'Afak was murdered in his sleep because of four verses critical of Muhammad. The Prophet had said, in an off-hand manner: "Who will punish this scoundrel for me?" And someone took care of the matter.

But the first political assassination perpetrated on the order of Muhammad is, at the same time, the most well known. The oldest biography of Muhammad, written by Ibn Ishâq, deals at length with the campaigns and the expeditions of the Muslims at the time of the Prophet, and among the expeditions are found 'political assassinations.' The translator of this biography, Abdul Rahman Badawi,<sup>5</sup> entitles the account of this first assassination: "The Murder of Kaab Ibn Al-Ashraf."<sup>6</sup> The victim was a poet of Medina, of the tribe Tayy, a Jew by his mother, who was of the Banû al-Nadîr. He detested Muhammad, and he was continu-

ously deriding the Prophet of Islam. When he learned of the victory at Badr, he could not comprehend that this refugee from Mecca had caused the death of Qurayshite noblemen. So he went to Mecca, where he did not rest from inciting the Meccanese to vengeance. What is more, he composed erotic poems with the intention of destroying the reputation of Muslim women. Whereupon Muhammad, exasperated, ordered his assassination, but indirectly, however, as a Mafia godfather who puts out a contract on someone: "Who will get rid of Kaab Ibn Al-Ashraf for me?" Muhammad b. Maslamah answered: "I'll take care of him, o Messenger of God. I will kill him." The Messenger of God said to him: "Do it, if you can." And Ibn Maslamah said: "O Messenger of God, we shall be obliged to use deceptive speech." The Messenger of God answered: "Say what you will. It is permitted to you."

So the assassination was prepared. The episode, reported at length by Ibn Ishâq, will only be summarized here, as the details are insupportable in their terrible cruelty. Several men conspired together to kill Kaab. In the evening, they went for a walk with the poet. One of the company, also a poet, Abû Nâ'ilah, was especially nice to Kaab. Touching his hair, he said: "I have never smelt a better perfume." They walked for several hours, in order to inspire confidence in the Jewish poet. Then, suddenly, Abû Nâ'ilah seized the hair of Kaab, and said: "Smite this enemy of God!" Then they smote him, but their swords, which rained blows on Kaab, did not suffice to finish him off. And Muhammad b. Maslamah said: "When I saw that our swords would not do the trick, I remembered the knife attached to my sword. I grasped it and thrust it deep into his abdomen, leaning on it till I cut him open down to the pubis. Then Kaab fell to the ground." The assassination of this Jewish poet is recounted in detail by Ibn Ishâq over seven long pages (pp. 18 to 25), and he defends the reporting of this act by quoting the verses of Hassan b. Thâbit: "They sought victory for the religion of their Prophet, regarding as insignificant all iniquitous acts."



The murder cases reported by Ibn Ishâq are numerous, and they occupy a large part of the second volume of the biography. There is the case, for example, of the assassination of the Jew Satam b. Abî Al-Huqayq in the city of Khaybar. Before the battle of Uhud,<sup>7</sup> the Arab tribe of the Aus, of Medina, had murdered Kaab Ibn Al-Ashraf. So the Medinese Arab tribe of the Khazraj, which did not want to seem less zealous, asked Muhammad permission also to kill a Jew, who, such as Kaab, was an enemy of the Prophet. And the Messenger of God gave them permission. Here again, it was a collective assassination, also carried out by deceit. Five men of the tribe of the Khazraj traveled to Khaybar to carry out the plan. They pretended to be buyers. "The wife of Al-Huqayq asked: 'Who are you?' They answered: 'We are Arabs, and we wish to buy grain.' The woman said: 'There is the person you are looking for. Just go in.' When they went in, they shut the door, and they attacked him with their swords while he was lying on his bed. They first stabbed him, then 'Abd Allah b. 'Unays again thrust his sword into his abdomen so forcefully that it came out on the other side of his body. They then returned to Medina, went to Muhammad's home and informed him of the death of the Jew. But each of them insisted that he was the one who killed him. So the Messenger of God said: 'Bring me your swords,' so they brought them to him. He examined them, and pointing to the sword of 'Abd Allah b. 'Unays, he said: 'This one killed him, for I see traces of food on it.' "

There is yet another political assassination which one cannot forget, that of Kinânah b. al-Rabî, an important Jew of Khaybar. He was believed to be guarding the treasure of the Banû al-Nadîr, the Jewish tribe that had been banished from Medina. The Messenger of God asked him where this treasure was, but Kinânah refused to answer. After having found a part of the Jewish valuables, the Prophet asked Kinânah where the rest was, but again he refused to answer. The Messenger of God then ordered Al-Zubayr to torture him: "Al-Zubayr began to burn his chest with the red-hot blade of a sword until Kinânah was

on the point of death. The Messenger of God then turned him over to Muhammad b. Maslamah, who slit his throat to avenge his brother, Mahmūd b. Maslamah.” The Prophet took Safiyya, Kinānah’s wife, as his spouse, but he had not the patience to wait until they had returned to Medina before consummating the marriage. One of Muhammad’s men, who stood guard all night with his sword next to the tent of the couple, will tell him later: “I was afraid of that woman’s reaction to you, for you have killed her father, her husband and her people.”

Political assassination, however, does trouble some contemporary Muslims, such as Philippe Aziz,<sup>8</sup> a writer and journalist with the weekly magazine *Le Point*, who writes about the assassination of Kaab Ibn Ashraf. But Salah Stétié, whom we have already quoted, in his book on Muhammad<sup>9</sup> has simply chosen totally to ignore all the political assassinations committed at Medina. In his *Mahomet*,<sup>10</sup> however, Roger Caratini does indeed discuss political murder (p. 409). Further, this author of the famous *Encyclopédie Bordas* could not pass over in silence what all the biographies of the Prophet of the Abbassid period recounted without the slightest embarrassment. But, knowing that he is writing for Westerners, in his *Génie de l’Islamisme*,<sup>11</sup> the same author seems to justify political murder: “It is hardly necessary to remind those of our readers who are scandalized by this account, that in Gaul, after the death of Clovis, in 511, political murder flourished among the Franks, at the rhythm of several assassinations each year! The fundamental difference between these actions, however, is important. The Merovingian murder is kind of a murder of succession, whereby one eliminates a pretender or a rival, while the Muslim murder is strategic.” In other words, for Caratini, it is not Kaab Ibn Ashraf whom Muhammad condemns, but rather: “an important element of the system, in this case an agent of communication and propaganda.” The death of Kaab caused a clamor, reports Caratini, and Muhammad ben Maslama, the agent of such important feats, boasted of having sewn terror among the Jews of Medina. And

the Prophet proclaimed to his faithful: "Kill any Jew who falls into your hands."

In his book on Muhammad<sup>12</sup>, Rodinson speaks of political assassination. Thus, after having returned from Badr, the anger of the Prophet unleashed itself against two prisoners from Mecca, who had attacked him intellectually. Having gathered information from Jewish and Iranian sources, they addressed difficult questions to him. They made fun of him and of his 'divine messages.' Muhammad ordered them to be executed. One of them asked him: "And who will take care of my boys, Muhammad?" He answered: "Hell!" In reality, assassination was one of the means used by Muhammad to gain status in tribal politics and to become sufficiently powerful, so that no one would think of exacting vengeance from him and from his faithful. The Prophet was surrounded by fanatical partisans, ready to carry out such vile tasks. But it was Muhammad who 'put out the contract.' To spread fear, such fear that no one would ever again attempt to move against him, that was the strategy of the Prophet of Islam. But spread fear only when it was necessary. Thus, one once reported to him insulting words spoken by Ibn Ubayy, head noble of the Arab tribe Khazraj, who was only outwardly a convert and who detested Muhammad, whom he considered to be vile. Omar<sup>13</sup> said to him: "Command Abbad Ibn Bishr to kill him." Muhammad answered: "Why, Omar? People will say that Muhammad kills his companions!" Thereupon, Ibn Ubayy came and denied everything upon an oath. The people of Medina supported him, and Muhammad let the incident pass. Later, however, Ibn Ubayy acted in such a way as to incur the displeasure of the Medinese. Then Muhammad said to Omar: "What do you think now? By Allah, had I killed him when you advised me to do so, the leaders of Medina would have trembled with rage, but now, if I were to order them to kill him, they would do it."

How, then, can one be surprised at political assassinations in the name of Islam? On June 29<sup>th</sup>, 1992, the Algerian President,

Muhammad Boudiaf, was assassinated at Annaba by a young officer of his own security guard. Before that, in October 1981, Anwar Sadat was assassinated. Both assassins were young elite officers, won over to the ideas of Islamic Fundamentalists. The Egyptian assassin was Khalid al-Istambuli, the Algerian, Lembarek Boumaarafi. The Egyptian example fed the imagination of militants from Algiers to Teheran and from Istanbul to Djakarta. Khalid al-Istambuli has his boulevards in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and his brother is a much sought-after speaker in religious circles. Also in 1992, the lay essayist, Farag Roda, was assassinated in the Spring. But if we keep in mind the example of the Prophet, we are not surprised at the behavior of those Muslims who rid the community of those who corrupt it.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> This sub-sect of the Ismaeli branch of Shiite Islam is technically known as Nizaris, after their founder. They terrorized northern Syria, Iraq, and Persia in the XII<sup>th</sup> and XIII<sup>th</sup> centuries by murdering those marked for death by the leadership of the sect, i.e. those considered to be a danger to them, both Muslims and non-Muslims. Since those who carried out their crimes were thought to prepare themselves for action by smoking hashish, they were popularly known as *hashashiyun* or *hashashin*, transformed by the Crusaders into *assassin*, which then entered European languages, where it is still in common use. *Translator's note*.

<sup>2</sup> The most violent branch of the Kharejites ("those retiring from Islam"), in contrast to the *ibadis*, the moderate Kharejites, which one finds today in Oman and in the Mزاب district of Algeria.

<sup>3</sup> The strictest and narrowest of the four schools of Islamic law. It is predominant in Saudi Arabia. *Translator's note*.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Delcambre, A-M, *Mahomet*, Desclée de Brouwer, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> The biography was published in French by Editions Al-Bouraq, Beirut, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> In vol. 2, p. 18.

<sup>7</sup> After their victory at Badr in 624, the Muslims were defeated by the Mecs at Uhud in 625. *Translator's note*.

<sup>8</sup> Son of a pious Tunisian family, his real name is Aziz Mahjoub, author of *Mahomet, le glaive, l'amour et la foi*, Editions Ramsay, 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Editions Pygmalion, 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Editions Criterion, 1993.

<sup>11</sup> Editions Michel Lafont, 1996.

- <sup>12</sup> Rodinson, Maxime, *Mahomet*, Editions du Seuil, 1961. (English translation by Anne Carter: *Muhammad*, Pantheon Books, New York, 1980. This book is a classic. *Translator's note*.)
- <sup>13</sup> A close collaborator of Muhammad from the beginning, he became the second Caliph (leader of the Muslim community), holding office from 634 till 644 AD. *Translator's note*.

## 4

### Islam and Terrorism?

**S**hi'ite Islam and Kharejite Islam have both had recourse to terrorism, but so has Sunni Islam. One must create fear in order to assert one's authority. Muhammad understood this at Medina, and throughout history the various currents in Islam have only followed the example of their Prophet. The Lebanese newspaper *Al-Hayat* comments that the revolutionary image of Iran and of its Lebanese ally, Hezbollah, pales in the face of the Sunni radicalism symbolized by Osama Ben Laden. Who still remembers the violence of Shi'ism in 1979, labeling the United States as the "Great Satan" and Saddam Hussein as the "Little Satan"? At the time, the Ayatollah Khomeyni created terror in the West, and one forgot about the terrorism of the Muslim Brotherhood. Compared to Ben Laden, Khomeyni almost seems a pacifist. In 2003, one considered Shi'ite terrorism less dangerous than that practiced by the Sunnites.

And there is another terrorism that one forgets: that practiced by the azraqi Kharejites. These Islamic puritans had two practices unknown among the Sunnites. The first was the probationary examination (*imtiḥan*).<sup>1</sup> It consisted in requiring every Kharejite neophyte, as proof of his sincerity, to cut the throat of an adversary taken prisoner. In this, the Kharejites, former partisans of 'Ali who rebelled at his weakness in his confrontation with Mu'awiyya<sup>2</sup> at Siffin, took inspiration from the fact that the Prophet Muhammad had asked his cousin and son-in-law to decapitate Meccanese prisoners. And 'Ali, son of Abû Talib, handled his sword with dexterity! The second practice was that of religious murder, which authorized not only the killing of men, but also of their wives and children, even if these latter

were only infants. The Kharejites considered territory occupied by other Muslims as the territory of infidels (*dâr kufr*), where it was permitted to attack the inhabitants and to steal their goods. In the VII<sup>th</sup> century, in 685, Kharejites extremists took control of Bahrein and of a part of Yemen, and these ferocious azraqi Kharejites created a reign of terror with their practice of religious murder.

The terrorist attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, have placed the twenty-first century under the sign of Islamic Fundamentalist terror. And one must ask this question of Islam: "Why is it, that the use of terror is approved by such a large number of Muslims, who come from different peoples?" The roots of this Islamic terrorism are to be found in the fundamental texts of Islam themselves, and it is this that explains its force of attraction in the Muslim world, in all branches of Islam, and its continued existence right up to the present day. Its chances of survival in the coming years as well are real. The recourse to a violent and avenging Islam is a great temptation for some Muslims, in order to make themselves heard by terror, just as the Prophet did at Medina. The Qur'an contains a large number of 'violent' Suras and of 'wrathful' verses. One cannot deny the violence of their tone, as they contain scathing reproaches, vehement curses, terrible threats, expressions of abuse, and vindictive speech. All this in order to sew terror among the enemies of Islam.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Laoust, Henri, *Les schismes dans l'Islam*, Payot, 1983.

<sup>2</sup> Bitter opponent of 'Ali, who blamed him for the death of the third Caliph, 'Uthman, from whom he had received his appointment as governor of Syria. This position provided him with the means to oppose 'Ali.  
*Translator's note.*

## 5

### Islam and Women?

**I**n 1913, Mansour Fahmy, an Egyptian, defended a dissertation at the Sorbonne on "The Condition of Women in Islam." In it, he compared the two periods of the conjugal life of the Prophet of Islam. In the first period, at Mecca, Muhammad is rigorously monogamist, while in the second, at Medina, he is, on the contrary, abundantly polygamist. Because of this analysis, considered sacrilegious, Fahmy was expelled from the staff of the university in Egypt, and he was doomed to live despised.

One cannot avoid noticing the enormous difference between the period at Mecca, where Khadîja is free to engage in commerce and to marry whom she pleases, and the period at Medina, where Muhammad, on the advice of certain of his companions, such as the authoritarian Umar, limited the liberty of his very numerous wives. Thus, in Sura 33, v. 59, God says: "O Prophet, tell your wives, your daughters, and the wives of the faithful to cover themselves with their great veils, a sure way that they be recognized and that they avoid any offense." In Sura 24, v. 31, the rules of conduct are proclaimed: "Say to the believing women to lower their gaze and to guard their modesty, not to show their beauty, except for what is apparent, and to draw their veil over their bosoms. They should not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husband's sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the female slaves whom their right hands possess, or to their male slaves incapable of the sexual act, or to boys who are as yet ignorant of intimacy with women. And they should not stamp their feet on the ground, so as not to reveal their hidden ornaments. ..."



The Qur'an prescribes the veil, and the Sunna as well. It happened one day that Asma, the daughter of Abu Bakr and sister of Aïsha, went to the Prophet's home dressed in thin and transparent clothes. The Prophet turned his face away from her and said: "Ô Asma! One should not be able to see anything at all of a woman's body once she has reached puberty except this and that." As he spoke, he showed her his face and his hands.<sup>1</sup> This is because a young and beautiful woman represents a danger for a man, liable to arouse him sexually. For this reason men and women are separated in the mosque. Ayatollah Mortadhâ Motahhari, in his book, "The Question of the Hijab",<sup>2</sup> writes: "The noble Prophet gave orders that, in the evening, after prayers, the women go out first, and then the men. He did not want women and men to mix on leaving the mosque, for from such mingling arise temptations. Again, in order to avoid them, the Prophet commanded that the men walk in the middle of the street and the women on the sides. Thus, one will not be surprised that all legal experts, Sunnite as well as Shi'ite, discourage the intermingling of men and women, judging it to be *makrûh*—detestable." And the Ayatollah Sayyid Tabâtâbâi Yazdi specifies: "The mixing of men and women is to be discouraged, except in the case of elderly women."

It is the fear of sensuality, of voluptuousness, that causes the legal experts of fundamentalist Islam to rule that it is forbidden for an unrelated man and woman to shake hands, unless something be interposed, such as a glove. A Muslim has always in mind this phrase of the Sunna: "A man, a woman, and Satan is between the two!" In other words, man and woman are constantly tempted by the Devil. Woman is the temptation of man, but the man may not have pleasure with a woman except in the context of marriage. On the other hand, women are forbidden to give pleasure to men outside of a legal union. It is for that reason that the woman must cover herself.<sup>3</sup> It is more decent, for she has the capacity to trouble men by her seductive power.

This theological position concerning the veil held by the legal experts of Islam helps us better understand certain recent events. In Algeria there have been massacres of women living alone, considered to be 'shameless', or even 'prostitutes.' These women were attacked, beaten, raped, and mutilated because they were considered to be a menace for the qur'anic and prophetic moral order, which forbids celibacy, monasticism, and fornication. Muslim women who do not respect the taboos of Islam are a menace to the community, and therefore they do not deserve to live. Bar hostesses had their throats cut, and their bodies were abandoned as 'filth' and as 'heaps of excrement.'<sup>4</sup> And this took place in July of 2001, at Tebessa, some 400 miles from Algiers!

In fact, for fundamentalist Islam, alone the propriety of conjugal life counts, for in marriage it is not a question of living a passion or being madly in love. On the contrary, according to Sura 30, v. 21, it is tenderness and compassion that are the basis of a successful union: "Among His Signs is that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell with them in tranquillity, and He has put between you love and mercy." Woman, the repose of the warrior, is a necessary haven of peace for man. Indeed, that is why in the Qur'an, Sura 2, v. 187, God says: "It has been made lawful to you on the night of fasting to approach your wives; they are a raiment for you, and you are a raiment for them." Nevertheless, there is a difference between the man and the woman. The man may use the woman as he wishes and when he wishes: "Your women are a tillage for you, so go to your tillage whenever you like," says God in Sura 2, v. 223.

The man has pre-eminence over the woman. He can force her to obey, order her about, oblige her to remain in her room, even beat her. Sura 4, v. 34: "Men are in charge of women, because Allah has made some of them excel the others, and because they spend some of their wealth. Hence righteous women are obedient, guarding the unseen which Allah has guarded. And those of them that you fear might rebel, admonish them and abandon

them in their beds and beat them..." The man has the role of head of the family, financial responsibility is his, and it is to him that the initiative of repudiation is given. The woman as such has no worth. Only the mother is valued; the sterile woman is despised. Polygamy is thought to be in accordance with the biological and physiological natures of the man and the woman. The woman is inferior. Regarding the questions of bearing witness (cf. Sura 2, v. 282) and of inheritance (Sura 4, v. 11), she has exactly half the value of a man. Concerning the inferiority constituted by menstruation, the Qur'an says what it thinks: "And they ask you about menstruation. Say: 'It is an impurity.' So keep away from women during their menstruation and do not approach them until they are clean..." (Sura 2, v. 222). In addition, a woman can be repudiated, and repudiation thrice expressed becomes irrevocable. Such a woman is then forbidden to her former husband, except if she remarries another man and is then again divorced.

Inferior in every aspect, there nevertheless remains one way in which a woman can be equal to a man: that of vice. This is why the woman is mentioned in the Qur'an together with the man regarding the legal penalty for certain crimes: stealing (Sura 5, v. 38) and adultery (Sura 24, v. 2). It is true, however, that there is yet another equality, that existing between male and female believers, for one of the Prophet's wives had rebelled against a qur'anic discourse reserved exclusively for men. Thus it is that we may discover in Sura 33, v. 35, perfect equality between male and female faithful in the matters of fasting, chastity and prayer: "Men and women who have submitted, believed, obeyed, are truthful, steadfast, reverent, giving in charity, fasting, guarding their private parts and remembering Allah often, Allah has prepared for them forgiveness and a great reward." It is to have access to this equality in virtue, the prospect of which the Qur'an holds out to them, that some Muslim women insist on wearing the veil: to taste, even if it is illusory, a semblance of equality!

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Abû Dâwûd, Collection of Traditions, vol. 2, p. 383.

<sup>2</sup> *La question du Hijab*, Editions Al-Bouraq, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> In Iran, the Ayatollahs use the term *pushesh*, which means “to cover”, for besides the veil covering the head, a woman must be entirely covered from head to foot, except for the face.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. *Courrier International*, June, July, August, 2003.



## Islam and Jews?

**A**s for the Jews, one must use the term ‘diatribe’ in order to describe the style the Qur’an uses in their regard. But even this word seems too weak. One would have to add: ‘curse’, ‘loathing’, and ‘anathema.’ The verses concerning the Jews express, in fact, “a volcano of resentment, of anger, and of condemnation”,<sup>1</sup> which are expressed by “insults, abuse, and vituperation so violent and varied as to be unimaginable.”<sup>2</sup> In his *Concise Guide to the Qur’an*, Laurent Lagartempe remarks, that while no Sura is totally exempt from this vindictive tone, when there is question of the People of the Book, and in particular the Jews, one finds that a record number of disparaging superlatives are employed: “The term ‘Sons of Israel’ is used forty-one times in the ‘Collection’ [Qur’an], usually followed by reproaches, abuse, or curses.”<sup>3</sup>

In fact, we see that there is a progression in the attitude of Allah toward them. First, there is an appeal to the Jews of Medina that they believe in the message of Muhammad. Sura 2, v. 41: “And believe in what I reveal, confirming the revelation which is with you, and be not the first to reject faith therein, nor sell My Signs for a small price...” Then comes a second phase, polemic against them, in which they are described as possessing all possible defects. Their capacity to enjoy life is criticized. Sura 2, v. 96: “Indeed you will find them of all people the most attached to life, even more attached than those who associated other gods with Allah. Every one of them wishes to live for one thousand years. This long life, however, will not spare them punishment. Allah sees what they do.” They are unjust, ungrateful, perverse, and obstinate in sin. They have neither Faith nor Law! Sura 2, v. 85: “Yet there you are, killing each other and turning some of

your folk from their homes, making common cause against them with sin and aggression..." The Jews are forgers as well. In Sura 2, v 79, we read: "Then woe to those who write the Book with their own hands, and then say: 'This is from Allah,' to traffic with it for a miserable price! Woe to them for what their hands do write, and for the gain they make thereby." The reference, of course, is to the scrolls of the Torah. But the third phase is the most violent: the Jews of Medina are condemned straightaway, indeed, by a divine condemnation to Hell (Sura 98, v. 6): "The unbelievers, among the People of the Book and the idolaters, shall be in the Fire of Hell, dwelling therein forever. These are the worst of creatures." But had the Jews believed they would have had the right to Paradise.

The Jews are accursed. Sura 4, v. 155: "But because they broke their covenant, disbelieved in Allah's Revelations, killed the Prophets unjustly, and said: 'Our hearts are sealed', Allah has sealed them on account of their disbelief..." Sura 4, v.156: "And for their disbelief and their imputing to Mary a great falsehood." Sura 4, v. 157: "And their saying: 'We have killed the Messiah, Jesus, son of Mary and the Messenger of Allah.' They neither killed nor crucified him; but it was made to appear so unto them..." But it is in Sura 62, v. 5, that the judgment of the Jews is the most contemptuous: "The case of those who were loaded with the Torah, then failed to carry it, is similar to an ass which carries learned books. Wretched is the case of the people who have denounced Allah's Signs. Allah does not guide the wrongdoing people."

The fourth phase is the rupture with the Jews of Medina. Sura 5, v. 57: "O Believers, do not take as friends those who take your religion as a mockery or a sport, be they from among those who received the Book before you or the unbelievers..." Sura 5, v. 58: "And when you call to prayer, they take it as a mockery and a sport; that is because they are a people who do not understand."

At Medina, Muhammad had to confront three Jewish tribes. Two were expelled, and the third massacred, put to the sword. After the victory of Badr, it was the tribe of the Banû Qaynuqâ that was forced to leave. And after the defeat of Uhud, it was the tribe of the Banû Nadhîr that was attacked by Muhammad. The Banû Nadhîr, having become rich through handicraft, lending money with interest, and commerce, owned prosperous groves of palm trees, about a half-day's journey from Medina. In August, 624, citing their refusal to pay tribute, Muhammad ordered them to leave Medina within ten days. But, secretly incited by Abd Allah Ibn Ubayy, the head of the Arab tribe of the Khazraj, who detested Muhammad, they blockaded themselves in their palm groves. But they were immediately besieged, and they capitulated without combat. All their belongings and property were confiscated, and were distributed exclusively among the immigrants from Mecca. So the Nadhîr emigrated to Khaybar, to the north of Medina. Sura 59, v. 2, refers to this event: "It is He Who drove out the unbelievers among the People of the Book from their homes at the first mustering. You did not think that they would be driven out, and they thought that their forts would protect them from Allah. Then, Allah seized them from an unexpected quarter and cast terror into their hearts, so that they destroyed their homes with their own hands, as well as the hands of the believers. Reflect, then, O people of perception!" Sura 59, v. 3: "Had not Allah decreed dispersion upon them, He would certainly have punished them in the present life, and in the Hereafter, the punishment of the Fire shall be theirs." And we should not forget the spoils taken by the Muslims, which would enrich the young community. Sura 59, v. 7: "And whatever spoils Allah bestows on His Messenger from the inhabitants of the cities belongs to Allah, His Messenger, the kinsmen, the orphans, the destitute and the wayfarers..."<sup>4</sup> Sura 59, v 8: Give to the poor Emigrants who were driven out of their homes and their possessions, seeking bounty from Allah and good pleasure and assisting Allah and His Messenger..."<sup>5</sup>



But the third Jewish tribe, the Banû Qurayza, will suffer a fate far worse than expulsion. After the Battle of the Trench,<sup>6</sup> the male members of this tribe, who had hoped for the defeat of Muhammad, and perhaps even plotted with the Meccans, will be condemned to death. They were not condemned by Muhammad, himself, but by the sentence of the head of the Arab tribe of the Aus, who had been asked by the Prophet to pass judgement. Normally, this tribe owed assistance and protection to the Jews, with whom they had enjoyed a long economic association in Medina, but the chieftain chosen to be judge had been mortally wounded in the confrontation with the Meccans. He was thus little inclined to show mercy. On the Prophet's order, large pits were dug in the city square. There was then played out a particularly heinous drama: securely bound, the Jews were decapitated by a stroke of the sword, one by one. The killing lasted all night. According to Muslim historical sources, the Prophet assisted in silence at the execution of 'the enemies of God and of his Prophet.' For Muslim commentators, the punishment was perfectly legitimate since the Jews were guilty of betrayal. As for the Qur'an, Sura 33, vv. 26-27 calmly note: "...Some of them you slew, and some you took captive. And He bequeathed to you their lands, their homes and their possessions, together with land you have never trodden..." The Prophet simply applied to them their own Law, the Jewish Law of Deuteronomy (Dt. XX, 10-14). After the carnage, Muhammad took Rayhana, the beautiful widow of one of those executed, as a concubine. The Jewish women and children were sold as slaves. But why should one weep for these perfidious traitors, who represent the worst of humanity? However, Muslims, on the other hand, deserve attention and respect. For, indeed, those who received Scripture are not all equal (cf. Sura 3, v. 113). The Muslims are the best community. Sura 3, v. 110: "You were the best nation brought forth to mankind, bidding the right and forbidding the wrong, and believing in Allah..."

But after the massacre of the third Jewish tribe, Muhammad had not yet finished with the Jews. There still remained the oasis of Khaybar, a very prosperous grove of palm trees situated just under a hundred miles from Medina, where the Jews expelled from the city had taken refuge. After a fairly short siege, the Jewish farmers capitulated, paralyzed with fright at the sight of these pillaging Arab hordes, commanded by Muhammad, anxious to do battle and to seize an exceptional prize. But the Arabs have real disdain for agriculture. So the Jewish farmers and the head of the Muslim community made a pact: Muhammad would allow them to cultivate the oasis, provided that they turn over to him half of the harvest. In fact, this agreement would serve as a model for requiring tribute from Jewish and Christian communities. The attitude of Muhammad towards the Jews of Medina would carry great weight in future Islamic law and in its dispositions concerning the *dhimmis*—‘protected’ Jews and Christians.

In 640 AD, Omar Ibn al-Khattâb, the second Caliph, expelled the Jews and the Christians from Arabia, thereby fulfilling the desire expressed by the Prophet: “Two religions should not co-exist in Arabia.” A century after the death of the Prophet of Islam, Muslim legal experts determined the fate of the Jews and the Christians of conquered countries by relying on the revelations of the Qur’an, but also on the conduct of Muhammad at Medina. The principle of ‘protection’ translated into taxes that the Jews and the Christians had to pay: a head-tax (*jizya*) and a property tax (*kharaj*). These taxes represented the ransom paid by the non-Muslim to the Muslim community for the right to live in the land of Islam. It was not possible to break this agreement. For the ‘protected’ (*dhimmis*), there could be no recourse against a Muslim. A Muslim would not be executed for the murder of an infidel, while an infidel would, on the contrary, be executed for the murder of a Muslim. Very long, indeed, is the list of prohibitions and humiliations resulting from this agreement of protection-ransom. For the non-Muslim, it is forbidden to

possess Muslim religious books, to discuss them with Muslims, to have Muslim servants, for a Muslim may not submit to the authority of a non-Muslim. Marriage or sexual relations between a Jew or a Christian and a Muslim woman would be punishable by death. And the same punishment is foreseen for a Muslim who becomes a Christian.

What is the reason for such taxes? The Islamic community alone possesses the true religion, and is, thus, the only legitimate beneficiary of the good things created by Allah. The *jihâd* restitutes to the Muslims the things that the infidels had illegally appropriated to themselves. Given the dispositions of the Qur'an concerning the Jews and the attitude of Muhammad in their regard, one can well imagine the nightmare experienced by non-Muslims obliged to pay tribute in order to purchase their protection, for the payment of such taxes never went without humiliation. Why, one may well ask, does one never speak of these discriminatory practices concerning Jews and Christians, which took place and which continue to take place in Islam in certain countries?

And what about clothing? What of the coarse fabrics, the special waistbands, the ridiculous hats, the special color, yellow (in Baghdad) or blue (in Libya)? And what may they ride? No horses, camels or noble animals for the Jews, but asses...which, according to the noble Qur'an, resemble them! What can we say about the obligation to humiliate the People of the Book, inscribed in the holy Qur'an? Sura 9, v. 29: "Fight those among the People of the Book who do not believe in Allah and the Last Day, do not forbid what Allah and His Messenger have forbidden and do not profess the true religion, till they pay the poll-tax out of hand and are submissive." For the believing Muslim it was a work of piety to express publicly his aversion for the Jews. Forced to live in areas apart (*ghettos*), the laws concerning housing were just as draconian as those concerning clothing: there could be no question that a Jew might possess a house higher or finer than the houses of the Muslims. Finally and above all,

Muslim law required of the *dhimmis*, and thus of the Jews, submission to the Muslims. Concretely, that meant that they must have a humble and modest attitude, their gaze lowered and their step hurried. They had to give way to the Muslims, even if that meant getting off the sidewalk to let them pass! In short, Jews under Islam are far from respected. On the contrary, they are disgraced. Why does one not dare to say that there is, in fact, a phobia against the Jews in Islam, based not on race, but on their refusal of religious submission to Islam? The Jews no longer have the vocation of being the Chosen People. They have lost that right. Indeed, they have lost everything because of their attitude towards the Prophet of Islam! It is the Muslims who are the new Chosen People of God. The status of *dhimmi* avenges the humiliation suffered by the Prophet between 622 and 629. The Jews in the lands of Islam would pay very dearly for the proud arrogance of the Jews of Medina, their condescension, and their scornful hostility. They would pay throughout the centuries, even till the present day. The problem is, that for Islam, the indignity of the Jews is anchored in its fundamental texts, in the Qur'an, in the Sunna, and in the texts of Muslim law, and one cannot imagine by what possible miracle the Jews, damned by God in the Qur'an, destined to Hell, guilty of all possible sins, could ever see an improvement in their religious status in the Muslim mind.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Lagartempe, Laurent, *Petit Guide du Coran*, Editions de Paris, Versailles, 2003, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem, ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*, p. 95.

<sup>4</sup> This verse, not mentioned by the author, is given here as it facilitates the understanding of the following verse, which is quoted in the French text. *Translator's note.*

<sup>5</sup> The Emigrants were those followers from Mecca who went to Medina with Muhammad in the migration of 622, known as the *hijra* [emigration]. It is noteworthy that the Qur'an describes them as 'driven out.' As followers of the new religion, which was in conflict with the traditional religion of

the Meccans, they were indeed the object of ill will and even of persecution, but they left in compliance with Muhammad's orders. They were not driven out. *Translator's note.*

- <sup>6</sup> At the end of March, 627, a Meccan force of some ten thousand men under the leadership of Abû Sufyân marched on Medina, but they were unable to attack, because Muhammad had ordered that a trench be dug on the unprotected northern edge of the city. After a two-week siege, the force retreated, and Muhammad had won a key victory. However, he suspected the Banû Qurayza of collusion with the enemy, and there is some evidence to suggest this, so he attacked them as soon as the Meccans had withdrawn. They held out for twenty-five days, and then surrendered. The men were beheaded, the women and children were taken or sold as slaves, and all their property, of course, was confiscated by the Muslims. Historians put the number of the slain between six and nine hundred. *Translator's note.*

## 7

### Islam and Christians?

**S**ome verses of the Qur'an seem to indicate that the Christians enjoy a favorable image. For instance, in Sura 5, v. 82, Allah declares to his Prophet: "You shall find the most hostile people to the believers to be the Jews and the polytheists; and you shall find the closest in affection to the believers those who say: 'We are Christians.' For among them are priests and monks, and they are not arrogant." And Sura 5, v. 83: "And when they hear what was revealed to the Messenger, you see their eyes overflow with tears on account of the truth they recognize. They say: 'Our Lord, we believe, so write us down among the witnesses.' " But in many Suras, Jews and Christians together incur the same rebuke. They have falsified their Scriptures. They are ungodly. For Muslim legal experts, the most militant texts, the most severe ones abrogate the earlier dispositions, which authorized a hopeful attitude towards Polytheists, Jews, Christians, Sabeans, and Zoroastrians. Sura 5 is essential, for it is on this Sura that Muslim jurists based themselves in the IX<sup>th</sup> century to establish discrimination between Muslims on the one hand, and idolaters and People of the Book on the other.

Sura 5, v. 73, is perfectly clear in its attitude towards Christians: "Unbelievers too are those who have said that Allah is the third of three. For there is no god except the One God; and if they will not refrain from what they say, those of them who have disbelieved will be severely punished." In fact, Christians must ask pardon of Allah. As we hear in Sura 5, v. 74: "Will they not repent to Allah and ask His Forgiveness? For Allah is All-Forgiving, Merciful." And Sura 5, v. 75: "The Messiah, son of Mary,

was only a Messenger before whom other Messengers had gone; and his mother was a godly woman. They both ate [earthly] food. Look how We make clear Our Revelations to them; then look how perverted they are!" For the Muslim commentators, the Messiah is only a human being, since by the nature of things Allah does not eat. But in spite of the proof of the uniqueness of God given by Allah himself, through his Messenger Muhammad, the Christians are not moved and persist in their error. The questions that Muslims have always asked of Christians are the following: why are they attached to the Trinity, and why do they believe that Jesus is the Son of God? God can no more have a Son than He can have a Father. Why would God become incarnate to save mankind? Why would God be crucified as a common slave? The Mystery of the Holy Trinity, the Mystery of the Incarnation, the Mystery of the Redemption, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection... Islam considers these to be pernicious doctrines, erroneous dogmas. Sura 5, v. 77: "Say: 'O People of the Book, do not exceed the bounds in your religion unjustly, and do not follow the fancies of a people who went astray in the past and led others astray and strayed from the Right Path.' " Sura 5, v. 17: "Unbelievers are those who say: 'Allah is the Messiah, son of Mary...' " Moreover, Islam believes that, in a manner of speaking, Jews and Christians are 'friends' of one another. Sura 5, v. 18: "The Jews and the Christians have said: 'We are Allah's children and His beloved.' Say: 'Why then does He punish you for your sins? ...'" In fact, what Islam rejects, indeed abhors, are Trinitarian Christians, thus Catholics [and Orthodox], who are considered as polytheists, or tritheists. It seems that the 'good' Christians of the Qur'an are the 'Nazarenes.'<sup>1</sup> But for Trinitarian Christians no pardon is possible. Sura 4, v. 48: "Allah will not forgive associating [other gods] with Him, but will forgive anything less than that to whom He pleases. And he who associates other gods with Allah has committed a very grave sin."

For Muslims, the Mystery of the Holy Trinity is God, Jesus, and Mary! (For Christian theology, of course, it is the Father,

the Son, and the Holy Spirit.) One can easily understand the profound unease of Catholics faced with the erroneous, indeed, caricatured perception of Christianity by the Muslims. But, on the other hand, even educated Muslims are disconcerted by the Christian Mysteries, as well as by the absence of ritualism and a certain disdain for the juridical aspect of the Faith. In reality, Christianity appears to be a religion that is very unlike Sunni Islam. In fact, Islam is much nearer to Judaism, for the notions of belonging to a specific community and of a 'law' that orders the life of the believers even down to detailed alimentary prohibitions are foreign to Christianity. If, in the light of certain Qur'anic verses of the Meccan period, Islam seems more favorable to Christians (Nazarenes?), it is because Muhammad was in confrontation with the Jews of Medina, who denied him as a prophet and who even ridiculed him. The Christian hermits whom Muhammad came to know in the desert near Mecca (or perhaps further north, in the Syrian desert)—often heretics fleeing persecution and seeking refuge in Mecca—did not oppose his message. Perhaps they even informed him of their own religion.

The religious experience of Muhammad was not the same regarding the two religions. At Medina, the organization of the Muslim cult was achieved mainly by taking the Jews as an example in an initial stage, and then by simply dispossessing them of their religious heritage and appropriating it to Islam. But in answer to their legitimate protests, the Jews were accused of having falsified their Scriptures and of having perverted their religion. For the Muslims, God is angry with the Jews, while He considers the Christians as having lost their way. God is angry with the Jews, who refuse to accept a prophet who considers himself so close to them. The Muslims venerate Jesus as prophet who worked miracles, but for them, He is only a prophet. He is not the Son of God, for God cannot have a Father. Muslims refuse the Incarnation. The idea of God who becomes Man is totally rejected, just as is equally rejected the idea that Jesus was crucified on a cross



as a common slave. No prophet could have had to endure this sort of infamy. At the last minute, someone else took His place on the Cross. For this reason, the Cross is a shameful symbol that provokes the pious Muslim. As for the Redemption, Christ Who redeems the sins of humanity, this teaching is perceived by Muslims as pure folly, a wild exaggeration. Folly for them as well is the Eucharist, the Sacrament which perpetuates the Sacrifice of Christ by the transubstantiation of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ. Holy Communion is the reception of the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ by the Faithful, and, particularly in the case of the reception of the Sacrament under the two species, the Muslim sees a dietary prohibition—the drinking of wine—and the grossest of impurities—the drinking of blood, and, what is more, the Blood of Christ! Transubstantiation—the changing of the eucharistic bread and wine into the substance of the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ—this and all such affirmations are considered to be the worst of heresies. As for Confession, the revelation of one's sins to a priest in order to receive absolution, a priest who, moreover, is celibate, and who, in the confessional, this small, isolated enclosure, listens, as a representative of God, to the sins of men, but also to those of young women who come alone and who confide to him things that they would not tell their husbands... Muslims would hardly dare to say what they think of such a thing, persuaded, as they are, that Satan is present in the confessional. And Islam has great difficulty in understanding the celibacy of Catholic priests and their vow of chastity. It often imagines the vilest turpitude, for it accepts neither celibacy nor monastic life. Marriage, they say, is the half of religion. But here again, a chasm separates Christians and Muslims. For the latter, marriage is a simple contract, and polygamy as well as repudiation are possible. For the former, marriage is an indissoluble sacrament.

In reality, Islam has in mind a laicized Christianity, severely modified by the Reformation. But fundamentalist Islam spontaneously and instinctively mistrusts Christians. Its standpoint

is that which one finds in Sura 5, v. 51: "O believers, do not take the Jews and the Christians as friends; they are friends of each other. Whoever of you takes them as friends is surely one of them. Allah indeed does not guide the wrongdoers." And in Sura 5, v. 57, we read: "O believers, do not take as friends those who take your religion as a mockery or a sport, be they from among those who received the Book before you, or the unbelievers..." But Sura 9, v. 28, is stronger still. This Sura, 'Repentance', is the only one that does not begin with the usual formula 'In the name of God, the Gracious, the Merciful.' Muhammad has now been nine years at Medina. In 631, he is at the height of his political and military career, and his is finally in a position to impose his conditions. He is truly feared. Terror reigns due to political murders and successful razzias. He no longer negotiates nor fears any foe. It is he, himself, who spreads fear. And it is at this time that he adopts a much more severe attitude towards Jews, Christians, and Polytheists. There is no longer even any difference between idolaters and the People of the Book. Verse 28 of this 9<sup>th</sup> Sura stipulates: "O believers, the polytheists are truly unclean..." And v. 29 of the same Sura, which we had occasion to quote regarding the Muslim attitude toward the Jews, applies equally to the Christians, for they also refuse to acknowledge Muhammad's message. It calls on the Muslims to: "Fight those among the People of the Book who do not believe in Allah and the Last Day, do not forbid what Allah and His Messenger have forbidden and do not profess the true religion, till they pay the poll-tax out of hand and are submissive." And the following verse is hardly less severe (v. 30): "The Jews say: 'Ozair<sup>2</sup> is the son of Allah', and the Christians say: 'The Christ is the son of Allah.' That is their statement, by their [own] mouths. They emulate the words of the unbelievers before them. May Allah damn them!<sup>3</sup> How perverted they are!" Thus, those who believe in Jesus, the Son of God, deserve death, and Allah must kill or destroy them. They deserve Hell, where they will be for all eternity. Just as the Jews, they are the worst of humankind.

This is precisely what Sura 98, v. 6, says: “The unbelievers, from the People of the Book and the idolaters, shall be in the Fire of Hell, dwelling therein forever. They are the worst of creatures.” Those engaged in the Islamo-Christian dialogue should re-read what the Qur’an has to say about Christians and Jews, for these are indeed the worst people imaginable for the pious Muslim Fundamentalist. They are impure, corrupters of [revealed] texts and of men!

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In Arabic, *nasârâ* is a plural form meaning simply ‘Christians’, but the general assumption is, that it referred to some heretical sect at the time of Muhammad, who demonstrably had a completely erroneous conception of Christianity. The modern term for ‘Christian’ in Arabic is *masîhî*. *Translator’s note.*
- <sup>2</sup> Ozair is probably Esdras, also spelled Ezra. The Book of Esdras recounts the Jews return from exile.
- <sup>3</sup> The reader will not fail to note that God would hardly say: “May God damn them!” As the verse stands, it is obvious that it is not God who is speaking. *Translator’s note.*

## 8

### Islam and Animals?

In Islam, they practice ritual slaughter, cutting the animal's throat in order to empty it of its blood, so that its meat be licit for consumption, *halâl*. The Muslims have this practice in common with the Jews, who, for their part, insist that the meat be *kasher*, that is, purified. This concept of 'pure' and 'impure' was not taken over by Christianity. The animal must be emptied of its blood, because blood is considered impure.<sup>1</sup> The animal's throat is cut quickly, with one stroke of the knife, but this practice is often perceived as shocking for the Western mentality, formed by Christian culture. In this regard, Islam is close to Judaism, but not to Christianity. Jesus exempted food and drink from the weight of the Law. Indeed, it was the Blood of Christ, Himself, that freed blood from the qualification of impure and illicit that it has for the Jews and the Muslims. The Qur'an itself speaks of alimentary prohibitions. In Sura 5, v. 3, we find: "You are forbidden the eating of carrion, blood, the flesh of swine as well as whatever is slaughtered in the name of any one other than Allah. [You are forbidden] also the animals strangled or beaten to death, those that fall and die, those killed by goring with the horn or mangled by wild beasts, except those which you slaughter and those sacrificed on stones set up..." Prohibited as well are carnivorous animals, such as the wolf, the lion or the cheetah, and domestic animals, such as the dog and the cat, and, in addition, the ass, the mule, and the horse.

One must not overlook, as well, the enormous market of the *halâl* butcher's shops, and the large number of animals slaughtered for the Feast of the Sacrifice, the Great Feast, in commemoration of Abraham's sacrifice. The official slaughter houses are unable to

meet the demand, so many people simply purchase their sheep and slaughter it wherever they can. In such circumstances, it is not surprising that animal-rights movements get involved and vigorously protest against such practices.

Another point that the Western mind, accustomed to domestic pets, finds shocking is the status of the dog. For Islam, as for Judaism,<sup>2</sup> the dog is an impure animal. "Angels will not enter a house where there is a dog", says the Tradition, recalling the episode when the Angel Gabriel refused to meet the Prophet at his home, because a puppy had taken refuge under the bed. But in Western countries, it is not rare that a dog is treated royally, eating and sleeping beside his master! But such an attitude is repugnant to Muslims, who cannot free themselves of the idea of the impurity of the dog.

After the attacks on the twin towers of the World Trade Center in New York, one discovered, it is said, the instructions that Muhammad Attah, the leader of the terrorists, left regarding his funeral: "At my funeral I want no impure beings, that is, animals and women." It is possible that this testament is only an invention of the media, but nevertheless it corresponds exactly to what the texts of Islam have to say regarding the impurity of the dog and of the woman in menstruation. Regarding the sacrifice of an animal, it is not the question of impurity that is foremost in the mind of the Muslim, but rather the violence of the slaughter. Abdelwahab Meddeb, in his article "Cut Throats", has understood, perhaps better than others, the possible consequences of an act considered purely religious and inoffensive. Describing the annual slaughter of sheep in commemoration of the act of the Patriarch Abraham, Meddeb writes: "The celebration of this symbolic act renders the Muslim familiar with the scene of the death rattle that ensues when a throat is cut. Witnessing this act as a child, I saw the warm blood of the animal spilling out to the last drop... I could not help but think of this ritual commemoration of Abraham's act of sacrifice when images reached us from Algeria of entire families with their throats cut, the work of the

GIA,<sup>3</sup> formed in the crucible of Afghanistan with the complicity and the benediction of al-Qâ'ida. Perhaps celebrating the symbolism of the act of Abraham in the reality of spilled blood predisposes one to such a degeneration into madness.”<sup>4</sup>

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This, in fact, is not the case in Judaism, which considers blood to represent life, or the principle of life, and, as such, it is something sacred. At death, the life must return to God Who gave it, and therefore blood may not be consumed. Further, in Old Testament times, aspersion with the blood of sacrificed animals effected forgiveness of sins, and thus renewed the relationship between God and man, ruptured by disobedience. In this way it had a quasi-sacramental aspect. However, in the case of an animal sacrificed to a false god, such as *Baal*, both the animal itself and its blood became impure. In any case, it remains true that the method of slaughtering animals for food is essentially the same in Judaism and Islam. *Translator's note.*
- <sup>2</sup> Jewish dietary laws permit only animals with a cloven hoof and which chew the cud to be used as food. Thus, the dog, just as the horse and many other animals, cannot be eaten, and in this narrow sense, and only in this narrow sense, is the dog ‘impure.’ For the Jew, the dog is in no way whatsoever a repugnant animal that inspires disdain and loathing, as can be the case for the Muslim. And even here, one must not think that all Muslims share such an aversion to dogs. *Translator's note.*
- <sup>3</sup> *Groupe Islamiste Armé.* An underground resistance organization in Algeria in the 1950's, which fought the French colonial occupant to achieve independence. It did not hesitate to resort to the most horrendous acts of terrorism to achieve its ends. It is exactly the same mentality which is behind the attacks of September 11, the suicide and other bombings in Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Indonesia, Spain and elsewhere, and the recent beheading of hostages in Iraq. *Translator's note.*
- <sup>4</sup> Abdelwahab Meddeb, « Cous coupés », p. 65-67, in : *Algérie, textes et dessins inédits*, Le Fennec, Casablanca, 1995.



## Islam and Images?

A number of Qur'anic verses condemn idols, and in the Sunna [Tradition] we find the prohibition of the representation of images. In the collection of Traditions transmitted by Bukhari,<sup>1</sup> we find: "Angels do not enter a house where there is a dog or an image." And it is true that in mosques one finds neither statues nor images. But that does not mean that mosques are without decoration. On the contrary, superb arabesques and multi-colored mosaics abound therein. Aisha<sup>2</sup> recounts that she had some material of colored wool with images on it. When the Prophet saw it, he became angry and shouted: "In truth, among those who will receive the harshest torments on the Day of Final Judgment there will be those who made images." And in reference to a man who was drawing, Muhammad is said to have declared: "At the Final Judgment, God will punish one who makes images by condemning him to give a soul to his images." Further, again according to Aisha, Muhammad would not tolerate any object in the form of a cross, because Jesus, considered to be a mere prophet, in the view of Islam was not crucified. So Muhammad used to destroy crosses, images, musical instruments, wine skins. And that means that there was no painting, sculpture, or music in Islam, if we limit ourselves to the strict example of the Prophet. However, here it is a question of primitive Islam, of the Islam of the time of Muhammad. Military conquests would bring non-Semitic peoples into Islam, people who knew and appreciated figurative art, in particular the art form of the miniature. And we see the same phenomenon in literature, where, for example, *The Thousand and One Nights* speaks not of the Arabian desert, but is chiefly constituted of borrowings from other cultures, in



particular India, Persia, and China. The aim of Islamic Fundamentalists is to dissociate this civilization known as the Golden Age, created in large measure with the aid of borrowings from other cultures, from Islamic culture such as it was at Medina, with the Prophet Muhammad for guide. *The Thousand and One Nights* enjoys the esteem of the westernized fringe of the Arab intelligentsia, but it is perceived as a sign of moral depravation by the Fundamentalists. In 1985, the court of public morality in Cairo ordered the confiscation of an unexpurgated Lebanese edition of it. The public prosecutor's office had even asked that the work be burned in public. In fact, the work is considered to be in contempt of Islam and an attack on morality. Muslim jurists find some descriptions of wedding night celebrations and of some rather scabrous situations shocking.

And how could we fail to mention the two millenary statues of the Buddha in Afghanistan that the Taliban destroyed six months before the attacks of September 11, 2001? These enormous Buddhas, cut straight out of the rock, were situated in the Bamyán valley. The oldest of the two, dating from the III<sup>rd</sup> century A.D., measured thirty-five meters in height, while the other, from the IV<sup>th</sup> century, was nearly fifty-four meters tall. They were part of the rock from which they had been sculpted, and both were covered with polychrome stucco, red, yellow, green, blue, and violet. Their faces and hands were overlaid with gold, so that in the sun they shone brilliantly, dazzlingly, so as to resemble gigantic jewels. The walls of the alcoves in which they stood were embellished with various frescos. The description of these statues had been printed in newspapers all over the world. They were true works of art, held in the greatest esteem by western experts. But for the Muslim Fundamentalists they represented idolatry, so they had to be broken, destroyed. These statues were idols for them, and in the Qur'an, Sura 21, vv. 57-58 we read: "...[Abraham said] and by Allah, I will show your idols my guile, after you turn your backs. Then he reduced them to pieces..."

For these statues of Bamiyan, there was even a real trial. The verdict of the Supreme Court of Islamic Jurisprudence in Kabul, given on February 26, 2001, stipulated: "All pre-Islamic statues shall be demolished. All pre-Islamic symbols and idols condemned by the Prophet shall be destroyed." Then one went off to see the spectacle. They machine-gunned the faces, the noses and the chins of the statues, and set off explosive charges placed at the feet of the two Buddhas. A veritable execution.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Muhammad ibn Ismâ'îl ibn Ibrâhîm al-Ju'fî al-Bukhârî, 810-870, compiler of one of the most authoritative collections of *hadîth*, or Traditions (Sunnâ), regarding the words and deeds of Muhammad. *Translator's note*.

<sup>2</sup> The youngest of the wives of the Prophet.



## Islam and Science?

**A**ccording to the Abdelwahab Meddeb,<sup>1</sup> Islam is more concerned with technology than with science. The Islamic world has not been creative in the field of science since the XVII<sup>th</sup> century. But in the beginning, was it truly scientifically creative? Above all, it experimented with theoretical sciences, in particular those of the Greeks. It was the Greek sciences that the learned Hellenists of Islam developed, thanks to the translations of scientific texts made by Oriental Christians living in Islamic lands, often from Syriac, but at times directly from the Greek. Neither Avicenna, of the X<sup>th</sup> century, nor Averroes, of the XII<sup>th</sup>, knew Greek. As for the 'scientific spirit' which is supposed to have flourished in Islamic cities in the past, this is in large part a myth. It characterized above all a very small elite, fascinated by Greek philosophy. Such persons, who only spoke of Aristotle, were considered heretics and were rejected by the people and by the theologians and jurists.

The Caliph Al-Ma'mun, whose mother was Persian, who had encouraged the work of translation being done at Baghdad, and who supported the Mu'tazilites<sup>2</sup> to the extent of carrying out a veritable inquisition, was called 'The Prince of the Unbelievers.' The true exercise of reason could never really take root and develop in the lands of Islam, where it was considered a blameworthy innovation (*bid'at*), a heresy, and totally foreign to the original message of Islam. Muslim intellectuals remain inconsolable at the passing of the Golden Age of Islam, thereby forgetting that this Golden Age was in no way exclusively Islamic, that it was rather the result of cosmopolitanism, with external contributions from India, Persia, and China, and that its nature was completely

heretical in relation to the original Islam and the Islamic culture of Medina. The brilliant civilization that took form between the IX<sup>th</sup> and the XII<sup>th</sup> centuries at the courts of metropolitan centers such as Baghdad, Cairo, Esfahan, and Cordoba, with the encouragement of rich and noble patrons, among them caliphs, viziers, emirs and simply prominent citizens, was in large measure foreign to religion as such. Avicenna was persecuted, as was Averroes as well, nearly two centuries later, because they placed too much emphasis on thought and reason. But these scholars of the land of Islam adapted more than really invented, even if Avicenna (980-1037) spiritualized the legacy of Aristotle, the great mystic Sohrawardi (1155-1191) revitalized the principles of Zoroastrianism, and Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) elaborated an original, syncretistic system.

Averroes recommends the method of inference, a method of reasoning that deducts the unknown from the known, which is thus comparable to the syllogism. He observes, however, that the first generations of Islam, which were the source of tradition, were ignorant of the fundamental instrument of logic, the rational syllogism. He believed, however, that it would be useless to waste one's time reinventing what others had already invented, even if they were non-Muslims! But that is precisely what the traditional jurists of Islam refuse to admit. According to them, the precious Islamic culture is that which was elaborated at Medina under the leadership of the Prophet: how to make one's ablutions, how to eat, how to pray, how to conduct oneself in this or that circumstance. When fundamentalist Islam speaks of science, it means religious science. There can be no question of science detached from religion. It is this that prompted Abdus Salam, recipient of the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1979, to comment: "Of all the great civilizations of the planet, it is the Islamic community that has given the least attention to science." The Qur'an speaks of science, of the scholar, of the necessity to reflect, of analysis, but always from a religious point of view. Calling into question, doubt, critical research is absolutely not

tolerated. The Muslim submits only to Allah, and science cannot be separated from religion. This explains why Muslims do not feel the apprehension for the mathematical sciences and for information technology that they do for philosophy or biology, which are capable of calling into question the established truths of Islam.

For the Islamic Fundamentalist, technology is not for the service of modernity. It is tolerated if it can further Islamic heritage, or, at least, if it does not oppose it. One recalls the case of the Egyptian, Nasser Hamed Abouzeid, who, being accused by Fundamentalists, was obliged to stand trial in 1996 before the Supreme Court of Appeals in Cairo. He was condemned for apostasy and declared “divorced from his wife”, for she could not remain married to the infidel that he had become. What, then, was his crime? He had made a critical analysis of the Qur’an and the Sunna according to modern historical and epistemological criteria! What one does not dare to say is, that if Muslims of rich countries make it a point of honor to purchase ultramodern computers and related technology, if the Saudi Prince, Sultan Ben Salman, accompanying Patrick Baudry in 1985, became the first Arab astronaut in history, if Muslim women eagerly study computer science, never, on the other hand, does one use the instruments of modern technology to discuss the established dogmas of Islam. One discourages any and all criticism which might question Islamic heritage, and anyone who would dare to doubt, to criticize, to revolt is ridiculed and attacked. In extreme cases, such as in Sudan, the modernist religious scholar is even condemned to death. We recall here the case of the Sudanese theologian, Mahmud Taha, who was hanged for having attempted to distinguish between the verses of the Qur’an which do, in fact, call to wage war and those which merely express moral exhortations. While all over the world scientific studies which strive to achieve progress in fighting the diseases that menace humanity are published, Islamic fundamentalist Sheiks distribute among Muslim youth publications on the “medicine of the

Prophet.” They maintain that western physicists and chemists have invented nothing truly original, for everything is mentioned in the Qur’an! In fact, many Muslim intellectuals are convinced that the holy Book contains all the great discoveries of our time, from quantum physics to atomic fission.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> cf. Meddeb, Abdelwahab, *La maladie de l'Islam*, (The Sickness of Islam), Paris, Seuil, 2000.
- <sup>2</sup> The Mu'tazilites rejected predestination as irreconcilable with divine justice and mercy, and they rejected as well the dogma that the Qur'an was the uncreated word of God, holding instead that God created all things, including the Qur'an.

## Islam and Sexuality?

**F**or Islamic practice, bodily cleanliness is an imperative: “Cleanliness is part of the Faith.” Abdelwahab Boudhiba, in a well-known book on sexuality in Islam,<sup>1</sup> speaks of the obsession of purification. One must exercise constant control over all bodily orifices emitting secretions. Sperm, urine, feces, blood, and nasal mucus all render the body unclean and are considered culpable secretions. There are precise details concerning the manner of purification of the genitals and the anus, which must be performed exclusively by the left hand, the hand which is reserved for this function. For this reason one never eats with the left hand, but only with the right hand, the noble hand. The profusion of detail regarding these procedures is in fact shocking. And regarding the matter of bodily secretions, one cannot overlook Sura 2, v. 222: “And they ask you about menstruation, say: ‘It is an impurity.’ So keep away from women during their menstruation and do not approach them until they are clean...” The woman is impure during her monthly period, and one must flee contamination. Sura 74 expresses it clearly: v. 4 “And purify your garments.” And v. 5: “And abandon abomination.”

One must, of course, purify oneself before prayer as well. Sura 4, v. 43 teaches: “O believers, do not approach prayer while you are drunk,<sup>2</sup> until you know what you say; nor when you are unclean—unless you are on a journey—until you have washed yourselves. And if you are sick or on a journey, or if any one of you has relieved himself, or you have touched women and could not find water, you might rub yourselves with clean earth, wiping your faces and hands with it. Allah indeed is Pardoning, All-Forgiving.”



One finds an obsession with defilement in the Qur'an. Muslims and pure and purified, but infidels are only impurity. Sura 9, v. 28, is explicit: "O believers, the polytheists are truly unclean, so let them not come near the Sacred Mosque..." Sura 5, v. 6, stipulates the manner of ritual ablutions: "O believers, if you rise to pray, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows and wipe your heads and your feet up to the ankles..." And the verse continues: "...If you are unclean, then cleanse yourselves; and if you are sick or on a journey, and if one of you has come from the restroom, or if you have touched women and cannot find any water, then take some clean earth and wipe your faces and hands with it. Allah does not wish to burden you, but to purify you and complete His Grace upon you, that you may be thankful." One cannot fail to note the strange resemblance between Sura 4, entitled: 'Women' v. 43, and Sura 5, 'The Table', v. 6. The terms utilized are identical, with the exception of a few variations, and this can mislead even Muslims themselves. Allah considers the matter of purification so important that He seems to repeat himself. In light of this, one better understands the important place occupied by ritual ablutions in the Sunna and in Muslim legal treatises. What seems shocking for the modern western mentality is, that a religious text, the Qur'an, and a legal treatise can discuss aspects of one's intimate life that one would rather expect to find in medical publications specializing in sex.

Let us make no mistake, however. Sexuality in Islam is not unbridled. Sexual activity is inconceivable outside of marriage. Marriage, as the saying has it, is half of religion. A man or a woman may not have sexual relations outside of marriage, for they would then be acting as animals or savages. The constant concern in Islam is to 'civilize' man, to educate him, so that he may not conduct himself as an animal. Thus, for Islam, to let hair grow on the body, not to wash oneself, to eat in a slovenly manner, to copulate with anybody at all, is the negation of all human and religious education. Man distinguishes himself from

the animal by the fact that he is endowed with reason, and the proper use of this reason cannot but lead him to God, indeed, to submission to God. The true, the primary nature of man is to be submitted to God (*muslim*), and therefore to be a Muslim, if we take account of the sense of the word *muslim*! To be in a state of submission to God is the natural religion of man. To revolt against God is satanic. Sexual liberty, which denies all difference between good and evil, pure and impure, is an aberration, and the trivialization of homosexuality is a satanic perversion.

With all that, however, what Muslims do not wish to proclaim is, that for Islam, the individual may not dispose of his body as he sees fit, eat what he wants, nor do what he wishes to do. Psychoanalysis advises one to express oneself freely, to be oneself, to say what one feels, while Islam, on the contrary, advises self-control—under penalty of repression. One must discipline oneself, avoid doing certain things and speaking certain words. Islam sets the rigidity of Islamic morality against the laxity of secularized western sexual morality. In this sense, one may speak of culture-shock.<sup>3</sup>

It was not Ossama Ben Laden but the Sheik Abd al Azim al Mitaani, professor at the famous Islamic university Al-Azhar, in Cairo, who, when questioned about homosexuality in June, 2003, replied that the punishment for “acts of debauchery between women” is to be locked up until death ensues. In Sura 4, v. 15, we find a similar punishment for adulterous women: “As for those of your women who commit adultery, call four witnesses from your own against them, and if they testify, then detain them in the houses till death overtakes them, or Allah opens another way for them.”<sup>4</sup> Should one, then, be surprised that this same Sheik declared that, in the case of sodomy, the majority of Islamic jurists consider that both the passive and the active partner must be put to death? It is even stipulated that, in the case of one who sodomizes an animal, the man must be put to death and the animal slaughtered. Why such severity? Because sexual perversion goes against the will of God and his

Creation. It is a question of conduct so despicable that even the vilest of animals avoid it. Sheik al Mitaani considers homosexuals to be perverts, who commit filthy acts. They are, in his words, “a natural secretion of materialistic western society, which is oriented toward the satisfaction of one’s instincts and desires, while turning its back on religion.”<sup>5</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Boudhiba, Abdelwahab, *La sexualité en Islam*, Presses Universitaires Françaises, 1979.

<sup>2</sup> One will not miss the irony of this stipulation, considering that the consumption of intoxicating beverages is forbidden in Islam. *Translator’s note.*

<sup>3</sup> In all fairness, one may not fault Islam for having a moral code. All religions have a moral code, which they propose to their adherents as the norm of proper human conduct. In particular, Judaism and Christianity have a very clear moral code based on the Ten Commandments, and the faithful of these religions are expected to live according to the principles of morality contained therein. Like Islam, these two religions steadfastly oppose the current hedonistic culture, promoted by current principles of psychology and psychoanalysis, which places man rather than God at the center of things, and which prefers pleasure to virtue. The difference between Islam and Christianity in particular is that Christianity preaches and practices mercy for the sinner rather than condemnation. In Islam, a thief will have his hand cut off. In Christianity, a thief will be asked to make restitution, will be forgiven, and admonished to mend his ways. When the Apostle Peter asked Jesus if one must forgive his brother seven times, Christ replied: “Seventy times seven times!” Cf. Mt. 18:22. *Translator’s note.*

<sup>4</sup> The “another way” mentioned in this verse did, indeed, come. But it was not a way of mercy and forgiveness. If found guilty, the unmarried woman is to receive one hundred lashes, while the married woman is to be stoned to death. Many recall the world-wide indignation in 2004, the mobilization of public opinion and the campaigns for signatures on petitions demanding mercy for the woman in Nigeria condemned to be stoned to death for adultery. She had been raped by her ex-husband, and the child she bore was the proof of her adultery. It is of note, as well, that there was no question of calling the man to account for his violence, the reason being, presumably, that there had been no witnesses to the crime, and the woman’s testimony was not sufficient to take legal action against the man. *Translator’s note.*

- <sup>5</sup> In spite of this clear statement of the majority opinion of Islamic jurists, of Sheik Mitaani's own opinion, and of the extraordinary severity of the punishment foreseen for these things, one must not assume that homosexuality does not exist in Islam, nor that adultery and fornication are not present in Islamic society. *Translator's note.*



## Islam and Money?

**I**slamic law forbids usury in all its forms. Five long verses near the end of Sura 2 stigmatize the taking of interest on monies lent. Thus, v. 275: "Those who take usury will not rise up, except like those maddened by Satan's touch. For they claim that trading is like usury, whereas Allah had made trading lawful and prohibited usury..." V. 276: "Allah prohibits usury and does not bless it; but He compounds alms. And Allah does not like a vicious unbeliever." V. 278: "O believers, fear Allah and forgo what is still due from usury, if you are [true] believers." V. 279: "But if you fail to do that, take note of a war [waged] by Allah and His Messenger. But if you repent, you will have your capital, neither wronging nor being wronged." And finally, v. 280: "If he [the debtor] is in straits, then allow days of grace until he is at ease. But to remit [the debt] as alms is better for you, if you only knew."

Muslims must renounce usury, and this explains the success of Islamic banks. In Egypt, at the beginning of the '80's, one witnessed a spectacular growth of these banks for Muslims. In 1979, the Minister of Religious Affairs, Shaarawi, promulgated a law creating the Islamic bank 'Faysal' amid acclamations of 'Allahu akbar' [God is great!] on the part of the members of parliament. But today, the director of the university Al-Azhar is practically asking for them to be closed, arguing that these banks are directed by a 'group of bandits' and that they are not operating in the spirit of Islam. Nevertheless, Islamic banks are prosperous in Indonesia, even more so in Malaysia, and in Arab countries as well: Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Kuwait, Dubai, Jordan, Bahrain, Iran, Turkey, and even in Switzerland and Australia.

The fact that usury is prohibited outlaws professions such as money lender, insurer, money changer, director of a credit institution, etc. The problem is not the type of political regime, whether capitalist or socialist, it is a question of how the money is used. To loan money and receive in return a sum superior to the amount lent is absolutely contrary to Islamic principles. Sura 3, v. 130, expresses this: "O believers, do not devour usury, doubled and redoubled, and fear Allah, that you may prosper!" Legal alms, the *zakat*, serves to purify money. Islam wants money that is not soiled by the practice of taking interest, and, in fact, legal almsgiving purifies the money of the Muslim. This is why commerce and the honest businessman are respected. All that is required is that the money produced by commerce be perfectly licit. Indeed, the most faithful companion of Muhammad was Abu Bakr, an honest businessman. In fact, commerce is looked upon with favor both by the Qur'an and the Tradition, while, on the other hand, agriculture is despised. There is a tradition that the Prophet said: "A sincere businessman, worthy of confidence, will be among the prophets, the righteous, and the martyrs on the Day of Final Judgment."

Honest capitalism is not incompatible with Islam. One cannot find a better example than that of the Ibadite Kharejites,<sup>1</sup> in Oman and the Mزاب district of Algeria. They are the puritans of Islam, but they have perfectly integrated capitalism. The marketplace, far from being opposed to the mosque, permits the perpetuation of the rigid traditionalism of Muslim religious life. With the Omani Arabs, as with the Algerian Mozabite Berbers, Puritanism and Capitalism co-exist effortlessly. In both countries, one finds aspects of primitive Islam, the Islam of Muhammad, and in particular, violence. Kharijism appealed to the Bedouin rebels of central Arabia as well as to the insubordinate Berbers because, in fact, it incarnated the social revolt and the religious intransigence of the people of the desert and the countryside. But in regard to money, the Omanis have serenely entered the club of rich oil monarchies of the Gulf, although in former times the

Sultanate of Oman was very poor, and in Algeria, the Mozabites have been particularly successful in the world of commerce.

Then, of course, one must mention Saudi Arabia, where poor Bedouins have become extremely rich, and the Arabian Desert has become the land of black gold. And the Arabs of Arabia, Sunnite Wahhabites,<sup>2</sup> are no more surprised than the Omanis, Ibadite Kharijites, by their sudden riches. They recall what the Qur'an has to say about their Prophet in Sura 93, v. 8: "[Had not your Lord] found you in need, and then enriched you?"

Fundamentalist Islam, of whatever branch of Islam, has no complexes regarding money, as long as it is purified by almsgiving. To speak only of Saudi Arabia, we may mention the establishment there in 1973 of the Islamic Bank of Development, in 1977 the International Association of Islamic Banks was founded, in 1981 the Islamic House of Capital was created, and, also in 1981, the International Islamic Institute of Banking and Economy was opened. Islam has not hindered spectacular financial successes, such as that of Ben Laden. It remains without doubt, however, that usury is shameful. In the Tradition, no term is too harsh to stigmatize usury and the usurer. Numerous traditions assert that the usurer will be possessed by Satan, who will strangle him with his own hands, and that such a person will be thrown into a river, from which someone will prevent him from getting out by throwing stones at him. It seems that Muhammad very early on, while still at Mecca, condemned lending money at interest.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>The Ibadite Kharijites are moderates, in comparison with extremist Kharijites, such as the Azraqites, who practiced religious assassination and political terrorism. (Kharijite, from *khârijun*, 'those who go out.' The reference is to a sect formed by a group of dissidents, who separated themselves from 'Ali, the son-in-law of Muhammad, after his attempt at compromise in his struggle with Mu'awiya. Ibadites are the descendants of the followers of 'Abdullah ibn Ibad, who modified the extremism of Kharijite doctrine. *Translator's note.*

<sup>2</sup>Muhammad ibn 'Abd al Wahhab was co-founder of the Saudi state and propagator of the strictest interpretation of Islamic Law. *Translator's note.*





## Islam as a Community?

**N**o one can efface from the mind of the Muslim the feeling of responsibility that he has in regard to other Muslims. Every Muslim is truly proud to belong to the Umma of the Prophet, the Motherland, the Community. In the Qur'an, Sura 3, v. 110 proclaims: "You are the best nation brought forth to mankind, bidding the right and forbidding the wrong, and believing in Allah..." Such is the mission incumbent on every Muslim: to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong. But it is a question of right and wrong such as they are understood in the Qur'an.

For Islam, every Muslim is the brother of every other Muslim. This is the seemingly appealing aspect of the Community. But there is also a negative aspect, some would say almost menacing: every Muslim is responsible for his brother, and has the duty to lead him back to the straight and narrow way. This right of intervention, justified by religious faith, is broadened when the Muslim is in enemy territory, for example in Europe. As Martine Gozlan remarks: "There are victims due to the enclosed, narrow nature of the community of Islam, bristling as it is with prohibitions, in which one wishes to imprison people, even should they die of it."<sup>1</sup>

One should mention here the *Tabligh*, an Islamic organization, the purpose of which is the re-islamization of Muslims. One seeks to re-cement the Muslim community, and to lock it up legally by the prescriptions of Islamic law. What Muslim Fundamentalists want, is to detach Muslims from western values and shut them up within the limits of the Umma, the Community, this closed circle, this communal enclosure, for Islam, as it reveals itself

through its fundamental texts, indisputably has a communal dimension. All of the obligations (Pillars) of religion display this communal aspect. Communal prayer is superior to individual prayer; indeed, according to a *hadîth* (tradition) quoted by Bukhârî and Muslim,<sup>2</sup> it is twenty-seven degrees superior. And the *zakat* has nothing at all to do with Christian almsgiving; it is a “purifying social tax.” As well, it is hardly necessary to insist on the communal aspect of fasting and of the gathering constituted by the pilgrimage to Mecca.

The *shahâda* (the profession of faith) is the necessary condition for entering the Umma. A good Muslim pronounces it with a sincere heart at the moment of death. But a Muslim may not leave this community. One does not leave the community, for to do so incurs the death penalty, if Muslim law is applied, followed by eternal damnation. Indeed, in Muslim law, apostasy is punishable by death. The Qur’an classifies it among the sins of disbelief. In Sura 4, v. 137, we read: “Those who believe, then disbelieve, then again believe, then disbelieve, then grow in disbelief, Allah shall not forgive them...” And Sura 16, v. 106, proclaims: “He who disbelieves in Allah after he has believed, except him who is compelled, while his heart remains firm in belief; but those who rejoice in disbelief shall incur Allah’s Wrath and a grievous punishment awaits them.” In fact, to become unfaithful, disbelieving, is a sort of apostasy. In Sura 3, v. 91, we find: “As for those who disbelieve and die as unbelievers, the earth’s fill of gold will not be accepted from any of them, even if it is offered as ransom. For those, a painful punishment is reserved and they will have no one to help them!” There is no need to dwell on the politico-religious attitude of Islam, which condemns apostates to death. For them, not even the intercession of the Prophet himself could make a difference. Sura 9, v. 80, reads: “Ask forgiveness for them or do not ask forgiveness for them. If you ask forgiveness for them seventy times, Allah will not forgive them; because they disbelieve in Allah and His Messenger. Allah does not guide the sinful people.”

Some Muslims think in good faith that they have complete liberty to believe or not to believe, but that is false. The words of Sura 2, v. 256: "There is no compulsion in religion..." does not concern them. It is a question of respect for the other monotheistic religions.<sup>3</sup> The Muslim is absolutely not free. His only liberty is to believe with the community of believers. For Islam, "everyone is born a Muslim, it is the family which makes one Jew, Christian or Zoroastrian." (Ibn Khaldun). Islam is the natural identity of man. Therefore conversion to Islam is considered purely and simply as a return to one's original identity, while any abandonment of Islam is a veritable betrayal, a perversion with regard to the natural law and the pristine nature of man. Whoever leaves Islam is unnatural, a pervert, for it is truly a crime to abandon the best of religions. And for Islamic law, such a person deserves death.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Gozlan, Martine, *op.cit.*, p. 167.

<sup>2</sup> Authors of the two most revered collections of traditions. *Translator's note.*

<sup>3</sup> The reference is to Judaism and Christianity. *Translator's note.*



## Islam and the Law?

We cannot interpret correctly the conduct and the way of life of contemporary Muslims, from the wearing of the veil for women to letting one's beard grow for men, without understanding that, if their conduct is such, it is because they are following rules, and that these normative rules are found in the law (*sharia*)<sup>1</sup> and the jurisprudence of that law (*fiqh*).<sup>2</sup>

Behind the veil as well as the beard, behind the *halla* butcher's shops as well as the alimentary prohibitions, behind the abhorrence of celibacy as well as the repugnance to allow a dog inside the house, there is a law. The norm is at the heart of the conduct of the Muslim concerning not only worship, but the way of life as well. Muslim law is at the base of Islamic culture. This attachment to the rule is explained by the fact that Islam is both normative and profoundly ritualistic. Its faith is not only theoretical, it demands actions in which the body is involved. One must submit physically to the rule. But if the Muslim submits so willingly to the norm, it is because, for him, it leads to salvation. Muhammad H. Benkheira<sup>3</sup> speaks of 'love of the law.' In wearing the veil or the beard, the Muslim subject embraces the imaginary body of the law. But why this eagerness to embrace the norm? Because failure to respect the norm would make the Muslim a 'deviant', one who is 'lost' on the road to perdition.

Thus, the Muslim is guided by the example of the Prophet. In order to understand the eagerness of the Muslim to follow the example of Muhammad, one must first understand the importance of the rite in Muslim life. One does not pray whenever and however one pleases. One does not keep the fast of Ramadan whenever and however one likes. So is it the same for all the

religious obligations, which must be performed according to very precise rules. From the cradle to the grave, the Muslim is bound by a system of rules and regulations from which he cannot free himself.

But simply to follow the law explains nothing. The question is: what is behind the law? The prohibition. All the rules, whatever may be the aspect of life that they concern, deal with prohibitions, whether they deal with sexuality, nutrition, or any other of the manifold facets of human existence. The essential question is always: "Is this in accord with Islamic law?", and this holds for every human act. One always has recourse to the written norm. If we consult contemporary compendia of juridical consultations (*fatwa*), one finds this type of question: are blood transfusions permissible?, are heart transplants licit?, is plastic surgery allowed? Thus, one understands the importance of the role of the *mufiti*,<sup>4</sup> for it is he who provides juridical consultations and issues *fatwas* according to his legal opinion. His duty is not to interpret the Qur'an and the Sunna (Tradition), but rather the treatises of Islamic Law. His role is to calm the fears of the faithful. For in fact, the obsession of the believing Muslim is to be faithful to the norm. His desire is to be a Muslim who lives according to the exigencies of the Law.

Islam detests what is in conflict with the norm, what is abnormal, what is marginal. Everyone must be an exact copy of the perfect Muslim. The Muslim always feels guilty for not being good enough, for not being a perfect Muslim. A book by Dr. Yousef Quardhaoui, *The licit and the illicit in Islam*,<sup>5</sup> demonstrates well the importance of the law and of the five juridico-moral qualifications: permitted, recommended, obligatory, blameworthy, and forbidden. Even Averroes, in his "Decisive Discourse" reasons like a *qadi*<sup>6</sup> rather than a philosopher, when he writes in his introduction: "The purpose of this inquiry is to determine whether the study of philosophy and the science of logic is permitted by revealed law or whether it is condemned by it, or whether it is prescribed by it, either as a recommendation or as

an obligation.” Thus, in Islam repudiation (unilateral divorce)<sup>7</sup> is certainly licit, but it is of that category of things licit which is the most detestable. ‘Licit’ is that which is permitted without any prohibition, and that which the divine legislation has authorized to be done. ‘Forbidden’ is that which the divine legislation has formally forbidden, which thus carries as consequences punishment by God in the afterlife and a legal sanction in this world. ‘Forbidden’ is only something that has been explicitly declared to be such by a text. ‘Recommended’ is that which results in a reward for the accomplishment of the act. Something not ‘forbidden’ is permitted, but when something is forbidden, it is not only the thing itself, but also everything that leads up to the thing or act prohibited is also forbidden. With regard to wine, for example, accursed is the one who drinks it, the one who presses it, the one who transports it, and the one who sells it.

Acts are always judged according to whether they are licit or illicit. And the quest for the ‘licit’ results in the examination of the conduct of the Prophet with a magnifying glass, what he did, and how he did it. Concerning this quest of the ‘licit’, in the XI<sup>th</sup> century Al-Ghazâlî<sup>8</sup> declared: “There is that which is clearly licit and that which is clearly illicit, and between these two there are questionable cases... Those who abstain from such ambiguous matters protect themselves both with regard to their honor and to their religion.” Al-Ghazâlî definitively set the boundaries which mark the point to which the believer can go without going too far. Beyond these limits, the Muslim is no longer assured of being on the path of right conduct, the path of proper behavior which assures salvation. If the quest of the licit is so important, it is, as Al-Ghazâlî says, because: “this present world is the soil in which the seeds of the life to come are sown.” Thus, one understands that the Muslim has constantly in mind this counsel: “For the present life, act as if you will live forever. For the life to come, act as if you will die tomorrow.”



### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The *sharia* contains the objective norms, the ideals, the theoretical content of the Qur'an and the Sunna (Tradition). It contains the Qur'anic regulations and the prophetic injunctions in their raw state, without the intervention of the jurists.
- <sup>2</sup> The jurisprudence, or case law, practiced by the four schools of Muslim law (Malikite, Shafi'ite, Hanbalite, Hanifite) as elaborated by their legal experts, principally from the Qur'an and the Sunna.
- <sup>3</sup> Benkheira, Muhammad, *L'amour de la loi. Essai sur la normativité en Islam*. (Love of the Law. A Study on the Role of the Norm in Islam), Paris, PUF, 1997.
- <sup>4</sup> Jurist, Doctor of Islamic law.
- <sup>5</sup> Quardhaoui, Yousef, *Le licite et l'illicite en Islam*, Paris, 1990.
- <sup>6</sup> A judge appointed by the government.
- <sup>7</sup> A possibility available only to the man, not to the woman, who cannot divorce her husband without his consent.
- <sup>8</sup> Al-Ghazâlî, Abû Hamîd Muhammad, (1058-1111), outstanding Islamic theologian. *Translator's note*.

## Islam and Politics?

**F**rom the moment he entered Medina as a refugee in 622, Muhammad became a player in tribal politics. He was not, in fact, Muhammad, Head of State, the model for all times and all places. Jacqueline Chabbi<sup>1</sup> writes: "Any description presenting Muhammad as such a model is pure extrapolation... This may surprise Muslims, accustomed to the traditional presentation and devoid of any critical approach to the matter. For, in fact, Muslims have idealized their past and the life of Muhammad and those close to him. Thus pure legends have been made sacred truth by the creative faith of Muslim societies."

The community at Medina was, in truth, only a tribal confederation. It was not a community without a tribal hierarchy. Politics were, therefore, necessarily tribal politics. Indeed, the historical Muhammad was in no way a revolutionary. If Muhammad finally succeeded in imposing his will, it was due to the force of his arms, to his successful raids, and to his political calculations. His religion was only accepted because he was feared militarily. The role of Muhammad in his society of origin seems therefore to be much more a political one rather than one pertaining to some form of belief. Later, the Islam of the Abbasside Caliphs, in the VIII<sup>th</sup> century, will invert the process and will make of Muhammad above all a religious prophet, above all a Muslim, surrounded by perfect companions, who are perfect Muslims, and perfect, obedient disciples. This makes him like Jesus. Thus, one obscures the political aspect of Muhammad, Muhammad at Medina, who could only succeed by submitting to the laws of tribal politics of the clans of Arabia. But for the cosmopolitan society of Baghdad, in the VIII<sup>th</sup> century, one needed a prophet

who was above all a Muslim, for that society contained a great number of non-Arabs.

Today, the problem of the relationship between Islam and politics is still debated. “No! Islam is not political in nature!” Thus says, for example, Dr. Dalil Boubakeur.<sup>2</sup> Muhammad was not a politician. He takes his place beside his brother, Moses, and like him, he was a prophet and a leader of men. Dalil Boubakeur wants to believe in a prophet who was exclusively religious. Obviously, for the believing Muslim of today, it is difficult to envisage his prophet simply as a member of a tribe, and endowed with the qualities of a tribal chieftain, applying mercy in some cases, but, in others, a certain cruelty as well, using at times a calculated benevolence, while at others, showing himself spiteful and bearing a grudge. Muhammad was careful not to disrupt the tribal hierarchy brutally. But it was the violence of war, deceit, and assassination that allowed him to be successful and to impose his religion. The politics of combat and of raiding and plundering was essential, because it permitted Muhammad to exist as a prophet. Islamic Fundamentalists have certainly understood the political role of Muhammad as depicted in his biography, but at the same time they idealize their noble prophet. The vision of Islamic Fundamentalists today is the vision of Islam at the time of the Caliphs. Muhammad was a prophet, above all religious, who used politics in the service of religion. In any case, however, it is impossible to consider the period of Medina as a period devoid of politics. Indeed, Islam was first of all a political strategy!

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Chabbi, Jacqueline, *L'Islam de Mahomet*, Noésis, Paris, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Boubakeur, Dalil, *Non ! l'Islam n'est pas une politique*, Desclée de Brouwer, 2003.

## Islam and Mysticism?

**M**uslim law is at the very heart of Sunni Islam, while mysticism and the individual mystic quest were always proscribed as totally heretical. In fact, for Islamic jurists, the Qur'an is above all a message of ethical and social character. Indeed, 'Ayn Al-Quzât Hamadanî, a Persian mystic of the XII<sup>th</sup> century was accused of heresy, and on May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1131, he was skinned alive, hanged, then thrown into a fire. He was thirty-three years of age, and his only crime had been that he was a mystic. For juridical Islam, such a deep and personal love for God, which does not take account of society, of the community, is the worst of all sins, for it makes Islam resemble Christianity, which has room for hermits, but there must be no monasticism in Islam. Therefore, those who are mystics spread a lie over the earth, and their retribution will be crucifixion and death. The Qur'an, Sura 5, v. 33, says clearly: "Indeed, the punishment of those who fight Allah and His Messenger and go around corrupting the land is to be killed, crucified, have their hands and feet cut off on opposite sides, or to be banished from the land. That is a disgrace for them in this life, and in the life to come theirs will be a terrible punishment." It was precisely this Qur'anic verse that authorized the crucifixion and death of the Persian mystic, Hamadanî.

It is, of course, true, that the mystical temptation has always existed in Islam, even if Sunni Islam condemns it. If Sunni Islam refuses mysticism, it is because in mysticism one no longer speaks of law, and for the Sunnis, what is important is to obey. St. Augustine said: "Love, and do what you will", but the motto for Islam could be: "Obey, and do all that you are obliged to do."

This rigorous and demanding duty excludes any possible fantasy. The religion of Sunni Islam is a way of life, a way of conducting oneself. It is an attitude: submission. One bows to adore God, a distant God, whom one can neither attain nor draw near to. But mysticism is an aspiration to the heights, a desire of union. So these two attitudes are radically opposed one to the other. It is the law opposed to love. Mystics justify their attitude by v. 16 of Sura 50: "We have indeed created man, and We know what his soul insinuates to him. We are closer to him than his jugular vein."

Legalist Islam senses a danger concerning the mystical experience. A personal relationship with a God of Love is a destabilizing factor in the midst of the community. It is true, however, that certain passages of the Qur'an are 'used' by mystics. In Sura 24, v. 35, we find: "Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. His Light is like a niche in which there is a lamp, the lamp is in a glass, the glass is like a glittering star. It is kindled from a blessed olive tree, neither of the East nor the West. Its oil will almost shine, even if no fire has touched it. Light upon light, Allah guides to His Light whomever He pleases...." Mystics see therein the promise of mystical union. And there are other Suras susceptible of mystical interpretation. For instance, Sura 18, the Cave, v. 18, referring to the Seven Sleepers of Ephesus,<sup>1</sup> reads: "You would think them awake, whereas they were sleeping..." As well, there is Sura 17, which recounts the Night Journey of Muhammad to Jerusalem.

Islam has, however, historically tolerated active mystics in groups, united in confraternities. Contrary to widely held belief, though, it was not at Medina that mysticism was born, but only when Islam came into contact with foreign cultures. Mysticism is, indeed, a deviation from Islam. It has taken many of its elements from other religions such as Zoroastrianism (the religion of the Magi mentioned in the Gospels, for whom fire, the symbol of righteousness, is an essential element of worship), Hinduism (reincarnation, illusory quality of the world), Bud-

dhism (liberation, involving the loss of one's falsely conceived 'identity' upon entering *nirvana*), and, of course, Christianity.<sup>2</sup> It is precisely mysticism which has led, and which still leads, a significant number of Westerners to convert to Islam. It explains the title: "*The Other Face of Islam*" of a work by Eva de Vitray-Meyerovich.<sup>3</sup> It is a christianized Islam, to borrow the expression of a Spanish orientalist, Asin Palacios.

And how could one speak of mysticism without mentioning Mansur Al-Hallaj, born in Iran in 858 AD, called by some the Christ of Islam? He advocated the love of God carried to the limit, elevating one into the ecstatic, transfiguring union with God. Legal proceedings were begun against him in 910, from which time he was incarcerated until 922, when he was finally executed. He was led to the public square, where the executioners amputated his hands and feet, then administered five hundred strokes of the whip to him, and fastened him to a cross. He was then decapitated and his body, doused with kerosene, was burnt, and his ashes were scattered in various places. His head was impaled on a lance and exposed for two days on a bridge over the Tigris.

It is undeniable that Sufism, the mysticism of Islam, is violently condemned by all Fundamentalists, whether Sunnite or Shi'ite. In particular the Sunnite Muslim feels an instinctive repulsion for Sufism, which appears to him as christianized Islam. Thus the western islamophile is captivated by reasons radically opposed to those which motivate the Muslim Fundamentalist, for whom the only true Islam is the one that is based on the law.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> A Eastern Christian legend preserved in Syriac literature tells the story of seven young Christians, who took refuge in a cave near Ephesus during the persecution by the Emperor Decius (249-251 AD), and are said to have remained asleep there for several centuries. *Translator's note.*

<sup>2</sup> Mysticism does not necessarily involve a belief in reincarnation, the illusory character of the world, the loss of one's identity, *nirvana*, etc. *Translator's note*.

<sup>3</sup> French orientalist, a convert to Islam.

## Islam and Human Rights?

One must have the courage to say it: in Islam there are no human rights in the sense that one understands them in Christianity (even if the Catholic Church accepted the notion of human rights only about a half-century ago)<sup>1</sup> and in the Universal Declaration of the Rights of Man by the United Nations, on December 10, 1948. For Islam, man is a slave (*'abd*), a servant of God, and, as such, he has no rights. Only God has rights, only God is Lord. As for man, he has only duties. Since man is the slave of God, the finest name he can be given is 'Abdallah (Slave of God). Man, in and by himself, is not the subject of rights. This conception of man who, without reference to God, could have rights simply because he is a human being is both inconceivable and intolerable for Islam.

It is rather the fact that one is a believing Muslim that gives one the right to be respected, not the fact that one is a human being. What is more, the idea that an atheist, an infidel, a sinner, a homosexual, an adulterer, etc., could have rights, and that a woman could have the same rights as a man, and this without consideration for the Revealed Book [Qur'an] nor respect for the prescriptions announced by the prophets, is simply unthinkable for Islam. Even a believer of other religions does not have the same status as a Muslim.

Nevertheless, one did see the appearance, in 1981, of a Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Islam, promulgated by the UNESCO, but it was nothing more than a mockery of western values. It was, in fact, entirely inspired by the *shar'ia* [Muslim religious law]. However, this parody of the Declaration of Human Rights, this grotesque imitation, succeeded in



deceiving those who could not read the Arabic text, since it was published in other languages as well. Some voices were raised, such as that of Ali Merad, to denounce this deception, but many simply closed their eyes, unless, of course, it was a case of sudden myopia that prevented them from seeing the reference to the *shar'ia*, mentioned in small print and as if incidentally.

It is true, of course, that in westernized Muslim countries, such as Morocco and Tunisia, leagues of human rights have long existed, in imitation of western values. But such leagues are not in conformity with Islam, and they are often the object of attacks by the governments of these countries. Amnesty International denounces the lack of respect for human rights in many Muslim countries. Even if these countries do not fully apply Islamic law and are wary of their own Islamic Fundamentalists, they are nevertheless Muslims, and for them the rights of God will always take precedence over human rights, even if they are reluctant to admit it! Why is it, that one does not have the courage to say clearly that, for Islam, the Muslim believer is above the non-Muslim believer? And as for the infidel and unbeliever, he does not even deserve to live.

More sincere than the other Muslim countries, Saudi Arabia rejected the Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations. The fact is, that there is an insurmountable difference between the inspiration that is behind such human rights and the spirit of Muslim law. The demands of Muslim law are religious in nature and have their roots in the Qur'an and the Sunna. They can never be abrogated by the prescriptions of the charter of 1948, which are based on a radically different philosophy of man.

### Note

- <sup>1</sup> In fact, the Catholic Church was already defending human rights in the social encyclicals of the popes in the second half of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century, in the early days of the industrial revolution. In particular *Rerum Novarum*, promulgated by Pope Leo XIII<sup>th</sup>, is well known.

## Islam and the West?

**W**hy is it, that Muslim Fundamentalists so hate the West? It is, in particular, because the West has removed the aura of guilt relating to the free enjoyment of sexuality.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Muslim tradition surrounds sexuality with a series of prohibitions. Will the Muslim have as great an attraction to the Islamic Paradise,<sup>2</sup> when, in the West, he can already freely consume alcohol, drink as much wine or beer as he wishes in cafes? And as for women? If he takes one or more mistresses, he will not be executed! In short, the West and its pleasures become as enticing as the Islamic Paradise, and, what is more, it is available here and now.

But there still remains the spectre of Hell, the sufferings of which are described as intolerable and unbearable. It is necessary, then, to reawaken in the Muslim living in the West this fear of Hell, which, alone, can achieve a renewal of faithful religious practice. One notes that in the westernized Muslim world, the Muslim is, in fact, torn between the attractions of the West and the desire to remain a faithful believer in order to go to Paradise. Not only does the West represent the seduction of technology, money, and sex, but it has values that are diametrically opposed to the values of Islam, the values of change, evolution, reform, progress, and modernization. The values of Islam, on the other hand, attach to tradition an importance that is extreme to the point of making it the second source of truth.

Any change is a culpable innovation, a heresy, the worst of crimes against the letter of the law. One violently refuses to modernize Islam. One prefers instead to Islamize modernity! There can be no question of permitting a Muslim to choose his

religion, of permitting a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim, no question of allowing a Muslim to take a critical approach to the sacred texts. Those Muslims who say they would like Islam to be reformed, can never go all the way to the logical end of their convictions. If they do so, they incur the reprobation of their community, and sometimes even risk their lives. Those who suggest a truly new reform do so without the support of the 'representative' Muslims of their country. And there, where Islam itself is in power politically, nothing at all is possible. For many, western values risk destroying Muslim identity. And, paradoxically, certain modern western thinkers, on the left of the political stage, join Islamic Fundamentalists in the struggle against 'Westernism'! In a word, the Muslim world is traumatized by the West, a West that would steal the souls of Muslims. One finds this defiance, this simplistic schema: in the Orient, there is the force of the faith and moral purity, while in the West, there is only atheism, debauchery, perversity, and sterility.

Birth control is viewed with horror by the believing Muslim. The Muslim woman must be, first of all, a mother of Muslims. It is precisely the numerous Muslim family that will, eventually, renew the strength of Muslim countries, while the decadent and sterile West will wither away, with its elderly population put away in rest homes, awaiting death. And the West will finally be defeated by Islam, because Islam symbolizes life and vitality, and it does this, of course, by the very immobility of its tradition!

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> This statement, of course, is valid only for secularized western society, and it is directly contrary to both Christian and Jewish moral values, which remain the criteria by which many in the West still live. *Translator's note.*

<sup>2</sup> The Muslim conception of Paradise is materialistic in the extreme. *Translator's note.*

## Islam and Secularism?

What characterizes secularism in western societies is, on the one hand, the lack of a religious dimension of the state, that is to say, that the state neither confesses nor supports any religion, and, on the other hand, the separation of the personal from the communal, and vice-versa. Thus we have the nearly absolute primacy of the individual. But in Muslim countries, on the whole, the very concept of secularism is not understood. In her book, Martine Gozlan<sup>1</sup> recounts that, having received her in his office at the religious university Al-Azhar, Dr. Abdelfatah was completely amazed to learn that, in France, the State did not punish blasphemy against Catholic dogma. The reason for this meeting between the journalist and the vice-Rector of Al-Azhar was the condemnation of the intellectual Farag Foda by this Islamic university. This 'secular' intellectual had been accused of blasphemy by the Sheik Gad-Ul-Haq, who was, at that time, the Dean of the university. A few weeks later, Foda was assassinated by a group of Islamic Fundamentalists in punishment for his crime of blasphemy, for death is the penalty foreseen by Islamic law. Nevertheless, the journalist had hoped to see a humane reaction on the part of religious dignitaries, for, after all, it was a question of a crime that had been committed by Islamic Fundamentalists. Did not Sunni Islam feel a certain discomfort as a result of this killing? For, after all, the link between the religious condemnation of the man and his assassination was evident. But the journalist was forced to admit that she had found the religious dignitaries to be serene, at peace. What one does not have the courage to say concerning Islam, is that such

disguised calls to murder are in accord with the example of the Prophet in his attitude towards the 'ungodly.'

Muslims raised according to Muslim tradition do not understand the 'sentimentality' of Westerners and their insistence in trying to save the impious. Here, of course, it is a question of Muslims without practical experience of secularism. But how is it with Muslims who live in a secular state? In his recent book, *Muslims in Secular Society*,<sup>2</sup> Tariq Ramadan recognizes that western societies offer a liberty of action that Muslims should recognize and welcome. He recalls the history of secularism, which, for the Westerner, he notes, signifies the liberation from religious control. But then he adds that the history which Muslims remember is quite different. In Muslim countries, it is precisely religion that has vivified and liberated energies unlike any other. There, the process is the opposite. It was rather the neglect of the Divine that smothered civilization, because, he asserts, the Muslim faith is as natural as the faculty of reason. Such remarks leave one pensive, when one knows that Tariq Ramadan teaches philosophy and French literature at Geneva. Further, he goes on to counsel Muslims to invest in a materialistic society that is undergoing a real crisis of values. Do we not recognize, here, a discreet invitation to Islamize modernity?

Let us note here that the contributions of Christianity are non-existent in the works of Mr. Ramadan. But perhaps we might remind him that the prestigious civilization of the *Thousand and One Nights* owes nothing at all to Islam, but rather, on the contrary, everything to foreign cultural contributions such as Byzantine, Greek, and Persian, and that the translations of the works of Greek philosophers were done by Oriental Christians working, often, from Syriac versions, and this on the orders of the Mu'tazilite Caliph Al-Ma'mun, who was considered to be the 'Prince of Infidels.' Avicenna,<sup>3</sup> in the X<sup>th</sup> century, did not know Greek, nor did Averroès,<sup>4</sup> in the XII<sup>th</sup>. All the Muslim Hellenistic philosophers, who waxed so enthusiastic over Aristotle, worked

from texts translated (and perhaps adapted) by Christians of the Orient!

There is absolutely nothing philosophical or artistic in the every-day spirituality of the ordinary Muslim. This narrow-minded spirituality has no other preoccupation than to prevent bodily expression, to control sexuality, to prevent bodily excretions from rendering unclean... But render what unclean? To the pure, all things are pure. But for Muslims, one must liberate oneself from the society of consumption. Indeed, for them, according to Mr. Ramadan, it is a question of a daily spiritual effort to further a process of liberation from such a society.

Indeed, the contamination against which one must protect oneself is the 'rotten' society of consumption. Mr. Ramadan has made known his point of view in this regard. In *Le Figaro*, of Wednesday, June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2003, we find an article by Cecile Calla, entitled: "When public swimming pools allow religious segregation." There we learn that for the last two years, the municipal administration of the city of Lille, France, has decreed that one of the four city swimming pools be reserved for women, thus, forbidden to men. This pool is operated by an exclusively feminine staff, in order that the modesty of Muslim women be respected and that they be protected from lusting eyes. And it goes without saying that all the windows were covered over. Again, in another area, at the end of April, 2003, Muslims demonstrated in the streets to demand that the local swimming pool be reserved for women at certain hours! For Islamic Fundamentalists, one must respect 'the naturally communal dimension of Islam.' It would seem that to respect these demands of Muslims concerning the school, the mosque, the veil, the cemetery, or *halal* meat, slaughtered according to Muslim ritual requirements, would not mean a revolution. But to accede to such demands is to introduce communal religion into the public sphere. It is a blow against secularism. What is more, to create openings in secular society to facilitate the emergence of a communal Islam in public life,

is to justify all its constraints and all its obscurantism, especially concerning women.

Tariq Ramadan reminds us, that Islam is not a religion like Judaism or Christianity. Islam controls the social aspect of life. To that which is properly religious, it adds the elements of way of life, of civilization, and of culture. This all-inclusive aspect is characteristic of Islam. But secularism must not tolerate exceptions. For all, religious faith must remain in the private, personal sphere. Otherwise, tomorrow we shall see the appearance of the demands of Muslim Fundamentalists that the political sphere become part of religion. And thus, in France, the home of liberty and secularism, we shall have achieved the dream of the Muslim Brotherhood!<sup>5</sup> We shall give precedence to the rights of God over human rights. We shall have Islamized the secular state!

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Gozlan, Martine, *Pour comprendre l'intégrisme islamiste* (Understanding Islamic Fundamentalism), Paris, Albin Michel, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> Ramadan, Tariq, *Les musulmans dans la laïcité* (Muslims in Secular Society), Editions Tawhid, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Sînâ (Avicenna) 980-1037, generally considered the greatest of Islamic philosophers.

<sup>4</sup> Ibn Rushd (Averroës) (1126-1198), a major Muslim philosopher.

<sup>5</sup> An Islamic Fundamentalist organization, founded in Egypt, working for the overthrow of the government and the establishment of an Islamic state. When the Muslim Brotherhood renounced violence at the beginning of the 70's, disenchanted members founded the '*Jamā'at al Islamiya*' (The Islamic Group) to continue the struggle. President Anwar Sadat was killed by one of their number for having signed a peace treaty with Israel. *Translator's note.*

## Islam and Democracy?

**D**emocracy, that is, sovereignty exercised by the people, is a foreign concept for Islam, unless, playing on words, one speaks of a Muslim democracy<sup>1</sup> of the people of God. But it is a question here of secular democracy.

In Egypt, in 1925, in his book *Islam and the Foundations of Power*, a certain Ali Abderrâzîk argued that the Qur'an did not favor any particular political system, and that it was therefore logical to make a distinction between religion and politics. The religious authorities of Al-Azhar University forbade the reading of the book and strongly condemned the young academic, who was thirty-seven years old at the time. In 1928, on the other hand, a young school teacher, Hassan al-Banna, proposed returning to the model of the Prophet at Medina by re-establishing the political dimension of Islam. Like the movement of the Muslim Brotherhood, opposing western influence, he insisted that the Qur'an was the only Constitution, that Islamic law (*sharia*) was the law of God, and that *jihâd*<sup>2</sup> was the means to create a Muslim state, governed according to the principles of the *sharia*.

It is undeniable that Christianity, with the principle of giving to Caesar what is of Caesar and to God what is of God, makes the separation of politics and religion possible, even if such a separation was only established slowly during the course of history. Muhammad never made such a distinction between these two powers. Indeed, quite the contrary! That is why the commingling of the temporal and spiritual powers has been a constant characteristic of Islamic history. One must be of extraordinarily bad faith to assert, as indeed some researchers do, that such a separation is possible in Islam. To make such an



assertion is not to take account of the example, so important, of the Prophet, it is to ignore the foundation of the Islamic edifice, and it is to deny the communal dimension of Islam and the importance of Muslim law. It is not to see that, between Islamic Fundamentalism, described as political Islam, and Islam simply as a religion there exists a difference of degree but absolutely not of nature. Sunni Islam, which is practiced by nearly 90% of all Muslims, or around 900 millions believers, is juridical Islam. It is not the Islam of Ibn 'Arabi, the Andalusian mystic, nor is it the Islam of the rationalist philosophers such as Avicenna. It is neither a Christianized Islam nor a westernized Islam. It is Islam constructed from the prohibitions of the Qur'an, the prohibitions of the Sunna [Tradition], and the prohibitions of Islamic law, while taking account of the political experience of the Prophet at Medina.

As for Democracy, it is clear that, in the West, it is based on the principle of secularism. It is a question of obeying, not a Divine Law, but the laws of 'conscience and reason', as Ferdinand Buisson, one of the great theoreticians of secular philosophy, stresses. It matters little what the origins of this secular morality are, whether they are secularized Christian, Greco-Roman, Buddhist, or an indistinct mixture, they lead to the concept of the secular citizen. And the secular citizen has a religion, it is the lay, secular religion of the state. Its centerpiece is no longer God, but man. And as for religion, it has become an 'affair of the individual conscience', to borrow the expression of Ernest Renan. But for Islam, all these ideas are the negation of the separation of the sexes, the negation of the distinction Muslim and non-Muslim, the negation of the distinction believer and non-believer. They are the negation of the distinction between Good and Evil, between the Sacred and the corrupt, the negation of the distinction between God and the Devil. With the motto Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, democracy goes directly against the philosophy that underlies Islam.

In its founding texts, Islam is against equality. Islamic law is profoundly non-egalitarian. The Muslim is above the non-Muslim, the believer is above the atheist, the man is above the woman, the free man is above the slave. Islamic law is against liberty. There is no liberty to abandon Islam or to change one's religion, no sexual liberty nor liberty to conduct oneself as one sees fit. And, finally, there is no fraternity, in the western sense. The Muslim is the brother of the believing Muslim. He does not consider himself to be the brother of the Christian nor of the Jew. And even less is he the brother of the atheist or of the ungodly. When Saudi Arabia prohibits the exercise of any religion other than Islam on its territory, it is only applying the saying of the Prophet, according to which one may not tolerate more than one religion in Arabia. The Vatican was not opposed to the construction of a great mosque at Rome, financed by Saudi Arabia. But when may we await a reciprocal gesture, such as the construction of a great cathedral at Mecca, financed by the Pope? Up till now, the Saudi authorities, with rare arrogance, have forbidden not only the construction of churches, temples, and synagogues on the holy soil of Arabia, but the celebration of any non-Muslim cult, even in private, is punishable by confinement in prison!

Secular democracy is a notion that is rejected by fundamentalist Islam. Nevertheless, some Islamic Fundamentalists have decided to make use of it for their own ends. Sheik Sahraoui, who was assassinated in France in 1995 and who was one of the founders of the FIS,<sup>3</sup> declared: "For us, democracy is a technique, not a value."

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> As one speaks of Christian Democracy.

<sup>2</sup> Holy war.

<sup>3</sup> *Front Islamiste du Salut*, an Algerian Islamist party, founded in 1989, that opposed democracy and the Algerian constitution. It was set to win the national elections in 1992, but, in order to save democracy, the army took power by a coup d'état and banned the party. *Translator's note.*



## Islam against Islamic Fundamentalism?

**H**ow can one not see that in the majority of Muslim countries something is developing that some people like to call 'Islamism', 'Fundamentalism' or 'Political Islam', which they go on to describe as 'a deviationist current', 'the sickness of Islam', 'terrorism' or 'totalitarianism', when in fact it is nothing more than, purely and simply, the integral and rigid application of Islam as revealed in its founding texts, something which is desired by a segment of the population of these countries, including their youth. Islamic countries which are largely westernized, or which at least are sensitive to Western pressure, don't know what to do with their Islamic Fundamentalists. Some countries imprison the most visible elements of the Fundamentalists, the armed groups which commit acts of terrorism. This is the case in Algeria. But the Fundamentalism largely diffused in society is not eradicated. Other Muslim countries try to create a counterweight to this radical Islam by claiming that they, themselves, represent Islam, a traditional, but nonetheless evolved, Islam. This is the case of Morocco, where the King claims religious authority over his people. He may have imagined that he had succeeded in discouraging the most active Fundamentalist elements, but the recent attack on a hotel in Morocco shows that for the Fundamentalists, Morocco is a corrupt monarchy. The King personifies to a certain extent political Islam. As a descendent of the Prophet, he calls himself 'Commander' of the believers. Political power is united with the religious authority. Morocco, which claims to be a modern country, near to Spain, has an Islamic

government, which is just the opposite of western secularism. It has a code defining the personal status of its citizens which is taken from Islamic law. On the other hand, it does not apply Muslim penal law. It is true, that there are no severed hands, no flagellation, even if human rights are not respected.

The political adroitness of the King, Muhammad VI<sup>th</sup>, and before him, his father, Hassan II<sup>nd</sup>, enables him to dupe the West regarding the question of the Jews and that of women. But let us make no mistake. We are still dealing here with the classic Islamic religious structure, of which we no longer notice the archaism, to such an extent does the exoticism of the country discourage many from any political analysis. But Moroccan Islam has Islamic Fundamentalist enemies. Abdessalam Yassine, and elderly man, whom Hassan II<sup>nd</sup> judged extremely dangerous, was first interned in a psychiatric hospital, then, in 1989, placed in house arrest at Salé, near Rabat. After he succeeded his father, Muhammad VI<sup>th</sup> set him free.

In a certain way, Morocco is a Muslim country that is much further removed from the West than are Egypt, Algeria, Iraq, or Syria. It has no need to advocate the reestablishment of the Caliphate, since it is a descendent of the Prophet who has power. Nevertheless, an article of Andrew Husseyn, published in June, 2003, at London in *The Independent on Sunday*, carried the title: "How Long Will Muhammad VI<sup>th</sup> Last?" In fact, Osama Ben Laden has recently stated that the country is 'ready to be liberated.' In Nador, Rabat, Casablanca, and Salé drug traffickers, alcoholics, prostitutes, police officers, and 'bad Muslims' have been stoned to death, or sometimes simply had their throats cut. Upper class Moroccans want to believe that their monarch, as a descendent of the Prophet, can impose an Islamic legitimacy to counter the diehard Islamic Fundamentalists, who, according to them, are the products of a 'foreign Islamic culture, exported by Saudi Arabia!' But the strongly westernized, educated Islamic bourgeoisie is grievously mistaken. It is not at all a question of 'foreign' culture, but of the Arab Muslim culture of the VII<sup>th</sup>

century in Medina. On the contrary, when the King organizes a festival in honor of his friend, the American rapper, Diddy, with Elton John as guest, then, for the pious Moroccan it is, indeed, a question of foreign culture, precisely that western culture, which is completely rejected as radically contrary to the Islamic ideal.

One could evoke still other cases of Muslim countries that must take account of their Islamic Fundamentalists. Kuwait, for example, has had a parliament since 1961, but the majority of its members are Fundamentalists and are opposed to any innovation. When the Head of State, the Emir Sabah, wanted to promulgate a decree giving women the right to vote, the Parliament blocked it, just as it had, on the other hand, approved a law against co-education at the university level. And this Parliament also favors the adoption of Islamic Law, the *shar'ia*, and the revision of the penal codes to make them conform to the *shar'ia*, for example, bank interest must be suppressed because of the Qur'anic prohibition against usury and lending money for interest!



## Islam and Modernity?

**T**o treat of modernity, one must first of all explain how the term is understood in Western philosophy. This modernity is not based on metaphysics of a religious nature. It looks toward earth rather than toward heaven. It does not consider the group, but rather the individual as the autonomous subject. In other words, the philosophy which is the foundation of modernity is the fruit of the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in 1789. But with regard to modernity, one must make a distinction between philosophy and technique. From the point of view of philosophy, it is impossible to conclude that Islam is modern. If some quote a few verses of the Qur'an and conclude therefrom that individual responsibility is inscribed in the text, they forget that it is only from the religious point of view. Sura 17, v. 15, states, in fact: "He who is well-guided is well-guided for himself, and he who goes astray, goes astray to his own loss. No soul shall bear the burden of another soul..." But one cannot conclude from this that the Muslim holy text echoes the western philosophy of the individual! Modern western philosophy accepts the atheist, the agnostic, the renegade, and indeed the corrupt. It makes no difference between the man and the woman, the believer and the infidel. In short, it is based on secular humanism, not on religious humanism, even if its values are, in fact, are a tacit mixture of Christianity and Greek philosophy.

It is quite understandable that Muslim Fundamentalists refuse to accept such a philosophy, which goes against the theoretical foundations of Muslim law. But in all that concerns technology and modern science, Islam has 'accepted' modernity, and even



the poorest of Muslims wish to take advantage of it. If Muslim Fundamentalists condemn the TV antennas that cover the roofs of houses, calling them 'paradiabolic', it is because they risk alienating the faithful from their religion. But television used to diffuse the Qur'an is perfectly all right. Some Sheiks, in fact, have become stars of the small screen. For instance, Sheik Yussef al-Qardawi, has a program where he gives juridical consultations on the station Al-Jazira, and his audience is several hundreds of millions of Muslims. Indeed, even Osama Ben Laden has had no problem in using this means of communication.

But the 'intellectual' message delivered by these sheiks leaves a non-Muslim speechless. This message is quite simply the traditional religious message of the prohibitions of Islam. A TV program entitled 'The Shar'ia and Life' would seem to us to be a humorous sketch. But it is by no means so. It is classic Islamic law explained to an audience of millions of Muslims. Western intellectuals may smile pretentiously, but these sheiks are often excellent pedagogues. However, they can only speak of what they know, that is to say, Islam, as revealed by its founding texts. In the same way, one cannot deny the importance of audio cassettes for the diffusion of the Qur'an. The audio cassette has been for Islamic Fundamentalists what printing was for Calvinists, the material vehicle for the diffusion of ideology. The text of the Qur'an and the sermons of the sheiks circulate in audio cassettes, and, of course, they insist on the dissolute state of morals and on deprivation. The basic ideas are always the same.

Today, Islam has accepted the internet, and Muslims are becoming more and more familiar with the new media. The internet is attractive because it is not based on anything specific and material. The cybercity seems to be a disembodied city, a virtuous city. The periodical of the International Institute for the Study of Islam in the Modern World, appearing every three months in the Netherlands, published an article by Matthias Brückner, who describes how young Muslim internet surfers, who cannot meet with a girl in their society, can, thanks to the internet,

converse with them, and even discuss religious subjects. Thus, paradoxically, the prohibition of meeting with the opposite sex fades away in the cybercity, where time, space, and reality seem to have been abolished. Indeed, the internet has transformed the daily life of Muslims. With just a click of the mouse, the entire Muslim world is plunged into a community of millions of believers, ready to live their religion together.

Electronic mail is indifferent to time and space. It even offers newsgroups. And there are cybercafes everywhere for those who cannot or will not invest in a computer. In Irbid, a town in Jordan, in Shafiq Rasheidat Street, over a distance of about a half-mile, there are one hundred and five shops that offer an internet connection. And some fundamentalist publishing houses, such as Al Bouraq Editions, have opened a website. In this way, through the internet, we see the constitution of a Muslim community whose members are joined together through virtual ties.



## The Qur'an—Untouchable?

**V**ndeed, one must have the courage to say it: the most open of Muslims, the most modern, the most desirous of aiding the evolution of Islam, inevitably collide with the Qur'an. This holy text is considered by Muslims to be the very word of God. For them, it was Allah, himself, who dictated the Revelation to his Prophet. He did so over a period of twenty years. First of all at Mecca, from 612 until 622, then at Medina, from 622 to 632. There can be no question of keeping some verses and rejecting others. Even the most moderate of Muslims consider the Qur'an to be holy in its entirety. And yet, certain prescriptions of the Qur'an speak of slavery. So, one may ask, will Muslim Fundamentalists reestablish slavery in order to conform to the letter of the Qur'an?

But this untouchable Qur'an, has it, in fact, remained untouched? According to Muslim tradition, the text of the Qur'an was established about 653 by order of Uthman, the third Caliph.<sup>1</sup> The Qur'an, such as we know it, would have thus been constituted only some twenty years after the death of Muhammad, in 632. The determination of the authoritative text in a short period of time is a satisfaction for the faithful. However, one may conjecture that the passage from the oral memory of the verses to the written Book took place at a later time than that given by Muslim tradition. In Damascus, Islam, in the person of the first Omayyad Caliph, Mu'awiyya, was confronted with a society of Scripture in the double meaning of the term, that is, holy, revealed Scripture, with a capital letter, and writing as a means of communication, scripture written with a small letter, the society of Near Eastern Syria. But for Muslims, the scientific and

critical analysis of the Qur'an is a sacrilege. Just as for Catholics Jesus Christ is the Incarnation of God, the Son of God, so, for Muslims, the Qur'an is the fixing in writing of God, the words of God. To touch or manipulate the Qur'an is just as much a sacrilege for Muslims as it would be for a Catholic to cut up a consecrated Host with scissors. One may not place a Qur'an in a room where there is a dog. To throw a Qur'an in the garbage is equivalent to apostatizing from Islam, and it is sanctioned by the death penalty.

The importance of the Qur'an in Muslim life and society is immense. One learns it by heart, and this learning of it by rote is the cement of the community. It is also why the Qur'an is alive in the minds and hearts of Muslims, and why it has not become something foreign to the Muslim conscience. But one cannot in any way criticize the Qur'an. "Anyone who uses his own judgment in dealing with the Qur'an, even should he arrive at the truth, is nevertheless in error by the very fact that he approached it only with his own judgment." The author of these lines was the great Tabari, born in Persia in 839.

In fact, however, contemporary non-Muslim researchers have studied the Qur'an. Jacqueline Chabbi, for instance, speaks of a 'tribal biblical representation.' And Professor Remi Brague, in an article entitled "The Qur'an; Getting Out of the Circle",<sup>2</sup> underlines the distance that separates the context in which Muslim historians and commentators wrote about the Qur'an and the context in which the Qur'an first appeared. The (vicious) circle refers to the fact that the learned commentators of the IX<sup>th</sup> century at Baghdad, in particular the Persian, Tabari, who died in 923, having undertaken the task of explaining the meaning of the Qur'an, sought simply to clarify the tissue of obscurities that constitute the 'Clear Book', and at times they achieved rather curious results. In his article, Remi Brague discusses research such as that of the German scholar, Christoph Luxenberg, who holds the opinion that obscure expressions of the Qur'an are not bad Arabic, but, instead, good Syriac. What is fascinating

here, is that this method actually changes the meaning of certain passages of the Qur'an. Thus, Sura 44, v. 54, instead of reading: "...We gave them wide-eyed houris in marriage", should be translated: "We shall make them comfortable under [vines with] white grapes, clear as crystal."

Let us hope for the Fundamentalists, that the Qur'an for which they are ready to sacrifice everything is a Qur'an correctly understood. If not, instead of being married to houris in an eternity of lovemaking, they will have to content themselves with lounging under beautiful bunches of white grapes, a paradise considerably less interesting for warriors who wish for something more than the Vision of God of the Christian Paradise! There have perhaps been misinterpretations in the explanations of the Qur'an, but for thirteen centuries these misinterpretations have worked very well, if, indeed, there are misinterpretations. And if this grossly materialistic Islamic paradise has, indeed, embarrassed a number of Muslim intellectuals, it was nevertheless suitable to motivate warriors and to satisfy the people. The Paradise promised to Christians was too pale, according to Avicenna,<sup>3</sup> to inspire the Muslims, who wanted something tangible!

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> The third successor of Muhammad.

<sup>2</sup> Remi Brague, "Le Coran: sortir du cercle", appearing in *Critique*, no. 671, April, 2003, pp. 232-251.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Remi Brague, op. cit.



## Conclusion

**W**ith regard to the founding texts of Islam, the Qur'an and the Sunna, the question arises as to whether or not one could attempt a new interpretation of them, but so far such a question has not been raised in the lands of Islam. To put it another way, is it possible to read these texts according to the conditions established by the mentality of our time?

For the traditional scholars of Islam, the answer is a categorical 'no'! To attempt such a thing would be a culpable innovation (*bid'a*), a heresy. Soheib Bensheikh, in his book "*Marianne and the Prophet*",<sup>1</sup> is honest when he writes: "Intellectuals who belong to the Islamic confession continuously repeat that Islam is fraternity, peace, and tolerance. They are certainly right in doing so, but they have no theoretical support which would permit them to justify the greater part of their affirmations. The moderates wish to embellish the image of their religion, but what they say about Islam is only wishful thinking. Alone the archaic version of Muslim law, which presents a global vision of things, remains in force. But its application in the realm of human relations is madness." Without doubt certain Muslim intellectuals would like their religion to be more rational or more mystic, and less juridical. In this connection, one calls to mind the plea of Dr. Dalil Boubakeur, rector of the Muslim Institute of the Great Mosque of Paris, expressed in his book: "No, Islam is not Politics!"<sup>2</sup> This rationalist scholar does not want to see "the faith hemmed in by the yoke of legalism", constrained as it were in an enclosure. He fears those who, in their delirious madness, proclaim fidelity to Islamic law. Against such people, he proposes the Islam of the philosophers, such as Avicenna and Averroes, seemingly forgetting that the Islam of the jurists violently opposed these



very philosophers. But not only the jurists opposed them, the people did so as well. Dalil Boubakeur obviously feels himself in tune, both by his milieu and his culture, with the Islam of the philosophers. But with all due respect for this gracious rector, we must remind him that Islam is not only a faith, it is also a law. Islamic jurists (*fuqahâ*) have always stigmatized those who swore by Aristotle, and the people of Baghdad firmly rejected such foreign cultural elements and followed Ibn Hanbal.<sup>3</sup>

One can talk all one wants about the fossilized theology of Islam and the archaism of Islamic law, but it is precisely juridical Islam that is very much alive throughout the whole Muslim world. In fact, it is indeed the only Islam that is practiced. Islamic Fundamentalists are not heretics in relation to the traditional system of Islam. All they want is that everything be done according to the letter of the law. Indeed, how could anything change, since the Qur'an is considered to be immutable and untouchable? In the Islamic milieu, the Qur'an remains sacred, and one is very far indeed from the debates of Mut'azilite philosophers, who, in the VIII<sup>th</sup> century raised the question of whether the Qur'an was created or uncreated.

Since September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, one keeps repeating that Islam is not like that, that the Qur'an is a message of peace and love, and that the attacks were the result of a political aberration, a sickness, a sort of sinister fever! But if the Qur'an were only a word of compassion, of gentleness, and of pardon, valid for everyone and for all times, then why does it contain verses authorizing an eye for an eye and requiring combat? Why the requirements of amputation as punishment for theft, of flagellation for adultery? Why the authorization of polygamy, even if under certain conditions? Why the verses authorizing repudiation, even if it is the most hateful of all that is licit? Why the difference of treatment of men and women regarding inheritance and the giving of testimony? Why the authorization for the man to beat the woman, even if as a last resort? Why Sura 8, concerning booty and the spoils of war? Why the recollection of the massacre of

the third Jewish tribe of Medina? Why the verses restricting women's dress? Why the verse that brands menstruation as a defilement? Why all the verses stigmatizing the Jews? Why the invective against those who sew corruption on earth?

If the Qur'an made no mention of such things, if the life of the Prophet and his personal conduct were free of any call for vengeance, in short, if the Qur'an and the Sunna (the imitation of the Prophet) were above all suspicion in regard to the acts for which one blames the Islamic Fundamentalists, how could they, then, justify the obligation of the veil for the woman, polygamy, flagellation as punishment for the adulterous woman, amputation of the hand as punishment for theft? But such verses are indeed to be found in the Qur'an. They have never been suppressed, and any Muslim, even the most moderate, can read these prescriptions. It is not right, and above all not very judicious, to try to make non-Muslims believe that such prescriptions are pure inventions without any religious foundation, the acts of Muslim fanatics, of hotheads, of sick or insane people, when all the while such things are found in Iran, in Saudi Arabia, in Sudan, in Libya, in Indonesia, in Pakistan, in Algeria, and in Morocco.

The list of such countries is getting longer. The truth is, that it is a question of a return to the founding texts of Islam. One must have the courage to say it: in the Qur'an as well as in the Sunna, there are prescriptions that are intolerable for the modern conscience. In the Middle Ages, one thought it normal to burn heretics at the stake. The traditional Muslim, the Fundamentalist, who interprets these texts literally, is perhaps not so very far from the medieval mentality. Latifa Ben Mansour<sup>4</sup> deplores the fact that "the Muslim Fundamentalists employ a language that kills."

But the Fundamentalist discourse is undeniably based on the fundamental, founding texts of Islam. Why is it that one finds so often among Muslim intellectuals that mutilated, paralyzed vision that prevents them from seeing that the word of their

Holy Qur'an and the example of their noble Prophet are, in fact, the very basis and justification of the conduct that they reject among those that they label Islamic Fundamentalists, savage brethren, members of the Muslim Brotherhood? Again, why is it that Erdogan, a former mayor of Istanbul, whose fundamentalist party 'Justice and Development' obtained 34% of the vote, thus taking 363 out of 550 seats in Parliament, is labeled a moderate Muslim by our exceedingly indulgent media when he, himself, proclaimed, loud and clear, that: "The minarets are our bayonets, the cupola our helmets, and the mosques our barracks"?

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Bensheikh, Soheib, *Marianne et le Prophète*, Editions Grasset et Fasquelle, 1998, p. 146.

<sup>2</sup> Boubakeur, Dalil, *Non ! l'Islam n'est pas une politique !*, Desclée de Brouwer, 2003.

<sup>3</sup> Ibn Hanbal, 780-855, a well-known theologian, traditionist and jurist. He was a champion of orthodoxy. *Translator's note*.

<sup>4</sup> Ben Mansour, Latifa, *Frères musulmans, frères féroces. Voyage dans l'enfer du discours islamiste*. (The Muslim Brotherhood, Savage Brethren. Voyage into the Hell of the Fundamentalist Discourse.) Ramsay, Paris, 2002.