

Is Islam Compatible With Democracy?

CARMEN A. ABUBAKAR

After the transition to democracy of socialist states in Eastern Europe and other authoritarian states in Asia and Latin America, which captured worldwide attention, the lenses now shift to Muslim states. Perceived as inherently authoritarian, Muslim societies invite criticism from the West as being incompatible with democracy. In turn, the Muslims, though recognizing the precepts of democracy, question the validity of Western orthodoxy by challenging the exacting, secular Western model of democracy. They argue that the term "democracy" has been used arbitrarily, as authoritarian and socialist states alike appropriate it for their own designs. Moreover, they are of the view that there is as yet no universally accepted and encompassing definition of democracy. In the final analysis, if the leaders, the people and ultimately the state remain true to Islamic ideals, democracy would most likely have the same resonance in Muslim societies as elsewhere in the Western world.

Introduction

With the fall of the Soviet Union and the sweeping reforms toward democracies in the former Soviet states, democracy has become a favorite subject of discussion and debate. In this regard, a number of Muslim states have come under a lot of criticisms for failure to move into the same orbit.

This phenomenon is the result of a particular belief that Islam, and by extension, Muslim societies are inherently authoritarian and therefore, incompatible with democracy. (*Middle East Report*, 1992: 5) This belief was (and still is) common among Westerners and even written about by no less than Lord Cromer, once head of the colonial authority in Egypt, in a 1908 essay entitled, "The Government of Subject Races." Lord Cromer said: "Do not let us for one moment imagine that the fatally simple idea of despotic rule will readily give way to the far more complex conception of ordered liberty." (*Ibid.*, 5).

With the advancement of democracy throughout the world, the new formulation is that the "Middle East, or at least, its Arab core, has fallen off the curve of history." (*Ibid.*, 5) No doubt this is in reference to the

presence of monarchies and authoritarian regimes that prevailed and continue to do so in some Muslim states.

The notion of incompatibility between Islam and democracy is difficult to answer since as Hamid Enayat notes: "There is no universally accepted definition either of democracy in general, or of its Western version in particular." (Enayat, 1982:134). At one time, even totalitarian regimes like East Germany spoke of itself as a democracy. However, democracy can be understood in terms of its important principles and by doing so, it is possible to discover the incompatibilities, if any exists.

The *Qur'an* and Democracy

Enayat identifies some of the important democratic principles and discusses how Islam responds to them. These are: (1) recognition of the worth of every human being, irrespective of any of his or her qualities; (2) the acceptance of the necessity of law, that is, a set of definite or rational norms to regulate all social relationships; (3) the equality of all its citizens before the law, regardless of their racial, ethnic and class distinctions; (4) the justifiability of state decisions on the basis of popular consent; and (5) a high degree of tolerance of unconventional and unorthodox opinions (Ibid., 126).

Since the *Qur'an* is the primary source of reference on the Islamic worldview, it is useful to find out directly from this source answers to democratic postulates.*

To start, recognition of the value of the human being is a central concept in the *Qur'an*. Man is regarded as "the vicegerent of God on earth." Some important *Sura* are the following:

Behold, thy Lord said to the angels:
"I will create a vicegerent on earth," S. 2:30

And He taught Adam the nature
of all things. S.2:31

*For this article, other sources such as the Hadith and juristic formulations will not be included. The following discussion, therefore, cannot be regarded as exhaustive. For consistency, verses are quoted from Yusuf Ali's translation of the *Qur'an*.

And behold, We said to the angels,
 "Bow down to Adam" and they did bow down. S.2:34

And He has subjected
 To you, as from Him,
 All that is in the heavens
 And on earth: behold,
 In that are Signs indeed
 For those who reflect. S. 45:13.

We have honoured the sons
 Of Adam; provided them
 With transport on land and sea;
 Given them for sustenance things
 Good and pure; and conferred
 On them special favours,
 Above a great part
 Of our creation. S. 17:70

The conception of Man as the vicegerent of God on earth is taken as a sign of God's favor and man's elevated status. As vicegerent, man is the steward of God's creations. Muslim thinkers consider man's vicegerency as "evidence of the care, respect and glorification that God has bestowed" on the former. (Al-Sayyid, 1996:43)

To further emphasize man's status, God ordered even the angels to bow down to Adam; and as a favor, God taught Adam the nature of all things, knowledge that even the angels did not have.

Man's relationship with his fellowmen is captured in the well-known verses which state:

O mankind! We created you
 From a single soul (pair)
 Of a male and a female,
 And made you into nations and tribes,
 That ye may know each other
 Not that ye may despise (each other). S. 59:13.

Mankind was one single nation
 And Allah sent messengers
 With the glad tidings and warnings. S. 2:213

A Muslim writer notes that the *Qur'an* underscores not only the single parentage of mankind but also mankind as having the same substance and origin. (see *Sura* 6:2, 22:5, 40:67, 30:20, 29:38 and 23:12) This view of mankind as one single *ummah* or community implies that recognition of this unity should be the basis of understanding, interaction and cooperation among humans. (Ahmad, 1994:81)

Such a view, therefore, encourages an attitude of tolerance and acceptance of others. Anis Ahmad concludes that: "Islam looks at man as essentially an ethical being." As such, Islam calls followers of other religions to join and cooperate in the establishment of *ma'ruf* (virtue, good and justice) and the elimination of *munkar* (evil, vice, corruption and injustice). Cooperation in virtue (*birr*) and good deeds (*taqwa*) then become the basis of interaction among human beings. (Ibid., 81)

The *Qur'an* further established the basis of treatment among human beings in the practice of justice and fair dealings. Thus, the *Qur'an* says:

O you who believe!
 Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses
 To Allah, even as against
 Yourselves, or your parents,
 Or your kin, and whether
 It be (against) rich or poor. S. 4:135

Allah doth command you
 To render back your trust:
 To those to whom they are due;
 And when you judge
 Between man and man,
 That ye judge with justice. S. 4:58

The *Qur'anic* view can best be described as being inclusive rather than exclusive of people of different persuasions as evident in this verse, S. 5:9,

Those who believe (in the *Qur'an*),
 Those who follow the Jewish (scriptures),
 And the Sabians and the Christians;
 Any who believe in Allah
 And the Last Day,
 And work righteousness,
 On them shall be no fear,
 Nor shall they grieve.

Inherent in these verses is the idea of a plural society. It is not only accepted but recognized as part of God's plan. In such a society, Islam envisions the doctrine of equality to be operational.

According to Enayat, the equality, as envisaged by Islam is not subordinate to any prior condition; that is, "men are born and created equal and become unequal by virtue of social and political, that is, man-made institutions." (Enayat, 127)

The doctrine of equality espoused by Islam, therefore, as Ahmad and Enayat point out, negates all racial, ethnic and hereditary criteria of distinction among human beings because mankind is believed to form one community. The only valid distinction which would make an individual superior to others is fear of God, or piety (*tagwa*). (Ibid., 128)

To each among you
 Have we prescribed a Law
 And an open way
 If Allah had so willed,
 He would have made you
 A single people, but
 (His Plan is) to test you in what
 He hath given you; so strive
 As in a race in all virtues.
 The goal of you all is to Allah. S. 5:48

The status of *dhimmi* or religious minorities is one that has often been raised as regards the principle of equality in Islam.

The *Qur'an* divides non-Muslims into two categories: *kafir* (plural *kuffar*) and the *Ahl al-Kitab* or People of the Book, identified in the *Qur'an*

as the Jews, Christians and Sabians. *Kufr* (disbelief) and *Kafir* (one who hides the truth) is distinguished from each other by Ashgar Ali Engineer, (1996:69). Citing Imam Raghīb, an authority on *Qur'anic* etymology, he pointed out that *Kufr* means hiding the truth, particularly revealed truth, Engineer claims that according to the *Qur'an*:

A real *kafir* is one who refuses to accept guidance and truth and leads an immoral, unethical life; one who is mainly concerned with worldly possessions, pursues a life of luxury and comfort oblivious of others' needs, ridicules those prophets and spiritual guides who warn him of the consequences of the pursuit of pleasure and neglects the doctrine of accountability on the Last Day. (Ibid.)

The *Qur'anic* position regarding *Kuffar* is found in the last line of a verse that says: "Unto you your religion, and unto me, mine." This verse is taken to mean that those who do not believe cannot be compelled to do otherwise as found in *Sura 11:256* which states: "Let there be no compulsion in religion."

Let there be no compulsion
In religion: Truth stands out
Clear from error;
Whoever rejects Evil and believes
In Allah hath grasped
The most trustworthy
Handhold that never breaks.
And Allah heareth
And knoweth all things. S. 11:256

If it had been your Lord's will,
They would all have believed —
All who are on earth!
Will you then compel mankind
against their will to believe? S. 10:99

During the caliphate, the presence of non-Muslims in society was provided for by the concept of *dhimmah*, or "protected minorities." Atabani (1995:65) defines *dhimmah* "as a contract concluded between Muslims and a certain group of non-Muslims who co-exists in one community." According to this contract, a non-Muslim enjoys all the

rights and privileges the particular society offers except holding a few posts like the head of state and the chief of the army. In return, the non-Muslim pays a tax known as *jizya*.

There are different interpretations of what *jizya* meant. Essentially, *jizya* was intended as tax in lieu of military duties in the Muslim army, a guarantee to the security of life and property, and freedom to exercise religious faith. The arrangement also included the right of the minority community to settle their own affairs according to their own laws and to select their own leaders. A much later interpretation saw *jizya* as a symbol of "humiliation" for non-Muslims who became subjects of the caliphate. However, not only the non-Muslims were taxed; Muslims also paid a tax known as *zakat*.

Although treatment of minorities fluctated from levels of great tolerance to discrimination during times of conflict, the general record of Muslims is summed up by Enayat in these words: "The Muslims' record over the whole span of history, on this rare civic virtue in inter-cultural relationships is decidedly superior to that of Westerners. Anti-Semitism in the form prevalent in European history was unknown among Muslims. There were no Islamic equivalents of the mass expulsion of the Jews such as those which took place in Germany, Spain, France, England, Rumania and Poland." (Enayat, 129) Nor, it might be added, had there been any experience of the Inquisition in Muslim history.

The critique about the concept of *dhimmah* is that if applied in the present context of the modern nation-state with plural societies, people in this category and situation would become second-class citizens. While given internal autonomy, they are theoretically excluded from participating in the politics of the state since only Muslims are qualified to positions with decision-making functions. In practice, however, it was not always true since many non-Muslims rose to positions of ministers during the caliphate. It must also be pointed out that criterion for membership in the the caliphal state was membership in the *ummah*, and non-Muslims can become members of this state by conversion. Present-day Islamists, pursuing an agenda of establishing an Islamic state, argue that since an Islamic state is an ideological state, Islamic law will be the law of the land and it is only natural that Muslims will be the ones to implement them. They stressed, however, that this does not alter the fact that minorities will be protected and will enjoy the rights and duties of other citizens. It

goes without saying that indigenous non-Muslim populations will raise questions as to their participation in matters of governance.

Clearly, the idea of *dhimmah* cannot be reconciled with the Islamic vision of equality. It must then be pointed out that the word *dhimma* is not mentioned in the *Qur'an*. The concept rose out of the experience of the early Muslims. In this case, the observation of Charles Amjad Ali is worth noting, that: "Early political events and exigencies shaped the subsequent interpretation of Islamic ideology, often without regard for fairly obvious *Qur'anic* teachings." (Ali, 1996:37). Pursuing the logical outcome of this view means that concepts like *dhimmah* will have to be re-studied or re-conceptualized, if not altogether eliminated, once found to be irreconcilable with the basic principles of Islam. This is where the call for reform in the interpretation of *fiqh* (Islamic Jurisprudence) becomes very timely. It was no less than the Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohammad who expressed such sentiment in a recent interview with *Asiaweek*. (1997:39)

Another equality issue raised is the status of women in Islam. While the general spirit and intention of the *Qur'an* is towards gender equality, there are a few verses which have been interpreted otherwise. Unfortunately, the numerous verses stressing equality between believers, male and female, pale beside two verses which supposedly give superiority to men over women.

Men are the protectors
And maintainers of women,
Because Allah has given
The one more (strength)
Than the other, and because
They support them
From their means. S. 4:34

And women shall have rights
Similar to the rights
Against them, according
To what is equitable;
But men have a degree over them. S. 2:228

To cut to the heart of the debate, the role of men as protectors and maintainers of women derives from the fact that they are physically stronger and because they provide financial support. Many scholars agree that this is what the "degree over them" refers to in verse 228. This specific context was not intended to become a general rule nor to imply superiority. Once the conditions are no longer present, then roles will necessarily change. Again, the need for reinterpretation becomes extremely important.

Historical evidence shows that women were full and participating members of the new community during the lifetime of the Prophet, but after his death, the situation began to change. Jane Idleman Smith (1994:51) describes it as "a movement from inclusion to exclusion and finally, seclusion." Yet, even this movement was interrupted by periods when women were rulers and significant members of society. Women rulers existed in the Middle East, in the Ottoman Empire, in South and Southeast Asia (for details, see Roded, 1994). Today, the situation is again changing as Muslim women are taking advantage of the rights and opportunities guaranteed by the *Qur'an*. Nevertheless, groups like the Taliban are likely to offset the gains made by women particularly in Afghanistan. In the end, it is the struggle of all enlightened Muslims that will define not just the status of women but the operationalization of basic Islamic principles as they try to realize the Islamic vision of society.

To come now to the matter of popular participation in governance, it is altogether incorrect to say that popular consent is also absent. Although the *Qur'an* does not speak of government, it does speak of the *ummah* or the community of believers. Among them, the *Qur'an* prescribed *Shura* (consultation) as the best way of settling their affairs. One verse of the *Qur'an* is relevant in this discussion:

Those who hearken
To their Lord, and establish
Regular prayer, who (conduct)
Their affairs by mutual consultation. S. 42:38

...and consult
Them in affairs (of moment). S. 3:159

Muhammad Asad, a noted Muslim scholar and commentator on the *Qur'an* says that these injunctions, implying government by consent and council, must be regarded as one of the fundamental clauses of all *Qur'anic* legislation relating to statecraft. (Engineer, 1995:4) This being so, it must be taken that consultation lies at the very heart of the Muslim community's decision-making processes.

Besides *Shura*, two other concepts — that of *Ijma* (consensus) and that of *Ijtihad* (independent reasoning) — are also part of the primary and integral process of decision making in Islam. *Ijma* refers to consensus reached by consultative discussions; while *Ijtihad* is the ability to undertake independent reasoning in order to arrive at a decision. In cases where there are no provisions in the *Qur'an*, or *Sunnah* and *Hadith* of the Prophet, then a Muslim is enjoined to practice *Ijtihad* to arrive at an informed decision. These values are not strange to the concept of democracy.

Al-Qurtubi, a prominent commentator on the *Qur'an* said that the Prophet practiced *shura* with his companions in the matters of common interest (*masalih*), and not in the matters of law, which came out only by revelation. He further quoted the jurist Ibn Khuwayz Mandad, who had stated that it is the duty of a ruler to practice *Shura* with the *ulama* (religious scholars) about the problems of religion and *Sharia* (army leaders) about military affairs, leading persons about public interests, and with top administrators about the common good and the development of the country. (Osman, 1984:76) From this list, it is evident that while *Shura* was used in coming to a decision, it is usually not with just anyone, but with those who know or were experts in their own field.

Consultation as a process of decision making was the means by which successors to the Prophet were selected. When the Prophet died, his first successor was determined by consultations among his companions known as the *muhajirs* and the representatives of the Muslims of Medina, known as the *ansars* or helpers. In these discussions, a consensus was formed and Abubakar became the first caliph. Abubakar's election was proclaimed to the people and was confirmed by them through the *baiyah* or pledge of allegiance and loyalty. This pledge represented not just consent of the people but their acceptance and recognition of the legitimacy of the caliph's leadership. When it came to selecting Abubakar's successor, he appointed Omar and enjoined the other companions to

uphold his appointment. When Omar's time came, he chose to appoint a committee to look for the next caliph. However, the selection of Uthman by this committee was contested by partisans of Ali, the son-in-law and nephew of the Prophet. This protest started what is now the Sunni and Shia divide.

The process of consultation broke down at this point because of unresolved criteria for succession as well as in the process itself. Although Uthman and Ali became caliphs one after the other, the rift in the community was not healed. With the succession of Muawiya to the caliphate, the process of consultation and consensus came to an end as the period of dynastic reign began lasting through the Umayyad (661-750), the Abbasid (750-1258) until the Ottoman (1258-1924) caliphate was abolished in 1924. The period of consultation and consensus lasted for about 30 years and this period is known as the reign of the Four Rightly Guided caliphs or *Kulafa Rashidun*.

These historical experiences notwithstanding, the principle of *Shura* remains enshrined in the *Qur'an* and in the Muslim collective consciousness. Fazlur Rahman (1986:7) claims that "in Islamic history, this *Shura* was distorted to mean that the head of state would consult with certain people who he thinks are endowed with certain wisdom and whose advice he may or may not finally take." Rahman considers this as a "deviation from the norms of the *Qur'an*." Therefore, he recommends that: "Muslims, in order to make the Muslim community a real community as envisioned by the *Qur'an*, must have a close look at the *Qur'an* and learn from it the purpose it stands for and then give this knowledge to the average member of the Muslim community so that the whole community possess an adequate insight into the teaching of the *Qur'an*." (Ibid.)

Another democratic principle, freedom of opinion, has been raised since the Rushdie and other similar cases caught the world's attention. The contemporary Iranian Shi'i philosopher, Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba'i argues that "Islam does not subscribe to freedom by abolishing all manner of moral restrictions on human behavior, and total subordination of matters lying outside the penumbra of law to unfettered individual will." (Enayat, 136) In this regard, he asks: "How can Islam lay down the freedom of opinion while belief in the unity of God, the prophecy of Muhammad, and the certainty of the Hereafter constitutes its unquestionable premises? (Ibid.)

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Enayat concedes that the reconciliation between Islam and freedom of opinion as a democratic principle would be easier if the topics on which free opinion is not allowed is confined to the three basic principles of the unity of God, the prophethood of Muhammad and the certainty of the Hereafter. This is consistent with other major religions which have their own unquestionable premises and Islam is not an exception. Experience, however, shows, as Enayat readily admits, that the "taboo subjects are not limited to these

sublime axioms," but involve even mundane problems as determined by the rulers. Enayat pointed out that "even minor disagreements with the state, let alone the right to criticize major policies and resist injustice, can be alleged to impinge on any principles, or run counter to a holy consensus." (Ibid., 137) Not surprisingly, the history of the caliphate is peppered with Muslim scholars who have stood up to the tyranny of the state and were executed by the rulers for their efforts. This situation is what makes Fazlur Rahman's passionate appeal to go back to the *Qur'an* and understand its meaning more pressing and urgent today.

A similar view is advanced by the Egyptian scholar, Muhammad Al-Nuwayhi. He believes that Islam began as a progressive and revolutionary religion but has been turned into a tool for restricting the intellect and rigidifying society. He believes that two causes are responsible for this development: (1) the rise of a class of people (the *ulama*, *rijal al-din*) who monopolizes the interpretation of religion and claims they alone have the right to speak for it and to make pronouncements about what opinions and doctrines to agree or disagree with it; and (2) the belief of this class that the religious sources and texts have regulations and teachings that are binding and cannot be amended or changed, whether they deal with doctrine or with matters of every day life. (Boullata, 1990:63).

Al-Nuwayhi maintains that while Islam is concerned both with spiritual salvation and with life in this world, it did not provide all the necessary details, particularly for the latter. Instead, it provided two things: (1) it set up the sublime ethical ideals that Muslims should strive to achieve but it left them free to choose the means to these ideals in

accordance with their changing needs and circumstances; and (2) through the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*, it provided the Muslims, during the lifetime of the Prophet, with a minimum civil legislation which they urgently needed at the time, on account of the staggering change occasioned by the rise of Islam. (Ibid., 66) This thinking exemplifies those who are called modernists as opposed to those called traditionalists. The latter is of the opinion that everything has already been provided in the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* which have been formulated into legal prescription by the four schools of Islamic jurisprudence. All that is needed is to implement these provisions.

One verse associated with respect to freedom of opinion is Surah 5:59 which states:

O ye who believe! Obey Allah and obey the Apostle,
And those charged with authority among you. S. 4:59

This verse is often interpreted by some *ulama* as not blind obedience enjoined on individuals but obedience only so long as the rulers themselves obey the law. Some classical thinkers, however, postulated that it was better to obey even tyrannical rulers if, by doing so, the community is preserved from disorder and chaos. Instead of blind obedience of *Taqlid*, many Muslim scholars are emphasizing *ijtihad* as a means of dealing more creatively with decision-making situations provided these *ijtihad* do not go beyond the framework of the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*.

Islamic Revivalism and Democracy

With the rise of Islamic revivalism in the 1980s to the present, the debate on democracy has taken on a new angle. This is because the claim of incompatibility between Islam and democracy is both being made by outsiders and by Muslims. According to John L. Esposito and James P. Piscatori (1991:435), the notion of incompatibility between Islam and democracy first emerged in Iran during the Constitutional Movement of 1905-1911

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where Shayk Fadlallah Nuri argued that the equality of all citizens which is a key democratic idea is "impossible" in Islam because unavoidable and insurmountable inequalities exist. Nuri further claimed that it was not possible to have a legislative body since "Islam does not have any shortcomings that require completion." (Ibid.).

Much later, another thinker, Sayyid Qutb, a leading theoretician of the Muslim Brotherhood, executed by the Egyptian government in 1966, objected to the notion of popular sovereignty. To him, "it is an usurpation of God's sovereignty and a form of tyranny since it subsumes the individual to the will of other individuals." (Ibid.)

Qutb's impact on Muslim thinking and movements throughout the Muslim world has been very strong and similar positions can be heard within radical groups like the Takfir wa-al-Hijra of Egypt. Shayk Muhammad Mutawwali al-Sharawi, a popular religious leader in Egypt, declared in 1982 that "Islam and democracy were incompatible and that *Shura* does not mean simple domination of the majority." (Ibid., 436)

More recently, one of the younger leaders of Algeria's Front Islamique du Salut or Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), Ali Berihadj, declared that "democracy is a flawed system," pointing that "the very concept of majority rule is objectionable since issues of right and justice cannot be quantified; the greater number of votes does not translate into the greater moral position." (Ibid., 436)

Abul A'la Mawdudi, founder of the Jamaat-i-Islami of Pakistan holds that "Islam constitutes its own form of democracy." He distinguishes between divine sovereignty and popular sovereignty. If democracy is understood as essentially based on people's sovereignty, then Mawdudi concluded that there is incompatibility, but if "democracy is conceived as a limited form of popular sovereignty, restricted and directed by God's law, (then) there is no incompatibility at all." Describing this alternate view as theo-democracy, he states:

The executive under this system of government is constituted by the general will of the Muslims who have also the right to depose it. All administrative matters and all questions about which no explicit injunction is to be found in the *sharia* are settled by the consensus of opinion among the Muslims. Every Muslim who is capable and qualified to give a sound opinion on matters of Islamic law is entitled to interpret the law of God when such interpretation is necessary. In this sense the Islamic polity is a democracy. (Ibid., 436)

The notions of divine and popular democracy is perceived as basically contradictory due to the fact that while all are agreed on the supremacy of God's Will, the insistence on the process of consultation and consensus must require some form of popular participation. (Ibid., 438) Yet, this sense of contradiction did not seem to have occurred to the early Muslims. Indeed, the community's processes of consultations and consensus was what made it a dynamic community. In fact, contrary to the usual claim that there is no use for a legislative body in an Islamic polity, Javid Iqbal (1983:257) has this to say:

The establishment of a legislature is also necessary because subordinate legislation, which is not repugnant to the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*, is a very wide field due to the changing needs and requirements of the modern Muslim community.

Essentially, Iqbal is saying that the supremacy of God's Will cannot be compromised nor demunitized because man formulates only subordinate laws that do not contradict the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*.

While some scholars have been accused of "the artificial grafting of democracy in Islam" in their theorizing, there is no doubt that Islam can respond positively to democratic ideals. Yet, the perception is otherwise. Perhaps this is because Muslim states, which have experimented in democracy, have not been successful or that Muslim states, which claim to be Islamic continue to be authoritarian.

Failure of Democratic Experiments in Some Muslim Countries

Independence after the colonial period pushed many Muslim states to experiment with democracy, secularism and socialism with varying degrees of success.

The failure of the democratic experiments in some of these states according to Enayat is not due to any "conceptual incoherence" but are due to "the absence of specific and economic formations, including an autonomous, conscious and articulate middle class." (Enayat, 138) In addition, he pointed to the aggravating effect of educational backwardness, widespread illiteracy, and the prevalence of servile habits of thinking and blind submission to authority. (Ibid.) The last factor appears to be the remaining vestiges of interpreting the verse (4:59) earlier cited. Also not mentioned is the effect of secularism which alienated many Muslims from the central core of their cultural values mainly based on Islam.

Writing in 1982, Enayat was probably referring to the Muslim societies of the 1960s and 1970s. Now in the 1990s, many of these countries have progressed educationally, and a vibrant middle class is certainly developing as can be found in Malaysia and elsewhere.

The bottomline, therefore, is that those Muslim states, which have authoritarian governments do so not because Islamic doctrine says so, but more because rulers have used and exploited Islam to further their own interests.

Authoritarianism, and its continuing existence, particularly in the Middle East has also been a matter of Western interest. According to a *Middle East Report* (1992:47), Western determination to control the region's oil has often led to interventions that ended the movements for popular self-determination. The details are not secret. For instance, in 1953, US intervened in Iran to restore the Shah to power; in Jordan in 1957, the popularly elected parliament tried to assert an independent role but was deterred by US continued support of the King. In 1991, Iraqi uprisings were similarly deterred in favor of keeping the status-quo. Finally, to quote from the writers:

Washington's identity of views with its Saudi and other Persian Gulf allies on issues of popular sovereignty makes it abundantly clear that whatever indigenous obstacles confront the champions of democracy in the Middle East, they will have to contend with US fear of what popular rule may mean for its oil interests. (Ibid., 47)

The most recent Western collusion with authoritarianism was in Algeria, when the military cancelled the national election which would

have given power to the FIS. The fear was that the FIS would be anti-West and its success could encourage more Islamic movements. This attitude is not lost to Muslims. In fact, two Muslim leaders of the Al-Nahda of Tunisia, Rashid Al-Ghanoushi and Abdelfattah Mourou (1991:438) "chide the West for not promoting its own democratic ideas." Morou stressed:

Why does the West speak about democracy and human rights when it supports regimes that persecute and imprison activists? Yet, Western governments support such regimes. There is a contradiction between what the West wants or applies in the West and what it wants and supports in other countries (Ibid.).

Both leaders accept the democratic process and has sought to make their organization a legalized political party. In addition, other Islamic organizations like the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and in Jordan have participated in parliamentary elections as did the FIS in Algeria when allowed to do so. Elsewhere, Islamic parties like PAS in Malaysia and Jamaat al-Islamic in Pakistan have been doing the same. In short, none of these parties which call themselves Islamic, had any trouble with the democratic idea of elections. To them, this is just one way of operationalizing *Shura*. Their resentment stems from the fact that they are not allowed to work out their own system without too much interference from the West. Their anti-West position has made their political aspiration suspect. There is also the fear that once these parties are in power, they will turn out to be authoritarian states just the same. But much worst because of their anti-West position. It would help if these Islamic parties would be more forthcoming with their programme of government or more definite in their vision of an Islamic state in order to allay suspicion and distrust.

Another reason why authoritarian states continue to prevail is explained by an interesting observation made by Francis Fukuyama (1993:5) who pointed out that many of the most impressive economic growth records in the last 150 years have been compiled not by democracies, but by authoritarian states with more or less capitalist economic systems. He goes on to say "in theory, a competent authoritarian

■ The bottomline, therefore, is that those Muslim states, which have authoritarian governments do so not because Islamic doctrine says so, but more because rulers have used and exploited Islam to further their own interests.

government that makes economic growth its top priority should be able to achieve this goal more easily than a liberal democracy, as many countries in Asia have shown."

Kenneth Auchincloss (1992:11) reiterates the same observation that the pattern seen in countries like South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore is prosperity first and democracy later. He attributed the gradual opening in these countries to the pressure coming from an affluent middle class. Thus, Auchincloss concludes: "If democracy does not breed prosperity, then perhaps prosperity can help breed democracy." (Ibid., 12)

- After all, as Auchincloss commented: "Democracy is not some theoretical construct like the decimal system or the game of chess that works the same way in any place or culture. It is necessarily overlaid with cultural differences, some of them profound." [T]o Muslims in general, Islam constitutes the core of their cultural values and it is only to be expected that even democracy will be shaped accordingly.

Evidently, authoritarian Muslim states will not move towards democracy or Islamicity any sooner so long as vested interests, both internal and external ones, find authoritarianism profitable. It is unfortunate that some of these governments call themselves Islamic.

Conclusions

While Islam does not negate important democratic principles, Islamic parties, once in power, would probably implement a different system. Whether such a system can be called "democratic" after the secular Western model is doubtful mainly because Islamic parties envision a system centered on God and His Laws. However, they would have to devise a system to implement this vision since the *Qur'an* has wisely left this open for Muslims to work out the structures most useful to their needs. And this is how it should be. After all, as Auchincloss commented: "Democracy is not some theoretical construct like the decimal system or

the game of chess that works the same way in any place or culture. It is necessarily overlaid with cultural differences, some of them profound." (Ibid.) To Muslims in general, Islam constitutes the core of their cultural values and it is only to be expected that even democracy will be shaped accordingly.

Having said this, it is not also far-fetched to think that the Islamic system will adopt some of the structures of Western democracy. Why, even Iran has an elected parliament. But this structure is expected to continue to evolve as the Islamic state begins to adopt to its internal and external environment and as it attempts to implement the Islamic vision of society. If the leaders, the people and ultimately the state remain true to the Islamic ideals, the goals of social justice, progress and development would most likely have the same resonance in these areas as elsewhere in the Western world. ●

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