

## Reading Material about Islam for Students

### **I. A CHRISTMAS PALM TREE, by William Dalrymple**

*This is a beautiful piece by a kindred spirit, William Dalrymple, a wandering Scot, a Catholic travel writer, who walked all over the Middle East following the footsteps of a 6th century Palestinian poet and divine, John Moschus. His travelogue, From The Holy Mountain (HarperCollins 1997), is a compulsory and compelling reading for all lovers of the Holy Land. William Dalrymple feels and expresses the great unity of Christianity and Islam, nay, considers, as St John of Damascene, Islam but a form of Christianity. Christmas is the day that puts emphasis on this unity, as Muslims also remember the Nativity of Mary's Son. It is an important message, exceedingly timely in the days when theology again became a weapon. In 1204, the Crusaders sacked the greatest Christian city on earth, Constantinople, as for them the Eastern Orthodox Church was as foreign as Islam. Sooner or later, people shall view the present American crusade against Islam with the same horror as the rape of Constantinople and the Night of St Bartholomew. The following text by William Dalrymple was broadcasted by the BBC Radio 4.*

In late December, the plains of North India turn suddenly cold and gray. Towards evening, as the sun is beginning to set over the minarets of the village mosques, smoke from the buffalo-dung cooking-fires begins to mass in a flat layer at the level of the treetops. By dusk, the layer has turned into a vaporous mist, which thickens and curdles overnight to form by morning a dense fog.

Some fifteen years ago, on just such a bleak, cold dawn, I climbed the long flight of ceremonial steps leading up to the great mosque at Fatehpur Sikri. This lay in the heart of the ruined Moghul capital built by the sixteenth century Emperor Akbar, a few miles to the West of Agra. I was a nineteen year old backpacker, and it was my first visit to India. I had just spent my first Christmas away from home, and I was enjoying the sensation of complete disorientation. It was immediately after Christmas, I kept thinking, but not only was there not a Christmas tree or a Christmas decoration in sight, there was nothing even remotely Christian to be seen- or so I thought.

For when I reached the top of the steps that rose to the Buland Darwaza- the massive domed, arched gate leading into the Imperial mosque- I saw something that confused me even further. Here was one of the greatest pieces of Muslim architecture in India, but according to my guide book, the strip of Persian calligraphy which framed the arch read as follows: "Jesus, Son of Mary (on whom be peace) said: The World is a Bridge,

pass over it, but build no houses upon it. He who hopes for a day, may hope for eternity; but the World endures but an hour. Spend it in prayer, for the rest is unseen.”

The inscription was doubly surprising: not only was I taken aback to find an apparently Christian quotation given center stage in a Muslim monument, but the inscription itself was unfamiliar. It certainly sounded the sort of thing Jesus might have said, but did Jesus really say that the world was like a bridge? And even if he had, why would a Muslim Emperor want to place such a phrase over the entrance to the main mosque in his capital city? Weren't Christians regarded as the enemies and rivals of the Muslims- and vice versa? This was certainly the impression I had been given at my Catholic school where I had only ever come across Islam in the confrontational context of the Crusades.

It was only much later, after I had lived and traveled in India and the Middle East for several years that I began to be able to answer some of these questions. The phrase emblazoned over the gateway was, I learned, one of several hundred sayings and stories of Jesus that fill Arabic and Islamic literature. Some of these derive from the four canonical gospels, others from now rejected early Christian texts like the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, others again from the wider oral Christian culture-compost of the Near East- possibly authentic sayings and stories, in other words, which Islam has retained but which Western Christianity has lost.

These sayings of Jesus circulated around the Muslim world from Spain to China, and many are still familiar to educated Muslims today. They fill out and augment the profoundly reverential picture of Christ painted in the Koran where Jesus is called the Messiah, the Messenger, the Prophet, Word and Spirit of God, though- in common with some currents of heterodox Christian thought of the period- his outright divinity is questioned. The Koran calls Christians the 'nearest in love' to Muslims, whom it instructs in to “dispute not with the People of the Book [that is, the Jews and Christians] save in the most courteous manner and say ‘we believe in what has been sent down to us and what has been sent down to you; our God and your God is one, and it is to him we bow’.”

I have been thinking a lot about that quotation over the last three months. Ever since September the 11th we have seen some of the right-wing ‘Qualities’- as well as the tabloids- united in an often virulent bout of Islamophobia, as a hundred instant experts in Islam have popped up to offer their disparaging views on a religion few seem ever to have encountered in person. After the scale of horror of the atrocity in New York perhaps this sort of thing is inevitable; but it doesn't alter the fact that the image these writers are projecting of Islam- particularly vis-a-vis its relations with Christianity- is a ludicrously unbalanced, inaccurate and one-sided one.

For the links that bind Christianity and Islam are so deep, and so complex, and so intricately woven, that the more you learn about them, the more the occasional confrontations between the two religions begin to seem like a civil war between two

different streams of the same tradition than any essential clash of two incompatible civilizations.

When the early Byzantine were first confronted by the Prophet's armies in the seventh century, they assumed that Islam was merely a variant form of Christianity: Islam of course accepts much of the Old and New Testaments, obeys the Mosaic laws about circumcision and ablutions, and venerates both Jesus and the ancient Jewish prophets. The early Life of Muhammad relates how, when Muhammad entered Mecca in triumph and ordered the destruction of all idols and images, he came upon a picture of the Virgin and Child inside the Ka'ba. Reverently covering the icon with his cloak, he ordered all other images to be destroyed, but the image of the Madonna to be looked on as sacrosanct.

When Mohammed's successor Abu Bakr stood on the borders of Syria he gave very specific instructions to his soldiers: "In the desert," he said, "you will find people who have secluded themselves in cells; let them alone, for they have secluded themselves for the sake of God." Likewise, when his successor Omar went to Syria, he actually stayed with the Bishop of Ayla and went out of his way to meet the Christian Holy Men in the town. For many years Muslims and Christians used to pray side by side in the great churches of the Middle Eastern cities: in Damascus, for example, the great basilica of St John was used for worship by both Christians and Muslims; only fifty years later were Christians obliged to pray elsewhere and the building formally converted into what is now known as the great Umayyad mosque.

As late as 649 AD a Nestorian bishop wrote: "These Arabs fight not against our Christian religion; nay, rather they defend our faith, they revere our priests and saints, and they make gifts to our churches and monasteries." There were never any conversions by the Sword, a myth much propagated in anti-Islamic literature.

Indeed, the greatest theologian of the early church, St. John of Damascus (d. 749), was convinced that Islam was at root not a new religion, but instead a variation on a Judeo-Christian form. This perception is particularly remarkable as St. John had unique access to the fountainhead of Islamic thinking in the earliest days of the faith. He had grown up in the Umayyad Arab court of Damascus- the hub of the young Islamic world where his father was chancellor, and he was an intimate boyhood friend of the future Caliph al-Yazid; the two boys drinking bouts in the streets of Damascus were the subject of much horrified gossip in the streets of the new Islamic capital. But, in his old age, St. John took the habit at the remote desert monastery of Mar Saba, where he began work on his great masterpiece, the Fount of Knowledge.

I first really heard about St John of Damascus and his writings when I went to spend a few night in Mar Saba in the course of a journey around the monasteries of the Middle East in 1994. Mar Saba lay tucked into a cliff face in the wastes of Judea, a spectacular near vertical plunge of chapels, cells and oratories. One night, while the monks were still singing their vespers in the chapel, and their chant of their quires were echoing around the rock-cut corridors of the monastery, I was taken by the monastery

guestmaster to see the cave with St John wrote *The Font of Knowledge*. With a flickering storm lantern in his hand, he led the way to a small cell backing onto a rock wall, its ceiling cut so low as to make standing virtually impossible.

“St John spent thirty years in that cell,” he said. “Although he could not stand he hardly ever went out of it. He believed he had become too proud of his high position in the court of Damascus, so he chose this cave in which to live as a monk.”

It was here that St John of Damascus wrote his critique of Islam, the first ever penned by a Christian. Intriguingly, John- the ultimate insider- regarded Islam as a form of Christianity closely related to the heterodox Christian doctrine of Aryanism: after all this doctrine, like Islam, took as its starting point the idea that on Christmas Day God could not have become fully human without somehow compromising his divinity.

Used to the often surrealistic scriptures of the Gnostics, then in widespread circulation among the Christians of the Near East, John was apparently unworried by the points where the Koran diverges from the basic narrative of the Gospels- such as the very full but oddly unfamiliar description it gives of the first Christmas. In this Koranic version, Jesus' birth takes place not in a stable but under a palm tree in an oasis, shortly after which the Christ child, still in his swaddling clothes, sits up and addresses Mary's family with the words: “I am the servant of God. He has given me the Gospel and ordained me a prophet. His blessing is upon me wherever I go, and he has commanded me to be steadfast in prayer and to give alms to the poor as long as I shall live. I was blessed on the day I was born; and blessed I shall be on the day of my death; and may peace be upon me on the day when I shall be raised to life. “

Islam of course grew up the largely Christian environment of the Late Antique Levant, and the longer you spend in the ancient Christian communities of India and the Middle East, the more you become aware of the extent to which Eastern Christian practice formed the template for what were to become the basic conventions of Islam. The Muslim form of prayer with its bowing and prostration appears to derive from the older Syrian Orthodox tradition that is still practiced in pewless churches across the Levant. The architecture of the earliest minarets, which are square rather than round, unmistakably derive from the church towers of Byzantine Syria, while Ramadan, at first sight one of the most distinctive of Islamic practices, bears startling similarities to Lent, which in the Eastern Christian churches still involves- as it once used to in the West- a grueling all-day fast.

Perhaps no more branch of Islam shows so Christian influence as Islamic mysticism or Sufism. . For Sufism with its Holy Men and visions, healings and miracles, its affinity with the desert and its emphasis on the mortification of the flesh and the individual's personal search for union with God, has always borne remarkable similarities to the more mystical strands of Eastern Christianity, and many Muslim saints- such as the great Mevlana Rumi- worked to reconcile the two religions. Indeed the very word Sufi seems to indicate a link with Christianity. For Sufi means wool which was the characteristic clothing material of Eastern Christian monks, which was taken over by the early Mystics

of Islam. Other styles of dress adopted by the Sufis are also anticipated in pre-Islamic Christianity: the patchwork frock made from rags, and the use of the colour of mourning, black for the Christians, dark blue for the Muslims. Another interesting link- at the extreme edge of both Christian and Muslim asceticism- is the wearing of heavy chains. This was a practice first adopted by the Christian Grazers and which was later adopted by some Sufi sects. Through punishing the flesh, such exercises were believed by both groups of ascetics to induce visions and spiritual ecstasy.

Certainly if a monk from sixth century Byzantium were to come back today it is probable that he would find much more that was familiar in the practices and beliefs of a modern Muslim Sufi than he would with, say, a contemporary American Evangelical. Yet this simple truth has been lost by our tendency to think of Christianity as a thoroughly Western religion rather than the Oriental faith it actually is. The recent demonisation of Islam in the Christendom, and deep and growing resentment felt in the Islamic world against the Christian West, has created an atmosphere where few on either side are still aware of, or even wish to be aware of, the profound kinship of Christianity and Islam.

I first came across the idea of Christ as an object of Muslim devotion when I read that inscription quoting Jesus, son of Mary, on whom be Peace, on the gateway at Fatehpur Sikri. Last month I came across a Mughal miniature, now on display in the British Library, which was probably painted within that city soon after the gateway had been built. It is a nativity scene, with Mary and the Christ child and wise men coming to offer gifts. But the wise men are Mughal courtiers, Mary is attended by a Mughal serving girls, and the Christ child and his mother are sitting under a palm tree. As this miniature shows, there are certainly major differences between the two faiths- not least the central fact, in mainstream Christianity, of Jesus' divinity. But Christmas – the ultimate celebration of Christ's humanity- is a feast which Muslims and Christians can share together without reservation. At this moment when the Christian West and Islamic East seem to be heading for another major confrontation, there has never been a greater need for both sides to realize what they have in common and, as in this miniature, to gather around the Christ child, to pray for peace.

## **II. Part of HP CEO Corporate Address**

**CARLY FIORINA, CEO OF HEWLETT PACKARD, MINNEAPOLIS,  
MINNESOTA , SEPTEMBER 26, 2001**

**"TECHNOLOGY, BUSINESS AND OUR WAY OF LIFE: WHAT'S NEXT"**

I'll end by telling a story.

There was once a civilization that was the greatest in the world.

It was able to create a continental super-state that stretched from ocean to ocean, and from northern climes to tropics and deserts. Within its dominion lived hundreds of millions of people, of different creeds and ethnic origins.

One of its languages became the universal language of much of the world, the bridge between the peoples of a hundred lands. Its armies were made up of people of many nationalities, and its military protection allowed a degree of peace and prosperity that had never been known. The reach of this civilization's commerce extended from Latin America to China, and everywhere in between.

And this civilization was driven more than anything, by invention. Its architects designed buildings that defied gravity. Its mathematicians created the algebra and algorithms that would enable the building of computers, and the creation of encryption. Its doctors examined the human body, and found new cures for disease. Its astronomers looked into the heavens, named the stars, and paved the way for space travel and exploration. Its writers created thousands of stories. Stories of courage, romance and magic. Its poets wrote of love, when others before them were too steeped in fear to think of such things.

When other nations were afraid of ideas, this civilization thrived on them, and kept them alive. When censors threatened to wipe out knowledge from past civilizations, this civilization kept the knowledge alive, and passed it on to others.

While modern Western civilization shares many of these traits, the civilization I'm talking about was the Islamic world from the year 800 to 1600, which included the Ottoman Empire and the courts of Baghdad, Damascus and Cairo, and enlightened rulers like Suleiman the Magnificent.

Although we are often unaware of our indebtedness to this other civilization, its gifts are very much a part of our heritage. The technology industry would not exist without the contributions of Arab mathematicians.

Sufi poet-philosophers like Rumi challenged our notions of self and truth. Leaders like Suleiman contributed to our notions of tolerance and civic leadership.

And perhaps we can learn a lesson from his example: It was leadership based on meritocracy, not inheritance. It was leadership that harnessed the full capabilities of a very diverse population—that included Christianity, Islamic, and Jewish traditions.

This kind of enlightened leadership — leadership that nurtured culture, sustainability, diversity and courage — led to 800 years of invention and prosperity.

In dark and serious times like this, we must affirm our commitment to building societies and institutions that aspire to this kind of greatness. More than ever, we must focus on the importance of leadership— bold acts of leadership and decidedly personal acts of leadership.

### **III. Muhammad, the Most Influential Person Ever Lived**

In his thought-provoking and utterly absorbing book, "The 100" (Hart Publishing Company, Inc), Michael H Hart lists and ranks what he thinks were the 100 most influential persons ever lived. In such an academic exercise, Dr Hart's standards for measuring influence are intriguing and stimulating. To determine who were the 100 persons who had the greatest effect on history and the course of the world, he ranked these persons in order of importance: that is according to the total amount of influence on human history and on the everyday lives of other human beings. In composing the list, neither fame nor talent, nor nobility of character were considered; rather, the total impact of an evil genius, such as Hitler, and an innovative scientist or political figure, such as Isaac Newton or George Washington were considered.

The key factors Dr. Hart used to determine the total impact of a person on mankind, and thus, to determine his/her rank in the list were, a) the extent to which the actions of that person affected daily life of humans, b) how long the impact lasted, and, c) what proportion of the human race were affected.

Applying the above factors, Dr. Hart concluded that the person who deserves to be number 1 in the list as the most influential person ever lived is Muhammad, the founder of the Islamic monotheistic religion. Isaac Newton came second, and Jesus Christ was third. The second Caliph, Omar Ibn-Elkhattab, ranked 51st.

Below are Chapters 1 (Muhammad) and 51 (Omar Ibn Elkhattab) of "The 100".

## **1 MUHAMMAD 570-632**

My choice of Muhammad to lead the list of the world's most influential persons may surprise some readers and may be questioned by others, but he was the only man in history who was successful on both the religious and secular levels.

Of humble origins, Muhammad founded and promulgated one of the world's great religions, and became an immensely effective political leader. Today, thirteen centuries after his death, his influence is still powerful and pervasive.

The majority of the persons in this book had the advantage of being born and raised in centers of civilization, highly cultured or politically pivotal nations. Muhammad, however, was born in the year 570, in the city of Mecca, in southern Arabia, at that time a backward area of the world, far from the centers of trade, art, and learning. Orphaned at age six, he was reared in modest surroundings. Islamic tradition tells us that he was illiterate. His economic position improved when, at age twenty-five, he married a wealthy widow. Nevertheless, as he approached forty, there was little outward indication that he was remarkable person.

Most Arabs at that time were pagans, who believed in many gods. There were, however, in Mecca, a small number of Jews and Christians; it was from them no doubt that Muhammad first learned of a single, omnipotent God who ruled the entire universe. When he was forty years old, Muhammad became convinced that this one true God (Allah) was speaking to him, and had chosen him to spread the true faith.

For three years, Muhammad preached only to close friends and associates. Then, about 613, he began preaching in public. As he slowly gained converts, the Meccan authorities came to consider him a dangerous nuisance. In 622, fearing for his safety, Muhammad fled to Medina (a city some 200 miles north of Mecca), where he had been offered a position of considerable political power.

This flight, called the *Hijra*, was the turning point in the prophet's life. In Mecca, he had had few followers. In Medina, he had many more, and he soon acquired an influence that made him a virtual dictator. During the next few years, while Muhammad's followers grew rapidly, a series of battles were fought between Mecca and Medina. This war ended in 630 with Muhammad's triumphant return to Mecca as conqueror. The remaining two and a half years of his life witnessed the rapid conversion of the Arab tribes to the new religion. When Muhammad died, in 632, he was the effective ruler of all of southern Arabia.

The Bedouin tribesmen of Arabia had a reputation of fierce warriors. But their number was small; and plagued by disunity and internecine warfare, they had been no match for the larger armies of the kingdoms in the settled agricultural areas to the north. However, unified by Muhammad for the first time in history, and inspired by their fervent belief in the one true God, these small Arab armies now embarked upon one of the most astonishing series of conquests in human history. To the northeast of Arabia lay the large Neo-Persian Empire of the Sassanids; to the northwest lay the Byzantine, or Eastern Roman Empire, centered in Constantinople. Numerically, the Arabs were no match for their opponents. On the field of battle, though, the inspired Arabs rapidly conquered all of Mesopotamia, Syria, and Palestine. By 642, Egypt had been wrested from the Byzantine Empire, while the Persian armies had been crushed at the key battles of Qadisiya in 637, and Nahavend in 642.

But even these enormous conquests –which were made under the leadership of Muhammad's close friends and immediate successors, Abu Bakr and Umar ibn al-Khattab- did not mark the end of the Arab advance. By 711, the Arab armies had swept completely across North Africa to the Atlantic Ocean. There, they turned north and, crossing the Strait of Gibraltar, overwhelmed the Visigothic kingdom in Spain.

For a while, it must have seemed that the Muslims would overwhelm all of Christian Europe. However, in 732, at the famous battle of Tours, a Muslim army, which had advanced into the center of France, was at last defeated by the Franks. Nevertheless, in a scant century of fighting, these Bedouin tribesmen, inspired by the words of the prophet, had carved out an empire stretching from the borders of India to the Atlantic

Ocean –the largest empire that the world had yet seen. And everywhere that the armies conquered, large-scale conversion to the new faith eventually followed.

Now, not all of these conquests proved permanent. The Persians, though they have remained faithful to the religion of the Prophet, have since regained their independence from the Arabs. And in Spain, more than seven centuries of warfare finally resulted in the Christians re-conquering the entire peninsula. However, Mesopotamia and Egypt, the two cradles of ancient civilization, have remained Arab, as has the entire coast of North Africa. The new religion, of course, continued to spread, in the intervening centuries, far beyond the borders of the original Muslim conquests. Currently, it has tens of millions of adherents in Africa and central Asia, and even more in Pakistan and northern India, and in Indonesia. In Indonesia, the new faith has been a unifying factor. In the Indian subcontinent, however, the conflict between Muslims and Hindus is still a major obstacle to unity.

How, then, is one to assess the overall impact of Muhammad on human history? Like all religions, Islam exerts an enormous influence upon the lives of its followers. It is for this reason that the founders of the world's great religions all figure prominently in this book. Since there are roughly twice as many Christians as Muslims in the world, it may initially seem strange that Muhammad has been ranked higher than Jesus. There are two principal reasons for that decision. First, Muhammad played a far more important role in the development of Islam than Jesus did in the development of Christianity. Although Jesus was responsible for the main ethical and moral precepts of Christianity (in so far as these differed from Judaism), St. Paul was the main developer of Christian theology, its principal proselytizer, and the author of a large portion of the New Testament.

Muhammad, however, was responsible for both the theology of Islam and its main ethical and moral principles. In addition, he played the key role in proselytizing the new faith, and in establishing the religious practices of Islam. Moreover, he is the author of the Muslim holy scriptures, the Koran, a collection of certain of Muhammad's insights that he believed had been directly revealed to him by Allah. Most of these utterances were copied more or less faithfully during Muhammad's lifetime and were collected together in authoritative form not long after his death. The Koran, therefore, closely represents Muhammad's ideas and teachings and to a considerable extent his exact words. No such detailed compilation of the teachings of Christ has survived. Since the Koran is at least as important to Muslims as the bible to Christians, the influence of Muhammad through the medium of the Koran has been enormous. It is probable that the relative influence of Muhammad on Islam has been larger than the combined influence of Jesus Christ and St. Paul on Christianity. On the purely religious level, then, it seems likely that Muhammad has been as influential in human history as Jesus.

Furthermore, Muhammad (unlike Jesus) was secular as well as religious leader. In fact, as the driving force behind the Arab conquests, he may well rank as the most influential political leader of all times

Of many important historical events, one might say that they were inevitable and would have occurred even without the particular political leader who guided them. For example, the South American colonies would probably have won their independence from Spain even if Simon Bolivar had never lived. But this cannot be said of the Arab conquests. Nothing similar had occurred before Muhammad, and there is no reason to believe that the conquests would have been achieved without him. The only comparable conquests in human history are those of the Mongols in the thirteenth century, which were primarily due to the influence of Genghis Khan. These conquests, however, though more extensive than those of the Arabs, did not prove permanent, and today the only areas occupied by the Mongols are those that they held prior to the time of Genghis Khan.

It is far different with the conquests of the Arabs. From Iraq to Morocco there extends a chain of Arab nations united not merely by their faith in Islam, but also by their Arabic language, history and culture. The centrality of the Koran in the Muslim religion and the fact that it is written in Arabic have probably prevented the Arabic language from breaking up into mutually unintelligible dialects, which might otherwise have occurred in the intervening thirteen centuries. Differences and divisions between the Arab states exist, of course, and they are considerable, but the partial disunity should not blind us to the important elements of unity that have continued to exist. For instance, neither Iran nor Indonesia, both oil-producing states and both Islamic in religion, joined in the oil embargo of the winter of 1973-74. It is no coincidence that all the Arab states, and only the Arab states, participated in the embargo.

We see, then, that the Arab conquests of the seventh century have continued to play an important role in human history, down to the present day. It is this unparalleled combination of secular and religious influence which I feel entitles Muhammad to be considered the most influential single figure in human history.

## 51 'UMAR IBN AL-KHATTAB c. 586-644

'Umar ibn al-Khattab was the second, and probably the greatest, of the Moslem caliphs. He was a younger contemporary of Muhammad, and like the Prophet, was born in Mecca. The year of his birth is unknown, but was perhaps about 586

'Umar was originally one of the most bitter opponents of Muhammad and his new religion. Rather suddenly, however, 'Umar became converted to Islam, and thereafter was one of its strongest supporters. (The parallel with the conversion of St. Paul to Christianity is striking.) 'Umar became one of the closest advisors of the prophet Muhammad, and remained so throughout Muhammad's life.

In 632 Muhammad died without having named a successor. 'Umar promptly supported the candidacy of Abu Bakr, a close associate and father-in-law of the Prophet. This avoided a power struggle and enabled Abu Bakr to be generally recognized as the first

caliph (i.e., as the "successor" of Muhammad). Abu Bakr was a successful leader, but he died after serving as caliph for only two years. He had, however, specifically named 'Umar to succeed him, so once again a power struggle was avoided. 'Umar became caliph in 634, and retained power until 644, when he was assassinated in Medina by a Persian slave. On his deathbed, Omar named a committee of six persons to choose his successor, thereby again averting an armed struggle for power. The committee chose Othman, the third caliph, who ruled from 644-656

It was during the ten years of Omar's caliphate that the most important conquests of the Arabs occurred. Not long after Omar's accession, Arab armies invaded Syria and Palestine, which at that time were part of the Byzantine Empire. At the battle of Yarmuk (636), the Arabs won a crushing victory over the Byzantine forces. Damascus fell the same year, and Jerusalem surrendered two years later. By 641, the Arabs had conquered all of Palestine and Syria, and were advancing into present-day Turkey. In 639, Arab armies invaded Egypt, which has also been under Byzantine rule. Within three years, the Arab conquest of Egypt was complete.

Arab attacks upon Iraq, at that time part of the Sassanid Empire of the Persians, had commenced even before Omar took office. The key Arab victory, at the battle of Qadisiya (637) occurred during Omar's reign. By 641, all of Iraq was under Arab control. Nor was that all: Arab armies invaded Persia itself, and at the battle of Nahavend (642) they decisively defeated the forces of the last Sassanid emperor. By the time Omar died, in 644, most of western Iran had been overrun. Nor had the Arab armies run out of momentum when Omar died. In the East, they fairly soon completed the conquest of Persia, while in the West they continued their push across North Africa.

Just as important as the extent of Omar's conquests is their permanence. Iran, though its population became converted to Islam, eventually regained its independence from Arab rule. But Syria, Iraq and Egypt never did. Those countries became thoroughly Arabized and remain so to this day.

Omar, of course had to devise policies for the rule of the great empire that his armies had conquered. He decided that the Arabs were to be privileged military caste in the region they had conquered, and that they should live in garrison cities, apart from the natives. The subject people were to pay tribute to their Muslim (largely Arab) conquerors, but were otherwise to be left in peace. In particular, they were *not* to be forcibly converted to Islam. (from the above, it is clear that the Arab conquest was more a nationalist war of conquest than a holy war, although the religious aspect was certainly not lacking.)

Omar's achievements are impressive indeed. After Muhammad himself, he was the principal figure in the spread of Islam. Without his rapid conquests, it is doubtful that Islam would be nearly as widespread today as it actually is. Furthermore, most of the territories conquered during his reign has remained Arab ever since. Obviously, of course, Muhammad, who was the prime mover, should receive the bulk of the credit for

those developments. But it would be a grave mistake to ignore Omar's contribution. The conquests he made were not an automatic consequence of the inspiration provided by Muhammad. Some expansion was probably bound to occur, but not to the enormous extent that it did under Omar's brilliant leadership.

It may occasion some surprise that Omar –a figure virtually unknown in the West –has been ranked higher than such famous men as Charlemagne and Julius Caesar. However, the conquests made by the Arabs under Omar, taking into account both their size and their duration, are substantially more important than those of either Caesar or Charlemagne.

***IV. Karen Armstrong (an ex-nun) has written many books on religion, including Islam: A Short History, published last year by Modern Library. Below are two of her articles***

**1) The True, Peaceful Face Of Islam. BY KAREN ARMSTRONG  
TIME.COM October 1, 2001 Vol. 158 No. 15**

There are 1.2 billion Muslims in the world, and Islam is the world's fastest-growing religion. If the evil carnage we witnessed on Sept. 11 were typical of the faith, and Islam truly inspired and justified such violence, its growth and the increasing presence of Muslims in both Europe and the U.S. would be a terrifying prospect. Fortunately, this is not the case.

The very word Islam, which means "surrender," is related to the Arabic salam, or peace. When the Prophet Muhammad brought the inspired scripture known as the Koran to the Arabs in the early 7th century A.D., a major part of his mission was devoted precisely to bringing an end to the kind of mass slaughter we witnessed in New York City and Washington.

Pre-Islamic Arabia was caught up in a vicious cycle of warfare, in which tribe fought tribe in a pattern of vendetta and counter-vendetta. Muhammad himself survived several assassination attempts, and the early Muslim community narrowly escaped extermination by the powerful city of Mecca. The Prophet had to fight a deadly war in order to survive, but as soon as he felt his people were probably safe, he devoted his attention to building up a peaceful coalition of tribes and achieved victory by an ingenious and inspiring campaign of nonviolence. When he died in 632, he had almost single-handedly brought peace to war-torn Arabia. Because the Koran was revealed in the context of an all-out war, several passages deal with the conduct of armed struggle. Warfare was a desperate business on the Arabian Peninsula. A chieftain was not expected to spare survivors after a battle, and some of the Koranic injunctions seem to

share this spirit. Muslims are ordered by God to "slay [enemies] wherever you find them!" (4: 89). Extremists such as Osama bin Laden like to quote such verses but do so selectively. They do not include the exhortations to peace, which in almost every case follow these more ferocious passages: "Thus, if they let you be, and do not make war on you, and offer you peace, God does not allow you to harm them" (4: 90). In the Koran, therefore, the only permissible war is one of self-defense. Muslims may not begin hostilities (2: 190). Warfare is always evil, but sometimes you have to fight in order to avoid the kind of persecution that Mecca inflicted on the Muslims (2: 191; 2: 217) or to preserve decent values (4: 75; 22: 40). The Koran quotes the Torah, the Jewish scriptures, which permits people to retaliate eye for eye, tooth for tooth, but like the Gospels, the Koran suggests that it is meritorious to forgo revenge in a spirit of charity (5: 45). Hostilities must be brought to an end as quickly as possible and must cease the minute the enemy sues for peace (2: 192-3).

Islam is not addicted to war, and jihad is not one of its "pillars," or essential practices. The primary meaning of the word jihad is not "holy war" but "struggle." It refers to the difficult effort that is needed to put God's will into practice at every level--personal and social as well as political. A very important and much quoted tradition has Muhammad telling his companions as they go home after a battle, "We are returning from the lesser jihad [the battle] to the greater jihad," the far more urgent and momentous task of extirpating wrongdoing from one's own society and one's own heart. Islam did not impose itself by the sword. In a statement in which the Arabic is extremely emphatic, the Koran insists, "There must be no coercion in matters of faith!" (2: 256). Constantly Muslims are enjoined to respect Jews and Christians, the "People of the Book," who worship the same God (29: 46). In words quoted by Muhammad in one of his last public sermons, God tells all human beings, "O people! We have formed you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another" (49: 13)--not to conquer, convert, subjugate, revile or slaughter but to reach out toward others with intelligence and understanding. So why the suicide bombing, the hijacking and the massacre of innocent civilians? Far from being endorsed by the Koran, this killing violates some of its most sacred precepts. But during the 20th century, the militant form of piety often known as fundamentalism erupted in every major religion as a rebellion against modernity. Every fundamentalist movement I have studied in Judaism, Christianity and Islam is convinced that liberal, secular society is determined to wipe out religion. Fighting, as they imagine, a battle for ignoring the more compassionate principles of their aggressive passages that exist in all our scriptures, they distort the tradition.

It would be as grave a mistake to see Osama bin Laden as an authentic representative of Islam as to consider James Kopp, the alleged killer of an abortion provider in Buffalo, N.Y., a typical Christian or Baruch Goldstein, who shot 29 worshipers in the Hebron mosque in 1994 and died in the attack, a true martyr of Israel. The vast majority of Muslims, who are horrified by the atrocity of Sept. 11, must reclaim their faith from those who have so violently hijacked it.

## 2) Ghosts of Our Past

To win the war on terrorism, we first need to understand its roots.

By Karen Armstrong, January 2002

About a hundred years ago, almost every leading Muslim intellectual was in love with the West, which at that time meant Europe. America was still an unknown quantity. Politicians and journalists in India, Egypt, and Iran wanted their countries to be just like Britain or France; philosophers, poets, and even some of the ulama (religious scholars) tried to find ways of reforming Islam according to the democratic model of the West. They called for a nation state, for representational government, for the disestablishment of religion, and for constitutional rights. Some even claimed that the Europeans were better Muslims than their own fellow countrymen since the Koran teaches that the resources of a society must be shared as fairly as possible, and in the European nations there was beginning to be a more equitable sharing of wealth.

**'We cannot understand the present crisis without taking into account the painful process of modernization.'**

So what happened in the intervening years to transform all of that admiration and respect into the hatred that incited the acts of terror that we witnessed on September 11? It is not only terrorists who feel this anger and resentment, although they do so to an extreme degree. Throughout the Muslim world there is widespread bitterness against America, even among pragmatic and well-educated businessmen and professionals, who may sincerely deplore the recent atrocities, condemn them as evil, and feel sympathy with the victims, but who still resent the way the Western powers have behaved in their countries. This atmosphere is highly conducive to extremism, especially now that potential terrorists have seen the catastrophe that it is possible to inflict using only the simplest of weapons.

Even if President Bush and our allies succeed in eliminating Osama bin Laden and his network, hundreds more terrorists will rise up to take their place unless we in the West address the root cause of this hatred. This task must be an essential part of the war against terrorism.

We cannot understand the present crisis without taking into account the painful process of modernization. In the 16th century, the countries of Western Europe and, later, the American colonies embarked on what historians have called "the Great Western Transformation." Until then, all the great societies were based upon a surplus of agriculture and so were economically vulnerable; they soon found that they had grown beyond their limited resources. The new Western societies, though, were based upon technology and the constant reinvestment of capital. They found that they could

reproduce their resources indefinitely, and so could afford to experiment with new ideas and products. In Western cultures today, when a new kind of computer is invented, all the old office equipment is thrown out. In the old agrarian societies, any project that required such frequent change of the basic infrastructure was likely to be shelved. Originality was not encouraged; instead people had to concentrate on preserving what had been achieved.

So while the Great Western Transformation was exciting and gave the people of the West more freedom, it demanded fundamental change at every level: social, political, intellectual, and religious. Not surprisingly, the period of transition was traumatic and violent. As the early modern states became more centralized and efficient, draconian measures were often required to weld hitherto disparate kingdoms together. Some minority groups, such as the Catholics in England and the Jews in Spain, were persecuted or deported. There were acts of genocide, terrible wars of religion, the exploitation of workers in factories, the despoliation of the countryside, and anomie and spiritual malaise in the newly industrialized mega-cities.

Successful modern societies found, by trial and error, that they had to be democratic. The reasons were many. In order to preserve the momentum of the continually expanding economy, more people had to be involved—even in a humble capacity as printers, clerks, or factory workers. To do these jobs, they needed to be educated, and once they became educated, they began to demand political rights. In order to draw upon all of a society's resources, modern countries also found they had to bring outgroups, such as the Jews and women, into the mainstream. Countries like those in Eastern Europe that did not become secular, tolerant, and democratic fell behind. But those that did fulfill these norms, including Britain and France, became so powerful that no agrarian, traditional society, such as those of the Islamic countries, could stand against them.

Today we are witnessing similar upheaval in developing countries, including those in the Islamic world, that are making their own painful journey to modernity. In the Middle East, we see constant political turmoil. There have been revolutions, such as the 1952 coup of the Free Officers in Egypt and the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. Autocratic rulers predominate in this region because the modernizing process is not yet sufficiently advanced to provide the conditions for a fully developed democracy.

**'By the 15th century, Islam was the greatest world power—not dissimilar to the United States today.'**

In the West, we have completed the modernizing process and have forgotten what we had to go through, so we do not always understand the difficulty of this transition. We tend to imagine that we have always been in the van of progress, and we see the Islamic countries as inherently backward. We have imagined that they are held back by their

religion, and do not realize that what we are actually seeing is an imperfectly modernized society.

The Muslim world has had an especially problematic experience with modernity because its people have had to modernize so rapidly, in 50 years instead of the 300 years that it took the Western world. Nevertheless, this in itself would not have been an insuperable obstacle. Japan, for example, has created its own highly successful version of modernity. But Japan had one huge advantage over most of the Islamic countries: It had never been colonized. In the Muslim world, modernity did not bring freedom and independence; it came in a context of political subjection.

Modern society is of its very nature progressive, and by the 19th century the new economies of Western Europe needed a constantly expanding market for the goods that funded their cultural enterprises. Once the home countries were saturated, new markets were sought abroad. In 1798, Napoleon defeated the Mamelukes, Egypt's military rulers, in the Battle of the Pyramids near Cairo. Between 1830 and 1915, the European powers also occupied Algeria, Aden, Tunisia, the Sudan, Libya, and Morocco—all Muslim countries. These new colonies provided raw materials for export, which were fed into European industry. In return, they received cheap manufactured goods, which naturally destroyed local industry.

This new impotence was extremely disturbing for the Muslim countries. Until this point, Islam had been a religion of success. Within a hundred years of the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632, the Muslims ruled an empire that stretched from the Himalayas to the Pyrenees. By the 15th century, Islam was the greatest world power—not dissimilar to the United States today. When Europeans began to explore the rest of the globe at the beginning of the Great Western Transformation, they found an Islamic presence almost everywhere they went: in the Middle East, India, Persia, Southeast Asia, China, and Japan. In the 16th century, when Europe was in the early stages of its rise to power, the Ottoman Empire [which ruled Turkey, the Middle East, and North Africa] was probably the most powerful state in the world. But once the great powers of Europe had reformed their military, economic, and political structures according to the modern norm, the Islamic countries could put up no effective resistance.

Muslims would not be human if they did not resent being subjugated this way. The colonial powers treated the natives with contempt, and it was not long before Muslims discovered that their new rulers despised their religious traditions. True, the Europeans brought many improvements to their colonies, such as modern medicine, education, and technology, but these were sometimes a mixed blessing.

Thus, the Suez Canal, initiated by the French consul Ferdinand de Lesseps, was a disaster for Egypt, which had to provide all the money, labor, and materials as well as donate 200 square miles of Egyptian territory gratis, and yet the shares of the Canal

Company were all held by Europeans. The immense outlay helped to bankrupt Egypt, and this gave Britain a pretext to set up a military occupation there in 1882.

Railways were installed in the colonies, but they rarely benefited the local people. Instead they were designed to further the colonialists' own projects. And the missionary schools often taught the children to despise their own culture, with the result that many felt they belonged neither to the West nor to the Islamic world. One of the most scarring effects of colonialism is the rift that still exists between those who have had a Western education and those who have not and remain perforce stuck in the premodern ethos. To this day, the Westernized elites of these countries and the more traditional classes simply cannot understand one another. After World War II, Britain and France became secondary powers and the United States became the leader of the Western world. Even though the Islamic countries were no longer colonies but were nominally independent, America still controlled their destinies. During the Cold War, the United States sought allies in the region by supporting unsavory governments and unpopular leaders, largely to protect its oil interests. For example, in 1953, after Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi had been deposed and forced to leave Iran, he was put back on the throne in a coup engineered by British Intelligence and the CIA. The United States continued to support the Shah, even though he denied Iranians human rights that most Americans take for granted.

### **'We in the First World must develop a "one world" mentality in the coming years**

Saddam Hussein, who became the president of Iraq in 1979, was also a protégé of the United States, which literally allowed him to get away with murder, most notably the chemical attack against the Kurdish population. It was only after the invasion in 1990 of Kuwait, a critical oil-producing state, that Hussein incurred the enmity of America and its allies. Many Muslims resent the way America has continued to support unpopular rulers, such as President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and the Saudi royal family. Indeed, Osama bin Laden was himself a protégé of the West, which was happy to support and fund his fighters in the struggle for Afghanistan against Soviet Russia. Too often, the Western powers have not considered the long-term consequences of their actions. After the Soviets had pulled out of Afghanistan, for example, no help was forthcoming for the devastated country, whose ensuing chaos made it possible for the Taliban to come to power.

When the United States supports autocratic rulers, its proud assertion of democratic values has at best a hollow ring. What America seemed to be saying to Muslims was: "Yes, we have freedom and democracy, but you have to live under tyrannical governments." The creation of the state of Israel, the chief ally of the United States in the Middle East, has become a symbol of Muslim impotence before the Western powers, which seemed to feel no qualm about the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who lost their homeland and either went into exile or lived under Israeli occupation. Rightly or

wrongly, America's strong support for Israel is seen as proof that as far as the United States is concerned, Muslims are of no importance.

In their frustration, many have turned to Islam. The secularist and nationalist ideologies, which many Muslims had imported from the West, seemed to have failed them, and by the late 1960s Muslims throughout the Islamic world had begun to develop what we call fundamentalist movements.

Fundamentalism is a complex phenomenon and is by no means confined to the Islamic world. During the 20th century, most major religions developed this type of militant piety. Fundamentalism represents a rebellion against the secularist ethos of modernity. Wherever a Western-style society has established itself, a fundamentalist movement has developed alongside it. Fundamentalism is, therefore, a part of the modern scene. Although fundamentalists often claim that they are returning to a golden age of the past, these movements could have taken root in no time other than our own.

Fundamentalists believe that they are under threat. Every fundamentalist movement—in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—is convinced that modern, secular society is trying to wipe out the true faith and religious values. Fundamentalists believe that they are fighting for survival, and when people feel their backs are to the wall, they often lash out violently. This is especially the case when there is conflict in the region.

The vast majority of fundamentalists do not take part in acts of violence, of course. But those who do utterly distort the faith that they purport to defend. In their fear and anxiety about the encroachments of the secular world, fundamentalists—be they Jewish, Christian, or Muslim—tend to downplay the compassionate teachings of their scripture and overemphasize the more belligerent passages. In so doing, they often fall into moral nihilism, as is the case of the suicide bomber or hijacker. To kill even one person in the name of God is blasphemy; to massacre thousands of innocent men, women, and children is an obscene perversion of religion itself.

Osama bin Laden subscribes roughly to the fundamentalist vision of the Egyptian ideologue Sayyid Qutb, who was executed by President Nasser in 1966. Qutb developed his militant ideology in the concentration camps in which he, and thousands of other members of the Muslim Brotherhood, were imprisoned by Nasser. After 15 years of torture in these prisons, Qutb became convinced that secularism was a great evil and that it was a Muslim's first duty to overthrow rulers such as Nasser, who paid only lip service to Islam.

Bin Laden's first target was the government of Saudi Arabia; he has also vowed to overthrow the secularist governments of Egypt and Jordan and the Shiite Republic of Iran. Fundamentalism, in every faith, always begins as an intra-religious movement; it is directed at first against one's own countrymen or co-religionists. Only at a later stage do fundamentalists take on a foreign enemy, whom they feel to lie behind the ills of their

own people. Thus in 1998 bin Laden issued his fatwa against the United States. But bin Laden holds no official position in the Islamic world; he simply is not entitled to issue such a fatwa, and has, like other fundamentalists, completely distorted the essential teachings of his faith.

The Koran insists that the only just war is one of self-defense, but the terrorists would claim that it is America which is the aggressor. They would point out that during the past year, hundreds of Palestinians have died in the conflict with Israel, America's ally; that Britain and America are still bombing Iraq; and that thousands of Iraqi civilians, many of them children, have died as a result of the American-led sanctions.

None of this, of course, excuses the September atrocities. These were evil actions, and it is essential that all those implicated in any way be brought to justice. But what can we do to prevent a repetition of this tragedy? As the towers of the World Trade Center crumbled, our world changed forever, and that means that we can never see things in the same way again. These events were an "apocalypse," a "revelation"-words that literally mean an "unveiling." They laid bare a reality that we had not seen clearly before. Part of that reality was Muslim rage, but the catastrophe showed us something else as well.

In Britain, until September 11, the main news story was the problem of asylum seekers. Every night, more than 90 refugees from the developing world make desperate attempts to get into Britain. There is now a strong armed presence in England's ports. The United States and other Western countries also have a problem with illegal immigrants. It is almost as though we in the First World have been trying to keep the "other" world at bay. But as the September Apocalypse showed, if we try to ignore the plight of that other world, it will come to us in devastating ways.

So we in the First World must develop a "one world" mentality in the coming years. Americans have often assumed that they were protected by the great oceans surrounding the United States. As a result, they have not always been very well-informed about other parts of the globe. But the September Apocalypse and the events that followed have shown that this isolation has come to an end, and revealed America's terrifying vulnerability. This is deeply frightening, and it will have a profound effect upon the American psyche. But this tragedy could be turned to good, if we in the First World cultivate a new sympathy with other peoples who have experienced a similar helplessness: in Rwanda, in Lebanon, or in Srebrenica.

We cannot leave the fight against terrorism solely to our politicians or to our armies. In Europe and America, ordinary citizens must find out more about the rest of the world. We must make ourselves understand, at a deep level, that it is not only Muslims who resent America and the West; that many people in non-Muslim countries, while not condoning these atrocities, may be dry-eyed about the collapse of those giant towers,

which represented a power, wealth, and security to which they could never hope to aspire.

We must find out about foreign ideologies and other religions like Islam. And we must also acquire a full knowledge of our own governments' foreign policies, using our democratic rights to oppose them, should we deem this to be necessary. We have been warned that the war against terror may take years, and so will the development of this "one world" mentality, which could do as much, if not more, than our fighter planes to create a safer and more just world.

## **V. NARRATIVES FROM ARAB AND ISLAMIC HISTORY**

### **Muhammad and Hind:**

*This narrative points to the loving and forgiving nature of Muhammad*

In one battle during the war imposed on early Muslims by the powerful city of Mecca, Muslims were defeated and Mohammed's uncle, Hamzeh, was killed. Muhammad loved Hamzeh very dearly, and was devastated for his death. The story tells that an influential Islam-opponent woman named Hind (the mother of Muawya, the establisher of the Ommayah dynasty) was pleased that Hamzeh was killed to the extent that she mutilated his body and pulled out his liver. When Muhammad victoriously entered Mecca and saw Hind, he waved his sword to her and said, "Hind, thou liver eater!" Hind cleverly replied, "a prophet and hater?" Muhammad paused a little and said, "Go, God shall forgive you".

### **Omar Ibn-Elkhattab:**

*Several of the narratives below relate to the remarkable character of Omar Ibn-Elkhattab, the second elected official or Caliph, and the conqueror of all Middle East and Most of North Africa. Omar's modesty, just and other exemplary behavior made him a legendary figure, and all Arabs memorize many stories attesting to that. In spite of the extreme wealth of the newly formed empire, Omar never lived in palaces, but lived all his life in a tent, he did not ride a horse, but a camel, ate simple and inexpensive food, and wore very simple dresses.*

### **Is that what you are afraid to say?**

*The following narrative describes how Omar, who was initially a strong opponent of the new faith and fought fiercely the new Muslims, converted to Islam.*

One day Omar accidentally overheard a Muslim praying. The words of prayer immediately caught his attention and affection. He approached the man and asked,

"what are these words you were uttering?" The man replied, "I am a Muslim, and this is our prayer to the one and only God". In a tone of disbelief, Omar said, "is that what you are afraid to say?" "Is that why we are prosecuting you?" "I swear this is the noblest and the most moving words I ever heard." Omar then rode his camel and headed quickly to the headquarter of Muhammad, and asked to see Muhammad. Muhammad's men were terrified and rushed into Muhammad's tent to alert him to the upcoming danger. Some suggested that several men should go out to face Omar's aggression and fight him to the end. Knowing Omar's style, Muhammad said, "Omar means no harm, let him in immediately". When the two men met, Omar said, "I am convinced this is the faith every one should have, and I decided to become a Muslim in front of you, thou messenger of God." Omar then proceeded to say, "I therefore declare that there is no God but Allah, and that Muhammad is his messenger." The two men hugged each other, and Omar apologized for what he had done before. Omar then stormed out with his sword and screamed at the opponents of Islam, "he who wishes that his mother or his spouse loses him shall meet me in this valley". That is how Omar became the strongest defender of Islam.

### **The pledge of Omar to the Jerusalemites**

*The following event is taken from history books, and is not a narrative embedded in the collective memory of Arabs.*

History tells us that when the Arabian army surrounded Jerusalem in the spring of 638 AD, the bishop and community leaders of Jerusalem sent messages to the invading army indicating their wish to surrender peacefully. They insisted however, that they would give the city's keys only to Omar. Jerusalemites, like most people of the Levant, have already learned about Muhammad and his new faith, and about the legendary justice practices of the second Caliph, Omar. Omar was informed about the new development, and he decided to go to Jerusalem (his first trip outside Almadinah in Arabia since he took office). Omar arrived at Jerusalem in May, 638 AD, and the Bishops were glad to see him, and to offer him the keys to the holy city. It should be noted that the Jerusalemites, and most of the Levant population for that matter, did not consider Omar and his army as invaders, but more as blood-related savers who would liberate them from the brutal and foreign Byzantine rule. They also have heard that the people of Damascus, for example, were unharmed after they surrendered to the Arab army 2 years earlier.

Omar soon offered his famous pledge to the Jerusalemites, in which he personally guarantees the personal safety of all men, women and children, and the complete freedom and practice of religion for all Christians and Jews who elected not to convert to Islam. Churches, synagogues, and all places of worship were also protected ("*Our Allah and your Allah is one; and it is to Him we bow.*").

The clergy of Jerusalem offered Omar to have his prayer in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Christian's most holy shrine. However, Omar respectfully declined, walked hundred steps, and had his prayer in the field. He later explained that his motive for praying outside the church was his fear that a zealot Muslim ruler may later decide to build a mosque in the place of the church, just because Omar Ibn-Elkhattab had his prayer in it.

Until today the keys to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher are held with a Muslim Jerusalemite family. They open the church, clean it every morning, and lock it at night. The Muslim family looks at this symbolic duty as a privilege, and takes great honor in doing so.

### **"Since when you enslaved humans who were born free?"**

Once upon a time, during the reign of Omar, an ordinary young fellow won a horse race with the son of an influential and strong Arabian governor. The governor's son was outraged, and badly beaten the poor young fellow, repeating all the time, "how dare you beat the son of noble people?" The young fellow went all the way to Omar and complained of what had happened. Omar summoned the governor and his son to his tent, and angrily told them "How dare you enslave humans who were born free?" Omar then gave a rode to the young fellow, and said, "hit the son of noble people". After some hesitation, the young fellow hit the governor's son few times as requested by Omar. When it was over, Omar asked the young fellow to hit the father too. The young fellow refused to do so, saying that the father did no harm to him, and therefore, he will not hit him. Omar said, "you have the right to beat his father too, because he is guilty for failing to raise a mannered son".

### **Is Caesar more just than we are?**

An Egyptian Jewish lady traveled all the way to Arabia to seek Omar's justice, for the governor's men have confiscated and destroyed her home to build a mosque in its place. When Omar heard her complain he immediately picked up an old piece of bone he found nearby, wrote on it a single phrase that reads, "is Caesar more just than we are?", and asked her to take it to the governor. The woman went back with the bone to Egypt feeling frustrated for not being able to achieve a just solution to the unjust inflicted upon her. She thought to her self, the governor might even decide to kill me for bringing him a dirty piece of bone. Finally, she gathered all the courage she had, and took the piece of bone to the governor. To her astonishment, when the governor read the writing on the bone, he immediately apologized to her, and ordered a new house to be built where her old house once stood.

## **Add some medicine to your prayer**

A poor old lady was sitting near her camel that contracted a life-threatening skin disease, and praying to God to save the life of her camel, the only thing she has to support her living. Omar passed by, and realized that prayer alone would not save the life of the camel. So, he approached the lady, and impatiently said, "add some medicine to your prayer". He then went, brought some medicinal creams, and treated her camel.

## **Where is Omar?**

One of the traditional practices of Omar as a ruler was to have routine night rounds, and anonymously check on his community to ensure no one is in need or having crises. One night, he heard children crying in a tent. He peaked through the tent opening and saw four children crying, while their mother looked like she was cooking something for them. When Omar went in he saw that the cooking pot had nothing in it but some dirt. When he asked the mother to explain what was going on, she replied that she has nothing to feed her kids, and that she is just trying to convince them the food is being cooked. When Omar asked why the woman did not seek to receive aid from Omar or the treasury department, she replied, "where is Omar? He is too busy with the new wealth coming to his treasury that he forgot about his ordinary people". Of course, the woman did not realize she was talking to Omar himself. When Omar heard what the woman had said he cried, and without revealing his true identity, he went to the treasury, carried bags of flour, sugar, and bread, and brought them to the starving family.

*The following article was written around Mid December, 2001 by the Israeli Jewish writer Dr. Israel Shamir. Some people disagree with Shamir's progressive views; others find him controversial, and few even accuse him of being a 'self-hater' Jew. However, I challenge any one to prove him wrong.*

## **V. Maidens and Warriors, By Israel Shamir**

burned Rabbi Samuel Sarsa at the stake. Once, Rabbis gathered to announce a marriage contract. They read "such and such year since the Creation of the world", and this Sarsa fellow placed his hand on his beard and alluded to the world's existence since time immemorial. The Rabbi Campanton rose to his feet and exclaimed, 'Why the bush isn't consumed?[1] Let the bush burn!' They sentenced him to death by burning because he denied Creation of the World 5000 years ago, and burned him at the stake'.

If you believe Islam is the reason for Muslim terrorism, probably Judaism is the reason for Jewish terrorism. Until now, Muslims succeeded to assassinate one Israeli minister. When Jews dealt with private (as opposed to state) terror, my saintly ancestors

assassinated two Russian tsars and a whole row of government ministers, officials, ambassadors and statesmen of Britain, Germany, Sweden, Russia and Arab countries. Until nowadays, the records of terror established by Jews were not beaten, and as a proud Jew, I reject the futile efforts to pass this crowning achievement to Muslims or anybody else.

In America, Jews can't do wrong, and whoever thinks otherwise, is branded an anti-Semite. By proving the Jewish origin of the alleged faults of Islam, we therefore proved that the Islam-bashers are anti-Semites and probably hidden Holocaust deniers. Whoever doubted it, may look up the Washington Post of November 27. The co-ed by the ex-CIA chief James Woolsey illuminates a much-retouched hysterical close-up picture of the bestial and demonic Semite, dark-skinned and full-lipped cruel savage. Der Sturmer, the Nazi newspaper, would like it[iii]. The contents of the article are also eminently suitable for Der Sturmer. Woolsey, in an Orwellian-named article, Objective: Democracy, calls to 'take out Iraqi air defences and hit Iraqi ground forces' as 'we did to Afghanistan'.

The great Russian playwright, Anton ('The Seagull') Chekhov, established the law of scene: if there is a gun hanging on the wall in the first act, it will fire in the third act. Life imitates theatre, or, as Shakespeare put it, this world is but a stage. The gun of anti-Semitism fired as expected, but it shot at real Semites, the Arabs. Paradoxically, among new anti-Semites, there are many persons with Jewish names, or known by their sympathy to Jews. How could it be?

It brings us back to the adage of our sages, regarding paedophiles and proselytes. Jewish faith is extremely suspicious of proselytes. They are like scab on the head of Israel, taught Rabbi Helbo, and modern practice supports his learned opinion. Judaism is too complicated to receive in mature age. People born and raised as religious Jews got used to be the Chosen folk, and take it easy, but neophytes go dizzy at the thought.

It is not strange. The true English aristocrat Tony Benn supports the rights of ordinary folk, while freshly created parvenu Conrad Black promotes the oppression of Europeans and Muslims alike in his numerous newspapers. Some of the worst racists in Hebron, this frontline of Israeli apartheid are actually proselytes who took literally some risky Biblical ideas. Witness the converted American Gentile Nazi who took the name of Eli Hazeev (the Wolf) and was slain by Palestinian guerrillas, or this scourge of cyberspace, Dr Andrew Mathis who converted and began to defend his version of Judaism on various Internet localities.

A reader sent me a disturbing letter: 'my sister who converted to Judaism years ago (although we're WASPs) has gone over the edge. Last night when I asked her to interrupt her niggerization of Arabs long enough to cite just one example, anytime in history when Israel did something anything wrong (pointing out that peace cannot possibly be attained when one party thinks itself totally OK, and thinks the other party is completely at fault), the best she could do was "collateral" damage- id the unintentional bombing of civilians when a "legitimate" target was the intent. My sister is quite active in the Jewish community in St. Louis, and perhaps in a position to do a fair amount of damage to whatever chances remain for world peace'.

Yes, Rabbi Helbo had a good reason for his suspicion. Real Jews knew they live in real world, and left their fantasies for Sabbath. They remained humble, studied Talmud and did not try to find a modern equivalent of Amalek or the Red Heifer, to retake the Holy Land by force or stealth, or preach hate of Gentile. They knew: these concepts should be left untouched as hidden files in the Windows operational system. They are there for anhistoric reason and one should not meddle with them. Neophytes lack this humbleness.

It is not a question of race: neophytes, whether of Jewish or Gentile extraction, are equally blind to reason. That is why the ferocious Neo-Cons of America, Gentile Israel-firsters like Jeanne Kirkpatrick and secular Jews like infamous Podgoretz, her mentor from Commentary, relentlessly push for destruction of the Islamic world and poison the minds of Americans.

Islam is a form of Christianity particularly close to the Jews. While Eastern Orthodox Church was influenced by Greek culture, and Catholics partook of Roman world, Islam returned the ideas of Christianity into the Semitic milieu. The Prophet, peace upon him, upheld the Jewish concepts of strict monotheism, of fear of graven images, of protectiveness towards women and integrated them with the universal message of Christ and apostles. The cowardly enemies of Islam besmirch it, as they fear its unbroken spirit, courage of its warriors and chastity of its maidens.

Israel Shamir is an Israeli writer living in Jaffa. His other writings can be found on his site [www.israelshamir.com](http://www.israelshamir.com), his email: [shamir@israelshamir.com](mailto:shamir@israelshamir.com) To be removed from this list, reply with subject 'remove', to join it, write with the subject 'subscribe'.

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[1] Alluding to the verse in Exodous 3:3  
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[i] Twelve in some manuscripts.

[ii] "Osama Bin Laden's shifty, oily, Semitic features leer from every news bulletin, in a barely concealed appeal to the American viewers' racism. Dr Joseph Goebbels could not have done it better", reported from America the British historian, David Irving. He should know, he was a biographer of Goebbels.

*Dear friends,*

*In these days of endless vilification of Islam, it makes sense to know answers to some standard anti-Muslim accusations. This piece is one of the best and brightest; well written and enlightening, without too much of apologetics.*

*Israel Shamir*

[Interpretation and Exceptionalism](#), by Asma Barlas [i]

The title of my talk is "On Interpretation and Exceptionalism" and it deals both with the way in which most people in the U.S. perceive Islam, and the way in which Islam—in particular, its scripture, the Qur'an—deals with the concept of jihad.

As someone who has been asked to speak about Islam only a couple of times in the ten years I've been at Ithaca College, it's obvious to me that this new interest in it is the result not of positive developments but of people's desire to make sense of the attacks on the U.S. allegedly by a group of Muslim men, which has left them fearful, angry, and bewildered. The irony is that looking to Islam alone may not provide the answers, or the closure, that people are seeking.

As Robin Wright says, "mining the Quran for incendiary quotes is essentially pointless. Religions evolve, and there is usually enough ambiguity in their founding scriptures to let them evolve in any direction. If Osama Bin Laden were a Christian, and he still wanted to destroy the World Trade Center, he would cite Jesus' rampage against the money-changers. If he didn't want to destroy the World Trade Center, he could stress the Sermon on the Mount."

Even if one doesn't agree with this view, the point is that every religion—or secular ideology, for that matter—offers the possibility of violence and peace, oppression and liberation, depending on who is interpreting it, how, and in what particular contexts. As I always say, there is little family resemblance between modern liberation theology and the Christianity of the Crusades, the Inquisition, and the Conquest.

And yet, ignoring that every religion is open to multiple interpretations, many people are attacking Muslims for making "it sound like there are two versions of the Koran floating around out there. If so, what is the difference between the Koran that the Terrorists are reading, and the Koran that the rest of the Muslim world is reading?. I need to have the 'real' Islam please stand up." (This is from an article forwarded to me by a friend with no title or by-line).

The same author—who says he's a Catholic—also says he doesn't "want to hear [the] history about the Crusades, or the U.S. foreign policy crap, or comparisons [of Islam] to Christianity and Judaism." Thus, while wanting Muslims to explain which Qur'an we are reading and which is the real Islam, he himself chooses not to explain the difference between the bible that the Crusaders and Conquistadors were reading and the bible he has been reading, nor to convince others why his Christianity is the "real" one.

Such a strategy not only lays upon Muslims a burden that believers in other religions refuse to bear themselves, but it also obscures the fact that the bloodiest conflicts, like the two World Wars, have had secular, not religious roots. Even those conflicts we think of as religious can be shown to be about power and resources, not merely ideology. This is no less true of the Crusades, than it is of the conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Ireland, or Jews and Muslims in the Middle East, or even the attacks of September 11th.

We might, therefore, be better served by trying to understand the political and economic conditions that engender conflicts and religious extremism; but this would require us to focus on the nature of our own foreign policies and also to recognize the

complicity of secularism, capitalism, and liberal democracy in creating a global division of labor that, in privileging the few at the expense of the many, has provided the breeding grounds for much of modern day extremism, religious or not.

Second, even if we are to refocus attention away from politics and economics by looking only to religion to explain the events of 9/11th, I doubt that the confusion, hostility and fear most people are feeling these days are conducive to understanding Islam or for engaging in an honest dialogue with Muslims.

Ironically, even those people who are not necessarily angry with Islam will find it hard to have such a dialogue so as long as they continue to assume that learning about Islam will enable them to make sense of 9/11 inasmuch as this expectation arises in the assumption that there is a connection between Islam and terrorism.

It is this assumption that reveals the extent to which people think of Islam as exceptional and, in so thinking, do deep epistemic violence to it. Let me clarify with an example.

### Terrorism and Islam's Exceptionalism

Modern forms of terrorism were introduced into the Middle East in the 1940s by Jewish groups in then British-occupied Palestine. It was the Irgun, the Stern gang, and the Hagana that began the practice of bombing "gathering places [and] crowded Arab areas [in an attempt to] terrorize the Arab community" (Smith, 1992: 19; 140). The Stern gang even attacked Jewish banks, resulting in "Jewish loss of life" (120). The Irgun, as we know, "slaughtered about 250 men, women and children whose mutilated bodies were stuffed down wells" in the village of Dair Yassin (143).

Even though many such terror tactics continued until fairly recent times, people in the U.S. did not put world Jewry on call by asking Jews to explain what Judaism has to say about killing innocent civilians. People may have denounced these terrorist groups -freedom fighters to many- but they did not call on all Jews to explain which Torah or Talmud the Jewish terrorists were reading, or asked the "real" Judaism to "stand up."

Why, then, this assault on Muslims to explain what their "bible" -as that savant, Larry King, calls the Qur'an- teaches about violence? (He even badgered Hanan Ashrawi, assuming that because she's Palestinian, she's a Muslim, even though she's not.) The same people who say (like the anonymous author I quoted earlier does) that they don't give a "rat's -" about Islam nonetheless are shrieking for the "real" Islam to stand up!

In an atmosphere where only Muslims are expected to keep protesting our humanity and to defend our religion, my politics dictated that I should not speak at all in any forum on Islam. But, my religion teaches the jihad of knowledge and, as a Muslim, this jihad is obligatory for me. That is why I am here today, to speak to you about jihad.

### Jihad in the Qur'an

The word jihad means "striving" or "struggle," and not "war." So, the Qur'an speaks of the jihad of the soul, of the tongue, of the pen, of faith, of morality, and so on. This is the "greater jihad" and it is what allows us Muslims to actualize our identity as Muslims.

There is also the jihad of arms whose aim is to struggle in the cause of God; this is the "smaller jihad" and it permits fighting as a means of self-protection. There are a number of verses in the Qur'an about this form of jihad and I will quote two of the main ones:

"Permission to fight is given to those against whom war is being wrongfully waged -and verily God has indeed the power to succor them—those who have been driven from their homelands against all right for no other reason than their saying, 'Our Sustainer is God.' For, if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, all monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques -in all of which God's name is abundantly extolled- would surely have been destroyed [before] now" (22: 39-40).

The second verse is, "fight in God's cause against those who wage war against you, but do not commit aggression—for, verily, God does not love aggressors. And slay them wherever you may come upon them, and drive them away from wherever they drove you away—for oppression is even worse than killing" (2:190).

Although references to killing make most of us recoil, it's important not to let our horror become an alibi for refusing to recognize some transparent truths.

First, one can kill huge numbers of people, while also avoiding any casualties to oneself, without even fighting a war. Consider the economic sanctions on Iraq that are killing off nearly 5,000 children a month, all because our government opposes one man. My point is not to justify war, but to draw attention to one of its faces that we routinely ignore.

Second, Islam did not invent war; it merely teaches a specific approach to it. This approach forbids aggression, or attacking one's enemies unawares, and it also instructs Muslims to cease hostilities if aggression against them ceases. The last point may seem unimportant until one recalls that the U.S. destroyed Nagasaki and Hiroshima after the Japanese had broadcast their terms of surrender. More recently, the U.S. army shot about 100,000 Iraqi troops retreating from the battlefield during the Gulf War, with senior U.S. generals calling it a "duck shoot."

Third, it is not just any type of aggression Muslims must resist, but religious persecution. Thus, jihad is not for extending territories, protecting political or economic interests, or killing one's foes, reasons for which all nations, including Muslim, generally go to war.

Fourth, the Qur'an also teaches the precepts of forgiveness and peace. As it says, "Since good and evil cannot be equal, repel thou evil with something that is better, and lo, he between whom and thy self was enmity may then become as though he had always been close unto thee, a true friend" (41:34); and "when you are greeted with a greeting of peace, answer with an even better greeting, or at least the like thereof" (4: 86).

Of course, quoting verses selectively from the Qur'an is not the best way to convince people of the truth of one's argument, much less to impart a holistic understanding of its teachings, but such are the limitations of a ten-minute talk. The point I want to

stress is that the Qur'an asks us to read it for its best meanings and it defines Islam as "sirat ul mustaqeem," the straight path, the middle path, the path of moderation, not excess.

There is no question that some Muslims have fallen into extremism and excess and there is also no question that we need to do a better job of reading the Qur'an for liberation than we have done so far. This requires us to struggle constantly to try and redefine our understanding of it. That is why I'm never averse to anyone wanting to know what Islam "really" teaches because such questions can help in that definitional struggle, or jihad.

But, unfortunately, many people who are beating up on Muslims today to identify the "real" Islam are not really interested in our doing so; rather, they use such questions to cast the proverbial first stone at us. To such people, I would say, you have no right to ask this question until you also are willing to assume the responsibility of asking "which is the 'real' U.S.: the one that advocates freedom, civil liberties, and democracy at home, or the one that carries out wars and violence and repression abroad?" Surely, there is much to be learned by asking the "real" U.S. also to "please stand up."

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[i] Talk given at Ithaca College, Oct. 29th, 2001

## **Ghosts of Our Past. By Karen Armstrong, January 2002**

### **To win the war on terrorism, we first need to understand its roots**

About a hundred years ago, almost every leading Muslim intellectual was in love with the West, which at that time meant Europe. America was still an unknown quantity. Politicians and journalists in India, Egypt, and Iran wanted their countries to be just like Britain or France; philosophers, poets, and even some of the ulama (religious scholars) tried to find ways of reforming Islam according to the democratic model of the West. They called for a nation state, for representational government, for the disestablishment of religion, and for constitutional rights. Some even claimed that the Europeans were better Muslims than their own fellow countrymen since the Koran teaches that the resources of a society must be shared as fairly as possible, and in the European nations there was beginning to be a more equitable sharing of wealth.

**'We cannot understand the present crisis without taking into account the painful process of modernization.'**

So what happened in the intervening years to transform all of that admiration and respect into the hatred that incited the acts of terror that we witnessed on September 11? It is not only terrorists who feel this anger and resentment, although they do so to an extreme degree. Throughout the Muslim world there is widespread bitterness against America, even among pragmatic and well-educated businessmen and professionals, who may sincerely deplore the recent atrocities, condemn them as evil, and feel sympathy with the victims, but who still resent the way the Western powers have behaved in their countries. This atmosphere is highly conducive to extremism, especially now that potential terrorists have seen the catastrophe that it is possible to inflict using only the simplest of weapons.

Even if President Bush and our allies succeed in eliminating Osama bin Laden and his network, hundreds more terrorists will rise up to take their place unless we in the West address the root cause of this hatred. This task must be an essential part of the war against terrorism.

We cannot understand the present crisis without taking into account the painful process of modernization. In the 16th century, the countries of Western Europe and, later, the American colonies embarked on what historians have called "the Great Western Transformation." Until then, all the great societies were based upon a surplus of agriculture and so were economically vulnerable; they soon found that they had grown beyond their limited resources. The new Western societies, though, were based upon technology and the constant reinvestment of capital. They found that they could reproduce their resources indefinitely, and so could afford to experiment with new ideas and products. In Western cultures today, when a new kind of computer is invented, all the old office equipment is thrown out. In the old agrarian societies, any project that required such frequent change of the basic infrastructure was likely to be shelved. Originality was not encouraged; instead people had to concentrate on preserving what had been achieved.

So while the Great Western Transformation was exciting and gave the people of the West more freedom, it demanded fundamental change at every level: social, political, intellectual, and religious. Not surprisingly, the period of transition was traumatic and violent. As the early modern states became more centralized and efficient, draconian measures were often required to weld hitherto disparate kingdoms together. Some minority groups, such as the Catholics in England and the Jews in Spain, were persecuted or deported. There were acts of genocide, terrible wars of religion, the exploitation of workers in factories, the despoliation of the countryside, and anomie and spiritual malaise in the newly industrialized mega-cities.

Successful modern societies found, by trial and error, that they had to be democratic. The reasons were many. In order to preserve the momentum of the continually expanding economy, more people had to be involved—even in a humble capacity as printers, clerks, or factory workers. To do these jobs, they needed to be educated, and once they became educated, they began to demand political rights. In order to draw upon all of a society's resources, modern countries also found they had to bring outgroups, such as the Jews and women, into the mainstream. Countries like those in Eastern Europe that did not become secular, tolerant, and democratic fell behind. But those that did fulfill these norms, including Britain and France, became so powerful

that no agrarian, traditional society, such as those of the Islamic countries, could stand against them.

Today we are witnessing similar upheaval in developing countries, including those in the Islamic world, that are making their own painful journey to modernity. In the Middle East, we see constant political turmoil. There have been revolutions, such as the 1952 coup of the Free Officers in Egypt and the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979. Autocratic rulers predominate in this region because the modernizing process is not yet sufficiently advanced to provide the conditions for a fully developed democracy.

**'By the 15th century, Islam was the greatest world power-not dissimilar to the United States today.'**

In the West, we have completed the modernizing process and have forgotten what we had to go through, so we do not always understand the difficulty of this transition. We tend to imagine that we have always been in the van of progress, and we see the Islamic countries as inherently backward. We have imagined that they are held back by their religion, and do not realize that what we are actually seeing is an imperfectly modernized society.

The Muslim world has had an especially problematic experience with modernity because its people have had to modernize so rapidly, in 50 years instead of the 300 years that it took the Western world. Nevertheless, this in itself would not have been an insuperable obstacle. Japan, for example, has created its own highly successful version of modernity. But Japan had one huge advantage over most of the Islamic countries: It had never been colonized. In the Muslim world, modernity did not bring freedom and independence; it came in a context of political subjection.

Modern society is of its very nature progressive, and by the 19th century the new economies of Western Europe needed a constantly expanding market for the goods that funded their cultural enterprises. Once the home countries were saturated, new markets were sought abroad. In 1798, Napoleon defeated the Mamelukes, Egypt's military rulers, in the Battle of the Pyramids near Cairo. Between 1830 and 1915, the European powers also occupied Algeria, Aden, Tunisia, the Sudan, Libya, and Morocco-all Muslim countries. These new colonies provided raw materials for export, which were fed into European industry. In return, they received cheap manufactured goods, which naturally destroyed local industry.

This new impotence was extremely disturbing for the Muslim countries. Until this point, Islam had been a religion of success. Within a hundred years of the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632, the Muslims ruled an empire that stretched from the Himalayas to the Pyrenees. By the 15th century, Islam was the greatest world power-not dissimilar to the United States today. When Europeans began to explore the rest of the globe at the beginning of the Great Western Transformation, they found an Islamic presence almost everywhere they went: in the Middle East, India, Persia,

Southeast Asia, China, and Japan. In the 16th century, when Europe was in the early stages of its rise to power, the Ottoman Empire [which ruled Turkey, the Middle East, and North Africa] was probably the most powerful state in the world. But once the great powers of Europe had reformed their military, economic, and political structures according to the modern norm, the Islamic countries could put up no effective resistance.

Muslims would not be human if they did not resent being subjugated this way. The colonial powers treated the natives with contempt, and it was not long before Muslims discovered that their new rulers despised their religious traditions. True, the Europeans brought many improvements to their colonies, such as modern medicine, education, and technology, but these were sometimes a mixed blessing.

Thus, the Suez Canal, initiated by the French consul Ferdinand de Lesseps, was a disaster for Egypt, which had to provide all the money, labor, and materials as well as donate 200 square miles of Egyptian territory gratis, and yet the shares of the Canal Company were all held by Europeans. The immense outlay helped to bankrupt Egypt, and this gave Britain a pretext to set up a military occupation there in 1882.

Railways were installed in the colonies, but they rarely benefited the local people. Instead they were designed to further the colonialists' own projects. And the missionary schools often taught the children to despise their own culture, with the result that many felt they belonged neither to the West nor to the Islamic world. One of the most scarring effects of colonialism is the rift that still exists between those who have had a Western education and those who have not and remain perforce stuck in the premodern ethos. To this day, the Westernized elites of these countries and the more traditional classes simply cannot understand one another. **After World War II, Britain and France became secondary powers and the United States became the leader of the Western world.** Even though the Islamic countries were no longer colonies but were nominally independent, America still controlled their destinies. During the Cold War, the United States sought allies in the region by supporting unsavory governments and unpopular leaders, largely to protect its oil interests. For example, in 1953, after Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi had been deposed and forced to leave Iran, he was put back on the throne in a coup engineered by British Intelligence and the CIA. The United States continued to support the Shah, even though he denied Iranians human rights that most Americans take for granted.

**'We in the First World must develop a "one world" mentality in the coming years.'**

Saddam Hussein, who became the president of Iraq in 1979, was also a protégé of the United States, which literally allowed him to get away with murder, most notably the chemical attack against the Kurdish population. It was only after the invasion in 1990 of Kuwait, a critical oil-producing state, that Hussein incurred the enmity of America and its allies. Many Muslims resent the way America has continued to support unpopular rulers, such as President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt and the Saudi

royal family. Indeed, Osama bin Laden was himself a protégé of the West, which was happy to support and fund his fighters in the struggle for Afghanistan against Soviet Russia. Too often, the Western powers have not considered the long-term consequences of their actions. After the Soviets had pulled out of Afghanistan, for example, no help was forthcoming for the devastated country, whose ensuing chaos made it possible for the Taliban to come to power.

When the United States supports autocratic rulers, its proud assertion of democratic values has at best a hollow ring. What America seemed to be saying to Muslims was: "Yes, we have freedom and democracy, but you have to live under tyrannical governments." The creation of the state of Israel, the chief ally of the United States in the Middle East, has become a symbol of Muslim impotence before the Western powers, which seemed to feel no qualm about the hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who lost their homeland and either went into exile or lived under Israeli occupation. Rightly or wrongly, America's strong support for Israel is seen as proof that as far as the United States is concerned, Muslims are of no importance.

In their frustration, many have turned to Islam. The secularist and nationalist ideologies, which many Muslims had imported from the West, seemed to have failed them, and by the late 1960s Muslims throughout the Islamic world had begun to develop what we call fundamentalist movements.

Fundamentalism is a complex phenomenon and is by no means confined to the Islamic world. During the 20th century, most major religions developed this type of militant piety. Fundamentalism represents a rebellion against the secularist ethos of modernity. Wherever a Western-style society has established itself, a fundamentalist movement has developed alongside it. Fundamentalism is, therefore, a part of the modern scene. Although fundamentalists often claim that they are returning to a golden age of the past, these movements could have taken root in no time other than our own.

Fundamentalists believe that they are under threat. Every fundamentalist movement-in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam-is convinced that modern, secular society is trying to wipe out the true faith and religious values. Fundamentalists believe that they are fighting for survival, and when people feel their backs are to the wall, they often lash out violently. This is especially the case when there is conflict in the region.

The vast majority of fundamentalists do not take part in acts of violence, of course. But those who do utterly distort the faith that they purport to defend. In their fear and anxiety about the encroachments of the secular world, fundamentalists-be they Jewish, Christian, or Muslim-tend to downplay the compassionate teachings of their scripture and overemphasize the more belligerent passages. In so doing, they often fall into moral nihilism, as is the case of the suicide bomber or hijacker. To kill even one person in the name of God is blasphemy; to massacre thousands of innocent men, women, and children is an obscene perversion of religion itself.

Osama bin Laden subscribes roughly to the fundamentalist vision of the Egyptian ideologue Sayyid Qutb, who was executed by President Nasser in 1966. Qutb developed his militant ideology in the concentration camps in which he, and thousands of other members of the Muslim Brotherhood, were imprisoned by Nasser. After 15

years of torture in these prisons, Qutb became convinced that secularism was a great evil and that it was a Muslim's first duty to overthrow rulers such as Nasser, who paid only lip service to Islam.

Bin Laden's first target was the government of Saudi Arabia; he has also vowed to overthrow the secularist governments of Egypt and Jordan and the Shiite Republic of Iran. Fundamentalism, in every faith, always begins as an intra-religious movement; it is directed at first against one's own countrymen or co-religionists. Only at a later stage do fundamentalists take on a foreign enemy, whom they feel to lie behind the ills of their own people. Thus in 1998 bin Laden issued his fatwa against the United States. But bin Laden holds no official position in the Islamic world; he simply is not entitled to issue such a fatwa, and has, like other fundamentalists, completely distorted the essential teachings of his faith.

The Koran insists that the only just war is one of self-defense, but the terrorists would claim that it is America which is the aggressor. They would point out that during the past year, hundreds of Palestinians have died in the conflict with Israel, America's ally; that Britain and America are still bombing Iraq; and that thousands of Iraqi civilians, many of them children, have died as a result of the American-led sanctions.

None of this, of course, excuses the September atrocities. These were evil actions, and it is essential that all those implicated in any way be brought to justice. But what can we do to prevent a repetition of this tragedy? As the towers of the World Trade Center crumbled, our world changed forever, and that means that we can never see things in the same way again. These events were an "apocalypse," a "revelation"- words that literally mean an "unveiling." They laid bare a reality that we had not seen clearly before. Part of that reality was Muslim rage, but the catastrophe showed us something else as well.

In Britain, until September 11, the main news story was the problem of asylum seekers. Every night, more than 90 refugees from the developing world make desperate attempts to get into Britain. There is now a strong armed presence in England's ports. The United States and other Western countries also have a problem with illegal immigrants. It is almost as though we in the First World have been trying to keep the "other" world at bay. But as the September Apocalypse showed, if we try to ignore the plight of that other world, it will come to us in devastating ways.

So we in the First World must develop a "one world" mentality in the coming years. Americans have often assumed that they were protected by the great oceans surrounding the United States. As a result, they have not always been very well-informed about other parts of the globe. But the September Apocalypse and the events that followed have shown that this isolation has come to an end, and revealed America's terrifying vulnerability. This is deeply frightening, and it will have a profound effect upon the American psyche. But this tragedy could be turned to good, if we in the First World cultivate a new sympathy with other peoples who have experienced a similar helplessness: in Rwanda, in Lebanon, or in Srebrenica.

We cannot leave the fight against terrorism solely to our politicians or to our armies. In Europe and America, ordinary citizens must find out more about the rest of the world.

We must make ourselves understand, at a deep level, that it is not only Muslims who resent America and the West; that many people in non-Muslim countries, while not condoning these atrocities, may be dry-eyed about the collapse of those giant towers, which represented a power, wealth, and security to which they could never hope to aspire.

We must find out about foreign ideologies and other religions like Islam. And we must also acquire a full knowledge of our own governments' foreign policies, using our democratic rights to oppose them, should we deem this to be necessary. We have been warned that the war against terror may take years, and so will the development of this "one world" mentality, which could do as much, if not more, than our fighter planes to create a safer and more just world.

*Karen Armstrong is the author of The Battle for God: A History of Fundamentalism and Islam: A Brief History.*

**Important distinctions. By: ROBERT MALLEY**

**Islam has been used as a channel of pretest against repressive regimes, and some terrorists are Muslims, but there's no such thing as Islamic terrorism**

The question of Islam is back, and, in the United States at least, that generally has not been very good news for Muslims. American pre-occupation with things Islamic is episodic, to say the least. It seems to take moments of extreme gravity - the 1979 revolution in Iran and the ensuing hostage crisis; the horrendous terror-1st attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon - to awaken Americans' dormant Interest. Little wonder, then, that Islam has been at the receiving end of so much stereotyping - depicted as intolerant, reactionary, fanatical and, when resisted, violent. Such caricature notions of Islam are rarely far from the surface.

So much of what is thought and said barely resists even cursory analysis. There is, of course, no Islamic monopoly on either violence or terrorism. Americans tend to forget that for long stretches of the 20th century, groups that resorted to terror could be found in Europe (the Baader Meinhof in Germany, Red Brigades in Italy, Action Directe in France), Latin America (the Shining Path in Peru, the Monteneros in Argentina) and other non-Muslim countries, such as Sri Lanka and Japan. Indeed, earlier expressions of Palestinian terrorism were the province of secular, not religious, organizations.

Moreover, the notion of a monolithic Islam defies reality and common sense.

It is shared by roughly a billion believers, spans several continents and dozens of societies. It encompasses a wide range of different, often contradictory at times incompatible theories and practices. As a religious belief system, it enjoys more than enough latitude to justify openness to the outside world and seclusion from it; political conservatism and militancy; jihad as an effort to redeem oneself and jihad as a war against others.

## WHY NOW?

And yet, a question looms. From sui-cide bombers in Israel to political murders in Egypt to indiscriminate and grisly assassinations in Algeria, a re-curent theme appears to be the persis-tence of a strand of Islam that has opt-ed for religious violence. If the ques-tion is not why Islam begets violence -for it does not - then it must be why vi-olence has donned the garb of Islam, and why now.

My own research on Algeria - home to some of the deadliest acts of terror of late-suggests some clues.

To begin, in so much of the Muslim world, the absence of democracy has caused a vacuum that Islamic militants alone were able to fill. While governments silenced all dissident political speech, Islam enjoyed the use of an in-violable space (the mosque), a tribune (the preacher's pulpit) and a sacred pub-lic language (religious discourse). Forms of public discontent thus have tended to take on religious accents.

And there has been plenty of discon-tent to go around. Its roots lie in political repression, economic dislocation and in-equality; and the alienation of the urban young, intellectuals and members of the middle class, threatened by the globalization of their domestic economy and yearning for the certainty and stability that seems so much a thing of the past.

Islam having thus become the privi-leged channel of protest, both its char-acteristics and the repressive condi-tions under which it has had to operate contributed to the radicalization of politics and, in some instances, to the resort to violence. These characteris-tics and conditions include its moral language and its fusion of the political with the religious, which could turn earthly arguments about right and wrong into holy debates on good and evil; its classical imagery of warfare, conquest and martyrdom; its self-per-ceived status as an oppressed religion long besieged by non-Muslims (from the Crusades to colonialism to Western support for Israel to the U.S.-led war against Iraq); the state's suppression of almost all forms of peaceful dissent.

All this helped transform Islamic movements into vehicles of radical insurgency - against repressive regional regimes and against the American su-per power that backs them.

## RADICAL ISLAMISM

The rise of radical, anti-Western Is-lamism is the product of several mental associations, whether justified or not of Westernization with conspicuous consumption and widening inequities; of economic Injustice with faithlessness; of faith (Islamic, that is) with social re-demption and political salvation.

There is a leap –a colossal one- from these feelings of hostility and even vio-lence that exist among the many to the abhorrent mass-casualty terror car-ried out by the very few. The terrorist groups succeeded in laying hands on the resentment and the

frustration; what they then choose to do with both is something hardly any of us can genuinely comprehend.

There is no such thing as Islamic terrorism. There are Muslims who happen to be angry and terrorists who happen to be Muslim. That is a distinction that makes all the difference.

- Robert Malley is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington, DC. WASHINGTON POST