

Religion and Development Revisited: Comparing Islam and Christianity With Reference to the Case of Iran

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ABSTRACT

To explain the level of difference between Muslim societies and the West, many refer to religious sources as if Christianity caused modern development; and Islam all present misfortunes. This paper challenges this common view of religious determinism arguing that rather than Christianity or Islam per se, it is the variation in social, historical, and ecological conditions that led to the persistence of integration of religion and state hence underdevelopment in many Muslim countries. Neither the realm of Islam was always behind nor was the land of Christianity always at the forefront. Major characteristics such as violence and sexism have been common in Islam and Christianity as well as other religions. That Islam emerged in violence and Christianity against state violence does not represent the entire history of these religions. Jihad in Islam and Crusade in Christianity justify massive violence in favor of their interests. Despite violent resistance of the church against modern reforms, Western societies succeeded in achieving a new civilization and forced the church into its domain of faith, rituals, and moral responsibilities, while Muslim societies have not succeeded yet in achieving similar developments needed to reform Islam. Consequently, unlike the West, religion in Muslim societies still continues to play its traditional roles, including exertion of political power that prevents structural and institutional changes and, most notably, the recognition of individuals' rights needed for modernity. Religious reforms, including separation from the state as a requirement for modern development and democracy in the Muslim world, must begin with multidimensional societal changes with the engagement of the global community.

Introduction: Why Does Theocracy Persist in the Islamic World?

There is little disagreement among social scientists that the integration of state and religion, which usually results in a theocracy or semi-theocracy, is a serious hindrance to socioeconomic development and progress (Weber 1963; Turner 1974; Kurtz 1995; Ganji 2000). This is clearly evident in the experiences of many Islamic societies where religious states have hindered democratization and the

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overall development of society. Such a hindrance has not been endemic to Muslim or Islamic societies. The stagnation of Western civilization for a long period of time (between the fifth and thirteenth centuries) too, was due to the integration of church and state power. Joseph Stayer (1970) believes that the Church contained some characteristics of a state. The Church was a permanent institution, and organized as a judicial system. Bernard Lewis (2002a) writes that "the conversion of Christianity in the early fourth century and the establishment of Christianity as the state religion" enabled Christians to have "access to the coercive power of the state" (p. 98). By the ninth century and expansion of its territory the church proclaimed the Pope as the absolute ruler of the world (Tabatabaei 2001). However, with the emergence of city-states in France and Italy in the fourteenth century, and intellectual development (e.g., Niccolo Machiavelli's book, *The Prince* in the sixteenth century) in favor of secularization of state, absolute authority of the Pope and the religious law were seriously questioned and created a situation for institutional change (Tabatabaei 2001). At the time of secularization in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries these responsibilities were transferred to a secular state. This change occurred only through "the bloody religious wars of the sixteen and seventeen centuries, which almost compelled Christians to secularize their states and societies to escape from the vicious circle of persecution and conflict" (Lewis 2002a: 103-4).

Despite the common perception, however, development in the West was not due to the separation of the church and state; on the contrary, certain changes in society—primarily the emergence of industrial capitalism—resulted in this separation. What caused the emergence of industrial capitalism? Many social scientists believe that rationalism was the main factor behind capitalist development in the West (Collins 1980). As rationalism opened the path to capitalism, progress, modernity, and industrialization in the Christian West, the continuation of the predominance of religiosity of power in the Islamic East (the Ottoman Empire and the Safavid state) kept it lagging behind. Was this contrast in the course of development between the two the result of some essential differences between Christianity and Islam, rendering the former open to, but the latter incompatible with, rationalism and modernity? As Lapidus argues, while there is consensus over the role of rationalism in capitalist development, there is no commonly accepted explanation as to what caused the prevalence of rationalism in the first place (Lapidus 1975).

Focusing on the case of Iran as a predominantly Muslim society, this paper attempts to challenge religious determinism in general and Islamic determinism in particular. This paper does not deal specifically with "underdevelopment," but rather with the question of why socioeconomic development has differed in the (Christian) West and the (Islamic) East, and why the integration of religion and state has been so persistent in the Islamic world but not in the Christian (Western) world. Rather than perceiving the role of Islam in socioeconomic development as essentially different from that of

Christianity, this study emphasizes the role of broader societal and historical differences rooted in the objective and material conditions of the societies in which Islam and Christianity were born or fostered. This paper will argue that rather than Religion per se, it is the variations in societal, historical, and ecological conditions that led to the persistence of integration of religion and state and underdevelopment in many Muslim countries. For example, the Quran and *hadith* (sayings attributed to Prophet Muhammad) provide the foundations of Islamic "laws" (*fiqh*). This prevalence of religious law is not unique to Muslim societies but also can be found in many places in the East, so that Max Weber was amazed at how the entire history of the East was the history of religion (Weber 1963). Roman law, the foundation of laws in the West, was secular. Laws in the Middle East originated in religion and therefore, presumed unchangeable (Bloch 1961). This pattern, interestingly, has had its basis in the land tenure system so that invisible religious laws have run even the secular states in the Middle East (Alamdari 2004b). In Islam, sovereignty belongs to God (Amir Arjomand 1993). This is illustrated in the Constitutional Revolution of Iran (1905-1909) where, in the absence of a secular native legal system, new laws were adopted from the West (Belgium) in order to construct the constitution. To protect Islam, however, an article was added to the constitutional laws in order to create a watchdog group composed of five *mujtaheds* (high clerics) to monitor the Majlis bills and prevent passage of any law contradicting the Shari'a. Religious opponents of the constitutional laws, such as Sheikh Fazlollah Nuri, opposed the secular laws as an innovation of those societies lacking divine laws (Nuri in Aabaadian 1374 [1996]).

The integration of religion and state in the historical process of Iran is one of the most important factors in the slow development of the country. This has been a product of the subsistence mode of production governing Iran. In order to analyze the role of religion in the development or underdevelopment of Iranian society and its comparison with the West, a number of assumptions or questions should be addressed first. Is there a causal relationship between Christianity and development in the West, and a likewise relationship between Islam and underdevelopment in Iran as has been assumed by some scholars (Kermani 1992; Mir Fetrus 1997)? The second question is whether the role of Christianity in the state power of Western societies is identical to the role of Islam in the state power of Islamic Societies. In other words, is there a difference between Islam and Christianity as far as integration of religion and state is concerned? A brief explanation of these questions is offered in the forthcoming section.

By integration of religion and state, or a religious state, I mean a theocratic society. In a theocratic society, social regulations that ought to be based on rational, relative, changeable, and collective agreements are based on religious principles; hence they are absolute, unchangeable, and autocratic. In

such a society, the government gains its legitimacy not from people's consent but from God's will. In a society in which a religious government rules, freedom of expression is limited and human creativity is repressed. The integration of religion and state leads to a more centralized and a more absolutist power, and this, in turn, leads to the creation of obstacles to rationalism, secularization, and pluralism, for instance, the three fundamental elements of modern civilization in the West. I will briefly expound the various views on the difference between Islam and Christianity.

Three Perspectives on Religion and State

With regard to the integration of religion and state within Islam and Christianity, three perspectives can be identified. I will describe each perspective, and then add my critique and alternative analysis.

I. The dominant perspective is that the relationship between religion and state in Islam is different from that in Christianity. While in Christianity, the church and the state establishment had separate identities at the beginning, in Islam these two were the same.

Bernard Lewis is perhaps the most renowned historian of Islam who believes in the existence of a fundamental difference between Islam and Christianity. To him this very difference (secularism in Christianity and absence of secularism in Islam) is responsible for the West's development and the Islamic World's underdevelopment (Lewis 2002a). In Islam, "there is from the beginning an interpenetration, almost an identification, of cult and power, or religion and the state: Mohammed was not only a prophet, but a ruler" (Lewis 1996: 61). Elsewhere he writes:

In classic Islam there was no distinction between Church and state. In Christendom the existence of two authorities goes back to the founder, who enjoined his followers to render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and to God the things which are God's. Throughout the history of Christendom there have been two powers: God and Caesar, represented in this world by *sacerdotium* and *regnum*, or, in modern terms, church and state. They may be associated, they may be separated; they may be in harmony, they may be in conflict; one may dominate, the other may dominate; one may interfere, other may protest, as we are now learning again. But always there are two, the spiritual and the temporal powers, each with its own laws and jurisdictions, its own structure and hierarchy. In pre-Westernized Islam, there were not two powers but one, and the question of separation, therefore, could not arise. The distinction between church and state, so deeply rooted in Christendom, did not exist in Islam, and in classical Arabic, as well as in other languages which derive their intellectual and political vocabulary from classical Arabic, there were no pairs of words corresponding to spiritual and temporal, lay and ecclesiastical, religious and secular. It was not

until the nineteen and twentieth centuries, and then under the influence of Western ideas and institutions, that new words were found, first in Turkish and then in Arabic, to express the idea of secular. Even in modern usage, there is no Muslim equivalent to 'the Church', meaning 'ecclesiastical organization'. All the different words for mosque denote only a building, which is a place of worship, not an abstraction, an authority, or an institution. (Lewis 1988: 2-3)

D. Other scholars also underscore the difference between Christianity and Islam, but emphasize the role of socioeconomic factors, not religion, in the development of the society.

These include Ira Lapidus (1975), Arkoun (1988), Sami Zubaida (1989), Nazih Ayubi (1991) and Nikki Keddie (1995). Nikki Keddie (1995) has a realistic and reasonable position about the points of qualitative differences between Islam and Christianity in classic and pre-modern eras, and believes that the main difference appeared in the era of modernism.

She points to the relationship between the state and religion in the Orthodox church of Eastern Europe and the relationship between religion and politics in the Western world prior to the era of modernization; she argues that the present differences on the issue of separation of religion and state in the West and their unity in the Islamic world is a new phenomenon that appeared in the era of modernization.

Reinhard Bendix takes a more cautious approach in his support of Max Weber's perspective about the relationship between the state and the church and argues that Christianity is not a unified or homogeneous phenomenon. He writes: "Some religions-Lutheranism and Islam, for example-reject or neglect a separate church organization" (Bendix 1977: 322). While "on the other hand, Catholicism and Calvinism clearly favor a separate church organization" (Bendix 1977: 323). What is known as the Byzantine Empire was more similar to the culture of the Islamic caliph than was the Western kingdom (Halabi 1987). The idea of the unity of religion and state originated in the belief that all earthly powers represented evil as they were only concerned with their own power, which stood in opposition to the divine power. Governments ought to be ready to serve the objectives of the church (religion) (Halabi 1987). According to St. Augustine (354-430), the first Christian political theorist, political power was man-made and evil, while the Church was designed to bring mankind salvation. Of course, Augustinian thought was a "brilliant synthesis of Greco-Roman classicism and Christianity" (Nielsen et al. 1988: 474). However, in the thirteenth century, Thomas Aquinas recognized the legitimacy of Christian polity. What I conclude from these ideas is that if the drastic change of modernity in the West forced the Church out of the domain of political rule, so will it occur in Muslim societies as modernization prevails.

ID. A third argument is that in early Islam, like Christianity, religion and state were separate. Mohammad Arkoun considers that during the era of

the Prophet Mohammad, there was no sign of an established state, and the states of Umayyads and the Abbasids were secular (Arkoun 1988). We may consider Arkoun's view as the third theory, as he considers the separation of state and religion in early Islam a reality.

I believe, contrary to this claim that the integration of religion and state existed during the era of the Islamic caliphates, when the caliphs issued both religious and government decrees, religious rulers assigned the judges, the judiciary system was based on shari'a, and the regional rulers praised the caliphs in their lectures and prayers. Although the newly established Islamic state was challenged by tribal wars during the time of the Prophet, Arabia unified itself during the rule of Abu-Baker (632-634) under one state, and continued to remain unified during the four orthodox (*rashidun*) caliphs. Addressing the issue of integration of religion and state, Ira Lapidus states that this unity existed in the era of the Prophet because the prophet of Islam was said to have expressed God's wishes, and the political trust he enjoyed emanated from his religious status. After Muhammad's death, the caliphs preserved the same tradition. This tradition persisted in the tribal relations of the Arabs and was later abused by personal interests. This trend continued even after the Islamic caliphs deviated from the line of Islam (Lapidus 1975), but eventually a new challenge and competition emerged within the Muslim world. While the caliphs wanted to use religion to legitimize their political rule, the Shi'ite sect originated in the rejection of the caliph's legitimacy (Bendix 1977). The Shi'ites were in conflict with the caliphs trying to seize the ruling power as the heirs of the prophet Mohammad.³ As I discuss below, Shi'ites also integrated state and religion when they seized political power. In following pages, I explain how the integration of state and religion began in Islam.

A Critique

The differences perceived by Bernard Lewis do not prove that Islam is incompatible with development or modernization; neither do they confirm that Christianity was responsible for the emergence of the modern civilization. Socioeconomic factors influenced the identities of both Christianity and Islam in the early stages. An ongoing conflict, of various degrees, has existed between modernization and religion in both Islam and Christianity. That Islam was less rooted in urban culture made it more resistant to modern civilization. Modern development in the West, including secularism was the result of capitalism, not Christianity. The passage "render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and to God the things which are God's" used by Lewis to show the separate coexistence of two authorities, is from one of the authors of the Bible, Matthew, who was a Roman citizen with a Greek culture. Lewis himself calls this influence "the Romanization of Christ" (Lewis 2002a: 98). Indeed, in the scriptures Jesus is quoted as saying: "All authority has been given me in heaven and on

the earth" (Matthew 28: 18 New World Bible; Revised 1984) and, further: "Go therefore and make disciples of people of all the nations" (Matthew 28: 19 NWB). This Biblical statement was used by the Church to establish its own rule after the collapse of the Roman Empire, and to subordinate the monarch during the medieval era as the Church would argue the soul should rule over the body (the monarch). Before the fall of Roman Empire, Christianity emerged in the territory of the Roman Empire and proposed to share power with the dominant state, while Islam emerged as an absolute central power, introduced a monotheistic religion, and pushed for the unity of Arabs (I add details in the following pages). The Muslim societies with these characteristics developed into the center of world civilization, while the Christian world lagged behind.⁴

Samuel Huntington emphasizes the unity of religion and politics in Islam versus the Western Christian concept of the separate realms of God and Caesar, but he does not ignore the similarities between the two. As he notes, both are monotheistic, universalistic, missionary religions, with theological views of history: "From its origins Islam expanded by conquest and when the opportunity existed Christianity did also. The parallel concepts of jihad and crusade not only resemble each other but distinguish these two faiths from other major world religions" (Huntington 1996: 211). Bernard Lewis stresses the similarities in the Muslim and Christian approach to war:

If one looks at the historical record, the Muslim approach to war does not differ greatly from that of Christians, or that of Jews in the very ancient and very modern periods when the option was open to them. While Muslims, perhaps more frequently than Christians, made war against the followers of other faiths to bring them within the scope of Islam, Christians—with the notable exception of the Crusades, which were themselves an imitation of Muslim practice—were more prone to fight internal religious war against those whom they saw as schematics or heretics. (Lewis 2002b: 7)

Principally, war is launched by the state as the institution of power and violence, not religion as "a social institution involving beliefs and practices based on a conception of the sacred" (Macdonis 2000: 326). When religion integrates with state power then war becomes part of its duties, as was the case with Islam in its inception, or the Roman Catholic Church after the demise of the Roman Empire. According to Huntington, the level of violent conflict between Islam and Christianity over time has been influenced by demographic change, economic developments, technological growth, and intensity of religious commitment (Lewis 2002b). This point signifies the impact of the socioeconomic development of society on religion, not the reverse, as Huntington and Bernard Lewis conclude. Religion is part of a society, not the reverse. That is why Christianity, in a politically repressive situation in Central America, unlike the West, developed into a "liberation theology." This is where I begin to distinguish between Muslim societies and the West. I believe Western civilization infused

into Christianity Greek and Roman values, which were absent in Muslim societies. Otherwise, there were many similarities between the two religions. Islam, also, can be defined based on modern demands as society develops into new stages. The modernist point of view was first espoused by Muslim intellectual elites such as Sayyed Jamal al-Din Afghani (1839-1897), and by the Young Ottomans in the 1860s and 1870s and unsuccessfully continued by others during the twentieth century (Enayat 1982; Lapidus 1975).

Different factors-not only religion-have played a role in the formation of contemporary Western civilization. These factors include the Hellenic culture and the Greek official logic, the Roman laws, the emergence of Christianity and the Catholic system with the Papacy,⁵ the City-government, the Renaissance, the Reformation, the Enlightenment movement, and the various bourgeois revolutions (Rothman 1970). If these characteristics have been absent in the East, some of the reasons must be beyond human control, such as ecological differences (Keddie 1992). The growth of Christianity, different from Eastern religions, has been closely linked to the trend of growth in Western civilization. That the Bible was written in Greek inevitably put Christianity under the influence of Hellenic culture and, further, the authors (Paul, Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Peter) were socialized in Greco-Roman values (Kautsky 1925; Durant 1944: 555-74). Judea had given Christianity ethics, Greece had given it theology, and Rome gave it organization (Durant 1944).

Alternative Analysis

With regard to the argument of each perspective and my critique, I offer my own alternative analysis, which is a synthesis of the first and the second theories.

Although Ira Lapidus comments upon the unique nature of Christianity, he believes that modern civilization developed as the result of the downfall of the agrarian economy and the growth of industry and commerce in the West. According to one theory, "science rebelled against the Church; the *bourgeoisie* could not do without science, and, therefore, had to join in the rebellion" (Engels 1868[1975]: 255). Or "the development of the middle class, the bourgeoisie, became incompatible with the maintenance of the feudal system; the feudal system, therefore, had to fall. But the great international center of feudalism was the Roman Catholic Church" (Engels 1868[1975]: 255). The Catholic Church was united in alliance with feudal lords; therefore, "every struggle against feudalism, at that time, had to take on a religious disguise, had to be directed against the Church in the first instance" (Engels 1868[1975]: 387). The middle class, the bourgeoisie, forced the separation of political power from the church. Lapidus writes that in the West, "not only were church and state separate institutions, but Christian and secular societies had separate foundations" (Lapidus 1975: 269). He further argues that Christianity's fundamental

values stress the importance of individual will, and secularist forces defend individualism, which is an essential element in the classical culture of the West (Lapidus 1975). In short, Christianity fostered and developed within the institutional structure of Western society in which these characteristics were present. The Roman Empire had a concept of citizenship, and Roman citizens had certain rights. Islam, on the other hand, ignores individualism or citizenry: "The Qur'an recognises Man (*insan*), irrespective of his beliefs and political standing, but has no word for *citizen*. That is why Muslims in modern times have had to invent new terms for the concept: *muwatin* in Arabic, *shahr-vand* in Persian, and *vatanda-*, in Turkish, are all neologisms" (Enayat 1982: 127).

According to Bendix, the early Christian Church was a "typically urban institution," which was supported by Roman traditions (Bendix 1977: 323). Rationalism, including religious action, was more closely linked to urban life as opposed to rural life, which was threatened by natural disasters (Chirot 1996). Weber writes that the rational tendency in Christianity is attributed to the inherent rationalism of commerce and industry as contrasted with agricultural pursuits (Bendix 1977). Weber (1964) emphasizes that cities were regarded as the carriers of the development of modern rationalism, and "Christianity as an ethical religion of salvation and as personal piety found their real nurture in the urban environment" (p. 85). Islam emerged in a backward society under the adverse conditions of desert life and tribal relations to meet the needs and interests of Arab tribes that predominantly led a nomadic life (Hitti 1970). The ecological influence was so deep that even "the settled population in cities such as Hijaz and Najd did not leave any form of ancient culture behind" (Hitti 1970: 87). Abdul Rahman al-Bazzaz (1964) writes: "many of the principles that Islam has asserted, and have become part of it, are ancient Arab traditions which were refined by Islam, and invested with a fresh character. The veneration of, and paying pilgrimage to, the Ka'bah, are an ancient Arab tradition, and so are many of the rituals of the pilgrimage itself" (cited in Enayat 1982: 113-14). But this situation changed when Islam merged with other cultures. Arab populations became familiar with, and were influenced by, the neighboring cultures from Byzantine to Sumeria and Persia because of the existence of trade relations with these civilizations. However, non-urban experiences became the basis of the religious principles of Islam.

In short, it can be argued that Islam, primarily rooted in nomadic life, adapted itself to the norms of an agricultural society in the new territories it conquered later. But Christianity, quite to the contrary, entered other territories and became kneaded with the culture of the middle class in urban areas: "Judaism and Christianity were specifically civic and urban religions, but the city had only political importance for Islam" (Weber 1963: 265). Therefore, I conclude that religion has been a product of different modes of subsistence. What is emphasized here is that the degree of the relationship between religion and state in Christianity and Islam has not been the same. Additionally, unlike

Christianity, Islam carries an organization of economic laws, philosophy of life, and social and governmental order (Enayat 1982). Western civilization has been based on secular Roman laws, whereas Muslim societies in the absence of secular laws have had to rely on religious "laws" mainly rooted from the tribal traditions. The Western laws, as human products, were dynamic and changeable; the religious "laws" were presumed divine, therefore static and unchangeable.

Muslim societies have to adopt secular laws *for* their modern development. Many contemporary experts in Islam or "virtually all of the Islamist authors writing about Islam and democracy, or about the ideal 'Islamic order', subscribe to the view that Islam is religion and state (*ai-Islam din wa-dawla*) or religion and world (*din wa-dunya*)" (Kramer 1999: 178). And, to use Weber's words, this is "the most consistent religious expression of the organic view of society" (Weber 1963: 268). According to this view, when the realms of religion and politics became distinct, a constant struggle between the power of the caliphs and that of the Sultan resulted. This traditional interpretation of Islam will continue unless society starts to require a different religion, a religion that serves a new way of life in industrialized and developed society. In short, it is not religion that creates human society; rather, human beings socially construct religion to meet their needs.

Integration of State and Religion in Islam

One of Islam's distinguishing characteristics from other great and global religions is that Islam, unlike other religions, not only laid the foundation of a new religion, but *for* the first time it was also able to pave the way for the establishment of an Arab state and to bring ethnic unity to the Arab people.

At the time Islam emerged, Arabia had no centralized state. Tribes were still governed by regional, primitive, and headstrong governments who resisted Islam (Hitti 1970). Islam united the people of Arabia and gave them a powerful centralized state. The mechanism that motivated this change was a revolutionary force that used violence and eventually brought a great wealth to ruling Arabs. This feature made Islam, from the beginning, a state religion. This development, in turn, played a very important role in the development of Islam as a global religion. But during the process of its development, Islam gradually turned into a tool to justify the policies of the government it supported. From this point on, Islam began a violent history, all under the pretext of defending the "true" religion against religious deviations. Reinhard Bendix (1977) writes that Islam, like the Lutheran Church, has been an easy victim of dictatorial rule because it "was tied from the beginning to the expansionist drive of the Arabs and consequently espoused the idea of forceful subjugation of infidels" (p. 323). This made it easier *for* the rulers to suppress their political opponents, as has been the case in the history of all religions up to the present time. In addition

to politics, religion helped powerful religious figures accumulate wealth, to the point that "some of the caliphs-especially those that ruled after Osman-used religion as a tool to transfer the caliphate into a kingdom" (Petroshevsky [1354]1976: 411).

For this reason, the revolutionary message of Islam during the prophet's lifetime, for instance, equality and equity, was gradually forgotten. What remained of Islam was state power and competition among different groups and religious sects, not for the sake of the religion but so they could gain power and wealth: "The principle of equality among all the Muslims was officially recognized, but in fact, even at that time it was a term with no significance, a bubble with no depth" (Petroshevsky [1354]1976: 47).

Non-Arab governments, such as the Turks and Persians, secured their own political interests and mercilessly destroyed their dissidents; claiming that they were the enemies of Islam and not the enemies of the government. In the beginning, the Shi'ite sect unsuccessfully made attempts to separate religion from the Caliphate. However, in 909 the Shi'ite sect founded its own Caliphate, the Fatimid dynasty which ruled Tunisia and Egypt for two centuries. In Iran, the Safavid Dynasty (1501-1722) united all Iranian tribes after some nine centuries of fragmented rule. Shah Isma'il declared Shi'ism the state religion. It was a political medium to keep Iranians separate from the rest of the Islamic world, particularly from Sunni Ottomans (Mazzaoui 1972).

State as the institution of power naturally generates violence. When religion is associated with state or when they are integrated, the state's violence becomes part of the religion. This has happened in both Islam and Christianity in various forms. In such circumstances, the unity of religion and state acted as an inhibiting and even destructive force to block the development of society (Alamdari 2004a). Will Durant (1957) points to the varying degree of the unity of religion and state in different Islamic countries in different eras, and stresses emphatically the role of the government in supervising the observance of religious rites and laws in the societies of the Middle East.

Furthermore, at the time of the emergence of Islam, two neighboring states, Persia and Byzantine were religious. Apart from the Arabs' socioeconomic situation that made Islam emerge as a state religion, the Arabs learned the methods of government from the Persians, whose experience with the unity of religion and state (Zoroastrianism and empire) was transferred to the Arabs and became one of their religious principles. Ardeshir Babakan, the founder of the Sasanian dynasty (224 A.D.), was a Zoroastrian clergyman and Zoroastrianism was the official religion of the government.⁶ In this era, religion and state were considered the main columns supporting this dynasty in Iran, and no tension or contradiction existed between the two (Christensen [1375]1997). Such an experience was not unique to Iranians. The unity of state and religion or divine rule had a long history in the entire region prior to Islam.'

In addition to this, as I stated before, unlike Christianity, which emerged in opposition to the Roman Empire, Islam emerged in unity with the polity to form a national government replacing tribal rules, whereas Christianity formed using different cultural components of Roman civilization:⁹

Christianity was created in the intercultural conflict of the Roman Empire's conquest of the ancient Middle East; and Islam came into being amidst warring Bedouin tribes and the growing materialism of the merchant class. Those varied social contexts and intercultural conflicts provided the soil in which the beliefs, rituals, and institutions of each tradition were cultivated. (Kurts 1995: 49)

Following the unity of Arab tribes, Islam expanded its power beyond the Arab lands, encompassing more advanced civilizations such as Iran, Byzantine, and Egypt, and forming an Islamic Empire which always engaged in political power. Was such a concept foreign to Christianity?

How did State and Religious Integration Begin in the West?

Toward this end, the Church took three steps: the formation of a scriptural canon, the determination of doctrine, and the organization of authority (Durant 1944). As Durant explains:

The Roman gift was above all a vast framework of government, which, as secular authority failed, became the structure of ecclesiastical rule. Soon the bishops, rather than the Roman prefects, would be the source of order and the seat of power in the cities; the metropolitans, or archbishops would support, if not supplant, the provincial governors; and the synod of bishops would succeed the provincial assembly. The Roman Church followed in the footsteps of the Roman state; it conquered the provinces, beautified the capital, and established discipline and unity from frontier to frontier. Rome died in giving birth to the Church; the Church matured by inheriting and accepting the responsibilities of Rome. (Durant 1944: 618-619)

In the third period, after the Renaissance, the downfall of feudalism, the change of the mode of subsistence, and the emergence of capitalism forced the Church out of the state power. From the very beginning, state/church relations in the West were influenced by the fundamental elements of the Greco-Roman world and, later on, modern civilization, for instance, rationalism, secularization, and pluralism in the West. The roots of these elements lie in Greek rational philosophy, Roman laws, feudalistic relations, and the ethics of commerce, "each of which constituted a world of values independent of Christian beliefs" (Lapidus 1975: 270). Lapidus, however, adds: "The potentiality for secularization was already implicit in the nature of the Christian Church" (p. 269). This potential should be included when analyzing the role of Christianity in modern civilization in the West.

Separation of State and Religion in the West

Islam led to a centralized government and a religious empire. In comparison, Christianity, influenced by the Greek-Roman culture, created a non-centralized organization. Even during the Middle Ages, the church, as an independent political force, existed alongside other institutions to the point that sometimes it supported the kings, sometimes the feudal lords, and sometimes even the urban merchants (Bendix 1977).

Church and state were also linked in the West during certain periods of history. The integration of religion and state emerged after the demise of the Roman Empire. Will Durant writes that the Church inherited the responsibilities of the Roman Empire after it declined (Durant 1944). Western history can be categorized into three periods: the Roman Empire, the Middle Ages, and the Modern. While the first and the third periods developed into major civilizations, in the Middle Ages Europe remained backward. In the first and the third periods political power was out of the domain of the Church, whereas during the Middle Ages, either religion integrated into the state or the Church became a rival political power that challenged both monarchs and feudal authorities. When Christianity became intertwined with the state it acted as a religion of warriors, much like Islam. Christianity emerged as a secular institution, which resisted state violence, but later merged into a state power. In modern times, once again, the growth of capitalism forced the separation of church and state.

The First Roman emperor who converted to Christianity was Emperor Constantine in 312 A.D. (Kurtz 1995). Theodosius (ruled 379-395) and Justinian (ruled 527-566) imposed their divine rules over the east and west parts of the Roman Empire and, at this point, Eastern and Western Christendom went separate ways:¹⁰ "In the East, church and state were linked; both civil and religious matters were directed by the emperor" (Nielsen et al. 1988: 468). Bernard Lewis, who argues about the peculiarity of Christian secularism, cannot deny this fact. He states: "The conversion of Constantine in the early fourth century and the establishment of Christianity as the state religion initiated a double change; the Christianization of Rome and some would add the Romanization of Christ" (Lewis 2002a: 98). By the middle of the third century, the position and resources of the papacy were so strong that Decius vowed he would rather have a rival emperor in Rome than a pope. After the demise of the Roman Empire, however, the capital of the Empire naturally became the capital of the Church (Durant 1944). The link to the state power structure led Christianity into a new phase, which continued until the

end of the Middle Ages. The change moved Christianity from the egalitarian teachings of Jesus to an authoritarian power: "By the eleventh century, Christianity had shifted from being a pacifist to a warrior religion" (Nielsen et al. 1988: 217). Antonio Gramsci (1978) rejects the popular view of seeing the expansion of Christianity in the world without using violence. He adds it was

true only before Christianity developed into a state religion. Thereafter, the history of Christianity has not been different from any other ruling power. Islam, initially as state religion, had clear legitimacy for acts of violence. During the Crusades, Christianity was used as a theological justification for the mobilization of Europe using violence in the war against Muslims. During the Middle Ages, the East, the worlds of Islam and China in particular, were technologically more advanced than Europe (Diamond 1999). This fact can be justified as the East continued its "natural" development during the Middle Ages, while the process of development was interrupted by the integration of religion and state in the West.

If the integration of religion and state hindered further development in the West, how did development take place in the Muslim societies of the medieval era? Briefly we may refer to the silent force behind the rise of medieval Islamic civilization.

With the expulsion of the Byzantines and the destruction of the Sasanids, the political barrier that had hitherto divided the Near East into two separate blocks ceased to exist. The transformation of the vast western and eastern regions into a "common market" under the same political and ideological regime meant that the *Dar ai-Islam*, enjoying relative internal stability and an expanding economy, became the most lucrative area to serve the needs of investors and merchants engaged in long distance trade linking the Far East with Western Europe, the Indian Ocean with the Atlantic, and the Baltic regions with Africa (Ehrenkreutz 1989: 124). Adding to this, the integration of state and religion hindered development when industrial capitalism replaced the agrarian system.

Summary and Conclusion

With regard to all of these factors, one can conclude that the ultimate separation of religion and state in the West was the result of the growth of a force outside of these institutions, i.e. commerce and rational philosophy in GreekRoman civilization in ancient times and the growth of bourgeoisie in modern times which badly needed these two establishments to be separate.

The existence of the conditions that allowed the separation of the realms of power in Christianity no doubt helped the separation of religion and state in the West, and that such conditions did not exist in Islam added to the increasing difficulty of the separation of religion and state in Muslim societies, including Iranian society. The separation of religion and state in Islam can become a reality only through the development of competitive relations in economics, politics, and religion. To end the unity of state and religion (theocracy) as the main obstacle to development in some Muslim societies, the domination of political religion must be terminated and the monopoly of religious interpretation must be replaced by a fair competition among theologians and believers.

After a century of various attempts to adopt modern elements into Muslim societies, new theoretical and political challenges finally have begun to undermine the traditional authorities in Muslim societies, particularly in Iran.¹¹ But the success of this process depends on the development of the industrial economy, the growth of the middle class, and the formation of civil society.

Capitalism appeared in the West, and the fruit it yielded was the separation of religion and state, paving the way for the development of society in all directions. **In** the East, including Iran, industrial capitalism did not prevail; therefore, there was no reason for the separation of religion and state in a system that was based on an agrarian economy. Historically, the unity of these two institutions was an enormous obstacle to Iran's development. Let me emphasize again that this unity was not exclusively and merely the result of the difference in the natures of Christianity and Islam, but chiefly was the result of a third factor: the growth of capitalism in modern times. **In** the West, despite its differences from Islam, Christianity played no direct role in creating capitalism, in the same way that Islam played no direct role in inhibiting its emergence in Iran.¹²

This point takes us to the present situation. Indeed, Muslim societies should be able to produce the characteristics of modernity when similar factors are present. The socioeconomic development of industrial capitalism, which leads into an industrial middle class, will promote a democratic religion as well. Currently, the most effective mechanism of such change is globalization.

NOTES

1. State is a modern concept. Therefore, the term "state" may not be a precise term in describing "ruling power" in pre-modern societies.
2. Karl Marx argues "the origin of capital implies money as its starting point"; he adds that "capital appears as the product of circulation," and circulation implies "the accumulation of laborers plus their instruments at given points" (cited in Selsam, Goldway, and Martel 1975: 232-233).
3. The Islamic Republic of Iran, though unprecedented, is a model of a salient unity of state and religion.
4. Another issue seen by Lewis -wrongfully- as unique to Islam is sexism. In his latest book, *What Went Wrong* (2002a), Bernard Lewis considers "the status of women," to be "probably the most profound single difference between the two civilizations" (Lewis 2002a: 67). In regard to the backwardness of Muslim societies, he adds: "the main culprit is Muslim sexism, and the relegation of women to an inferior position in society, thus depriving the Islamic world of the talents and energies of half its people" (p. 157).

But Lewis fails to realize that in the Western civilization, too, sexism prevailed and up to the early twentieth century Western women were deprived of many civil and political rights. It was only thanks to the women's movement that the Western societies began to expand the opportunities for actualizing the talents and energies of half of its people. Women's contribution to science, philosophy, and politics in the "Christian world" was facilitated due to recent modern socioeconomic and technological developments. If Muslim sexism was the "main culprit" as Lewis asserts, so would be Christian sexism or Jewish sexism as all Abrahamic religions share a common patriarchal tradition (Bayes and Tohidi 2001; Esposito and Voll 1996).

The main flaw in Lewis' argument, however, is that he reduces the explanation of women's inferior status to religion, neglecting other cultural variables and historical and socioeconomic factors. The present status of women and their achievements in the West has been an outcome of modern developments, an effect, and not a cause, of the modern changes in the West. Patriarchy has been common to all organized religions, and Christianity is no exception. The violence against women such as witch hunting, both in Europe and in America, by the Catholic Church and Protestants, indicates how women were treated in pre-modern Christian cultures. See Alamdari (2003) for a critical view on Bernard Lewis's book *What Went Wrong?*

5. The word "church" originated from the Greek *ecclesia* meaning assembly of citizens. Many of these independent communities (churches) became organized under the papal authority (Durant 1944).
6. The Sasanians revived Persian culture and religion (Zoroastrianism) and made all efforts to return to Achaemenian norms (Christensen [1375]1997).
7. Following Arab domination in Iran, this attitude apparently penetrated the world of Islam through two books on political ethics by Ibn Muqafa'a, an Iranian adib and writer and translator who served the Umayyad (641-750) and the Abbasid governments (759-1285). These two books were *Ketab al Sahabeh* and *Adab al Kabiar va Adab al Saghier*, which were translated into Arabic from Pahlavi (these were books that were used to guide the rulers on how to govern people with consent). As Bernard Lewis writes: "adab, a word which, as used in medieval texts, comes close to expressing the meaning of the modern term 'political culture' . . . the adib, the possessor of adab, needs to achieve a certain elegance in behavior and certain level of intellectual sophistication" (Lewis 1988: 27). Ibn Muqafa'a apparently translated these books in order to disseminate Iranian political culture throughout the Arab territories (Abaadian [1374]1996). One of the Arab thinkers by the name of Al Hijaz (869 A.D.) began to combine the Iranian literature and Arab humanism, using Ibn Muqafa's works, and wrote *al-Mahasen va al-Monadi (The Book of Altaj)*, and

The Book of Virtues and Tradition. Onsoor al Ma 'ali, Qabous Nameh, Imaam Mohammad Qazali, Nasihat-al Moluk, and Nezam al Mulk, Siyasat Nameh are other books written on this subject. Nezam al Mulk went out of his way to glorify Khosrow Anushirvan-the pre-Islamic Iranian king-and called him a symbol of Justice. Meanwhile, he was one of the strong supporters of Islam's religious laws and, to disseminate them, he conceived establishing religious schools (*nizamiyeh*) for the first time (Alamdari 2004a).

8. The initial conflict between Christianity and the Roman Empire was replaced by Christian power. According to Will Durant, when the secular power of Rome diminished, the Church emerged to replace it (Durant 1944).
9. The Prophet Muhammad proceeded to achieve three goals: to replace idolatry with monotheism; to replace tribal differences with Arab unity; and to replace tribal rules with a central state.
10. Even in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, absolute monarchs such as Lewis XIV in France and Philip II in Spain attempted to materialize their dream of reconstructing the Roman Empire on Christian land: "Philip II's crowning stupidity was probably his war against England." Philip wanted to bring England back into the catholic faith, and "he sent a great fleet in 1588, the 'Invincible Armada' to destroy Queen Elizabeth's Navy. But most of his 132 ships were sent to the bottom of the Channel. Spain never recovered from the blow" (McNall Burns 1973: 481-82).
11. Among those who advocate this trend in Iran are Abdolkarim (1990); Eshkevari [1377](1998); Shabestari [1377](1998); and Shabestari (2000).
12. Weber contends that "we have no intention whatever of maintaining such a foolish and doctrinaire thesis as that the spirit of capitalism (. . .) could only have arisen as the result of certain effects of the Reformation, or even that capitalism as an economic system is a creation of the Reformation. In itself, the fact that certain important forms of capitalistic business organization are known to be considerably older than the Reformation is a sufficient refutation of such a claim. On the contrary, we only wish to ascertain whether and to what extent religious forces have taken part in the qualitative formation and the quantitative expansion of that spirit over the world" (Weber 1958: 91). Of course, some of the Western researchers have simplistically considered Christianity the main factor in the West's development. For example, Joel Mokyr (1990) believes that the religious differences between the East and the West explain the miracle of the West's development.

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