

RELIGION AND POLITICS

A Reference Handbook

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1

Introduction

The Lord said to Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain, stay there and let me give you the tablets of stone, the law and the commandment, which I have written down that you may teach them.” (Exodus 24:12–13)

Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and his laws. The whole people answered with one voice and said, “We will do all that the Lord has told us.” (Exodus 24:3)

Stories such as those of Moses descending Mount Sinai with God’s laws are a staple of ancient mythology. King Menes of Egypt, for instance, obtained a code from Thoth, the god of wisdom, as did Hammurabi of Babylonia from Shamash, the sun-god. The gods had sent him, proclaimed Hammurabi, “the obedient, god-fearing prince, to cause righteousness to appear in the land, to destroy the evil and the wicked, that the strong harm not the weak.”¹ Additional similarities to Moses are seen in the accounts of King Minos returning from Mount Dicta with a legal code for Crete and of Dionysus’s stone tablets inscribed with laws for the Greeks. From the Far East come comparable tales of the heavenly origins and earthly responsibilities of ancient Japanese and Chinese emperors.² Such mythology does more than confirm an intimate linkage since the dawn of civilization between religion and politics. It also bestows a certain legitimacy upon government that endured in much of the world until as recently as the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, a legitimacy that some religious fundamentalists in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries apparently would like to reestablish. Just as politics and religion once routinely bolstered one another, with religion infusing politics with a touch of divinity in return for the state’s enforcement of religious dogma, many of today’s religious and political leaders around the world would seem to welcome the return of such an arrangement.

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To generalize even broadly about relationships between religion and politics in modern times is definitely risky, maybe foolhardy, given the enormous diversity of religious expression, from established institutionalized faiths to less formal folk varieties, and the almost equally diverse forms of politics. The task is simplified somewhat by taking a rather narrow view of both religion and politics, but even then the distinction is more theoretical than real. Whereas religion deals with the supernatural and centers around institutions such as synagogues, mosques, and churches, politics concerns the manner in which society organizes and governs itself and maintains order. Whereas religion is often a private, personal experience involving spiritual matters, politics is a public expression of society's collective wishes. Whereas religion sees temporal existence as preparation for higher spiritual purposes, politics regards earthly existence as an end in itself. Whereas religion looks to prayer and ritual, politics turns more to the rational, scientific, and material.³

This division of religion and politics, of course, is entirely too neat, for it suggests clearly defined and mutually understood boundaries between spiritual and secular authorities. Nothing is farther from the truth. Religion and politics, appealing to the deepest human passions, have always interacted, and that interaction has often been confrontational if not violent. Problems inevitably arise when religion, presuming itself to be the sole custodian of society's moral values, employs the state to impose its will on the larger community, or when the state charts a new course at sharp odds with prevailing religious sentiment. From the twentieth century alone testimony abounds. Unable to persuade Americans to stop drinking, for instance, churches in the United States in the early twentieth century readily turned to state coercion, supporting enthusiastically the Nineteenth Amendment to the Constitution. The Islamic fundamentalists who took power in Iran in 1979 had no qualms about using political means for religious ends. On the other side, people of a more secular bent have just as frequently relied on political power to curb religious influence. Such was the case of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey, whose programs came at a high price for Muslim clerics. Similarly, Communist China's incorporation of Tibet in 1950 brought about the flight of the Dalai Lama to India in 1959 and the eventual destruction of thousands of the Himalayan country's Buddhist monasteries and nunneries and the deaths of numerous monks. As for the United States, Supreme Court decisions of the early 1960s on prayer in

the public schools that attempted to clarify the boundary between religious practice and public institutions still rankle religious conservatives.

Further complicating the interaction of religion and politics have been attacks by one religious group upon another, usually a dominant body against minority ones. That such conflicts have political repercussions is apparent, as seen in modern India. With over 80 percent of its population classified as Hindu, it would seem that the small Muslim (12 percent), Christian (2.5 percent), and Sikh (2 percent) elements posed no threat. Yet, Indian nationalists who consider Hinduism a unifying aspect of their culture see it differently. As a result, in December 1992 a sixteenth-century Muslim mosque in northern India was razed, apparently with the blessing of members of the Indian Peoples Party (BJP) and World Hindu Assembly (VHP), two of the more aggressive Hindu parties. Before running its course the resulting Hindu-Muslim violence claimed the lives of thousands of Muslims in western India, caused comparable numbers of Hindus to flee Muslim-dominated Bangladesh, and prompted Muslim terrorists to bomb Bombay.⁴ Christians, too, have aroused the ire of Hindu nationalists, who loudly objected to the pope's visit to India in November 1999. At issue was an allegedly vigorous campaign by Christian missionaries to convert India's Hindus. One angry Hindu nationalist considered this "world Christian conversion campaign" a "grave threat," while another claimed that it jeopardized "the unity, integrity of the country" by fueling Christian separatist movements. Christians meanwhile blamed the unrest on the BJP, which had come to power in March 1998 at the head of a coalition government.⁵ Such developments seriously test the traditional tolerance of Hinduism and cast doubt on the ability of India's more secular rulers to achieve a pluralistic society.

Complexities notwithstanding, at least three fundamental relationships between temporal and religious institutions exist today, two rooted in the distant past, one of more recent vintage. In two patterns exist a close, though not necessarily cordial, tie between civil and spiritual authorities, but religion is subordinate to the state in one, the state to religion in the other. The third model, that of separation and independence between religion and politics, springs from the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and finds classic expression in the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

Contemporary China offers an example of the first relationship. Until 1911, when revolution ended the imperial rule of the

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Manchu dynasty, the Chinese state wielded both civil and spiritual authority; the emperor was both a secular and religious ruler. Instead of autonomous religious institutions, there was an official state religion derived primarily from the ethical teachings of Confucius, the Chinese philosopher who lived 500 years or so before Christ. If Confucianism was a religion, authorities agree not only that it differed fundamentally from the more traditional faiths of Buddhism or Christianity, but also that its appeal was more to an educated elite than the unlettered masses.⁶ This, along with the vastness of China itself, made it impossible to establish religious uniformity throughout the realm. Buddhism, Islam, Christianity, and Daoism attracted sizeable numbers, as did various expressions of folk religion. Imperial China responded to these alternative religions with tight controls, exemplified by restrictions on the number of Buddhist and Daoist priests allowed in any given geographical area. As long as these other faiths operated within the approved boundaries and posed no challenge, they were relatively free of government meddling. However, if a threat was perceived, real or not, it invited the state's wrath. In the early 1700s, for instance, Jesuit missionary activity in China was banned when the papacy instructed Chinese Catholics to stop the practice of worshiping their ancestors, a custom central to Confucianism. Those popular movements of the nineteenth century that emerged and flourished outside acceptable channels brought harsh government action. The Taiping enthusiasm of the 1850s and early 1860s, for example, inspired by a certain amount of Christian idealism and fueled by the anger of oppressed, land-hungry peasants, left huge numbers dead and caused enormous property damage in its confrontation with the state.⁷ As this episode shows, the state would bend only so far with regard to departures from religious orthodoxy.

Dramatic religious change accompanied the Chinese revolution of 1911. New political leaders, seeking to create a modern secular society, severed the ancient connection between religion and politics. A period of hostility ensued during which the state seized Buddhist and Christian property, along with local village temples. This policy of subordination moderated with the emergence of Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, the Nationalist leader who wielded considerable power from 1928–1948. Though a secularist, Chiang recognized the value of religion in promoting certain national and political goals. World War II intervened, and in the postwar struggle between Communists and Nationalists, Chiang was defeated and fled to Taiwan.

Despite its official atheism, as well as the conviction that religion would disappear with the advancement of scientific information, the new Communist regime, the People's Republic of China (PRC), nevertheless permitted freedom of "religious belief." As Mao Tse-tung, China's new leader, declared in 1957, religion could not be abolished by "administrative decree" any more than could Marxism. The desired end, he elaborated, would come about through "discussion, . . . criticism, . . . persuasion and education."⁸ Overseeing this dialogue would be the PRC's Bureau of Religious Affairs. Actually, the religious policy of the PRC was similar to that of the imperial rulers. It allowed room for China's five institutionalized religions—Buddhism, Islam, Daoism, Protestantism, and Roman Catholicism—but accorded no official standing to popular sectarian movements. Guided by the Bureau of Religious Affairs, the PRC expected religion to serve national interests.

Although presumably permitting religious belief, the PRC sharply limited religious practice. Spiritual activity was to take place only on religious premises, and foreign support of any kind to internal religious groups was outlawed. A longstanding suspicion of outsiders was evident in this last restriction. "The imperialist powers have never slackened their efforts to poison the minds of the Chinese people," wrote Mao in 1939. "This is their policy of cultural aggression. And it is carried out through missionary work."⁹ Accordingly, Protestant and Catholic missionaries came under intense pressure, and by January 1953 all but a handful had been expelled, achieving an objective sought at various times by many Chinese since the midnineteenth century. Although it eventually failed, the Catholic Church attempted to hold its position in China. Priests and Chinese Catholics who remained loyal to Rome paid a high price. In 1951 China and the Vatican broke diplomatic ties, and by 1957 the state had essentially nationalized the Catholic Church.¹⁰ The hostility persists into the twenty-first century. An announcement of plans by the Vatican to canonize on October 1, 2000, 120 Catholics killed in China from 1648 to 1930 brought an angry response from the PRC. To the Vatican, these were martyrs to the faith; to Chinese authorities, they were agents of Western imperialism and colonialism who had "committed monstrous crimes against the Chinese people."¹¹ That October 1 also marked the anniversary of the founding of the PRC added to China's resentment, the Vatican's claim that the date was coincidental notwithstanding. Predictably, the cessation of diplomatic ties between the PRC and the

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Vatican led to cordial relations between the papacy and Chiang's government on Taiwan.

A similar concern of the Chinese government, in that it involved loyalty to an authority other than the Communist state, was Tibet's Dalai Lama. When China took control of the Himalayan nation in 1950, sending in troops on the pretext of ending feudalism, the Dalai Lama, who was both a spiritual and political leader to Tibetan Buddhists, was a problem for China's Communist leaders. They could no more tolerate his authority over Tibetan Buddhists than that of the papacy over Chinese Catholics. To the PRC, the Dalai Lama was a potential source of nationalistic and separatist activity. To Tibetan Buddhists, the official atheism of Mao's regime, to say nothing of political and cultural differences, was anathema. China's heavy-handedness in Tibet sparked an unsuccessful uprising in 1959, whereupon the Dalai Lama escaped to India, touching off something of an international incident. In a move that angered the Chinese, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru of India not only granted the Dalai Lama political asylum but also allowed him to establish a government in exile in the northern town of Dharamsala. To this day the Dalai Lama remains an embarrassment to China and a source of tension in Sino-Indian relations. For instance, a fourteen-year-old monk recognized as the Karmapa Lama, the head of another Tibetan Buddhist sect whom many Tibetan exiles regard as the eventual successor to the Dalai Lama, eluded the Chinese in late December 1999, slipping out of Tibet and arriving at Dharamsala on January 5, 2000. China promptly warned India not to offer asylum to the Karmapa, a warning India ignored.¹²

Mao's Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976 was a particularly repressive period not only for Tibetan Buddhism but for all expressions of religion, whether Christianity, Islam, Daoism, or Confucianism. Young zealots known as Red Guards killed thousands of clerics and believers, imprisoned many others, and razed religious property. A 1966 wall poster in Beijing captured the mood. "There is no God; there is no spirit; there is no Jesus; there is no Mary; there is no Joseph," it proclaimed, adding: "Like Islam and Catholicism, Protestantism is a reactionary feudal ideology, the opium of the people, with foreign origins and contacts." It ended with a call to "all people to burn Bibles, destroy images, and disperse religious associations."¹³ This brutal policy did not abate until 1976, after Mao's death and the emergence of a more liberal faction within the Communist Party. In 1982 China's new political leaders, seeing once again a certain practi-

cal use for religion, returned to a somewhat more tolerant stance on spiritual matters.¹⁴

Whether imperial rulers or recent Communist Party officials, state authorities in China have always been suspicious of popular movements that arise from the masses without any government sanction. This common stream linking past and present meanders like the Yangtze River through Chinese history. Consider the current case of Falun Gong. It was founded in 1992 by Li Hongzhi, a former government bureau clerk who left China for New York City in 1998 and who maintains contact with his followers via the Internet. Falun Gong, known also as Falun DaFa, meaning “law of the wheel,” was an obscure religious movement until quite recently. It combines elements of Buddhism and Daoism with meditation and slow-motion exercises to produce spiritual enlightenment and physical well-being. It appeals to people of all ages and backgrounds, including among its members government researchers, factory managers, radio reporters, police officers, and even some Communist Party members. Estimates of the movement’s size vary enormously. The state puts the figure at 2 million; Falun Gong claims at least 100 million.¹⁵

One thing is certain, Falun Gong startled Communist officials by quickly mobilizing large numbers for a rally in Beijing on April 25, 1999. Attempting to pressure the state into according their group official recognition, about 10,000 of Li’s followers suddenly surrounded Communist Party headquarters. An angry and embarrassed President Jiang Zemin ordered a crackdown. Falun Gong’s leaders were subsequently detained, its members harassed, and its Web sites blocked. Undaunted, Li’s movement mounted protests in cities across China, prompting even more repressive measures by the government. On July 22, 1999, the state banned Falun Gong, labeling it an “evil sect,” a “devil cult” that “brainwashes” members with “heretical ideas.”¹⁶ Resilient, resourceful, and defiant, Falun Gong stood its ground, and the state, despite increasingly tougher steps, seemed incapable of crushing “this evil force.” The clash between Falun Gong and the state took a grisly turn in January 2001, at the beginning of China’s Lunar New Year, the nation’s biggest holiday. Witnessed by a CNN camera crew, five alleged members of the religious group, one man, three women, and a twelve-year-old girl, attempted collective suicide by setting fire to themselves in Tiananmen Square. One of the women died from her burns. Although other Falun Gong members disavowed the five, asserting such

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suicide protests were not condoned, the state used the event to prove the point it has made all along—Falun Gong is a cruel, irrational, and evil cult.¹⁷

Political issues definitely were at the center of this battle of wills over religion. Denying any political intentions for Falun Gong, the attitude of a thirty-eight-year-old Beijing woman was typical. “We are good people, and we are not interested in politics,” she explained. “We have to persuade the authorities not to brand good people as evil.”¹⁸ Party leaders, of course, saw matters differently. To them, any movement or organization that competed with the party for the people’s loyalty was political. So, regardless of statements to the contrary by its members, Falun Gong, from the party’s perspective, was a political force as potentially menacing as the student demonstrations in Tiananmen Square in 1989. As one party official put it, the state’s handling of Falun Gong was justified because of “the danger it posed to our country and our people. Any responsible government would do the same.”¹⁹ A meeting of about 1,200 Falun Gong members from around the world in January 2001 only strengthened government suspicion. From their safe haven in Hong Kong, where the group is legal, Falun Gong disciples rebuked the PRC for its religious oppression. “There’s no human rights in China,” said one, “because you cannot even say a word about Falun Gong in Tiananmen Square.”²⁰ Such talk in Beijing’s backyard was sufficient evidence of the sect’s political motives and ties to subversive elements. “Li Hongzhi’s claim that he doesn’t take part in politics and doesn’t oppose the government is a cheap lie,” editorialized the *Beijing Daily*. “The result will only be to make people even more aware of the sinister political machinations of Li Hongzhi and his Falun Gong cult organization.”²¹

This continuing internal religious tug-of-war could have significant external repercussions. In February 2000 the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service announced it was considering granting asylum to Falun Gong members, something unlikely to please the PRC.²² And in January 2001 former assistant secretary of state for President Ronald Reagan and current chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, Elliott Abrams, after cataloguing a lengthy list of Chinese religious and human rights violations, urged the U.S. to initiate a resolution of censure at the annual spring gathering of the U.N. Commission on Human Rights and to use its diplomatic influence to thwart China’s effort to host the 2008 Summer Olympic Games. China,

Abrams added, could avoid such punitive actions by releasing all its religious prisoners, responding to inquiries about people detained for religious belief, allowing international human rights groups access to China's religious leaders, engaging the U.S. in a high-level dialogue on issues of religious freedom, and ratifying the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights.²³

Standing in sharp contrast to China is modern Iran, where the state has been subordinate to religion since 1979. The overwhelming majority of Iranians, about 93 percent, are Shi'ite Muslims, making Iran the only nation in which Shi'ism prevails. Elsewhere Sunni Muslims, representing the mainstream of the faith, generally predominate, but in Iran they comprise only about 6 percent of the populace. Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini was a Shi'ite, and so were the Pahlavi monarchs, but with a fundamental difference. Whereas the ayatollah looked to Islam's distant past for political direction, the shahs found in the West an example for separating religion and politics. The Pahlavi monarchy, not the ayatollah, was the aberration. To understand this requires some grasp of the origins and political significance of the divisions within Islam.

Beginning with the Arab conquest in the seventh century, Islam gradually but steadily replaced Zoroastrianism as the religion of most Iranians. By the ninth century Islam's triumph was more or less complete, but Islam itself by then had divided into rival factions. From Abu Bakr, the first caliph and Muhammad's father-in-law, emerged the Sunni tradition. This dominant body of Islam recognizes the first three caliphs as rightful heirs to the Prophet Muhammad and subscribes to a more moderate view of political succession. This position is more conducive to political stability, allowing for an easier transmission of power. From Imam Ali, a cousin of Muhammad who was married to the Prophet's daughter Fatimah, sprang the Shi'ite tradition. Muslims of this persuasion looked to Allah to provide an infallible leader, an imam who would guide the community with fortitude, justice, and compassion for the poor, and Ali was seen as the first such caliph; they insisted that only direct descendants of Muhammad could succeed to political leadership; and they believed that the twelfth imam, who had gone into concealment toward the end of the ninth century, would reappear at the end of time to create a perfect world. This was Twelver Shi'ism, and its so-called Hidden Imam, or the *Mahdi*, was the only legitimate authority on earth. All temporal political leaders were illegitimate unless they governed as his trustee.²⁴

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But even Shi'ism, derived from an Arabic term meaning *partisan* or *faction*, also became fragmented. Whereas the Shi'ism of Ali was to become the religion of the masses, a popular expression of the faith that saw in Imam Ali the classic virtues and expectations of Islam, the Shi'ism of the Safavid dynasty, which appeared in the late thirteenth century, became the religion of the monarchy, the elite, the establishment. It was not until 1501, under Shah Isma'il, that Twelver Shi'ism became Iran's official state religion, and since the early 1700s the vast majority of Iranians have been Shi'ites. Significantly, Ayatollah Khomeini harkened back to Imam Ali, whose collected speeches, *Nahj Al-Balagheh*, soon became the most popular book in Iran, next to the Qur'an.²⁵ Seen from the perspective of Khomeini's followers, the 1979 revolution was "an act of restoration—a halt to the rapid pace of development, and a revival of traditional cultural symbols" that "emerged from the very depth of Iranian society."²⁶ And by drawing support from the masses, the revolution of 1979 arose in classic Shi'ite tradition to oppose an allegedly illegal state. Just as Imam Ali had earlier challenged and defeated his rivals, so the Shi'ite mullahs challenged and defeated a despised and illegitimate shah.

In February 1921 Reza Khan, an imposing military officer in command of the Persian Cossack Brigade, seized power in Iran in a bloodless coup, supported apparently by British officers. Skillfully consolidating his political grip, he had himself crowned Reza Shah Pahlavi by a constituent assembly in 1925. What followed was a sixteen-year reign, from 1925 to 1941, remarkably similar in method and objective to that of Atatürk in neighboring Turkey. Modernization of Iran was his goal, and he tolerated no opposition to his plans. Though a Muslim whose first name recalled a revered Shi'ite saint, Reza Shah was actually indifferent to religion. Indeed, he was a secularist determined to curb clerical influence. Accordingly, in defiance of the mullahs, he banned traditional Persian garb in favor of Western dress for men and women, required licenses of anyone donning religious attire, raised the marriage age for women from nine to fifteen, introduced coeducation, permitted foreigners to visit certain sacred mosques, abandoned the Muslim calendar, and encouraged Western music, architecture, and cinema. Other actions struck at the institutional power of the clergy, particularly in the area of education. This customarily religious responsibility was transferred to a newly fashioned secular ministry of education. A French curriculum was taught at all levels, and foreign profes-

sors held positions at the University of Teheran, founded by Reza Shah.²⁷

Suspected of being pro-German in World War II, Reza Shah was forced from power by Soviet and British forces in August 1941. Before fleeing to South Africa, where he died in 1944, he abdicated in favor of his young son, the twenty-two-year-old Mohammad Reza. Although deeply resented by Iranians, this foreign invasion was made somewhat more bearable by the collapse of an autocratic regime that Persians from all walks of life had come to hate.²⁸ After some reluctance by the Russians, the occupying forces, including Americans, withdrew by early 1946, but not until 1953 did the shah gain firm control of the reins of power. Thereafter he brooked no opposition, relying increasingly on the secret police, SAVAK, to silence both secular and religious opponents. To the shah these opponents were “black reactionaries”; even so, the mullahs had found by the early 1960s a forceful opposition leader who proved to have broad popular appeal. Until 1963 Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, then in his early sixties and a respected but rather obscure teacher of ethics and philosophy in Qom, stayed aloof from politics. His reticence ended, however, as with ever-increasing stridency Khomeini lashed out at the shah. A particularly biting rebuke came in June 1963, when Khomeini urged the shah to avoid the pitfalls of his father. “Listen to my advice, listen to the Ulama of Islam. They desire the welfare of the nation, the welfare of the country,” asserted the cleric, adding: “Don’t listen to Israel; Israel can’t do anything for you.” With obvious contempt, Khomeini then declared: “You miserable wretch, forty-five years of your life have passed; isn’t it time for you to think and reflect a little, to ponder about where all this is leading you, to learn a lesson from the experience of your father?”²⁹

Although accusing the shah of hostility toward Islam, thereby capturing the mood of most religionists, Khomeini couched his arguments broadly enough to catch the attention of many secularists as well. Paralleling the shah’s religious apostasy, according to the ayatollah, were financial and moral corruption, fraudulent elections, and a foreign policy slanted toward Israel and the United States. Such claims not only resonated with all manner of Iranians, but, given the fearless nature of their proclamation, also inspired confidence. Because the secret police were always lurking, Khomeini’s verbal attack showed remarkable courage. It also won the admiration of some liberal, secular-minded Iranians who saw in this audacious cleric

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an ally against the shah. Not until later, after the fall of Mohamad Reza, would the secularists discover the depth of Khomeini's religious conservatism. In the meantime, the ayatollah paid for his outspokenness. Imprisoned for a time in 1963 and 1964, he was exiled in late 1964, first to Turkey, then to Iraq, where he remained until the events of 1978–1979 unfolded.

Even though opposition steadily mounted, the swiftness of the shah's demise nonetheless caught observers by surprise. Without the support of middle-class professionals, civil servants, students, and teachers, the revolution probably would not have succeeded, but it was the religious leaders who identified with the Shi'ite masses that gained control of the movement. Aside from agreeing on the corruption of the Pahlavi monarchy, however, the mullahs were divided on Iran's political future. Some, leery of direct religious involvement in the political process, sought merely to reform the monarchy, to remake it in accordance with Islamic laws; others wanted to establish an Islamic republic based upon democratic values; others, those of a more moderate temperament, favored a constitutional government of some sort that would preserve much of the social progress of the Pahlavi era, particularly regarding women; and yet others, the most authoritarian and anti-Western element, would settle for nothing less than a rigidly Islamic state. Khomeini belonged to this last group, and he was easily the most towering figure of the revolution. Here was a proven, charismatic leader who not only spoke the religious language of the masses, but also had trained a host of lesser clerics who now held positions in towns and villages across the nation.³⁰

Once Khomeini and the forces loyal to him gained the upper hand in early 1979, a movement begun primarily to oust a hated shah became a crusade to restructure society. The result was the world's only theocratic republic. If those secularists who at first rallied to Khomeini had been listening, they would have known the ayatollah's vision for the future differed from theirs completely. A 1971 series of lectures by Khomeini on Islamic government made clear his desire for a system in which political authority was subordinate to Islam, a system drawn from Eastern rather than Western ideas and practices. As though nothing had happened in the last 1,300 years, the ayatollah turned the clock back to the seventh century, to the Prophet Muhammad himself and Imam Ali. To prepare the way, Khomeini called upon fellow religious scholars, beseeching them to "explain what the form of government is in Islam and how rule was conducted in

the earliest days of Islamic history," to tell the faithful "how the center of command and the seat of the judiciary under it were both located in . . . the mosque."³¹ For most Iranians of a secular bent, the elimination of the shah's regime was sufficient; for Iranians of Khomeini's persuasion, nothing less than a social upheaval would do. For this latter group, the existing social structure had to be totally dismantled and rebuilt with Islamic materials.

The constitution drafted by the Council of Experts in the summer and fall of 1979 disclosed the full triumph of Islamic fundamentalism. It established a theocratic republic composed of a supreme leader, a popularly elected president, a prime minister and cabinet (the Council of Ministers), a 270-member unicameral parliament (the Islamic Consultative Council), and a twelve-member Council of Guardians. Behind this republican facade the clergy exercised almost absolute authority. Based upon the principle of *velayat-e-faqih*, the guardianship of the jurist-theologian, the supreme leader was recognized as the trustee of the Hidden Imam, from whom all legitimate temporal authority flowed. Khomeini held this position until his death, and it gave him the power to appoint half of the Council of Guardians, declare war and make peace, and select supreme commanders of the military and revolutionary guards. The president's primary responsibility was to implement the constitution and act as a liaison of sorts among the various branches of government. He had to be a Shi'ite and supporter of the revolution. The appointment of the prime minister, who normally presided over the Council of Ministers, had to be approved by both parliament and the president. The parliament, whose members served four-year terms, considered legislation presented by at least fifteen of its own members or by the Council of Ministers. The Council of Guardians had the enormously powerful assignment of ensuring that everything harmonized with Islamic principles. Composed of six "Islamic jurists" and six "just and religious persons," this body not only had veto power over parliamentary acts, but also screened candidates for presidential and parliamentary elections. Thus, this council had the right to set aside what it saw as undesirable laws and to prevent undesirable candidates, those who had criticized the revolution or whose fidelity was in some way suspect, from running for office. The constitution also accorded legal standing to the revolutionary guards, those youthful zealots who sprang into action behind Khomeini during the first days of revolution. Thus from the wreckage of the Pahlavi monarchy quickly evolved an

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increasingly authoritarian and intolerant theocracy. Revolutionary courts handed out swift justice for allegedly making war against God; an August 1979 law silenced the opposition press; classical Iranian music was banned from radio and television; women daring to wear Western attire faced growing harassment; Islamic uniforms became mandatory at girls' schools; the University of Teheran was closed; and street gangs of *hezbollahis*, or partisans of God, saw to the enforcement of the new orthodoxy.³² If this was Khomeini's dream for the future, it was a nightmare for Iranians of a different, more secular, more Western outlook.

The Islamic Republic remains intact despite major setbacks, such as the failure to ignite Islamic revolution throughout the Middle East, a costly eight-year war with Iraq, diplomatic isolation from much of the world community, and an economy unable to provide jobs for more than 50 percent of its university graduates and plagued by a 15 percent rate of unemployment and a 25 percent rate of inflation. Yet there are some signs of change. In May 1997 Mohammad Khatami, a relatively unknown mullah and former culture minister, was permitted to run for president, a decision Islamic conservatives later regretted. Though in his mid-fifties, Khatami caught the imagination of youthful Iranians with hints of a more open, tolerant society. Today 65 percent of Iran's population is under twenty-five years of age, too young to remember "the tyranny of the Shah or the euphoria of the revolution,"³³ but old enough to know and resent the constraints of clerical rule. Of the 29 million ballots cast, Khatami received 20 million, or about 69 percent.³⁴

Once in office President Khatami moved cautiously to loosen restrictions. The special police force charged with enforcing public morals was disbanded, allowing young men and women to mingle somewhat more freely; satellite dishes, once outlawed, began to reappear on rooftops; some women began dressing in more fashionable Western garb; newspapers became more outspoken; and subtle diplomatic overtures calculated to end the nation's isolation were made toward the West. Modest but significant, these shifts marked Khatami as a genuine reformer. His objective was to liberalize rather than replace the existing Islamic system. He offered a more moderate interpretation of Islam, suggesting that the revolution begun in 1979 was not a finished product but a "point of departure." When asked of Khatami's fidelity to the revolution, one grand ayatollah who supports the new openness remarked that the president's "goals remain those of the Imam [Khomeini], but the means of reaching them can

change."³⁵ So although he was taking a new course, Khatami posed no threat to the fundamental structure of the Islamic Republic itself. He was an insider seeking change from within rather than an outsider determined to topple the system. Even so, in a speech to students in Teheran in September 1999 he made clear his disagreement with those who "suppose that the more retarded a society is, the better protected its religion will be."³⁶

Timid though they were, these steps toward a more open society nevertheless provoked a strong reaction. Khatami's overwhelming election notwithstanding, conservative religious leaders still controlled the key sources of institutional power. The supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has held that position since Khomeini's death in 1989, was resistant, as was the powerful Council of Guardians. Thus, the hard-liners struck back, closing several reformist presses, impeaching members of Khatami's cabinet, jailing dissident clerics, sentencing to death four students for their part in recent protests, and allegedly ordering the murder of some opposition writers. Such strong-arm tactics failed to intimidate Khatami's supporters, who handed the conservatives a stinging setback in the parliamentary elections of February 2000. Of the 270 seats, the reformers won 170, the conservatives 45, and the independents 10, giving the advocates of change control of parliament for the first time since the 1979 revolution. In runoff elections in April for the remaining seats, the reformers substantially increased their majority.³⁷

Khatami's victory in 1997 and the parliamentary elections of 2000 buoyed reformers but did not foreshadow the demise of the Islamic Republic. As one observer noted, the youthful champions of reform were "not radical Westernizers or anti-Islamic zealots." Rather, they were Muslims who simply wanted "a less oppressive, less dogmatic system of government." Their goals, he concluded, were "jobs, an end to intrusive Islamic restrictions of individual rights and greater freedom of expression."³⁸ And this was precisely what the largest party in the reform coalition, the Iran Islamic Participation Front, promised shortly after the 2000 elections. The theocracy would become more tolerant and humane but otherwise endure. Politics would remain subordinate to religion. Change, of course, can be unpredictable, as that astute French observer Alexis de Tocqueville knew so well. "The most dangerous moment for bad government," he remarked in the early 1800s, "is usually when it begins to reform itself."³⁹

Events in Iran may well bear out de Tocqueville's observation. Despite the recent elections, Islamic conservatives have re-

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sisted the popular will, and in March 2000 they lashed out violently. A gunman attempted to assassinate Saeed Hajjarian, a forty-seven-year-old newspaper editor and key supporter of President Khatami. Hajjarian had been the principal architect of the reformers' landslide victory in February.⁴⁰ Since then reformers and conservatives have clashed repeatedly. Fighting actually erupted in parliament in August 2000 as the two sides debated a law allowing greater press freedom. The measure pitted the elected president squarely against the unelected supreme leader. With twenty-three newspapers having been closed since April 2000, Khatami favored the proposal, seeing a free press as an essential means of making his case for change to the people; Khamenei opposed, viewing an open press as a threat to society. Said the supreme leader: "If the enemies of Islam and the Islamic system take control of the press or infiltrate it, a big danger will threaten the security and faith of the people."⁴¹ Khamenei prevailed, whereupon hard-liners promptly closed another reformist paper, arrested a liberal journalist, and called for the execution of a particular member of parliament who had vigorously supported the press bill.⁴²

As 2000 closed and 2001 began, Khatami and his followers were showing signs of despair. "After three and one half years as president," acknowledged Khatami in a remarkably candid statement, "I don't have sufficient powers to implement the constitution, which is my biggest responsibility." He added somewhat plaintively: "In practice, the president is unable to stop the trend of violations or force implementation of the constitution."⁴³ Many of the president's youthful supporters have also become more downcast. Typical was the attitude of one twenty-one-year-old student. "People voted for him because they expected more freedom," he observed. Khatami "delivers speeches for freedom and peace, but we don't think he's done anything." With reference to the upcoming presidential race in June 2001, the young man concluded: "This time many university students are not going to participate in elections at all."⁴⁴ Perhaps the time had come, one analyst speculated, for someone "more aggressive than Khatami."⁴⁵

Change may yet demand someone more daring, but on June 8, 2001, an overwhelming majority of 76.9 percent of Iranian voters, most of them young, elected Khatami to a second term. Predictably, reformers saw the election as an unequivocal mandate for the beleaguered president's policies. "Friday's polls should have convinced hard-liners that the nation endorses Khatami's

program," declared one lawmaker.⁴⁶ Perhaps so, but many conservatives remained defiantly intransigent, vowing to block "structural changes" that would restrict the powers of the supreme leader, increase those of the president, or permit dissidents "to write in newspapers." The hard-liners were unfazed by electoral results, for the "legitimacy of our Islamic establishment," as one proclaimed, "is derived from God," and "this legitimacy will not wash away even if people stop supporting it."⁴⁷ Thus, the present situation in Iran is definitely dangerous, volatile, and complex. On both sides of the country's religious-political divide one now finds moderates and radicals. In each camp the former show a willingness to compromise for the sake of domestic calm, the latter appear ready for violence.

It is a gigantic leap in temperament and practice from Iran's theocratic republic to America's policy of religious independence, or separation of church and state. The classic biblical justification emerged from an exchange between Jesus and a group of Pharisees. When asked if they should pay taxes to Rome, "Jesus answering said unto them, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."⁴⁸ Not until the Revolution and shortly thereafter did separation of church and state become a reality in the United States, brought about by a coalescence of religious and secular interests. Chafing under the establishment policies then prevailing in most of the colonies, Baptists from Massachusetts to Virginia, along with other dissenting groups, wanted the state out of religion; George Mason, James Madison, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, and others who shared their outlook, aware of the potential for religious strife, wanted religion out of the state. In those southern states where Anglicanism had been established, religious independence was accomplished rather easily and quickly a few years after the Revolution; but in those New England states—New Hampshire, Connecticut, and Massachusetts—Congregationalism continued to receive state support until 1817, 1818, and 1833, respectively.⁴⁹ At the federal level, meanwhile, religious liberty became the governing principle with the adoption of the First Amendment, which went into effect in 1791. It reads: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Americans have never been in complete agreement over the meaning of those sixteen words. Do they call for a total separation between church and state, or neutrality by the state toward religion, or mutual support by the two?

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The debate over these questions has grown more rancorous as the religious terrain has become more diverse. For a prolonged period after the Revolution, until about 1860 or so, Protestants easily dominated the landscape. Admittedly, Roman Catholicism had become the largest religious body in the nation well before the Civil War, but Catholics as yet wielded little national influence. By contrast, Protestants of diverse denominations, whose members held positions of economic and political prominence, labored zealously to ensure for the United States a Christian future. Through a multitude of interdenominational societies, Protestants shared Sunday school literature, promoted Sunday closing laws, and worked steadfastly to curb if not eliminate alcoholic consumption. It must have struck certain Americans of the revolutionary era as ironic that Protestants in this immediate postestablishment era seemed determined to make Protestantism the new establishment faith. Although persuasion was the preferred means, Protestants were ready to use state coercion if necessary to advance their goals for the United States.

Though not numerous, issues of church and state did arise in this age of Protestant ascendancy. In the midst of a cholera epidemic in 1832, for instance, a group of ministers implored President Andrew Jackson to proclaim a day of prayer and fasting. Citing separation of church and state, the president declined, prompting the scornful rebuke that all this talk about church and state was so much cant, "the watch word of infidels and drunkards and the very dregs of human society" (*Connecticut Observer*, July 16, 1832). A subsequent chief executive, Zachary Taylor, faced with a similar request during the cholera outbreak of 1849, readily complied, eliciting concern that religionists were attempting to reunite church and state.⁵⁰ The public criticism of these contrasting presidential responses discloses the ambivalence of Americans in the early 1800s. Jackson's critics took for granted that religion and politics should be mutually supportive, while Taylor's preferred strict separation.

A more vexing matter during this period involved the Mormons and plural marriage. Disclosed by the Prophet Joseph Smith in 1841, this new marriage doctrine was regarded as an important aspect of the Mormon faith. As such, Mormons insisted it was protected under the free exercise provision of the First Amendment. Not so, retorted evangelical Protestants, who condemned the practice as a dangerous threat to normal family institutions and demanded restrictive legislation from political leaders. Mormons fled the United States for the Mexican south-

west in 1847 only to find themselves back in the Union at the close of the Mexican War in 1848. The difficult task of sorting out the dimensions of church and state fell to the Supreme Court, and with regard to the Mormons the justices made a distinction between belief and practice. In *Reynolds v. United States* (1878) the Court held that the state had no quarrel with theology; religious people could believe whatever they wanted. However, if religious practices were at odds with the law, the state certainly had the right to involve itself. Polygamy was such a practice, for it transgressed federal laws. The significance of the *Reynolds* decision was that it established that religious beliefs were no protection against punishment for the commission of secular offenses. Only when Mormons finally agreed to abandon plural marriage was Utah admitted to statehood in 1896.⁵¹ As the Mormons discovered, the free exercise clause was not an entitlement to disregard polygamy laws or flout popular convention.

The century beginning about 1860 witnessed fundamental religious change in U.S. society. Specifically, it was apparent the nation was not going to become a Protestant republic. Increasingly assertive Roman Catholics and Jews were making room for themselves and forcing Americans to reexamine church-state relationships. Much of the tension centered on public schools, whose historically Protestant character offended Catholics. Public schools in Cincinnati, Ohio, for instance, had since their inception in 1829 opened the class day with scripture reading. Objections by Catholics brought a change in 1842, allowing pupils whose parents so desired to be excused from reading the "Protestant Testament and Bible." A decade later students could read from the Bible of their choice; then in 1869 a majority of the school board ended altogether the practice of starting the day with Bible reading. A minority of members sued the majority, and the state supreme court eventually ruled in favor of the majority.

The argument generated by the Cincinnati case has a remarkably contemporary ring. A lower court judge who supported the minority contended "that the mere reading of the Scriptures without note or comment" was not "an act of worship." He elaborated that "the lessons selected are, in all probability, those which elevate the mind and soften the heart—an exercise not only proper, but desirable to calm the temper of children, while it impresses the truth of personal responsibility for good or evil conduct." An Episcopal cleric made the case for the other side, asserting that in a nation of religious diversity "a school system in which a specific form of religion shall be taught

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or practiced at the public expense, is among such a people unjust to all who dissent from that religion, but are, nevertheless, compelled to contribute to its support."⁵² This makes clear that the battle over religion in U.S. classrooms has a long history, and ongoing efforts today to post the Ten Commandments and permit student-initiated prayer at football games or around the flag pole, efforts that have gained momentum with each outbreak of school violence, only represent the latest phase of that struggle.

Just as the Mormons in the late nineteenth century had forced the Court to distinguish between belief and practice, the Jehovah's Witnesses in the midtwentieth century compelled it to examine again the implications of religious liberty. Founded in the 1870s, this small sect was fiercely antiestablishmentarian, rebuking with equal fervor the alleged corruption of mainstream religion, state tyranny, and oppressive business behavior. The Witnesses won support among the poor and disinherited, but angered the more affluent by ignoring Sabbath quiet laws, distributing literature in public places, and engaging in aggressive door-to-door proselytizing campaigns. Were such unconventional methods, methods irritating to many middle-class Americans, allowed under the free exercise clause? Relying on the belief-practice precept, the Court ruled against the Witnesses in the 1930s, but shifted positions in the 1940s. In *Cantwell v. Connecticut* (1940) and *Murdoch v. Pennsylvania* (1943) the justices accorded the practices of the Witnesses "the same claim to protection [under the First Amendment] as the more orthodox and conventional exercises of religion."⁵³

Another and more controversial series of cases involving the Witnesses had to do with flag salutes, pledges, and oaths. Such ceremonial practices, the Witnesses believed, violated commandments against having other gods and making graven images. Yet in rejecting these symbols of allegiance, particularly in the early stages of World War II, the Witnesses struck many Americans as unpatriotic. Accordingly, Witness children, faced with an unusual degree of public animosity, were expelled from school for refusing to recite the pledge of allegiance. Upholding such expulsions in *Minerville School District v. Gubitis* (1940), the Supreme Court reasoned: "The flag is a symbol of our national unity, transcending all internal differences, however large, within the framework of the Constitution."⁵⁴ That the refusal of children should bring such reproach, even in wartime, is difficult to comprehend in retrospect. In any event, the composition of the Court changed somewhat, and so the justices reversed themselves in 1943. "If

there is any fixed star in our constitutional constellation," the Court said in *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette*, "it is that no official, high or petty, can prescribe what shall be orthodox in politics, nationalism, religion, or other matters of opinion or force citizens to confess by word or act their faith therein."⁵⁵ The *Witness* cases pushed the Court beyond the simple belief-practice rule to the conclusion that certain actions that would otherwise be illegal are sometimes permissible under the free exercise clause. In terms of personal freedom, therefore, all Americans were the beneficiaries of the *Witnesses'* perseverance.

Although most issues coming before the Supreme Court dealt with free exercise, an important case involving the establishment clause confronted the justices in 1947. The precise meaning of the establishment clause was always debatable. Although virtually everyone agreed that the state could not establish a church, considerable uncertainty about other questions remained. Was it all right for the state to aid religious institutions, so long as it showed no preference for any particular group? Or should the state adopt a strict hands-off policy, separating itself from any religious entanglements? These were the issues facing the justices in *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947), which arose from a New Jersey school board's practice of reimbursing parents for the cost of transporting their children by bus to parochial schools. Split 5–4, the Court arrived at a muddled conclusion. In unmistakable separationist language, Justice Hugo Black spoke for the majority: "In the words of Jefferson, the clause against establishment of religion by law was intended to erect 'a wall of separation between church and state.'" Yet, paradoxically, the Court upheld the school board. However, in 1952, reflecting the fluid nature of the debate, the justices backed away even from the hard separationist tone of the *Everson* decision. The issue in *Zorach v. Clauson* was released time for New York public school children for religious instruction. Since the program was voluntary and took place off school property, Justice William O. Douglas saw no violation of the establishment clause. Indeed, Douglas believed the kind of church-state cooperation involved in this case followed "the best of our tradition."⁵⁶ The division on the High Court was no doubt indicative of the divided mind of the U.S. public.

Twice during this period of emerging pluralism, religion and politics intersected at the highest level of public life—the presidential campaigns of 1928 and 1960. It is doubtful that Alfred E. Smith, a New York Democrat and the first Catholic nominated for the presidency, would have been elected even if he had been a

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Protestant. Still, his religion was a liability, arousing among many Protestants concerns about federal money for parochial schools and papal control of Catholic politicians. Playing upon those fears, a nationally prominent Baptist fundamentalist from Texas, J. Frank Norris, reduced the race to a contest between God and Herbert Hoover on one side and Satan and Al Smith on the other. The flamboyant minister barnstormed the state, conjuring up images of Dark Age persecutions and papal abuses and imploring voters to oppose that “wet Catholic” Smith and support “that Christian gentleman” Hoover. More than once Norris asked: “Are we ready to permit a man to occupy the highest office, the chief magistracy over this Government, who owes his first allegiance to a foreign power which claims” to be supreme in all things, infallible, and unalterable?⁵⁷ The answer was self-evident to Norris, and multitudes of Protestants obviously agreed.

John Kennedy, a Massachusetts Democrat, confronted similar opposition, but with a different result. Kennedy’s success was in part due to adroit handling of the church-state question. In a televised speech in Texas to the Greater Houston Ministerial Alliance, Kennedy astutely recalled the role of Baptists in securing religious liberty in the eighteenth century. He proclaimed his own belief in religious liberty and his opposition to federal aid for parochial schools and diplomatic recognition of the Vatican. “I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jewish,” explained the candidate, “when no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from the Pope, the National Council of Churches or any other ecclesiastical source.”⁵⁸ If Kennedy’s victory in 1960 eliminated Catholicism as a barrier to the White House, it in no way settled the debate over church and state.

It is significant that Kennedy used the phrase “neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jewish,” for it signified what many Americans by 1960 had come to accept as the boundaries of religious pluralism. One scholar called this “mainstream pluralism,” a view given classic expression by Will Herberg, *Protestant-Catholic-Jew* (1955). As Herberg observed: “Protestantism today no longer regards itself either as a religious movement sweeping the continent or as a national church representing the religious life of the people”; instead, it “understands itself today primarily as one of the three religious communities in which twentieth century America has come to be divided.”⁵⁹ Acceptance of this reality had come only slowly and grudgingly to Protestants, and Jews, as vigorous in defending separation of church and state in the twentieth

century as Baptists had been in the eighteenth, “nicely mediated between the far larger Protestant and Catholic communities.”⁶⁰ Ironically, by the time Christians of varied persuasions and Jews were becoming more accommodating toward one another, the dimensions of America’s religious pluralism were becoming ever more expansive. Protestants, Catholics, and Jews would have to make room for additional expressions of religion.

With changes in U.S. immigration laws in the 1960s came a sizeable influx from the East, producing a religious kaleidoscope unimaginable only a half century ago. Since the 1960s Islam has become the largest non-Christian body in the nation, and mosques have appeared in cities from coast to coast. It is too soon to gauge the political effect of this development, but it could eventually have some bearing on U.S.-Israeli policies. Though not as numerous, Buddhists and Hindus have been increasingly evident since the 1970s. The first Buddhist chaplain to the armed services was named in 1987, the same year in which the American Buddhist Congress was organized to advance greater understanding of Buddhism. Both Buddhists and Hindus today claim 3 to 5 million adherents, making them as numerous as any number of Christian denominations.⁶¹ Add to this mix smaller groups of spiritualists, pagans, humanists, atheists, and New Age disciples and it becomes apparent that for the first time this nation is truly plural in religious configuration.

To be sure, these changes have not pleased all Americans, and since the 1980s many religious conservatives, particularly Christian evangelicals, have entered politics to accomplish cherished religious goals. Under the banner of the Moral Majority, then the Christian Coalition, these Christian conservatives joined the political fray determined to “save” the United States by restoring its alleged godly foundation. This entailed rejecting the new pattern of religious pluralism and challenging secular institutions. Again the Supreme Court found itself the principal arbiter of bitter constitutional clashes over church and state. Much of the fury stemmed from the controversial school prayer decisions of 1962 and 1963, *Engel v. Vitale* and *Abington Township School District v. Schempp*, respectively. *Engel* dealt with the daily recitation of a prayer composed by the New York Board of Regents, while *Abington* concerned mandatory prayer and Bible reading. In striking down both practices as violations of the establishment clause, the Court returned to the strict separation course charted in *Eversson*.⁶² A furor erupted. “With the possible exception of its ruling on racial integration [in 1954],” wrote E.S. James, editor of the

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widely-read Baptist weekly in Texas, the *Baptist Standard*, “nothing has so stirred the citizens of this country.”⁶³

The Baptist journalist was absolutely right. Since 1962 there have been repeated calls, including one from President Ronald Reagan, for a constitutional amendment to allow school prayer. This country must strike many outsiders as something of a paradox. It is a secular nation in which over 90 percent of all Americans believe in God and in which religion commands considerable public influence and absorbs an unusual amount of its elected officials’ time. In 1999 Congress spent countless hours debating the posting of the Ten Commandments in schools and other public buildings, allowing student-initiated prayer, and calling for days of prayer and fasting. Not to be left out, President Bill Clinton joined the chorus in December 1999, announcing support for stronger ties between religious institutions and public schools. “Finding the proper place for faith in our schools is a complex and emotional matter for many Americans,” the president declared, adding: “I have never believed the Constitution required our schools to be religion-free zones, or that our children must check their faith at the schoolhouse door.”⁶⁴ These recent eruptions suggest that Americans are as divided as ever with regard to church and state. Do they want strict separation, neutrality, or mutual support? The issue remains unresolved.

An important question that definitely has a bearing on attitudes about the proper relationship between religious and political institutions is whether specific religions predispose one to think in a certain way about politics. It is true that numerous faiths make little or no distinction between the secular and spiritual, the profane and sacred realms. Such is the case with Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. As one scholar observed, Islam is a religion “that embraces all aspects of life and controls all the attitudes and actions of its believers. Religion is government. Religious law is the law.”⁶⁵ This belief, rooted in the Prophet Muhammad himself, can be seen in practice throughout the Muslim world. It guided the Muslim Brotherhood and continues to inspire the more recent militant Muslim groups; it was evident in the Iranian constitution of 1906, which was drafted “in the name of God, the Compassionate, the Most Merciful”;⁶⁶ it informed the writings and lives of such prominent twentieth century Islamic thinkers and activists as Sayyid Qutb, Hasan al-Banna, and Maulana Sayyid Abul Ala Mawdudi; it sustained the exiled Ayatollah Khomeini; and it presently drives Osama bin Laden.

But the belief that religion and politics are inseparable has

not forced the Muslim world into a political straitjacket. Atatürk, for instance, as well as the Pahlavi dynasty in Iran, was a Muslim who pursued a modern course for Turkey. Despite the objections of religious conservatives, who have become more vocal and violent in recent years,⁶⁷ Turkey remains a secular state. A better example of a modern Muslim country that is attempting to harmonize Islam with political democracy, religious pluralism, ethnic diversity, and women's rights is Indonesia. Brought to western Indonesia by Arab traders in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Islam gradually extended throughout the islands, where it fused with traditional animist practices to produce a moderate form of Asian Islam in which women were free to work and leave their heads uncovered. Today, with Muslims representing almost 90 percent of its 216 million people, Indonesia is the most Muslim-dominated nation in the world. Yet, since the 1960s its political leaders have endeavored to ensure religious equality for all inhabitants. Although the state encourages religious development, there is no formal connection between religion and the state. Indonesia is not officially an Islamic state, but rather accords equal rights to Islam, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, and Hinduism. The Indonesian experience suggests that Islam does not require an Islamic state.

Of course, Indonesia, which has known both ethnic and religious violence in the past, is presently experiencing turmoil. Conflicts between Muslims and Christians have recently flared, fueled by staggering economic problems and the political instability accompanying the collapse in 1998 of longtime dictator Suharto, who had held Islamic fundamentalists in check for over three decades. Nevertheless, the victor in the presidential election of October 1999, Abdurrahman Wahid, promised to hold Indonesia on a moderate course. A respected Muslim religious leader, Wahid assured the nation of his commitment to a policy of tolerance and inclusion. Criticized by some Muslims for his openness, the new president asserted: "Those who say that I am not Islamic enough should reread their Koran. Islam is about inclusion, tolerance, and community." Wahid's words carry weight because of his actions. Unlike Muslim leaders elsewhere, he has refused to condemn Salman Rushdie, the British author whose *Satanic Verses* (1988) outraged much of the Islamic world; he journeyed to Jerusalem to pay respect to the assassinated Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin;⁶⁸ he has rebuffed calls by Indonesian fundamentalists to impose Islamic law; and he has thus far managed to keep religion out of politics. Whether Wahid will succeed or not

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remains uncertain. Although considered a wily politician, financial scandals have plagued his administration, and parliament has twice censured the nearly blind and frail president. By May 2001 Wahid faced a serious threat of impeachment. Compounding his troubles was a series of church bombings across Indonesia on Christmas Eve 2000 that killed fifteen and injured about 100 worshippers. It was feared that outraged Christians, comprising no more than 10 percent of the population, would retaliate, initiating a round of Muslim-Christian violence.

Wahid's ability to hold Islamic fundamentalists in check remains unsure at this point. Even so, the Indonesian experience, though troubled at times by religious strife, shows that the Muslim world is hardly monolithic in politics, theology notwithstanding. Hinduism and Buddhism disclose similar parallels. Assumptions about the unity of the sacred and the profane have not precluded either from accepting political arrangements that accord equal treatment to all citizens regardless of religious persuasion.

By contrast, Christianity in the West has long acknowledged a distinction between the things of Caesar and the things of God, and in the United States that principle has undergirded political practice since adoption of the First Amendment. Religious liberty accomplished through separation of church and state has not only enabled this country to escape for the most part violent religious conflicts but also has contributed to an expanding pattern of religious pluralism. If anything, the U.S. experience shows that Christianity, or Protestantism, or Catholicism, or Islam does not require a religious state to flourish. On the contrary, by showing no preference to any one body, the policy of church-state separation affords all religious groups an equal opportunity to prosper—or to perish. As already shown, however, Americans remain perplexed over the exact meaning of church and state. Among these are many religious conservatives who, if they could have their way in the political area, would no doubt shorten if not eliminate the distance between the sacred and profane. To these Americans the story of Moses as a divine lawgiver has the ring of truth.

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