



**Comparative Reflections on  
Religious Revivalism in  
Nineteenth Century Europe  
and in the Contemporary Middle East**

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*A key assumption in much of the literature on Islamic revival is that there is a unity of religion and politics in Islam that is not found in any other major religion. It is claimed, therefore, that parallels cannot be drawn between Islam and Christianity, and that the history of church-state relations in Europe has nothing to teach us about the interaction of politics and religion in the Middle East.*

*This paper challenges these notions. It argues that in Christianity the relationship between religion and politics has been as close as in Islam, and for a greater portion of its history. It then compares the current Islamic revival with the revival of religion in Europe during the nineteenth century, focusing, in particular, on the pattern of relations between state, church, and social classes that have characterised the two revivals. Both in Europe and in the contemporary Middle East, a revival of militant, literal, old-fashioned religion reversed a centuries-long trend in which religion had become increasingly separate from and subordinate to state power. In both regions, religion was used by politically motivated social groups seeking to defend or extend their power as social and economic changes increasingly challenged structures of traditional society.*



## Introduction

Much of the literature on the current Islamic revival in the Middle East assumes that there exists a unity of religion and politics in Islam that is not found in any other major religion and that, consequently, parallels cannot be drawn between the history of church-state relations in Europe and the interaction of politics and religion in the contemporary Middle East. The following sections challenge these assumptions. Section I reviews the relationship that has existed historically between religion and politics in Christianity and in Islam. The next two sections compare the politics of religion in nineteenth century Europe and the contemporary Middle East. Section II describes Europe's nineteenth century religious revival, an aspect of modern European history often overlooked by scholars. Section III focuses on the pattern of relations between state, church, and social classes that characterised the revivals in Europe and in the Middle East. Based on these two cases, the conclusions offer some comparative reflections about the politics of religious revival.

## The relationship between politics and religion in the history of Christianity and Islam

The notion that Islam does not distinguish between religious and political spheres of social life was, from the start, actively promoted by ideologues of the Islamic revival (e.g., Khomeini 1981, Qutb 1981, Khalid 1981, al-Rayyis 1972) and widely accepted by Western scholars and journalists (e.g., Black 1993, Lewis 1985: 24; Pipes 1982: 4-5, 10-13). However, this view is sharply at odds with the history of Islam. Throughout most of the history of Islam, religious and political institutions have been separate.

During the life of the Prophet, the state was the 'church' (three forms of the word 'church' will be employed in the discussion that follows: **Church**, to refer to the Catholic Church in Europe, and in the title of specific religious establishments, such as the Church of England; **church**, where reference is to both the Protestant and Catholic churches in Europe, and '**church**', in statements meant to apply to religious establishments generally, both Christian and Islamic). Muhammad 'performed the functions of prophet, lawgiver, religious leader, chief judge, commander of the army and civil head of state - all in one' (Hitti 1951: 139). However, since the Prophet's death in 632 A.D., religious and political institutions within Islamic societies have usually been separate.

After the Prophet's death, the office of Caliph was established to provide leadership for the Islamic community. In the years that immediately followed, the Caliph combined the functions of both political and spiritual leader. However, after the Umayyads took over the Caliphate in 661, processes of change began to transform the Islamic Empire into an Arab secular state more closely resembling the Empires of Persia and Byzantium. The Abbasid Caliphate (750-1258 A.D.) advanced this process by recognizing the *ulema* (religious teachers) as the interpreters of the sacred law, thus bringing about a formal division between religious and political authority. From the middle of the tenth century, the Caliphate began to evolve into a purely spiritual office as the political functions performed by the early Caliphs shifted to generals, administrators, governors, and provincial lords (Lapidus 1975: 364). This separation of political and religious functions was formalized in the eleventh and twelfth centuries when the Seljuq Turks ruled as 'sultans' (holders of power), while the Abbasid Caliphs exercised authority over spiritual matters through an office that was now fully differentiated from and subordinate to state power (al-Mulk 1960: 51).

Religion and politics remained separated throughout the centuries of Ottoman rule (1453-1923). Though officially loyal to Islam and committed to its defense, the Ottoman Sultans ruled as secular and political leaders. They based their authority on the absolute right of the King and refused to be bound by any religious duty or authority. The Sultans absorbed the privileges and, ultimately, the title of Caliph; but it was not until the second half of the nineteenth century, and in the face of a rebellion by religious leaders and urban and landed Sunni Muslim notabilities (against the Tanzimat reforms of 1839-1876), that the Sultans began to identify themselves fully, and not just nominally, with the office of Caliph and the exercise of religious authority over the Muslim community. Throughout most of the centuries of Ottoman rule, the Sultan was essentially a lay ruler and exercised his authority primarily in the realm of administration. The separation of religious and political authority continued at the local level: a variety of lay leaders exercised political authority, while the *ulema* looked after religious affairs (Hourani, 1968).

The unity of religion and politics that existed during the life of the Prophet has no parallel in the early years of Christianity; however, later in its history, the ecclesiastical and political realms in Christianity became closely associated. After the dissolution of the Carolingian Empire in the tenth century, the Church became the



ultimate source of power in Europe; by the twelfth century the Church had become an international state. Despite various rebellions against Papal authority, Popes continued to claim exclusive sovereignty in the temporal affairs of Europe until the seventeenth century. The Papacy exercised direct authority over political and class struggles, economic life, education, and social welfare. It sent large armies into battle, organised crusades, dethroned monarchs, bequeathed kingdoms, and raised revenue through direct taxation; throughout Europe, Papal legates oversaw the carrying out of Vatican orders and the maintenance of discipline.

Though the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 marked the end of the Church's exclusive sovereignty over European political life, the Church refused to recognise any distinction between ecclesiastical and political domains. This was true, too, of the Eastern Orthodox Church and of Protestantism: the Anglican Church (established in the sixteenth century) holds that the religious and political domains are inseparable, and asserts that church and crown, while distinct in function, are inseparable in substance and subject to the same law; Puritanism (which emerged in the seventeenth century) maintains that the administration of men are directly subject to divine law, and that the state will ultimately be a single church/state entity. In much of Europe - in France, Switzerland, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Russia, and elsewhere - the separation of church and state did not become law until the twentieth century.

The overall trend in the seventeenth century, however, was towards the increasing subordination of the church to state power. As the authority of the church declined in Europe, there was also a decline in religious observance. There was widespread de-Christianisation among the upper classes by the end of the seventeenth century, and de-Christianisation in rural areas in France and England during the following century. By the end of the eighteenth century, Ernst Troeltsch concluded in a massive study, religion - both Catholic and Protestant - was 'going through a process of decay and even of destruction' (Troeltsch, 1960: 1012).

These trends culminated at the end of the eighteenth century, with the attempt, during and after the French Revolution and throughout continental Europe, to accelerate the process of secularisation and de-Christianisation begun during the previous century. In France, the state seized Church lands, abolished tithes and fiscal immunities that had favored the Church, dissolved all religious orders, reordered diocesan boundaries, turned the clergy into state employees, ceased its enforcement of Church attendance, and imposed deist or atheist ritual substitutes for Christianity.

In reaction, there ensued a great war between religious and secular forces in Europe. This war - the final round in a centuries-long battle between secular and religious authority - dominated the history of nineteenth century Europe.

## The revival of religion in nineteenth century Europe

A common assumption concerning Western historical development is that by the end of the eighteenth century, the path from religious to secular society in Europe had largely been traversed. It is assumed that, in the eighteenth century, the Enlightenment (1715-1774) and the French Revolution (1789) accelerated a process of secularisation that had been ongoing since at least the mid-seventeenth century; and that in the nineteenth century, technological progress and changing patterns of economic relationships worked to complete that process.

But what is often overlooked is that during the nineteenth century secularization — a 'process whereby religious thinking, practice, and institutions lose social significance' and are increasingly restricted to the domain of private faith' (Krausz, 1971-2: 212) - battled a revival of militant, literal, old-fashioned religion, described by one historian as 'religion in its most uncompromising, irrationalist, and emotionally compulsive forms' (Hobsbawm, 1962: 271). The Roman Catholic Church, which remained throughout the century 'the greatest international organization of that or any other day' (Petrie, 1944: 165), provided this revival with a powerful ideology of uncompromising resistance to the modern world. Throughout the century the Church forcefully condemned the separation of Church and State, freedom of conscience, freedom of books (*Mirari Vos*, 1832), liberalism and the liberal state (*Quanta Cura* and the *Syllabus of Errors*, 1864; *Immortale Dei*, 1878), industrialization, capitalism, republicanism, democracy, and socialism (*Quadragesimo Anno*, 1931; *Divini Redemptoris*, 1937), and called for a return to medieval Christian principles (*Rerum Novarum*, 1891). It showed no desire for compromise of any kind. In the course of the century, the breach between the Church and the dominant secular forces of the time 'approached the dimensions of a schism in civilisation' (Brinkley, 1935: 67). As this breach widened, European societies became increasingly polarized and politically volatile.



During the French Revolution, French clerics and aristocrats called upon religious sentiment to set in motion a counter-revolution, the *Vendée*; by 1796, the *Vendée* had fused with a full-blown religious revival.

Following the Revolution there emerged a revitalised, more militant and monolithic 'Ultramontane' Catholicism in Europe. Its principal exponents included the Jesuits, who were reconstituted after the Revolution, and a host of new orders, like the Assumptionists. Its principal aims were to defend the Church against hostile forces and to broaden its popular appeal. In France, where the movement began, Ultramontane clergy led revivalist meetings in public squares, held mass to purge the sins of Jacobinism, imposed on Catholics weekly attendance at mass, built bigger and more richly decorated churches, and revived cults like the *Sacré Coeur* and the cult of the Virgin Mary. The Ultramontane movement spread to other Catholic countries and to Catholic communities within predominantly Protestant states. Its re-Catholicisation of Ireland was considered to be among its greatest triumphs (Gilley, 1988: 238).

Throughout Catholic Europe there was a phenomenal revival of religious orders, pilgrimages and processions, and veneration of saints. New saints and, consequently, new places of pilgrimage, were continually being born. There was a steady increase in the number of churches and religious orders. In the last half of the nineteenth century, the number of religious orders rose from 37,000 to 162,000 in France, from 770 to 1643 in Belgium, and from 15,000 to 68,000 in Spain (Boulger, 1904: 167; McLeod, 1981: 49).

The French Revolution and the decades following it also saw a revival within the established Protestant churches, the beginning of systematic Protestant missionary activity, and the creation of Protestant sectarianism as a mass religion. Germany's 'Awakening', and the revival of orthodox Calvinism in the Netherlands, were part of the revival that took place within the established churches in many parts of Europe after the Revolution. Protestant sects that had been large and influential in the revolutionary seventeenth century, but had lost considerable ground in the course of the eighteenth, grew into a mass religion. The Methodist movement in England, which had less than 60,000 adherents before the

French Revolution, grew to 143,000 in 1811, and 600,000 in 1850 (McLeod, 1981: 37; Hobsbawm, 1959: 129). At the same time, there emerged movements whose 'harsh and pristine puritanism' and literalist understanding of Scripture became the foundation of modern fundamentalism (Hunter, 1976: 101). Numerous missionary societies were founded: the Baptist Missionary Society (1792), the Netherlands Missionary Society (1797), the interdenominational London Society (1799), the British and Foreign Bible Society (1804), Wesleyans (1813-1818), the Basel Missionaries, the Berlin and Rhenish societies (1820s), the Church of Scotland (1824), the United Presbyterians (1835), the Swedish, Leipzig, and Bremen societies (1830s), and the Norwegian society (1842). As a result of their activities, these decades saw an astonishing mass conversion to Protestantism, the building of Protestant churches in remote areas and revitalization of long neglected parishes.

The church attracted mass support primarily through a vast and growing network of charitable organizations that provided the poor with social services not provided by the State. Among the most successful of these was the Société de Saint Paul, which was founded in France in 1833. The Société supplied the poor with soup kitchens, cheap food, old clothes, help with rent, warm public rooms in winter, cheap housing, employment agencies, free medical and legal advice, holiday camps, old people's homes, orphanages, apprenticeships, adult classes, clubs, allotments, libraries and pilgrimages. As was typical with Church-sponsored charitable organizations throughout the century, the Société was primarily concerned, not with curing the causes of poverty, but with 'resisting liberal ideas' (Zeldin, 1970: 108).

The role that religion came to play in national identity and nation building provides perhaps the most salient evidence of Europe's religious revival and of the consequent universality and centrality of religion as a factor in the lives of Europeans in the nineteenth century. In many places religion and nationality became totally fused as, for instance, in France, Spain, Poland, Russia, Scotland, Ireland, Serbia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Rumania, Poland, Belgium, Slovakia, and in the Greek national independence movement.



## The politics of religious revival

A comparison of religious revivals in nineteenth century Europe and in the contemporary Middle East reveals a similar pattern of relationships. First, state ‘churches’, traditional elites, and states entered into an alliance to preserve elements of the traditional order upon which, in varying ways, their privileges depended. Religious elements occupied the most powerful, most privileged position in the traditional order of both regions; consequently, as socio-economic and political changes began to threaten that order, religious leaders joined other traditional elites to lead popular movements in defense of religiously-sanctioned authority and ways of life. Second, a revival of dissident, radical or ‘nonconformist’ religious movements emerged when the monopolization of gains from economic expansion by traditional elites began increasingly to frustrate the ambitions of the middle and professional classes. Finally, though these largely middle class groups challenged the power of traditional elites, they were essentially conservative and sought to preserve traditional structures that kept the lower classes in check; thus, in both regions, wherever socialism or socialist reforms threatened to undermine the traditional order, the opposition between the largely upper class and the middle class groups was subsumed.

A comparison of class relationships in nineteenth century Europe and the contemporary Middle East might be seen as inappropriate for at least two reasons. It might be argued, first, that the comparison imposes Western sociological norms on societies characterised more by ethnic, racial, religious, tribal and other identities, than by class. But the contemporary Middle East is as much constituted by the division of classes as was Europe in the nineteenth century. The organisation, ideas and evolution of the classical four estates in the Middle East resembled that of the medieval social estates of Europe and, in both regions, these forces pre-dated states and limited their autonomy from the start. States in both regions grew up within a pan-regional society dominated by a landowning and clerical elite and, initially, they worked to guarantee and enforce the traditional estate order. In both regions, traditional elites, opposed to subsequent attempts by state rulers to develop autonomous institutions, initiated movements that enabled them to gain control of these institutions. In some places, these elites filled the role of governing and administering (e.g., in Germany, in Saudi Arabia); in others this role was filled either by a separate bureaucratic elite (e.g.,

in France, at times; in Egypt and Syria), or by some combination of the two. In these cases, the governing elite proved either unwilling or unable to challenge successfully the power of traditional elites and to affect meaningful reforms over their opposition.

It might be argued, secondly, that the nature and meaning of politics has changed across the times and places that form the comparative focus of this discussion. But, as will be shown below, both in Europe and in the Middle East, religious leaders and groups that entered the political arena behind the banner of religious revival did so for broadly similar interests. In both regions, these interests were principally concerned with society, law, and government, and with the defense of traditional power relations against liberalism and socialism.

## The Christian revival in nineteenth century Europe

After 1815, religious-political parties and connections developed throughout much of Europe. Their principal object was to oppose the secularization of European society and make the machinery of the state serve the interests of the church. However, though the religious revival in Europe had been initiated by the clergy largely in defense of church interests, the phenomenal growth of religious-political parties and movements during the nineteenth century owed much to groups who found in them a means of pursuing political ends relating, not to the defense of church interests, but to the class conflicts which increasingly worked to polarize European society after the French Revolution. The French Revolution’s attack on traditional society involved both the church and the traditional landowning elite; consequently, during the Revolution these two pillars of traditional society joined forces to defend the institutions upon which their power and privileges depended. After 1815, in France and most other west European countries, the state became allied with these forces.

In the nineteenth century, religious parties and movements entered the political arena in order to defend church interests. Chief among these interests was the preservation of the established church as the state religion. At various times, religious toleration was introduced in France, Britain, Germany, Scandinavia, and elsewhere, threatening the character of the church as the state religion and, thus, its status as the sole religion enjoying the privilege of public worship.



The Catholic Ultramontane clergy condemned the French state for allowing Protestants, Jews, and freethinkers to exercise equal rights with Catholics. Catholic emancipation and disestablishment occupied a large place in British politics throughout the century. The attempt by the German state to dismantle its anti-Catholic legislation in 1866 was vigorously opposed by the church and the issue became central to election campaigns and other aspects of public life, both under the Empire and in the Weimar Republic.

Other church interests defended in the political arena included its control of family life and education. The church fiercely contested state measures to introduce civil marriage and divorce, as well as new systems of mass schooling. In England, vested religious interests in education remained a constant obstacle to the development of general education throughout the century; England, in fact, was the last of the western European states to establish a national school system. Conflict over education remained a central issue in Belgian politics after 1847. In the Netherlands, militant Calvinists and the large Roman Catholic minority organized themselves politically in the 1870s to fight for state support for their own schools. In Austria, the Church fought against the introduction of civil marriage and state-controlled education.

Religious-political parties and connections were powerful elements in national politics: Britain's Conservative Party remained committed to the interests of the Anglican Church; Germany's Catholic Center Party, which became almost totally identified with the defense of Church interests, became the largest party in the national and Prussian legislatures in the 1870s; the Catholic Church in Austria directly involved itself in national politics through its Social Christian Party; the Eastern Church in Russia remained an extension and branch of state power, and its clergy took an active role in party, electoral, and parliamentary politics; the Catholic Party in Belgium was asked to form a government in 1878; the Calvinist Anti-Revolutionary Party in the Netherlands became an important source of support for forces on the right.

Though Europe's religious revival was initiated by the clergy during the French Revolution largely in defense of church interests, it was sustained during the years following the Revolution by a variety of groups, and for political ends not solely or directly related to the church or the defense of corporate church interests. The church was a natural ally of the traditional landowning elite since it was itself a major property-owner; and the symbolism, emotionalism, wealth, and organizational power of the church made it an ideal instrument

for offensive political operations. Consequently, the aristocracy as a class remained committed to the defense of the church as a social and political institution throughout the century. Following the Napoleonic Wars, the formerly de-Christianised French *émigré* nobility returned to the Church en *masse*: seventy of the ninety bishops chosen under the Restoration were nobles (Moody et al, 1953: 177), and in most parts of France attendance at mass was largely confined to rich Catholics. The upper classes remained the mainstay of the church in most of Europe throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Large estate owners were the most devoted followers of Germany's Protestant 'Awakening'. At the beginning of the twentieth century, counts of church attendance in London showed that, in wealthy parishes, Anglican congregations averaged 22% of the total population, but only 4% in the poorest districts (McLeod, 1981: 27; 1973: 31).

Before the French Revolution, states had sought to restrict the expansion of church power; however, after the Revolution, they joined forces with the church to suppress revolutionary forces that repeatedly swept through the region. The Holy Alliance of Austria, Russia, and Prussia formed in 1815; the restored Bourbon monarchies of France, Spain and Naples; and conservative governments throughout Europe, invoked the sanctity of Christianity for traditional constituted authority. The formula 'Throne and Altar' dominated European society and politics throughout the nineteenth century. However, whenever the state failed to uphold church interests, the alliance between church and state dissolved. So, for instance, the Church helped Louis Napoleon seize power in a coup in 1852, but the Ultramontane clergy declared war on him seven years later when he assisted Piedmont in its struggle against the Papal States. When administrative reforms threatened traditional privileges as, for instance, in Greece, Serbia, Romania and Bulgaria, churches joined in or led uprisings against the state (Hapsburg or Ottoman); and they helped to bring down governments in Portugal (1933), Austria (1934), and Spain (1936).

During the nineteenth century, the monopolization of economic gains by traditional elites increased tensions between the upper and middle classes, triggering the emergence of dissident, 'nonconformist', or radical religious movements. In an era in which electoral systems severely restricted the political participation of all but the most wealthy, these movements provided a means by which the middle and professional classes could oppose traditional elites and attract support from the multitude of urban poor, particularly in



cities like London and in the port towns where vast accumulations of immigrants lived in crowded slums. But though these new movements expressed opposition to the established churches, they were essentially conservative: like the established churches, they were hostile to religious minorities, and sought to impose 'totalitarian controls' over those who they brought within their sphere (McLeod, 1981: 36).

Particularly after the 1830s, there was intense conflict between the new movements and the state churches. In the 1880s, however, the upper and middle classes closed ranks against the rising tide of socialism, and conflict within the church abated. Alexis de Tocqueville noted that, in France, where 'fear of socialism' affected the middle classes in much the same way as the French Revolution had affected the traditional landowners, the rise of socialism inspired a 'return toward faith' by both upper and middle classes. (1866: VI, 178). The wealthier members of England's nonconformist churches defected to Anglicanism, and their membership began to decline (McLeod, 1981: 12, 69).

After the 1880s, as socialist activity became more violent, frequent, and widespread, the church moved further to the right. During the interwar years, the Church relaxed its ban on Catholic participation in Italian politics in the hope of stemming the tide of socialism and, in the Lateran Treaty of 1929 formalized its support of fascism. In Germany, France, Austria, Portugal, Spain, Poland, Belgium, Holland, Italy, Norway and Sweden, corporatist regimes or structures were established whose organisational basis was the clerico-corporatist social order defined by the Church in *Rerum Novarum* and which, in a variety of forms, embodied all of the themes which the Church had used throughout the centuries to oppose the breakdown of traditional society (see, e.g., Berghahn, 1988, and Elbow, 1953). A clerico-fascist regime came to power in Austria in 1934 and ruled until the country united with the German Reich in 1938. The victory of Fascism over Spain's Second Republic in the Spanish Civil War was regarded by most Catholics as a Christian triumph (Carr, 1966). The Church helped to bring about the collapse of Portugal's Republic and the establishment, in 1933, of an authoritarian regime under Salazar. In Germany, despite the overt atheism of Nazism, the Catholic Center Party voted to pass the Enabling Act granting Hitler dictatorial powers and, after 1933, many Catholic organisations were merged with Nazi organisations. The vast majority of French bishops supported authoritarian movements

as, for instance, Charles Maurras' monarchist *Action Française* (Soucy, 1972; the Church condemned the *Action Française* in 1926 but later relaxed its position regarding it) and the Church supported the Vichy regime. Clerico-fascist regimes were established in the 1940s in Croatia and Slovakia.

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the church and the nobility worked together to preserve traditional structures and institutions. Even where, early in the century, traditional elites and the church were at odds with one another - for instance, in Italy, where the existence of rival secular and Papal governments split the aristocracy from the Church, or in Spain, where popular hostility to the Church made it a poor vehicle for preserving traditional society - the nobility and the church eventually closed ranks. Later, divisions within the church and between the upper and middle classes dissolved or were submerged as the threat of socialism increased. The tensions engendered by the rise of socialism increasingly polarized European society and led, eventually, to the world wars. Religion was thoroughly interconnected with these conflicts and integral to their development.

## The Islamic revival in the contemporary Middle East

The Christian revival in Europe during the nineteenth century and the current Islamic revival in the Middle East exhibit a similar pattern of relations. In the Middle East, as was the case in nineteenth century Europe, the religious establishment is closely linked to the landowning and urban notability. This elite, which had dominated the old Ottoman social structure and survived the transition from empire to state system intact, allied both with religious elites and with the state as social forces began to threaten the structures of traditional society on which, in varying ways, the power of all three depended. In the 1940s and 1950s, the 'church', the state, and elements of the traditional landowning and urban notability formed an alliance to combat the rise of communism and the left in the region. At some times and places over the course of the next two decades, this alliance dissolved as traditional elites closed ranks with middle class elements to oppose government-imposed reforms. By the end of the 1970s, the ambition and frustration of middle and professional classes had given rise to dissident religious movements that have fuelled and sustained the Islamic Revival to the present time.



With the demise of the Ottoman Empire after World War I and the emergence of a system of independent states in the Middle East, state governments and their religious and other traditional allies undertook as their first project the elimination of the foreign and minority bourgeoisie that previously had performed the functions of an entrepreneurial bourgeois class in trade, finance, and industry. The large emigration of Jews to Palestine became a particular concern of religious and traditional elites and the states that depended on their support. Concerned that Jewish capital, technical know-how and contacts with the West would deprive it of its hoped-for Middle Eastern markets, Egypt's landowners and industrial bourgeoisie, Palestinian notables, and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, worked together to oppose further Jewish immigration and to make the preservation of Palestine as an Arab country the pre-eminent Islamic and Arab cause (Kazziha, 1979: 43-44; Davis, 1983: 171-172, 182, 191). The Muslim Brotherhood played an active role in encouraging anti-Zionist and anti-Jewish demonstrations (as well as attacks on Catholic, Armenian, and Greek Orthodox churches). It took the lead in mobilising mass support for the Palestinian Arabs, sent volunteers to fight with the Arab armies in the war in Palestine in 1948, and later forged close links with Fatah, the largest and most important of the factions within the Palestine Liberation Organization.

The second project of this alliance between states and religious and other traditional elites was to stem the rising tide of socialism and communism in the region.

In Egypt, communist activity and an increasingly militant workers' movement were important elements in bringing about the demise of the monarchy, and the emergence of a governing elite of party, bureaucratic and military personnel; and this pattern of events was repeated in a number of other Arab countries during the 1950s and 1960s.

Egypt's role in the Middle East, both in regional politics generally and, more specifically, in the region's Islamic revival, might be seen as somewhat analogous to that of France's role in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Europe. Egypt has played a key role in the development of revolutionary and nationalist movements throughout the region; and its Muslim Brotherhood was the first politico-religious organisation to enter the political arena under the banner of religious revival and with the goal of establishing an Islamic state. The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in Egypt in 1928 and, by the late 1940s, had become the most powerful Islamic movement in the world.

The Brotherhood was allied with the 'Free Officers' who came to power in the Egyptian Revolution of 1952. Once in power, the new regime, with the support of religious and other traditional elites, suppressed communism, outlawed strikes and trade-union activity, and closed down all political organisations, except for the Muslim Brotherhood. In Jordan, the rise and spread of Communist Party influence also drew the state and traditional elites into an alliance with the Muslim Brotherhood. As in Egypt, the Government suppressed all political parties, but permitted the Muslim Brotherhood to continue to operate. Jordan (before 1967) and Israel (after 1967) also allowed Islamic groups to operate in the West Bank as a counterweight to leftist, secular nationalist forces.

However, as in Europe, the alliance between state and 'church' dissolved whenever states threatened religious interests. Thus, when Egypt's President Nasser attempted to abolish the *shari'a* courts and nationalise religious endowments (*awqaf*), the Muslim Brotherhood began to attack the regime, and the government dissolved the organisation. Nasser's successor, Anwar al-Sadat, also attempted to use the Muslim Brothers as a counterweight to the left; but ultimately, like Nasser, came into conflict with the organisation. In October 1981, a month after Sadat had responded to violent attacks on Copts by arresting religious activists, he was assassinated by members of a splinter group calling itself the New Jihad. In Syria and Iran, radical religious groups began to emerge in the 1960s and 1970s as middle and professional classes joined with traditional elites to oppose land reform and other state policies that threatened traditional patronage systems. As Syria's ruling Ba'th Party began to highlight the socialist aspects of its program in the early 1970s, middle class elements closed ranks with religious elites and traditional landowners against the Ba'thist government of Hafiz al-Asad. Throughout the 1970s, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood and an Islamic Front of traditional notables and middle class elements sought to bring down the government. In the 1980s, policies of economic liberalisation in Egypt and Jordan triggered a resurgence of religious opposition to the state.

As was the case with Europe's revival, which involved both the Catholic and Protestant churches, the revival in the Middle East is taking place within both *Sunni* and *Shia Islam*.

It is often noted that the link between religion and state is closer in *Sunni* countries (as, for instance, Egypt) than in *Shia* Iran, where the financial independence of the clergy has enabled it to retain



a considerable degree of autonomy from the state. In both the *Sunni* and *Shia* traditions, religious leaders traditionally have had independent sources of income, most notably revenue from religious endowments (*awqaf*), and money earned as judges, notaries, teachers, and scribes. But though secular governments have taken control of these revenues, *Shia* have not been prevented from paying the tithe (half of the *khums*, a religious tax on income and property) they believe they owe to their *mujtahid* (a leading religious scholar whose interpretations of Islamic law are binding on all his followers). Thus, while *Sunni* clerics have become increasingly dependent on state patronage, *Shia* clerics have been able to remain relatively independent.

Despite these differences, the dynamics of religious opposition in *Sunni* and *Shia* countries have been largely the same. Wherever states have attempted to introduce reform measures, they have been generally unable to withstand the anti-reform pressure either of the right-wing religious and traditionalist establishment or of newer 'Islamist' groups. Consequently, nowhere in the region have governments been able to effect meaningful economic and political reform.

Iran's 1979 Revolution is the most salient and powerful expression of these dynamics. The Revolution was the culmination of sixteen years of effort on the part of the clergy and other traditional elites to dismantle land and liberal reforms introduced by the government of the Shah. In the 1960s, clerics in Iran revived a crusading, militant, and political brand of Islam in opposition to these reforms. Religion in Iran had long been subordinated to state power. In fact, for centuries, Iran's *Shia* clerics had been instrumental in the depoliticisation of Islam and the secularisation of politics, and they had a long tradition of waging war *against Shi'i* millenarianism (Bayat, 1980: 96-98). It was only when government reforms threatened to deprive them of their wealth and social position that the clergy encouraged the emergence of extremist *Shi'i* millenarianism.

The reform programme launched by the Shah during the 1960s (the 'White Revolution') involved, among other things, a far-reaching program of land reform that broke up the great estates and distributed about half the arable land to nearly two million village families.

The first land reforms were introduced in 1963. The clergy, exploiting the discontent which three years of economic depression had sown among the lower-middle and lower classes, organized a series of bloody riots in Teheran, Tabriz, Shiraz, Mashhad, Kashan,

Qom and Isfahan. From 1963 to 1979, when traditional forces led by the clergy seized power and put a halt to the reform process, these forces were at war with the state.

The other major group responsible for the Revolution, the bazaar merchants (*bazaaris*), became allies of the clergy in 1975 when the government introduced a series of measures that sought to wrest control of the economy from the bazaars and place it firmly in the hands of the state (Bianchi, 1986: 23). The government abolished the traditional guild system and replaced it with new Chambers of Guilds responsible for imposing price controls. It established special Guild Courts and teams of inspectors to find and fine hoarders and profiteers, and labour and welfare agencies began to impose new regulations for minimum wages, social security and medical insurance. These measures drove the *bazaaris* into alliance with the *ulema*.

The first clashes leading up to the Revolution began in 1978. Knowing it was impossible to reach an agreement with the clergy, the Shah approached a leader of the National Front of secular oppositional parties, Shahpur Bakhtiar, with an offer to form a cabinet. Bakhtiar agreed and, in January 1979, he became the new Prime Minister. He immediately set about formulating a broad program for democratic change that included, among other things, depriving the Shah of his dictatorial powers and establishing a parliamentary system in Iran.

However, the clergy declared Bakhtiar's government illegal and organised massive demonstrations every day in Teheran in order to bring about its demise. The following month, the Ayatollah Khomeini, who had been exiled by the government in 1964, returned to the country and announced the creation of a provisional government under Mehdi Bazargan, who was close to both the Ayatollah and the National Front. Insurgents took over Teheran, Bakhtiar fled the country and, following a plebiscite on 30th March, Khomeini announced the creation of an Islamic Republic.

The secular and middle classes that had joined the movement in opposition to the Shah hoped that once the Shah had gone they could take control of the movement. However, almost from the start, the clerics under Khomeini began to isolate the secular political groups and to consolidate power in their own hands. By the time that presidential elections were held in January 1980, only those secular politicians who were supporters of Khomeini remained in the government.



As was the case in Europe, in the Middle East the religious establishment has been linked to the dominant traditional landowning and urban notable elite, and shares with it a common interest in preserving the structures of traditional life. Both are unalterably opposed to land reform as well as other liberal and democratic reforms, such as legal and educational reform, the extension of labour, women's and national minority rights and religious toleration. Religious leaders and groups have called for the expulsion of Christians and other infidels from the region, and have attacked Arab governments (including those of Syria, Egypt, Jordan, and the Palestinians) that have taken part in peace talks with Israel. Wherever states have tried to introduce reform measures they have been attacked by the religious right

The new Islamic groups that emerged in the 1970s and 1980s are essentially conservative. Their leaders oppose land and other reforms that would destroy the socio-economic basis of traditional society. They oppose measures that would provide the masses with the type of education that they themselves received and that would extend to women the career opportunities that they themselves enjoy. They preach and practice intolerance of other religions and for minorities. Their fundamental creed is that the separation of religion and politics which exists today in the Middle East violates a sacred and essential tenet of Islam. Their fundamental aims are to gain control of the machinery of government and make it serve their interests, to block far-reaching reforms in economic and social structures, and to make competition for jobs and other valued goods in society, and participation in the economic and political life of their countries, subject to religious sanction based on their own interpretation of Islam.

### Conclusions

Religious revivals in nineteenth century Europe and in the contemporary Middle East reversed, in both regions, a centuries-long trend in which religious authority had become increasingly separate from and subordinate to state power. In both regions, these revivals

brought about a return to militant, literal, old-fashioned religion. In both regions, religion became a tool of politically motivated social groups seeking to defend or extend their power by excluding other classes and groups from participation in political and economic life. Consequently, these revivals played a central role in the class struggles that emerged as social and economic changes increasingly challenged structures of traditional society.

While many parallels can be drawn with regard to the interaction of politics and religion in Islam and Christianity, the aim of the foregoing discussion has been neither to re-describe nor to interpret in terms of the history of church-state relations in Europe, the interaction of religion and politics in contemporary Islamic societies. Nor has the purpose been to understand the current Islamic Revival and Europe's nineteenth century Christian Revival wholly through comparisons with each other. The aim, first, has been to confront claims which bar comparative analysis; and, second, to demonstrate the ways in which comparative analysis might contribute to our understanding of religious revival. The comparative perspective developed here is limited in scope. But, for students of modern European history, it helps to bring into focus a chapter in Europe's history that is often overlooked by scholars and, in so doing, highlights, more generally, erroneous and highly ideological assumptions which form the basis of standard accounts of Western historical development. For students of the contemporary Islamic world, it suggests that insights into the Islamic Revival may be found, not only within the narrow terrain marked out for us by its architects, but within the broader arena of human experience and history, as well.

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