



ISLAM, towards a necessary dialogue

Luis Sols Lucia

- 1. The West and Islam
 - 2. The Evolution of Islam
 - 3. The Middle East in the Twentieth Century
 - 4. Islamism
 - 5. Political Attitudes
 - 6. Society
 - 7. Woman in Islamic Society
 - 8. Recent Conflicts
 - 9. Islam Countries Today
 - 10. Islam in the International Order
- Notes
Group Work

1. THE WEST AND ISLAM

As we end the twentieth century, there are more than 1,000 million Muslims in the world. In the next century it is likely that Islam will be the religion with most followers. The number of followers rises by 3 % a year, remarkably faster than that of Christianity, which at the moment boasts about 1,900 million followers. Islam's territorial influence is spreading in various parts of the world, particularly in Central Africa, and it is not likely to decrease anywhere in the near future.

Western civilization is expanding as well. It was first a mere territorial expansion, but today it is above all a cultural one. It assimilates and makes all the world's cultures homogeneous, and it does so remarkably fast. It imposes its economic system, political structures, clothes, sports and way of thinking. Japan, China, Central Africa, among others, seem to aim at the Western lifestyle. Even such an ancient and profound civilization as Hinduism might become a victim of this trend.

Islam alone seems to be immune to this assimilation. It stands as the great alternative to the West in the coming years. For more than a millenium both Islam and the West have been two rival cultures fighting each other. Islam maintained its superiority for many centuries and Muslims believe their hegemony will come back one day.

Apart from that, the differences between these two cultures are very marked. In the West, religion is a part of life, like Science, Politics, or Art, which are essentially independent, even though they influence each other. The West is the domain of a fragmented concept of reality. Religion is perceived as a personal matter with only a little social relevance. In Islam, however, everything centres on religion: the individual, society, economic or cultural structures. Whereas Muslims perceive a sacred reality, where religion encompasses and unifies all aspects of life, reality is to westerners essentially material. To a westerner, the scientific perception of matter is essential and, should it run up against a religious dogma, this should be revised and adapted. Muslims believe the Religious rules over the Material. Religion is perfect, no compromise is possible.

Assimilation –or, rather, the dialogue between cultures– is further made difficult because Muslims identify many aspects of this integrating international tendency with what their religion considers signs of the advent of Doomsday, namely, loss of honesty, undignified people in power, corruption of habits, generalization of usury, women's power, youth revolts, weakening of devotion, backward movement of True Knowledge...

2. THE EVOLUTION OF ISLAM

Islam, like so many other civilizations, is profoundly conditioned by its past. Ever since the late Middle Ages it has hardly adapted to the formidable changes the world has witnessed. Many of its concepts are therefore formulated from the olden days, and many problems are posed in the same way as they were in the early years of Islam.

1. In its beginnings, early in the seventh century, Islam spread stunningly fast. After its first century of existence, it extended from the Iberian Peninsula to the North of India. It was then that the main religious and philosophic varieties of Islam took shape, which have lasted until the present day. In the time of the first four caliphs, the "well-guided caliphs" (632-659) the definitive text of the *Koran* was established, and the revelations Allah had transmitted to Muhammad, and which up to then had been preserved exactly in the minds of the Prophet's followers, were committed to paper. It was also at that time that the *Sunnah*, an account of sayings and teachings by the Prophet was first written. The *Koran* and the *Sunnah* contain the Islamic law, the *Shariah*. At the same time, the concept of *Jihad* (a special struggle for Islam, wrongly translated as 'Holy War') was developed. It is a struggle both against the inner enemy, inside every Muslim, and the outside one, when necessary, when Islam is being attacked.

2. *The main divisions* that still exist in Islam arise around Ali, Muhammad's son-in-law and the fourth of the great Caliphs. Deposed by Muawiyya –from the Omeya family– in 659, he was murdered two years later.

Then arose the party of the followers of Ali, the *Shiah*, who regard the ruling Omeya Caliphs as illegitimate and defend the rights of Ali's children –Hussein and Hassan– and their descendants. The *Shiites* respect the *Sunnah*, but unlike the rest of Muslims, the *Sunnis*, they do not accept its holiness. Instead, they attach great importance to the knowledge transmitted orally from the first to the twelfth of the *Imams*, descendants of Ali. They claim part of this knowledge arrived at the Shiah clergy, the *mullah*, some of whom show a special capacity to interpret the *Shariah* and are acknowledged as *Ayatollah*. According to the Shiah tradition, the twelfth and last of the great Imams –the *Mahdi*, the 'well-guided'– has not died, but is the hiding Imam that is to return and reestablish Justice.

3. The *Imam* is the leader, he who "keeps himself ahead". The name is used by the Sunnis to refer to the religious authorities that lead the communal prayer. They do not give it the fundamental character that the Shiites do. Their Imams are not descendants of Ali, nor do they possess any special knowledge transmitted by the Prophet. Amongst the Sunnis – orthodox Muslims– there soon developed the four great law interpretation schools of the *Koran* and the *Sunna*. By the middle of the ninth century, they had been defined, and to this day remain as the only ones acknowledged by the Sunni majority.

4. *The Islamic culture* had at the beginning a rather eclectic character. The Muslim religion itself is derived to a great extent from Judaism and Christianity. The territories that were conquered from the Byzantines and the Sasanid Persians belonged to two of the most highly developed cultures of the time. Their contributions integrated into the Arabic

traditions, thus giving birth to what we call Islamic civilization. This was –leaving aside the faraway Chinese one– the most advanced civilization in the world during the Middle Ages. Both the Omeya (659-750) and the Abbasid (from 750) Caliphates witnessed an era of great splendour at a time of cultural darkness in Western Europe.

5. When political fragmentation seemed to weaken the strength of Islamic civilization, there arose in Al-Andalus the brilliant *Caliphate of Cordoba* (929-1031), one of the cultural peaks of the Middle Ages. From the ninth century onwards, the invasion of the Turks –by that time already converted to Islam– provided military and political strength to some of the Islamic states. They stopped the onslaught of the crusades. Only for a few years did Jerusalem remain in the hands of the Christians.

6. The appearance of the Ottoman *Turks* in the fifteenth century marked the beginning of a new territorial expansion of the Muslims in Europe. The peak of this expansion was reached when, after conquering the Byzantine Empire (Constantinople, 1453), they moved on towards Central Europe and , in the seventeenth century, were twice about to take the city of Vienna.

7. For many centuries European culture was enriched by contributions –in Literature, Science and Philosophy– from Islam. After the late Middle Ages, however, there was in Islam a *cultural stagnation* that contrasted with the vitality of European culture at that time. From the fifteenth century onwards, Christian Europe witnessed a wide economic and commercial expansion that placed it in a position politically and militarily superior to that of Islam. The industrial and bourgeois revolutions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries consolidated and accentuated this process. The French and the English in the North of Africa from the eighteenth century; the Russians occupying Central Asia in the nineteenth; the sharing out of the Turkish Empire between the English and the French in the twentieth: the *European colonialism* fell heavily on the Muslim people, humiliating them deeply.

8. Islam makes it clear that the (faithful) Muslims are the spearhead of mankind. This was so for many centuries. But when it ceased to be, when they saw themselves behind and dominated by the civilization that had always been their great rival, *a terrible uneasiness*, a deep religious crisis spread amongst them, a crisis derived from the contradiction between their beliefs and the reality around them.

3. THE MIDDLE EAST IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

The Arab countries in the Middle East make up the core of Islamic civilization, even though they are located in a scarcely populated area. Their traditional territories are Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem, the principal holy places in the Muslim religion. Long before Muhammad preached, the Arabs were already an ethnic group with a language and a culture of their own. The expansion of Islam led to their language being adopted by other peoples of different origins, particularly in the north of Africa. Even today every Muslim must have notions of Arab, since it is the language they use for their prayers.

At some point in the twentieth century, amongst the peoples that shared this language a feeling of belonging to an Arab nation developed together with some ephemeral integrating processes. However, the Arabs do claim to have a culture of their own, and do not identify themselves with peoples -Muslim as well - that speak other languages such as Turks, Iranians, Kurds or Berbers.

3.1. THE BREAKDOWN OF THE OTTOMAN EMPIRE AND THE ECOLONIZATION

1. At the beginning of the twentieth century Turkey was the "sick country" of Europe. A large empire but terribly weakened, still surviving thanks to the reciprocal suspicions between the Great Powers. When the **First World War** broke out, Turkey allied with the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires. The Arab countries in the Middle East had been dominated for centuries on end by the Ottoman Turks. It was not hard for the English to reach an agreement with Hussein, the leader of Mecca, and thus provoke the Arab tribes to rebel against the Turks in exchange for promises of independence. But at the same time France and England secretly agreed on the sharing out of zones of influence (the Sykes-Picot Pact, 1916), with their eyes on the natural resources of the area.

These zones of influence took shape after the war as a group of colonies and protectorates backed up by the League of Nations. Syria and Lebanon remained under French dominion. The Kingdoms of Feisal –Iraq– and Abdullah –Jordan– , together with Palestine and Egypt, remained under British influence. Hussein –the father and the leader of Mecca– never attained the great Arab Kingdom he had been promised. When in 1924 he attempted to proclaim himself Caliph, Ibn Saud –the Emir of the Nayed– invaded his territories and proclaimed himself King of all Arabia.

2. In 1923, after exterminating the Armenian people and crushing the Kurds, the Turkish National Movement, led by **Mustafah Kemal Atatürk**, finally threw out the foreign settlers and established a dictatorial Republic. This nationalistic and authoritarian regime embarked on a process of compulsory westernization, doing away with every vestige of Islamism either in politics or in culture.

Following the Turkish model started by Kemal, in 1925 the Cossack chief Reza Khan proclaimed himself Shah of Persia and introduced an ambitious programme of reforms aimed at westernization.

3. After the Second World War, the process of decolonization made France and England leave. A nationalistic and arabizing socialism imposed itself in Syria and Irak –the Baas Party– and in Nasser's Egypt. This was the most earnest attempt to modernize Arab society and promote economic development without renouncing their cultural roots. When this attempt failed, the Arab population was left hopeless and infuriated at their poverty and the constant humiliation of seeing the establishment of the State of Israel.

In the twentieth century, immense oil reserves were found in the Middle East. Such formidable natural riches granted a considerable influence to the Islamic countries. In 1973 the boycott imposed by the OPEC brought about a change in the attitude of Western countries towards the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Muslim masses became aware of the powerful tool that might bring back their lost dignity and leadership. Unfortunately for them, their leaders used it to their own advantage.

3.2. THE PALESTINE PROBLEM

1. In the nineteenth century there was in some European countries a rebirth of *anti-Semitic attitudes*. This was particularly so in Russia where, from 1881 to 1882, horrible *progroms* took place. The Tsars forced the Jews to live in ghettos and denied them access to land ownership and education. Thousands of Askenazi Jews had no choice but to emigrate. Some of them, financially supported by the banker Rostchild, settled down in Palestine. The moderate Jewish immigration was welcomed at the beginning. As soon as it became slightly more intense it raised some distrust.

2. Most European Jews were all for total integration and assimilation into their countries. Yet, the rising anti-Semitism led some of them to think over the need to establish a differentiated nation to settle in and live according to their own identity. That was how towards the late nineteenth century –the century of the emergence of nationalisms– *zionism* was born, a Jewish nationalism which aspired to make the dream of the return to the Promised Land come true. In 1897 the first Zionist Congress claimed the right of the Jewish people to make Palestine their homeland.

3. In 1917 the British Foreign Secretary Lord Balfour backed up this aspiration, without prejudice to the rights of the Palestinian inhabitants. Thanks to this declaration Lord Balfour won the support of the influential American Jewish community for the intervention of the U.S.A. in the First World War. As a consequence, the colonies in the Turkish Empire were shared out as follows: Palestine was segregated from Syria and Lebanon and remained under *British control*. There followed an ever more rapid Jewish immigration and a massive purchase of land. Then arose the first conflicts and immigration was sometimes limited.

4. After the horror of the holocaust in the Second World War, many governments were favourably disposed to the Jews' aspirations. Great Britain, where they were most familiar with this problem, recommended creating one interdenominational state. There was a wave of terrorism by the radical zionists aiming at destabilization in order to force a favourable solution. They were the first to introduce terrorism in that part of the world². The United Nations finally agreed on the *creation of two independent states* and on the status of international city for Jerusalem. This territorial distribution was not accepted and in 1948 the proclamation of the State of Israel led to a mutual attack and conflict. The Israelis, fewer in number but better prepared, managed to take the advantage. They stopped short of Jerusalem, but managed to impede the creation of the State of Palestine. The territories they did not conquer were shared between Jordan and Egypt.

5. In 1956 Israel invaded the Sinai Peninsula in answer to the blockade imposed by Egypt to their trade in the Indian Ocean. The UNO intervened and things returned to their original situation. Under the leadership of the Egyptian Nasser, a rising Arab nationalism developed and had as its main goal the destruction of the new born State of Israel. A new blockade in 1967 led to a shattering attack by the Israelis. The so-called *Six Day War* ended with the Israeli occupation of Golan, Gaza, Sinai and the West Bank. All the Palestinian territory remained under Israeli control. The Suez Canal was closed. The loss of Jerusalem –the third holy city for the Muslims as it was the place from where Muhammad rose to heaven– meant a terrible humiliation for Muslims all over the world.

6. In 1973 it was the Syrians and Egyptians that attacked, backed up by the international **oil boycott**. When a large part of Israel's air force had been destroyed, the massive support by the US saved them from defeat. In 1979 the pressure from the Arab petroleum exporting countries forced Israel to sign an agreement with Egypt that included the return of the Sinai and the reopening of the Suez Canal. In 1982 Israel invaded the Lebanon in order to finish with the centres of Palestinian guerrilla activity. A strip of land in the south of the country has remained under their control ever since.

7. Since 1964 the different Palestinian groups have been united in the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization), led since 1969 by Yasir Arafat, leader of Al Fatah, the mightiest of the guerrilla groups. Until 1974 Arafat was involved in terrorism, but since then his attitude has become more moderate. From the destruction of Israel he moved to advocating one interdenominational state, and has finally accepted the existence of the State of Israel together with the still hoped for Palestinian State.

8. In spite of the UN resolutions ordering the Israeli withdrawal, the Palestinian territories remained occupied. When the extremist Likud Party –advocating the total annexation of these territories– gained access to the government, it made many *settlements* in Palestine that, according to International Law, were totally illegal. These settlements were peopled with Jews from Eastern Europe and enjoyed all the facilities of a developed country. In contrast, the Palestinians living in these areas were not allowed to participate in normal economic activity and of course could not vote³. The result was poverty and wrath in the face of such injustice.

9. In 1987 the *intifada* broke out, a rebellion in which both children and adults fought the Israeli soldiers with sticks and stones. Initially promoted by the PLO, it was soon in the hands of much more radical groups. The Palestinian masses felt Arafat's moderate proposals had failed, so terrorist groups had an ever rising influence.

10. In 1991, the pressure of the world public opinion and the new situation created by the Gulf War made Shamir –Prime Minister, belonging to the extremist Likud Party– enter into *peace negotiations* that in 1993 culminated in an agreement signed by the Palestinian Leader Yasir Arafat and the moderate Labour member Yitzak Rabin. The formula was "peace for territories", i.e. the Palestinians accepted the State of Israel in exchange for autonomy in the Gaza strip and part of the West Bank. Jerusalem remained outside the agreement. The combined action of Arab and Jewish extremism has blocked this process. A Jewish terrorist murdered Yitzak Rabin, who the efficient Israeli security service failed to protect. In the elections held immediately afterwards again the extremist Likud won the day. The new Prime Minister Netanyahu has allowed the illegal settlements to continue and in practice blocked the peace process.

11. The Arab people know that only with the almost unconditional support of the US can

such a small country as Israel keep its military superiority over incomparably larger countries. Israel receives an important *annual help* that has been rising up to \$4,000 million. It is not a loan, but a donation. A great deal of money for a country that started off with one million inhabitants and now has about five million. Besides, Israel has access to the United States' best military technology. Strategic considerations alone fail to account for this unlimited support. The American Jewish community –very sensitive to everything related to Israel– is very influential. Without their support a candidate is unlikely to win an election. Therefore Congress –normally wary of expense– accepts every year these huge donations with hardly any debate and by virtual unanimity.

12. The Arabs are more aware of this situation than the public opinion of most developed countries. They feel attacked by Christianity, their historical rival. This *Western harassing* is seen as a continuation of the Crusades, and they also relate it to the petroleum pillaging. They are also aware that a military solution ceased to be feasible long ago as Israel possesses the atom bomb and might use it should they feel in danger. It is no wonder that the impoverished masses –hurt in their dignity and lacking any other alternative– sympathise with the fundamentalists' views.

4. ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS

In the last few centuries movements have risen that preach a return to the original purity of Islam, as was established by the Prophet and practised in its first days. This trend has come to be called salafiyah and to it belong the so-called Islamic movements. Here are some of them.

4.1. ORIGINS

1. Arabia

In Arabia in the sixteenth century –when Muslim decadence was already evident– there lived a man called **al-Wahhab** (1703-1787), a follower of the *hanbali* school (see note 2), the strictest of the four Sunni law schools. His studies of theology in Medina, Iran and Irak did nothing but convince him that in order to restore Islam to the purity and simplicity of its beginnings, it had to get rid of all later accretions. He therefore rejected all knowledge not based on the Koran, the Sunnah or necessary inferences of reason. Religious practice was for him a state affair, so those who did not attend communal prayers were condemned to death. He ordered the literal application of all the precepts of the Koran or the Sunnah, which meant observing exactly the *Shariah Law*, including corporal punishment.

This severity was opposed by theologians, but was adopted by Ibn Saud, Emir of Nayeve. His son and successor, Abd al-Aziz, attempted to impose Wahhabism in the Arab world: he conquered and unified all Arabia, but was defeated when attacking the Turkish Empire. He nevertheless showed the world that the Arabs were capable of great deeds when fighting for their faith.

One century later, in the twentieth century, another Ibn Saud –Emir of Nayeve and descendant of the first Ibn Saud– resumed his ancestor's project and unified Arabia pushed by Wahabbism. Saudi Arabia was born⁴.

2. Afghanistan

However, Wahabbism did not impose itself outside Arabia and no other country has ever tried to put it into practice.

The roots of Islam in the twentieth century can be traced back to the previous century in Afghanistan. There lived Djamal ed-Din **al-Afghani** (1838-1897), an activist that found in Islam the basis for his anti-colonial fight. His hatred of the British came from India, where the English were wresting power from the Muslim minority. He lived in Istanbul and Cairo, where he contacted intellectuals from Al-Azhar University, the most prestigious in the Arab world. He also lived in London and Paris.

For an intellectual Muslim capable of understanding reality, it must have been heartbreaking to compare what Islam had been to what it was now⁵. Afghani was well aware of the Western challenge. He wanted to cleanse the Muslim religion of all the weaknesses it had acquired for centuries, but he was also convinced that Islam could live in harmony with technical innovations.

3. Egypt

Afghani's plea to Muslims of all sects, schools or countries to fight the West together had a great influence on intellectual circles in many countries. His disciple and friend, the Arab Sheik Muhammad **Abduh** (1849-1905) spread in Egypt what he considered his master's essential idea: you can be modern and be a good Muslim. Science and religion must be brought into harmony, like in the golden age of Muslim civilization. Abduh went so far as to defend, in many areas, women's equality.

4. India and Pakistan

A parallel reformist movement was developed in India by Muhammad **Iqbal** (1873-1938), who had studied philosophy in Europe. Iqbal shook Islam out of its slumber –at the time, Muslims were losing their hegemony to the Hindu majority– and preached a return to the moral values of the traditional Muslim community. He also defended the need for modern knowledge and democracy, but claimed it all had to be contemplated in the light of Islam.

His disciple **Mawdudi** (1903-1979) shared his master's modernizing ideas only at the beginning. As soon as Iqbal died, Mawdudi developed a more fundamentalist doctrine. According to him, Muslims had to be faithful to the word of the Revelation and observe the *Shariah*, The Islamic Law found in the Koran and the Sunnah.

4.2. MUSLIM BROTHERS

1. The movement most influential on present Islam is the Muslim Brothers, founded in Egypt in 1928 by the Sheik Hassan **al-Bannah** (1906-1949).

This theorist of Islam was the son of a learned man, a former student of Abuh at Cairo Al-Azhar University. He shared Abduh's modernising ideas but had also assimilated the most traditional values of Islam when living in a *Sufi* community. His simple and moderate approach has exerted a great influence on the recent awakening of Islam. The *Ummah* is one nation, he claimed. The bonds of brotherhood must be strengthened. The base of reform is the return to the teachings of Islam.

2. Sayyid **Qutb** (1906-1966), al-Bannah's successor as the main ideologist of the movement, was more radical. A university professor on good terms with Westerners, he experienced a personal conversion and entered the Muslim Brothers. Persecuted by Nasser, he spent practically the rest of his life in jail and was finally hanged. Despite the ill treatment he was subjected to, he was able to write the bulk of his work in prison. Qutb believed the world was in *jahiliyyah*, a time of ignorance comparable to that of pre-Islam. He believed in Islam there were solutions to the great social and political problems of our time, and the ideal of Social Justice could be achieved through it. But it was not enough to defend it with words. It must be defended with deeds, with the Revolution⁶.

3. Together with Qutb's radicalism, there was amongst the Muslim Brothers a more moderate stream whose main representative was Abd al-Hamid **Kichk** (b. 1903), a blind Imam from a Cairo mosque. His weekly preachings on Fridays brought together an ever larger crowd. Arrested in 1966 and released two years later, his prestige has kept growing through the circulation throughout Islam of *cassettes* of his preachings. Kichk rejects violence and believes Islam must move forward only through preaching. However, he attacks fiercely the "foes of Islam", –amongst whom he includes Western imperialism– and claims that the Muslim nation will conquer the world when the *Ummah* returns to

true Islam and the observance of the Law. The theoretical foundation of Islam –which today is accepted by large sectors of Muslim society– was thus carried out.

4. The Muslim Brothers were persecuted with ferocity by Nasser and his successors. Nevertheless, the Brotherhood has kept extending all over the Arab world. In *Syria* they grew spectacularly, but the Baas Party and the dictator Assad turned out to be their most ferocious enemies. In 1982, after a failed rebellion and a repression with over a thousand dead, they were terribly weakened. In *Arabia* they are tolerated by the Wahhab regime – with which they coincide in some aspects– and the people support and sympathise with them. Likewise, the Islamic movement in *Algeria* is, in origin, closely related to the Muslim Brothers.

4.3. THE ISLAMIC REVOLUTION IN IRAN

The Shiite branch of Islam showed some distrust from the start, which at times became plain hostility, towards the established political power. That is why it caught on so much amongst the non-Arab Muslim people, particularly in Iran. Since 1501 Shiism has been the official religion in Iran.

The belief in the return of the hidden Imam –the *Mahdi*– can be compared to the messianic hope of Judaism. It is an essential belief of Shiism that *Mahdi*, the Lord of Time will return in the vicinity of the Last Hour.

The Iranian sociologist Ali **Shariati** (1933-1977) related this idea to Marxist views and saw the *Mahdi* as a saviour who would come to Earth to release the oppressed⁷. In this way, Shariati presented Islam as a revolutionary and progressive force. His thought had a great influence on Iranian youth and put the people in favour of revolution. This revolution was to be the first in a series of changes related to the possible advent of the *Mahdi*.

We have already seen how after World War I the Pahlavi dynasty gained access to power, and started a process of compulsory westernization. From 1953 on, the regime became one of the cruelest in the world. In opposition to this state of affairs, there arose the *feddayin* (fighters of Islam), the Shiite counterparts to the Muslim Brothers. Initially they received the support of some *ulemas* (theologians) who ended up imposing their views on the Iranian clergy.

Ruhollah **Khomeini** (1902-1989) stands out amongst them. From the holy city of Qom he launched furious attacks against the Shah's unpopular reforms. Persecuted by the Iranian police, Khomeini took refuge first in Irak and later in Paris. Both he and Shariati were the most outstanding figures of opposition to the Shah, and the main inspirers of the revolution that finally overthrew him in 1979. But the early death of the Marxist sociologist soon before the revolution allowed Khomeini to impose his conservative views in the new regime.

After the revolution, power was theoretically left in Khomeini's hands, but in practice it was in the hands of the Revolutionary Committees, Revolutionary Courts and the Guards of the Revolution, all of whom were radical Islamists.

There was soon a cruel repression of the Marxist circles that had contributed decisively to the triumph of the revolution. *Feddayins*, *mukhaidins* and members of the communist party Tuddeh were arrested and many of them executed. The Islamic Law, the *Shariah*, was imposed and also written down in a Constitution. This Constitution established an

Islamic Republic whose proclamation had been previously backed up by a referendum. A reasonably democratic system was established, but Khomeini –its "spiritual guide"– was granted power for life, a power above all the State institutions.

The Shiite leader used his power to moderate the excesses of the radical Islamists who followed his ideas. He tried to put a stop to the excesses of the Revolutionary Courts, although he did not dissolve them. He promulgated amnesties that were seldom obeyed. He even demanded that any execution be signed by him, but this was not observed either. The Presidents of the Republic he chose –Bani-Sadr and Rafsandjani– were relatively moderate.

He appointed Montazeri as his succeeding "spiritual guide", a prestigious *ayatollah* with views considerably less radical than his. It was a secret appointment that was neutralised when, not long before Khomeini's death, someone made it public. Khomeini decided then to appoint Khamenei as his successor, a radical religious leader who was otherwise unimportant, so that the President of the Republic, the moderate Rafsandjani, had the real power.

The Iranian revolution has had an enormous impact. It has meant the first triumph of the Islamists and shown that their ideas could be put into practice. In the early 80s it seemed that the Islamic revolution could spread like wildfire all over the Middle East, as the Muslim population was receptive to these claims for identity and the conflict with the West. The West's support of the excesses of Israel seemed to prove that the historical conflict between both cultures still continued and that a radical approach must be taken to defend Islam.

Some factors, however, have stopped –or, at any rate, slowed down– this process. The Iranian revolution was essentially Shiite. Its religious leaders, therefore, could never be leaders in the rest of Islamic countries, where most people are Sunni. As a matter of fact it has been the Shiite minorities in different countries that have worked hardest for the Islamic revolution.

Apart from that, the oil monarchs of the Gulf have felt threatened by the republican ideas of the Iranian Shiites, and tried by all means to avoid their diffusion. On the whole, the Middle East governments have tried to cut short the revolutionary current by islamizing many laws and habits and carrying out reforms that put them at a safe distance from the Western pattern. In this way the Islamic revolution –not having triumphed quite yet– has already transformed dramatically Muslim politics and society.

The Iranian experience has had little economic success –there is a high inflation–, although it has helped shape an egalitarian society, with none of the hindrances of a centralized system. This relative economic failure has made other countries reluctant to follow this revolution⁸.

5. POLITICAL ATTITUDES

Over the last century, the challenge of modern Western society has given rise to different political attitudes in Islam. Most of them are still relevant and make up the bulk of the political world in Muslim countries, especially in the Arab ones.

1. Initially a clear feeling of inferiority led some rulers to defend a radical *westernization*. They wanted to modernize their countries, which required imitating the West. Such was the path taken in Turkey by Kemal Ataturk and in Iran by the Pahlavi. Their model was a lay State based on religious neutrality and against any external religious manifestations. Such cultural capitulation, reducing religion to the sphere of privacy, ran up against some very deep aspects of the Muslim religion. Ataturk fiercely repressed Islamic traditions and habits –like the use of the veil by women– that might affect this public neutrality.

2. There was another trend that decided on a more moderate modernization to respond to the challenge of the West. It consisted of taking the most positive aspects of Western society and adapting them to the reality and mentality of Islamic societies. This trend enjoyed wide popularity until a few decades ago. From this group, the so-called *Arabist socialism* stood out, a left-wing, nationalistic approach that took the leadership in the process of decolonization. In this line of progressist, pan-Arabic nationalism we find the Baas Party, in power in Syria and Irak; Nasser's regime in Egypt, and the Boumediene's NLF in Algeria.

The failure of all these attempts has had far-reaching consequences for Islamic civilization. They have almost invariably ended up in dictatorships –of a sometimes very cruel manner, like Saddam Hussein's in Irak– and have never raised their populations out of poverty. The great expectations that came along with decolonization have never been fulfilled. Not even the possession of oil fields has brought economic development. The constant and humiliating defeats against Israel go to show that their civilization is still in a state of prostration.

A very high cultural price has been paid for introducing modernizing elements from the West, and so far the result has only been inequality, oppression and poverty⁹.

3. Within the *Islamist* movement, which has been observed in previous chapters, there are two variants.

- *The integrists* –e.g. the Wahhabists or the Muslim Brothers– who set great store by tradition. They want to return to the Holy Texts, but at the same time respecting all the positive aspects Tradition has brought.
- *The fundamentalists* –e.g. Khomeini or the Afghan Taliban– are more literal in their interpretations, and want a society organized according to the exact application of religious precepts, completely ignoring the differences of our society or whatever has been contributed by centuries of religious piety.

We should emphasize the aforementioned differences between the most radical sectors, which defend the *Ummah* by violent means, and the more moderate who believe religiousness and preaching is enough. In practice both sectors complement each other: the

moderate views spread easily among a population willing to listen to them. Afterwards, some might abandon this moderate approach and adopt a radical attitude. With their violent actions they then put Islamism in the eye of the political storm.

These Islamist tendencies share a belief in a relative delegitimization of the State. According to them, the *Ummah*, like in the old days, should be united in one State, ruled by an authority both civil and religious. As this is not so, all States are hardly legitimate. Such views grant them a great revolutionary potential, but go against them when it comes to the responsibility of governing a country.

They also share a bitter feeling towards the West being "ahead of them". They believe Islamic civilization will eventually be compatible with modernity and again overtake the West, as long as Muslims return to a faithful observance of their precepts.

4. The *Sufi* brotherhoods do not exactly make up a political tendency, but an attitude towards politics that is much more coherent with Islamic roots. They do not make any concessions to modernity. They cultivate a very traditional and spiritualist Islam, with an intense religious fervour. As early as the Middle Ages, the Sufis promoted a personal spiritual experience, considering specific religious forms as relative. Sometimes they speak of a Sufi "mysticism". Today they are divided into very different brotherhoods, but most of them still faithfully preserve Islamic spirituality.

These brotherhoods have adapted to secrecy when necessary, and have preserved their identity even in situations of extreme repression. They maintained the flame of Islam in Ataturk's Turkey or in the Soviet Union. After several generations of persecution they now emerge with great vitality and help spread Islam amongst the people.

From a political point of view, Sufism could be considered as conservative, but it does not advocate specific political actions. Modern movements show themselves to be very hostile to Sufism, as they resent its going too far away from the modern world. Sufism has been seen collaborating with colonial power, only because they considered themselves to be *separate* from political values. Today Sufism enjoys a remarkable diffusion and exerts a great influence on the rest of Muslims. It is very widespread amongst intellectual circles, especially in the prestigious Cairo Al-Azhar University.

6. SOCIETY

The Muslim countries in the Middle East and North of Africa show on the whole a moderate degree of development. Practically all of these countries are in the intermediate zone in the Human Development chart carried out by the United Nations¹⁰.

Given the poverty some of these countries suffer from, this is surprising. The Islamic religion promotes help for the underprivileged and thus it alleviates to some extent the hardships of this poverty. Only when economic or cultural factors play a significant role, as happens in the Muslim countries of Central Africa, South East Asia, or the oil monarchies, does one observe great inequality.

In an Islam community there are solidarity mechanisms to prevent the social exclusion of the poorest. Everyone, especially the rich, must help with compulsory *zakat* (alms-giving) to those least favoured in their community. The richness of a few is legitimate as long as it benefits up to a point the least fortunate Muslims.

In the Middle East society is seldom dominated by a disproportionately rich minority. The exception to this rule is found in the Gulf monarchies where, as a result of the oil, there is indeed a very rich minority, close to the family in power.

Only in those countries with a more relevant intellectual tradition, e.g. Egypt, Syria or Irak, does one find a middle class whose origins can be traced a few centuries back. These middle classes welcomed enthusiastically the new modernizing trends and the Western influence. When the time came, they also espoused the cause of Arabist socialism, led the anti-colonial and nationalist movement, and became the ruling class of the new States.

Nevertheless, the population of these countries is made up mostly of peasants who have been terribly treated by this century's transformations and convulsions. The expectations of an improvement in living standards brought by decolonization were not fulfilled. The population figures keep soaring and farming production –with very traditional equipment– does not adapt quickly enough.

Many people therefore migrate to big cities where, in the face of the lack of industry, they integrate into the so-called casual economy. They have been culturally beaten by an alien society they do not comprehend. On top of that, as has been pointed out, they feel deeply humiliated by the West, because of its military and economic superiority, and the unjust treatment in the Palestinian conflict.

Disappointed with it all, these crowds of peasants are turning to Islam, much more so the young people, who, because of the soaring birth rates, make up 65% of the population. They find Islam gives them back their lost dignity and opens new hopes for them.

These crowds hate the Gulf monarchies, as they consider their riches should be used to the advantage of the *Ummah* and the poor. Since these monarchies are supported by the West, the Muslim masses suspect they are actually defending interests alien to Islam.

In a few countries such as Tunisia and Morocco, there is an expanding middle-class thanks to economic growth and a moderate modernization of its productive structures. This middle-class is disconcerted: they are aware of the positive aspects of Western life through trade, tourism, university or emigration. But they are also afraid of losing their identity and much more so, of the poor turning against them. Therefore *they are looking for a compromise between Islam and modernity, out of which has risen a great hope to avoid a yet more serious confrontation between Islam and the West.*

7. WOMAN IN THE ISLAMIC SOCIETY

Although there is a deep, wide and quiet process of emancipation of Muslim women, one can see harsh reactions which make the advances of several decades move two steps back. The situation of women in Islamic countries –especially in the Middle East or in North Africa– is perhaps the most controversial aspect of Muslim civilization.

Islamic habits relating to women are based on the Koran, the Sunnah and on traditions, some of which date back to pre-Islamic times. The Arab society Muhammad preached to was a patriarchal, pastoral society. Women were considered as family property, subject to male dominance, with the duty of providing male children in order to secure the family line.

The Koran protects women from the excesses of this model by forbidding the killing of daughters at birth, limiting polygamy and repudiation, acknowledging the right of women to property and education, and demanding the consent of the woman before marriage. These provisions are found in the *suras* –God's revelations to Muhammad, collected in the Koran– belonging to the first period, when Muhammad lived in Mecca with his wife, Khadija, and had but a few followers.

After Khadija's death and Muhammad's escape to Medina, the new *suras* were inclined to collect the patriarchal ideas of man's pre-eminence over woman. In order not to damage the established social structure it was necessary for this contradiction to be resolved by stating that later *suras* prevailed over old ones. Traditionalist Muslim sectors still today defend this interpretation, whereas reformists advocate the prevalence of the first *suras*, more favourable to women¹¹.

The lay regimes that arose with decolonization were concerned with maintaining cultural identity. Fearing that any evolution in the legal situation of women might be taken as a loss of identity, they legitimized the traditional authority of men over women.

The recent development of Islamist movements has placed the women issue in the centre of the social debate. Some even advocate removing women from work and leaving their posts to unemployed men. It is not venturing too far to talk of the State retraditionalizing the country to prevent the Islamist expansion.

It is surprising to see so many women welcome enthusiastically this Islamism. As a matter of fact, the separation of sexes might lead to a situation where women's subordination was exceptional.

Many women support traditions that discriminate against them. Sometimes it is pre-Islamic traditions lacking any religious basis. A terrible example is the cutting off of the clitoris which in some areas of Africa –both Muslim and non-Muslim– is still everyday practice and affects millions of women.

This social reality, nevertheless, is changing, especially in the cities, where the population is rising most rapidly. The demographic boom, male emigration, and the need to contribute money to the family are changing the social behaviour of those women who

have already gained access to university and work.

The use of the *hidjab* (veil) has a significance sometimes completely opposite to the way we Westerners interpret it. It is not only a cheap, comfortable traditional garment, but it also allows women wearing it to move freely and gain access to university and work.

Polygamy is not very common and in clear retreat. It is forbidden in some countries whereas in others it is common to agree to annul a marriage in the event of a second marriage. Weddings are arranged between families, although in big cities young people have the freedom to choose. Once married, the woman must obey her husband. Likewise, the woman's inheritance is always less than her brothers'. Besides that, the tradition of the Koran allows the man to repudiate his wife, while the woman needs authorization from an Islam judge to divorce her husband.

Women are widely integrated into an education system that is generally mixed. Her presence is very common in primary education, and reasonably so in secondary education. However, depending on the country, the situation differs, and there are areas where parents are reluctant to send their daughters to secondary education. At university there are fewer women than men, but the gap is getting smaller. Some intellectual circles defend the creation of universities exclusively for females as the only way to grant women a wide presence in higher education.

The participation of women in work is common in the peasantry, but is met with great difficulties in modern professions. Many men believe women are taking the scarce jobs available away from them.

Having people from both sexes working together raises some apprehension in society. Some countries have established separate areas in public centres and transport. Only amongst some professions –such as teaching or nursing, where female presence is the norm– does this apprehension recede. However, new consumer habits are forcing families to look for a second wage and –despite their unwillingness to do so– incorporate women into the world of work¹².

Whenever Islamists reach power, the establishment of the *Shariah* makes women's situation intolerable. In Afghanistan, the Taliban have imposed an absolute separation of men and women, and have gone so far as to throw out ill women from hospitals.

In the Muslim world there are many situations that are alien to modern sensitivity and radically opposed to human rights. However, Islam is not the same everywhere: in Europe, as well as in Central, Southern and Southeast Asia the existence of other cultural factors makes it possible for women to live in better conditions, comparable to those of other women in the same areas.

Curiously enough, never before in the history of Islam have woman played such a relevant role as now. In 1995 there were three Prime Ministers in Muslim countries: Tansu Ciller in Turkey, Benazir Bhutto in Pakistan, and Khaleda Zia in Bangladesh. There are more women poets and novelists than ever before, and it is amazing how resolutely and courageously many women are denouncing the problems of their place in Islamic society¹³.

8. RECENT CONFLICTS

The advance –sometimes violent– of Islam is provoking conflicts in many countries. The oil interests, the proliferation of dictatorships and the uneasiness provoked by the Palestinian conflict have made the Middle East and Northern Africa one of the most unstable areas in the world.

8.1. THE IRAN-IRAK WAR

The Iran-Irak war was the legacy of the ancient disputes between the Persian and Turkish Empires. These disputes were focused on the Shatt-al-Arab Canal –which had remained under Iraqi control– and the region of Khuzestan, rich in oil reserves, which remained in the hands of Iran although its population was not Iranian but Arab of Shiite origin.

When, in 1978, the Islamic revolution triumphed in Iran, it seemed likely to spread all over the Persian Gulf, where there were two thirds of the world's oil reserves. In Irak, the huge fortunes produced by oil allowed Saddam Hussein to build a powerful army with which he thought he could fight Israel and thus become the leader of all the Arab world.

For a long time Saddam Hussein had repressed the Shiites in the South, who were in favour of the Iranian Islamic revolution. In 1980, thinking the Iranian army weakened as a result of the revolutionary purges, he attacked Iran. In this way he intended to stop the spread of the revolution and get hold of the oil in Khuzestan. However, the unexpected resistance put up by the Iranian revolutionaries led to eight long years of war which bled both countries dry.

The Western powers saw in this conflict their chance to export weapons –which both countries could afford, thanks to their huge oil resources– and, at the same time, to weaken two dangerous powers. In 1988 an armistice was reached, as it was obvious the war would be won by neither of the two countries.

8.2. THE GULF WAR: "OIL FOR BLOOD"

In 1990 Saddam Hussein still had a powerful army, which he intended to use to make himself the king of the Arab world. Convinced that both the West and the Gulf monarchies considered him as the main hindrance to the feared Islamist revolution in Iran, he resolved to invade Kuwait. This small country, sparsely inhabited and with huge oil reserves, belonged historically to Irak. With the decolonization, the British decided to segregate it in order to exploit its riches more easily. Irak never accepted the independence of this small area, and always regarded the segregation as mere pillaging.

The 1989 Revolution in the East had shattered the international order established in Yalta. Saddam Hussein's ambition provided President Bush with a great opportunity to define the new world order. At the same time, he was at last able to have military control of the Gulf, which was important because developed countries depended on it for their oil supplies. A few days before the invasion, the American ambassador had promised Saddam Hussein the neutrality of the U.S. in the event of a conflict.

The United Nations Security Council –with Russia and China powerless because of their problems at home– only apparently took charge of the conflict, while actually hiding the

obvious Western interests in intervention. The public opinion in Muslim countries right from the start felt this war as an aggression to the *Ummah*. Saddam Hussein was certainly a cruel dictator, but in Islam there are hardly any democracies. Most people hoped that his army could take hold of the Gulf and its huge oil reserves. The population was hostile to the Gulf monarchies, which lived in opulence while Islam was being humiliated time and again. A powerful and determined leader, capable of facing the West and unifying the Gulf territories, might be able to create a world power able to face Israel and give Muslims back their dignity.

The show of military power and the triumph of the Western powers –allied to the unpopular Gulf monarchies– was felt by the Arabs as another defeat and aggravated their hatred of the West. For all the propaganda spread about Saddam's undeniable cruelty, in the decisive moment the U.S. avoided his total defeat. His ferocious dictatorship was never the real reason for the intervention, and the U.S. still needed an obstacle to the Iranian revolution.

8.3. THE ALGERIAN CIVIL WAR

During their colonization of Algeria, the French attempted to root out the country's culture: French was declared the only official language and Islam was written off school curricula. When, in 1962, Algeria gained independence, it became clear that, in spite of decades of hostility by the colonizers, Islam was still a mighty force. The revolutionary struggle against colonization was interpreted by some in Marxist terms, by others as a *Jihad* against the enemies of the *Ummah*.

Such confusion led to the appearance of a conflict that had been latent. A dictatorial socialist regime, close to the soviet model, was established. The proclamation of Islam as the official religion, together with the building of more than 10,000 mosques, did not satisfy the part of the population that wanted to see the establishment of some *Shariah* rules. Islam, to the lay Algerian authorities, was a sign of identity rather than a way of life.

Colonization bequeathed a split society, with a very westernized minority in charge of politics and the army, and a very traditional majority, and few women in the world of work.

In the 1970s a movement emerged, close to the Muslim Brothers, supported directly by Saudi Arabia. The example of the Iranian revolution and the preachings of the Egyptian Kichk –known through his popular cassettes– greatly increased the influence of this movement. The fact that their activities were relatively tolerated allowed them to channel the discontent of the people towards the dictatorial regime. The Afghanistan war attracted many volunteers ready to resume the *Jihad*.

The first democratic elections were won by the moderate Islamists of the Islamic Front of Salvation, both in the 1990 local elections and in the 1992 general election. Their immediate intention to establish the *Shariah* inspired terror amongst the westernized urban sectors, and more so amongst the few working women. The triumph of the Islamic Front of Salvation in the general election was annulled with the scarcely democratic support of European countries; its leaders were imprisoned and the activity of its mosques severely restricted. The answer was Islamic terrorism. From selective violence – directed at first towards foreigners and then towards working women– the situation has shifted to the present massive violence, with atrocious slaughters of whole villages and

neighbourhoods.

The security forces –with frequent tortures, summary executions, concentration camps and countless missing– has but helped increase the spiral of violence. Some distrust the incomprehensible police and army inefficiency during the Islamist massacres, and suspect they allow these slaughters to happen in order to justify the repression and reestablish the dictatorial regime in the not too distant future. It is a real civil war that has already killed thousands. It is a war being waged at the gates of Europe and whose consequences are impossible to tell.

8.4. THE AFGHANISTAN WAR

Afghanistan was a "buffer-country" between the British colonies in the Middle East and the Tsarist Empire. The country comprises very different peoples and artificially separates their traditional territories. For many years nomads have left these frontiers without any visible effects.

When, in 1978, the Iranian Islamic revolution broke out, the Soviet Union feared it might spread to Afghanistan –where there was a pro-soviet regime– and even that it might have an influence on the soviet population of Central Asia, mostly Muslim. In 1979 Soviet troops invaded Afghanistan and imposed a ruler even more loyal than the one before. This was interpreted as another move in the Cold War, which led the U.S. to finance an anti-communist guerrilla, based in Pakistan, where over four million refugees would eventually flee. Islamists saw this conflict as an attack by the Soviet Union on the *Ummah* and sent many volunteers financed by Saudi Arabia. In 1988 the Soviets left Afghanistan, thus leaving the situation apparently stable.

Three years later, the pact between the U.S.S.R. and the U.S. to stop the arms supplies, left the situation in the hands of Saudi Arabia and Iran, both of whom financed different Islamist guerrillas. In the North, the guerrilla war between the Tadjiks and the Uzbeks – Tadjikistan and Uzbekistan are now independent countries– was clearly of an ethnic character. In the South the guerrilla had its bases in Islamic Pakistan. In spite of belonging mostly to the Pashtu people, an ethnic group shared with Pakistan, this guerrilla of *mukhaidins* was of a more religious character.

The increasing weakness of the regime –Afghanistan is one of the poorest countries in the world– finally gave power to a coalition of different guerrilla groups. Constant disagreements between them soon made the capital Kabul the scene of bloody fights, which led to the exodus of most of the population.

Then came onto the stage the *talibans*, young theology students trained in the Pakistan refugee camps, who defended the application of a *Shariah* with rigour bordering on cruelty. Their rigid discipline granted them first control over the *mukhaidins* in the South and later, in 1996, the triumph over the groups fighting in Kabul. Their appeal to the Islamic *Jihad* against rulers supported by foreigners was welcomed by the population, as was the peace brought about in their territories after decades of ethnic fighting. However, with their intolerance, they may end up estranging the people who support them, even the Pashtu people, whose support is strongest.

The *Talibans* enjoy the total support of Pakistan and have, at some time, enjoyed the "sympathy" of the U.S. On the other side are both Russia –who fears their possible influence on the Muslim republics in Central Asia– and Iran, suspicious of the spread of this Sunni movement taking place across its frontiers.

9. ISLAM COUNTRIES TODAY

Some Muslim countries in Eastern Asia are witnessing a rapid economic development while those in Central Africa seem to be stuck in underdevelopment. In the Middle East the demographic boom and the identity crisis are the most serious problems of countries generally ruled by dictators.

9.1. Eastern and Southern Asia

In Southern Asia, countries such as *Indonesia* and *Malaysia* are amongst the emerging countries sharing the rapid growth of the Pacific Ocean area. The Muslim population lives together reasonably peacefully with people of other religions. However, the Islamist groups are every time more active amongst young people and the governments have, amongst others, the pressing need to stop the growth of these movements. Indonesia –the largest Muslim country, with 200 million inhabitants– has so far refrained from imposing Islam laws on its population.

In the *Philippines*, a Muslim guerrilla has been trying for decades to get independence for the island of Mindanao, where Islam is the majority group.

In *India* the Muslim group was the largest for many centuries, but the advent of independence forced many Muslims to emigrate to Pakistan, victims of interconfessional violence. However, there remain about 100 million Muslims, frequently suffering violence from Hindu fundamentalists.

In *Bangladesh* Islam has been declared the State religion in order to combat the rising fundamentalist influence.

In *Pakistan* the latent conflict with India emphasizes its religious identity. In the 1980s, the dictator Zia attempted to impose a radical view of Islam, establishing some *Shariah* laws. At present, the Pakistan army is providing great support to the fundamentalist extremism of the Afghan Taliban.

9.2. Central Africa

In Central Africa Islam is growing dramatically, especially in those areas –like South Sahara or Eastern Africa– which had traditional trade contracts with the Muslim area. Conversion to Islam in those areas implies social advancement. Saudi Arabia finances the mosques, which play an important role as cultural and educational centres. Here Islam adapts to local traditions and habits while it eliminates tribal and ethnic borders, thus integrating all the faithful into one community¹⁴. In this sense we must remember that since its origins Islam has always been absolutely anti-racist¹⁵.

In contrast to the Christian missionaries, the job of Muslim envoys is exclusively religious, avoiding taking part in projects of economic development. *Nigeria*, with its 115 million people the largest country in Africa, has a population that is mostly Muslim.

9.3. Middle East and North Africa

Even though they make up only a fraction of it, the Arab countries of the Middle East are

the heart of the Muslim world. Even Iran is left out of this privileged nucleus, because of its Shiite and Indo-European character. Egypt, Syria and Irak are countries where, for many centuries, a rich Muslim intellectuality has flowered.

The Cairo Al-Azhar University in *Egypt* is the oldest and most influential institution of Islam studies in the world. There Islam thought developed and the movement of the Muslim Brothers was born. Hosni Mubarak's regime combines a harsh repression of the most radical movements with the dialogue with moderate Islamists. The rising radicalism has brought about the first serious conflicts with the Copt Christian minority, something unheard of in a country characterised by thousands of years of tolerance.

Syria and *Irak* are also the birthplace of ancient civilizations. They boast an economic development higher than their neighbouring countries', and one can notice in them the leadership of middle-classes with a very old tradition. Practically since their independence, they have been ruled by rival branches of the Baas Party, lay, socialist, and pan-Arabic. In Syria, Hafed al-Assad's iron dictatorship –after two wars against Israel and the repression of the Islamists– shows reasonable stability and a noticeable economic growth. Irak is suffering a terrible recession as a result of the blockade decreed by the U.N.O. after the Gulf War, while the rebellions of the Shiite Arabs and the Kurds, oppressed by the Arab Sunni minority, are still latent.

This area is witnessing the plight of the *Kurds*, a people of Indo-European origin, who number more than 25 million. After the colonial division, they remained scattered between Turkey, Irak and Iran, in all of which countries they are being cruelly repressed. Only the rivalties between these countries provide them with some sporadic support.

In *Turkey*, the rise of the moderate Islam parties has not changed the strictly lay character of the regime, protected by an army that feels guardian of Kemal Ataturk's legacy. At a cultural distance from its Arab neighbours, Turkey has a clear European vocation and has applied for admission into the European Union. But the constant violation of human rights of the Kurd minority makes such an application unfeasible for the moment. Apart from this, the independence of the Turkish countries of Central Asia has strengthened their Muslim identity and their aspiration to rule that part of Asia.

Since the Iranian revolution, the Wahhabist monarchy of *Saudi Arabia* has been imposing the *Shariah* yet more severely, which contains precepts such as flogging or cutting off the hands of thieves. Through the Saudi Arabian Council of Ulemas, the religious authorities of the country maintain an unquestionable authority in religious matters all over the Muslim world. The huge income from oil allows Saudi Arabia to finance the pilgrimage to Mecca of millions of Muslims, as well as the building and maintenance of mosques in many countries, particularly in Central Africa. Besides which, with its money, they house and feed Palestinian refugees and undercover, foster the expansion of integrist movements all over the Islam world.

In *Sudan*, the integrist Islam government has established the *Shariah* and wages a long and exhausting war against the Christians of the South, which is sometimes compared to genocide.

In *Morocco*, King Hassan II is a political and religious leader at the same time. Although it tolerates the limited action of a few democratic institutions, his regime is clearly dictatorial. A direct descendant of Muhammad, Hassan is acknowledged as *Commander of the Believers* by the Moroccan faithful. His political power is strengthened by the fact

that he is the religious leader, which also grants him power to stop the growth of Islamist movements in Morocco. He has severely repressed Islam fundamentalists whenever he deemed it necessary, and is at the moment keeping a close watch on them lest the events in Algeria should spread to his country. The feeling of Islamic identity is deeply rooted in Morocco, as could be seen in the people's attitude towards Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War. However, it is difficult to tell what will happen in the future, as Morocco is also a country with close bonds with Europe through emigration and is at the moment undergoing profound changes as a result of its rapid economic growth and industrialization.

10. ISLAM IN THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER

The colonialism of the last centuries as well as the Palestinian problem in the last decades have placed the Muslim civilization in a state of prostration. However, as has been seen, today we are witnessing a certain awakening of Islamic identity. Their soaring demographic growth is a serious obstacle for the development of Muslim countries, but gives them the prospects of an increasingly relevant role in the international arena. Their radical anti-racism allows Islam to spread amongst many minorities discriminated against because of their race. Whereas the rise of Islamic movements is bringing about serious inner conflicts and instability in these countries, it is also strengthening its signs of collective identity and returning to them confidence in the worth of their own culture.

The West perceives Islam as a potentially dangerous rival and feels tempted to satanize it.

After the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the capitalist world was left without an enemy. But its ideological and military structure necessitated the fear of an outside enemy in order to impose social discipline and justify many political and economic policies. The huge emerging China could have fulfilled this role. But, despite its countless violations of human rights, its obvious orientation towards Western culture and capitalism has helped project the image of a fabulous potential market rather than a dangerous rival.

The unwillingness of the Muslim people to assimilate the Western influence into their culture makes Islam the perfect candidate for this role of "enemy". The proliferation of dictatorial regimes in Muslim countries and their scarce respect for human rights enhances their own "demonization".

However, more than two thirds of the world's oil reserves are in Muslim countries. It is likely that oil will be the main source of energy for a long time. The West has been forced to sign pacts –sometimes not very ethical– with the ruling oligarchies of these dictatorial regimes in order to guarantee the supply of oil. Apart from that, the United States support Israel unconditionally, in spite of their systematic violations of International Law and human rights in the occupied territories of Palestine.

It is understandable, although not justifiable, that a large part of the Muslim population – especially the underprivileged– have developed a feeling of hatred towards the West. The *Ummah* is being attacked on all fronts –the recent tragedy in Bosnia seems to confirm this– and it is the duty of the faithful to defend it. Many Muslims feel morally bound to join the *Jihad*, which is now seen as an armed fight against Western aggression. When a despicable dictator like Saddam Hussein dares stand up and fight the West and the unpopular oil oligarchies, this sector of the population tends to forget his cruelties and regard him rather as a hero defending Islam pride.

The cultural distance between the population of Western countries and that of Muslim countries is growing every day. In the near future it might not be a problem for the United

States or Japan, but it will be for Europe. *They are our neighbours, with a spectacular birth rate. They are clearly expanding in Central Africa and even in Europe through a rising and necessary immigration. They own the oil reserves our economy will need in the next century.*

Our economic prosperity and social stability depend largely on our being on good terms with our Muslim friends. We urgently need to open a road to dialogue that will lead to peace and mutual understanding. Undoubtedly the Muslim communities in Europe will make a decisive contribution to this dialogue.

May 1998

NOTES

1. The *hanifiyyah* school (founded by Abu Hanif in 767) is the most liberal one; the maliki (Malik, 767) has today very few followers; the shafei (Chafii, 820), particularly widespread in Egypt and Arabia; and the *hanbali* (Ibn Hanbal, 855), the strictest one, from Baghdad, which at present dominates in Saudi Arabia.

2. The Irgun group –to which belonged Menahen Begin, who later became Prime Minister and Nobel Peace Prize winner, and also the former Prime Minister Yitzak Shamir– assassinated the representative of the United Nations Count Bernardotte, and blew up the hotel King David, where many people died. This group also attacked Deir Yassin, an Arab village that had become a symbol of harmony because it was on good terms with the Zionist authorities. They killed all its inhabitants, more than two hundred and fifty men, women and children. In this way they made many frightened Arabs leave the area that had been given to the Jewish State. Initially in this area 498,000 Jews and 497,000 Arabs lived. It was "ethnic cleansing" similar to what has recently taken place in the former Yugoslavia.

3. Particularly tragic is the theft of water, a vital resource in this area. In 1990, out of the 807 million m³ of water from the occupied West Bank, 510 million were re-routed to Israel, 160 million went to the Jewish settlers (some 100,000 people) and only 137 million m³ went to the 1.2 million Palestinians. Meanwhile, between 34% and 55% –depending on the area– of Palestinian children suffer from malnutrition.

4. Pasquier, Roger du: *El despertar del Islam*, Desclée de Bouver. Bilbao, 1992. P. 53.

5. Jauregui Adell, Juan: *Y en el centro, el Islam*. Ediciones 29. Barcelona, 1996. P. 167.

6. Pasquier, Roger du: *El despertar del Islam*, Desclée de Bouver. Bilbao, 1992. P. 75.

7. Pasquier, Roger du: *El despertar del Islam*, Desclée de Bouver. Bilbao, 1992. P. 31.

8. Santoni, Erik: *El Islam*. Acento Editorial. Madrid, 1994. P. 63.

9. Ayubi, Nazih: *El Islam político. Teorías, tradición y rupturas*. Biblioteca del Islam Contemporáneo. Edicions Bellaterra. Barcelona 1996. P. 83.

10. The UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) publishes a yearly report giving each country an HDR (Human Development Rate) . Those countries showing a rate between 0.5 and 0.8 are considered to have an intermediate degree of development. In the 1994 report, all Muslim countries of the Middle East (except Afghanistan, one of the most underdeveloped countries in the world) and North Africa belonged to that intermediate development group.

11. Martín Muñoz, Gema: *Mujeres musulmanas: Del Corán a los Códigos de Familia*. "Africa-América Latina. Cuadernos" No. 9. Madrid 1992: P. 40.

12. Jauregui Adell, Juan: *Y en el centro, el Islam*. Ediciones 29. Barcelona, 1996. P. 49.

13. Balta, Paul: *El Islam*. Ed. Salvat. Barcelona 1996. P. 145.

14. Santoni, Erik: *El Islam*. Acento Editorial. Madrid 1994. P. 52.

15. This anti-racism has been one of the most striking features of the Muslim religion since Muhammad's days, as is shown by the fact that Bilal, the first Imam that called the faithful to pray from a mosque, was a liberated black slave.

GROUP WORK

1. First of all we should get familiar with some key words in Islam, not easy to translate into English:

- *Do you understand the meaning of the following: Islam, Imam, Sunnah, Shariah, Jihad, Mullah, Ummah, Sufism?*
- *Do you know who the following are: Shiites, Sunnis, Wahhabists, feddayim, ulemas? The text of the booklet will help you answer.*

2. If you read the text carefully, you will find a series of complaints and accusations held by Islam against the West:

- *What are they?*
- *What is your opinion of such accusations?*

3. Read Chapter ten carefully and study the following two positions:

- *Islam is a real threat and a total enemy of what we call the "civilized world".*
- *The West needs to have an absolute enemy (a role formerly played by Communism) in order to ensure its own unity, and justify (or distract our attention from) things such as the arms race and rising economic inequality, which appear to go against essential Western values.*
- *Argue for both of these positions, and try to reach an agreement.*

4. Nobody can deny the presence in some Muslim countries (e.g. Algeria, Afghanistan) of what has come to be called "Islamic fundamentalism".

- *What do you think are the reasons for this phenomenon?*
- *Which are the result of and which are alien to Islam?*
- *Is the Muslim world the only breeding place of fundamentalism?*