



Re-Examining Islamic History – A Religious and Political Imperative

The separation of religion and politics has been debated throughout history. Some Christian countries in the West adopted the principle of separation in their constitutions. Nevertheless, the debate persists and has been thrown back into the political arena, more recently so in the U.S. and to a lesser extent in Europe. In the Muslim World, the separation of religion and politics is even more difficult to achieve, given that religion as a governing principle has become an integral part of Islamic religious dogma. Dr. 'Ali Al-Khushayban, an advocate for the separation of religion and politics, argues that to resolve this dilemma it is necessary to have a serious review and re-interpretation of some aspects of the Islam which have their roots in early Islamic history.



Al-Khushayban believes that, regardless of the adopted religion, it is impossible for the political constitution of a society to remain static for hundreds of years. It must consider the diversity of its constituents, which was the case during the first hundred years of Islam. Politics which ignores the diversity and interaction among different members of the population is bound to fail. In Christianity or Islam, religious dogma must remain untainted by politics; otherwise it becomes an ideological and social impairment. Religious beliefs devoid of politics tend to be pure and concentrate on the creator. History is a witness to this fact, he states.

What is missing in present Islam, the author contends, is for Muslims to reread their history in a scientific and realistic manner so as to alleviate society from the burden of metaphysical justifications for political accommodation. The success of any effort to separate religion and politics in the Muslim world requires re-examination of the early first century historical events that confronted Islam. In doing so, the author's philosophical argument attempts to differentiate between the dogmatic foundations of the Muslim religion, *i.e.*, the five pillars of Islam, which all Muslims accept, and subsequent politically-motivated interpretations of that dogma, which he rejects.

By design or conviction, the author avoids dwelling on the period in which the prophet Muhammad was alive and which he considers to be divinely inspired and beyond review. He calls on Muslims to re-examine the time following the death of the prophet. The main premise of his argument is his belief that, during this period, evolution of the dogma was largely the result of political motivation and manipulation and less the result of divine inspiration, which ceased to exist after the death of the prophet. According to *Al-Khushayban* politics impregnated the earlier ideological/social base upon which Islam was built, giving birth to a new Islamic dogma on the role of religion in politics. That new dogma became the nucleus of a distorted ideology.

The writer questions why these political infusions, which could have been reexamined and reinterpreted within a historical context, were instead sanctified as part of a static dogma beyond reproach or discussion. He points to the difference between metaphysical religious events, which he considers necessary to the human interpretation of the inexplicable forces surrounding humans, and political events which are subject to review and debate.

***Al-Khushayban's* argument provides a valuable opening to discussion of how Islam can and should adapt to the realities of modern life, not by rejecting core beliefs, but rather by cleansing them of the taint of politics. It may also facilitate reconciliation between the different sects in Islam by resolving differences that arose in the post-Muhammad period.**

Source: Al-Arabiya – author: 'Ali Al-Khushayban - Date 12/27/2007
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