Introduction

In God's Name?

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As experience shows, diplomatic agreements between the elites of conflicting parties are not sufficient to achieve lasting peace between their societies. Conflicts of long duration marked by ideological "overdetermination" highlight the limits of a pragmatic approach to their solution.

Hindrances on the path to an understanding in the Middle East often appear in a religious guise. We need but recall the names of Baruch Goldstein (Hebron massacre, 1994), Yigal Amir (Yitzhak Rabin's assassin, 1995), Ariel Sharon's provocative visit to the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem (2000), or the Islamic suicide bombers of Hamas and Islamic Jihad. In all these instances, the actors cited guidance from religious commandments and the blessing of religious authorities. The eruption of the al-Aqsa Intifada in October 2000, as well as the events of 9/11—although with very different meaning—were a powerful confirmation of the political explosiveness of religious symbolism.

But it would be a crude simplification to limit the political role of religion to these extreme examples. In both Jewish-Israeli and Islamic-Arab societies, religious categories and concepts are central to identity and legitimacy, and even secular individuals, movements, and regimes must pay tribute to religious influences. That is why it is imperative to study the sociopolitical perception of religious traditions and their selective interpretation and utilization for diverse strategies (on behalf of freedom and human rights as well as war and violence).

In the West, interreligious studies and conferences are customarily dominated either by the relations between Christianity and Judaism or relations between Christianity and Islam. Aside from their generally Western and Eurocentric perspective, encounters of this type have yielded few practical results. Due to their predominantly diplomatic and theological character, they have had little real discernible impact on political conflicts.

Our project aims to be different. We hope to contribute to a reduction of violence and potential violence in a region where the religious overdetermination of conflicts is a concrete, seemingly insuperable political problem. To achieve this goal it is necessary to analyze the role and function of religious discourse in its own context. Initially, we proceed from two theses. First, there is no necessary connection between the politicizing of religion, the sacralization of politics, and the quest for coexistence and peace in the Middle East. And second, the politicization of religion and sacralization of politics unavoidably tends to heighten conflict. Consequently, ways have to be found to uncouple politics from religion, religion from politics.

Religion and Politics in the Middle East

This book is based on the assumption of a reciprocal dynamics between religious and political behavior and consciousness. But the character of that relation differs depending on time and place. That caveat also holds for the role of religious patterns of argumentation and rhetoric in a given political discourse. The phenomenon of a "politicized religion" (Bielefeldt and Heitmeyer 1998) can be seen as something distinctively modern, even in the Middle East, to the extent that it appears as a mode of confronting new challenges. The phenomenon of fundamentalism is associated today almost exclusively with the Middle East. Who still recalls the origin of the term? Who associates it today with its specifically American Protestant matrix of genesis and elaboration (Marty and Appleby 1996)?

Indeed, the Middle East is not only the cradle of the three great monotheistic world religions, it also seems to be the area most intensely affected by the present global (re)surgence in religions. One of the reasons is probably historical: in the past, except for Turkey, a relative secularization was either the product of colonial influences or failed political movements (nationalism, socialism) (Gerner 2000; Halliday 2000; Steinbach 2000). For this reason alone, despite Westernization and globalization, religious structures of thought and action have retained a central role in public consciousness and the self-identity of the state, both in the Arab-Islamic world and in Israel, albeit for different reasons.

Judaism and Zionism

The relation between Zionism and the Jewish religion was and remains contradictory because the Jewish national movement was born as an antithesis to traditional messianism. Indeed, most Jewish Orthodox leaders admonished the Zionists that they were wrong in seeking to "hasten the end" (i.e.,

messianic redemption), traditionally termed *dehikat ha-kets*. Rather, it was necessary to wait patiently for the Messiah's coming. At most one might bring that day closer by a life of piety and strict adherence to the commandments of the Torah. The Zionists in any case could not claim they were living such a life of reverence since they had replaced the Torah with a secular national concept and did not keep the religious commandments, and their leaders were totally secular (Ravitsky 1993; Timsit 1996). Yet even traditional and religious Jews could not fail to be impressed by the practical success of Zionism, especially in the wake of repeated calamity for the Jews in Europe, and its progress in constructing a new society in Palestine. Thus, within the movement in Europe, Palestine, and, later, in the young state, a national-religious (Mizrahi) current developed. Initially it was interested solely in serving the cultural needs of its adherents and so sought a role in the political structures of the state. Until 1967 this current was basically pragmatic in outlook and action; Zionism and the state were not sacralized. That was to change after 1967 and the "miraculous" conquest of the Old City in Jerusalem and the biblical core area (Judea and Samaria). Already during the mandate, Chief Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook had espoused the thesis that the nonreligious Zionists were unintentional tools of redemption. His son, Zvi Yehuda Kook, citing older sources such as the book of Joshua and the views of Moshe ben Nachman (Nachmanides, 1194–1270 C.E.), provided an ideological rationalization for the religious-settler movement Gush Emunim (Bloc of the Faithful), whose leadership were among his students at the rabbinical seminary Merkaz Harav. The 1967 and 1973 wars as well as proactive settlement in the Occupied Territories were seen as part of a divine plan of redemption. Israeli soldiers fell as martyrs *al kiddush ha-shem* (sanctifying the Holy Name), and Palestinians, latter-day Canaanites, were to be treated like the ancient biblical adversaries of the Israelites. Israel, they argued, had to struggle against cultural Westernization, opposing it with a "Jewish" codex of morality (Demant 1995; Lustick 1988; Silberstein 1993; Sprinzak 1991; Prior 1997). Yet the national-religious camp sacralized the Zionist state only so long as it adhered, as they saw it, to the divine plan of redemption. In their eyes, the 1993 Olso Accords were heinous treason and the 1995 murder of Rabin rightful retribution (at least in the mind of the perpetrator).

While a small group (Neturei Karta, Edah Haredit) stuck to the original positions of Orthodox anti-Zionism (Ravitzky 1993), the great majority of the *haredim*—ultra-Orthodox in Israel, represented by Agudat Israel (Ashkenazic) and Shas (Sephardic) political parties—came to occupy a middle position somewhere in between. On the one hand, the state (like all other states) continued to be regarded as a neutral entity. Exile *(galut)* was not a

geographical concept but rather the absence of the Shekhina (Divine Presence); galut could thus also continue to exist unabated even in the State of Israel. On the other hand, the parties of the haredim were adept at instrumentalizing the state to further their special interests (mainly in the area of religious education) and to gain certain select posts and even bailiwicks within the political system (Knesset, ministries) for their own. Most successful in this enterprise was Shas, whose phenomenal growth has made it currently the third largest party in the Knesset. Shas was able to galvanize a kind of "Oriental revolution" in the milieu of the haredim, becoming a magnet for Jews from socially underprivileged backgrounds. Led by the former Sephardic chief rabbi, Ovadiya Yossef, the party initially championed moderate positions on the peace process, serving for a time as a coalition partner in the Rabin and Barak governments. However, the party's differences with the Zionist-Ashkenazic-Western-secular left parties (especially Meretz) drove Shas ever further to the right. This is partially due to a standing practice on the Israeli right (Likud and other nationalist parties) to exploit imagery drawn from Jewish tradition. Moreover, the question of holy sites such as the Western Wall, Rachel's Tomb, or the Machpela (Tomb of the Patriarchs) in Hebron cannot be ignored, nor can the presence in the territories of the Torah-true settlers. On the other hand, Israeli sovereignty is somehow secondary for haredi groups like Agudat Israel or Shas, important only insofar as it assures access to the holy sites and the freedom to practice the Jewish Orthodox religion. Unlike the radical Temple Mount Faithful, they do not, for example, make an express demand for Israeli sovereignty over the Temple Mount (Har ha-Bayit, Haram al-Sharif) (Maul 2000; Neugrat 2000; Shragai 2001).

We can thus distinguish between various functions fulfilled by religion in Israel. Ravitzky (1993) proposes a distinction between fundamentalists and quietists, referring to the shifting relation between state/politics and religion. While the fundamentalists utilize religious categories in order to "sacralize" a state/political battery of aims, the quietists mobilized the secular profane state for their "sacred" agenda: the continuity of their congregations, way of life, and education. Although this distinction is valid in ideal-typical terms, it gives too little consideration to the intersections (such as the Chabad Hassidim) and other marginal currents. These encompass not only the ultra-Orthodox anti-Zionist sects but also efforts for a new synthesis between religion and politics influenced by Reform Judaism in the United States (e.g., Netivot Shalom or "Rabbis for Human Rights"). In any event, Israel's political system as a whole would appear to be constrained to fashion a religious justification for existence that springs primarily from the difficulty of constructing a purely secular Jewish identity.

Islam and Islamism

In contrast with the European-Zionist attempt to nationalize and secularize Judaism, analogous efforts in Islam have less importance. Nonetheless, within the context of the current politicization of religion, there are similarities deriving from the legalistic core *(halakha/shari'a)* of these traditions. On this basis, it is possible to legitimate claims to subordinate individual and collective behavior to a sacrally legitimated code.

Nonetheless, the concerns promoted by reference to Islam are as a rule quite modern and political. The use of an Islamic language serves to reduce complexity and is quite selective in trying to cope with problems of modernity. One example is the use of the concept *jahiliyya,* coined for pre-Islamic societies lacking moral values and legitimate rule—and challenged by the prophet Muhammad—but applied to contemporary ones. In any event, Islam is a cultural system open to an array of diverse interpretations (Halliday 1995, 2000; Beinin 1997; Humphreys 1999; Sivan 1985; Zubaida 1993).

The phenomenon of repoliticization of Islam and its mobilization on behalf of a politics of authenticity begins at the end of the nineteenth century as a reaction of Oriental intellectuals like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897), Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905), Rashid Muhammad Rida (1865–1935), Hassan al-Banna (1906–1949), or Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966) to the inordinate influence and power of the imperial West. Their approaches flow into those of current fundamentalisms but are modified depending on the situation. This is why generalizing statements on fundamentalism are so problematic. It is necessary to look at the distinctive specific features of each movement, analyzing them from a comparative perspective, such as in contrast to melds of nationalism and religion in places like Ireland, Poland, Greece, Serbia, and Macedonia.

While the first wave of Islamicist politics began at the turn of the last century, the current wave is bound up with the years 1967 (Six Day War) and 1979 (Iranian Revolution). The loss of the June 1967 war against Israel, perceived as a Western outpost in the Arab East, catalyzed a search for the causes of this traumatic defeat. Criticism soon singled out the defective character of the existing Arab regimes. Nationalism and "socialism" were viewed as apparently failed enterprises and "Islam" was (re)discovered as internal therapy and a weapon toward the hostile outside. The Iranian Revolution appeared to confirm that only an Islamic uprising could achieve true emancipation from the yoke of Western imperialism (Abu-Rabi 1994; Ayubi 1991; Choueiri 1990; Esposito 1998).

The loss of Iran triggered shock in the West. After all, the regime of the shah had been the most important regional ally of the West. Now Khomeini

became an exporter of an Islamic revolution *against* the West (and Israel). Although the revolution's export ran into difficulties due ultimately to its distinctively Shi'ite character, it more than sufficed to resurrect and rejuvenate anti-Islamic images of the adversary in the West. This was vigorously abetted by the seizure of hostages at the U.S. embassy in Tehran (1979), the kidnappings and bombings in Lebanon (1983/84), and the growing presence of Egyptian extremists or Hamas in Palestine. Although Western policies did not always target Islamic forces—one need but recall Washington's support for the anti-Soviet Afghan Mujahiddin, the regimes in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf, the Bosnian Muslims, and the Kosovars (Esposito 1999; Tibi 1999)—"Islamic fundamentalism" remains a central image of the current enemy in Western societies, especially after September 11, 2001.

This review should help clarify the relative function of religious or "cultural" (Huntington 1993) affiliations or democratic concerns. There is apparently no clear-cut connection between religion as such and democracy or peace, although there tends to be a contrast between religious extremism on the one hand and liberal democracy and pacifism on the other (Kurzman 1998; Monshipouri 1998; Rejwan 2000).

Relations between Judaism and Islam

To assess the relations between Judaism and Islam, it is necessary to look at their encounter in theological and historical terms. The prime distinction is between theological correspondences and differences on the one hand and the political-historical relevance of such similarities and contrasts on the other.

As numerous authors (Bouman 1990; Bunzl 1989; Busse 1991; Katch 1954; Lewis 1984; Peters 1982) have noted, Muslims over the course of fourteen centuries were not anti-Semites—not because they themselves were Semites (an irrelevant argument), but because they were not Christians. In Islam, the concept of a son of God or murder of God is inconceivable. Jesus, as Muhammad himself, is considered in Islam to be a human being and prophet, not a "savior." The crucifixion, which in the Qur'an is considered an act the Jews were incapable of, is regarded as an illusion: God simply took Jesus unto Himself. While Christianity regarded itself as the sublation and supplanting of Judaism, and saw the survival of Jewish congregations as a provocation and threat, Islam never regarded the Jews as a challenge of comparable salience and severity. Naturally there was Muhammad's dispute with the Jewish tribes in Arabia and his rancor over the fact that they did not accept his prophecy, a teaching that contains many elements of Jewish tradition (see below). But the cosmic exaggeration of the importance of these

disputes is part of current Islamic rhetoric, something quite contemporary and novel by any historical yardstick.

Islam and Judaism share many theological and sociocultural features (see Geiger 1970; Rosenthal 1961; Wasserstrom 1995; Brinner and Ricks, 1989; Kramer 1999; Nettler 1993; Nettler and Taji-Farouki 1998), such as the following:

—strict monotheism
—analogous role for religious law *(halakha/shari'a)*
—dietary laws (Sunnis permit kosher food)
—circumcision
—rabbi/*'ulema:* scholars, sages of the Law, theologians, but no priests
—Abraham/Ibrahim: "Jew before the Torah" and "Muslim before the Qur'an"
—acceptance of the biblical genealogy of the Arabs via Ishmael
—Abraham as builder of the Ka'ba
—Moses as role model for Muhammad
—original direction of prayer *(qibla)* to Jerusalem

This list could be continued (and can be found in what is probably its most detailed appearance in Katch 1954), but should suffice for our purposes here as a bridge to the next section.

On the Historical Experience

In evaluating the history of Jewish minorities in Islamic societies, two extremes should be avoided: the image of idyllic coexistence, often sketched by Islamic apologists, and the image of an eternal hell sometimes propagated by Zionist propagandists (Cohen 1994; Stillman 1979, 1991; Ye'or 1985; Deshen and Zenner 1996; Braude and Lewis 1982; Rejwan 1998). Summarily, one can say that though the historical experience differed at times, there was doubtless an Islamically grounded dualism of discrimination and protection, though the situation of Jews in predominantly Shi'ite societies was generally worse than in Sunni societies. In the latter, there was occasional but rare persecution, though violence against Jews never took on the proportions it achieved in the Christian Occident (before emancipation of the Jews following the French Revolution of 1789). There are no parallels to the mass expulsions, Inquisition, and pogroms, not to speak of the Holocaust. Bernard Lewis (1984) has determined that the situation of minorities in Islamic lands was better in periods of rise than decline. There are references again and again of course to the flowering in Spain after the Islamic conquest (eighth century C.E. to 1492) and in the Ottoman Empire after

1492 (acceptance of Sephardic immigrants) (Goitein 1967; Shaw 1991; Levy 1992; Ashtor 1973–84; Rodrigue and Benbassa, 1995). The legal status of the "People of the Book" (*Ahl al-Kitab,* i.e., Jews and Christians) was basically regulated by their *dhimmi* (protected) status, according to which a certain security, internal autonomy (*millet* system in the Ottoman Empire), and exemption from military service were granted to these minorities in return for recognition of the dominance of Islam and the payment of a poll tax, the so-called *jizya.* Since Jews, in contrast to Christians, were not perceived as actual or potential rivals, a kind of benign neglect or condescending toleration was practiced toward them.

The decline of the Islamic world, represented by the Ottoman Empire, and the rise of the European colonial powers offered Christian minorities (and to a lesser extent Jewish minorities as well) the possibility of overcoming their inferior status by drawing closer to a Europe that in the wake of the French Revolution had developed forms of minority emancipation beyond the dreams of non-Muslim minorities in the Orient. The relative weakness and impotence of the Islamic state reduced its tolerance toward Christians and Jews as well, who were often accused of disloyalty and collaboration with the West. Now the groundwork was laid for a possible deterioration in Jewish-Islamic relations. These preconditions did not spring from religion or religious differences but were rooted in the following historical circumstances:

—the appearance of Zionism; conflicts in and over Palestine
—the percolation of European anti-Semitism, initially via Christian minorities and competitors of the Jews
—the attraction exercised by European ethnonationalisms and later by Nazi propaganda
—shock over the emergence of a Jewish military might

Initially it was believed that the Jews, associated with the traditional stereotype of cowardice, were incapable of creating a state themselves. The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 constituted a shock. Consequently, it had to be rationalized as a creature of the machinations of imperialism—and then, reversing the classic stereotype, defamed as the product of a Jewish "world conspiracy" (see Sivan 1985). This conspiracy theory, actually Christian anti-Semitic in origin (see the classic *Protocols of the Wise Men of Zion*), is now Islamicized (cf. Nüsse in Nettler 1993). The successive process of termination of the Jewish presence in the Arab-Islamic world in the wake of the establishment of the State of Israel intensified an estrangement rationalized in part by both sides in terms of "religion."

On the Structure of This Volume

In the spirit of Edward Said's remarks at the beginning of this book, but more focused on Jewish and Islamic dimensions of contemporary Middle Eastern politics, we refuse to ignore the "internal dynamics and plurality of every civilization." We pay conscious attention to the "exchange and cross-fertilization" between cultures, especially in the present globalizing world. It follows logically from this that we must warn against generalizations and constructions of the "other" as totally different and alien, combined with associated exclusionary practices. Instead of a "clash of civilizations," we prefer to look at "clashes within civilizations."

As for the clash over Palestine, our contributors agree that the origins of the conflict are not religious: rather, in the course of a long and passionate struggle, actors on both sides have sacralized the dispute. Those least able and willing to reach an accommodation have hijacked the discourse on the conflict. Millenarian Jewish and Jihadic Muslim interpretations and politics have gained acceptance in nearly direct proportion to the disappearance of hope for "earthly" solutions. One might add that Evangelical Christian support for right-wing Israeli agendas has been strengthened, especially after 9/11, to a large extent by the dubious attractiveness of these developments, which seem in the eyes of the Evangelical Christians to corroborate their pro-Israel and anti-Islamic attitudes.

While one task of the book consists of an analysis of these troubling phenomena, another looks into alternative interpretations of the same religious-cultural traditions. For broad masses of people in the Middle East, the element of the "religious" plays a significant role in their lives and identity; thus, a struggle over the meaning of this heritage assumes a major political importance.

These concerns flowed into the conception of a conference on which this volume of essays is based: held on 27–29 November 2000 in Vienna, its participants included a number of prominent scholars from the Middle East, Europe, and North America. Organized jointly by the Austrian Institute for International Affairs (Österreichisches Institut für Internationale Politik, Vienna) and the German Orient Institute (Deutsches Orient-Institut, Hamburg), the conference was entitled "Islam, Judaism, and the Political Role of Religions in the Middle East."

The essays presented can be usefully grouped in terms of four thematic research foci within the general subject of the conference:

1. Theological and historical relations between Muslims and Jews, Islam and Judaism, with an emphasis on issues of exchange and cross-fertilization

2. The dynamics of ethnic, cultural, and religious identities in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian encounter and within the Palestinian National Movement itself, where the issue of Muslim-Christian relations is examined
3. Sources within religious traditions that can be given an emancipatory meaning and constitute a potential for progressive politics
4. Issues of contemporary instrumentalization of religions for political purposes in the sense of a "clash of civilizations"

Accordingly, the essays by Hans-Michael Haussig (University of Potsdam) and Nissim Rejwan (Hebrew University of Jerusalem) investigate theological and historical aspects subsumed under the first focus. Haussig elaborates on the differing status of the concept of religion within Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, exploring not only the status of belief systems within each tradition but also the recognition and comparability of other denominations. Rejwan's essay, on the other hand, centers on the most productive periods of the Muslim-Jewish intellectual and cultural symbiosis, especially in medieval Muslim Spain, stressing that these traditions could have renewed political relevance today. The concept of a Judaeo-Christian tradition as opposed to the World of Islam can be thus understood as a relatively recent construction.

Within the second focus, Herbert Kelman (Harvard University) draws on comprehensive research on the political psychology of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as well as on extensive experience in interactive workshops where Israeli and Palestinian personalities participated unofficially. In addressing the centrality of the identity of the Other, Kelman conceives of religion as an important element of identity. Helga Baumgarten (Birzeit University, Palestine) draws our attention to the relevance and irrelevance of religious (Muslim-Christian) identities and cleavages within the Palestinian National Movement. She shows how secular and Islamist concepts of political struggle affect the status of Christians within Palestinian society in different ways.

The third thematic complex revolves around the issue of alternative political potentials within Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions, "alternative" in the sense of "counterhegemonic" under the present circumstances. The contributors in this section focus on Jewish and/or Islamic traditions in order to substantiate emancipatory, intercultural, or democratic approaches. Raja Bahlul (Birzeit University, Palestine) examines this attempt within a Muslim framework, investigating sources and conceptions of democracy in Islamic thought. Uncovering Muslim roots of democratic concepts imbues the idea of democracy with greater authenticity in the Middle East, distinguishing it from a discourse and practice of democracy as im-

ported from the West. In a similar vein, Adam Seligman (Boston University) explores the religious roots of tolerance with special reference to Judaism and Islam. His point of departure is the conviction that for the predictable future, religious forms of consciousness will remain predominant and valorized among peoples in the Orient. Seligman suggests that given this configuration, political change should best be sought from armatures of these traditions.

The fourth focus is addressed in the essay by Joel Beinin (Stanford University). He stresses pluralism and syncretism, pointing to the relevance of multiple identities in the region. In a powerful analysis he gives examples of how the hegemonic "clash of civilizations" can be undermined by subversive forms of popular culture. Writing about the Palestinian National Movement, Alexander Flores (University of Bremen) explores the extent and limits of its "Islamization." Referring to the al-Aqsa Intifada, he emphasizes that in spite of the religious significance of Jerusalem's sacred places, the character of the uprising has remained primarily political. On the other hand, a constant deterioration of living conditions and political prospects (especially after 9/11) increases the dangers of "essentializing" the conflict, that is, seeing it as an uncompromising cultural confrontation. A similar development is observed by Avishai Ehrlich (Tel Aviv University) for the Israeli side. He presents a predominantly pessimistic account of the way religious themes enter political discourse and/or mass consciousness, citing empirical data indicating a reverse relationship between religiosity and readiness for peace and reconciliation with the Palestinian Other. Moreover, he suggests that an "Israeli Judaism" has developed, reflecting conditions other than those that led to the emergence of traditional "Diaspora Judaism." Nonetheless, Ehrlich cautions us not to trivialize secular nationalisms by overemphasizing religious fundamentalisms.

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