

Islam and the West: Lines of Demarcation

Roger Scruton

The West today is involved in a protracted and violent struggle with the forces of radical Islam. This conflict is intensely difficult, both because of our enemy's dedication to his cause, and also, perhaps most of all, because of the enormous *cultural* shift that has occurred in Europe and America since the end of the Vietnam War. Put simply, the citizens of Western states have lost their appetite for foreign wars; they have lost the hope of scoring any but temporary victories; and they have lost confidence in their way of life. Indeed, they are no longer sure what that way of life requires of them.

At the same time, they have been confronted with a new opponent, one who believes that the Western way of life is profoundly flawed, and perhaps even an offense against God. In a "fit of absence of mind," Western societies have allowed this opponent to gather in their midst; sometimes, as in France, Britain, and the Netherlands, in ghettos which bear only tenuous and largely antagonistic relations to the surrounding political order. And in both America and Europe there has been a growing desire for appeasement: a habit of public contrition; an acceptance, though with heavy heart, of

the censorious edicts of the mullahs; and a further escalation in the official repudiation of our cultural and religious inheritance. Twenty years ago, it would have been inconceivable that the archbishop of Canterbury would give a public lecture advocating the incorporation of Islamic religious law (*shari'ah*) into the English legal system. Today, however, many people consider this to be an arguable point, and perhaps the next step on the way to peaceful compromise.

All this suggests that we in the West stand on the edge of a dangerous period of concession, in which the legitimate claims of our own culture and inheritance will be ignored or downplayed in an attempt to prove our peaceful intentions. It will be some time before the truth will be allowed to play its all-important role of rectifying our current mistakes and preparing the way for the next ones. This means that it is more necessary than ever for us to rehearse the truth and come to a clear and objective understanding of what is at stake. I will, therefore, spell out in what follows some of the critical features of the Western inheritance which must be understood and defended in our current confrontation. Each of these features marks a point of contrast, and possibly of conflict, with the traditional Islamic vision of society, and each has played a vital part in creating the modern world. Islamist belligerence stems from having found no secure place in that world, and from turning for refuge to precepts and values that are at odds with the Western way of life. This does not mean that we should renounce or repudiate the distinguishing features of our civilization, as many would have us do. On the contrary, it means that we must be all the more vigilant in their defense.

The first of the features that I have in mind is citizenship. The consensus among Western nations is that the law is made legitimate by the consent of those who must obey it. This consent is given through a political process in which each citizen participates in the making and enacting of the law. The right and duty of participation is what we mean by “citizenship,” and

the distinction between political and religious communities can be summed up by the view that the former are composed of citizens, whereas the latter are composed of subjects who have “submitted” (which is the primary meaning of the word *islam*). If we seek a simple definition of the West as it is today, it would be wise to take this concept of citizenship as our starting point. Indeed, it is what the millions of migrants roaming the world are in search of: an order that confers security and freedom in exchange for consent.

Traditional Islamic society, by contrast, sees law as a system of commands and recommendations laid down by God. These edicts cannot be amended, though their application in particular cases may involve jurisprudential argument. Law, as Islam understands it, is a demand for our obedience, and its author is God. This is the opposite of the concept of law that we in the West have inherited. Law for us is a guarantee of our freedoms. It is made not by God, but by man, following the instinct for justice that is inherent in the human condition. It is not a system of divine commands, but rather the residue of human agreements.

This is particularly evident to British and American citizens, who have enjoyed the inestimable benefit of the common law—a system which has not been laid down by some sovereign power but, on the contrary, built up by the courts in their attempts to do justice in individual conflicts. Western law is therefore a “bottom-up” system that addresses the sovereign in the same tone of voice that it reserves for the citizen. It insists that justice, not power, will prevail. Hence, it has been evident since the Middle Ages that the law, even if it depends on the sovereign to impose it, can also depose the sovereign if he tries to defy it.

As our law has developed, it has permitted the privatization of religion and of large areas of morality. To us, for instance, a law punishing adultery is not just absurd, but oppressive. We disapprove of adultery, but we also think that it is none of the law’s business to punish sin just because it is sin. In the shari’ah, however, there is no distinction between morality and law. Both stem from God, and are to be imposed by the religious authorities in obedience to his revealed will. To some extent, the harshness of this is mitigated

by a tradition which allows for recommendations as well as obligations in rulings of the holy law. Nevertheless, there is still no place in the shari'ah for the privatization of the moral, and still less of the religious, aspects of life.

Of course, most Muslims do not live under shari'ah law. Only here and there—in Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Afghanistan, for example—is the attempt made to impose it. Elsewhere, Western codes of civil and criminal law have been adopted, following a tradition begun in the early nineteenth century by the Ottomans. But this recognition accorded to Western civilization by the Islamic states has its dangers. It inevitably provokes the thought that the law of the secular powers is not *really* law; that, in truth, it has no real authority, and is even a kind of blasphemy. Sayyid Qutb, the former leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, argued precisely this in his seminal work *Milestones*. Indeed, rebellion against the secular powers is easy to justify when their law is seen as usurping the sovereign authority of God.

From its origins, then, Islam has found it difficult to accept that mankind stands in need of any other law, or any other sovereign, than those revealed in the Koran. Hence the great schism following the death of Muhammad, which divided Shi'ia from Sunni. From the point of view of secular government, questions of legitimate succession such as those that drove these two groups apart are settled by the very same constitution that governs the daily operation of the law. That is to say, ultimately they are a matter of human agreement. But a community that believes itself to be governed by God, on terms conveyed by his messenger, has a real problem when the messenger dies: who takes over, and how? The fact that rulers in Islamic communities have a greater-than-average tendency to end up assassinated is not unconnected with this question. The sultans of Istanbul, for instance, surrounded themselves with a household guard of Janissaries chosen from among their Christian subjects precisely because they did not trust any Muslim to miss the opportunity to rectify the insult to God represented in the person of a merely human ruler. The Koran itself speaks to this point, in sura 3, verse 64, commanding Jews and Christians to take no divinity besides the one God and no lords (*arbâbân*) from among each other.

In short, citizenship and secular law go hand in hand. We are all participants in the process of law-making; hence we can view each other as free citizens, whose rights must be respected and whose private lives are our own concern. This has made possible the privatization of religion in Western societies and the development of political orders in which the duties of the citizen take precedence over religious scruples. *How* this is possible is a deep and difficult question of political theory; *that* it is possible is a fact to which Western civilization bears incontrovertible witness.

This brings me to the second feature which I identify as central to European civilization: nationality. No political order can achieve stability if it cannot call upon a shared loyalty, a “first-person plural” that distinguishes those who share the benefits and burdens of citizenship from those who are outside the fold. In times of war, the need for this shared loyalty is self-evident, but it is as necessary in times of peace, if people really are to treat their citizenship as defining their public obligations. National loyalty marginalizes loyalties to family, tribe, and faith, and places before the citizen, as the focus of his patriotic feeling, not a person or a group, but a country. This country is defined by a territory, and by the history, culture, and law that have made that territory *ours*. Nationality is composed of land, together with the narrative of its possession.

It is this form of territorial loyalty that has enabled people in Western democracies to exist side by side, respecting each other’s rights as citizens despite radical differences in faith and absent any bonds of family, kinship, or long-term local custom to sustain the solidarity between them. Such national loyalty is not known everywhere in the world, and certainly not in the places where Islamists are rooted. People sometimes refer to Somalia, for example, as a “failed state,” since it has no central government capable of making decisions on behalf of the people as a whole, or of imposing any kind of legal order. The real trouble with Somalia, however, is not that it is a failed state, but that it is a failed *nation*. It has never developed the kind

of secular, territorial, and law-minded loyalty that makes it possible for a country to shape itself into a nation-state, and not simply an assembly of competing tribes and families.

The same is true of many other places where Islamists are produced. Even if, as in the case of Pakistan, these countries function like states, they are often failures as nations. They have not succeeded in generating the kind of territorial loyalty which enables people of different faiths, different kinship networks, and different tribes to live peacefully side by side, and also to fight side by side on behalf of their common homeland. The recent history of these countries might lead us to wonder whether there is not, in the end, a genuine and profound conflict between the Islamic conception of community and the conceptions which have fed our own idea of national government. Maybe the nation-state really is an anti-Islamic idea.

This observation is, of course, highly pertinent to the Middle East today, where we find the remnants of a great Islamic empire divided into nation-states. With a few exceptions, this division is the result of boundaries drawn by Western powers, most notably by Britain and France in the Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916. It should hardly be surprising, therefore, that Iraq has had such a checkered history as a nation-state, given that it has only spasmodically been a state, and has never been a nation. It may be that Kurds, Sunnis, and Shi'ias in Iraq will all come, in time, to see themselves as Iraqis. But this national identity will likely be fragile and fissiparous, and in any conflict the three groups will identify themselves in opposition to each other. Only the Kurds seem to have developed a genuine *national* identity, and it is one opposed to that of the state in which they are included. As for the Shi'ias, their primary loyalty is religious, and in turbulent times they look to the homeland of Shi'ia Islam in Iran as a model.

It is true that not all the nation-states carved out of the remnants of the Ottoman Empire are as arbitrary as Iraq. Turkey, which saved itself as the rump of the empire, succeeded in recreating itself as a genuine nation-state—though not without the expulsion or massacre of many of

its non-Turkish minorities. Lebanon and Egypt have enjoyed a kind of quasi-national identity under Western protection since the mid-nineteenth century. And, of course, Israel has established a thoroughly Western form of national government, over territory which is disputed for that very reason. These examples, however, in no way serve to allay the suspicion that Islam is not friendly to the idea of national loyalties, and certainly not friendly to the idea that, in a crisis, it is national rather than spiritual allegiance which should prevail.

Consider Turkey. Atatürk created the Turkish nation-state by imposing a secularist constitution; adopting a secular legal system based on French and Belgian models; outlawing Islamic dress; expelling the traditional scholars of Islamic law (*'ulema'*) from public office; forbidding polygamy; and rooting out Arabic words from Turkish and adopting the Latin alphabet, thus cutting the language off from its cultural antecedents. As a result of these revolutionary changes, he succeeded in pushing the conflict between Islam and the secular state underground, and for a long time it seemed as though a stable compromise had been achieved. Now, however, the conflict is erupting all over again: Secularists have attempted to outlaw the ruling Islamic party (the AKP), recent electoral victors in a landslide vote, and the government has attempted to arraign leading secularists in a terrorist trial of dubious legality.

Lebanon, to take another example, owes its exceptional status in the Arab world to its erstwhile Christian majority, and to the longstanding alliance of Maronite and Druze against the Ottoman sultan. Its current fragility is largely due to the Islamists of Hezbollah, who have allied themselves with Iran and Syria and reject Lebanon as a national entity to which any loyalty is owed. Egypt, too, has survived as a nation-state only by taking radical measures against the Muslim Brotherhood, and by leaning upon a legal and political inheritance which would likely be rejected by its Muslim population—though not by the Coptic Christian minority—in any free vote. As for Israel, it has been condemned by its neighbors to live in a permanent state of siege.

The third central feature of Western civilization is Christianity. I have no doubt that it is the long centuries of Christian dominance in Europe which laid the foundations of national loyalty as a type above those of faith and family, and on which a secular jurisdiction and an order of citizenship could be founded. It may sound paradoxical to identify a religion as the major force behind the development of secular government. But we should remember the peculiar circumstances in which Christianity entered the world. The Jews of first-century Judea were a closed community, bound by a tight web of religious legalisms but nonetheless governed from Rome by a law which made no reference to any God, and which offered an ideal of citizenship to which every free subject of the empire might aspire.

Jesus found himself in conflict with the legalism of his fellow Jews, and in broad sympathy with the idea of secular government. Hence his famous words in the parable of the tribute money: "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." After his death, the Christian faith was shaped by Paul for communities within the Roman Empire that sought only the freedom to pursue their worship, and had no intention of challenging the secular powers. This idea of dual loyalty continued after Constantine, and was endorsed by Pope Gelasius I in the fifth century in his doctrine of the two swords given to mankind for their government: that which guards the body politic, and that which guards the individual soul. This endorsement of secular law by the early Church was responsible for subsequent developments in Europe, from the Reformation and the Enlightenment through to the purely territorial law that prevails in the West today.

During the early centuries of Islam various philosophers attempted to develop a theory of the perfect state, but religion was always at the heart of it. The tenth-century polymath al-Fārābī even tried to recast Plato's *Republic* in Islamic terms, with the prophet as philosopher-king. When all such discussion stopped, at the time of Ibn Taymiyya in the fourteenth century, it was clear that Islam had decisively turned its back on secular government, and would henceforth be unable to develop anything

remotely like a national—as opposed to a religious—form of allegiance. Indeed, the most important advocate of Arab nationalism in recent times, Michel Aflaq, was not a Muslim but rather a Greek Orthodox Christian, who was born in Syria, educated in France, and died in Iraq, disillusioned with the Baath party he had helped to found. If national loyalties have emerged in the Muslim world in recent times, it is in spite of Islam, and not because of it. And it should come as no surprise if these loyalties seem peculiarly fragile and fractious, as we have noticed in the case of Palestinian attempts at national cohesion, and in the troubled history of Pakistan.

Christianity is sometimes described as a synthesis of Jewish metaphysics and Greek ideas of political freedom. No doubt there is truth in this, given the historical context of its inception. And it is, perhaps, the Greek input into Christianity which is responsible for the fourth of the central features that I believe worthy of emphasis when addressing the Western confrontation with Islam: that of irony. There is already a developing streak of irony in the Hebrew Bible, one that is amplified by the Talmud. But there is a new kind of irony in Jesus' judgments and parables, one which looks at the spectacle of human folly and wryly shows us how to live with it. A telling example of this is Jesus' verdict in the case of the woman taken in adultery. "Let he who is without fault," he says, "cast the first stone." In other words, "Come off it. Haven't you wanted to do what she did, and already done it in your hearts?" It has been suggested that this story is a late interpolation—one of many culled by early Christians from the store of inherited wisdom attributed to Jesus after his death. Even if that is true, however, it merely confirms the view that the Christian religion has made irony central to its message. This irony is shared by the great Sufi poets, especially Rumi and Hafiz, but it seems to be largely unknown in the schools of Islam that shape the souls of the Islamists. Theirs is a religion which refuses to see itself from the outside, and which cannot bear to be criticized, still less to be laughed at—something we have abundantly witnessed in recent times.

Indeed, this is nowhere more apparent than in the matter that called forth Jesus' ironical judgment. Death by stoning is still officially endorsed in many parts of the Muslim world as a punishment for adultery, and in many Islamic communities women are treated as prostitutes as soon as they step out of the lines drawn for them by men. The subject of sex, which cannot be usefully discussed without a measure of irony, has therefore become a painful topic among Muslims, especially when confronted, as they inevitably are, by the lax morals and libidinous confusion of Western societies. The mullahs find themselves unable to think about women as sexual beings, and unable to think for very long about anything else. As a result, an enormous tension has developed in the Muslim communities of Western cities, with the young men enjoying the surrounding freedoms and the young women hidden away and often terrorized lest they do the same.

Irony was seen by the late Richard Rorty as a state of mind intimately connected with the postmodern worldview.¹ It is a withdrawal from judgment that nevertheless aims at a kind of consensus, a shared agreement not to judge. It seems to me, however, that irony, although it infects our states of mind, is better understood as a virtue, a disposition aimed at a kind of practical fulfillment and moral success. If I were to venture a definition of this virtue, I would describe it as the habit of acknowledging the otherness of everything, including of oneself. However convinced you are of the rightness of your actions and the truth of your views, look on them as the actions and the views of someone else, and rephrase them accordingly. So defined, irony is quite distinct from sarcasm. It is a mode of acceptance, rather than a mode of rejection. And it points both ways: Through irony I learn to accept both the other on whom I turn my gaze, and also myself, the one who is gazing. *Pace* Rorty, irony is not free from judgment. It simply recognizes that the one who judges is also judged, and judged by himself.

Irony is intimately related to the fifth notable feature of Western civilization: self-criticism. It is second nature to us, whenever we affirm something, to allow a voice to the opponent. The adversarial method of deliberation is endorsed by our law, by our forms of education, and by the political systems that we have built to broker our interests and resolve our conflicts. Think of those vociferous critics of Western civilization such as the late Edward Said and the ubiquitous Noam Chomsky. Said spoke out in uncompromising and, at times, even venomous terms on behalf of the Islamic world against what he saw as the lingering outlook of Western imperialism. As a consequence, he was rewarded with a prestigious chair at a leading university and countless opportunities for public speaking in America and around the Western world. The consequences for Chomsky have been largely the same. This habit of rewarding our critics is, I think, unique to Western civilization. The only problem with it is that, in our universities, things have gone so far that there are no rewards given to anyone else. Prizes are distributed to the left of the political spectrum because it feeds the ruling illusion of those who award them: namely, that self-criticism will bring us safety, and that all threats come from ourselves, and from our desire to defend what we have.

This habit of self-criticism has created another critical feature of Western civilization, and that is representation. We in the West, and the English-speaking peoples preeminently, are heirs to a longstanding habit of free association, in which we join together in clubs, businesses, pressure groups, and educational foundations. This associative genius was particularly remarked upon by Tocqueville in his journeys through America, and it is facilitated by the unique branch of the English common law—equity and the law of trusts—which enables people to set up funds in common and to administer them without asking permission from any higher authority.

This associative habit goes hand in hand with the tradition of representation. When we form a club or a society which has a public profile, we are in the habit of appointing officers to represent it. The decisions of these

officers are then assumed to be binding on all members, who cannot reject them without leaving the club. In this way, a single individual is able to speak for an entire group, and in so doing, to bind it to accept the decisions made in its name. We find nothing strange in this, and it has affected the political, educational, economic, and leisure institutions of our society in incalculable ways. It has also affected the government of our religious institutions, both Catholic and Protestant. Indeed, it was among nineteenth-century Protestant theologians that the theory of the corporation as a moral idea was first fully developed. We know that the hierarchy of our church, be it Baptist, Episcopalian, or Catholic, is empowered to take decisions on our behalf, and can enter into dialogue with institutions in other parts of the world, in order to secure the space that we require for worship.

Association takes a very different form in traditional Islamic societies, however. Clubs and societies of strangers are rare, and the primary social unit is not the free association, but the family. Companies do not enjoy a developed legal framework under Islamic law, and it has been argued by Malise Ruthven and others that the concept of the corporate person has no equivalent in shari'ah.² The same is true for other forms of association. Charities, for instance, are organized in a completely different way than are those in the West: not as property held in trust for beneficiaries, but as property that has been religiously “stopped” (*waqf*). As a result, all public entities, including schools and hospitals, are regarded as ancillary to the mosque and governed by religious principles. Meanwhile, the mosque itself is not a corporate person, nor is there an entity which can be called “the Mosque” in the same sense as we refer to the Church—that is, an entity whose decisions are binding on all its members, which can negotiate on their behalf, and which can be held to account for its misdeeds and abuses.

As a result of this long tradition of associating only under the aegis of the mosque or the family, Islamic communities lack the conception of the spokesman.³ When serious conflicts erupt between Muslim minorities in Western cities and the surrounding society, we have found it difficult, if not impossible, to negotiate with the Muslim community, since there is no

one who will speak for it or take responsibility for imposing any decision upon it. If by chance someone *does* step forward, the individual members of the Muslim community feel free to accept or reject his decisions at will. The same problem has been witnessed in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and other countries with radicalized Muslim populations. When someone attempts to speak for a dissident group, it is very often on his own initiative, and without any procedure that validates his office. Like as not, should he agree to a solution to a given problem, he will be assassinated, or at any rate disowned, by the radical members of the group for whom he purports to be speaking.

This point leads me to reflect once again on the idea of citizenship. An important reason for the stability and peacefulness of societies based on citizenship is that individuals in such societies are fully protected by their rights. They are fenced off from their neighbors in spheres of private sovereignty, where they alone make decisions. As a result, a society of citizens can establish good relations and shared allegiance between strangers. You don't have to know your fellow citizen in order to ascertain your rights against him or your duties toward him; moreover, his being a stranger in no way alters the fact that you are each prepared to die for the territory that contains you and the laws which you enjoy. This remarkable feature of nation-states is sustained by the habits to which I have referred: self-criticism, representation, and corporate life, the very habits not to be found in traditional Islamic societies. What the Islamist movements promise their adherents is not citizenship, but "brotherhood"—*ikhwân*—an altogether warmer, closer, and more metaphysically satisfying thing.

And yet, the warmer and closer an attachment, the less widely can it be spread. Brotherhood is selective and exclusive. It cannot extend very far without exposing itself to sudden and violent refutation. Hence the Arab proverb: "I and my brother against my cousin; I and my cousin against the world." An association of brothers is not a new entity, a corporation which can negotiate for its members. It remains essentially plural—indeed, *ikhwân* is simply the plural of *akh*, "brother"—and denotes an assembly of like-minded people brought together by their common commitment,

rather than any institution which can claim sovereignty over them. This has significant political repercussions. For instance, when Nasser's successor as president of Egypt, Anwar Sadat, set aside seats in the Egyptian parliament for the Muslim Brotherhood, they were immediately occupied by those judged suitable by the president, and disowned by the *real* Brotherhood, which continued its violent activities, culminating in Sadat's assassination. Simply put, brothers don't take orders. They act together as a family—until they quarrel and fight.

This brings me to a final and critical point of difference between Western and Islamic communities. We live in a society of strangers who associate rapidly and tolerate each other's differences. Yet ours is not a society of vigilant conformity. It makes few public demands that are not contained in secular law; and it allows people to move quickly from one group to the next, one relationship to the next, one business, religion, or way of life to the next, and all with relative ease. It is endlessly creative in forming the institutions and associations that enable people to live with their differences and remain on peaceful terms, without the need for intimacy, brotherhood, or tribal loyalties. I am not arguing that this is a good thing, but it is the way things *are*, and this is the inevitable byproduct of citizenship as I have described it.

What makes it possible to live in this way? There is a simple answer, and that is drink. What the Koran promises in paradise but forbids here below is the necessary lubricant of the Western dynamo. You see this clearly in America, where cocktail parties immediately break the ice between strangers and set every large gathering in motion, stimulating a collective desire for rapid agreement among people who a moment before did not know each other from Adam. This habit of quickly coming to the point depends on many aspects of our culture besides drink, of course, but drink is critical, and those who have studied the phenomenon are largely persuaded that, for all the costs that our civilization has paid in terms of alcoholism, accidents, and broken homes, it is largely thanks to drink that we have been, in the

long run, so successful. Of course, Islamic societies have their own ways of creating fleeting associations: the hookah, the coffee house, and the traditional bathhouse, praised by Lady Mary Wortley Montague as establishing a solidarity among women that has no equivalent in the Christian world. But these forms of association are also forms of *withdrawal*, a standing back from the business of government in a posture of peaceful resignation. Drink has the opposite effect: It brings strangers together in a state of controlled aggression, able and willing to engage in any business that should arise from the current conversation.

The features to which I have referred do not merely explain the uniqueness of Western civilization; they also account for its success in navigating the enormous changes that have come about through the advance of technology and science, just as they explain the political stability and democratic ethos of its component nation-states. These features also distinguish Western civilization from the Islamic communities in which terrorists are cultivated. And they help to explain the great resentment of those terrorists who cannot match, with their own moral and religious resources, the easy competence with which the citizens of Europe and America negotiate the modern world.

If this is so, then how should we defend the West from Islamist terrorism? I shall suggest a brief answer to that question. First, we should be clear about what it is that we are and are not defending. We are *not* defending, for example, our wealth or our territory; these things are not at stake. Rather, we are defending our political and cultural inheritance, embodied in the seven features which I have singled out here for attention. Second, we should be clear that you cannot overcome resentment by feeling guilty or by conceding fault. Weakness provokes, since it alerts your enemy to the possibility of destroying you. We should therefore be prepared to affirm what we have, and to express our determination to hold on to it. That said, we

must recognize that it is not envy but resentment that animates the terrorist. Envy is the desire to possess what the other has; resentment is the desire to destroy it. How do you deal with resentment? This is the great question that so few leaders of mankind have been able to answer. Christians, however, are fortunate in being heirs to the one great attempt to answer it, which was that of Jesus, who drew on a longstanding Jewish tradition that goes back to the Tora, and which was expressed in similar terms by his contemporary R. Hillel. You overcome resentment, Jesus told us, by forgiving it. To reach out in a spirit of forgiveness is not to accuse yourself; it is to make a gift to the other. And it is here, it seems to me, that we have taken a wrong turn in recent decades. The illusion that we are to blame, that we must confess our faults and join our cause to that of our enemies, only exposes us to a more determined hatred. The truth is that we are *not* to blame; that our enemies' hatred of us is entirely unjustified; and that their implacable enmity cannot be defused by our breast-beating.

There is a drawback to realizing this truth, however. It makes it seem as though we are powerless. But we are not powerless. There are two resources on which we can call in our defense, one public, and the other private. In the public sphere, we can resolve to protect the good things that we have inherited. That means making no concessions to those who wish us to exchange citizenship for subjection, nationality for religious conformity, secular law for shari'ah, the Judeo-Christian inheritance for Islam, irony for solemnity, self-criticism for dogmatism, representation for submission, and cheerful drinking for censorious abstinence. We should treat with scorn all those who demand these changes and invite them to live where their preferred form of political order is already installed. And we must respond to their violence with whatever force is required to contain it.

In the private sphere, however, Christians should follow the path laid down for them by Jesus: namely, looking soberly and in a spirit of forgiveness on the hurts that we receive, and showing, by our example, that these hurts achieve nothing save to discredit the one who inflicts them.

This is the hard part of the task—hard to perform, hard to endorse, and hard to recommend to others. Nonetheless, it is the task at hand, and in a battle the stakes of which are so high, it is a task that we cannot fail to undertake.

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Notes

1. Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1989).
2. Malise Ruthven, *Islam in the World* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2000).
3. There is an important exception to this rule in the worldwide Ismā'īlī community, which has found its representative and spokesman in the person of the Aga Khan.