Over the last few decades, fundamentalism and secular authoritarianism have been two exclusive practiced optionally by the Muslim-majority countries of the Middle East. These two alternatives have attracted close scrutiny as a consequence of the recent volatile political developments in the region. Although both options face serious challenges, neither fundamentalism nor secular authoritarianism has been challenged by its opposing alternative. Radical Islam had proven voiceless in the uprisings against the authoritarian secular states of Tunisia, Egypt and Syria: nor has secular discourse emerged as a threat to the Islamic states of Iran and Saudi Arabia. This distinguishing feature of events implies that the prevailing categories, e.g., political Islam and secular-religious dualism, are no longer suited to conceptualising the situation. Rather, it signals the emergence of a discourse which bypasses the classic 'Islamism-secularism conflict'. Political Islam, in this discourse, no more signifies radicalism-fundamentalism than secularity stands in direct opposition to Islam. There is an evolving connotation of 'political Islam' in which the separation of the institution of state from Islam is lauded but not the separation of Islam from politics. The dissentient image of political Islam, which couples it with the Islamic state, fundamentalism, fanaticism and terrorism, is no longer the sole signifier of political Islam. However, while Islam's role in the Middle Eastern events is beyond doubt, it does not constitute any form of hostility. The friendly attitude towards democratic values, the absence of violence and anti-westernism are descriptive of the distinguishing features of emendatory political Islam.

Developments in the Middle East have subjected emendatory political Islam, an evolving discourse, to scrutiny, particularly its perspective on matters such as human rights, democracy, women's rights, economic systems, relations with the West and religious freedom. Due to the determinative position of the state regarding these matters, state-religion relations have emerged as an overarching and most appealing theme. Emendatory political Islam, it will be argued, supports a religiously neutral state in which (1) there is no state intervention in religious affairs, and (2) religion does not claim special privilege within the state institution. But, I will argue, religion includes important socio-political dimensions and, for this reason, the privatisation of religion is neither feasible nor desirable.

There is no overarching model for the separation of state from religion. As Alfred Stepan argues, a separatist approach includes various and often vicissitudinous models. He uses the term 'multiple secularisms' to describe these variations (Stepan, 2010). The separatist setting proposed by emendatory political Islam has certain distinctive characteristics, with religious motivation and justification for a separatist approach as its most distinctive features. This is why the somewhat oxymoronic phrase 'religious secularity' is proposed. Both conceptually and empirically, secularism is associated with anti-religious policies in the Muslim world. There is no accurate translation for secularism in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish languages which logically makes it alien to Muslims. Besides, as a normative ideal, secularism has recorded outright hostility to Muslims (Keane, 2000a:
Secularism is assumed as a top-down imported ideology peculiar to authoritarian, pro-western regimes. However, in the case of new emerging discourse, not only is religious secularity not antagonistic towards Islam: it is promoted by Islamic teachings. There are three correlated justifications for employing religion as a signifier of this emerging model of secularity:

a) It is motivated by religious concerns. The loathing directed towards Islam has been a direct consequence of militant Islam which is presented by the conventional political Islam. The disadvantages of the latter to religion are the chief concern of the proponents of religious secularity, whose aim is to revitalise and propagate an image of the true Islam. This is why, rather than separation, emancipation of religion from state should take precedence in the discourse.

b) Religious scholars are the leading proponents of this model of secularity. Due largely to the perceived derogatory connotations of the term 'secularism', political leaders are reluctant to articulate it even though they in truth promote secularism. Yet, Islamic scholars argue for the emancipation of religion from state from a religious standpoint. In Iran, for example, it is not primarily the political theorists or philosophers who advocate religious secularity: it is the country's religious intellectuals and scholars who lead the discourse.

c) Finally, religious methods and sources are the main tools of the proponents of religious secularity. More than being simply a political project, religious secularity is a religious project, which falls into the broader progression of religious reformation. Reformation discourse extends over a wide spectrum, from promoting hermeneutic reading of the Quran at one end to revising jurisprudential rules at the other.

Religious secularity is not only a descriptive notion: it is also a normative and strategic conception of state-religion relations. It describes debates and endeavours by religious scholars who countenance emendatory political Islam. As well, the notion of religious secularity may be considered a normative conception because it offers a vision for the future. It includes recommendations for a separatist setting, a setting better and superior to the unification of religion and state that defines the Islamic state. Furthermore, this conceptualisation may be seen as a pragmatic strategy through which the reality of the Muslim world, i.e., religiosity, can find a way to accommodate modern democratic notions. In other words, it is a strategy to bypass the conventional conflict between modernism and religiosity.

Emendatory political Islam is built upon the turbulent situation that has destabilised the Muslim world over the last decades of the 20th century. The emergence of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Al Qaeda phenomenon, and the Islamic state of Iran combine to represent the foundations of this discourse. Among them, the disadvantages that Islamic states have caused to religion have played a major role in stimulating Iranian religious scholars to argue for a separatist setting. Prior to explaining religious secularity, it is necessary to briefly explain the implications of a unification setting for Islamic precepts. This explanation will facilitate an understanding of how Islamic states disadvantage religion.
**Inherent Contradiction between State law and the Shari’a**

A basic function of the modern state is to enforce fixed sets of rules nationwide as state law. States have the legitimate right to use coercion to impose these laws on their populations. As Na’im observes, this function contradicts the inherent nature of the Shari’a. But, this contradiction is not a matter of bad practice in a specific time or location; rather, it is an inherent and fundamental contradiction. Insisting on the necessity of a neutral state in Islamic society, Na’im states that the enactment of the Shari’a as state law is a fallacious goal which can never be realised (Na’im, 2008: 10). Similarly, Eshkevari contends that some principles in the Shari’a are neither just nor seem rational in the modern era. And, even more importantly, it is practically impossible for a state in the contemporary world to put them into practice (Eshkaveri, 2009a, Eshkaveri, 2009b). Na’im further argues that because there are strong disagreements among and within the different schools of Islam, it is impossible to put into practice all the various interpretations of the Shari’a as state law. He claims that:

> It is simply impossible to know and apply Shari’a in this life except through the agency of human beings. Any view of Shari’a known to Muslims today, even if unanimously agreed upon, had to emerge from the opinion of human beings about the meaning of the Qur’an and Sunna ... In other words, opinions of Muslim scholars became part of Shari’a through the consensus of believers over many centuries, and not by the spontaneous decree of a ruler or the will of a single group of scholars (Na’im, 2008: 20).

The lived experience of the Islamic state in Iran conforms to Na’im’s conceptual argument. Soon after establishing the Islamic state, the ruling clergy realised the multifarious realities of governance issues which made the practice of many religious principles impossible (Arjomand, 1993). Hundreds of examples can be cited in which the ruling clergy had to ignore religious precepts. Mehran Tamadonfar, who investigates the level of non-compliance with Shari’a by the Islamic Republic, concludes: 'They have found it increasingly impossible to govern by the Shari’ah. Motivated by self-preservation and intent on maintaining control, they have turned into self-appointed ‘guardians of the community’ and have abandoned the guardianship of Islam' (Tamadonfar, 2001: 218). Confronted by this contradiction, the ruling clergy re-conceptualised state-religion relations. Khomeini’s introduced a new religious concept and immediately practice it through making institutional changes in the political structure.

**Fiqh-ul Maslaha: An Authoritarian Solution**

The aforementioned contradiction could have been mitigated by disregarding the realities of the governance responsibilities. But, opting for this course of action could conceivably have resulted in the emergence of an untimely religio-political system similar to that of the Taliban in Afghanistan. Perhaps with this in mind, Iran’s ruling clergy opted to overlook religious precepts in favour of political considerations. The adoption of religious precepts in changing situations in different times and places has always been a primary responsibility of jurists. Regardless of different approaches, there has been a general consensus regarding the two overarching categorisations: ‘constant precepts’ and ‘variable precepts’. As the titles suggest, while the former refers to those precepts which are applicable to every place and era, the latter represents those which should be adjusted based on different circumstances. Khomeini bypassed this traditional categorisation by authorising
the state to change each and every one of the religious precepts. He introduced the pioneering conceptualisation of expedient *fiqh* (*Fiqh-ul Maslaha*) within the Shiite jurisprudential faculty. Khomeini, who approved the violation of precepts, admitted that many religious precepts are not applicable when they are sought to be practiced by a state in the contemporary world (Khomeini, 2006b: 217-218). According to expedient *fiqh*, when incompatibility arises, political considerations take priority over religious precepts. Even fundamental religious practices such as worshipping are not excluded:

A government which is a branch of the Prophet Mohammad’s absolute guardianship is one of the primary Islamic precepts and takes priority over all subsidiary precepts, even over praying, fasting and pilgrimage ... if necessary, [a] governor can close or destroy mosques ... the government can unilaterally terminate its religious agreements with the people if an agreement violates the expedience of the country or Islam. And [it] can abandon every commandment- both worshipping and non-worshipping precepts- which is against the expedience of Islam (Khomeini, 2006a: 170-71).

Khomeini is repeatedly quoted referring to the government as the most religiously indispensible issue (Oujab-e vajebat), which suggests that regime preservation is of the highest necessity among all that is required (Yasuyuki, 2009). Religious precepts are instrumental in the implementing of governance. According to Kadivar, for Khomeini, religious precepts are not inherently desired; they are methods, not goals. Therefore, in the interests of preserving the main goals, these subsidiary aspirations can be changed or deliberately overlooked (Kadivar, 2002: 421).

This logical and pragmatist approach, which is well described as ‘a process of secularising Shiite *fiqh*’ (Hajjarian, 2001, Salehpour, 1995, 1999), has persuaded some scholars to propose a notion according to which the religious state may lead to secularisation (Kazemi and Faraji, 2003, Kazemipur and Rezaei, 2003, Mohammadi, 2008: 279-331, Roy, 2007: 62-64, Vasigh, 2005: 11). This shift seems in line with aspirations to religious secularity. However, it becomes problematic when the political side of the coin - of expedient *fiqh* - is taken into consideration. Khomeini shifted his doctrine of ‘*Velayat-e Faqih*’ to ‘*Velayat-e Motlagh-e Faqih*’ (absolute guardian of jurist), according to which one person has the ultimate authority over this rational decision-making process. Based on his understanding of the expedient, *Valey-e Faqih* has the final word not only on all governance issues but also regarding the necessity to either implement or abandon religious precepts. The state is Islamic because it is led by *Valey-e Faqih*, not necessarily because it enforces Islamic precepts. Rather than the enforcement of religious precepts, it is a person, i.e., *Valey-e Faqih*, who assures the religiosity of the Islamic state.

Khomeini’s political position provided him with an opportunity to promote expedient *fiqh*, both within the political structure of the Islamic Republic and in its administrative structure. He ordered the establishment of ‘The Council for the Determination of the Expedience of the Islamic State’ in February 1988.¹ Not only was this council added to the Constitution in the 1989 amendment but also

¹ According to the political structure, the religious watchdog, the Guardian Council, has the authority to refuse and nullify parliament’s legislations if they are deemed incompatible with Islamic precepts. In the
the concept of *Velayat-e Faqih* (Guardian of Jurist) was changed to *Velayat-e Motlagh-e Faqih* (Absolute Guardian of Jurist) in the Constitution.

Pluralism is an essential feature of the Shiite school: a single jurist can never claim to represent the school. Thus, it is the political position of the *Valey-e Faqih* which allows him to prioritise his perspective over that of other jurists. In Kadivar’s view, this has resulted in the domination of political power over jurisprudence: 'The authority of the state over *fiqh* subordinates Shari’a precepts and makes them submissive to political power' (Kadivar, 2007). Although expedient *fiqh* enjoys full political support, its acceptance within the traditional religious nexus is not secured. According to Soroush, the concept of expedient *fiqh* was not taken seriously at the Qom seminary (Soroush, 2008a: 256). There were even some explicit objections to this concept within the traditional cluster of jurisprudence. One outstanding example was Ayatollah Montazeri, who argued that 'even the Prophet Mohammad and the infallible [Imams] did not have absolute guardianship ... I do not believe in the absolute guardianship that the authorities added [to the Constitution] in the amendment and I did not vote for that' (Montazeri, 2006). Kadivar contends that Khomeini’s approach does not enjoy religious credibility among jurists:

> The absolute authority/guardianship of the state over *fiqh* only has the endorsement of its progenitor and some of his students; it is not accepted among traditionalist *fuqaha*. Traditional *fiqh* is very cautious and - unlike Ayatollah Khomeini - is neither of the view that interests or expediency can be clearly ascertained, nor that precepts based on interests or expediency can take precedence over all [of the] Shari’a precepts, especially the worship-related ones (Kadivar, 2009: 59).

Kadivar, who also finds this solution problematic, insists that it is not reasonable to allow 'the fate of the entire Shari’a ordinances - and, for that matter, the religion of Islam—to depend on ... ‘personal’ understanding (Matsunaga, 2007: 326). He further argues that: 'If assessing the expedient of the society and determining the requirements of time and place are rational, irreligious, and objective issues, why should these issues be conceded to a jurist?' (Kadivar, 2002: 426). Finally, expediency-based *fiqh* can be challenged for exploiting religion. If decisions are to be made based on rational assessment of the circumstances, there is no reason to tag them 'Islamic'.

The *Fiqh-ul Maslaha* solution expresses reasonable doubt over the nature of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Since post-revolutionary Iran is ruled by clergy, and policies are dressed in Islamic garb, there is

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a common misconception that the Islamic Republic is a theocratic regime. I want to stress here that this does not provide an accurate explanation of religion-state relations in the post-revolutionary era.

**A Shifting Trend: From Theocracy to Caesaropapism**

Sociologists of religion have proposed various models of interaction between religious institutions and the state. These models include supremacy of church over state, i.e., theocracy or hierocracy at one end of the spectrum, and the dominance of state over religion, that is, Erastianism and Caesaropapism, at the other (Panikkar, 1985, Robertson, 1987, Smith, 1970, Weber et al., 1978). Unlike Roman Catholicism, in the Islamic context, the lack of a unified hierarchical system has resulted in an ambiguous relationship between religion and state. This, then, begs an important question: To what extent can the ruling clergy in Iran claim to represent religion? Having posed this question, it will not be easy to mount a cogent argument in favour of employing the term 'theocracy' to explain the Islamic Republic of Iran (Chehabi, 1991). Instead, an underlying trend can be traced which points to a shift in state-religion relations in post-revolutionary Iran.

While the early years after the 1979 revolution were marked by the dominance of religion over politics, subsequent years saw a shift to the supremacy of politics over religion. Not only did Khomeini occupy the highest of all religious positions, i.e., that of Grand Ayatollah, but many others including Montazeri, Taleghani, Beheshti, Mousavi Ardebili, to name but a few, were considered high ranking in the religious sense. Their religious credibility thus enhanced their political credentials. With time, this situation changed. Now, political power was expected to enhance religious credibility. An outstanding example in this regard is the current Supreme Leader. When Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder of the Islamic Republic, died in 1989, the ruling clergy's decisions would have had profound implications for state-religion relations. Of the two indispensible qualifications required for the position of Supreme Leader stipulated in the Constitution, one was high religious competence, i.e., source of imitation (Marja-e Taghlid) and political capability. During his two terms as president, Khamanei enjoyed the second qualification: he was by no means qualified for the first.

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3 In his critique of secularism, Keane argues that separation of church and state as the inherited category of secularism is insufficiently complex to deal with the diversity of religion-state relations. See Keane, J. (2000b) 'Secularism?', The Political Quarterly, 71(s1), 5-19.

4 There are officially five grades in the Shiite school for clergy: a) Seghatuleslam, b) Hujatuleslam, c) Hujatuleslam-e Valmuslemin, d) Ayatullah, and, e) Grand Ayatollah. Khamanei, who was Hujatuleslam-e Valmuslemin, was called Ayatollah immediately after being appointed Supreme Leader. Nowadays, he is widely called Grand Ayatollah; but, by no means, is his religious knowledge and capability accepted without question.
The amendment to the constitution legally paved the way\(^5\) for him to fill the vacancy left by Ayatollah Khomeini, who was suited to the position in both political and religious terms (Milani, 1993: 367-9). While there were many optional, high-ranking religious figures, this selection was a conscious decision of the ruling clergy, who prioritised political capacity over religious credentials (Chehabi, 1991, 1997, Gheissari and Nasr, 2006: 105-126). Other positions filled by the clergy have followed the same pattern. The clergy's political standing is no longer rooted in its religious credibility. As Oliver Roy observes: 'Today, there is not a single grand ayatollah in power' (Roy, 2001: 180). Many of the high-ranking religious leaders, even those known to be supporters of the regime, do not occupy official positions. The political instability of that prevailed in 2009 explicitly revealed the distance between high-ranking religious leaders and the Islamic Republic. This was borne out by the fact that a considerable number of Grand Ayatollahs did not send congratulatory messages to Ahmadinejad on the occasion of his second term and did not agree to meet with him during his visit to Qom in March 2010.\(^6\) But, notwithstanding, 'Islamic' is the most familiar tag in contemporary Iran's political lexicon.

Some reformist scholars have concurred with the ruling clergy that many religious precepts are not applicable in contemporary times and that a rational approach should be adopted to manage socio-political and economic matters (Eshkaveri, 2010, Kadivar, 2002: 406-7, Mojtahed-Shabestari, 2004: 192-208, Soroush, 2009: 241-254). However, rather than rationalising political considerations in the name of Islam (Maslahah in Khomeini’s words), religious secularity promotes a democratic secular articulation through the emancipation of religion from state.

The Emancipation of Religion: A Secular-Democratic Solution

Their concerns over the exploitation of religion for political ends led a group of religious scholars to propose an alternative to the expedient fiqh, i.e., discharging fiqh from governmental responsibility. Mohsen Kadivar, who employs the same jurisprudential reasoning as Khomeini, divides Islamic precepts into four dimensions: a) Faith and belief; b) morality; c) worship; and d) social transaction. The faith/belief dimension addresses issues such as belief in God and in judgment day. Ethical or moral elements establish principles for self-purification and virtuous values. Worship includes praying, fasting, and pilgrimage (Hajj) rules. The last of the Islamic precepts, social transaction, addresses socio-political and economic matters, namely 'fiqh of social transaction' (fiqh-e Moamemati).

Kadivar, who claims that governance issues fall into the last category, states that 98 per cent of the verses from the Quran address issues related to the first three dimensions: only two per cent relate to social transaction issues (Kadivar, 2009: 65-6). He further states that Islam explicitly avoids

\(^5\) The amended Constitution was endorsed through a referendum taken two months after Khamanei’s appointment as Supreme Leader. Thus, his appointment was a violation of the Constitution in force at the time.

\(^6\) He managed to meet only three grand Ayatollahs: Noori Hamedani, Makareme Shirazi and Sobhani. Javadi Omoli, Vahidi Khorasani, Safi Golpayegani, Mousavi Ardebili and Sanei refused to meet him.
providing economic, political or policy prescriptions specific to every time and every place (Kadivar, 2004, 2006b: 44). Kadivar’s reading of the Shari’a concluded that each and every one of the social transaction precepts had three features in the revelation era: a) they were rational; b) they were just; and c) they were the best solution when compared with the alternative solutions (Kadivar, 2006b: 44, 2009: 67). Kadivar concludes that unlike the worshipping precepts, this dimension of Islamic teachings is subject to understanding by human reasoning, as was the case in the revelation era.

Another jurisprudential argument is rooted in the distinction between the 'established' (taasisi) and 'approved' (emzaiee) precepts. The first refers to precepts which were initiated by Islam but of which there is no record in the pre-Islamic era. The second set did in fact exist in the pre-Islamic Hejaz (Eshkaveri, 2010, Haeri, 1996, Kadivar, 2006a, Lotfi, 1996, Mhqaqhegh Damad, 2009). According to Eshkevari, the Prophet Mohammad did not introduce new socio-political and economic structures; he approved the current structures as they were, or with some minor changes. This proves that these precepts are not an intrinsic part of Islam (Eshkevari, 2000: 230-2). In the words of Eshkaveri:

> If the Prophet of Islam were alive now and wanted to complete his sacred mission under the current situation, he would take the same inevitable logical and rational approach towards the social norms, traditions, and mores ... finally [he would] make creative and effective interaction with the contemporary era (Eshkaveri, 2010).

Similar to Eshkaveri, Kadivar subscribes to the notion that most of the social transaction precepts are approved precepts. Islam accepted many of the pre-Islamic-established rules pertaining to socio-political matters in order to achieve justice. Thus, they are valid insofar as they are seen to be just and rational according to the conventions of contemporary times. (Kadivar, 2002: 427). Kadivar proposes justice as a new denomination to distinguish between constant and variable precepts. Human reasoning and compatibility with contemporaneous rationality should determine if a religious precept is applicable to every place and time. Unlike Eshkaveri, Kadivar does not propose modifying variable precepts; instead, he refers to them as precepts which are outdated and disqualified from practice. As an alternative, he proposes that: 'Instead of these variable precepts which are outdated, rational laws ought to be issued by the collective reasoning of people and these laws must not be attributed to religion' (Kadivar, 2002: 429). Kadivar raises a fundamental objection to expedient fiqh by arguing that only God and the Prophet Mohammad hold law-making jurisdiction. No other person - neither jurist nor guardian of jurist- is authorised to issue religious precepts. Kadivar insists that: 'It is not admissible to issue civic commands and attribute them to religion and the Shari’a' (Kadivar, 2002: 429).

The mutable nature of socio-political and economic contexts forms the bedrock of religious secularity. However, this contextual approach is not confined to jurisprudential argument. Scholars including Mojtahed-Shabestari and Soroush, who adopt theological and philosophical perspectives, broach the contextual facts to argue for religious secularity. Mojtahed-Shabestari contends that from the beginning, religions were not established to engender change in socio-political structures. Islamic precepts were responses to the socio-political challenges of the revelation era. But, he argues, the challenges of the contemporary world are completely different, and, it is because of this, that the Quran and traditions should not be expected to provide Muslims with answers. In contrast
to Kadivar and Eshkevari, Mojtahed-Shabestari does not address the issue of constant and variable precepts. When it comes to political matters, Islamic sources do not offer orders/prohibitions because they do not relate to contemporary questions. As with Kadivar, Mojtahed-Shabestari sees justice as the principal objective of Islam. Justice is the only overarching principle which has to be borrowed from Islam to manage the socio-political arena.

Mojtahed-Shabestari further argues that there is a fundamental difference between the orders/prohibitions of God and those of the state. For a believer, absolute submission to God’s orders/prohibitions is required; but, this submission is rooted in discretionary trust. He states: ‘Being sure that there are matters of God’s orders/prohibitions, a believer will obey them without ... question... State authority can never be the source of this submission’ (Mojtahed-Shabestari, 2005: 180). Even if the state authorities claim commitment to God’s orders/prohibitions, this commitment and its consequences are human phenomena and not sacred. Islam cannot be held responsible for socio-political matters where human decisions prevail (Mojtahed-Shabestari, 2005: 170-83).

In this respect, Mojtahed-Shabestari’s view is close to that of Soroush, who, adding a profane feature to the Quran, argues that religion possesses both essential and accidental dimensions. The essential dimension is an inseparable feature of religion. In contrast, the accidental dimension, which includes most aspects of religion, may have initially been shaped in a different format. Compared to those of Kadivar and Eshkevari, Soroush’s concept of the Essential and accidental in religion offers fertile ground for fundamental change in religion-oriented issues. He lists eight dimensions of religion as contingent and maintains that the variability of precepts is not confined to the socio-political; the Shari’a, taken overall, is contingent. For example, whereas Kadivar and Eshkevari consider worshipping precepts constant, Soroush, who presents them as a contingent dimension of religion, states:

The precepts of Shari’ah, religious customs, the form and appearance of rites of worship and other rites, and the regulations pertaining to individual and social behaviour ... are originally ordained on the basis of the lives and characteristics and the spiritual, social, geographical and historical circumstances of a particular people, such that, had these circumstances been different, the customs, precepts and regulations would also have taken on a different form and shape... There can be no doubt that the underlying contention is that most of the precepts of fiqh and even its basic tenets are accidentals. Even prayers and fasting have been made proportionate to what people can endure on average. If their endurance was much greater, the obligations may well have been more severe (Soroush et al., 2009: 88-9).

Soroush’s proposition poses fundamental challenges to religious claims in the socio-political sphere. For him, religion will be preserved, even if these precepts undergo total change. They were not fundamental to religion in the revelation era, let alone in the contemporary world where the context is completely different.

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7 For a detailed explanation of these accidental dimensions of Islam see Sorosh, A. a.-K., Mobasser, N. and Jahanbakhsh, F. (2009) *The expansion of prophetic experience: essays on historicity, contingency and plurality in religion*, Boston: Brill.
Religion: not a Political Ideology

'Islam is the solution' (*al-Islam huwa al-hal*) has been the main slogan of most of the Islamic movements that have striven to find solutions to the myriad problems facing Muslims in the modern world (Fuller, 2003: 23-33, Martin and Barzegar, 2010: 1-13, Mulcahy, 2007, Nasr, 1996: 49-140, Roy, 2001: 35-42, Tibi, 2001: 84-145). The 1979 Islamic revolution was no exception: the doctrine of Velayat-e Faqih refers to this assumption on many occasions. In an attempt to justify the validity of establishing Islamic states in the modern age, Khomeini wrote:

[T]he laws of the [S]har‘ah embrace a diverse body of laws and regulation[s], which amounts to a complete social system. In this system of laws, all the needs of man have been met: his dealings with his neighbors, fellow citizens, and clan, as well as children and relatives; the concerns of private and marital life; regulations concerning war and peace and intercourse with other nations; penal and commercial law; and regulations pertaining to trade, industry and agriculture... It is obvious, then, how much care Islam devotes to government and the political and economic relations of society, with [the] goal of creating conditions conducive to the production of morally upright and virtuous human beings. The Glorious Qur’an and the Sunnah contain all the laws and ordinances man needs in order to attain happiness and the perfection of his state (Khomeini and Algar, 1981: 43 - 4).

As a consequence of this attitude of 'Islam is the solution', unrealistic worldly expectations of religion were generated. However, after the reality of their experience of the Islamic Republic of Iran, some religious scholars opted to revise their early conceptualisation. Mehdi Bazargan, the first prime minister of post-revolutionary Iran, was an outstanding example in this regard. Both at the practical and scholarly levels, Bazargan played an effective role in supplementing religion with socio-political functions (Jahanbakhsh, 2001: 80-112, Rajaee, 2007: 74-83 & 91-126, Taqavi, 2004: 66-77).

But, after being impacted upon by the lived experience of the Islamic state, Bazargan revised his earlier ideas. In a speech delivered in 1992, he argued that setting worldly aims for religion contradicts the spirit of the teachings of the Quran. In support of this, he introduced two ultimate goals for religion: God and the hereafter. He contested that jurisprudential precepts accounted for only two per cent of the Holy text. By contrast, he argued, every page and verse of the Quran expressed 'directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly concern about God and the hereafter' (Bazargan, 1995: 52). Bazargan argued to the effect that the social precepts of the Quran aim to facilitate believers' devotion to God and, that if these precepts have impacted on the worldly life of Muslims, it is a subsidiary outcome, not the main goal of the aforesaid precepts. He asserted, for example, that the Quran promises next worldly rewards in return for believers' alms. In no way does the Quran invite Muslims to give alms with the expectation of receiving social justice or achieving economic growth in return. Bazargan stated:

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If worldly issues and their improvement are not pictured as a goal and responsibility of religion, religion won’t be charged with deficiency and incompetence. It won’t be said that [Islamic] principles and precepts do not include ... comprehensive and complete ground rules required for political, social and economic issues of the society (Bazargan, 1995: 54).

He concluded that there is no difference between governance and other living issues: 'Islam and the prophet have not taught us cooking, gardening, ranching and housekeeping. As [these issues] are left to us to be managed via employing our wisdom, experiences and skills .... economic management and political issues are our responsibilities as well' (Bazargan, 1995: 56).

Soroush addresses the notion of 'Islam is the solution' by countering the use of religion as a political ideology. Along with Bazargan, he upholds the notion that religion’s role is to address next worldly issues. Seeing religion in this light opens up the possibility of converting religion into a political ideology (Soroush, 1996b: 5). Soroush maintains that in reaction to reformation in the West, Islamic scholars initiated the secularisation of religion,9 according to which worldly matters become the principal concern of Islam. Islamic reformers in the 19th and 20th centuries were of the opinion that making a better life in this world would lead to a better hereafter. This is how such an ideology was developed by Muslim thinkers, by furnishing religion with socio-political functions (Soroush, 1996b: 7-8).10 Counter to the thought of his mentor Ali Shariati, who is widely cited as the ideologue of modern political Islam,11 Soroush argues that the main function of religion is to inform and lead human beings in issues pertaining to the hereafter (Soroush, 1993: 10-11, 1994: 12).

A propos of the subject of development in non-Islamic countries, Soroush further argues that there is no correlation between being Islamic and development. It cannot be assumed that because a country is a Muslim country it should automatically be developed (Soroush, 1996a: 312-18). In 'The Theoretical Expansion and Constriction of Shari'a', Soroush argues that it is impossible to reach a single understanding of Islam. However, transforming religion into a political ideology is to cast it in a definitive and fixed model. 'The use of religion as a political tool ... subordinates the depth and

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10 On a larger scale, John Keane asserts that adding a worldly dimension to religion and emphasising that religion has to do with the whole life is a form of rebirth of God to protest secularism. See: (Keane 2000: 12)


Soroush's refutation of recruiting religion as a political ideology brings him in line with Bazargan's concerns. He argues that worldly issues are religion's concern as long as they serve next-worldly-happiness; but, this does not mean that religion provides a plan of action for worldly matters as is the case with political ideologies. He states: 'Planning should include the economy, population, public education ... all of which are the products of logical arrangements of human beings. Religion cannot replace rationality in these arenas' (Soroush, 2008c: 198).

Compared with others' contributions, Mojtahed-Shabestari presents a more forthright argument. His most significant contribution to the religious reformation discourse is 'his authoritative commentary on the essentially limited nature of religious knowledge and rules' (Sadri, 2001: 261). Mojtahed-Shabestari maintains that it is not the task of prophets to provide guidelines for introducing social, political and economic structures (Mojtahed-Shabestari, 1996: 90, 2005: 158). The knowledge required for governance in the modern age is absent from Islamic teachings. He states:

Development is a social goal that should be pursued by citizens of a given society through their own free will ... [Muslims] should seek the required knowledge [for development] themselves or get it from the developed countries. The intervention of the [holy] book and traditions in the development of Muslim societies is just for setting the final moral goals of the development, which should not contradict the principles of the moral values of the book and traditions (Mojtahed-Shabestari, 1997: 89).

Referring to the lived experience of Iran, Mojtahed-Shabestari argues that the macro-policies implemented by the Islamic Republic are formulated by a rational planning process. It is obvious that they are not derived from the holy book or traditions (Mojtahed-Shabestari, 2005: 194-5). There was, he claims, a rational reading of religion early after the 1979 revolution, which resulted in the writing of the Constitution based on modern political philosophy and the social sciences (Mojtahed-Shabestari, 2005: 28). Challenging an age-old practice he asks: 'Can we write a constitution in the contemporary world through accumulating tens of fatwas? Is the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran a combination of fatwas? (Mojtahed-Shabestari, 1998: 39). Similar to Kadivar, Mojtahed-Shabestari objects to the labelling of governance issues as 'Islamic', arguing that it is not acceptable to depict routine governance responsibilities as subject to Islamic precepts (Mojtahed-Shabestari, 2005: 25-27).

Soroush, in support of Mojtahed-Shabestari, claims that in essence, the state's task has nothing to do with religion. Labelling these responsibilities 'Islamic' neither changes their nature nor the ways in which they ought to be approached. An Islamic state cannot be different from other states in terms of function or form. This is why, according to Soroush, methods of governance are essentially extra-religious issues (Soroush, 1996c: 11). In order to plan and administer issues pertaining to public life, education, economy and health care, for example, states ought to adhere to rational reasoning. In modern times, he argues, religion cannot effectively manage these arenas; the social sciences, e.g., sociology, economics and public administration are the proper tools to manage public life (cited in Jahanbakhsh, 2001: 157). In Soroush's view, the occasional intervention of religious sources in these
matters does not obviate the need for other forms of knowledge (Soroush, 2008c: 275). Medieval Islamic historian and philosopher Ibn Khaldūn, in his magnum opus *al-Muqaddima*, addressed the same issues, distinguishing these aspects of religious sources from the Prophet’s core message. He wrote as follows:

The medicine mentioned in religious tradition is of the (Bedouin) type. It is in no way part of the divine revelation. ... Muhammad was sent to teach us the religious law. He was not sent to teach us medicine or any other ordinary matter (Ibn Khaldūn et al., 2005: 387).

Soroush, pursuing the same path, asserts that there is no difference between issues pertaining to governance and medical or engineering issues in this regard; they are all scientific and methodological issues, which cannot be considered the responsibility of religion. As methodological and managerial issues have a rational nature, referring them to religion would be a mistake (Soroush, 1996c: 6, 2006: 65-67).

In sum, the lived experience of the Islamic state in Iran has seen religion used as a means of attaining political goals. Disillusioned by the authoritarian excesses of the Islamic state, a group of religious scholars, who supported the establishment of the Islamic state in the 1970s, and contributed to the institutionalisation of the Islamic state in the 1980s, re-conceptualised the notion of political Islam. As explained throughout the paper, they deconstructed the socio-political dimensions of Islam in order to argue in support of the necessity to adopt rational decision-making mechanisms suited to managing the political arena. This discourse, which is based upon religious sources, employs Islamic jurisprudential and theological methods. More importantly, rooted as it is in religious concerns, it principally seeks the emancipation of religion from the state. It is this distinguishing feature of the discourse which invites the oxymoronic phrase ‘religious secularity’.

**Conclusion**

The religious resurgence in the closing decades of the twentieth century challenged the veracity of the global secularisation thesis popularised by Herbert Spencer, Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim. The relevant literature in the new millennium is critical or at least suspicious of the thesis, albeit religion-secularity dualism is the underlying assumption. It is not far-fetched to propose that the emergence of political Islam represented the most significant contribution to the subverting of the secularisation thesis. However, the Muslim world’s contribution to the secularisation literature is not confined solely to this case. The post colonial states of the Islamic world saw modernisation and secularisation as a solution to the problems confronting the Islamic world. This is evident in Mohammad Ali’s reforms in Egypt in the late nineteenth century, Ataturk’s secularisation plans for Turkey, Reza Shah and his son Mohammad Reza Shah’s secularisation programs in Iran, the Baathists movement in Iraq and Syria, and the programs put in place by the Algerian *Front de Liberation*. They all envisioned victory for the secularisation forces; but, as John Keane points out, the victory of the forces favouring the ‘privatisation’ of religion may be considered as one episode in the complex history of modern religious politics (Keane, 2000b: 11). Many scholars regard political Islam as a reaction to decades of imposed modernisation and secularisation (Arjomand, 1988, Keddie, 2003: 21-22, Lawrence, 1989, Mandaville, 2007: 48-57, Nasr, 1998, Roy, 2007: 62). The hostile attitude towards secularism, evident in much of the Muslim world, is related to the rise of
political Islam, an eventuation which I refer to as the 'Islamism-secularism conflict'. This mirrors the dualism between religion and secularity that underlies the secularisation thesis.

Once again, development in the Muslim world is making a profound contribution to the debate surrounding secularisation. The Turkish AKP presents an empirical example, according to which the conventional dissentient image of political Islam is discredited. Political Islam in Turkey is a response to assertive secularism. Yet, not only does it evince a favourable attitude towards the secular political structure, but it reconciles religiosity with secular politics. A similar conclusion may be drawn from Iran's current situation. This paper sheds light on an emerging discourse in which secularity is promoted not only as desirable but also as an inevitable political structure vital to ensuring genuine religiosity. The authoritarian excesses of Iran's Islamic state have neither led to the abandonment of religion in the political sphere nor to the re-emergence of anti-religious secularism. Instead, a religious discourse based upon the compatibility of Islam and political secularity has generated considerable public support. This was evident in the profound influence of the religious scholars on the eve of the reformist era (1997-2005) and the Green Movement (2009 onwards).

Recent volatile political developments in the Middle East provide more apposite examples to test this argument. As events unfold in the Middle East, more evidence will be revealed regarding the role and function of religion in the political mosaic of countries such as Egypt and Tunisia. However, so far it seems evident that rather than conventional dissentient political Islam, it has been emendatory political Islam, along with other discourses, that has toppled the authoritarian, secular regimes in Tunisia and Egypt. In addition, the challenges facing Bashar Asad's secular regime in Syria are not attributable to radical political Islam. Scrutinising the history of religious versus secular, Charles Taylor calls for de-centralising attention from religion (Taylor, 2009). The argument put forward by this paper pushes the boundaries by proposing the possibility not only of the co-existence of religion and secularity but also by revealing the religious roots of an emerging model of secularity in the Muslim world in general and Iran in particular. This is in line with Keane’s anticipation at the beginning of the millennium of the possibility of calls 'for a new political philosophy which is rid of fictions about the withering away and privatisation of religion' (Keane, 2000b: 17).

**Biography**


