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## Islam and Freedom of Religion

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By Philip Carl Salzman

Islam is difficult for Westerners to understand because we view it through our own cultural categories. Our categories have been formed by the post-Enlightenment and post-industrial revolution in the West. Modern Western society has been organized on the basis of occupational specialization and division of labour. This is why we see our societies divided among distinct spheres of activity: familial, economic, political, cultural, and religious.

The history of the West during the last few centuries has been one of increasing institutional differentiation, with economic, political, cultural, and religious institutions ever more distinct and separated. During the European Middle Ages, the Catholic Church provided an all-encompassing way of life, defining what was allowed and what was not allowed in most aspects of life. But the total control of the Church as well as the influence of its Protestant dissidents were overthrown or eroded following the Enlightenment, resulting in the secularization of public life leading to the separation of church and state, the marginalization of Church power, and the ever narrower restriction of faith and worship to personal preference. Nevertheless, remnants of Church dominance can be seen in England, with the Queen the head of the Church of England, and Lord Bishops of the Church of England sitting in the British House of Lords.

There is no clearer example than in Quebec, where prior to the “quiet revolution” in the 1960s the Catholic Church participated in many spheres of activity: running schools and universities, hospitals, and guiding the populace on political matters. After the quiet revolution, the running of schools and hospitals was taken out of the hands of the Church, and the Church’s influence in politics waned. The Church’s social rules, bearing on marriage, family, and family planning came to be seen as suggestions, but the decisions were left to citizens. In short, the scope of Church influence was gradually reduced to that of faith and worship. Public identity shifted from the centuries old religious opposition between Catholic and Protestant, to the linguistic and cultural opposition between French and English.

During the last three centuries, the separation of church and state became an established principle of liberal democracies. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms says, under the heading “Fundamental Freedoms,” “(a) freedom of conscience and religion.”<sup>i</sup> The United States Bill of Rights says, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof...”<sup>ii</sup> Freedom of religion is thus a basic principle in the West.

As well, Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.”<sup>iii</sup>

Freedom of religion is thus a basic concern whenever issues about Islam are raised in countries of the West. But our modern narrow, contemporary conception of religion makes it almost impossible for us to understand Islam. Islam is not just “a religion” of faith and worship. It is a total way of life following the rules set out by Allah for all activities as specified in sharia law: hygiene, family relations, gender relations, education, charity, economics, inheritance, and politics, all are regulated by sharia law. There is no separation of mosque and state in Islam; a good state is defined as the manifestation of Islam in governance.<sup>iv</sup>

Many laws of Islam are incompatible with those of Western liberal democracies. Islam forbids freedom of speech, in that criticism of Mohammed, the Qoran, Islam, or Allah is a capital offence, accusations sometimes followed by summary execution.<sup>v</sup> As well, sharia law forbids freedom of religion, in a number of ways: In many countries, for example, Islam is the official religion of the state, and appears in the name of the country, such as “The Islamic Republic of Iran.”<sup>vi</sup> Apostates who leave for another religion must, by law, be punished by execution.<sup>vii</sup> Christians and Jews must pay a heavy tax *not* to be executed, and signs of their religions must be minimized, with no sounds, such as bells, with no new churches or synagogues, and even with the repair of churches and synagogues disallowed.<sup>viii</sup> Beyond these “favoured” Religions of the Book, other infidels, such as Yazidis, are fair game for killing or enslaving<sup>ix</sup>.

Furthermore, sharia law forbids gender equality, with men given the responsibility for women, who must accept men’s authority over them and obey.<sup>x</sup> Women are not allowed to choose who they will marry; if they do not marry the men chosen by their fathers, they are regarded as having committed adultery, a capital offence. For adultery in marriage, a woman can be executed.<sup>xi</sup> In contrast, according to sharia law, men are allowed up to four wives, whom they may divorce at will. Men are also allowed an unlimited number of mistresses, and an unlimited number of sex slaves.<sup>xii</sup> Sharia law also forbids freedom of sexual expression, the penalty for homosexuality being execution, as seen in Iran where homosexuals are hung from cranes in public squares. Islam restricts charity, the obligatory tithe must be directed to supporting Muslims and to advancing Islam, as in funding mosques and madrases.<sup>xiii</sup>

Islam rejects pluralism and tolerance in favour of Islamic dominance.<sup>xiv</sup> This was reflected in the Arab invasions of regions from Morocco to India, of West Africa, Sicily, and southern Iberia, followed by the Turkish invasions of the Balkans and Austria. Military jihad to bring the world under Islam is a standing obligation of all Muslims.<sup>xv</sup> The reasoning is that God made the world, so the world belongs to the true followers of God, that is, Muslims. Under Sharia law, a Muslim may capture and ransom infidels, may convert infidels, may enslave infidels, and may kill infidels. Infidel females may be taken and held or sold as sex slaves. This is all specified in the foundational documents of Islam, and commonly seen in historical and contemporary practice, one current example being the motto of the Islamic Brotherhood: “Allah is our objective, Muhammad is our leader, the Quran is our constitution, Jihad (holy war) is our venue and Shuhada (martyrdom) on behalf of Allah is our wish”<sup>xvi</sup>

The latest example of the application of Islamic dominance is the Islamic State, which has launched military campaigns against surrounding countries and against minority populations, murdering the males and enslaving

and raping the females.<sup>xvii</sup>

The tide of secularization arrived in the Islamic World only as shallow puddles of nationalism and socialism, and those puddles have since dried up. Islam, never much submerged, has once more arisen triumphant. But for Muslims, Islam is the only true faith, superseding Judaism and Christianity, and Mohammed is God's final Prophet. It is widely believed by Muslims that their duty to God requires them to spread the true faith until it is universally accepted by everyone.

Mass Muslim immigration to Europe raises question about how Muslims will integrate into Western societies. Muslims in non-Muslim countries as immigrants or refugees are not relieved of their faith-based obligations. According to a number of opinion polls of Muslims in Europe, a substantial minority wish to institute sharia law and believe that violence against non-Muslims is justified.<sup>xviii</sup> Some Muslim males see European infidel females as their legitimate prizes of conquest, which accounts for the rising epidemic of kidnapping, rape, and sexual assaults.<sup>xix</sup> Thus in the minds of many Muslims, immigration is just another form of jihad, ultimately aimed at establishing world-wide Islamic dominance.

In wishing to uphold democratic values and human rights, members of Western countries wish to extent to Muslims and others the right of freedom of religion that has been established in the West. We see this in the Canadian Parliament's well meaning but ill considered motion to condemn "Islamophobia," a motion that Canadian citizens at large did not support.<sup>xx</sup> But our narrow cultural conception of religion, a result of the evolution of Western societies, blinds us to the political and legal dimensions of Islam and to the laws and practices that are inimical to Western culture.

Muslim countries have made great efforts to have criticism of Islam banned in the West; the idea of Islamophobia in the West has been championed by Islamic countries. But for Western countries to disallow criticism of Islam, after centuries of criticism of Christianity, violates the most basic values of the West, freedom of conscience and speech.

However problematical Islam is for Western countries, the same cannot be said for all Muslims, for Muslims differ greatly in origin, race, ethnicity, and, particularly important, culture and political orientation. We cannot know, a priori, what a particular Muslim thinks or intends any more than we can know what a particular Christian or Jew thinks. There is disagreement among Muslims in regard to both principles and practice of religion and politics. In order to maintain the values of liberal democracy, all people must be treated as individuals and not as members of religious or racial categories. Thus, in matters of application of public policy, such as immigration, individual Muslims must be considered on a case by case basis as should all other people.

At the same time, there is no point in pretending that the foundational stance of Islam is not hostile towards the Western world and aggressive toward infidels. Islam divides the world into the "Dar al-Islam", the land of Islam, and the "Dar al-harb", the land of war. Throughout its history, Islam has been expansionistic, conquering infidels and occupying their lands as opportunity allowed. There is no point in trying to explain away the thousands of attacks by Muslims on infidel minorities in the Middle East, North Africa, and in Europe and North America,<sup>xxi</sup> by claiming that all of the attackers shouting "Allah Akbar" are mentally ill or disappointed with their employment prospects. Their call to Allah makes it clear that they are attacking on behalf of Islam. We should at least give them the respect of accepting their expressed motives rather than

trying to excuse the motives with ethnocentric explanations from our own culture. For over fifty years, we have uncritically celebrated multiculturalism and diversity, and now we have more of it than we can handle. We say that we celebrate “diversity,” but we are determined to deny that cultures differ in fundamental ways.

Our Western approach to Islam should not be determined by our commitment to freedom of religion, defined in the narrow sense that religion occupies in our culture. Islamic sharia law and political ambitions are, in fact, contrary to Western liberal democratic ways of life and should be open to criticism and restriction. Tolerance is an admirable trait; cultural suicide is not.

#### About the Author



Philip Carl Salzman B.A. (Antioch), M.A., Ph.D. (Chicago) is Professor of Anthropology at McGill University, appointed in 1968. He founded the Commission on Nomadic Peoples of the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences, and its international journal, *Nomadic Peoples*, for which he received the IUAES Gold Award. In recent years he has also served as Senior Fellow at the University of St. Andrews, Open Society International Scholar at the American University of Central Asia, Erasmus Mundus International Fellow at the University of Catania, and Visiting Professor at the University of Sydney. Extensive ethnographic field research in Baluchistan (Iran), Gujarat and Rajasthan (India), and Sardinia (Italy) provided the foundation many articles in academic journals, and for book publications such as *The Anthropology of Real Life: Events in Human Experience* (1999), *Black Tents of Baluchistan* (2000), winner of the Premio Pitr–Salomone Marino, *Understanding Culture: An Introduction of Anthropological Theory* (2001), *Pastoralists: Equality, Hierarchy, and the State* (2004), *Culture and Conflict in the Middle East* (2008), *Postcolonial Theory and the Arab-Israel Conflict* (2008), and *Thinking Anthropologically 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.* (2010). His latest book publication is *Classic Comparative Anthropology: Studies from the Tradition* (2012). In public affairs, he was a member of Middle East Strategy at Harvard (2008-2010), a member of the Board of Directors of Scholars for Peace in the Middle East (2004-2012), and is currently a Senior Fellow at the Frontier Centre for Public Policy, a member of the Academic Council of the Canadian Institute for Jewish Studies, a Fellow of the Middle East Forum (2015-), and a member of the Board of Directors of Scholars for Peace in the Middle East (2016-). His articles have been published by the Frontier Centre, the Middle East Forum, the Gatestone Institute, the Canadian Institute for Jewish Research, the Macdonald Laurier Institute, and Areo Magazine.

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<sup>i</sup> <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/Const/page-15.html>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/amendments/amendment-I>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html>

<sup>iv</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam\\_and\\_secularism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_and_secularism); [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam\\_and\\_secularism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_and_secularism)

<sup>v</sup> [https://wikiislam.net/wiki/Islam\\_and\\_Freedom\\_of\\_Speech](https://wikiislam.net/wiki/Islam_and_Freedom_of_Speech); <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sharia>.

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/171744.pdf>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://islamqa.info/en/20327>; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostasy\\_in\\_Islam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostasy_in_Islam)

<sup>viii</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dhimmi>; *The Dhimmi: Christians and Jews Under Islam*, Bat Ye’or, Fairleigh Dickinson Press, Revised edition, 1985; *Islam and Dhimmitude: Where Civilizations Collide*, Bat Ye’or, Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 2001

<sup>ix</sup> <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/report-isiss-egregious-religious-freedom-abuses>

<sup>x</sup> <http://www.wluml.org/fr/node/249>; <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/10914/women-islam=/mail/inbox>

<sup>xi</sup> <https://www.quora.com/What-is-the-punishment-for-adultery-in-Islam>

<sup>xii</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marriage\\_in\\_Islam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marriage_in_Islam)

<sup>xiii</sup> <https://www.islamichelp.org.uk/zakat/>

<sup>xiv</sup> <http://www.meforum.org/3545/islam-hatred-non-muslim>; <http://www.meforum.org/1754/peace-or-jihad-abrogation-in-islam>

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<sup>xv</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/jihad>

<sup>xvi</sup> <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-muslim-brotherhood>; <http://www.businessinsider.com/morsi-says-jihad-is-our-path-and-death-in-the-name-of-allah-is-our-goal-2012-6>

<sup>xvii</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic\\_State\\_of\\_Iraq\\_and\\_the\\_Levant](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_State_of_Iraq_and_the_Levant)

<sup>xviii</sup> <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/7861/british-muslims-survey>

<sup>xix</sup> <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/5879/child-rape-crimes>; <http://www.meforum.org/5410/muslim-rapists-prefer-blondes>

<sup>xx</sup> [www.angusreid.org/islamophobia-motion-103](http://www.angusreid.org/islamophobia-motion-103)

<sup>xxi</sup> <http://theettingerreport.com/Jerusalem-Cloakroom/Terrorism/Islamic-terrorism-%E2%80%93-extrinsic-or-intrinsic-.aspx>