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## **Religion and Democracy**

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# RELIGION AND DEMOCRACY

*Jean Bethke Elshtain*

***Jean Bethke Elshtain***, the Laura Spelman Rockefeller Professor of Social and Political Ethics at the University of Chicago Divinity School and Thomas and Dorothy Leavey Chair in the Foundations of American Freedom at Georgetown University, delivered the 2008 Seymour Martin Lipset Lecture on Democracy in the World (see box on p. 6). Her most recent book is *Sovereignty: God, State, and Self* (2008).

When I was a graduate student of political science, the work of Seymour Martin Lipset appeared regularly on the syllabi for my American politics courses. His seminal 1960 book *Political Man* was, even then, acknowledged as a classic in the study of politics. I vividly recall a little flap that occurred in one of my seminars when the day arrived for our discussion of the book. By the late 1960s, feminism was already a force on U.S. campuses, and the volume was called *Political Man*, after all. The “man” part made it suspect in the eyes of some: As usual, went the story, a male political scientist was ignoring or even demeaning women.

A reading of the text, however, made it clear that Professor Lipset’s analysis of political behavior was not, for the most part, gender-specific. He certainly was not making invidious comparisons between men and women as citizens. Once we had all calmed down and read the book, we recognized it as the stellar achievement of a consummate political scientist—clearly written, carefully thought out, precise in its use of data, and careful to avoid drawing overly grand conclusions. So, to deliver a lecture to which Professor Lipset’s name is attached is a humbling experience, and I am indeed grateful. Although I am a political theorist rather than an empirical political scientist, I am delighted to link hands with Professor Lipset who, in his insightful essay on “Religion and American Values,” reported that “democratic and religious values have grown together.”<sup>1</sup> Professor Lipset was perspicacious where many political scientists have not been.

When I was in graduate school in the 1960s, a distinguished visitor

## THE SEYMOUR MARTIN LIPSET LECTURE ON DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD

Jean Bethke Elshtain delivered the fifth annual Seymour Martin Lipset Lecture on Democracy in the World on 12 November 2008 at the Canadian Embassy in Washington, D.C., and on November 6 at the Munk Centre for International Studies at the University of Toronto. The Lipset Lecture is cosponsored by the National Endowment for Democracy and the Munk Centre, with financial support this year from the Canadian Donner Foundation, the Canadian Embassy in Washington, the American Federation of Teachers, the Albert Shanker Institute, and other donors.

Seymour Martin Lipset, who passed away at the end of 2006, was one of the most influential social scientists and scholars of democracy of the past half-century. A frequent contributor to the *Journal of Democracy* and a founding member of its Editorial Board, Lipset taught at Columbia, the University of California at Berkeley, Harvard, Stanford, and George Mason University. He was the author of numerous important books including *Political Man*, *The First New Nation*, *The Politics of Unreason*, and *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword*. He was the only person ever to have served as president of both the American Political Science Association (1979–80) and the American Sociological Association (1992–93).

Lipset's work covered a wide range of topics: the social conditions of democracy, including economic development and political culture; the origins of socialism, fascism, revolution, protest, prejudice, and extremism; class conflict, structure, and mobility; social cleavages, party systems, and voter alignments; and public opinion and public confidence in institutions. Lipset was a pioneer in the study of comparative politics, and no comparison featured as prominently in his work as that between the two great democracies of North America. Thanks to his insightful analysis of Canada in comparison with the United States, most fully elaborated in *Continental Divide*, he has been dubbed the "Tocqueville of Canada."

came to lecture at my campus, the renowned evolutionary biologist Sir Julian Huxley, grandson of scientist Thomas Henry Huxley and brother of author Aldous Huxley. Sir Julian proclaimed, in the self-assured way that prognosticators often affect, that by the year 2000 two pernicious phenomena would have vanished into the "dustbin of history": the first was nationalism, and the second was religion. This can fairly be called a failed prediction. Sir Julian, of course, was not the only one to get it wrong. Many thinkers foresaw a future of cosmopolitanism and secularism in which the hold of nations and faiths upon persons and societies would

steadily weaken. This was known as the “secularization hypothesis,” and those who subscribed to it missed much that was and still is important.

The problem lies in part in the dominant terms of analysis within empirical political science. Political theorist Joshua Mitchell, in an illuminating essay, describes the problem this way: “Human motivation and conduct were largely understood in liberal terms, under the guise of ‘preference’ and ‘choice.’ . . . Religion seemed then to be an anachronism, soon to be marginalized if not swept away by ‘modernization.’”<sup>2</sup> The vast majority of political scientists, having reduced religion to a set of private attitudes that had to give way before the onslaught of the powerful forces of modernization—which also meant secularization—lacked interest in the study of religion.

Let us take this a step further. Terms such as “preference” and “choice”—understood as narrowly self-interested—presuppose a human subject of a certain kind, one driven by calculations of marginal utility. In other words, the ordinary person was always “looking out for number one,” in one way or another, and his or her preferences were always reducible to utilitarian self-interest. Taking this as truth, political scientists missed all sorts of strong urgencies and relationships and beliefs. At the base of this error lay a flawed anthropology or understanding of human nature. It turns out that the language of the marketplace and its terms of reference, chief among these being “preference,” are not conceptually up to the task of dealing with certain phenomena, including religion. As Mitchell writes:

Religious experience is of a different order than having “preferences” . . . Religious experience cannot be understood as a “preference,” because the God who stands before man is not among the plurality of scalar objects among which he prefers this over that.<sup>3</sup>

One of my favorite illustrations of Mitchell’s point comes from a personal experience. A young political scientist interviewing for a position at the university where I was then teaching visited the campus for the purpose of delivering his “job talk.” For him, everything boiled down to preference. All that took place in politics fit within the framework of choice as preference maximization. After his talk, I probed him further: When the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered his great speech on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, he did not say, “I have a preference today.” He said, “I have a dream.” When I asked the young scholar to explain the difference, he was stymied but finally replied, “Well, I guess his dream was really his preference.”

No, I do not think so. King’s dream was a religiously inspired vision of the collective deliverance of an oppressed people. It was a dream of freedom for each and every person trapped by a pernicious system of *de jure* segregation. Once again, the dominant language and modalities of mainstream political science missed the boat where religion and politics were concerned.

How could this be so, I have often asked myself. If we look at the

saga of U.S. history, what do we see? We see that every major social movement in American history (until recent decades, perhaps) has been interlaced with religious language, inspiration, and enthusiasm: the American Revolution itself (“No King but King Jesus” was one of its rallying cries<sup>4</sup>); abolitionism; women’s suffrage; many of the social reforms of the Progressive Era; labor organizing; the Social Gospel movement; and the civil rights movement, which was, after all, headed by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. In the United States, religion has never been an exclusively “private” matter.

In part, no doubt, because of Alexis de Tocqueville’s great work *Democracy in America*, the United States has long been regarded as a template for democracy that provides the standard against which all other democratic possibilities are assessed. Nonetheless, today many rather disgruntled analysts who acknowledge the historic relationship between religion and democracy in the United States find this to be a troubling element in U.S. democratic life, one that inevitably will be superseded by the triumph of secularism. Thus they proclaim that West European democracies, now regarded as post-Christian, offer a sleek, up-to-date version of a system in which religion is more or less invisible—much as its presence has not been “seen” by U.S. political scientists for decades.

### The Secularist Challenge

What at times appears to be a rather arcane academic debate about secularism versus faith has serious consequences for the future of democracy worldwide and, if we are to believe many astute observers, for the future of Western democracy itself. Let us briefly take the measure of the academic debate. During the past few years, we have been treated to a spate of work blaming religion for every evil under the sun while conveniently ignoring that the greatest horrors of the twentieth century—the bloodiest of all centuries—were fueled by two antireligious totalitarian regimes, Nazi Germany and the officially atheistic Soviet empire. Nonetheless, many continue to insist that every religious believer—whether a liberal, mainline Protestant in the United States or a radical Taliban hiding out in the caves of Pakistan—is a lurking theocrat lying in wait and scheming to impose an official theocratic order. Such an assertion strains credulity, and it becomes even more implausible as one examines the matter closely.

Princeton scholar Jeffrey Stout, in an essay on “The Folly of Secularism,” notes that secularists insist that “striving to minimize the influence of religion on politics is essential to the defense of democracy.”<sup>5</sup> What is a secularist? A secularist in the U.S. context is someone who wants to go beyond the separation of church and state and to effect a thoroughgoing separation of religion and politics at the level of civil society. Although this has never been the way of democracy in the United States, the secularists claim that the country needs such a system lest it fall prey to the

dark and menacing religious forces that they contend are poised to stage a theocratic coup. This is fanciful, of course, but such arguments have gained traction inside the U.S. academy.

The late philosopher Richard Rorty, a subscriber to this type of thinking, went so far as to proclaim that atheists make better citizens. Not surprisingly, he was hard pressed to back this assertion with empirical data. After all, so many of the great public figures in U.S. history were either deeply religious or kindly disposed toward religion. To the secularists, however, relegating religion solely to the private sphere—it must never show its face in public—is the *sine qua non* of democracy, evidence to the contrary notwithstanding. And the body of evidence is vast. Stout writes,

Abolitionism was born in the revival tents of the Second Great Awakening. . . . The struggle for women's suffrage was another product of the Second Great Awakening. The labor movement was rooted in the Social Gospel. During the Civil Rights movement, there was only one Martin Luther King Jr., but there were thousands of ministers mobilizing their churches in support of civil rights.<sup>6</sup>

Stout also notes the profoundly important roles played by Lutheran churches in East Germany and the Catholic Church in Poland in the triumph over Soviet domination and the transition to democracy. Adam Michnik (not Catholic himself), a key figure in the Workers' Defense Committee and Solidarity movement, declared "secularism . . . a dead end for Poland."<sup>7</sup> Why is this important? It is important for the United States because excising religion from public life would gut U.S. civil society, where churches and synagogues and, more recently, mosques have done and continue to do nearly all the heavy lifting, so to speak.

In an international context, the issue of religion in public life acquires even greater exigency. For example, both France and Turkey (which modeled itself on France) officially mandate *laïcité*, and this is proving deeply problematic for faithful Muslims—not theocrats but ordinary Muslims who do not want to remove the signs and symbols of their faith from public sight; hence the controversy over Muslim schoolgirls wearing the characteristic headscarf (*hijab*) to school. In France, with the headscarf banned in public schools, many Muslim schoolchildren have enrolled in private institutions. In fact, an estimated "10 percent of the two million students in Catholic schools" are now Muslim.

The quiet migration of Muslims to private Catholic schools highlights how hard it has become for state schools, long France's tool for integration, to keep their promise of equal opportunity. . . . The shift from these schools is another indication of the challenge facing the strict form of secularism known as "*laïcité*."<sup>8</sup>

*Laïcité* is, in fact, a sort of state-enforced civic religion, and quite a

narrow and stringent one at that. The inflexibility of this secular “faith” actually makes it more difficult to integrate Muslim immigrants into the French democratic system, as Muslims there believe that their own faith is unwelcome and under assault.

I mention all this because, over the course of multiyear discussions with a group of Muslim Arab intellectuals, it became clear to me as well as the other U.S. interlocutors that our conversation partners, at least initially, saw the only options for the Muslim world as being Islamic fundamentalism or a strict *laïcité*-type secularism.<sup>9</sup> It took the U.S. participants some time to realize that the harshness of these options stemmed from our Arab Muslim partners equating a secular state with severe secularism at the civil society level—and this they found unacceptable. (Although several had at some point in the past subscribed to a Marxist-inspired hard secularism, they had since come to recognize that this approach lacked viability in the Muslim world.)

A breakthrough occurred when my U.S. colleagues and I were able to make clear to our Arab friends that, as the American model demonstrates, a secular state should not be equated with a secularized civil society scrubbed clean of religion. This surely helps to account for why and how the integration of Muslim immigrants into their new society has proceeded more smoothly in the United States than in the far more secularized societies of the West European democracies. Indeed, only by loosening severe restrictions on the public expression of religion will democracy become more attractive to moderate Muslims.

One might sum up the matter in this way: Out of the French Revolution came forth a monological form of democracy and sovereignty that underwrote the system of *laïcité*. In the United States, by contrast, a dialogical system emerged that combined a secular state with a democratic civil society that was both inspired by and infused with religion, and in which religion and politics intermingled in all sorts of ways. The future of democracy in the Muslim world will likely display similarly diverging patterns, but with the emphases somewhat reversed: What emerges will be either a monological fundamentalist Muslim state and society dominated by a stringent form of *shari‘a* law or a nontheocratic dialogical state characterized by a civil society in which *shura* (consultation) between religion and politics is practiced. I am not trying to shoehorn Islam into a U.S. Christian-inspired model; rather, this appears to be the considered view of a number of sophisticated observers who focus on Islam and democracy.

### Islam’s Democratic Prospects

Because the case of Islam invariably arises—erupts might be a better term for it—whenever the subject at hand is religion and democracy, it is necessary to consider briefly the democratic possibilities for the Muslim world. Although I cannot claim expertise in this area, I can claim intense

interest. I am also able to draw upon my years of experience in dialogue with intellectuals from the Arab Muslim world.

The empirical data are sobering: There is clearly a democratic deficit in the world's Muslim-majority countries. That said, there is also tremendous political ferment. Much of it revolves around the question of democratic possibilities and how the Muslim faith can fit within them. There is no consensus on the future outlook for democracy in the Muslim world. A scan of the ever-growing mountain of literature on this topic shows that views are divided roughly along three lines: the *optimistic*, the *hopeful*, and the *dubious* or *disillusioned*.

Those who belong to the optimistic group claim that:

Classical, medieval, and modern Islamic thought, whether jurisprudence, theology, philosophy, or other disciplines of Islamic knowledge, contain[s] concepts comparable to modern Western doctrines of democracy, pluralism, and human rights. While originally inspired by the law of natural rights, these doctrines are Islamicly based on textual authorities that derived from the Qur'an and the Sunna, and that lend themselves to arguments favoring democratic forms of government, pluralistic societies, and guarantees of human rights.<sup>10</sup>

Optimists minimize the difficulties—the roadblocks to democracy—by arguing that the divine texts can be interpreted to offer a clear path toward combining the “absoluteness of divine governance” with “the divine legitimacy of human *shura*,” and that “the honest observance of the former requires adherence to the latter. Modern interpretations of *shura* normally absorb democracy within a religious context.”<sup>11</sup> The optimist finds ordinary Muslims clamoring for human rights and democracy, and avers that there are Koranic arguments which support this view. To this way of thinking, it follows that moderate Muslims will adopt “liberal democracy in an Islamic fashion,” while radicals will “[adopt] popular democracy in an authoritarian fashion,” but the edge is given to the moderates.<sup>12</sup>

Egyptian human-rights activist and 2006 Lipset lecturer Saad Eddin Ibrahim sees democratic imperatives emerging from the use of mosques as public spaces within which challenges can be mounted against authoritarian regimes—although, as his own life and career tell us, democrats must sometimes pay a heavy price, as they are often subject to state repression and crackdowns. Ibrahim, too, identifies *shura* as the basis for “principles of rotation in public office via competitive elections and respect for basic rights and freedoms.”<sup>13</sup>

Let us now turn to the next category: the hopeful. In contrast to the optimists, the hopeful recognize that the transition to democracy in Muslim-majority countries will be rough, as the commingling of Islam in its several varieties with democracy is by no means inevitable and certainly no simple matter. The hopeful point out that during the twentieth

century there were prominent lines of thought advocating principles of strict secularism—hence, the *laïcité* order of modern Turkey, established in Article 2 of the Turkish Constitution of 1921—and others that insisted on Islamic law as the basis of all political and social life. Somewhere between these two poles the hopeful stake their claims. They are well

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aware of the many internal disagreements concerning basic Islamic ideas, including how to interpret the Koran itself: Does it allow for pluralism and diversity? Can consultation be the basis for democratic accountability? The hopeful believe that any system that is un-Koranic will never succeed. Thus the advocacy of democracy must be tethered to foundational Islamic traditions and texts.

Abdou Filali-Ansary, one of the hopeful, rejects the widely-held view of “Muslim exceptionalism,” which holds that because Muslim societies are already in possession of a “blueprint” for the social order lodged in Islamic law, these societies are extremely difficult to penetrate and imbue with new ideas and possibilities. The Muslim-exceptionalism argument claims that Muslim history has “acquired such a strong grip” that it will block progress of all sorts, including political transformation. Filali-Ansary calls this a “tenacious misunderstanding” that stymies our ability to distinguish between, among other things, secularism and democracy.<sup>14</sup>

In much of the Muslim world, secularism is equated with atheism and, as such, is unacceptable to ordinary Muslims. Here it becomes necessary to distinguish between the type of secularization that has proceeded apace all over the world as part and parcel of modernity from the secularization that requires setting religion apart in a private and hidden realm. In the minds of the hopeful, once the various misunderstandings are clarified, and the “strict identification between Islam and *shari‘a*-bound systems” is ruled out, democracy becomes a lively possibility.<sup>15</sup>

Bernard Lewis, the distinguished scholar of the Islamic world, should be counted among the cautiously hopeful. Noting that the historic record is not encouraging, Lewis nonetheless finds some religiously derived concepts useful for the purposes of democratic transition, although he also observes that there is “no word in Arabic, Persian, or Turkish for ‘citizen’”—one who participates in the “public thing,” the *civitas* or *polis*.<sup>16</sup> Looking around the present-day Muslim Middle East is a sobering exercise, to be sure, with its mixture of autocracies, fascist-style dictatorships (such as the late and unlamented regime of Saddam Hussein), and radical Islamic regimes. None of these outcomes

is foreordained, however. Most important, Islam is no monolith, and for Western observers of religion and democracy to treat it as such does it an enormous disservice.

One final voice among the hopeful is that of Abdelwahab El-Affendi, who writes that the absence of democracy in most Muslim countries is dismaying. He adds that:

[i]t goes without saying that Islamic teachings, traditionally understood, conflict with aspects of Western liberalism, but that does not in itself mean that they are an obstacle to democracy. Any set of religious beliefs . . . could be compatible with democracy (understood as consensual popular rule) if they are shared by all members of the community. On the other hand, differing and incompatible versions of beliefs would make democratic consensus difficult, regardless of their content.<sup>17</sup>

I will address below whether or not consensual popular rule is both a necessary and a sufficient definition of democracy. El-Affendi's overall point, however, is that it is unfortunate that the most prominent and notorious Muslim voices of the twentieth century were those that drew on religious arguments *against* democracy rather than the other way around. That a religious case for democracy can be mounted within Islam is, for El-Affendi, an essential item of faith.

Now to the third category—the despairing or dubious—of which there are two types: those who lament their own deep doubts about democracy's future within Islam, and those who celebrate what they take to be the antithetical nature of Islam and democracy, which is considered to encompass modernization, liberalism, and a host of other sins. Ladan and Roya Boroumand observe the way in which a

religious vocabulary hides violent Islamism's true nature as a modern totalitarian challenge to both traditional Islam and modern democracy. If terrorism is truly as close to the core of Islamic belief as both the Islamists and many of their enemies claim, why does international Islamist terrorism date only to 1979?<sup>18</sup>

The Boroumand sisters, who are rather despairing of the present situation in the Muslim world, dissect the claims of radical Islamists—those who rejoice in the incompatibility of Islam and democracy—ultimately branding them fraudulent and finding that terrorist practices are modern tactics at odds with the historic Islamic tradition of political ethics.

Their position dovetails with that of Francis Fukuyama who, in his 2005 Lipset Lecture, described militant Islamism, especially in Europe, as “a manifestation of modern identity politics” rather than an assertion of traditional Muslim culture.<sup>19</sup> In a complex and illuminating discussion, Fukuyama unpacked the stresses and strains attendant upon shifting from a territorially bound Muslim identity to one that is uprooted and exiled in the West. The failure on the part of Western Europe to integrate these

Muslim immigrants is, for Fukuyama, a ticking time bomb that has already exploded in repeated acts of terrorist violence.

Can Western liberalism incorporate “Muslim difference”? This is an open and contested question, and its answer hinges on the extent to which devout Muslims are prepared to let go of the full public enactment of religious faith (especially in regard to group rights and exemptions) in a religiously pluralistic society. The relinquishment demanded in Europe is more severe than in the United States. It is unsurprising, then, that the tensions across that continent have been so much worse.

To sum up, the optimists paint too sunny a picture of how Islam and liberalism can come together; the hopeful believe that in the long run a rapprochement between Islam and democracy is not only possible but likely, although they anticipate conflict along the way; and the despairing and the dubious, given the historical intransigence of certain features of Islam, see nearly insuperable barriers to the achievement of constitutional democracy in most of the Islamic world, if democracy is understood in a robust sense. Some in this last camp lament the gloomy outlook, while others are cheerleaders for separating Islam from democracy, which they equate with Western godlessness and decadence.

### **What Makes Democracy?**

There is one more topic that we need to address—namely, what sort of “democracy” do we have in mind when raising the questions of the relationship between religion and democracy. If we were to ask people the first thing that comes to mind when they hear the term “democracy,” the overwhelming majority would likely say “the vote.” As I finished writing this lecture on Election Day 2008 in my own country, the United States, I was deeply moved by the scenes of citizens waiting patiently for hours in long lines in order to exercise their right to vote. My thoughts also turned to the first election in post-Saddam Iraq, and the stunning images of men and women who, after braving intimidation and the risk of death, proudly displayed their purple fingers to show that they had voted.

One particular newspaper photograph from that day still stays with me: an infirm and elderly mother being carried in the arms of one of her sons to the polling station. The two had traveled for hours that way so that they could cast the first votes of their lives. Only the cold-hearted could be impervious to such sights. And yet I would argue that the vote, although necessary, is not sufficient if one’s vision is of a “thick” democracy. Without additional features of democratic civic life, popular suffrage and the nonviolent turnover of those who govern constitute merely a “thin” democracy.

In a thin democracy, one expects to find the vote, regular alternation of power, and at least minimal civic decency. That is, even in a democracy that is thin, a regime cannot egregiously and methodically violate fundamental human rights. It cannot, for example, systematically

“disappear” people or jail political opponents or murder those belonging to minority ethnic groups. Alas, there have been a number of popularly elected governments—I am loath even to call them democracies—that

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have engaged in all manner of repressive behavior. A good example would be the so-called plebiscitary systems under which the powerful are perpetually returned to power because elections are not genuinely competitive. Does such a system qualify even as thin democracy? Given the absence of genuinely competitive elections and alternation of power, the answer must be “no.”

Many analysts who are buoyant about democratic prospects in Muslim-majority societies cite *shura*, or consultation, as a way to achieve and maintain consensus.

They see this as the very essence of democracy. Consultation is certainly a good thing, but no democracy can or should be expected to attain consensus and then to sustain it without tremendous contestation and divisiveness along the way. Thick democracy provides for pluralism, allowing for minority rights and inclusion in a way that repressive or plebiscitary “democracies” do not.

How does religious belief fit in to this picture? In a thin democracy that stresses the formal requisites of the system without articulating the features of a democratic civil society, it is not easy to discern the roles played by religious beliefs and institutions. In a thin Muslim democracy, of course, one assumes that certain concepts and categories drawn from Islam will inform these formal practices. Indeed, one can readily imagine a regime that bows to the need for elections to validate itself and then goes on to ignore religion systematically or even attempts to repress what it considers dangerous manifestations of it. Saudi Arabia is a case in point. There we find strict enforcement of the Wahhabist version of Islam, which brooks no religious tolerance or diversity. Thus neither a synagogue nor a church is allowed on the kingdom’s soil, and there is precious little tolerance for Muslims voicing critical views and opposition.

How does thick democracy differ from this picture? A thick democracy requires the vote and a genuinely competitive series of election cycles; a pluralistic civil society, meaning a civil society within which religion engages in all aspects of civil life; and the full panoply of human rights, especially negative rights or immunity rights that curb arbitrary state power. Behind a thick democracy lies respect for the dignity of the human person and the promise that government will not violate that respect.

That said, thin democracy is better than no democracy at all, because once people begin to participate they often begin to question why they

cannot participate further. If thin democracy can be seen as a step in the transition toward thicker democracy, it is all to the good. In a thick democracy, we can expect the religious convictions of citizens to play a role in how they think and act politically, and this is not to be lamented so long as those thus thinking and acting abide by the democratic “rules of the game.”

The African American spiritual “Oh Freedom” speaks to the aspiration of a people for its collective emancipation from bondage:

Oh freedom!  
 Oh freedom!  
 Oh freedom over me!  
 And before I'd be a slave  
 I'd be buried in my grave  
 And go home to my Lord and be free.

It is an aspiration as old as the story of Exodus and the deliverance of the people of Israel. Any account of the rise of African slaves to the status of proud African American citizens is incomplete absent the slaves' embrace of Christianity as a religion of both solace and liberation.

To be sure, those of us who find entirely acceptable a strong public role for religion in the democratic public sphere must acknowledge that historically religion has at times underwritten intolerance and vindicated injustice. Thankfully, in the dominant religion of the West, there was a prophylactic internal to the faith that enabled, indeed required, it to criticize and halt its own worst excesses. Also, over time, we have seen religious orientations once considered antidemocratic—Roman Catholicism, for example—become the most enthusiastic defenders of human rights and democracy worldwide.

It remains to be seen whether this will one day be the story told of Islam. Certainly, Islam will chart its own course toward the accommodation of faith and democracy, perhaps finding (as many Muslim thinkers now are) grounds within Islam on which to condemn radicals and terrorists and, at the same time, to summon from the heart of their own tradition the resources with which they can build thick democracies. The secularization hypothesis has failed, and failed spectacularly. We must now find a new paradigm that will help us to understand the complexities of the relationship between religion and democracy.

## NOTES

1. Seymour Martin Lipset, “Religion and American Values,” in *The First New Nation* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 2003), 169.

2. Joshua Mitchell, “Religion Is Not a Preference,” *Journal of Politics* 69 (May 2007): 351.

3. Mitchell, “Religion Is Not a Preference,” 352. When Mitchell uses the language of “choice” here, he means preferring one option over another on, as he indicates, a scale of

possible options. He is certainly not arguing that human beings do not make choices, but rather that to bring the language of choice as a preference to bear where religion is concerned is profoundly misleading.

4. The American Revolutionary slogan is cited in Mitchell, "Religion Is Not a Preference," 360.

5. Jeffrey Stout, "2007 Presidential Address: The Folly of Secularism," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76 (September 2008): 533.

6. Stout, "Folly of Secularism," 542.

7. Stout, "Folly of Secularism," 543.

8. Katrin Bennhold, "Spurning Secularism, Many French Muslims Find Haven in Catholic Schools," *New York Times*, 30 September 2008, A6. Available at [www.nytimes.com/2008/09/30/world/europe/30schools.html?pagewanted=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/30/world/europe/30schools.html?pagewanted=1).

9. We call ourselves "the Malta Forum" as our first meeting took place on the island of Malta, itself historically a site of both the clashing and intermingling of Muslims, Christians, and Jews.

10. Ahmad S. Moussalli, *The Islamic Quest for Democracy, Pluralism, and Human Rights* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2001), 158.

11. Moussalli, *Islamic Quest for Democracy, Pluralism, and Human Rights*, 161.

12. Moussalli, *Islamic Quest for Democracy, Pluralism, and Human Rights*, 165.

13. Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "Toward Muslim Democracies," *Journal of Democracy* 18 (April 2007): 10.

14. Abdou Filali-Ansary, "Muslims and Democracy," in Larry Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, and Philip J. Costopoulos, eds., *World Religions and Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 153, 154.

15. Filali-Ansary, "Muslims and Democracy," 160.

16. Bernard Lewis, "A Historical Overview," in Diamond, Plattner, and Costopoulos, eds., *World Religions and Democracy*, 171.

17. Abdelwahab El-Affendi, "The Elusive Reformation," in Diamond, Plattner, and Costopoulos, eds., *World Religions and Democracy*, 213–14.

18. Ladan Boroumand and Roya Boroumand, "Terror, Islam, and Democracy," in Diamond, Plattner, and Costopoulos, eds., *World Religions and Democracy*, 229.

19. Francis Fukuyama, "Identity, Immigration, and Liberal Democracy," *Journal of Democracy* 17 (April 2006): 10.