

What is Wahhabi Islam?

Until recently, most Westerners had never heard of Wahhabi Islam, but we have now repeatedly heard this term applied to Osama bin Laden and Saudi Arabia. There are many interpretations of Islam, many schools of theology and law. Among the most ultraconservative is Wahhabi Islam, the official form of Islam in Saudi Arabia.

The Wahhabi movement takes its name from Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab (1703–1791), a scholar of Islamic law and theology in Mecca and Medina. Disillusioned by the decline and moral laxity of his society, Abd al-Wahhab denounced many popular beliefs and practices as un-Islamic idolatry and a return to the paganism of pre-Islamic Arabia. He rejected blind imitation or following (*taqlid*) of past scholarship. He

regarded the medieval law of the *ulama* (religious scholars) as fallible and, at times, unwarranted innovations (*bida*) or heresy. Abd al-Wahhab called for a fresh interpretation of Islam that returned to the “fundamentals” of Islam, the Quran and the Sunnah (example) of the Prophet Muhammad.

Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab joined with Muhammad Ibn Saud, a local tribal chief, to form a religious-political movement. Ibn Saud used Wahhabism to legitimate his jihad to subdue and unite the tribes of Arabia, converting them to this puritanical version of Islam. Like the Kharijites, Wahhabi theology saw the world in white and black categories—Muslim and non-Muslim, belief and unbelief, the realm of Islam and that of warfare. They regarded all Muslims who did not agree with them as unbelievers to be subdued (that is, fought and killed) in the name of Islam. Central to Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab’s theology was the doctrine of God’s unity (*tawhid*), an absolute monotheism reflected in the Wahhabis’ self-designation as “Unitarians”—those who uphold the unity of God.

In imitation of Muhammad’s destruction of the pantheon of pre-Islamic tribal gods in Mecca’s sacred shrine (Kaaba) and its restoration to worship of the one true God (Allah), Wahhabi puritanism spared neither the sacred tombs of Muhammad and his Companions in Mecca and Medina nor the Shiite pilgrimage site at Karbala (in modern Iraq). This pilgrimage site housed the tomb of Hussein, son of Ali, the first Shii Imam and third caliph, who with his followers was slaughtered in the Battle of Karbala and is remembered as “the martyr of martyrs.” The destruction of this venerated site has never been forgotten by Shii Muslims and contributed to the historic antipathy between the Wahhabi of Saudi Arabia and Shii Islam both in Saudi Arabia and Iran. Centuries later, many would point to Wahhabi-inspired iconoclasm as the source behind the Taliban’s wanton destruction of Buddhist monuments in Afghanistan, an action condemned by Muslim leaders worldwide.

In the early nineteenth century, Muhammad Ali of Egypt defeated the Saudis, but the Wahhabi movement and the House of Saud proved resilient. By the early twentieth century, Abdulaziz Ibn Saud recaptured Riyadh, united the tribes of Arabia, restored the Saudi kingdom, and spread the Wahhabi movement. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia melded the political and religious in a self-declared Islamic state, using the Wahhabi interpretation of Islam as the official basis for state and society.

Internationally, the Saudis, both government-sponsored organizations and wealthy individuals, have exported their ultraconservative version of Wahhabi Islam to other countries and communities in the Muslim world and the West. They have offered development aid, built mosques, libraries, and other institutions, funded and distributed religious tracts, and commissioned imams and religious scholars. Wahhabi puritanism and financial support have been exported to Afghanistan, Pakistan, the Central Asian Republics, China, Africa, Southeast Asia, the United States, and Europe. At the same time, some wealthy businessmen in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf have provided financial support to extremist groups who follow a militant “fundamentalist” brand of Islam (commonly referred to as Wahhabi or Salafi) with its jihad culture. The challenge is to distinguish between the export of an ultraconservative theology on the one hand and militant extremism on the other. This difficulty is compounded by the propensity of authoritarian governments in Central Asia and China, especially since 9/11, to use the label “Wahhabi extremism” for all opposition, legitimate and illegitimate, and thus justify widespread repression of all who are opposed to their rule and policies.

What is Salafi Islam?

“Salafi,” in its strict sense, means returning to the pristine Islam of the first generation (*salaf*, or pious ancestors) of Muslims. Like Wahhabis, Salafis idealize the period of Muhammad and his Companions as an uncorrupted time for

the religious community. They believe that Islam declined after the early generations because un-Islamic innovations (*bida*) were introduced. Therefore today there must be a return to the practices of the early generations and a purge of un-Islamic and foreign influences.

The Salafis' uncompromising monotheism leads them to condemn many common Muslim beliefs and practices, and in particular Sufi and Shii doctrines, as polytheism (*shirk*). They regard most Islamic movements today as innovations or deviations from "true Islam" and therefore "heretical."

Today *Salafism* is used as an umbrella term that can be misleading because it includes many groups and shades of belief. Salafism is found in many Muslim-majority countries as well as in European and American communities where individuals see it as an attractive alternative to cultural practices of Islam and secularism. For example, Salafis include disaffected second-generation Muslim youth who want to define their identity by rejecting the foreign cultural practices of the Islam embraced by their parents and grandparents as well as the secular practices of Westernization. Salafis see themselves as embracing an authentic, original, "pure" form of Islam that transcends a specific culture and emphasizes Islam's universality instead.

What about militant Salafism? Like Wahhabi Islam, Salafi religious exclusivism can lead to intolerance of other believers, both other Muslims—in particular Shii Muslims, whom Salafis despise—and non-Muslims. In itself, a religiously exclusivist theology is not necessarily violent. An exclusivist theology merely entails a division between those who will, and those who will not, go to paradise after the Day of Judgment. An exclusive worldview, like that of other radical fundamentalisms (Christian, Jewish, or Hindu), lends itself to extremism and violence when fundamentalists claim to legitimate their political agendas as a mandate from God. Global terrorists in North Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and Asia exemplify this militant Salafi ideology and threat.

Who are these Islamic fundamentalists?

The term *Islamic fundamentalism* evokes many images: the Iranian revolution, the Ayatollah Khomeini, the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks of 9/11, Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, and suicide bombers. For many, this term is simply equated with radicalism, religious extremism, and terrorism. But images of hostage crises, embassies under siege, hijackings, and bombings lead to simplistic understandings. The term *fundamentalist* is applied to such a broad spectrum of Islamic movements and actors that in the end it includes both those who simply want to reintroduce or restore their pure and puritanical vision of a romanticized past and others who advocate modern reforms that are rooted in Islamic principles and values.

The ranks of Islamic fundamentalists include those who provide much-needed services to the poor such as schools, health clinics, and social welfare agencies, as well as extremists. For every country where Islamic militants seek to reach their goals through violence and terrorism, there are Islamic political parties and social welfare organizations that participate in national and local elections and function effectively within mainstream society.

Though convenient, the use of the term *fundamentalism*, which originated in Christianity, can be misleading in the Islamic context, where it has been applied to a broad and diverse group of governments, individuals, and organizations. The conservative monarchy of Saudi Arabia, the radical socialist state of Libya, clerically governed Iran, the Taliban's Afghanistan, and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan have all been called "fundamentalist." The term obscures their differences. Libya and Iran, for example, have in the past espoused many anti-Western views, while Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have often been close allies of the United States. *Political Islam* and *Islamism* are more useful terms when referring to the role of Islam in politics.

Islamism, or political Islam, is rooted in a contemporary religious resurgence, which began in the late 1960s and has affected both the personal and public life of Muslims. On the one hand, many Muslims have become more religiously observant, demonstrating increased attention to prayer, fasting, dress, and family values as well as renewed interest in Islamic mysticism, or Sufism. On the other, Islam reemerged in public life as an alternative political and social ideology to secular nationalism, western capitalism, and Marxist socialism, which many believe failed to help the majority of Muslims escape poverty, unemployment, and political oppression. Governments, Islamic movements, and organizations from moderate to extremist have appealed to Islam for legitimacy and to mobilize popular support.

Islamic activists—"fundamentalists"—both extremists and mainstream come from very diverse educational and social backgrounds. They are recruited not only from the poor and unemployed living in slums and refugee camps but also from the middle class in prosperous neighborhoods. While some are from economically or politically marginalized or "oppressed" backgrounds, others are well-educated university students and professionals. Many hold degrees in the sciences, education, medicine, law, or engineering—professionals who function in and contribute to their societies.

Many Islamic activists are part of a nonviolent political and social force in mainstream society. Activists have served as prime minister of Turkey, president and speaker of the national assembly in Indonesia, and deputy prime minister of Malaysia. Cabinet officers, parliamentarians, and mayors in countries as diverse as Egypt, Sudan, Turkey, Iran, Lebanon, Kuwait, Yemen, Jordan, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Israel-Palestine are also activists.

At the same time, a militant minority are religious extremists and terrorists: Sheikh Omar Abdel Rahman, a religious leader who was imprisoned for his involvement in plans to bomb major sites in the United States, has a doctorate

in Islamic studies; Osama bin Laden, a university graduate and member of one of the wealthiest families in Saudi Arabia, became a global terrorist and leader of al-Qaeda; Ayman al-Zawahiri, right-hand man to Osama bin Laden, is a trained surgeon from a prominent Egyptian family.

Is Islam medieval and against change?

Islam and much of the Muslim world are often seen as medieval for many reasons: cultural (for example, the existence of strong patriarchal societies and the veiling and seclusion of women), political (authoritarianism on the one hand and fundamentalism on the other), and economic (lack of development and failed economies).

Yet in truth, today as in the past Muslims interpret Islam in many different ways. Like their Abrahamic brothers and sisters, Muslims exhibit a wide range of approaches and orientations, ranging from ultraconservative to more progressive or reformist.

The contrast between Islam and Christianity or Judaism appears as more vivid because we usually equate Christianity and Judaism with believers in modern Europe and America rather than those in more traditional, premodern, and less developed societies such as Ethiopia, Eritrea, or Sudan. However, Ethiopian Jews and Christians, whose religion is linked to local tribal and cultural traditions, also contrast sharply with their Western co-believers. Such contrasts are of course more evident among Christianity's 1.5 billion adherents spread across the globe than among Judaism's 14 to 18 million followers, who have a far more restricted geographic representation.

The forces of tradition and the authority of the past have been reinforced in Islam by a variety of historic forces and experiences. For four centuries (the seventeenth through the twentieth), much of the Islamic world was dominated by European colonialism. Religions, like countries, when under

siege tend to focus on survival, preserving and protecting what they have, rather than seeking and accepting change. Thus opponents often label Islamic calls for reform as attempts to Westernize Islam.

When conservatives try to preserve Islam, they often do not distinguish between revealed sources of faith and socially conditioned human interpretations historically preserved in manuals of Islamic law and theology. In contrast, reformers stress the difference between divinely mandated beliefs, practices, and laws and human interpretations from the past as they engage in a bold process of reinterpretation and reform that reapplies Islamic guidelines to problems in the modern world.

Amidst these differing religious interpretations and orientations, change has occurred and continues to occur in a process that sometimes seems to take two steps forward and one step back. Secular and religious reformers have promoted changes affecting religious understanding and education, family laws (marriage, divorce, and inheritance), broader opportunities for women's education and employment, democratization, pluralism, and human rights. On the other hand, more conservative voices among religious leaders as well as some ultraconservative Islamic activists and organizations have often attempted to impose rigid, militant, puritanical, and intolerant beliefs, values, and attitudes.

Finally, many authoritarian governments (secular and religious) use religion to restrict freedom of thought and expression. They limit or prohibit an independent press, media, political parties, and trade unions in the name of religion.

Muslims today are at a critical crossroads. They are faced with making radical social, political, and economic changes that the Western world has had many decades to implement gradually. Amidst increasing globalization, Muslims strive to survive and compete, often with limited resources, and to preserve their identity in a world dominated (culturally as well as politically and economically) by the West. For many,

the role of religion is critical in the preservation of their personal and national identities. It provides a sense of continuity between their Islamic heritage and modern life. For some, the temptation is to cling to the authority and security of the past. Others seek to follow new paths, convinced that their faith and a tradition of Islamic reform that has existed throughout the ages can play a critical role in restoring the vitality of Muslim societies.

Is Islam compatible with modernization?

The Muslim world is popularly pictured as lacking development. While some attribute this to Islam, lack of development in the Muslim world, as elsewhere, is in fact primarily due to issues of economy, limited resources, and education rather than religion. In Muslim societies around the world today, it is evident that modernization is seen as a goal worthy of pursuit and implementation. Travelers are often surprised to see television antennae or satellite dishes even in the remotest villages. The skylines of major cities are dotted with their World Trade Centers, modern factories, and corporate headquarters. People—secular and conservative, fundamentalists and reformers—equally take advantage of modern technology: cell phones, computers, the Internet, fax machines, automobiles, and planes. The absence of certain technologies such as the Internet in some Muslim countries is due not to resistance from the people but to cost or security concerns (the fears of authoritarian rulers that the Internet will take away their control).

Belief in an inherent conflict between Islam and modernization has arisen when modernization is equated with the Westernization and secularization of society. One Western expert said that Muslims must choose between Mecca and mechanization, implying that modernization necessarily threatened and eroded faith. This attitude reflects a belief that faith and reason, religion and science, are ultimately

incompatible. Thus to become modern intellectually, politically, and religiously would mean a loss or watering down of faith, identity, and values.

Secular Muslims and Islamic activists exist side by side in societies and in professions. Their opposing views regarding the relationship of religious belief to society and politics do give rise to conflict. If some believe that a viable modern nation-state requires a separation of religion and politics, or mosque and state, others advocate governments and societies that are more informed by Islamic principles and values. Yet as examples from around the Muslim world (Egypt, Turkey, Malaysia, Qatar, and Indonesia) and other countries such as Japan or China have demonstrated, modernization does not have to mean the wholesale Westernization or secularization of society. Nowhere is this more clear than among so-called fundamentalists, or Islamic activists, who are also graduates of modern universities, majoring in science, medicine, law, engineering, journalism, business, and the social sciences. Many hold prominent positions in their respective professions, functioning effectively and contributing to the ongoing modernization of their societies.

Are there any modern Muslim thinkers or reformers?

Because acts of violence and terrorism grab the headlines, most of us know much more about advocates of a "clash," militant jihadists, than about those who are working toward a peaceful revolution and civilizational dialogue. Nevertheless, today intellectuals, religious leaders, and activists all over the world are addressing Islam's encounter with the West.

Like Islamic modernist movements in the early twentieth century and, later, the Islamic ("fundamentalist") movements of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the Jamaat-i-Islami in Pakistan, today's Islamically oriented intellectuals and activists are continuing the process of Islamic modernization and reform. They represent a creative new stage, a minority

who are not only reformulating Islam but also implementing their ideas through their work in government and other public arenas.

Reformist and modernist Muslim Abdurrahman Wahid (d. 2009), former leader of Indonesia's Nahdatul Ulama (Renaissance of Religious Scholars) movement with thirty million members, became the first democratically elected president of Indonesia; Dr. Amien Rais, the University of Chicago-trained political scientist and former leader of Indonesia's Muhammadiyah movement, became speaker of Indonesia's national assembly; Anwar Ibrahim, founder of ABIM, Malaysia's Islamic Youth Movement, went on to become the deputy prime minister of Malaysia; Dr. Necmettin Erbakan, a trained engineer, became Turkey's prime minister; and Mohammad Khatami, a religious scholar, was president of Iran. Many Islamically motivated professionals have served as presidents or prime ministers, in parliaments, or as mayors of major cities and are leaders in their professions (lawyers, physicians, engineers, and scientists).

Reformist thought is especially prevalent in America and Europe, where there is a free and open environment absent in many Muslim countries. In Europe we find Muslim scholars and activists like Dr. Tariq Ramadan, grandson of Hasan al-Banna, founder of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, a Swiss academic and activist; and Dr. Mohammed Arkoun (d. 2010) of the Sorbonne university in Paris. In America, they include Prof. Sayyid Hossein Nasr of George Washington University, an expert on Sufism and on Islam and science; Prof. Abdulaziz Sachedina of the University of Virginia, who has written extensively on Islam and democratization and human rights; Prof. Sulayman Nyang of Howard University, who is a prolific author who writes about Islam in America and Africa; Dr. Fathi Osman (d. 2010), who has written extensively on the Quran, pluralism, and Islamic reform; Prof. Amina Wadud, retired from Virginia Commonwealth University, who is author of *Quran and Woman*; and Prof. Khaled Abou El Fadl

of UCLA Law School, who addresses issues of Islam, law, pluralism, gender, and violent extremism. These scholars formulate and debate new ideas, develop rationales and strategies for reform, and train the next generation in a more dynamic, progressive vision. Increasingly, their influence and impact are felt not only in the West but also in Muslim countries, as their ideas are exported through translations of their works.

Today, a two-way information superhighway spans the world. Ideas come not only from the traditional centers of Islamic scholarship in Muslim countries but also from religious scholars, leaders, and institutions in the West and from their students, who return to become professionals and leaders in their home countries. The Internet plays host to debates between progressive Muslims and more conservative voices globally, providing a venue for heated discussion of Islam's relationship to the state, Islamic banking, democracy, religious and political pluralism, family values, and gay rights, among many other topics.

Just as they were in the process of modern reform in Judaism and Christianity, questions of leadership and the authority of the past (tradition) are critical in Islamic reform. "Whose Islam?" is a major question. Who reinterprets, decides, leads, and implements change? Is it rulers and regimes, the vast majority of whom are unelected kings, military, and former military, or should it be elected parliaments? Is it the *ulama* (religious scholars) or clergy, who continue to see themselves as the primary interpreters of Islam, although many are ill prepared to respond creatively to modern realities? Or are Islamically oriented intellectuals and activists with a modern education most qualified? Too often in authoritarian societies that restrict freedom of thought and expression, and thus effective leadership, extremists like Osama bin Laden with their theology of confrontation and hate fill the vacuum.

The second major question is "What Islam?" Is Islamic reform simply a restoration of past doctrines and laws, or is it

a reformation through a reinterpretation and reformulation of Islam to meet the demands of modern life? While some call for an Islamic state based upon the reimplementation of classical formulations of Islamic laws, others argue the need to reinterpret and reformulate that law in light of the new realities of contemporary society.

The process of Islamic reform is difficult. As in all religions, tradition—centuries-old beliefs and practices—is a powerful force, rooted in the claim of being based upon the teachings of the Quran or the practice (Sunnah) of the Prophet. The vast majority of religious scholars and local mosque leaders (*imams*) and preachers, who wield significant influence over the religious education and worldview of the majority of Muslims, are products of a more traditional religious education. The ideas of a vanguard of reformers will never have broad appeal and acceptance unless they are incorporated within the curricula of seminaries and schools and universities where religion is taught. A twofold process of reform, intellectual and institutional, will be required in the face of powerful conservative forces, limited human and financial resources, and a culture of authoritarianism that limits or controls freedom of thought in many countries.

Why do Muslim women wear veils and long garments?

The word *veiling* is a generic term used to describe the wearing of loose-fitting clothing and/or a headscarf. The Quran

emphasizes modesty, although there is no specific prescription for covering one's head. The custom of veiling is associated with Islam because of a passage that says, "Say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty. They should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty" (24:31). Specific attire for women is not stipulated anywhere in the Quran, which also emphasizes modesty for men: "Tell the believing men to lower their gaze and be modest" (24:30).

The Islamic style of dress is known by many names (*hijab*, *burqa*, *chador*, *galabeya*, etc.; see glossary for descriptions) because of the multitude of styles, colors, and fabrics worn by Muslim women in countries extending from Morocco to Iran to Malaysia to Europe and the United States, and because of diverse customs and interpretations of the Quranic verses.

Veiling of women did not become widespread in the Islamic empire until three or four generations after the death of Muhammad. Veiling was originally a sign of honor and distinction. During Muhammad's time, Muhammad's wives and upper-class women wore the veil as a symbol of their status. Generations later, Muslim women adopted the practice more widely. They were influenced by upper- and middle-class Persian and Byzantine women, who wore the veil as a sign of their rank, to separate themselves not from men but from the lower classes. The mingling of all classes at prayer and in the marketplace encouraged use of the veil among urban Muslim women.

The veil is often seen as a symbol of women's inferior status in Islam. Opponents link veiling with backwardness and oppression, and Western dress with individuality and freedom. Critics of veiling, Muslim and non-Muslim, stress the importance of self-expression, which they associate with the distinctive way in which a woman dresses and wears her hair. They believe that any person or religion or culture that requires a mature woman to dress in a certain way infringes

on her rights and freedom. They question those who say the veil is for women's protection, and ask why not put the burden on the men to control themselves.

Supporters of veiling explain that they choose to wear the hijab because it provides freedom from emphasis on the physical and from competing with other women's looks. Further, it keeps women from being sex objects for males to reject or approve. It enables women to focus on their spiritual, intellectual, and professional development. Some scholars have argued that in returning to Islamic dress, particularly in the 1980s, many Muslim women were attempting to reconcile their Islamic tradition with a modern lifestyle, redefining their identities as modern Muslim women.

Islamic dress is also used as a sign of protest and liberation. It has developed political overtones, becoming a source of national pride as well as resistance to Western dominance (cultural as well as political) and to authoritarian regimes. Many young Muslim women have adopted Islamic dress to symbolize a return to their cultural roots and rejection of a Western imperialist tradition that in their view shows little respect for women. These young women think that Western fashions force women into uncomfortable and undignified outfits that turn them into sexual objects lacking propriety and dignity. Women who wear Islamic dress thus find it strange or offensive for people to condemn their own modest fashions as imprisoning and misogynist. The West should not condemn the hijab or Islam, they say, but rather a social system that promotes an unrealistic ideal, makes young girls obsessive about their physical beauty and their weight, and teaches young boys to rate girls based on that ideal.

Western and Muslim critics of Islamic dress, on the other hand, question those who say it is their free choice to wear the veil. They see such women as under the sway of an oppressive patriarchal culture or as just submitting to the dictates of their religion. Critics also argue that since the hijab has been used

to control and segregate women, as in Afghanistan under the Taliban, the veil is a symbol of conformity and confinement that reflects on any woman who wears it.

Some Muslims, however, would say that Western women only believe they are free. They do not see how their culture exploits them when they "choose" to spend countless hours on their appearance, wear uncomfortable skin-tight clothes and dangerous high-heeled shoes, and allow themselves to be displayed as sexual objects to sell cars, shaving cream, and beer. These Muslims say that Westerners condemn the veil because they themselves are not free to choose.

Since the 1970s, a significant number of "modern" women from Cairo to Jakarta have turned or returned to wearing Islamic dress. Often this is a voluntary movement led by young, urban, middle-class women, who are well educated and work in every sector of society. New fashions have emerged to reflect new understandings of the status and role of women. Indeed, designing contemporary Islamic dress has become a profitable enterprise. Some Muslim women have started their own companies specializing in the design and marketing of fashionable and modest outfits featuring varied flowing garments and matching veils.

Women who wear the scarf complain that, instead of asking what the hijab means to them, people simply assume that veiled women are oppressed. This assumption, they say, oppresses Muslim women more than any manner of dress ever could. Even if a woman wearing the veil is strong and intelligent, many people who are reluctant to get to know her or invite her to participate in activities automatically discount her value. They point out that women of many other cultures and religions—Russian women, Hindu women, Jewish women, Greek women, and Catholic nuns—often wear head coverings. They ask why these women are not viewed as oppressed. If opponents assume that women of other cultures who cover their heads are liberated, why can't they imagine freedom for Muslim women who wear a veil? Muslim women

often talk about what the hijab symbolizes: religious devotion, discipline, reflection, respect, freedom, and modernity. But too often nobody asks them what the scarf means to them.

Why do Muslim men wear turbans or caps?

Not all Muslim men wear turbans, and not all men who wear turbans are Muslims. Sikhs, for example, wear turbans as a religious requirement. Many Muslim men do not wear any head covering at all. Head coverings tend to be associated with culture, rather than with religion.

Head coverings for Muslim males who choose to wear them include turbans, fezzes, prayer caps or skullcaps, keffiyahs, and traditional Arab head coverings. Turbans are most often associated with the Taliban of Afghanistan and Iranian clerics. The color of the turban often indicates the status of the wearer: black marks the wearer as a *sayyid*, or descendant of Muhammad, while white signifies that the wearer is not a descendant of Muhammad. The fez was the traditional head covering of Turkish men during the late Ottoman era. It was forcibly replaced with a European-style brimmed hat in the early twentieth century. Keffiyahs tend to be associated with Jordan and Palestine and are often worn today to indicate sympathy for the Palestinian national cause. Traditional Arab head coverings, such as those worn in Saudi Arabia, were originally designed to protect the head and neck from the sun. Prayer caps and skullcaps are typically found in Pakistan and among some African American Muslims.

Why do Muslim men wear beards?

Many Muslim men wear beards in honor of the Prophet Muhammad, who had a beard. Some believe that the beard should be left untrimmed in the style of Muhammad, but many do not accept this assertion; thus differing styles of beards abound, ranging from full beards covering the entire

groups: the caliph, who serves as the guardian of both the faith and the community; the *ulama* (religious scholars), who provide religious and legal advice; and the *qadis* (judges), who resolve disputes in accordance with Islamic law. Over time, many Muslims came to believe that this ideal blueprint and perfect state had actually existed and should be returned to. Contemporary militant movements particularly look back to this utopia as an example to be emulated today.

While a minority of Muslims today believe that modernity requires the separation of religion and the state, many Muslims continue to maintain that religion should be integral to state and society. However, there is no clear agreement—indeed, there is considerable difference of opinion—on the precise nature of the relationship of Islam to the state. For some, it is enough to say that Islam is the official state religion and that the ruler (and perhaps those who fill most senior government positions) should be Muslim. Others call for the creation of an Islamic state. But even here, there is no single agreed-upon model of government, as attested to by the diverse examples of Saudi Arabia's conservative monarchy, Iran's clergy-run state, Sudan's and Pakistan's experiments with military-imposed Islamic governments, and the Taliban's Afghanistan. And still others reject all these experiments as un-Islamic authoritarian regimes and subscribe to more secular or Islamic democratic forms of governance.

Why does religion play such a big role in Muslim politics?

Islam is an Arabic word meaning "submission." A Muslim is one who submits to the will of God, one who is responsible not only for obeying God's will but also implementing it on earth in his or her private and public world. Being a Muslim means belonging to a worldwide community of believers (*ummah*). The responsibility of the believer to Islam and to the Muslim community overrides all other social ties and responsibilities to family, tribe, ethnicity, or nation. Politics is

therefore central, since it represents the means used to carry out Islamic principles in the public sphere.

Quranic verses have been used to guide Muslim political and moral activism throughout the centuries. Twenty-first-century Islamic reformers who believe that Islam, as a comprehensive way of life, should play a central role in politics support their arguments with Quranic verses as well as the example of how Muhammad and his Companions led their lives and developed the first Muslim community. They see these primary sources and examples as a blueprint for an Islamically guided and socially just state and society.

Islam's involvement with politics dates back to its beginnings with the founding of a community-state by Muhammad in the seventh century. According to Muslim tradition, several Arab tribes challenged Abu Bakr, Muhammad's first successor, who argued that the death of Muhammad represented the end of their political allegiance to the broader Muslim community. However, Abu Bakr reminded the Arab tribes of the overarching message of Islam—that membership in and loyalty to the Muslim community transcended all tribal bonds, customs, and traditions. Abu Bakr did not accept the argument of the Arab tribes that religion and politics were two separate and unrelated entities. Rather, he said, religion was intended to guide political decisions and to provide legitimacy to a political system. All Muslims belong to a single community whose unity is based upon the interconnection of religion and the state, where faith and politics are inseparable.

Under the political leadership of Muhammad and his successors, Islam expanded from what is now Saudi Arabia into Islamic empires and cultures that stretch across North Africa, through the Middle East and into Asia and Europe. Historically Islam has served as the religious ideology for the foundation of a variety of Muslim states, including the great Islamic empires: Umayyad (661–750), Abbasid (750–1258), Ottoman (1281–1924), Safavid (1501–1722), and Mughal

(1526–1857). In each of these empires and other sultanate states, Islam informed the state's legal, political, educational, and social institutions.

Today, Islam's connection with politics varies by country and region, but there are several common reasons why religion is intimately connected to the state. First of all, by the nineteenth century most Muslim countries were in a state of internal decline, and they were vulnerable to European imperialism. Muslims experienced the defeats of their societies at the hands of Christian Europe as a religious as well as political and cultural crisis. This crisis was deepened by Christian missionaries who attributed their conquests not only to superior military technology and economic power but also to the superiority of Western Christian civilization and religion. Because religion took on these political overtones on the part of Western colonialists, it is not surprising that some Muslims looked to the combination of religion and politics for a solution. Muslim responses to European colonialism ranged from resistance or struggle, justified as jihad in the defense of Islam in the face of the Christian onslaught, to accommodation and/or assimilation with the West.

Second, in the twentieth century many Muslim societies experienced a widespread feeling of failure and loss of self-esteem. The achievement of independence from colonial rulers in the mid-twentieth century created high expectations that have not been realized. Muslims have suffered from failed political systems and economies and the negative effects of modernization: overcrowded cities lacking social support systems, high unemployment, government corruption, and a growing gap between rich and poor. Rather than leading to a better quality of life, modernization has been associated with a breakdown of traditional family, religious, and social values. Many Muslims blame Western models of political and economic development as sources of moral decline and spiritual malaise.

Third, when Muslims ask themselves what went wrong, for many the inevitable answer is that their societies have

strayed from the straight path of Islam that had led them to great development and success historically. Therefore future success depends upon returning to a society whose politics are governed by Islam.

What is Islamism?

Since the 1970s, Islam, both mainstream and extremist, has emerged as a powerful force in politics. Governments and Islamic (Islamist) movements, reform or opposition movements as well as terrorists, have appealed to religion as a source of identity, legitimacy, and mobilization.

Islamism and *Islamist* are among many terms (such as *Islamic activism*, *revivalism*, *extremism*, *fundamentalism*, or *political Islam*) that are used to describe a political or social movement, organization, or person that believes Islam or God's will applies to all areas of life, private and public, individual and social. For Islamists, Islam is not only a religion but an ideology promoting the creation of an "Islamic state" or an Islamically informed social order. Islamists include both individuals who are mainstream/moderate and others who are militant. Mainstream Islamists, who represent a spectrum of beliefs ranging from very conservative to reformist, participate in the political system, and seek gradual change from within their societies. Militant Islamists are extremists who advocate armed struggle and who employ violence and terrorism to overthrow the established order and impose their own political agendas, threatening the freedom and security of their societies.

Islamist political parties and social institutions have become an integral part of Muslim politics and societies. Since the late twentieth century, Islamically oriented candidates and political parties in Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan, Kuwait, Bahrain, Pakistan, Malaysia, and Indonesia have opted for reform through ballots, not bullets. They have successfully contested and won municipal

and parliamentary seats, held cabinet positions, and served in senior positions including prime minister in Turkey and Iraq and president in Indonesia. They have been elected to the leadership of professional associations (physicians, lawyers, engineers) as well as journalists' guilds and trade unions. Many Islamist NGOs and groups provide schools, clinics, hospitals, day care, legal aid, youth centers, and other social services. Private (not government-controlled) mosques and financial institutions such as Islamic banks and insurance companies have also proliferated.

Religious extremist and terrorist movements today are both global and local. Militant Islamists have been responsible for attacks in the Middle East and elsewhere in the Muslim world and in the West: they range from Osama bin Laden and the al-Qaeda-led attacks in New York and Washington on 9/11 to those in London, Glasgow, and Madrid on 7/7 to Sunni and Shii militias and death squads in Iraq and Pakistan that have slaughtered innocent men, women, and children.

How to distinguish between mainstream and extremist groups is the subject of heated debate. More often than not, Western governments have looked the other way when autocratic rulers in Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, and elsewhere have intimidated and suppressed mainstream Islamist groups or attempted to reverse their electoral successes. The challenge has been particularly complex in connection with resistance movements like Hamas and Hizbollah. Both are elected political parties with a popular base. At the same time, they are resistance movements whose militias have fought Israeli occupation and whom Israel, the United States, and Europe have labeled as terrorist organizations.

Established precedents already exist for dealing with such groups, such as the ANC in South Africa and Sinn Féin, the political wing of the IRA in Ireland, groups with which the United States has had to come to terms. The United States and Europe need to deal with democratically elected officials,

from whatever political party, while also strongly condemning acts of terrorism by their militias and clearly distinguishing legitimate resistance from terrorist attacks upon civilians. At the same time, the United States must condemn Israeli attacks that kill hundreds of civilians like the 2008 Operation Cast Lead in Gaza and the 2006 assault upon Lebanon.

Why do Muslims reject secularism?

Muslim reactions to the term *secularism* have been influenced by Western history, politics, and religion, as well as fear that secularism leads to the marginalization of religion. The term *secularism* has often been misunderstood and seen as diametrically opposed to *religion*. Muslims interpreted European colonialism and attempts to introduce modernity as an attempt to impose Western secularism, separating religion from state and society and thus weakening the moral fabric of Muslim society. While some Muslims, especially among the Western-oriented elites, believed that secularism was necessary to build strong modern societies, many others saw it as a direct challenge to Islam and its heritage, in which religion had for centuries been closely associated with successful and powerful empires. Secularism was equated with unbelief and thus seen as a direct threat to the religious identity and values of Muslim societies.

The problem was compounded by the fact that Muslim languages lacked a precise equivalent word for modern secularism. Few have understood that American secularism separated religion and the state to avoid privileging any one religion and to guarantee freedom of belief or unbelief to all. Little notice was taken of the diverse forms that secularism has taken in modern Western secular countries like Britain, Germany, and Canada that have a state religion and provide state support for recognized religions.

The examples of France and Turkey, which have been anti-clerical and have banned the wearing of Muslim headscarves

in their schools, reinforce the belief that secularism means a state that is antireligious rather than simply religiously neutral. On the other hand, in recent years many Muslims in Turkey and India have called for a "true" secular state, one that does not privilege any religion but does ensure freedom of religious belief and practice. The Muslim leadership of the ruling AKP party in Turkey has balanced its support for this kind of secularism with freedom of religion.

Internet to educate and propagandize in the battle for the hearts and minds of Muslims that is taking place in private, in public, and in virtual reality.

What are the major obstacles to Islamic reform?

While in the past Muslims looked to the *ulama* (religious scholars) and *muftis* (legal scholars) in Muslim countries for authoritative answers, today questions about the relationship of faith to politics and culture, the status and rights of minorities, pluralism, and tolerance are addressed by Muslim intellectuals, religious and lay scholars, men and women. These Muslim reformers are a vanguard, facing resistance from conservative and fundamentalist factions as they challenge long-held traditions to articulate a progressive, constructive Islamic framework that meets the needs of society today.

A lively debate exists on issues as diverse as the extent and limits of reform, the role of tradition and its relationship to change, women's empowerment, legitimate and illegitimate forms of resistance and violence, suicide bombing and martyrdom, the dangers of fundamentalism, the question of Islam's compatibility with democracy and religious pluralism, and the role of Muslims in the West. The reformers debunk entrenched perceptions: that Islam is medieval, static, and incapable of change; that Islam is a violent religion that also degrades women; that Islam and democracy are incompatible; that Muslims do not speak out against religious extremism and terrorism; that they reject religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue, and they certainly cannot be loyal citizens of non-Muslim countries.

Reform-minded Muslims are informed by a deep knowledge of their religious tradition coupled with modern educations in law, history, politics, medicine, economics, and the sciences. They are equipped to reinterpret Islamic sources and traditions to meet the challenges of modernization and development, leadership and ideology, democratization, pluralism, and foreign policy.

However, reformers are still a minority that faces formidable obstacles. Repressive authoritarian regimes see all reform, any real power-sharing and rule of law, as threatening to their power and privilege. Thus reformers struggle in weak civil societies that do not support creative or independent thought or action. Other obstacles come from religious extremists who believe they have a mandate from God to impose "their Islam" and to destroy anyone who disagrees with them. Finally, intransigent religious conservatives, who are well-meaning but wedded to medieval paradigms, are often co-opted by governments to use their authority to delegitimize reforms as deviant or "heresies."

Opponents of reform are often the religious establishment that controls the major vehicles through which many learn about Islam. They run the madrasas or seminaries that train religious leaders as well as local imams for their mosques. In many countries, they influence the religion curriculum and teach courses on Islam in schools and universities. Thus, they remain powerful determiners of the understanding of Islam both officially and among Muslim populations and families.

Despite powerful forces restraining reform efforts, in the twenty-first century other influences are driving the implementation of new ideas. These include neo-traditionalists and more liberal, modern, educated, and Islamically oriented Muslim reformers and organizations, an increasingly educated sector of the population who are critical of those who cling uncritically to past and now outdated practices, religious leaders, scholars, and telepreachers. Those who espouse these new ideas apply Islamic principles in ways that more directly relate to modern-day problems and a two-way information superhighway by means of which Western Muslims, who are able to think and write more freely, exchange their reformist ideas with those in many Muslim countries who are more constrained in their research, writing, and speaking.

Is there a clash of civilizations?

The September 11 attacks appeared to dramatically highlight the well-known thesis of a clash of civilizations that was argued by Samuel Huntington in a 1993 *Foreign Affairs* article and 1996 book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Huntington maintained that cultural and religious differences had replaced the ideological conflicts of the Cold War and were emerging as the biggest threat to world peace. In a December 2001 *Newsweek* piece, he declared that “the Age of Muslim Wars” had officially begun, presaging an intensified battle between Islam and the West.

This theory of global conflict failed to appreciate the significant diversity that exists not only among but also between and *within* the countries and societies that Huntington grouped under the rubric of a given civilization—whether it is Islamic, Western, or Chinese. In *The Clash of Civilizations* Huntington posits “the West” as a monolithic formation when he writes: “The problem for Islam is not the CIA or the U.S. Department of Defense . . . It is the West, a different civilization whose people are convinced of the universality of their culture and believe that their superior, if declining, power imposes on them the obligation to extend that culture throughout the world.” This misses the mark. One need not look deeply into the history of great-power conflicts to see that civilizations do not reflect cultural and political unity. World Wars I and II, which pitted Germany against much of Europe and America, are sobering testimonies to the fragility of Western civilization.

So too, within the Muslim world a litany of conflicts dispels any idea of an Islamic civilization organized around a strong central identity: the Iran-Iraq war of 1980–88, the divisions within Muslim countries during the first Gulf War of 1990–91, and conflicts between Sunni-Shii in Iraq and Pakistan represent just a few examples opposing the view of an Islamic civilization organized around any strong central idea. More

misleading still was Huntington’s portrayal of Islam itself as “a different civilization whose people are convinced of the superiority of their culture and are obsessed with the inferiority of their power.” Strictly speaking, there is in fact no civilization that could be called “Islamic”: that term refers more properly and specifically to the religion of Islam, one component among many that shape Muslim culture and politics.

While some used Huntington’s rhetoric to legitimize a one-note caricature of Islam, most Muslims do not see the West as monolithic. In fact, anti-American sentiment among Muslim societies is primarily tied to opposition to American foreign policy, not Western religion and culture. In the Gallup World Poll of 2005–7, Muslim respondents expressed very negative views of foreign policies that Tony Blair and George Bush had pursued. Respondents had more positive views of Western powers such as France and Germany that dissented from those policies. For example, while 74 percent of Egyptians had unfavorable views of the United States and 69 percent said the same about Britain, only 21 percent felt unfavorably toward France and 29 percent toward Germany. These policy disagreements become especially sharp when we compare Muslims’ perceptions of the United States with their views of its neighbor to the north, Canada—i.e., America without the foreign policy. Sixty-six percent of Kuwaitis in the 2006 survey reported unfavorable views of the United States, while just 3 percent agreed with unfavorable descriptions of Canada.

These attitudes contrast vividly with Huntington’s conclusion that “Islam’s borders *are* bloody, and so are its innards,” which explicitly and simplistically attributes bloodshed to the religion of Islam—rather than to the actions of a minority of Muslim terrorists whose primary grievances are political.

After September 11, the image of a clash of civilizations was used to bolster depictions of contending forces in the “war on global terrorism,” routinely described in presidential addresses

and editorial pages as a war between the civilized world and terrorists in the Muslim world who "hate" Western democracy, capitalism, and freedom or as an existential struggle against "evil." In fact, extensive Gallup polling data, almost fifty thousand interviews conducted in more than thirty-five Muslim nations, showed that despite widespread anti-American and anti-British sentiment, Muslims around the world admire many of the Western qualities that analysts such as Huntington imagined they resented: technology, expertise and knowledge, and freedoms and values associated with democratic governments. Among the hopes for the future that respondents cited, economic security was a leading issue—but so was an eagerness "to have better relationships with the West."

The clash of civilizations theory flattens cultural and historical forces into a caricature distorting the societies and religious traditions. It dangerously oversimplifies the encounter between the West and the Muslim world and can become part of the problem rather than the solution.

What contributions have Muslims made to world civilizations?

Muslims have made very substantial contributions to world civilizations. Muslim societies not only preserved the ancient teachings of the Greeks, but they expanded upon them, developing new ideas in medicine, mathematics, astronomy, and social sciences. In Africa, Muslims preserved distinctive African cultural traditions in new Muslim urban societies, while in South Asia Muslim scholars adapted and developed Hindu number systems. These contributions of Muslims are not well known because what most people know about world history concentrates on the history of Western civilization from ancient Greece to the Renaissance, the Industrial Revolution, and the age of Western modernity. We may think that the "dark ages" in the West existed globally and therefore miss the rich heritage of Muslim societies' scientific, technological, and cultural achievements.

During the Middle Ages, knowledge from the ancient societies of Greece, Rome, China, India, and Persia was collected, preserved, and added to in the Muslim world. As Islam spread from the Arabian Peninsula across western Asia and North Africa, the Arabic language became the lingua franca of the region. Muslim rulers established research centers and universities where scientific, technological, and philosophical developments abounded. The achievements of Muslim societies during the ninth through fifteenth centuries greatly enhanced the theoretical and material development of world civilizations.

Muslims learned the art of paper production from the Chinese when Islam spread into China. Thus, while the West was still writing manuscripts on animal skin parchment, which was difficult to use and store, Muslims were experiencing a growth of knowledge and learning through accelerated production of books. Elite members of society patronized scholars and sought to acquire books. Great libraries, public and private, were established across the Muslim world. The Fatimids in Egypt housed over a million books, and at least eighteen thousand represented the ancient sciences. Individuals also had large private libraries. Saladin's physician, Ibn al-Mathran, had ten thousand manuscripts, while an important Jewish surgeon in Cairo, Dunasch ben Tamin, owned over twenty thousand.

Mosques also contained libraries, and private collectors commonly donated their books to mosques. Scholars would frequently dictate their works at mosques, and the general public attended to listen to them. Further, manuscripts in mosque libraries, covering topics ranging from science and medicine to philosophy and religion, were available to the public. Booksellers often stationed themselves close to the mosque, selling books to collectors, citizens, students, and merchants alike. In Marrakech, for example, the Kutubya Mosque is so named because of the two-hundred-plus book vendors (*kutubiya*) that built booths around the mosque. The

accessibility of books in Muslim societies contrasted greatly with the situation in Europe, where manuscripts were kept in monasteries and dealt with highly specialized theological subjects. Muslim societies gifted world civilizations with their libraries, which revolutionized the preservation of knowledge and education in the West.

Muslim contributions in the field of medicine are among the most important. In the ninth century, Mohammad Ibn Zakariya al-Razi (864–930), one of the greatest Muslim physicians of the Middle Ages, and Ibn Sina (980–1037), one of the foremost philosophers of the period, both wrote medical encyclopedias that became key medical references in Europe for centuries. Al-Zahrawi (936–1013), known by the Latin name Albucasis, was renowned among European physicians for his treatise on eye, ear, and throat surgeries. He provided drawings of surgical tools and information on using sedatives, antiseptics, and sutures and performed the first cesarean operation.

By rooting medicine in science, Muslims made it a profession requiring extensive training and study, which helped to abolish harmful, superstitious, and very popular folk medicine. Doctors were required to take the Hippocratic oath after successfully completing a physician exam. Many hospitals were open twenty-four hours a day, and physicians were required to see every patient. In time, hospitals became centers of great learning in Muslim societies and were precursors to the research hospitals of today.

Muslim interest in medicine contributed to developments in botany and agriculture as Muslim botanists learned more about plants, irrigation techniques, fertilization, and crop rotation. Herbs and plants such as anise, caraway, spinach, cauliflower, asparagus, and artichokes were grown for medicinal purposes and eaten to improve overall health. In the Islamic civilization of al-Andalus, Spain, Ibn Awwam wrote an encyclopedia in the mid-twelfth century identifying and describing the use of 160 different plants, some unknown

to Europe at the time, and improving on the classic European horticultural text by Palladius (c. 380) listing 76 different plants.

Muslim knowledge of agriculture had a significant impact on what is grown, purchased, and traded in the global economy today. Plants farmed in Muslim societies included coffee, bananas, cotton, hemp, tea, olives, watermelon, sugar cane, sesame, apricots, cherries, and peaches. Muslim botanists' and farmers' knowledge of beautiful, fragrant, and nutritious plants, fruits, and vegetables, and their farming techniques, were disseminated across Europe by Crusaders, travelers, and merchants and later transplanted to the Americas.

Botanical developments contributed to advances in both theoretical and applied chemistry in Muslim societies. For example, Muslims discovered how to make soap by mixing olive oil with plant ash, and Crusaders took this castile soap recipe back to Europe. In addition, vegetable and animal oils were used to light lamps, while flowers and herbs were chemically processed into cosmetics and perfumes.

The study of chemistry was cultivated in Muslim societies and imported to the West, where Europeans built on these concepts to develop the science of chemistry that is practiced worldwide today. In theoretical chemistry, essential chemical processes such as distillation, subliming, crystallizing, and the dissolving of substances were described in Arabic sources. The writings of Jabir Ibn Hayyan (c. 815), known as the father of Arab chemistry, were translated into Latin and became standard chemistry texts in Europe. His accomplishments include discovering aqua regia, a substance that dissolves gold and eases the extraction and purification processes. His classification of matter into spirits, metals, and stones forms the basis of naming chemicals today. Al-Razi, in addition to writing his medical encyclopedia, identified ethanol. The English word *alcohol* comes from the Arabic word for this substance.

Muslim scholars made major contributions to the field of mathematics. Muhammad Ibn Musa al-Khwarizmi

(c. 780–850) is known as Algoritmi in the West and is the father of algebra. Rather than use Roman numerals, al-Khwarizmi used Hindi numerals and introduced the Indian idea of zero into mathematics. Because al-Khwarizmi used the number scale 0–9, it was possible to express any number combination. Muslims were also the first to use the decimal point to express fractions in solving complex problems. Mathematical texts written in Arabic were later translated into Latin, and by the fifteenth century, across Europe, Arabic numerals had replaced Roman numerals in common usage.

Mathematical advances also contributed to astronomical discoveries. Al-Farghani (c. 861), for example, created important calculations on the circumference of the earth. Christopher Columbus relied on these calculations but misunderstood al-Farghani's unit of measurement. This mistake led to the discovery of the Americas. Al-Battani (c. 929) created astronomical charts (tables of the movement of bodies in the sky) and created trigonometry. He used trigonometry to measure both solar and lunar time. In Cordoba, Spain, another Muslim astronomer, al-Zarqali (d. 1087), enhanced the astrolabe, an astronomical instrument used to predict the position of the planets and the sun, keep time, and determine the location of points. Muslims also discovered stars and constellations in the sky such as the Scorpion (*al-'aqrab*) and the Goat (*al-jadi*). Other words in the English language such as *zenith*, *nadir*, and *azimuth* are derived from Arabic astronomical terms.

In the social sciences Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406), a Tunisian Muslim, is increasingly regarded as the first modern historian and the father of sociology because of his examination of human life and institutions. Recognizing that events do not happen in a vacuum, Khaldun was the first to pay attention to socioeconomic contexts in writing history. In his famous work, *Muqaddimah*, he records information on climate, social structures, occupations, and education rather than just events such as the reigns of kings and wars. This work of universal

history also considers the evolution of society, examining various societal structures and civilizational forms.

Muslims made very important contributions in philosophy. Muslims, like Jews and Christians, struggled to reconcile how Aristotle, Plato, and other Greek philosophers' concepts of reason and morality related to divine revelation and faith. From the ninth to the thirteenth centuries, important philosophical works were translated and preserved in Arabic at the House of Wisdom, a library and translation institute in Baghdad and the major intellectual center of Islam's golden age. Had these works not been maintained, they might have been lost to world civilization. Ibn Rushd (known in the West as Averroes, 1126–1198), a prominent Muslim philosopher, wrote important commentaries on Aristotle. Other Muslim philosophers such as Ibn Sina (known as Avicenna in the West) and al-Ghazali (1058–1111) also wrote on the relationship of faith and reason, encouraging Christians to contribute to the debate. The great Christian thinker Thomas Aquinas was greatly influenced by Muslim thinkers, especially Ibn Sina. These philosophers made it possible to examine the natural world, draw conclusions about it, and try to understand the natural laws of the universe. Philosophical work cultivated in Muslim societies contributed greatly to the process of scientific thought.

Finally, the educational system in Europe was changed as merchants, students, scholars, Crusaders, and travelers transmitted important ideas from Muslim cultures to the West and medical, mathematical, astronomical, and philosophical achievements made their way into Western civilization. Texts were translated from Arabic into Latin, and new knowledge gleaned from Muslims contributed to the rebirth, or Renaissance, of Europe. As Europeans rediscovered classical Greek knowledge and discovered knowledge from Muslim societies for the first time, they developed ways to improve their lives and societies.

Today, it is interesting to note the many English words having Arabic origins. For foods and drinks we have *alcohol*

(*al-kohl*), coffee (*qahwa*), artichoke (*al-kharshuf*), saffron (*za'faran*), lemon (*limun*), spinach (*isbanakh*), orange (*naranj*), sugar (*sukkar*), and tahini (*tahin*). In mathematics, *algebra* (*al-jabr*) means "the restoring of a missing part." The word *algorithm* originates from the Latinization of the name al-Khwarizmi, the father of algebra. Many names of common household items such as sofa (*suffah*), jar (*jarrah*), and talc or talcum powder (*talq*) come from Arabic loanwords, as do animal names such as giraffe (*zarafa*), gazelle (*ghazal*), and gerbil (*jarbua*). These and many other words used daily reflect Muslim influences in world civilizations.

MUSLIMS IN THE WEST

Who are the Muslims of America?

Muslim Americans are Americans who came here from sixty-eight different countries as well as indigenous African Americans and converts from a variety of ethnic backgrounds. They are one of the most diverse communities in the world, racially, economically, and politically. Although estimates of the Muslim American population vary widely, it is safe to say that there are at least five to seven million, making Islam the third largest religion (after Christianity and Judaism) in America. Many believe that in the first half of the twenty-first century Islam will become the second-largest religion in America.

In a national portrait of Muslim Americans conducted by Gallup in 2009, 28 percent of Muslims categorize themselves as "white"; 18 percent say they are Asian, and a surprising 18 percent classify themselves as "other," which may reflect their identification with more than one group. One percent say they are Hispanic. The majority (56 percent) of Muslims in America are immigrants who came to pursue political and religious freedom, economic prosperity, or education. Thirty-five percent are native-born African American Muslims, the descendants of slaves who have struggled for their civil rights as well as economic and social justice.

Muslims in America are predominantly young. Thirty-six percent are eighteen to twenty-nine years old (versus 18 percent