

# Islamic law

Business



By the year AD 2000 it seems probable that Islam will be one of the half-dozen significant political forces in the world. The others will be Leninism, Confucio-marxism, probably Catholic Christianity, probably an amalgam of humanism and Protestant Christianity, and Buddhism, perhaps in some sort of alliance with Hinduism.

To many Europeans and Americans it may seem strange to include religions among political forces, because they have been accustomed to think of religion as concerned only with personal piety. They are misled, however, by the divorce of religion and politics in the West since the European wars of religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Throughout the vast ranges of world history it has been normal for religion to be closely linked with politics. The reason is not far to seek. When politics becomes serious and it is a question of men being ready to die for the cause they support, there has to be some deep driving force in their lives.

Usually this force can be supplied only by a religion, or by an ideology that is acquiring some of the functions of religion (such as making man aware of the powers on which his life is dependent). This question of the relation of religion and politics will concern us further in the course of the study. My aim in what follows is to show the roots or genesis of the political conceptions operative in the Islamic world today. In this region of the world it is particularly necessary to look at the past, since for Muslims as for Irishmen history is still alive. The Islamic community is still divided by events that took place in 632 and 656. A remark about an incident concerning one of Muhammad's wives in the year 627, when made in the Sudan in 1965, led to riots and the declaration that the Communist party was illegal.

The World Islamic Front brought together Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda ("the groundwork") and four other organizations, including Islamic Jihad and the Egyptian Islamic Group. The formation of the front is a sign that at least the leaders of these groups see themselves as pursuing a common set of Islamic goals. It is difficult to say how many people these leaders represent, but they aim to address the conscience of "all Muslims." The declaration is a formal statement of the duty of Muslims, written in the style of what I call "Shari'a reasoning." (To call it "Islamic jurisprudence" or "Islamic religious law" would be slightly misleading.

) Shari'a reasoning presupposes that there is an ideal way for human beings to live. The very term "Shari'a" means "the Path." The declaration further presupposes that God provides "signs" for those who would discern the contours of this path. These signs are primarily texts: the Qur'an and the hadith, or "reports" relating the exemplary practice of Muhammad. Shari'a reasoning is, in effect, a kind of transgenerational conversation among Muslims regarding the implications of these signs and about the behaviors that are most consistent with the ideal way and which therefore will lead to happiness in this world and the next.

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