

# Imprimis

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## Views on Islam

**O**n September 15-20, 2002, Hillsdale College held a seminar on the topic, “How to Think About Islam.” Nine guest speakers, both Islamic and non-Islamic, and several faculty members offered divergent views on several questions: Does the radical form of Islam behind the terrorist attacks of September 11 represent true Islam? Or is it an aberration? Is Islamic doctrine compatible with religious pluralism and constitutional democracy? How are we to think of Islam in the context of the war against terrorism?

*The following remarks are excerpted or adapted from presentations at this seminar.*



### Benazir Bhutto

Former Prime Minister of Pakistan



. . . **THE MICROCOSM** of America that was destroyed on September 11 – people of all races, ethnicities and religions – is everything the extremists abhor: men and women, working side by side as equals; Muslims, Christians, Jews and Hindus, together building worldwide trade and communications. America is a symbol of what can be to millions of oppressed people all over the world. America means everything to those deprived of human rights and the rule of law. America symbolizes modernity, diversity and democracy, and it is these three things which are the fanatics’ worst fears.

At this time of continuing crisis, the American people and their leaders must understand that those who would use violence and terror in the name of Islam are heretics and hypocrites. They are criminals, not clerics. Their actions contradict the teachings of the Holy Prophet of Islam, who wrote, “Whenever the prophet of God sent forth a detachment, he said to it, ‘Do not cheat or commit treachery, nor should you mutilate or kill children, women, or old men.’” And there is a specific prohibition in Islamic law that bans killing by stealth and targeting a defenseless victim in a way intended to cause terror in a society.

It grieves me that included in the list of the innocent victims of the perfidy of September 11 is the image of Islam across the world. Our religion is not what these people preach; in fact, it is the opposite. Islam is committed to tolerance and equality, and it is committed by Koranic definition to the principles of democracy. It is ironic that despite the strong commitment to democracy in Islam, most Muslims today are living in dictatorships. The Muslim people want freedom, and they need support in their search for political, economic and social empowerment. Much like the people of the communist world of the past, the Muslim people today are hostages in totalitarian regimes that flourished during the days of the Cold War.

In the West, there is often talk about the “Muslim street.” The street most often seen on television is the street of fanaticism whipped into a frenzy. But there is another Muslim street. It is a silent street of women who suffer discrimination in every aspect of life. It is a silent street of students



who are not educated. It is a silent street of businessmen and businesswomen who are not allowed to compete freely. It is a silent street of human rights activists who are jailed, political parties that are decimated, and political leaders who are either prisoners or exiles. It is the street of the people constrained by the totalitarian powers of the state. It is the street of the future in the chains of the powers of intolerance, ignorance and dictatorship. And it is the street far more likely to explode than the street of the marginal religious extremists.

As I said, in Islam, dictatorship is never condoned. Nor is cruelty. In fact, according to Islam, those who commit cruel acts are condemned to destruction. Irrespective of the ignorance reflected in the actions of fanatics, there are three key principles in Islam that point to democracy: consultation, known as *shura*; consensus, known as *ijmaa*; and independent judgment, known as *ijtihad*. Today the Muslim people are searching for freedoms that exist in other parts of the world. They are searching for forms of government that are representative and accountable. Just as Christians and Jews have the Bible to guide them, Muslims have the holy Koran. The Koran makes it clear that the principal operations of the democratic process — consultation between elected officials and the people and accountability of leaders to the people — are fundamental to Islam. The holy Koran says that Islamic society is contingent on mutual advice, through mutual discussions, on

an equal footing. Consultation under the Koran demands that public decisions are made by representative officials. Consensus provides the basis for majority rule. And according to Muslim scholars, the legitimacy of the state depends upon the extent to which state organization and power reflect the will of the Muslim people.

Now this is the exact opposite of the fanatical, ignorant message that is spread by bin Laden, the Taliban and their allies in hate. These despots are the enemies of all civilizations. The terrorists who attacked America were not fighting for Islam. They were fighting for themselves. Their goal is to establish interlinked theocracies of ignorance that they can control for their own political ends. They are the enemies of Western principles, and they are the enemies of all humanity. In the end, they will be defeated. And, just as something more than arms defeated Communism, the terrorists will ultimately be defeated by basic and universal human nature. In the words of the former Czech president, Vaclav Havel, in his essay “The End of the Modern Era”: “Communism was not defeated by military force, but by the human spirit, by conscience, by the resistance of man to manipulation.”

Terrorism will fail unless we fall into the psychopaths’ trap. Professor Samuel Huntington of Harvard wrote of an inevitable clash of civilizations between the West and the Islamic world. Ladies and gentlemen, this clash is far from inevitable, unless we make it so. . . .



## David F. Forte

Professor of Constitutional Law  
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**A FEW MONTHS** ago, following a speaking tour in Jordan, I was escorted by a United States Embassy liaison to the Amman airport to catch a 3:15 a.m. flight to Paris and thence to the United States. There we were confronted with extensive lines of white-robed Arabs returning from the *hajj*, the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. This led me to think how striking it is that nearly all great civilizations revolve around a pilgrimage.

One cannot think of Christianity without pilgrimage. From the time pilgrims stealthily approached the tomb of St. Peter on Vatican hill in the first century A.D. to pray for his intercession, to the thousands of places of pilgrimage that have become the Christian leitmotif to the

present day, pilgrimage has been a central institution in Christianity. The Jews’ exodus in the desert was a pilgrimage. In India, Hindus go to the Ganges. In Buddhist cultures, there are many local pilgrimages. The Japanese travel to the shrines of their ancestors.

A pilgrimage is an ingrained metaphor for travelling through life toward that which is permanent and true. It is a path toward unity with God. It is a discovery. Recall the Magi who came from the East for the Epiphany of the Lord. Nowadays, the politically correct term for Columbus’ discovery of the New World is “the encounter.” It is as if the Indians were on a quest to find a passage to the West and happened to

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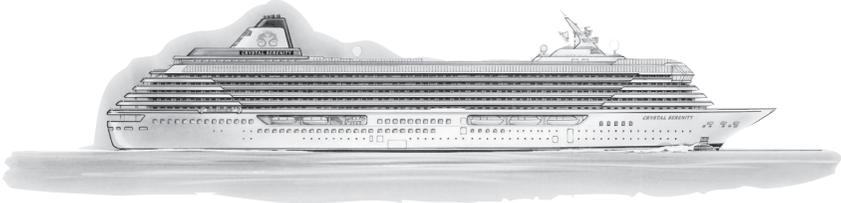


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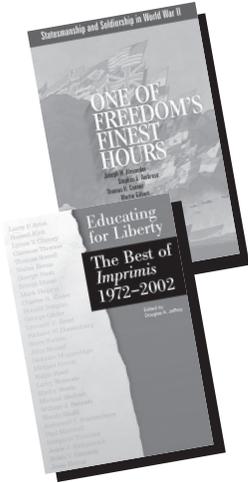
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bump into Columbus. No, it was the energy of the Christian West that drove Columbus to exploration and discovery. It was his own pilgrimage. In another sense, all philosophy – and all art that pertains to human experience – is part of the pilgrimage of man.

There are, of course, enemies of the pilgrim. Tyrants do all they can to prevent men and women from freely seeking the truth. Fatalists say there is nothing to discover – that everything is predetermined. Cynics say there is nothing to discover because there is no truth. And certain legalists – the Pharisees who confronted Jesus, for example – would constrain man with a set of unyielding rules that would prevent any personal voyage of discovery.

**Al-Farabi and Islamic  
Philosophy**

The Islamic philosopher al-Farabi spent his long life in a pilgrimage of the mind. He traveled through the Greeks, particularly Plato and Aristotle, through Islamic theology, through the law, music, politics and religious devotion to develop a theory of the intellect, of faith, and of politics that is one of the great contributions to the history of philosophy. He exercised enormous influence on Avicenna (980-1037), who in turn inspired Averroes (1126-1198) and Maimonides

(1135-1204), and through Avicenna and Averroes, al-Farabi opened the doors of classical philosophy to St. Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274), who perhaps created the greatest synthesis of philosophy and faith the world has ever known. Al-Farabi and his successors gave Jewish and Christian philosophy the impetus to drive both of those civilizations to unimagined heights. But his ultimate fate within Islamic culture was different.

Al-Farabi was born around 870 and came to Baghdad as a young man, probably because his father had gained a position at the court of the Caliph. He studied philosophy under Christian thinkers and translators patronized by the Caliph, began writing when he was about 50 years old, and produced works that at the same time defended philosophy and provided a comprehensive system of political and social thought. He and his work were at the cusp of the pilgrimage of Islamic civilization. Yes, civilizations – including our own – are themselves in a pilgrimage, successful if they defend the quest for truth, unsuccessful if they impede it.

Al-Farabi held that the end of life was happiness, in the Greek sense of *eudaimonia*. Happiness for him consisted in achieving theoretical, not practical, perfection. One achieves theoretical perfection by merging with or contemplating something that he called the Active Intellect, which emanates from God. However, one does not

achieve theoretical perfection by lonely contemplation. One does so only in a community, in which individuals assist one another in their progress towards perfection. And such a community needs a founder, one whose human intellect can intuitively join with the Active Intellect. In other words, a prophet. So for al-Farabi, Muhammad becomes a kind of philosopher-king.

While philosophy in al-Farabi's time was given a free hand by Islamic political authorities, there were other parties and systems of thought that competed, debated and strove to become the dominant voice of Islam. These philosophical and theological parties arose in reaction to the ongoing contest between Sunni and Shi'a Islam for political dominance within the empire.

One group, the Murji'tes, became the advocates of toleration and equality within Islam. They counseled peace to the warring parties, recognized non-Arab Muslims as equal to Arabs, accepted even sinning Muslims as members of the faith, and emphasized faith over works as the means to salvation. They were not enamored of the law.

A second party, the Mu'tazilites, championed the role of reason within Islam. Reason, the Mu'tazilites taught, could ascertain the truth even without the aid of revelation. Good and evil could be known by all men. But because of the weakness of the human will, revelation was necessary to confirm to man what was truly good and provide man with rules of behavior that unaided reason could not apprehend. Nonetheless, reason directs the understanding of revelation. These Mu'tazilites were close to what the Scholastics became in Christianity.

A third group, the Kharijites, was the enemy of all. The Kharijites held that any person who strayed from the perfect practice of Islam was, ipso facto, an apostate, subject to being killed with impunity. Any leader who did not hold true to the principles of Islam was likewise illegitimate and should be overthrown and killed. The Kharijites were never fully unified in command or tactics. But true to their beliefs, they committed frightful massacres on Muslims whom they believed no longer practiced the faith.

It took two centuries of warfare before the Kharijites were effectively suppressed and rejected by the other Islamic traditions. In their war against the Kharijites, both Sunni and Shi'a Islam confirmed the principles of tolerance, intellectual inquiry and open debate. The defeat of the Kharijites permitted the Islamic pilgrimage to continue apace.

Today, radical Islamists replicate that ancient and despised sect.

Of all the parties, the Mu'tazilites rose to political dominance. Under the Caliph al-Mamun, who ruled from 813 to 833, Mu'tazilism became the official theology of the empire and classical learning bloomed. But a fourth party was coalescing – the party of legalism – and in another century it would supplant the Mu'tazilites.

## The Rise of Islamic Legalism

Legal Islam was itself the product of a dramatic clash of ideas among three parties. The first were the *qadis* – not the religious judges as they later came to be, but administrative agents of the Caliph. The *qadis* sought to help the Caliph rule over his people, of whom a majority were Christians and Persians. They adapted much of Byzantine and Persian law to effectuate this rule. Along with the *qadis* arose an intellectual elite of legal scholars, who developed schools of law. These schools, in turn, created new solutions to legal problems, incorporating much local law into their jurisprudence. During the first two centuries of Islam, the *qadis* and the schools of law created a dynamic legal system, the likes of which had not been seen since Rome and would not be seen for another thousand years in Europe. They were opposed, however, by a third group – the pietists – who wanted the empire to adopt Koranic norms.

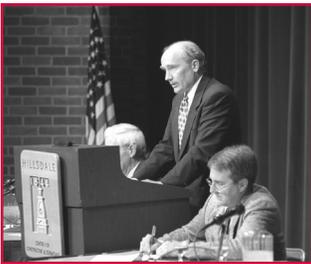
In debates, the schools of law claimed that their rules had been sanctioned by traditions deriving from great legal thinkers or even from the companions of the Prophet. The pietists countered with traditions that they claimed derived from the Prophet himself. There ensued a war between traditionalists, as thousands of traditions were fabricated to support opposing positions. This debate was ultimately resolved around the year 800 by a great legal thinker, ash-Shafi'i, who conceded that the traditions of the Prophet would be accepted as the major authoritative source of the law. The pietists, legal schools and *qadis* now merged into one party, the legalists, led by the *ulama*, an elite group of legal thinkers. So during the 9th century, while Mu'tazilism was recognized as the dominant party, legalists concretized the law's provisions and became effective in their opposition to the Mu'tazilites. In al-Farabi's lifetime, then, Mu'tazilism lost its position of dominance. Legalism brought the creative period of Islamic legal development to a close and defined the religion primarily in terms of a permanent, divinely sanctioned law.

In 932, al-Farabi witnessed a debate between a Christian logician and a Muslim theologian that made him realize which way the winds were beginning to blow. By all accounts, the Muslim theologian, a defender of tradition, won the contest over the philosopher in the eyes of the intellectuals of the day. Seeing what was happening, al-Farabi went out of his way to make the law a permanent fixture in his conception of the polity. He argued that the philosophical solution and the legal solution were not at odds in creating a polity that conduced to man's happiness. He was not entirely successful in squaring the circle. Scholars have noted many self-contradictory passages in his writing. One explanation is that al-Farabi intentionally wrote ambiguously in order to screen his opinions from what he knew would be serious opposition from the growing party of legalists.

Slowly over the next two centuries, the door to philosophical inquiry within Islamic civilization began to close. Avicenna was countered by al-

Ghazali, who combined his involvement in mystical Sufism with his faith in the literal word of God to mount a major attack on the capacity of reason. God has no purpose that man can reason to, said al-Ghazali. God works His will however He wishes, and His acts are beyond philosophical or ethical understanding. Later, Averroes was met by Ibn Taymiyya, who attacked philosophy with as much vigor as al-Ghazali.

In 1258, the Mongols sacked Baghdad and put a physical end to the centers of learning. Soon thereafter arose the Ottomans. Their autocratic method of rule, their alliance with the *ulama*, and their successful conquests made the law and territory a central part of Islam's self-understanding. The civilization's pilgrimage, its quest for understanding and truth, became stalled for centuries. To renew itself, Islam must resume its pilgrimage. All the world will be better for it. 🕌



## Will Morrisey

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**TO THINK ABOUT** Islam, we find ourselves first of all engaged in the question of what Islam is. To be entitled to an independent view, one would need a mastery of the principal Islamic texts in their original language. Neither I, nor (to my knowledge) anyone else associated with this college, claims such authority. So, how are we to try to think about Islam? Blocked from the deepest inquiry, we must think primarily as informed *citizens*, as most of us will never be Islamic *scholars*. As citizens, we must think *politically*. To think politically, we must think in terms of *regimes*. Regimes are the primary frame of reference for the political thinker.

What is a regime? That question, I can answer. A regime is the most authoritative form of ruling in a political community. To determine what regime rules in such a community, you need to know three things.

First, who rules there? What persons are in charge, and how many of them are there — one, few, or many? What kind of persons are they? What is their character?

Second, how do these persons rule? By what institutional structures? Do the rulers rule through parliaments and courts? Or through armies and secret police?

Finally, what way of life prevails in the country? What are the habits of the heart of the people who live there? For example, many of you were struck, as I was, by a film aired a few months ago on an Arab television network. In this film, a three-year-old girl was asked, “What are the Jews?” “The Jews,” she answered dutifully, “are apes and pigs.” It is fair to say that this catechism of contempt is not a habit of the heart publicly honored in commercial republican regimes — whether their peoples are Muslim as in Turkey, Jewish as in Israel, or predominantly Christian as in America.

Islamism, as distinct from Islam, is the blend of Muslim law and the principles of radical modernity, characterized by terrorism and culminating in theocratic tyranny. Islamists *must* target Americans and Jews — that is, the West generally — because the commercial republics represented by Americans and Jews hold up an understanding of the good for human beings that is antithetical to their own.

When George Washington wrote to the Newport Synagogue, in the letter quoted this week by Prime Minister Bhutto, he told those Jews that they enjoyed the free exercise of religion in America, *not* on the basis of mere toleration, but

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on the basis of natural right, the right to *life* in the fullest sense. In contrast, the Islam of the Islamists, and even the Islam of the *shar'ia* – the Islamic law – offers Jews and Christians toleration, not on the basis of the natural right to life, but on the basis of the right to kill. That is, in the status of *dhimmitude*, non-Muslims may live only on condition of strict subordination, enforceable by death. Exclusion from citizenship is the price of survival. A full life may only be lived if you believe rightly, and not because, as a human being, you are entitled to such a life, regardless of your religious beliefs.

This regime conflict has now become urgent because Tocqueville was right about the modern world. In 1836, he predicted that the decline of the old aristocracies, the mastery of nature by technology, and the rise of statism left two stark possibilities for modern man: the commercial republicanism seen in America or the despotism then seen in Russia. World history since that time has been a struggle between commercial republicanism and tyranny in its many forms.

In confronting the regimes of terror and tyranny, whether secular or religious, we sometimes hear the objection, “One man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter.” Empirically speaking, this is quite true. But let’s follow that line of thought to the end:

It is equally true, empirically speaking, that one man’s freedom is another man’s slavery. What Osama bin Laden calls freedom is tyranny to Milton Friedman, and vice-versa. By the same token, we’ve seen that one man’s man is another man’s ape or pig. While Dr. Friedman may be a man to us, to that Muslim three-year-old and her educators, he is an animal, and deserves to be treated as an animal.

So the real question is, which are *we*? Will *we* acquiesce in being classified as apes or pigs? Will *we* acquiesce if others are? Will *we* accept the consequences of such classification, consequences we all see very plainly?

As Americans, we are now involved in a geopolitical struggle between regimes, one an empire of liberty, another a nascent empire of tyranny. Like all past tyrants – King George in 1776, the slaveholders of 1860, the militarists of 1914, the communists and fascists who emerged from the ashes of that Great War – our enemies expect us to be cowardly, decadent, foolish and bourgeois. I rather expect that, like those earlier Americans, we will disappoint them. Indeed, I expect that we will defeat them.



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