

Islam and Freethought

1. Islam is one religion among many. As freethinkers, we owe it to ourselves to treat it like all others, to criticize it as we criticize other religions, neither granting it privileges nor targeting it beyond what circumstances dictate. Although we must not neglect the historical responsibility which religions carry, our criticism of each religion must correspond to the virulence which it displays currently, the danger which it presents today. We observe that currently Islam has become particularly important, by virtue of its claims and its recent destructive advances. Clearly, current circumstances dictate that we pay particular attention to Islam.
2. Which is worse, Christianity or Islam? Christianity is undoubtedly more dangerous than Islam in the United States, Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, while in Europe the former has been somewhat tamed after 2000 years, although anything is reversible. However, globally and currently, it is Islam, or at least its politicized form, which constitutes a greater threat to freedom and to Humanity's achievements and progress.
3. Islamism, political Islam, radical Islam, Muslim fundamentalism, Islamofascism, Islamist fanaticism and so on, these are various expressions which all identify a highly politicized and extremely virulent variant of Islam. The choice of the best label remains open for discussion, each having its advantages and its disadvantages (for example, fundamentalism need not be violent, and the term fascism is perhaps too modern under the circumstances), but one thing is certain: regardless of the expression one chooses, this phenomenon exists, it is currently on the offensive and its effects are devastating, both physically and ideologically.
4. This politicized variant of Islam is no less legitimately Muslim than any other variant. Indeed, given that so-called "holy" scriptures such as the quran say just about anything as well as its opposite, one can easily find both passages which promote peace and others which order extreme violence against "miscreants" or anything which is not adequately Muslim, even calls for genocide. Political Islam is neither a distortion of Islam nor an outrageous extrapolation of it. On the contrary, it is simply an eminently plausible interpretation of the Muslim religion.
5. The current virulence of political Islam has both distant, fundamental causes and proximal, recent causes. The fundamental causes are obvious and identified in the previous paragraph: it is an interpretation of Islam which is an integral part of that religion ever since its birth 14 centuries ago. Furthermore, these highly obscurantist political tendencies have reasserted themselves repeatedly ever since, for example: in the anti-philosophy of Hamid Al-Ghazali in the XIth century, in Wahhabism founded by Abd al-Wahhab in the XVIIIth century, in the Society of the Muslim Brothers founded by Hassan el-Banna in 1928, in the establishment of the Khomeini theocracy in Iran in 1979. The totalitarian nature of Islam which regulates all aspects of human life, both private and public, encourages such an interpretation.
6. The more recent causes of the spread of political Islam are the military and economic incursions of Western powers – USA, UK, France and their allies – in several countries of Muslim culture, especially in the Middle East, sometimes financing very retrograde Islamist movements and their military formations. Such incursions have greatly destabilized these regions, weakening or destroying regimes having a more

secular orientation, causing considerable devastation and enormous human misery, opening Pandora's box and allowing radical Islam to expand and spread. But these blunders by occidental powers did not create the problem. On the contrary, they merely liberated a pre-existing monster.

7. Islamists, with their totalitarian, theocratic project which categorically rejects any possible separation between state and religion – provided, of course, that the religion in question be the right one, their religion evidently – are fiercely opposed to human rights and especially opposed to secularism. They therefore have a particularly intense hatred for France whose Epicurean culture horrifies them and whose model of secularism – undoubtedly the most advanced in the world in spite of its shortcomings – is for them nothing short of diabolical.
8. The ultimate goal of Islam in its political version – and the goal of political Christianity as well – is world conquest. In order to promote this program, it has at its disposal three main weapons: the veil, propaganda and terror.
9. The veil in all its various forms, be it hijab, tchador, niqab, burqa or burkini, among others, is a banner of identity, loudly proclaiming adherence to the Islamist movement. The Islamist veil is not Muslim in the general sense of the word, because it belongs only to the fanatical Islamist fringe. It represents and conveys the values of Islamism, especially its extreme misogyny. The veil is a symbol of the subservience of women, a contemptible rag. To impose this veil everywhere it can and to repeal any measure which could possibly limit its spread, these are imperatives for political Islam. Islamism exploits the female body and uses it as a tool to fight against secularism, against freedom of conscience and against other fundamental freedoms. To claim that the Islamist veil is just an article of clothing like any other is a ridiculous fallacy. Discrimination and oppression of women do exist in other religions as tools of patriarchal power, but it is Islam which takes misogyny to extremes, relegating women to subhuman status: a woman's testimony in a sharia court is worth only half the value of a man's.
10. Islamist propaganda exploits the language of human rights in order to fight against human rights. Those who oppose Islamists' anti-freedom program are accused of "racism" – even though religion has nothing to do with race and is certainly not an innate attribute of the individual – or "islamophobia" – a dishonest term whose purpose is to bully and to censor the necessary criticism of Islam and Islamism. This propaganda makes copious use of the language of freedom of religion in order to promote its politico-religious program to the detriment of all others. In fact, its goal is to win religious privileges disguised as "rights" by giving religious freedom priority over all other freedoms.
11. As for Islamist terrorism, it spreads fear, shock and disorientation among the population. It is complementary to legal measures taken to normalize and trivialize the wearing of the veil everywhere, that is, violent jihad is complementary to legal jihad. Terrorism also serves to create an attitude of mistrust towards Muslims in general, which in turn creates a backlash, a feeling of persecution, among ordinary Muslims, those who want nothing to do with Islamist violence, thus promoting the fallacy that Muslims constitute a united, even monolithic, community. This is particularly unfair and dangerous for ex-Muslims, it constitutes a barrier to the secularization of Muslim societies and it facilitates recruitment of new jihadists.
12. When confronted with the Islamist threat, we observe that part of the political left – which, if it respected values traditionally held by the left, would criticize any and all political movements based on religious

obscurantism – has seriously failed. Instead of tackling the job of criticizing Islam with the same vigour it uses to criticize Christianity, this part of the left displays a cowardly reluctance. It capitulates to the Islamist campaign of promotion of the veil; it adopts Islamist propaganda by making false accusations of “islamophobia” or “racism” or worse against those who refuse to adopt it; and it fails to identify clearly the honestly the perpetrators of terrorist acts. The reasons for this left’s reluctance are diverse and controversial – post-colonial guilt? Christian guilt? Christian gullibility? blind solidarity with the oppressed while failing to see that they are themselves oppressors? the naïve notion that the enemy of one’s enemy (American imperialism) is one’s friend? Whatever the reasons may be, this submissive attitude displayed by part of the political left greatly encourages and facilitates the Islamist movement.

13. Given the existence of this political Islam (one may prefer a different choice of term from the list in paragraph 3) and its many breakthroughs, some violent, some legal, others socio-cultural, it is important to name this political tendency explicitly, especially under extreme circumstances. Recall the famous observation of Albert Camus, so well expressed by Éric Fottorino: “Failure to name things clearly, as Camus pointed out, only increases the world’s misery. Failure to name them at all negates our humanity.” For example, when a terrorist attack causes many deaths – as did those in Paris and in Nice – and the Islamist motives of the perpetrators are clear, then a failure to name that ideology explicitly is the most abject political cowardice.
14. Given that a large part of the political left has failed to confront the Islamist threat and its anti-secular agenda, a number of parties on the political right have often taken advantage of the situation by presenting themselves as critics of Islam and defenders of secularism. But the responsibility for this falls squarely on the shoulders of the spineless left. The political right is simply being opportunistic, rushing into the vacuum left by the timorous left.
15. What then is to be done in the face of this particularly intractable threat? The first step is to name and describe it honestly, which is the purpose of this document. Then we must defend secularism, without concessions or qualifiers, secularism which Islamists vehemently oppose. We must promote the idea of banning religious symbols among state employees while on the job, as well as banning face-coverings for both state employees and users of public services. Obviously the decision whether to implement these measures should be made by the electorate in each sovereign country. A ban on face-coverings everywhere in public, as is already done in France, is a stronger measure but nevertheless eminently possible. Finally, the possibility of banning religious symbols for employees in the private sector must also be envisaged, provided that such measures are accompanied and framed by legislation which guarantees that they will be applied equally to all religions without discrimination.
16. More generally, we must recognize that Islam, just like Christianity and all major religions, is fundamentally dangerous. Rather than mere reform, such as the Protestant Reformation, Islam needs an Enlightenment. Finally, we must simultaneously oppose two currents of the political right wing, i.e. the Christian nationalist right and the Islamofascist right.

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