

gung und behutsamer Anpassung an die Moderne. Ihnen ist der revolutionäre Islam oder gar der Terrorismus ein Greuel. Die Radikalen dagegen erstreben einen „reinen“ Islam, wie ihn Muhammad in Medina nach ihrer Überzeugung schuf. Für sie sind alle Gemäßigten Verräter, Heuchler und Opportunisten.

Der Islam wird weiterhin mit seinen Spaltungen, Brüchen und unterschiedlichen Richtungen leben müssen. Es ist

heute schwer zu sagen, in welche Richtung sich der Islam weiterentwickeln wird. Nichtmuslime tun gut daran, genau hinzuschauen und nicht falschen Klischeebildern des Islam – sei es ein angeblich generell friedlicher Islam, sei es ein generell kriegerischer Islam – zu erliegen. Die Achtung vor muslimischen Mitmenschen gebietet es, die Vielfalt und Gegensätzlichkeit innerhalb des Islam nicht zu übersehen.

Islam – One Faith, Many Schisms

*Eberhard Troeger**

Historically, Islam is the religious and political movement that began with the preaching of Muhammad Ibn Abdallah (ca. 570-632 AD) in or about the year 610 AD in Mecca. Muhammad's own background was Arabian animism, but, under the influence of Jewish and Christian proclamation, he concerned himself intensively with the belief in one God (Arabic: Allah). He came to the conviction that he was called to be Allah's ambassador to his own people, and gathered a congregation of followers in his home city of Mecca from ca. 610 AD. The leading families in Mecca, however, saw a danger in the new faith for the cult centered on the Kaaba and for the commerce associated with it, and rejected Muhammad's proclamation and claim for his mission.

Because of this rejection, Muhammad saw himself compelled in 622 AD to migrate with his followers to Jathrib (Medina).

Here he achieved the breakthrough leading to success by winning two Arabic tribes resident in Medina for Islam, driv-

ing two large Jewish tribes out of the city, killing the male members of one Jewish tribe, and forcing the Meccans to surrender in a war lasting several years by breaking a peace treaty. In Medina, Islam – Allah's will, as it was proclaimed by Muhammad – developed into an order encompassing all areas of life, that is, into a state founded upon religion. In this original form of Islam, there was no separation into a worldly and a religious sphere, no clergy, and no hierarchy (although Muhammad claimed some extra rights for himself). All Muslims of the community were subject in the same way to Allah's commandments as proclaimed by Muhammad. Muhammad was the religious leader of this community; he was lawgiver and the judge in all social affairs.

Sunnis and Shiites – the Most Important Schism

During the course of its history, the Islamic community has experienced nu-

merous schisms and incessant intellectual disputes about the correct understanding of Islam and its practice. Several reform movements eventually have developed from them.

Immediately after Muhammad's death, different opinions emerged in regard to the question of the succession in the leadership of the Islamic community.¹ As a result of these arose the two major groupings within Islam that, in the course of the centuries, became known as "Sunnis" (in English, roughly the "Advocates of the Habits of Muhammad") and "Shiites" (in English, roughly the "Party of Ali"). The Sunnis today comprise about 85%-90% of all Muslims worldwide, the Shiites accordingly 10%-15%.

Sunni Islam, thus, can be considered the main current in Islam. In terms of doctrine, it is reasonably homogeneous, although it has not developed any institution (comparable with ecclesiastical synods and councils) that could prescribe binding doctrines and legal systems. In the final analysis, state authority helped Sunni Islam to achieve victory and a relative unity. Shiite Islam, on the other hand, split into an abundance of very different groups² that often stood in opposition to state authority.

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¹ See on this, for example, W. Montgomery Watt and Alford T. Welch, *Der Islam. I. Mohammed und die Frühzeit, Islamisches Recht, Religiöses Leben. Die Religionen der Menschheit*, Vol. 25,1, Stuttgart, 1979.

² See on this, for example, Heinz Halm, *Der schiitische Islam. Von der Religion zur Revolution*, Munich, 1994, and the same, *Die Schia*, Darmstadt, 1988.

The Break Between the Political and the Religious Order

The unity of the religious and the political order, as Muhammad had created it in his own person in Medina, survived only during the reign of the first successors to Muhammad, the four caliphs (ruled 632-661 AD). The unity disintegrated with the fifth caliph, Mu'awiya. He seized the caliphate for himself and cared little for religious legitimation. Since this time, at the latest, the independence of the political power is a general characteristic of Islamic history. At the same time, religious Islam, with its mosques, places of instruction, and religious brotherhoods, led a life of its own to a great extent. Frequently, the religious sphere was required to defend itself against its instrumentalization at the hands of the political class.

But, the period of the great Sunni dynasties, the Omayyads (661-750) and the Abbasids (750-1258), also ended. The Ottoman Empire (ca. 1290-1923) was the last major Sunni-dominated Islamic empire. In Iran, Shiite imamism became the state religion in the sixteenth century. On the Arabian Peninsula, a Sunni, puritanical reform movement, Wahhabism, that became the state religion in modern Saudi Arabia, originated in the eighteenth century. In modern Turkey, on the other hand, the state and Islam were separated in 1924, but a moderate form of Sunni Islam was subjected de facto to state patronage. These examples make clear how much the relationship between the state and Islam can vary from country to country.³

³ See on this, for example, Werner Ende and Udo Steinbach (eds.), *Der Islam in der Gegenwart: Entwicklung und Ausbreitung*,

Intellectual and Religious Currents in Islam

Within Sunni Islam, as well as within the Shiite groups, there was for a long time a threefold division of the population, according to the religious as well as the intellectual view. At the pinnacle stood a small class of intellectuals led by the professors at Islamic educational institutions and reaching down to the simple prayer leader and preacher in a village mosque. In contrast to them, there was the great mass of the people, most of which had enjoyed little or no school education and, at best, knew only a few Koran verses by heart. These Muslims practiced a minimal Islam that was interlarded with many elements from other religions (burial cults, amulets, and others) and that is characterized generally as folk Islam.⁴ In the middle between these two groups stood mystic Islam, Sufism, which was organized in communities similar to orders and which engaged in additional religious exercises along with the practice of the official religious rites (such as the required prayers, fasting, etc.).⁵ In most cases, only the leaders of the Sufi communities had a more intensive knowledge of Islam. However, Sufism always has had an effect on folk Islam and the Islam of the intellectuals, and has influenced a considerable portion of Muslims.

Staat, Politik und Recht, Kultur und Religion, Munich, 1984/1996¹.

⁴ See on this Rudolf Kriss and Hubert Kriss-Heinrich, *Volks Glaube im Bereich des Islam*, 2 vols., Wiesbaden, 1960 and 1962. But also educated Muslims sometimes practise folkislam.

⁵ See, for example, Annemarie Schimmel, *Eine Einführung in die islamische Mystik*, Munich, 2000.

Islam and the Challenge of Modernity

This traditional threefold division in the religious-intellectual spectrum has changed completely in the last 200 years. A fundamental reason for this change is the clash of the Islamic world with the philosophies, cultures, and forms of government that have developed step by step in Europe since the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Since the High Middle Ages, in which science and theology had great opportunities for development, more and more stagnation and decline pervaded the world of Islam, while Europe from 1500 on experienced an unexpected awakening into the modern world. Europe experienced a great explosion of population and in education that then made it possible for European countries to bring large parts of the Islamic world under their political control and under their intellectual influence.

The Islamic world at first did not have the power to engage in the conflict with the dominant Europeans, but, from the middle of the nineteenth century, intellectual and political resistance was stirring everywhere. Today, we stand before the result of this long struggle. It shows that the world of Islam has become even more diverse than it already was earlier.

European-trained Muslims took up the ideas of the Enlightenment with enthusiasm. Their intention was to curb the influence of Islam in the area of personal piety and to emancipate society from Islam, in order to enable the world of Islam to move closer to the modern world. In the process, some developed into Muslim humanists, others into Muslim socialists, and still others into Muslim nationalists. It can be said in quite general terms that

the nationalist and socialists movements dominated from ca. 1900 to ca. 1970. Muslim humanists were to be found above all among professors and writers.

The Development of Islamism

The Islamism dominant on the surface today has its roots in the so-called “Reform Islam” that was founded in the second half of the nineteenth century by Muslim intellectuals.⁶ On the one hand, these intellectuals wanted to get behind ossified tradition and back to Islamic roots. On the other hand, they advocated a consciously rationalistic and, in so far as this went, modern Islam. They wanted to prove that Islam and modern scientific thought were not opposed to each other, and wanted to see Islam applied to all areas of life. They advocated, thus, an ideal form of Islam and sought to bring about a reformation of the Islamic world “in root and branch”, that is, in the political structures, too.

In the twentieth century, politically-thinking Reform Muslims went a step further. They did not content themselves with the promotion of Reform Islam, but rather founded communities in which a pure form of Islam was to be lived. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood came into being; in Pakistan, the Jamat-e Islami (Islamic Communities) were founded. Their thinkers developed Reform Islam into an ideological system with a claim upon political power. The intent was to change the entire Muslim society in this sense and to lead it back to true Islam. Islamism became more and more a revolutionary movement, but the

methods for attaining its goals remained controversial. The majority of Islamists pursue a peaceful revolution through the means of moral persuasion (sermons, distribution of texts), exemplary conduct (support of the poor), and the exploitation of all legitimate political ways and means (the demand for seats in Parliament, among others).

The extremists among the Islamists are not content with this. They do not respect the monopoly on the use of power in their respective states and justify their armed terrorist struggle by citing the example of Muhammad. They explain their conduct by proclaiming that Muhammad, with Allah’s permission, conducted war against the “unbelievers”. In their view, all Muslims who do not live in a consistent Islamic manner also are unbelievers, as well, of course, as all non-Muslims. In addition, the liberal West, with its secular culture, is considered to be especially ungodly and, for this reason, the chief enemy.

A Confused Diversity

In the last decades, the ideas propagated by Islamism have influenced broad portions of Islamic societies. The sphere of “educated Islam” has grown enormously thanks to compulsory education and the explosion in instruction. Many conventionally educated orthodox Muslims could not escape the influence of Islamism because it dominates many training institutions and mosques. The Sufi communities, too, which traditionally were to a great extent non-political, have been influenced in part by political Islamism. The sphere of folk Islam has receded. Whereas women earlier were the refuge of the Islamic folk tradition, it

⁶ See on this Tilman Nagel, *Geschichte der islamischen Theologie*, Munich, 1994, especially Chap. IX: „Islam als Ideologie“.

is the case today that educated Muslim women turn rather to Islamic ideas.

Of course, the dividing lines between all of the tendencies mentioned here are not at all clear-cut, so that we have quite a confusing picture before us. To be taken into consideration is also the fact that many people are easily influenced by the media and that, for this reason, large portions of the Islamic population follow first one particular current trend and then switch to others. Only through free elections and independent opinion polls – both are hardly conceivable at the present time in Islamic countries – could one really establish which currents are predominant at present and what percentage of each population is to be assigned to a particular Islamic tendency. All estimates, therefore, are to be considered with a certain measure of caution.

The Inner Conflict in Islam in the Muslim View

In the general Islamic view, Islam is neither a church nor one of many religions, but rather the only possible way for the human being to relate to the one God, Allah. In this view, every human being carries within him- or herself the natural tendency to be a Muslim. Thus, all human beings since Adam have been Muslims, in so far as they did not worship other gods besides Allah. Islam, as is said, merely was completed by the revelations sent to Muhammad by Allah.

According to the Koran, the community of Muslims, the umma, is “the best community that has come into being among human beings. [It] commands what is right, forbids what is wrong, and

believes in God”(Surah 3:110).⁷ Many Muslims therefore, consider the numerous schisms, conflicts, wars, and doctrinal disputes as a catastrophe that really should not occur. The reality frequently did not correspond in any way to the Koranic ideal of unity and brotherhood. In the Middle Ages, numerous works appeared about the schisms within Islam, and the different “sects” were described in detail.⁸ The one or the other groups was judged as “unbelieving” according to the standpoint of each author. For example, the perhaps most famous Islamic theologian, al-Ghazali (died 1111 AD), for whom the unity of the Sunni congregation was a concern, criticized his theologian colleagues because they branded opponents as “unbelievers” because of minor differences of opinion. This shows that, in his time, there was a strong rivalry between legal and theological schools within the Sunni community.⁹

In regard to the unity of Islam, there have always been two opposing endeavors. The harmony and unity within their individual spheres of Islam was of importance to most Sunni scholars and also to the representatives of Shiite state Islam in Iran. All “innovations” were suspect to them (the Arabic term for “innovation”, *bid'a*, also means “heresy”) because these innovations lead to schisms. For a minority, on the other hand, the “pure

⁷ Translation from the German translation by R. Paret, *Der Koran*, Stuttgart, 2001⁸.

⁸ The most well known in the West is: al-Shahrastāni, *al-milal wa-l-nihal*, German translation by Th. Haarbrücker, *Religionsparteien und Philosophenschule*, 2 vols., Halle, 1850/51.

⁹ W. Montgomery Watt and Michael Marmura, *Der Islam*, II. Politische Entwicklungen und theologische Konzepte, *Die Religionen der Menschheit*, Vol. 25,2, Stuttgart et al., 1985, p. 318.

doctrine” as they understood it was most important. This school frequently tended toward separation and radicalism. There have been these tendencies toward radicalism within the Sunni community as well as, and especially, within Shiite Islam.

We find representatives of both schools today, too. The scholars rooted in the tradition warn against radicalism and urge moderation, understanding, and a cautious adaptation to modernity. For them, revolutionary Islam, let alone terrorism, is an outrage. The radicals, on the other hand, strive for a “pure” Islam like that which Muhammad, in their belief, created in Medina. For them, all moder-

ates are traitors, hypocrites, and opportunists.

Islam will have to continue to live with its schisms, ruptures, and various schools of thought. Today, it is hard to say in which direction Islam will develop. Non-Muslims do well to look closely and not to succumb to stereotyped images of Islam – whether of a supposedly peaceful Islam in general, or of a generally belligerent Islam. The regard for our Muslim fellow human beings requires that we do not overlook the diversity and contrary tendencies within Islam.

„Islam“ ist nicht gleich „Islam“: Sunnismus und Schiismus im Vergleich

Christine Schirrmacher

<i>Sunniten</i>	<i>Schiiten</i>
1. Sunniten vertreten, dass der Herrscher der muslimischen Gemeinschaft aus dem Stamm Muhammads kommen müsse, dem Stamm der Quraysch. Zudem müsse er von der Gemeinschaft gewählt und bestätigt werden. Der rechtmäßige Herrscher ist der Kalif, der die Scharia aufrichtet und seinen Untertanen ein Leben nach ihren Geboten ermöglicht. Er ist Richter und Heerführer und bringt das Gesetz Gottes zur Anwendung, besitzt jedoch keine Lehrautorität.	1. Schiiten vertreten, dass nur ein direkter Verwandter Muhammads der rechtmäßige Führer der muslimischen Gemeinschaft sein könne. Der rechtmäßige Herrscher ist der Imam, ein religiöser Führer, kein weltlicher Herrscher. Er lebt heute „in der Verborgenheit“ und erteilt von dort aus Weisungen. Er besitzt die oberste Lehrautorität, er ist unfehlbar und sündlos. Eine schiitische Überlieferung lautet: <i>„Wer den Imam seiner Zeit nicht kennt, stirbt den Tod eines Ungläubigen“</i>
2. Sunniten erwarten am Ende der Zeiten die Wiederkunft Jesu, der in der Umayyaden-Moschee in Damaskus oder im Felsendom in Jerusalem als islamischer Prophet auf die Erde zurückkehren wird.	2. Schiiten erwarten am Ende der Zeiten die Wiederkunft des Imams, der seit dem 10. Jahrhundert n. Chr. in der Verborgenheit lebt.