Reformation as a General Ideal Type: 
A Comparative Outline*

Mohammad Nafissi

Abstract
This article pursues two specific and entwined objectives. It accounts for the absence of a general concept of reformation in Max Weber’s sociology of religion, and demonstrates the need for one and supplies it through a comparative analysis of Islam as a ‘reform-prone’ Abrahamic religion.

Keywords: Christianity, Democracy, Islam, Max Weber, Reformation.

Following the popular and scholarly consensus in western Europe, modernist Muslim reformers in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries drew on Protestantism as a source of inspiration and legitimation.1 In recent decades, the quest for an Islamic reformation has

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been turned on its head by two concomitant developments. First, the failure so far of a Muslim Luther and/or the Middle-Eastern middle classes to achieve the expected modernizing breakthrough. Secondly, the rise of what appears as an Islamic ‘counter reformation’ without a preceding local reformation, but apparently driven by opposition to the ‘modernizing’ consequences of its imported Christian variant. Understandably this has rekindled the interest in what may be called a post-modern Islamic reformation. The contributors to the ensuing debate seem generally comfortable with assuming that all concerned have the same operational concept of reformation from which an Islamic reformation may be unproblematically derived. In so far as that is the case, the concept in question is plausibly taken to arise from the experience of Protestantism. On closer scrutiny, however, both the nature of the Protestant case and the very usefulness of the concept of reformation for understanding old and new varieties of Islam remain in dispute.

Thus, on the one side, Robin Wright views Islamic reformation as over a century old and roughly similar to the Christian one in its motives and goals, and as attempting to ‘reconcile Islam and modernity by creating a worldview that is compatible with both’. On the other side, Abdou Filali-Ansary insists that

the updating of religious conceptions should be understood not in terms of Reformation that occurred in sixteenth-century Christian Europe...
The reformation is a singular event in history, linked to a particular environment... It cannot, as some observers are suggesting nowadays, be ‘replicated’ in the context of another religion and under twentieth-century conditions.

This debate is mediated by a broader one over the causes of under-development and development. At the broadest and much polemically reduced approximation, the ideationalists, primordialists, ‘orientalists’ or ‘internalists’ explain the wretched conditions of the Middle East by emphasizing the role of Islam and its resistance to reform. For their materialist, instrumentalist or ‘externalist’ opponents, however, this is mistaking the effect for the cause. From this vantage point, Islam (or Islams) is essentially a dependent variable shaped or instrumentalized

by socioeconomic and geo-political factors and actors wherein the
causes of the Muslim world’s tragic predicament may be found.¹⁴
Accordingly, for Bernard Lewis Islam has been a major cause of the
Muslim world’s decline but now ‘it may be that the Muslims, having
contracted a Christian illness, will consider a Christian remedy, that is
to say, the separation of religion and the state’. However, as ‘alas, there
is little sign’ that Muslims are doing so,⁵ we might either go on hoping
against experience or recognize that in the Middle East the real choice
is between a fundamentalism that attributes ‘all evil to the abandon-
ment of the divine heritage of Islam…[and] secular democracy, best
embodied in the Turkish Republic founded by Kemal Ataturk’.

Whereas for Lewis in the unavoidable absence of an Islamic refor-
mation the only realistic option is a Kemalist marginalization, if not
elimination of Islam, for Abdelwahab El-Affendi ‘an “Islamic Refor-
mation” is neither necessary nor sufficient for enabling Muslims to
build stable and consensual political institutions… Like the Christian
Reformation before it, it would more likely be a dauntingly divisive
and bloody affair.’ The process found missing in Lewis and appa-
rently described as reformation is, in El-Afendi’s view, taking place
through pragmatic ‘pro-democracy’ coalition building in various Mus-
lime countries, from Turkey and Tunisia to Malaysia and Pakistan.

These differences should suffice to indicate the need for a more
critical conceptualization of reformation in general, and the Islamic
reformation in particular, if only in order to ensure that the partici-
pants in the associated debates are talking about the same things
before setting out to address and perhaps overcome any substantive
differences that may remain. In the following I draw on both above
mentioned approaches to develop a general ideal type of reformation
based on (a) the ‘primordial’ religious world-views and the ‘charis-

¹⁴ I have examined the orientalism deba te in ‘Reframing Orientalism: Weber and
Islam’, Economy and Society 27.1 (1998), pp. 97-118. Although here I assume, use, and
develop the argument of this article, my view of Weber’s contributions and Islam itself
has evolved in the light of further research as well as reconsidering from the per-
spective of reformation.

⁵ B. Lewis, ‘Historical Overview’, in Diamond et al., World Religions, pp. 168-79
(178).

⁶ B. Lewis, What Went Wrong? The Clash between Islam and Modernity (Oxford:

212-17 (216-17). It is notable that the contributions of Wright, Filali-Ansary, Lewis and
El-Affendi were all originally published in the Journal of Democracy.

matic’ golden ages in which they originate, (b) the changing socio-economic and political contexts (or actors and factors) that favour or exclude particular agendas articulated by religious specialists in the process of ‘routinization’ or re-formation of these sacred legacies, and (c) the hierocracy or the organization and authority claims of these specialists. Focused on and deployed in the analysis of the orthodox, Sunni Islam, this ideal type is intended to satisfy three conditions. First, that it is capacious enough to accommodate Islam (and other religions) as well as Christianity and Protestantism. Secondly, that it is sufficiently determinate to allow the specification of the Islamic aspects of an Islamic reformation. This is another way of saying that it is intended to be recognizably Islamic once presented to the exponents of most, if not all, Islamic tendencies. Thirdly, that it demonstrates its dynamic usefulness in causal explanations of substantive questions such as the decline of Islamicate, the stalled ‘modernization’ of the Middle-Eastern states or the rise and prospects of political Islams.

Grappling with these questions is, of course, above all a Weberian affliction and Weber’s own work variously draws on both the ideationalist as well as materialist approaches. Indeed, I argue that Weber stopped short of developing a generic ideal type of reformation because, in agreement with the ideationalists, he found that the Islamic world-view and that of various ‘eastern’ religions precluded reformation in the sense of producing the kind of fundamental transformation that he attributed to Calvinism. Moreover, in consonance with the materialist prognosis, he concluded that, in any case, the ascendancy of rational capitalism had made the whole project redundant. Rational capitalist modernization, in his view, marginalized unreformed religions to the point of sociological and historical insig-

8. Here orthodoxy refers to the four surviving Sunni schools of law whose generally convergent interpretation of revelation and Islamic law is examined below. However, as G.R. Hawting, who uses the term, notes, orthodoxy is ‘an ambiguous term since there is no centralised authority in Islam to say what is and what is not orthodox’. See Hawting, The First Dynasty of Islam (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 6. The reasons for and the responses to this absence are discussed below. An examination of Shi‘i Islam forms another part of the larger project which includes the present study.

9. See M. Hodgson, The Venture of Islam (Chicago: Chicago University Press 1974), I, pp. 57-60, for a discussion of this and other cognate terms. Hodgson reserves the term Islamicate for what is generally denoted as Islamic civilization or culture and Islamdom as the ‘society that carries that culture’ (p. 58). Finding Islamdom unpalatable, I use Islamicate to stand for Muslim society (or societies) as well as the civilization permeated by Sunni Islam.
nificance. My exercise in this article is an attempt to go beyond these conclusions by reconsidering them in the light of the recent scholarship on Islam as well the historical developments outside Weber’s purview or post-dating his death.

Religious world-views in a comparative perspective

A hallmark of Weber’s thought and the Weberian sociology of religion has been the emphasis on the autonomous role played in shaping the historical trajectories of various civilizations by world-views arising in the inaugural phase of religious traditions. The neglected flip side of this approach is that not all religious world-views (and their institutional embodiments) lend themselves equally to change or that the various changes advocated by particular claimants to religious authority have equally significant impacts on their societies. Accordingly, the Abrahamic religions have been distinguished as ‘historical’ or what, for our purposes here, may be called ‘reform-prone’. Addressing the problem of suffering, termed ‘theodicy’ by Weber and considered central to the formation of religious world-views, all major religions offer an explanation containing the promise and the means of salvation or reconciliation.10 Notwithstanding the many differences between Hinduism and Buddhism both insist on an unchanging and harmonious reality, the access to which is radically individualized and, regardless of how many lifetimes it may take, immediate. In crude terms, there is no cosmological, historical or sociological gap between existence as it is lived and moral expectations whose elimination would entail collective action and/or divine intervention. In ‘eastern’ religions (and in many varieties of ‘western’ mysticism), there are therefore ‘golden individuals’, the holy men or ascetic virtuousi, whose example, whether ethically mediated or ritualized, may be followed on the path to overcome suffering, but there is no ethically compelling ‘golden age’. What has to be overcome, in other words, is centred on the individual’s failures (misperception of the ultimate reality, succumbing to worldly temptations, non-observance of sacred practices). In contrast, the Abrahamic tradition arises out of the gap engendered by repeated and multiple ‘falls’ from a variety of ideal states, the paradise, the ancient Jewish community ruled by prophet-kings, the early church, the Islamic state of Mohammad and his rightly guided successors.

This world-view entails a dynamic trajectory through collective as well as individual struggles to recover the lost ground and thereby hasten or prepare for the shared moment of ultimate judgment and, God willing, eternal bliss. It is the Jews as a community that enter into and break the many covenants with Yahweh and are sent into exile or saved from slavery or engage in war and conquest and ultimately settle for being God’s stateless but chosen people. The church is an all embracing community of faith embodying as well as pre-figuring the unity of the spiritual and temporal; whereas Muslims, as a potentially universal community, are called upon to command right and forbid wrong, to resort to both coercion and persuasion, and to achieve this-and other-worldly salvation. Thus, in broadest comparative terms and long before Protestantism, the Abrahamic religions already shared the defining condition of reform-prone religions, namely a dynamic ethic shaped by a mobilizing and legitimizing world-view that registered a profound dissatisfaction with the world as it is.

This distinction between the world-views of acceptance and transformation is grounded in Weber’s sociology of religion. The difficulty arises when he appears to exclude Islam, early and medieval Christianity, as well as the religions of China and India as being unable to generate reformation. This is reflected in his characterization of Christ as ‘primarily a magician’ or Christianity as ‘the second great religion of world rejection’ after Hinduism. Protestantism, in contrast, is represented not so much as a re-form of Catholicism as a revolutionary break traceable to ancient Judaism with its ‘transcendental and inscrutable God’ and from this perspective, Christianity is seen as ‘a regression in the course of Western rationalism’. This approach is informed by what Weber described in his methodological essays as cultural significance. This guides the selection of material from an otherwise infinite reality for the construction of objects of scholarly

investigation and their respective ideal types. In this case, if we take Weber’s object as the rise of ‘rational capitalism’, he turned for an explanation to Calvinism and its final elimination of all ‘magical’ avenues to salvation in favour of ascetic mastery in worldly callings; characteristics analogous to ancient Judaism’s rejection of magic and the manipulation of divine will. Against this a broader conception of modernity that included, for example, egalitarian universality could equally have gone directly to the magic-ridden Christianity, which overcame, in Weber’s own words, all ‘ethnic and national barriers’ and specifically Judaism’s ‘national delimitation’.14

In The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism Weber advances his conception of reformation by treating medieval Christianity and Protestantism as independent variables and attempts to show the traditionalizing impact of Catholic ideas, and the revolutionary impact of Calvinism in particular, on economic relations. More or less the same exercise is then performed with regard to other world religions in his subsequent studies of other world religions. But the two comparisons are not of the same order. Although an independent variable when looked at from within western Christian tradition, Protestantism will be seen as dependent on Catholicism and sharing many of its features when the perspective turns to comparing the developmental trajectory of western Europe and other civilizations. So to the question why Protestant areas were economically more dynamic than the regions in which Catholicism prevailed, Calvinist anxiety and individualization may form part of the answer. But if the question is why the Protestant societies modernized whereas the Muslim, or Chinese, or Indian ones remained in grip of their distinct varieties of ‘traditionalism’, the answer cannot simply be because of Protestantism, as Weber at times assumed.15 Protestant Europe was itself a product of Catholic Europe, and even after the schism it functioned in an environment shaped by Catholicism and shared or developed many of its features such as universalism, egalitarianism and rational bureaucratic organization.16 This in turn points to a conception of

16. Contrary to his stated intentions in The Religion of China, Weber never quite managed to conduct a controlled experiment that showed either that ‘comparison of ‘material’ conditions yielded no decisive distinction between Chinese and western
modernity and rationalism that is far broader than the sanctification of accumulation and continuous economic activity.

Again Weber himself implies this when, for example, in *The Religion of China*, the comparative reference point extends beyond ‘Puritanism’ to Christianity or even more broadly to ‘occidental’ religions. The ‘Author’s Introduction’ to the collected essays in the sociology of religion goes further and more clearly in this direction. It is one of Weber’s very last completed writings and it broadens the scope of rationalization beyond Calvinism, Christianity and the sphere of religion to Greco-Roman cultural developments. From this ‘universal history’ perspective, the Reformation appears as but one turning point among many preceding ones that conditioned and made it possible, and it is not the all important breakthrough without which western Europe may have reached at best the levels of rationalization achieved by China or India. For comparative purposes and for the construction of reformation’s ideal type this means working with a wider conception of modernity and its religious presuppositions than obtains from its Protestant variant or from an economically anchored interpretation of this variant. This entails not only retaining Catholicism as an already evolved form, which made possible and mediated the Protestant reform, but also, I shall argue, points to a reconsideration of the role assigned to Islam by Weber.

*Islam and the evolutionary re-formation of the Abrahamic tradition*

In view of Mohammad’s explicit reform of Christianity precisely through discarding the magical legacy of early and medieval Christianity, a systematic study of Islam should have been ‘the final and most perfect foil for illustrating the validity of the Protestant ethic thesis’. Whether such a comparative study would have validated, societies in terms of propensity for capitalist development’ or that therefore ‘the decisive contrast [was] between Confucian values and the ascetic protestant ethic’, *The Religion of China*, pp. 248-49.


19. W. Swatos, ‘Islam and Capitalism: A Weberian Perspective on Resurgence’, in R. Roberts (ed.), *Religion and the Transformation of Capitalism: Comparative Approaches* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 50. The fragmentary nature of Weber’s comments on Islam or the fact that they lack ‘the sometimes painful care that characterizes, for instance, his essays his essays on Hinduism and Buddhism’ is evident and widely noted (ibid.). But a prior question arises from the fact that Weber did not start or
undermined, or revised the Protestant thesis, however, is a key question that remains to be answered. This is not just because Weber did not produce a systematic study of Islam to match his studies of other world religions, but also because his comments on Islam neglect its rationalizing advances. In fact, he appears to go in the opposite direction, by presenting Islam as a warrior religion with an approach to wealth, status, power, gender, and ethics ‘diametrically opposed’ to Puritanism,20 and so disqualifying it as a ‘religion of salvation’ with strong Jewish and Christian roots.21 Is Weber right in taking this divergent approach to Islam or is it that, as with Catholicism, Islam’s role and promise is seen through the narrow prism of Protestant reformation and consequently its reformist advances and potential are ignored? According to Rodinson and Turner, Weber is ‘hopelessly incorrect’ on this point, while Swatos, Huff, and Schluchtcher have all found Weber’s view broadly defensible.22 A key to the resolution of this dispute may be found in examining the ‘essentially political character [that] marked all the chief ordinances of Islam’, which, in Weber’s view, is the main source of its failure as a rationalizing religion.23

For Weber, the fateful reversal in Islam takes place with Mohammad’s move from Mecca to Medina. In Mecca, the ‘eschatological religion of Mohammad developed in pietistic urban conventicles which displayed a tendency to withdraw from the world’. In ‘Medina, and in the evolution of the early Islamic communities’, however, ‘the religion was transformed from its pristine form into a national Arabic warrior religion, and even later into a religion with very strong status emphasis’.24 Put simply, from the standpoint of his preoccupation complete his study of the Abrahamic tradition before moving on the comparatively remoter cases of China and India.

24. Weber, Economy and Society, pp. 623-24. The distinction between the Meccan and Medinan phases of prophecy (and the Koranic revelations) has long been the subject of reflection and debate among Muslim thinkers. An impressive example is A. An-Naim’s approach to Islamic reformation, which privileges Koran’s Meccan chapters as the lasting and universal essence of Islam. An-Naim, Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights, and International Law (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse
with Protestantism and the rise of capitalism, Weber locates Islam’s limitation precisely in that fusion of state and religion that almost all Muslims (and non-Muslims) see, with greater or lesser clarity, as the hallmark of (ideal) Islam. Weber, and his divided followers, are both wrong and right. Islam’s political turn was a major rationalizing advance within the Abrahamic religious tradition. However, Weber is broadly right in that this came at significant historical costs including the booty, slavery, and hedonism of the ‘warrior religion’ of patrimonial or, as Muslims have preferred to call them, usurpatory (al-ja’ir) rulers.

The centrepiece of the Islamic reform of Judaism and Christianity was a historical agenda that synthesized them into what can be accurately described as a Judeo-Christianity that anticipated Protestantism in some areas and went beyond it at least in one crucial respect. Mohammad did not deny the ministries of Moses and Jesus, but claimed to have been sent to purify the corrupted Judaism and Christianity of the time. Jesus was a prophet, but to worship him as divine was precisely the mark of pagan magic, ignorance, and neglect of the one supreme God that had sent Mohammad, and all the preceding prophets. Virgin birth had taken place, as had the healings and other miracles, but these were demonstrations of divine power rather than signs of Christ’s divinity. Allah was absolutely transcendent, and if this is a mark of the Protestant Reformation’s rationalizing break with magical Christianity, then Islam’s consistency in this regard was greater than both ancient Judaism and Puritanism itself. The God of Islam overcame the wrath and jealousy of Yahweh and had no need of the twists and turns of a Lutheran theology of the cross to explain the apparent setbacks of Christ’s first mission on earth. Following Weber and filling the gaps in Weber’s fragmentary comments, Schluchter contrasts ‘the double God’ (Old and New Testament) of Calvinism with the ‘merciful heavenly father’ of early Christianity, the ‘great’ Absolute Allah and the wrathful transcendence of Yahweh.25 It is true that Allah is not double in the sense of the rather uneasy juxtaposition of Yahweh and heavenly Father. But this is because the Koran goes further than Calvinism in integrating the two. Every Koranic chapter

University Press, 1992). I recognize his democratic interpretation of Islam as, at the most general level, probably the only viable reform agenda in the modern world, but do not find the theological and hermeneutical basis of the use made of the Meccan and Medinan chapters in arguing his case convincing.

is introduced in the name of ‘God, the merciful, the compassionate’ whose emergent inclusive and egalitarian spirit permeates historical practice. At the same time, the same God is strict in the enforcement of the largely Jewish law and does not flinch over beheading hundreds of ‘infidels’ and ‘hypocrites’, if not the three thousand ‘brother, friend and neighbour’ killed by the Levites on Yahweh’s command.

This combination of spiritualist compassion and law, or what Ibn Khaldun calls coercion and persuasion, that permeates both the Koran and the less trivial ‘reports’ (hadith) of Mohammad’s life, are the lasting cornerstones of the Islamic reform of Abrahamic monotheism. The central focus that condenses the multi-layered Islamic message is the golden age fusion of the temporal and spiritual authority that realizes the centuries-old millenarian Jewish longing for the age of Saul, David, and Solomon, when Israelites were united under a single prophet king. Judaism, as Weber observed, ‘never in theory rejected the state and its coercion but, on the contrary, expected in the Messiah their own masterful political ruler, an expectation that was sustained at least until the time of the destruction of the Temple by Hadrian’. Mohammad, however, fulfils this expectation by extending the imme-


diate constituency of Yahweh, in line with Christian universalism in its theological and actual Roman-Catholic imperial form, to humanity as a whole. The completed task is at best left half done by Christianity as a consequence of the indefinite postponement of Christ’s second coming. Achievements as vast as the rise of the Catholic Church with its charisma of office, scope, and continuity, or Rome’s conversion to Christianity, were not enough to settle the question theologically or developmentally. Mohammad, the historical prophet-ruler, shifted the whole matter onto a new plane by claiming divine backing for completing Christ’s mission as a political project. This infusion of mundane politics with sacred energy and mission parallels the Puritanism that transformed economic relations. It also offers a more consistent basis for political action than the Puritan revolutionaries and their descendants could find in Christianity. As a religion of both worldly success and other worldly salvation, Islam cannot escape the failures of Islamicate. Once recognized, these must be accounted for and overcome, however long that may take.

Thus what has to be explained is not so much the increasing Islamic activism in the past two centuries, but the relative quietism of mainstream Sunni Islam in both the medieval and the modern periods. And the assumed break, noted by Weber and others, between the spiritualist universalism of the Mecca and political particularism of Medina is not the best starting point, even though it recalls the unity of state and religion that for long has been implicated as the major obstacle to Islamicate’s development. Without Medina, it is likely that Islam would have remained a sect among others on the margins of the Roman and Persian empires with a more or less defined Jewish and/or Christian identity. The fusion of Meccan and Medinan missions marked Islam as a distinct Abrahamic religion and infused it with a dynamism that overran Persia and much of the Byzantine territories and gave rise to an expansive empire and civilization. It was this new imperial context that favoured a form of routinized Islam which eventually achieved hegemony by decoupling religion and state and thus reversing Mohammad’s political development of Judeo-Christianity.

The brief, proto-democratic, reign of the rightly guided caliphs which separated Mohammad’s 21-year mission from the still continuing era of the usurpatory rulers has made this break between the golden age and routinized Islam doubly significant.31 This period,

universally venerated by Muslims, extends the Islamic golden age and divides into a necessarily theocratic phase presided over by the last divinely appointed prophet and a human phase in which the ordinary believers face the task of political self-organization without the benefit of direct guidance from prophets, monarchs, clerics, saints, or even the hope of a future saviour. Herein lies a ‘primordialist’ key to the resolution of the major dilemma (the incompatibility of secular democracy and a necessarily theocratic mainstream Islam) in primordialist accounts of Islam, which also illuminates the alternative legitimizing claims embedded in the contemporary fundamentalist and modernist agendas for an Islamic reformation. All, critical historians and social scientists as well as Muslim reformers or indeed the orthodoxy, may agree that Islam, in its most sacred moment, united state and religion (or began without the distinction and with an undifferentiated polity) and that the faithful therefore ideally would strive to maintain or restore this unity. The real dispute should be over the form that it could or should take in the absence of a living prophet.

By claiming that he was the seal of the prophets and excluding any basis in faith for faith in charismatic saints and saviors or miraculous intercession of any sort, and by refusing to name a successor or even a mode of succession, Mohammad left the shape and nature of the Muslim community to the community itself.

Press, 1997) for a particularly valuable study of the early caliphate and the disputes over Mohammad’s succession. It is notable that the ‘elections’ of the first four caliphs were of a ‘tribal’ kind where the choice between the candidates was never brought to open voting (or acquired democratic electoral mechanisms), but was arrived at through informal consensus.


34. Koran, 33:40: ‘Mohammad is the father of no man among you. He is the apostle of God and the seal of prophets.’
rudimentary forms, almost every form of rule was considered in the second, prophetless, phase of the golden age (Mohammad’s death in 632 and Ali’s assassination in 661). The plurality of credible claimants in the second phase of the Islamic golden age made the political community the ultimate arbiter; God’s collective caliph, in electing the Prophet’s deputy, created the executive caliph. The widely noted hadith, ‘my community never falls into error’, may have in fact been fabricated to underpin this development. It was thus not so much the early caliphs who were rightly guided, as the community that appointed them and fulfilled the function discharged by God in appointing the Prophet. The polity in question may be described as a theo-democracy (as Abul Ala Mawdudi argued both in the sense that all the participants referred to Koranic injunctions and drew inspiration from their memory of the Prophet’s reign), but crucially no single individual or faction could or did monopolize the theocratic element. On the contrary, the community was allowed and shown to be profoundly political in the pluralism of the agendas that competed for ascendancy in the absence of a single overriding authority.

An early Islamic democracy, however informal and elementary in its mechanisms or flawed by disputed impositions such as limiting caliphate to Quraysh lineage, is thus not a figment of modern reformers’ westernized imagination. Seen from this angle, rather than lacking ethical anchor or rational thrust, the politics and polity of the human phase of the Islamic golden age anticipate the modern democratically integrated orders. But, then, the break with this phase was as inescapable as its unfolding was dramatic and its duration brief. This period lasted about three decades and the conditions of possibility of its revival did not resurface until the nineteenth century, and then under the impact of contacts with the West.

Environmental pressures and the anti-evolutionary routinization of Islam

The discussion so far has focused on religious world-views and the extent to which they may be considered reform-prone. But Weber’s apparent reluctance to develop an ideal type of reformation resulted also from the conviction that rational capitalism had, in effect, dis-

placed the reformist movements as the main driver of change everywhere. This is most tellingly indicated in a crucial passage in the concluding part of PESC. Initially conceived as a polemical response to ‘one-sided’ materialism and ever since its publication generally seen as the key idealist text in Weber’s oeuvre, it does, however, follow Marx in the crucial assumption that once established in some corner of the world, capitalism moves in all directions with the force of a self-expanding system:

...when...asceticism was carried out of monastic cells into everyday life, and began to dominate worldly morality, it did its part in building the tremendous cosmos of the modern economic order. This order is now bound to the technical and economic conditions of machine production which today determine the lives of all individuals who are born into this mechanism, not only those directly concerned with economic acquisition, with irresistible force...victorious capitalism since it rests on mechanical foundations, needs its [religious asceticism’s] support no longer.36

Taken seriously, this makes the famous dispute redundant before it even began insofar as it concerned the nature and dynamic trajectory of capitalism as a developed system rather than its historical rise, over which the debate continues between Weberians and others as well as within the Weberian camp. Here Weber seems to concede that once rooted in its own rationalizing grounds, capitalism superseded its religious basis and original impetus. It is thus in the historical realm that Weber breaks rank with Marxism and finds in the Protestant reformation modern rational capitalism’s initial driving force and counters Marx’s original accumulation of ‘physical capital’ with what may be called the original accumulation of spiritual capital. The promise and possibility of reformation as the basis of the new historical track is then displaced by the dynamics of a science-based rationalizing economy and polity that marginalizes religious traditions through secular modernization. This could be taken as the rationale for developing a historically unique real type of reformation based on the singular experience of Protestantism rather than a general ideal type open to deployment in the analysis of other religions. It also explains Weber’s limited approach to these religions. These are ultimately found wanting in relation to what they were not, that is Puritanism, and not what they were or could become in the unavoidable light or shadow of the Protestant and other European breakthroughs.

However, in order to extend the debate about reformation, we do not have to see all recent conflicts as a manifestation of civilizational clashes, consider the rise of political religion as evidence of rampant desecularization, give primacy to Confucian values in explaining the high growth rates of East Asian economies, or succumb to the relativistic temptations of postmodernism. All our ideal type requires is that an old and still generally recognized hallmark of Weberian sociology such as the causal efficacy of religious and other belief systems is retained in the face of the apparent reductionism of Weber’s own analysis of modern capitalism. This implies that, although in a vastly different context, an Islamic reformation remains a possibility of some historical significance and a reasonable ground to develop and deploy an ideal type that reaches beyond Protestantism. But this aim should not be pursued by discarding the wisdom of the ‘Marxian’ Weber. That would be tantamount to ignoring the environmental pressures and changes that variously shape the substance and fate of reformist movements. This is a universal condition and applies to all movements, religious or not. Specific and contingent contexts set contemporary reformist movements apart from Protestant reformation, as we saw Filali-Ansary emphasize at the outset. As a pre-modern movement, Protestantism was oblivious to its own unintended, modernizing consequences. Our ideal type incorporates historical context as a feasibility condition as well as an ensemble of non-religious factors.

37. The point can be put even more modestly and noncontroversially by hypothesizing that religion still plays an autonomous or structural role in hindering (or promoting) the institutionalization of modernity in certain societies. This should be acceptable even to steadfast advocates of the secularization thesis such as Steve Bruce who may insist that God is dead, but concede this is only or fully the case in Western countries. Bruce, *God Is Dead: Secularisation in the West* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2002), pp. 37-38. For a much stronger and broader claim about the current role of religion see P. Berger, ‘The Desecularisation of the World: A Global Overview’, in *The Desecularisation of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Washington, DC: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1999), pp. 1-18; cf. Bruce, ‘The Curious Case of the Unnecessary Recantation: Berger and Secularization’, in L. Woodhead (ed.), *Berger on Religion* (London: Routledge, 2001), pp. 87-100. My assumptions and argument are broadly consonant with the approach and findings of P. Norris and R. Inglehart, *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) although their discussion of Muslim states (pp. 133-55) does not address the issues examined here.

38. Here the Marxian-Weberian secularization theory is extended rather than negated. See E. Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason, and Religion* (London: Routledge, 1992), pp. 80-96. Modernity is universal and universalizing, but universalization is not homogenization. Other civilizational, regional, national and local levels and
This is another way of saying that the prevailing political and socio-economic conditions can enhance, eliminate, or reduce the chances of reformist movements and their sustained hegemony or reformation breakthrough. The historical conditions of feasibility can explain the fate of the past reformist projects and aid the prediction of the outcomes of the present reformist movements.

Islam has remained reform-prone throughout its history. But the projects of reform and renewal pursued by Kharijites and other dissident sects or reformist figures from within the orthodox ranks, such as Ibn Taymiyyah, proved unsustainable under the emergent imperial conditions, in the same way that Anabaptism was doomed in the sixteenth century and beyond. Only the Sunni camp effectively met the feasibility condition engendered by the imperial context, even though in the long run the ensuing routinization depleted its own (and Islamicate’s) evolutionary potential.

In the eyes of the devout, whether Sunni mainstream or various dissident sects, dynastic rule was a corruption of true faith, modelled on the Persian and Byzantine empires, that the Prophet and his pious successors had warned and fought against. What eventually proved overriding was that an egalitarian community of faith was no longer sustainable in an expansive imperial setting. This was the historical cost of Islamic polity’s precocity. The limited but genuine political mediations of the first three decades after the Prophet’s death could not be consolidated into a republican polis. It took Athens more than a millennium to evolve into its democratic stage; the Islamic state in less than two decades was transformed from a small city-state with limited political and cultural resources to a fast expanding world empire. No empire, including the Athenian and Roman (or the British and American for that matter), has yet to rest on empire-wide democratic foundations. The sectarian strife, civil wars, and assassinations that informed the abdication of Hassan, Ali’s son and the last elected caliph, reinforced the case for dilution of ideological purity with the requirements of hierarchic stability and order. Reliance on the models of imperial rule in conquered territories was in this context unavoidable. If Christianity had to accommodate the impenetrable Roman

corresponding levels of analysis remain, albeit in variously modified forms. It is the articulation of these that multiplies modernity. See S. Eisenstadt, ‘Multiple Modernities in an Age of Globalisation’, in idem, Comparative Civilizations and Multiple Modernities (2 vols.; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2003), II, pp. 519-60. But, as with reformations and reformation, modernities, too, must share a common, modern, genus.

Empire before christianizing it, Islam was compelled to accommodate itself to an empire of its own creation.

Repelled by instability and disorder and unconvinced by the dissident sects, the circles of learned and pious urbanites that eventually constituted the Sunni orthodoxy faced a simple problem that had no simple solution: how to reconcile the superior power of the sword with their own role as the guardians of the golden age legacy that rested on the unity of sword and word. From a comparative perspective, they could have aimed at an autonomous religious agency, along the general lines of Western Christianity, or accepted a subordinate position in a Caesaro-papist state as in eastern Christianity (or Confucianism) and as indeed the Umayyad caliphs eventually demanded by presenting themselves initially as God’s (rather than the Prophet’s) caliphs. Constrained by the legacy of the golden age, neither choice was clear cut: one involved accepting the dis-integration of the Islamic state along political and religious lines, the other perhaps the even greater blasphemy of idolizing the usurpatory caliphs. The subsequent two centuries, spanning the Umayyad dynasty and the flourishing and unified century of Abbasid rule, saw the rise of the four surviving Sunni schools of law and their growing convergence over an ingenious combination of both options in sharia, which ‘has remained at the heart of Islam in all its forms’. Sharia has thus defined what has been variously called classical, orthodox, routinized, medieval, traditional or tradionist, Sunni Islam, and we might have described it as the embodiment of Islam’s first reformation, had it not been for the fact that the term is now associated with ‘modernizing’ breakthroughs.

In retrospect, the anti-evolutionary essence of the Sunni (or ‘tradionist’) reform lay in the relatively successful insistence on minimizing the role of all living human agents in interpreting and representing and therefore developing the legacy of the golden age. It is widely agreed that the defining turn in the gradual consolidation of the

41. Following most scholars of Islam, ‘tradionist’, rather than traditional is used here as both an analytical and literal translation of the hegemonic Sunnism as it underlines its nature as a traditionalizing break rather than a mere traditional continuity in the usual path dependent sense of the term.
orthodoxy was the so-called humanist inquisition. It started in 833 CE and was presided over by three successive Abbasid caliphs and their rationalist (mu’tazilite) allies against the traditionists who, led by Ibn Hanbal, the eponymous founder of the fourth and last surviving orthodox school of law, resisted the imposition of the doctrine of ‘createdness’ of the Koran. At the theological level, by insisting on the timelessness of the Koran as the word of God, Ibn Hanbal enhanced its status as the primordial as well as the final revelation and insured ‘Islam’ against the admission of any contingency, particularity and development even before it arose as a distinct religion. As a political theory, this thoroughly anti-evolutionary agenda revolved around whether the rulers (and by implication all other Muslims including the clerisy) had any legislative powers or were at most executors of sharia. In politico-religious practice, it was or became above all about confining the tyrannical reach of the caliphs to the political sphere and ensuring that in all other matters pertaining to family, civil society, and religion, sharia (and, specifically, its Sunni guardians) reigned supreme. At the same time the emergent sharia facilitated the pursuit of what generally united the caliphs and the orthodoxy, namely the suppression of the dissident sectors opposing both in the name of the prophet’s offspring (the Shia) or the community (certain Kharijites).

By the reign of Ma’mun (813–33), the Abbasid caliph who instigated the inquisition, the prophet-like authority to act as God’s deputies claimed by the early Umayyad’s caliphs was increasingly confined within the boundaries of the patrimonial state.42 By championing the rationalist theologians and compelling their traditionists (ahl al-sunna or ahl al-hadith) opponents to follow suit, Ma’mun was re-fusing the state and the religious community and reclaiming an authority that, in the emerging orthodox view, was no longer on offer. That he did so by promoting and relying on the rationalist translators, disseminators, and assimilators of Greek, Persian, Christian, and Indian thought reflected his own personal interests as well as the extent to which the cosmopolitan articulation of Islam (as a religion and as a civilization) had advanced in the two centuries of a prophetless world. But it also indicated the orthodoxy’s advances in consolidating its own alternative vision of a distinct socioreligious sphere, a civil society, governed by religious law.

42. On the context within which Ma’mun started the inquisition and asserted his authority in the religious sphere, see D. Gutas, Greek Thought, Arabic Culture (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 75-81, 161-63.
Although eventually marginalized, the rationalists’ claim to represent Islam was and remains strong. With Mohammad the age of revelation had come to an end. He was the seal of prophets but not the seal of philosophers, theologians, scientists, or ordinary Muslims endowed with free will to command right, forbid wrong, and seek justice and salvation. The Koran was the last direct revelation, but seeking to understand God’s creations or God’s will through other means predated the Koran and would continue alongside it until the end of time. The Koranic injunction that ‘there is no compulsion in religion’ is redundant without a plurality of religious traditions and, as the first two hundred years of Islam showed, sects. To choose, free recourse to standards that are independent of, even if embodied in, the religion in question was essential. Without free will and choice, sin, piety, and striving for justice and salvation would be untenable. In Majid Fakhry’s summary of the rationalist position

God graciously recognizes human kind’s ability to discriminate between right and wrong through the natural light of reason, even before the ‘advent of revelation’… Revelation, as embodied in the Koran, simply confirms people’s moral insights, so to speak, and guards them against error. More specifically, such revelation spells out in detail the kind of moral and religious obligations incumbent upon individuals, and its ordinances are, in fact, divine ‘graces’ dispensed to humanity ‘so that those who perish may perish knowingly and those who live might live knowingly’ (Koran 8-42).43

As the inquisition shows, individual rationalists were as capable of constraining the free will of their fellow Muslims as the many traditionists who encouraged the persecution of the rationalists and dissident thinkers before and long after Ibn Hanbal’s incarceration. The point, however, remains that the rationalist discourse and principles were pluralistic and Janus faced, capable of accommodating revelation, whilst maintaining a relatively open and evolutionary trajectory that could draw on other sources.

In contrast, the traditionists considered the inclusion of ‘pagan reason’, or Christian and other ‘redundant’ religious traditions (reliant on corrupted versions of the primordial and now restored Abrahamic revelation), as blasphemous innovations. Indeed, they made the very term innovation (bid’a) synonymous with blasphemy to safeguard

the legacy of the prophet both against rival traditions and the tyrannical reach of caliphs. Thus whereas for most modern scholars the era of Ma‘mun and his immediate predecessors and successors is the golden age of Islam,⁴⁴ the orthodoxy remembers it as Ibn Hanbal’s mihna (‘inquisition’ or suffering) in recognition of his unflinching commitment to what became the orthodoxy through years of incarceration and persecution until the retreat and conversion of caliph Al-Mutawakkil (847–61 CE) to the traditionist cause.⁴⁵ This cause stands out for its opposition to the one common characteristic of the otherwise distinct agendas of the caliphate, the varieties of rationalists (including many of the jurists considered ahl al-‘ra’y, or exponents of personal opinion) and dissident Kharijites and Shi‘i sects, namely, the insistence on some living authority — reason, caliph, Imam, or the community — for regulating the conduct of believers. Instead, the traditionists elevated and drew on the authority of the dead Prophet. In effect they divinized Mohammad as a full-fledged exemplary prophet and reconstructed his life as a source of guidance for living Muslims alongside and beyond the Koran.

The initially spontaneous collection, verification, and classification of the hadith (reports) of the Prophet’s words and deeds which created his tradition or sunna made this move possible. In the course of two centuries between Mohammad’s death and Ibn Hanbal’s mihna, thousands of reports were classified according to their reliability by the specialist reporters (ahl al-hadith). ‘Revelation’ was thus extended to resolve the Koranic ambiguities and abrogations and fill the gaps revealed by the absence of the Prophet and the exigencies of an expanding empire. The vast number of reports more than compensated for the Koran’s relatively few law-like statements and made credible the claim that as the seal of the prophets, Mohammad had left the believers a comprehensive, self-sufficient, and lasting legacy that guaranteed both salvation and worldly success. That many reports were convenient fabrications or incorporated pre-Islamic custom did not undermine their usefulness. On the contrary, the very possibility of fabrication created the science of hadith and the classification of the

Prophet’s reports according to degrees of reliability and thus further enhanced the role of the specialists.

In opposition to both extreme traditionism and rationalism, the ‘moderate’ traditionism of al-Shafei (the eponymous founder of the third orthodox school and the single most important contributor to the final formulation of sharia) and Ibn Hanbal proved to be the winning contribution by offering a realistic synthesis in which reason (in the form of *ijtihad* or the use of reason to issue new rulings on the basis of revelation) is retained, but strictly subordinated to the extended revelation and rendered largely impotent by thousands of atomized *hadith*. This approach allowed rational mediation, without which no functioning legal system is possible, and affirmed a limited but crucial role for religious scholars and so eliciting their general support against the extremists at the very ‘dead end’ of the traditionalist spectrum who saw no further role for human mediation once the collection, certification, and codification of *hadith* and sharia were completed.46

In any case, by denying that the Koran was created, Ibn Hanbal ‘affirmed the transcendent authority of the written word as opposed to human interpreters… The Caliph was merely the executor of the Islamic community, and not the source of its beliefs.’47 This can be put differently by saying that the hegemonic scholars and jurists presented Muslims with the choice of Mohammad’s legacy, the caliphs, the Shi’i Imams (and their deputies), the Sufi masters, and human reason as their ultimate guide, and eventually received the right answer from the one agency that mattered above all, the caliphs. Following Ibn Hanbal’s victory, according to Ira Lapidus,

Islam would evolve in full autonomy of the state under the aegis of the religious teachers… The further evolution of state institutions and cosmopolitan forms of culture, and the evolution of Muslim religious institutions, values and practices would proceed along separate lines.48

46. As an indication of the weight given to the prophet’s purported tradition over reason and the cardinal Koranic principles ultimately accessible through rational examination (and consensus or acceptance of ‘legitimate’ difference), even by moderate traditionists, this ruling of Shafei is telling: ‘a hadith even if it be “isolated” and transmitted by only one transmissional chain must be accepted as binding because it provided an anchoring point in the midst of what seemed to be an interminable conflict of opinion’. Rahman, *Islam and Modernity*, p. 26.


But this victory sealed not just the ‘full autonomy of Islam’. It also signaled the full unravelling of Islam’s reform of Christianity. Long before the explicit formulation of the ‘Sunni realist’ version of might is right,49 the hero and grand progenitor of Islamic fundamentalism Ibn Hanbal had himself given up the political ambitions of the golden age and ‘was ready to render unto Caesar the things which were Caesar’s’.50 What he was unable to countenance was not political interference in the religious sphere, but the demand for his personal propagation of false belief. In this light it is thus unsurprising that the supposedly comprehensive law of the supposedly most political of all the world religions said ‘virtually nothing about “constitutional” or administrative law’ while ‘it was most precise in regards to matters of personal status—marriage and divorce, bequests and inheritance’.51

This decapitation of Islam as a ‘political’ religion was the culmination of a process set in motion by the aforementioned political expansion of the city-state of Medina into a universal empire ‘usurped’ by dynastic caliphs. The failure to dislodge what may be called the usurpatory polity even when the original Umayyad dynasty was overthrown (and in many respects reformed) by the Abbasids showed to

Faber & Faber, 1991), p. 69. Although in agreement with Lapidus, Crone warns that ‘the scholars did not proceed to draw up a clear line of demarcation between their own and the caliph’s jurisdiction’. Crone, Medieval Islamic Political Thought, p. 132. This is precisely what is to be expected from the present account since clarity would have made explicit and permanent the abandonment of the (political) legacy of the golden age.


50. Cook, Commanding Right, p. 113; S. Al-Azm, ‘Is Islam Secularizable?’.

51. Hourani, History, p. 161. According to Bernard Lewis, however, most Muslims ‘would agree that God is concerned with politics and this belief is confirmed and sustained by sharia, the holy law, which deals extensively with the acquisition and exercise of power, the nature of legitimacy and authority, the duties of ruler and subject and exercise of power, the nature of legitimacy and authority, the duties of ruler and subject, in a word with what we in the West would call constitutional law and political philosophy’, The Crisis of Islam: Holy War and Unholy Terror (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003), p. 6. Cook reinforces in very concrete terms Hourani’s overall conclusion in his recent study of the principle of ‘commanding right and forbidding good’. His fullest case study is on the Hanabalite approach to the principle, and he shows not only how all the recorded cases brought before Ibn Hanbal concerned drinking, sexual, and other personal transgressions, but that the latter systematically avoids contact with state officials whom he considers liable to commit greater wrong in punishing the wrongdoer. Commanding Right, ch. 5; see also Zubaida, Law, ch. 1.
all realistic enough to see it that might is right, however normatively illegitimate. This happened because the only real alternatives, anarchy and external (Christian) and internal heresies, were convincingly presented as even less legitimate. The second best solution was thus to come to terms with the second best rulers and try to consolidate a differentiated socio-religious sphere. This would preserve the legacy of the first, sacred, and therefore intrinsically legitimate, phase of the golden age.

At the same time, this traditionalist routinization/reform of Islam in the Abassid period maintained continuity with the golden age without which the motivations of its architects and their success will not be fully understandable. Notwithstanding its lopsided focus on personal and commercial matters, in mainstream sharia Islam was presented as an organic whole fusing and ruling all aspects of life from before birth to after burial with the ruler privileged as the ‘commander of the faithful’. Normatively, the whole traditionalist edifice was thus built on the everlasting self-sufficiency of Mohammad’s legacy. This underpins the commonplace view of Islam as a quasi-totalitarian unity of spiritual-religious and temporal-political realms emphasized by both totalitarian fundamentalists and anti-totalitarian orientalists and at the centre of their civilizational clashes.\(^52\) This is not untrue, but it is a misleading half-truth. For sharia’s totalizing agenda, as we saw, was aborted particularly in its political aspect and retained some force largely at the discursive and normative levels. Indeed, the traditionalist project was designed to block the institutionalization of the caliphate as the sole, quasi-totalitarian, ‘caesaro-papist’ voice of Islam. For the traditionalists, in Patricia Crone’s words

> found it deeply troublesome that government tended to be synonymous with tyranny, but they were not prepared to abandon civilization for the world of tribes, and they saw no other way of avoiding it… [They] thus sacrificed the political autonomy of the first Muslims in order to preserve their social solidarity.\(^53\)

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\(^{52}\) See S. Huntington, \textit{Clash}, pp. 210-18: ‘The underlying problem for the west is not Islamic fundamentalism. It is Islam…’ (p. 217). The notion of clash of civilizations, as Huntington acknowledges, was first coined and developed by Bernard Lewis in his analysis of political Islam. It is, however, notable that in contrast to Lewis, Huntington considers Kemalism among the failed attempts at ‘civilizational shifting’ and generally counsels against projects of westernization which in his view can only produce ‘torn countries’, pp. 139-49. Lewis and Huntington may be said to represent respectively the offensive and defensive politics of the clash thesis.

\(^{53}\) Crone, \textit{Medieval Islamic Political Thought}, p. 140. This conclusion appears to contradict the widely held view that in ‘classical Islam there was no distinction
The articulation of these two, normative and political, realities in pre-modern Islamicate engender a third level of analysis with historically telling results. In the millennium separating the inquisition and the encounters with the modernized West in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which exposed the long-term decline of Muslim empires and eventually destroyed them, mainstream Islam reverted back to a form of quasi-Christianity, whether in a differentiated form approaching Catholicism as in the period following the confrontations just explored, or as a department of the state going beyond the Eastern Orthodoxy as during the later Ottoman rule. The price of the religious redundancy of the caliphs was the political redundancy of the sharia between Church and state… The distinction… so deeply rooted in Christendom, did not exist in Islam, and in classical Arabic, as well as in other languages which derive their intellectual and political vocabulary from classical Arabic, there were no pair words corresponding to spiritual and temporal, lay and ecclesiastical, religious and secular.’ Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 2-3. Notwithstanding Lewis’ apparent neglect of the opposition between the state and religious community reflected in binary notions such as *urf and shar’ā*, *din* and *dovlat* or *showkat*, or indeed caliph/Imam and sultan, and the history and debates that engendered them, he (and the fundamentalists and the mainstream Muslim scholars who would welcome this account of ‘true Islam’) appears to reflect and emphasize the continued significance of the ideal of an Islamic state traceable to the golden age of Mohammad and his immediate successors. Except that in Lewis’ account both the democratic dimension claimed here and by modernist reformists for the reign of the rightly guided caliphs and the subsequent (historical though not discursive) separation of religion and state is ignored in favour of an apparently seamless continuity linking the first caliphs to the Ottoman rulers. Lewis, *The Crisis of Islam*, p. xvi. Recently, Lewis has acknowledged that ‘jurists and other Muslim writers on politics have long recognised a distinction between state and religion, between the affairs of this world and those of the next’, but goes on to insist that ‘this in no way corresponds to the dichotomy expressed in such Western pairs of terms as “spiritual” and “temporal” or “lay” and “ecclesiastical”. Conceptually, this dichotomy simply did not arise.’ ‘A Historical Overview’, p. 178. The apparent inconsistency in Lewis’ views may be overcome by following the present analysis. Religion and the dynastic states did become separated, but this separation was not explicitly acknowledged or pursued systematically or led to the emergence of a Christianized Islam given, among other factors, the weight of golden age Islam. See, however, M. Zaman, *Religion and Politics under the Early Abbasids: The Emergence of the Proto-Sunni Elite* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1997) who concludes his study by insisting that ‘if there ever was a divorce of religion and state, it did not occur in, nor was it the product of the early Abbasid times’, p. 213. See also Al-Azm’s incisive comments in ‘Is Islam Secularisable?’ on Gellner’s claim about the incompatibility of Islam and secularization, which in this respect, is consonant with Lewis’ position. Here I attempt to go beyond al-Azm’s opposition between what he calls the ‘eternal’, the ‘historical’, and secularized Islam while accommodating his periodization of Islamic history.
and its custodians. Yet, in view of the golden age legacy, neither side could explicitly give up the claim to the other’s territory. What was being transacted was a compromise, a Faustian bargain, whereby the caliph generally keeps clear of a de-politicized but socially grounded religion and in return receives socioreligious legitimacy and more or less free reign to act as unaccountably as he wishes, provided that he does not openly flout sharia or is overthrown by a more powerful contender.54

In this transformed context, both the caliphate and the hierocracy made use of notions that best fit the second phase of the golden age. The caliphs, and later the sultans, thus continued with the practice of receiving the pledge of allegiance (beya’) of the notables as a mark of the community’s approval of their de facto power while the jurists reframed and deployed community (umma), consensus (ijma), consultation (shura), and public interest (maslaha) in describing their own position and rulings. In the democratic phase, consensus was exercised by the community of Muslims through the caliph and in consultation with the notables who elected him in the first place. In the new context, a double displacement took place. The question of legitimate succession addressed in the undifferentiated politico-religious sphere of the democratic phase is now reconsidered in the differentiated legal-religious field with the jurists projecting themselves both as a (new) community with the authority to pronounce on religious matters and the representatives of the Muslim community (umma) as a whole. Islam thus came to be identified with sharia, or Islamic law, and the scholarly consensus over its content came to be ‘considered a third source of law after the Koran and the sunna and represented the ultimate sanctioning authority which guaranteed the infallibility of those positive legal rulings and methodological principles that are universally agreed upon by Sunni scholars’.55 In this way, the infallibility attributed to the Prophet, and purportedly by him to the community and conflictually manifested in the second phase was appropriated by the hierocracy.

54. See, however, S. Einsenstadt, ‘Civil Society, Public Sphere, the Myth of Oriental Despotism, and Political Dynamic in Islamic Societies’, in Comparative Civilizations, I, pp. 359-98.

55. W. Hallaq, Islamic Legal Theory (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 75. According to Hallaq, once consensus is reached even on the basis of solitary evidence (from Koran and sunna) it will trump other Koranic and sunna evidence (pp. 76-77).
From a comparative historical retrospective, the main historical cost of the traditionalist turn did not lie in the retreat to a quasi-Christian division of Islam. In the circumstances, developmentally, that was probably the best option on offer. Rather it arose from the fact that (1) it was never acknowledged by either side to the point of engendering productive stability, cooperation, or competition and (2) it was achieved at the cost of suppressing the hierocracy’s own evolutionary potential. Starting off as perhaps one of the purest examples of what John Hall has called, after the strong civil society grounded states of Western Europe, the ‘organic state’, the Islamic state came to exemplify the extreme, sultanist form of patrimonialism, a weak state cut off from its civil society and reliant on slaves that guarded the caliph/sultan and fought his battles and populated his harems as both concubines and the eunuch who linked them to their master and the outside world. This is the meeting point of sultanism and its associated ‘warrior religion’ of hedonism, slavery, and booty that, for Weber represented the historically significant and ethically depleted Islam. The critics of Weber who rightly criticize him for failing to take account of the scripturalist, urban, ethical Islam of the Sunni orthodoxy equally miss the extent to which this Islam paved the ground for the concomitant and overlapping rise of a ‘warrior religion’ by leaving to the caliphs the political power that should not have been theirs, or by denying to them (and themselves) the intellectual resources to put to ‘good’ use what had nevertheless become theirs.

The realism or quietism of the hierocracy and the marginalization of political thought never amounted to legitimation of the state as fully Islamic. This remained the case even when the Ottoman state absorbed the hierocracy as one of its departments and thus provided it with a formal hierarchy and organizational capacity that the religious establishment, true to its debilitating anti-rationalism, failed to achieve itself. Again in this instance too, what may appear as an Ottoman ‘caesaro-papism’ did not imply a shift to an Eastern Christian or Confucian trajectory. Arising to consolidate the divine kingship and overcome anarchy and war, the Confucian stance towards and role within the ‘caesaro-papist’ state was positive and cooperative. That Confucianism became the training ground for the servants of the

57. After all patriarchy and slavery and other anti-universalist positions are embedded in the Koran and the prophet’s tradition.
Chinese state was the realization of its original political objective. Confucianism’s rationalization of the state did not achieve the universalizing breakthrough seen in the West, but it helped entrench a strong state tradition that may in part explain the recent success of the so-called developmental states in the Chinese zone.

The imperial caliphate, representing a forced break with the foundational phase of Islam, never elicited the full trust and cooperation of ulama. Hereditary monarchy was the very sign of worldly arrogance and corruption against which the Muslims were called to jihad by the Prophet and the rightly guided caliphs. Rejection of lineage as the condition of rulership was part of the Sunni case against the Shi’i claim that the caliphate rightfully belonged to the direct offspring of Mohammad and Ali. It is telling that, however quietist, every one of the eponymous founders of the four orthodox schools of law was persecuted by the caliphate and spent some time incarcerated. As with the memory of the golden age, this too was never forgotten. Routinized Islam remained reform prone, even as it was denied and denied itself the opportunity to reform. It is only with the rise of nations and nationalism and the ascendancy of European nation-states that the reformers were provided with a model, an agency, and an opportunity to mobilize for the evolutionary recovery of the democratic phase of the golden age.

Reformation and religious organization

What is in question about Christianity or other religions is not just their differing world-views and their differing developmental potentiality but also the institutions that embed and advance them. Randall Collins has drawn attention to this by way of counterposing the idealism of PESC to a ‘mature’ socioeconomic or institutional phase in Weber’s thought culminating in General Economic History which does not even mention the doctrine of predestination and where ‘Weber pays a good deal more attention to Marxian themes than previously’. This Weber pursues a ‘predominantly institutional theory in which

58. However, most Sunni scholars, following the tradition established during the reign of the rightly guided caliphs and supported by various hadith, included Quraysh lineage among the conditions of caliphate. See Ibn Khaldun, Muqaddima, I, pp. 394-96; and Crone, Medieval Islamic Political Thought, pp. 224-26.
religious organization plays a key role in the rise of modern capitalism but especially in conjunction with particular forms of political organization'. Collins' approach is welcome insofar as it points to the form, in this case the Catholic Church, without which reform and Reformation would have been inconceivable or, at any rate, would have taken a different course.

At a most basic level of analysis, institutions are the forms of appearance and dissemination of ideas. From this angle, what may be called institutionalism is not identical with 'materialism' or socio-economic structures, or 'Marxian themes' as Collins seems to suggest, but can be accommodated more or less comfortably in both subjectivist and objectivist accounts of historical change. It is only at a further level of analysis that the different and changing forms of institutions entail the distinction between ideas and institutions.

The 'charismatic' phases of world religions remain crucial, contra Collins, not only for reformers but also in shaping the institutions he finds historically significant. The actual and scriptural separation of church and state, the example of Jesus and the Eucharist, all played significant parts in the formation and consolidation of an autonomous church; the Koranic injunctions or the sacred associations of Mohammad's state and its normative legacy, too, significantly shaped orthodox Islam. Institutions vary in degrees of complexity and sociological significance: from oral transmission reliant on memory within face-to-face networks, to written texts, to internally differentiated organizations and collective actors with the capacity and authority to maintain, propagate, and change ideas. Historically the Catholic Church has presented the most developed variant of religious institutionalization. Not only did it produce the agents of its own partial destruction through Reformation, but also its creation was, according to Collins, 'the main Weberian revolution, creating the institutional form within which capitalism could emerge'. The point can be broadened here to talk about Christendom's contribution to the rise of modernity, and it can be used more narrowly to suggest that the Catholic Church embodied a religious tradition with the authoritative capacity to reform itself. From this standpoint, the Protestant turn is seen as a contingent development that proved uncontrollable within

the church. However great the historic consequences of this break were, it should not obscure the dynamic record and ‘pre-modern’ characteristics of Catholicism. Herein lies another condition of reformation, the institutional capacity and authority to pursue a reform agenda.

Thanks, in part, to the sharp divide between the state and the Christian movement in its founding phase, Catholicism was able to constitute itself as an autonomous, active and inclusive agent in a differentiated spiritual realm. As such it contributed to the rise of Europe as a multi-actor civilization. What Collins calls the Catholic revolution was, from our vantage, above all about solving the problem of legitimate succession in Christianity. Western Christianity did so not merely by traditionalizing the legacy of Jesus and the apostolic period within the imperial context, but it also ensured the continuity of the charismatic or divine moment through the agency of the church and in the process established the world’s first extensive rational-bureaucratic organization. A key moment in this development is described by Weber’s notion of ‘office-charisma’ through which the church appropriated the authority of Jesus and apostles and thus went beyond patrimonial associations. By around 1050 CE, the papacy had the capacity and ideology to act as ‘the first bureaucratic state in modern times’ and start developing a centralised administrative organization to regulate affairs and settle disputes within the far-flung monasteries and churches of Christendom…. Its efforts to enforce peace within Europe among rival feudal lords, and to direct their energies outward on the Church’s behalf in crusades, were part of its attempt at theocracy. This attempt did not in the end prove successful, although it dominated European politics during the High Middle Ages. But what is most important from our viewpoint is the fact that Europe had a bureaucratized government that nevertheless had just the right degree of organizational decentralization within it to foster Weber’s institutional precondition for capitalism.

From a comparative standpoint, this development is fraught with irony. In its original form Christianity had a great many disadvantages which had seemingly slowed down or limited its advance but which in the longer run contributed to the evolutionary leap of west-

63. Weber, Economy and Society, pp. 1139-40; see also pp. 1163-68. For Weber this is the process that reaches its highest development in the Vatican Council of 1870, but its historical trajectory and impact clearly are traceable to early and medieval Christianity.

64. Collins, Weberian Sociological Theory, p. 49; emphasis in the original.
ern Christendom: from mysticism and the magical qualities of its early representations—including the divinity of Christ and the miracle of Eucharist which underpin the church’s office charisma—to the unshakable presence of pagan Rome and its role in the otherwise ‘irrational’ separation of church and state or even the promise of the second coming and its indefinite postponement which engendered some space for creative speculation and thought. Thus the church, while presuming magical rites, pacifism and world-rejection in its original outlook, eventually emerged as the first modern organization capable of continuous collective action. Rather than a collection of loosely and defensively allied imitators of Jesus, the Catholic Church organized itself as a collective actor embodying Christ, and thus retained the capacity to act as and on behalf of his kingdom. The reformist trajectory of the Abrahamic religions thereby found an institutional embodiment beyond the prophetic era. In time this allowed Catholicism, unlike Sunni Islam, to expand its reach and institutionally accommodate various theological tendencies and monastic orders. However corrupt or corrupting it may have seemed in view of this or that account of Jesus and early Christianity, and however traditionalizing from the standpoint of liberal capitalism, the Catholic Church retained the authority to speak for Christianity and to reform it.

The Reformation broke up the church and that is a historical fact, but that is not because the church was intrinsically devoid of the authoritative capacity to reform. On the contrary, Luther rose to question what we may call the church’s innovative abuse of its authority beyond anything that he could reconcile with the legacy of Jesus and the disciples. In short, the golden age of Christianity’s greater contextual constraints and lesser (worldly) ambitions created the space for the rise of a ‘second kingdom’ with its own self-governing rationalized hierarchy. Again in sharp contrast with the situation faced by the Muslim clerisy, there was no overriding compulsion to deny the legitimacy of the worldly kingdom, much less to curtail its (and consequently the church’s own) legislative and other developmental potentials in the name of the original and lasting unity of the two realms. The difference plays a part in giving Christendom an evolutionary potential that is altogether reinforced by the political and social conflicts that arose through the Reformation.

Mainstream Islam did not develop a church in this sense and this is an important part of the explanation for the failure of the reformists once Sunnism achieves hegemony. Some elements of a Weberian ideal
type of a church are found in orthodox Islam, but they do not combine to produce an institution with effective agency. For Weber, ‘four features characterize the emergence of a church out of a hierocracy’: 

(1) the rise of a professional priesthood removed from the ‘world’ with salaries, promotions, professional duties and a distinctive way of life; 
(2) claims to universal domination; that means hierocracy must at least have overcome household, sib and tribal ties, and of the church in the full sense of the word we speak only when ethnic and national barriers have been eliminated, hence after the levelling of all non-religious distinctions; (3) dogma and rites (kultus) must have been rationalized, recorded in holy scriptures, provided with commentaries and turned into objects of education as distinct from mere training in technical skills; (4) all of these features must occur in some compulsory organization. For the decisive fact is the separation of charisma from person and its linkage with an institution and particularly with the office; from this fact derives all the above features, which we find developed to different degrees of typicality.65

Weber concludes by noting that ‘in the full sense of the term, churches have arisen only in Islam and Lamaist Buddhism, apart from Christianity’.66 In view of his concerns with universality and the transformation of traditional and charismatic forms of authority through bureaucratic rationalization, the point of his ideal type and comparative reference to Islam is clear. Indeed, contra some of his other remarks about the quasi-feudal characteristics of Islam, it anticipates the emphasis placed on the ‘modernity’ of Islam by Gellner and others.67 However, ideal types are not true or false; they are more or less useful in the analysis of historical situations and questions. For our purposes, Weber’s ideal type of church must be further concretized to include the crucial difference that excludes the designation of Sunni hierocracy as a church in the full sense or as defined by the comparative perspective of the present discussion.

Compared to the Catholic Church, the Sunni hierocracy did not go beyond an acephalous patrimonial network with limited, traditionalist and traditionalizing, organizational agency. It remained without the competence to achieve internal unity and centralization required for positive or innovative collective action and authoritative reform. The comparatively stunted development of Islamic hierocracy was the

corollary of the orthodoxy’s view of Islam as a comprehensive, lasting and already completed system of law which had to be obeyed rather than developed and which rendered other forms of thought superfluous, if not blasphemous. At most, the learned could be relied upon for the purposes of clarifying the apparent ambiguities of revelation or extending the established rules to cases not specifically addressed therein. For these strictly limited purposes, the consensus of the learned was widely recognized but only achieved in the negative sense of excluding caliphs, rationalist theologians, the more radical exponents of ‘personal opinion’ (ahl al-ra’y), and others from the consensus-building process. But, even before the (disputed) closure of the gate of ijtihad,68 the religious establishment came very close to its own self-exclusion by, first, denying to itself any genuinely active agency on the same grounds used to deny it to others, and, second, by the failure to create any formal mechanism to establish actual consensus within, let alone between, the orthodox schools.

The intellectual and social resources at the disposal of the hierocracy were indeed great, but organized continuous collective action requires, among other things, a degree of instrumental creativity that was precluded by the turn to strict emulation of the Prophet’s sunna and the rejection of rationalism and, notwithstanding the more inclusive positions of al-Ghazali and others, even mysticism.69 Golden age Islam did not engender the demand or space for church because of its fusion of the spiritual and worldly realms.70 Nor did it offer a mechanism for consensus making beyond the confines of a small city-state or tribal traditions. This legacy handicapped the four surviving schools of law — the officially recognized pillars of the hierocracy — when the new differentiated context provided the ‘objective’ grounds for effective organization of the religious field. They did not achieve or indeed demand, together or separately, the corporate integration and ideational or organizational agency.

69. Ghazali’s ‘grand synthesis’ stopped with the inclusion of the matters of ‘heart’ and certain versions of mysticism but firmly rejected philosophical thought. The Sufi orders and the legal schools variously overlapped, but this was not pursued to an institutional or evolutionary intellectual accommodation.
70. Mohammad did not so much unite religion and state as establish them in a fused form. The emphasis on the unity of the two as the hallmark of Islam arises from their subsequent separation or in the context of Abrahamic religions and in comparison with Christianity.
In the absence of a golden age precedent, any demand for a differentiated hierocracy and a supreme religious authority would have met serious opposition, not least from the caliphs, who retained the title of the commander of the faithful. But this never had to be put to the test, precisely because in denying the rulers the authority to legislate, that is, to think independently, the hierocracy also refused it to itself. Herein lies a fundamental advantage of the state in its struggle against the religious establishment. In the person of the caliph/sultan the former achieved the unifying authoritative and reforming voice (in both regressive and progressive directions) that the orthodoxy never engendered. The separation of the religious community and the caliphate did create the space for a church, but the demand for it, even the thought of it, was curtailed. The Islamic hierocracy stopped far short of papacy as the price of theoretically denying to the caliphs what was practically theirs.

This decentralized fragmentation was, however, underpinned and overcompensated by a most centralized and sanctified scriptural tradition unique among world religions and ideologies. Centered on the Koran, an apparently singular and definitive text addressed in first person by God for all time, and the equally eternal and historically ‘authenticated’ legacy of the seal of the prophets, the legitimizing and authority-bestowing pull of the first phase of the golden age was overwhelming. The Koran and the sunna empowered their legalistic exponents as much as it traditionalized them. The orthodoxy may have failed to unite in one hierarchical organization, but it succeeded in transforming, disbanding, or absorbing hundreds of ‘geographical’ schools into only four generally mutually tolerant ‘personal’ schools. ‘In the history of this development’, according to George Makdisi, ‘there are two moments of great significance.’ First, the synthesis of revelation and reason by al-Shafei’s (820 CE) through which ‘living “tradition” of a given city [was replaced] with the tradition of the Prophet’71 and, second and decisively, Ibn Hanbal’s victory over the rationalists through and following which

schools of law change from geographical designation to the personal one. For the change into personally designated schools of law is in itself indicative of a rallying call of the traditionalists to emulate the prophet and his disciples. Just as the Prophet was the leader with followers, each school consisted of a leader, imam, with followers… When

attrition had taken its toll...the Hanbali school emerged as the seal of the schools of law.\textsuperscript{72}

The opportunity for acting as effective agents of change or responding constructively to change was thence minimized, but in return the longevity of the orthodoxy was ensured.\textsuperscript{73} This explains both the fact that the state has been the main pole of reform until today and the fact that the traditionalist hegemony over the religious community survived even the bureaucratic absorption of the hierocracy into the Ottoman state ruled over by sultans who until the last decades of the eighteenth century did not even claim the title of caliph.\textsuperscript{74} In sum, the Koran-sunna or the revelation as embodied in sharia functioned as a supreme centralizing institution that fulfilled the multiple requirements of ensuring the continuity of the golden age, separating and unifying the religious community under the otherwise institutionally divided leadership of the traditionalist jurists, protecting Islam from pagan corruption, and, in the given imperial circumstances, curtailing the power of tyrannical rulers.

The traditionalizing impact of the hierocracy’s passive guardianship of revelation is most clearly illuminated by the case of Sheikh Mohammad Abduh, generally credited as ‘the greatest of all modern Muslim reformers’.\textsuperscript{75} While his mentor and the founder of modernist reformism, Sayyid Jamal a-din Afghani, died dejected and under house arrest in Istanbul, Abduh ended up as the grand mufti of al-Azhar, the supposed equivalent of the papacy in Sunni Islam. If that were so, his rise would have been tantamount to the crowning of Jean Calvin as the pope. But Sunnism was not a church to have filtered Abduh through its hierarchical structure, resisted him as infidel, or provided him and his associates with an institutionalized agency to take over or split from. His elevation was first and foremost an act of state in bewilderingly changing times, rather than signifying a reformation or even a religious coup d’état. To this extent it was a mere reminder of the continuing organizational subordination of the hier-

\textsuperscript{72} Makdisi, \textit{The Rise of Colleges}, pp. 7, 9.

\textsuperscript{73} Even though ironically the Hanbalis have always insisted on \textit{ijtihad}, albeit in the highly restricted way that they understand it. Ibn Taymiyyah the great failed reformer and the widely assumed precursor of modern fundamentalism was a Hanbalite, as are the Saudi Wahhabis.

\textsuperscript{74} H. Enayat, \textit{Modern Islamic Political Thought} (London: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 52-53.

ocratic, long a characteristic of the Ottoman rule. Yet, as discussed above, this lack of organizational agency did not imply ideological or institutional subordination to political authority. As with the Ottoman sheikh-al Islam, the mufti of al-Azhar was not elected by the ulama, none of whom were obliged to follow these officeholders in their religious capacity. To be sure, the prestige of the al-Azhar office added to the exceptional learning of Abduh in both Islamic law and Western thought to result in changes in al-Azhar organization and curriculum, but much of these were subsequently reversed and the reformists’ influence remained ‘far greater among educated Muslims outside the ranks of professional men of religion’. This anticipates both the continuing ideological hegemony of the traditionalist Islam of Sunni ulama and jurists and their political marginalization even when fundamentalist reformists of Muslim Brotherhood and other movements rose to oppose modernism and secularism by insisting on traditions long championed by the former.

Conclusion

In view of the above, an ideal type of reformation with the following general characteristics may be outlined:

1. An evolutionary dimension that sustains or blocks alternative reform agendas in and through interaction with environmental conditions;
2. a reform-prone or world-challenging religious ethic or world-view;
3. a golden age associated with the charismatic phase of world religions that serves as a common reference point for determination and promotion of the reform program and mobilization of support;
4. an agency with the capacity and authority to differentiate and represent the religion in question and act as a reforming agent and/or produce agents of reformation;
5. fundamental change that, in contrast to marginal reform, transforms the mainstream variant of a religious tradition or

77. The contrast between Sunni hierocracy and Twelver Shiism, the closest Islam has come to producing a church, is underlined in the respective roles of Ayatollah al-Sistani and the still generally unknown Sunni clerics in Iraq at present.
gives rise to a historically significant alternative, but remains reformist in the sense that its exponents insist on purifying rather than replacing the status quo with a new faith. In the post-axial era that concerns us here, the change in question has come to refer to paving the religious ground for the rise and/or consolidation of modernity.

The above discussion was intended to demonstrate the usefulness of this ideal type as a set of interrelated concepts that accommodates and draws on the rival approaches to the historical sociology of religion. If so, it remains true to the inclusive spirit of Weber’s methodology, if not to the in any case ambiguous letter of his studies of world religions.

Condition 1 differentiates and links three overarching contexts. In the axial age, prophetic charisma licenses the creation of new religions or heretical transformation of the existing ones.78 Thus Judaism, Christianity, and Islam or Hinduism and Buddhism may be seen as (a) distinct religions, (b) reformation within a single tradition, or (c) heresies within the same tradition. As a modernizing breakthrough (condition 5), by definition and historically, reformation belongs to the premodern phase of the post-axial age when both the formation of new world religions and knowledge of the modernizing consequences of the reform agendas are ruled out. Saint Paul and other early Christians had no inkling of the evolutionary nature of the emerging church. Luther and Calvin probably would have pursued a different course had they been aware of the longer-term consequences of their break with the evolved church of St Peter and St Paul. The same applies to the triumph of the ‘moderate’ Sunnism of al-Shafei and Ibn Hanbal and their anti-evolutionary routinization/reform of the golden age Islam.

What marks out the Protestant reform as ‘the Reformation’ is of course the retrospective significance assigned to it by historical sciences rooted in the universalizing modernity that has dominated, penetrated, and radically transformed Islamicate and other parts of the world in the past two centuries. This points to the third and current context where the sequence reformation > modernity > modernization is, at one level, displaced and, at another level, complemented by modernity-modernization > reformation > (a new Islamic?) modernity. Reflexive, intrusive, and expansive modernity gives modern/

postmodern reform movements a self-conscious and an extra, externally shaped dimension that distinguishes them from premodern ones.

Mohammad’s new religion/reform recovered, rationalized, and realized the Judaic and Christian promise of a godly state. His success laid the ground for the consolidation of Islam as a religion of world mastery (condition 2) combining worldly and other-worldly salvation and provided it with a model, a golden age/order (condition 3) whose maintenance, recovery or development has been the legitimizing core and inspiration of alternative reform agendas. However, the very rationalizing closure and relative consistency and solidity of Mohammad’s legacy exceptionally constrained the resources and objectives of future Sunni reformers compared to Christian or even Shii ones. The prophetic golden age was followed by the period of rightly guided caliphs during which time the prophetic authority was transferred to the community, which in turn bestowed it on the elected caliph (condition 4). The success of the Muslim community in this period to create an expansive empire, on the one hand, and internal political conflict and instability, on the other, favoured the consolidation of the Umayyad’s dynastic caliphate (condition 1). Considered illegitimate by other factions and subsequent generations of Muslims for having usurped the position of elected caliphs, the rise of the Umayyads in effect extended the golden age to include a second, human, phase of rightly guided democracy.

The democratic order associated with this phase has the characteristics of a historical utopia. In contrast to the hallowed and therefore irreproducible reign of the Prophet or the abstract speculative millenarian utopias, this order was human and historical and therefore replicable and serviceable as a concrete model for mobilization and reform. Yet it was rendered infeasible by the environmental constraints partly of its own making. Thus, all the rival agendas that arose in the wake of its collapse turned to the prophetic phase and in one form or another sought legitimacy by claiming the mantle of the Prophet and direct divine backing and to this extent were all blasphemous. The early Umayyad caliphs presented themselves as God’s caliphs, the Shia rallied around Ali and his uniquely infallible off-spring, the Sufi masters fused with and became vessels of the divine, and the orthodoxy entrenched itself by acting as the custodians of the


Prophet’s tradition. Appearing as the least blasphemous among the feasible alternatives and the most realistic of the dissenting agendas, the eventually hegemonic variant of Islam proved particularly debilitating in the long run.

The orthodox schools of law met the conflicting demands of continuity with the golden age, opposition to and reconciliation with the caliphate, by denying themselves the active role in the religious sphere that would have kept the reversal in Islam’s fortune to that achieved by Western Christianity or indeed by Eastern Christianity or Confucianism. First and foremost, mainstream Islam was denied a reforming agency or an agency in opposition to which reform projects could be sustained. The authority through which their hegemony was established was ‘final revelation’, and how could any fallible human actor begin or succeed in explicitly reforming that? This helps explain not only why the hierocracy failed to unite and create a church, but why its bureaucratic absorption in the Ottoman state was met with relatively little resistance whereas the claim that the Koran was created is considered such a decisive turning point in the history of Islam and Islamicate. The latter touched on the institutional core of the hierocracy, whereas the Sheikh al-Islam and his clerical and juridical subordinates were mere state appointees and in that capacity external to the religious community and the ulama that were the effective, but otherwise, passive guardians of revelation.

Furthermore, this explains the fact that throughout the medieval (and the modern) period, the state, that other (partially) successful claimant to the mantle of the Prophet, was the more active and dominant partner. Nevertheless, the Islamic state remained weak even compared with the Confucian and orthodox Christian states as it was denied the political approval and full intellectual and sociological resources of the orthodoxy while it was left to its own patrimonial devices in the political realm. In short, true to the intentions of its exponents, the traditionalist routinization/reform placed Islam on an anti-evolutionary track from which it is yet to be extricated. With its original evolutionary advances thus nullified, mainstream Islam was torn between a Christianity without a church to represent it and a caesaro-papist state without the effective support of the papacy, the orthodox patriarchate, or the Confucian mandarins. The permanent

80. The notable but marginalized exceptions were certain puritan Kharijite sects that insisted on an elective caliphate and the rationalists whose emphasis on reason and free will pointed to the possibility of new social orders.
tension between the quasi-totalitarian discourse of sharia and this torn reality of the Islamicate kept up the demand for reform while the anti-evolutionary and realistic stance of the orthodoxy frustrated it, until and indeed beyond the overwhelming evidence of the comprehensive European supremacy. ‘Of the three great Western monotheisms’, Islam had ended the axial age, in Gellner’s words, as ‘the one closest to modernity.’\(^8^1\) But it entered the modern age belatedly and the least prepared to deal with its consequences.

Yet modernity also engendered a dynamic environment and set of institutions that offered the Muslim reformers the opportunity to at last recover the golden age and re-fuse state and religion. Just as, in line with condition 1, the imperial context favoured the rise of dynastic caliphate and the contemporary or conquered imperial states (Persian and Byzantine) supplied the models and instruments of imperial rule, Western modernity demanded an overhaul of the Islamicate and the Islam that underpinned and permeated it. In bewildering contrast to the seventh century, however, the driver of change in the nineteenth century was an external conqueror whose combined power of ‘coercion and persuasion’ threatened to nullify Islam in its entirety through a universalizing advance that overshadowed Islamic conquests in its pace, scope, and depth. As conditions 2 and 3 indicate, other-worldly religions, whether the hierarchical Hinduism or the universalist Buddhism are prone to accommodation with worldly orders, whether of the ‘indigenous-traditional’ or ‘Western-modern’ types. Ironically, their other-worldliness equips them with a more or less convincing way of coping with hegemonic modernity, without necessarily compromising their distinguishing claims and characteristics. These can be retained as part of deeper and/or ritualized realities. The same is true of Confucianism from the other, worldly end of the spectrum. As an instrument of the divinized worldly power, Confucianism can serve different masters and more than one at the same time, from imperial and ancestral to modern parties and capitalist firms.

The encounter with Western modernity was and remains a uniquely difficult experience for all but the mystical varieties of Islam precisely because of its promise of both temporal and spiritual salvation. If, as Weber argued, for the Calvinists, worldly success was taken as a sign of belonging to the saved, for Muslims the success of Islamicate was the proof that they belonged to the right religion. By committing itself

\(^8^1\) Gellner, *Muslim Society*, p. 7.
directly to this world as well as the next, Islam asks the believers and the non-believers (including the historians and social scientists) alike to judge it on the basis of its record (and prospects) in this world to which all have access whether or not they uphold it as a matter of faith or tradition. The ascendancy of Europe not only put this record in a light that demanded an Islamic reformation in and through re-politicization of Islam but displayed and/or supplied (as well denied through supporting repressive autocracies) the missing institutional means (parties and other political agencies and electoral mechanisms or indeed the ‘state nation’) to pursue it.

The ideal type outlined here suggests that both theocratic and democratic wings of political Islam represent religiously credible reformist agendas. By drawing on the first phase of the golden age, the former in effect aims to reform the orthodoxy by pursuing its frustrated totalitarian ambitions and at the least restore those elements of sharia made redundant by secular states. In contrast, the latter resumes the rationalist project to address the failures of the hegemonic traditionalists that aborted it. It thus turns to the human phase of the golden age to advocate a democratic state which can only be secular (in the sense of ‘neutral’ as between all religions and ideologies including different Islams) if it is to re-fuse the state and Islam in a way that at long last institutionalizes both the (democratic) hadith that only the community does not err and the (liberal) Koranic injunction that there should be no compulsion in religion. These sharply divergent agendas are based on ideal typically drawn world-views based on taking ‘the Islamists at their own word’.

82. Ironically, as Filali-Ansary notes, Sayyid Jamal a-din Afghani, the founding light of modernist Islam, is partly responsible for the equation of secularism with anti-religious atheism. ‘Muslims and Democracy’, pp. 154-55.

83. Olivier Roy makes the point in underlining the failure of fundamentalist Islam in terms of its own stated ambitions but what he considers its success to ‘laying the basis of greater democracy and secularization’. Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Umma (London: Hurst, 2004), pp. 80-81. See also his bleak assessment of the situation of ‘some progressive intellectuals’ who talk the democratic talk, p. 82. In examining political developments across the Muslim world, from South East Asia to North Africa, Vali Nasr comes to a conclusion similar to those of El-Affendi and Roy and questions the view that ‘democracy…should wait until liberalization via ideological and religious reform can blunt the Islamic threat’. Shaped above all by pragmatic politicians, competitive politics and development of independent capitalism, ‘Muslim democracy provides a model for pragmatic change…that will in turn be harbinger, not the follower, of more Islamic thought and practice’. ‘The Rise of “Muslim Democracy”’, Journal of Democracy 16.3 (2005), pp. 13-27 (17, 26). This conclusion tends to confirm
and more, their actual and varied carriers (from left wing intellectuals to right wing politicians) have been involved in variously conflicting, overlapping, competitive and evolving contexts, organizations, and movements the analysis of which belongs to another study.\textsuperscript{84}

the implied consequences of the intellectual and organizational self debilitation of the Sunni hierocracy which in the modern context is necessarily addressed by ‘lay’ actors and agencies. Moreover, his conception of ‘Muslim democracy’ is consonant with the view, found in An-Naim and suggested here, that secular democracy is the defining core of a logically and sociologically sustainable reform agenda.

84. For a preliminary discussion of some of these issues in view of the above ideal type see my ‘Reformation, Islam and Democracy’, pp. 431-37.

\textsuperscript{84}