

## BOOK REVIEWS

### Extended Review

*Religion and Education: Islamic and Christian Approaches*, edited by Syed Ali Ashraf and Paul H. Hirst. Cambridge: The Islamic Academy, 1994.

*Religion and Education: Islamic and Christian Approaches* is a compilation of papers presented in a series of public lectures and seminars on religion and education at the University of Cambridge between 1983 and 1989. Five of the authors are themselves academics at that institution, four of them in education and also Christian. Other authors include a Muslim social scientist in the U.S.A., a Muslim academic in earth sciences in Saudi Arabia, a Christian academic in English in England, a Christian academic in education in Northern Ireland, a Muslim academic in religious studies in England, a Christian minister in England, and a Muslim who is an education inspector in England. Thus, nine of the authors are academics, and five of them are educationalists. All share an impassioned interest in advocating religious education; all share a rejection of secular education; and all share a desire to **replace** the existing public, secular education with public religious education.

Syed Ali Ashraf, Paul H. Hirst, and Anwar Ibrahim provide the context for the papers in the Foreword, Preface, Introduction, Conclusion, and Appendix. These add immensely to the collection of papers, not only for novice readers in the field but also for people interested in education. The contrast of religious versus secularist tradition in education and some of the history of the debate within various Christian and Muslim communities about this are just two examples of this context which is useful to all readers.

Though advocates of secular public education will likely reject much of what these authors posit, I suspect that many will also agree with some of the criticisms made, not only of current education but of modernity itself. Thus, I will begin this review with what I think most readers will find useful. First of all, there is the reminder that until the early 20th century, religious institutions were the main providers of education, the holy book was the basis of the curriculum, and teachers either held religious office or were themselves deeply religious persons. This was so in the West as it was in most other parts of the world. In cases where the state assumed responsibility for education, this did not change the fact that the values underlying the curriculum and held by the teachers were religious ones.



With the increasing development and influence of science on the social sciences in the West, the hegemony of religious values was replaced with the hegemony of "value-free knowledge". Positivism and its relatives in academia permeated education and religious-based values were rejected as "unscientific", "irrelevant", and even "backward" in modern society. The general devaluing of spirituality and rise of unfettered materialism are decried by all the authors. Criticism of the "no limits to growth" and "keeping up with the Joneses" is increasingly appealing to secular educationalists, though decline in spirituality perhaps less so.

Nevertheless, alienation and anomie in modern society, particularly amongst youth, is a common theme in education and social science. Many in the North American aboriginal communities have rediscovered the importance of spirituality and are using it as a basis for healing. They provide an example of the importance of spirituality and the necessity of its expression in modern society. This example, however, is not provided in the readings, which focus solely on Christian and Muslim communities, primarily in England.

Along with and related to the rise of materialism and decline of spirituality is the loss of community and rise of self-centered individualism. The authors all lament this development and believe it is related to the rise of secularism and the demise of religious tradition. They assert that a religious-based educational system would not be humanistic, that is, it would be not human-centered. Rather, education would be God-centered. It would not promote individualism but a sense of belonging to a community. Morality and truth would be God-based; they would be eternal, universal and absolute, not situation-based, particularistic, temporal, and relative. Some of this debate exists between the so-called "modernists" and "post-modernists", though both sides are usually argued within a secularist world-view.

I suspect that most readers will agree with the following statement found on page 221:

*We were especially alive to the subtle ways in which materialistic and selfish attitudes can undermine a morally sensitive and spiritual appreciation of life, and how the responsibilities and obligations of a common citizenship can be forgotten in the pursuit of personal advancement of private gain. Compassion can too easily be sacrificed on the altar of efficiency.*

Somewhat related to the problem of materialism and individualism in modern societies, Syed Ali Ashraf (page 115) asserts that "...neither the capitalist, interest-controlled economic system nor the rigid regimentation of the Marxist economy and political system can be acceptable to a Muslim." Neither the laissez-faire free



[sic] market system of capitalism nor the centralized, bureaucratic Marxist [sic] system are acceptable as a basis for ordering society because their core values are antithetic to religious values. While I do not contest this assertion, I find it somewhat disconcerting to remember that capitalism was, in fact, initially founded upon Protestant Christian values. Perhaps the problem is that people, not God, were running the system, but I am not sure how we can get around this problem when discussing the organization of human societies.

Another point made by the authors with which many readers may agree is that much of what has been put forth as "secular" and "modern" is really Western. In fact, much of it is Anglo-Saxon and Protestant. Rather than being an unbiased, universal modernity, modernity is a new form of imperialism oppressing other cultural world-views. This is found to be problematic, especially given the multicultural make-up of Britain, and one could certainly add of Canada and the U.S.A.

On a global level, this is also problematic in terms of development paradigms, though the authors do not address this *per se*. Mention is made, however, of the contribution made, for example, by Edward Said's *Orientalism*, to unveiling negative Western stereotypes of non-Western societies and of religions other than Christianity. Unfair and destructive negative stereotypes of Islam in particular are addressed. I dare say that if the situation were reversed, that is if Christians were being negatively portrayed by Muslims, there would be a broader-based and louder outcry against such discrimination than what we witness today. In terms of multiculturalism and freedom of religion, this is an issue of considerable concern, especially to educators. Some of the readings provide readers with food for thought on this matter.

Other beliefs posited by the authors with which most readers would agree include the notions that human beings possess free will, have the capacity for both evil and good, that self-control and self-discipline are essential components of education, and that what is valuable in a society's history and cultural tradition should be passed on to younger generations. It is not, however, the common ground between advocates of secular versus religious education which is problematic. Thus, I will turn my attention to those points on which agreement is not likely to occur. Ultimately, creating a public system of education which accommodates all people in any particular society is not possible unless and until these disagreements are overcome. These are the issues, therefore, which require the most work in terms of both theory and practice.

The authors reject the secularist basis of studying *about* religions from a sceptical or agnostic view rather than from *within* a religious view of faith. They also challenge the exclusion of religion from the study of all other social institutions and of society in general. They argue that much is lost to the



development of individuals and to society. This is part of their criticism of the privileging of science in education, as in modern society. It is also the basis of their criticism of science undermining religion with its conceptualization of truth and knowledge as limited, relative, and human-centered.

While it is generally true that religious values are devalued or overlooked in much social science, there are some notable examples of religion being considered as a significant factor. The phenomenon of mass social movements closely linked to "liberation theology", particularly in Latin America, is an example. There is a very large body of social science research which focuses on the importance of religion in Latin America, particularly on the potential for religion to be a basis for progressive social change. Even an atheist like Margaret Randall acknowledges this in her writings about the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua.

Ilyas Ba-Yunus (p 124-125) points out that Muslims have been able to institutionalize religious values, citing the example of the Khurshid Ahmad's Policy Institute in Pakistan convincing the Government of Pakistan to establish the *Zakaah*.<sup>4</sup> The campaign for interest-free banking in many Muslim countries is another example.<sup>5</sup> With regard to education, Ba-Yunus provides the example of Al-Azhar University in Cairo, the oldest existing university in the world, and still the center of Islamic learning. Until the mid-1970's, Islam was the only subject of study at Al-Azhar. Several new faculties were opened during this period, including medicine, science, and commerce. This was done in a serious attempt to overcome the dichotomization of religion and other subjects, and to heed the militant Muslim insistence that the secular must be "Islamized."

Ilyas Ba-Yunus suggests on page 119 that references to "nature" in the educational system are unacceptable and must be replaced by "God". This, I suspect, would be strongly opposed by the majority of the population in Britain, as it would in Canada and the U.S.A. Probably only fundamentalist Christians would support such a move, but they are the minority of Christians. I would further add that there would also be significant opposition to this by Muslims in many Muslim countries, even if there is some support for it. This is a good example of how much the authors underestimate opposition to their proposals, not only from educationalists and academics, but also from the general public. The authors have stated throughout the book that they acknowledge the fact that most individuals in public decision-making positions are secularists and the goal of the authors and those they represent is to change this. Beyond presenting their arguments, however, the authors give no indication as to **how** this change will come about. I hope it will not be through bloodshed, as it has been in Iran, Algeria, Egypt, Afghanistan, and elsewhere.

What the authors propose is nothing short of the transformation of the educational system from being secular to being religious-based. Citing the



alienation of religious people from the current secular educational system as one reason for the change, they have no answer to the problem of non-religious persons being alienated from a religious educational system.

I see nothing liberating in this. Criticizing the educational system for being intolerant of religion(s), they now would be intolerant of those who do not share their values. I have witnessed the religious, ethnic and cultural ethnocentrism in Canada as well as in Egypt of some religious educational institutions in hiring only teachers from their particular group and restricting enrollment to students only from their particular group. While this may be acceptable in a private educational system, it would not be in a public system.

At least within a secular educational system, one is supposed to be tolerant of different views. Criticism of such intolerance is common in education today. Thus, establishing the belief in one absolute truth as revealed by God as the basis for a public educational system does not give much room for diversity even within one culture, much less in a multicultural society.

Given the numerous protracted wars waging around the world today, and the fact that most warring groups claim to have "God" on their side, it seems somewhat naive to me that the authors assert the belief that there are common core beliefs to all religions upon which a religious public system of education could be established. In fact, I have always been somewhat appalled that Protestants and Roman Catholics in Britain as well as in Canada and the U.S.A. commonly refer to each other as being members of a **different religion!** What would they say about Muslims, Jews, and believers in other religions? Finally, this also ignores the fact that in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, believers are considered **The** [only] children of God, with believers in other religions consigned to second class status in the eyes of God. In fact, both Judaism and Islam has endogenous, sexist rules restricting marriage to non-believers. Considering the conceptualization of "pagans" as "beyond the pale" and "off limits" for intercourse (verbal and otherwise) by most Christians and Muslims, I find it somewhat strange that the authors would state on page 231:

*Awareness that there exists in the world different racial groups within one humankind. We should, therefore, understand each other and live in harmony, respecting the different and differing customs, values, beliefs and languages of the main cultures of the world and of our own country...Development not only of tolerance and concern for the rights and beliefs of others, but a commitment to practical engagement on their behalf on the basis of the awareness that in the eyes of God all have equal rights and are entitled to justice and compassion.*



This is not just a minor point. The books mentions that some of the seminars given at Cambridge University involved participation by Sikhs, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, along with Christians and Muslims. Besides stating that these are the six "recognized" religions in Britain, Syed Ali Ashraf (p xii) also asserts that:

*Unity lies in the concept of One Unique Supreme and Transcendental Reality which is the Deity or God in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Sikhism and the Transcendental Reality in Buddhism, in the concept of the presence of a Spirit in each individual which is endowed with eternal values in potentiality and in the recognition of some form of Divine guidance.*

Given the centrality of monotheism, at least to Judaism, Christianity and Islam, I can't imagine their pious believers accepting "pagans" with "polytheist" or "pantheist" conceptualizations of "God" into their fold as equals. This would certainly leave out most religions indigenous to the Western Hemisphere and much of the Third World as well. With the relatively recent re-emphasis on spirituality rooted in indigenous religions by aboriginal people in the Western Hemisphere, this could be a serious problem.

Another thing which troubled me as I read these papers is the conceptualization of reason. The authors juxtapose reason and faith, reason and affect. In doing so, they fall into the false dichotomization of concepts so typical of modernity and which has more recently been seriously challenged by post-modernists. I would counter that even some of the ancient Greek philosophers, great Islamic philosophers, and Jesus Christ himself have not fallen into this trap of the false dichotomy. Ibn-Siinaa, for instance, said that reason must be used not only to improve human life but also to prove the existence of God. Ibn Baajj'a said that Islamic philosophy seeks to gain by reason the truth already revealed in the *Qur'aan* by faith. Islamic philosophers point out that the stress on law in Islam can be traced back to the works of Plato.

Setting reason and the rational against faith and emotion is not only a false dichotomy, it is a very destructive one for human beings. It is used by patriarchal religions and societies as a basis for subordinating and discriminating against women. Men are conceptualized as rational, being governed by reason, and women as irrational, governed by emotions which preclude reason. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, at least in their literal interpretation, conceptualize gender as biological and essentialist, that "masculinity" and "femininity" are mutually exclusive and innate. Indeed, sexism is inherent in fundamentalist forms of Christianity and Islam and problematic even in their most "progressive" forms. Women are blamed for sin and equated with the Devil in both Christianity and Islam. Therefore, women are controlled and restricted by men to maintain God's



order. Even in English-speaking countries, women were men's property, not persons, in law until 1929.

None of this is discussed in the criticism of reason in the readings, yet it is central to it. The authors take a very narrow look at the privileging of reason in modernity; and in both equating affect with faith and valuing faith over reason, they obfuscate the equating of affect with women and the Devil in their own religious traditions. This is a tradition which is central to fundamentalist branches of Christianity and Islam and which has been particularly contentious in societies dominated by religion. Having stated the belief that the essential nature of humans is set and eternal, unchanging (p 179), there is no possibility of women shedding their innate evilness and inferiority in order to be equal human beings with men, or for tolerance, open-mindedness, harmony, and respect for others and difference. Therefore, I am very dubious of the tolerance the authors say they support, especially of the assertion that "...all have equal rights and are entitled to justice and compassion" (p 231) and that we should "...shun all stereotypes, be they of race, nation, gender, or religion." (p231-232) It also makes me wonder what the authors have in mind when they state that students "...should learn how to apply religious norms to the products of the imagination and discriminate between **correct and false emotive responses**" (p234 emphasis added).

Given that there is no written Constitution and no Charter of Rights and Freedoms or other similar written legal guarantee of human rights beyond laws passed by Parliament in Britain, common law, and the possibility of a strong rule of construction by some judges, the guarantee of freedom of religion or freedom of conscience is much more precarious than in the U.S.A. and Canada. Britain does not have a history of tolerance of religious dissent from the state religion and, indeed, despite claims by the authors that Britain is a secular state, there is a long and bloody history of association between the state and religion in Britain. Lack of religious freedom and domination by a state-sanctioned religion is the case in most countries and would be true in practice even if not strictly in law in most Third World countries. This is an important factor when discussing religious values in state education.

In terms of curriculum, teacher training and certification, and student evaluation, these are controlled by the central/federal/state/national government, not local communities. Therefore, they would be much more difficult for religious minority groups to influence. The centralized nature of education and the lack of constitutional guarantees for religious freedom and/or their enforcement in most countries are serious obstacles to the establishment of a public educational system based on religious values common to all people in almost any society.

The authors are vague about what their ideal educational system would actually be like in terms of structure. While they do mention the possibility of



Muslims and Christians cooperating in running a school together, and that a teacher does not necessarily have to be a member of a particular religion – but must be religious – to teach, I have difficulty imagining a Christian fundamentalist being allowed to teach Muslim children religion or a Muslim being allowed to teach Christian children religion, even in Britain. The authors give no indication that this has actually occurred, and I know of no cases where it has occurred.

So the question remains, do the authors propose one curriculum based on “common religious values” for all students with no differences amongst schools, a system of denominational schools with somewhat differing curriculum for each, or some other possibility? Can you, in fact, have a non-sectarian religious school system? They also do not address the education of teachers, and perhaps the “re-education” of practising teachers who do not fit their ideological model. What role would religious leaders and clerics have in the educational system? This is also not seriously addressed in the readings.

Finally, my last point is that of the difference between religion as dogma and religion as philosophy. While it is not addressed in the readings, I believe it to be crucial to any discussion about religion and education. Philosophy has been defined as the love of wisdom, an attempt to be rational, to use reason, to find truth. Religion has often been defined as dogma, a non-rational understanding of truth based on revelation and faith. Debated by the ancient Greeks, Muslims during the Golden Age of Islam, and Christians, there is disagreement amongst religious scholars about whether reason can and should be used to prove the truth of religious revelation as well as whether there should be a separation of the sacred and the secular.

Related to these points is the debate about whether the holy books of various religions are meant to be read and believed literally or metaphorically. Are they really the words of God spoken through a prophet or are they writings of persons who were divinely inspired? Furthermore, there is the question about who has the correct interpretation of the religious message. On one extreme are those who believe that the holy book is the literal word of God and must be adhered to strictly, and usually that dogma must be accepted on blind faith by “the masses” because they are incapable of understanding religious philosophy. At the other extreme are those who believe that the holy book should be interpreted metaphorically and that ordinary people are not only capable but obliged to accept responsibility for their interpretation. The authors do not address these issues in *Religion and Education: Islamic and Christian Approaches*.

While these concerns cannot be adequately dealt with here, it is important to keep them in mind when discussing the role of religion in education. How religion is conceptualized, in fact, how God is conceptualized, is extremely important.



Everything else is premised upon those conceptualizations. While I believe it is an important endeavor to pursue these discussions, I also believe that we are a long way from coming to any kind of agreement, particularly amongst different religions.

## Endnotes

- 1 One could argue that the U.S.A. is an exception to this, with its legal separation of church and state; however, one could also argue that what passes for secular is, in fact, Protestant Christianity. This debate, however interesting, lies beyond the scope of this review.
- 2 Though an increasing number of academics argue that all knowledge is value-laden and never "value-free", much social science still purports to be "scientific", "value-free", "objective", and "unbiased". Though many credit this to the development of post-modernism, much of the criticism of "value-free" knowledge can be found in the European classical works of the 19th century.
- 3 The best-known source of this is Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.
- 4 *Zakaah* is a tax for the benefit of the poor. Muslims are expected to give 1/40 of their gross income to the poor. This has traditionally been given to the poor living near the donor and known to him/her. It has also been done traditionally during the 'Iid Feast following the month of fasting, *Ramadan*. Militant Muslims, however, are demanding that the state take on the responsibility for collecting and distributing this tax. For militant or fundamentalist Muslims, the state should be a theocracy. A parallel concept exists in Christianity, the tithing of 10% of gross income which Christians are supposed to contribute to their local church; however, it is voluntary and there is no religious requirement that it be state-controlled or mandatory.
- 5 The Rayyaan scandal in Egypt during the late 1980's comes to mind here. Promoted as an "Islamically correct" investment company, they promised interest-free loans and investments but 30% return to investors. Ultimately, all the investors lost all the money they invested, involving so many millions of pounds that the Egyptian government had to get involved in prosecuting the promoters. Perhaps this is a bad example to give, but I know many sincere Muslims who lost their life savings in this fiasco and who tell me that they know of no genuine Islamic interest-free banking institutions.
- 6 The authors point out that in Muslim countries, it is usually not difficult to obtain religious-based education for children in primary and secondary schools, whether private or public; however, much of the post-secondary educational system is more secular than religious. This is because most post-secondary education was established by European colonial powers and/or the curriculum and textbooks are Western-based. Thus, not only is this level of education more secular, it is usually necessary for the students to be able to at least read a European language, since most Third World countries have not translated existing textbooks into the local languages nor have they written their own textbooks.

This has been a serious issue in Egypt for some time, particularly in the medical faculties, where a growing proportion of professors and students are demanding that classes be taught in Arabic and that texts be written in Arabic, rather than in English. Many Egyptian medical professors want their students to know more about the great contributions made to medicine by Arab and other Muslim physicians in the past and would like to break the intellectual dependency they feel has been forced upon them by the British. Thus, they wish to make medical education more reflective of and relevant to their religion and their history, not merely a clone of Western medicine. They do not want to be cast as inferior to Western practitioners, and wish to emphasize their contribution to medical knowledge.
- 7 For instance, in the "Appendix"(p 219). Syed Ali Ashraf states:

The purpose is not to form a syncretic religious approach, but to indicate that whatever the



doctrinal differences among religions, there are in nearly all religions, common beliefs regarding human nature, God, and a framework of eternal values. Religious groups should stand together so that the complete destruction of these values does not take place in the process of social change.

8 Naguib Mahfouz's novel, *Children of Gabalawi* comes to mind here as a good example of the intolerance of literary satire by religious groups and societies of this very point. The book was banned in Egypt since its initial publication, and remains banned today despite Mahfouz having received the Nobel Prize for Literature for just such social satire.

9 Though this point is outside the focus of this review, it is worth noting that in Islam, Islam is asserted to be the last and most perfect religion; that there will be no more prophets, no more religions. Muhammad is believed to be the **last** messenger of God. Furthermore, in Islam, the *Old* and the *New Testaments*, the *Torah* and the *Bible*, are considered Holy Books, the Word of God. Thus, in Islam, Muslim men are free to marry Jewish and Christian women. Muslim women, however, can only marry Muslim men. All Muslims are prohibited from marrying others, referred to as *kaafir*, the English equivalent being "pagans". I wonder how anyone could proceed from this to stating that **all** persons hold common beliefs upon which a public religious educational system could be established.

10 I would assume that "pagans" are not considered one of the "...main cultures of the world..." (p 231). See Endnote 9.

11 Ibn Siinaa, a Persian Islamic philosopher and scientist, wrote a medical encyclopedia and spent much of his life using reason to prove the existence of God. He wanted to reconcile reason and faith. Rather than using philosophy and science to reconcile the worldly and the metaphysical, many scholars in the golden age of Islamic civilization used philosophy and medicine. The Muslim scholars not only read the writings of the ancient Greeks, they translated them and reintroduced them into European societies.

Indeed, Aristotle believed that nothing in the universe moves without something to move it, that the assumed unmoved mover is God, and that God is law. The neo-Platonic School of Greek philosophy believed that the Divine spark permeates the universe. These ideas are also found in both Christianity and Islam.

Ibn Baajj'a (d. 1138), a Spanish Muslim philosopher referred to as Avenpace in Europe, believed that a religion of revelation as confirmed by reason is superior to religion gotten by reason alone. This was a common belief in Islamic philosophy at that time. However, some Islamic philosophers, such as the Persian al-Raazii (865-923), believed that it was wrong to try to reconcile reason and faith.

12 The struggle between reason and desire within each person is referred to as "the great  *Jihad* " (holy war) by Muhammad, the prophet of Islam, according to Fatma A. Sabbah (1984:112, *Woman in the Muslim Unconscious*), and much more important than the "small jihads" amongst people. The power struggle between reason and desire is also represented in the struggle between the sacred and the earthly, between male and female, between human and animal, between God and the Devil, between good and evil. Man's strength is measured by his capacity to vanquish himself [the evil within], not others. Women are seen as the main manifestation of all evil temptations, so man must neutralize this threat by subordinating and controlling women.

These beliefs existed long before Muhammad and Islam; they were present in the teachings of Socrates, who believed that the essence of women is lust. This belief was widespread in ancient Greece after the rise of patriarchy; indeed, the ancient patriarchal Greek society can be characterized as misogynist.

The dominance of such misogynist ideas in most societies globally today is being challenged by emancipatory social movements and ideologies, some of which are religious-based. Nevertheless, within established institutionalized religions, the emancipatory voice for women is still silenced. The struggle against patriarchy is a very old one but we are still far from victory. It would be an enormous leap forward to have religion as an ally.

13 Although beyond the scope of this paper, the legal guarantees of human and civil rights, particularly in this case the freedom of religion and conscience, become important factors in any



discussion of religion and education. In the U.S.A. and Canada there are formal, written constitutions and entrenched civil rights such as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In such cases, Parliament and Congress cannot pass laws which violate them; judges can strike down such laws as unconstitutional. This is much more precarious and difficult to do in Britain.

There is a radical tradition in the British judiciary wherein judges may override an act of Parliament if they believe it conflicts with the unwritten constitution which judges themselves have effectively constructed based on common law. British judges have traditionally held freedom of conscience in high esteem. Nevertheless, the radical position contradicts Parliamentary sovereignty; thus, the strong rule of construction is a more practical position, though still minority position. Using this, judges can argue that an act of Parliament which seems to trample on fundamental rights was actually not intended to do so and so will interpret the act even when the interpretation rendered was not intended by Parliament. Even using this approach, however, judges are bound by their constitutional role as defined by orthodox notions of Parliamentary sovereignty.

British law is further complicated now by their membership in the European Union. Rulings of the European Court of Justice have had profound effects on English jurisprudence, especially in cases involving fundamental human rights. These rights are guaranteed by the Treaty of Rome. U.K. citizens unable to get satisfaction in British courts have the right to argue their cases before the European Court of Justice — so long as their case is covered by an EU Directive or Regulation. This presents great difficulty for the notion of Parliamentary sovereignty in Britain, and more hope for the protection of fundamental human rights. (I would like to thank Jasmine El-Nahhas for pointing out these details and their significance).

14 Ibn Rushd (1126-1198 AD), referred to as Averroes in Europe, was one of the greatest Islamic philosophers, belonging to the Malakite School of Islamic jurisprudence in Spain. He advocated One Truth and tried to reconcile law and philosophy, the sacred and the worldly, insisting on a metaphorical interpretation of the *Qur'aan*. Furthermore, he believed that theologians should remain in close contact with the masses, that religion is important to the state and must be explained by philosophy and reason to the masses on its truthfulness. All of these ideas went against the tide at that time. (See his book, *Fahaafut al-Fahaafut, the Incoherency of the Incoherent*). Ibn Baajj'a (See Endnote 11), on the other hand, believed that the masses were incapable of understanding philosophy and so must accept dogma on blind faith. He believed that philosophy is incapable of governing the state and the masses.

This debate occurred while Europe was engulfed in the Middle Ages, often referred to as the Dark Ages of Christianity because such questioning of dogma usually resulted in being tortured to death. The debate within Islam was not only lost but effectively smothered, throwing Islam into the religious Dark Ages from which Christianity has since emerged. Today, any suggestion that the *Qur'aan* should be read metaphorically and any questioning of Islamic dogma would likely be met with death threats sanctioned by *fatwa*. The fate of Salmon Rushdi and Taslima Nasriin are recent examples. So much for religious freedom and tolerance! This has been referred to by Naguib Mahfouz and others in the English-language version of *Al-Ahram*, the government-controlled newspaper in Egypt, as the smothering of the flame of the Enlightenment in Egyptian civil society.

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