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To lay the foundation of relations between the state and civil society, the concept of “traditional religions” should be specified; regulatory documents relating to teaching the fundamentals of religious life in secondary schools are badly needed.

The following types of conflicts have become a regular feature of the dialog inside religions and between them: rejection of other confessions by both the leaders and members of religious communities; and the absence in public ideology of a conception of multiculturalism and its meaning. This is responsible for the political overtones in the dialog between religions: the leaders of the traditional North Caucasian religions (Christian Orthodoxy and Islam) have closed ranks against the Christian, so-called non-traditional, religions. Both rely on the so-called administrative resource represented by the republican administrations and security structures. This is done in violation of Art 14.2 of the Constitution, which says: “Religious associations shall be separate from the State and shall be equal before the law.” Interference does nothing for the relations among the followers of different religions.

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ON MODERNIZATION IN AZERBAIJAN: THE SECULAR AND THE RELIGIOUS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

A b s t r a c t

What are the prospects for interaction between the secular and the religious in the social and political life of Azerbaijan? How are the secular and the religious changing in the world today; how are they interconnected in the legal and cultural expanse? To answer these questions, the author traces how ideas about the “indivisibility” of religion and the state

in Islamic religious-political thought are developing, analyzes the latest experience of secularization in Azerbaijan, and outlines the directions in which relations between the state and the confessions are moving. The above, however, calls for a description of the geocultural paradigm which has determined the axiological trends of current modernization.

I n t r o d u c t i o n

All the social, economic, and political changes of the last two decades in Azerbaijan have been unfolding as a modernization effort designed to overcome the country’s economic and technological

backwardness; reform state administration and legislation; and create a civil society and public sphere able to efficiently cooperate with the political institutions. The process is channeled “from above” and relies, therefore, on administrative, financial, information, and other resources. Society, which has not acquired clear ideas about modernization, its nature, and its aims, cannot fully accept it.

The political elite and part of society (not all of society and not its larger part) identify modernization with Westernization and secularization of the country’s cultural development vector. Indeed, liberal-democratic values do penetrate into Azerbaijan’s cultural expanse together with other, mostly religious, ideologies and philosophical systems. While some people speak of modernization as a progressive phenomenon and a symbol of moral freedom, others resent it as a vehicle of ideological subversion and cultural enslavement. More often than not, the idea of modernization as a national development program is not considered by either group. Instead, they both tend to concentrate on the socio-economic and cultural conflicts caused by the changes in their lives.

Many developing countries have learned from experience that, to be successful, modernization, its values and standards formulated by the political and financial elite, should be accepted by the masses as legitimate. Authoritarian modernization leads to an economic crisis and a political catastrophe. This means that the future of the reforms in Azerbaijan depends on the ability of those in power to convince the nation that the changes are necessary and adequate. While democratization as a political project has practically no alternatives in sociopolitical thought, the social-cultural sphere is dominated by antagonism between those who are in favor of the Western lifestyle and those who support the Islamic tradition. A public discussion of the limits of the secular and the state’s monopoly on moral values is underway, while various factors of local and global importance add specific hues to the contradictions between the secular and the religious.

The Geocultural Justification of Modernization and Globalization

Modernization is commonly described as a process which transforms traditional societies into modern ones, emancipates science, encourages industrial development and capitalist production relations, generates changes in demographic behavior, etc. The modernization theory formulated at the turn of the 1960s under the impact of what Talcott Parsons and Robert Merton, two American theorists of structural functionalism, wrote at the time, served the geopolitical aims of the West, which was busy building a new system of relations with its former colonies. The architects of the new world order needed an idea that would justify their policies in Third World countries intended to perpetuate their corrupt and servile regimes. The modernization theory, which added scientific substantiation to the idea of a transfer to a Western-style industrial and democratic society, proved a handy instrument.

The modernization idea pointed not merely to West’s technological and military superiority, but also to its cultural superiority over the rest of the world. This made Western civilization the very embodiment of modernity, of everything advanced and desired—in short, an unattainable dream. Those societies that took the road of modernization borrowed, of their own free will, the Western values and Western lifestyle; they abandoned their own development course and were inevitably bound for a crisis in their civilizational identity. This blocked from the inside the prospects for political reform and economic advance. As American sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein put it, the universal conviction that all countries could achieve economic development proved to be an illusion rather than a lodestar.¹

Despite its patently contradictory nature, modernization has not lost its popularity in the developing countries and countries with so-called transition economies. The Soviet successor-states with

¹ See: I.M. Wallerstein, “Geokultura razvitiia ili transformatsia nashey kultury,” available at [<http://archipelag.ru/geoculture/concept/transform/transformation>].

their fairly developed industries, science, and technology that have chosen modernization as their development course can serve as the best example of this.² Some members of the academic community believe that in a world that has already entered globalization as a new phase of civilizational cooperation, modernization as a development program has lost its relevance. Globalization has opened new vistas of labor productivity, high-tech retooling, and rapid communication conducive to a single worldwide market system. The breakthrough in information technology has changed our ideas about the national economy, state borders, labor relations, and education. Financial capital has become almost totally mobile; transnational corporations are no longer tied to individual regions or states—they have become a cosmopolitan elite.

The triumph of liberalism was expected to confirm democratic values; early in the 1990s, the euphoria caused by the disintegration of the socialist camp created the temporary illusion of the “end of history:” “that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government.”³ It turned out, however, that when the world elite shook off its responsibility for the fate of the nations, unfair distribution of wealth became more glaring; the widening gap between the North and the South became more obvious, while the mounting corruption and violence grew more threatening. In his *Globalization. The Human Consequences*, Zygmunt Bauman, a British sociologist, wrote that the mobility of the financial tycoons “means the new, indeed unprecedented in its unconditionality, disconnection of power from obligations.”⁴ The powers that be have acquired enough immunity to feel safe from public opinion, economic crises, armed conflicts, and humanitarian catastrophes. Chaos has become their natural milieu, while chaos management is their means of existence and enrichment.

Globalization is not limited to total control over political, economic, and financial institutions; very much like modernization, it imparts universality to Western values and liberal morals. We should bear in mind, however, that these values and morals differ greatly from those which served as the cornerstone of Western civilization. Having legalized moral permissiveness and the cult of violence and cruelty, it moved away from its Christian roots and has already entered the last stage of theomachy. Western culture, which has turned to technological progress and material wealth, no longer cherishes what is genuinely human. Medical ethics are busy discussing active euthanasia (deliberate medical intervention to bring about a painless death). In disregard of the social and ethic consequences, genetic engineering is moving toward cloning of humans. The negative impact on human health of biotechnology, which brings transnational corporations enormous profits, is likewise disregarded.

Technology is no longer serving people—it imposes its own rules of human existence on them. A. Nazarchuk has written on this score that the biologically determined method of obtaining information and cooperation has been upturned by information technology. The human psyche replaces the real world, to which the human body and mind are adapted, with a de-materialized world. This causes depression, psychic disorders, and weakened social ties.⁵ Society, which enjoys technological achievements, but lacks spirituality and moral injunctions, cannot preserve its stability; in fact, its continued existence is threatened.

Recent decades have confirmed that emasculated moral content creates serious problems at the individual level and on the global scale: international terrorism, environmental pollution, global inequality, etc. The ecological, humanitarian, and financial crises of the new millennium have thrown into bolder relief the importance of genuine human values based, at all times, on religion. This is the Achilles’ heel of contemporary globalists and Western civilization.

² In his annual address to the RF Federal Assembly of 12 November, 2009, President Medvedev spoke of the need for modernization “based on the values and institutions of democracy,” available at [<http://en.ria.ru/russia/20091112/156810969.html>].

³ F. Fukuyama, “The End of History?” *The National Interest*, No. 16, Summer 1989, available at [<http://www.wesjones.com/eoh.htm>].

⁴ Z. Bauman, *Globalization. The Human Consequences*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1998.

⁵ See: A.V. Nazarchuk, *Etika globaliziruushchegosia obshchestva*, Directmedia Publishing, Moscow, 2002, p. 236.

Elie Maynard Adams was probably right when he said that, starting with the Renaissance, Western civilization has been gradually losing its axiological landmarks. Physics was the first to embrace a conceptual system unrelated to values. Later, the Darwin conception of change and causality brought biology to the same boundary. Behaviorist psychology applied scientific methods unrelated to moral assessments to human behavior, while the social sciences did the same with respect to social changes. As a result, wrote Adams, "Western man" accepted the empirical scientific method of cognizing reality as the only one, while beliefs unconfirmed by science were dismissed as superstition.⁶

Having rejected religious values and traditions, Western thought created numerous utopias and ideologies which functioned, partly, as traditional religions. Religious morality was replaced with secular principles which, according to Jean Baubereau, concentrate on two things: "The idea of human dignity, which postulates the fundamental equality of human beings, and the concept of solidarity, which treats the ties between people in time and space as the highest value."⁷ This, however, does not rule out the contradiction between secular morality and the doctrine of liberalism in all its forms.

Liberal democracy cherishes the cult of human freedom, which can only be limited when and if man infringes on the freedoms of others. By guaranteeing political and civil freedoms, it creates conditions conducive to the development of philosophy, science, and individual self-expression. To quote from Zbigniew Brzezinski, individual self-fulfillment generates wealth and "attracts the energetic, the ambitious, and the highly competitive."⁸

Having idealized morally unhampered freedom, liberalism created a society in which pursuance of individual desires constitutes the only meaning of life. This is the other side of liberal democracy. John Milbank regards materialistic hedonism as the natural outcome of the above: "If matter is not regarded as something connected with a sacrament, it inevitably degenerates into something meaningless, a mere instrument of sorts."⁹

The ease with which moral dissipation and hedonism spread in Western culture is explained by the fact that at all times it needed a balance between the material (rooted in the culture of Antiquity) and the spiritual (rooted in Christianity). The attempts to fill the void left by the spiritual with values of free enterprise and democracy failed. American academician Robert Wuthnow has written in this respect: "As public discourse has shifted increasingly toward politics, consumerism, and narrow contentious definitions of personal morality, we have lost touch with an important segment of our cultural heritage."¹⁰ Basil Mitchell has pointed out that many people are dissatisfied with the existing models of secular morals: "What they look for in them, and do not find, is a standard that transcends the de facto preferences of individuals and societies, by which these may be judged; the recognition of ideals or principles to which a man may be seriously and continuously committed, and upon which greater emphasis is laid than would be justifiable on utilitarian grounds alone."¹¹

The conflict with the traditional model uncovered the limits of liberal democracy, however it was the unipolar world that shook it to its very foundations. Inspired by idealized rivalry, a certain group developed the urge to achieve total control over the political, economic, and financial institutions. The recent results have forced Western societies to give up some of their democratic values and freedoms (the struggle against international terrorism is the most convincing example of this). A retreat toward

⁶ See: E.M. Adams, *Philosophy and the Modern Mind: A Philosophical Critique of Modern Western Civilization*, The University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1975, p. 32.

⁷ J. Baubereau, "Svetskost: Frantsuzskaia isklyuchitel'nost ili universalnaia tsennost?", available at [<http://www.krotov.info/history/20/1950/bobero.html>].

⁸ Z. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard. American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, Basic Books, New York, 1997, p. 27.

⁹ *Svetskost imeet totalitarnye naklonnosti*, Interview of John Milbank to *Russkiy zhurnal*, 25 December, 2008, available at [<http://russ.ru/Mirovaya-povestka/Svetskost-imeet-totalitarnye-naklonnosti>].

¹⁰ R. Wuthnow, *Poor Richard's Principle: Recovering the American Dream through the Moral Dimension of Work, Business, and Money*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1996, p. 12.

¹¹ B. Mitchell, *Morality, Religious and Secular: The Dilemma of the Traditional Conscience*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1980, p. 79.

totalitarian principles and violations of individual freedoms, the number of which is rapidly mounting, signified a decline in social life. In his *The End of History and the Last Man*, Francis Fukuyama wrote: "This suggests that no fundamental strengthening of community life will be possible unless individuals give back certain of their rights to communities, and accept a return of certain historical forms of intolerance. Liberal democracies, in other words, are not self-sufficient: the community life on which they depend must ultimately come from a source different from liberalism itself."¹²

The crisis of liberal democracy led to another round of discussions about the decline and fall of Western civilization. In 2002, American politician Patrick Buchanan published his *Death of the West*, in which he developed what Spengler and Toynbee had said before him about the inevitable "decline of the West." Even before him, in the mid-1990s, Russian philosopher Alexander Zinoviev wrote that "by becoming postindustrial, Western society is in fact becoming an obese social, and highly parasitical, organism. This will eventually impair its instinct of self-preservation."¹³ The consumer society, driven by the desire to satisfy its requirements and to preserve the deep social gap between the poles of poverty and richness as a source of its inspiration, does not look very attractive from the philosophical and moral viewpoints. This does not mean, however, that the American politicians and their partners will renounce their claims to world domination any time soon. The "right of the strongest" still applies, while there is no one in the unipolar world capable of trimming this "right." Today, America's impressive material and technological headway is matched by Washington's foreign policy course.

After losing the socialist bloc as a military-political and ideological opponent, the United States lost its interest in "democratization" of the Third World. American ideologists responded to this with "revelations" about the unique, but not universal, nature of Western culture. In *The Clash of Civilizations*, Samuel Huntington wrote: "In fundamental ways, the world is becoming more modern and less Western."¹⁴ Having relieved itself of its moral responsibility for the civilizations unable to follow the Western road, the United States confirmed its role as "world sheriff" in a cruel way: witness the "humanitarian interventions" of the last two decades (Somalia in 1993, Yugoslavia in 1999, Afghanistan in 2001, and Iraq in 2003). What the United States and its European allies present as support of democracy and the free market is, in fact, an attempt to strengthen their power and geopolitical influence.

Today, modernization in the developing countries lacks a solid geocultural foundation, yet the globalists leave the national elites with no alternative: those unwilling to embrace modernization pay dearly. The choice is, therefore, limited to modernization Western style (embraced by Kemalist Turkey) or modernization which preserves the basic principles of national culture. Russia and most of the Soviet successor-states have opted for the latter; the outcome, however, is hard to predict. Much will depend on the countries which have embarked on the road of development, as well as on their leaders and their ability to cushion the ruinous effects of globalism, chart the right way, and lead their nations along it.

Correct landmarks and development priorities depend on the ability to discern the paradigm of technological and civilizational advance in the near future. In other words, one should be able to forecast "the day after tomorrow" (if this day comes). Alexander Panarin described civilizational pluralism as the culturological foundation of the so-called post-Western era.¹⁵ Vadim Mezhuev believed that, as distinct from modernization, global politics should "create a world order in which the collective achievements of mankind in all spheres of human endeavor become accessible to each man and each nation, that is, become individual and national property."¹⁶

Immanuel Wallerstein wrote in one of his latest works that future civilization should stand on global universality, which would provide the nations with the equal right to give and take—a world

¹² F. Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man*, Avon Book Inc., New York, p. 326.

¹³ A.A. Zinoviev, *Zapad. Fenomen zapadnizma*, Tsentrpoligrafprom, Moscow, 1995, p. 144.

¹⁴ S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, Touchstone Books, New York, 1998, p. 78.

¹⁵ See: *Filosofia istorii*, ed. by Prof. A.S. Panarin, Gardariki, Moscow, 1999, available at [http://www.gumer.info/bogoslov_Buks/Philos/Panarin/03.php].

¹⁶ V.M. Mezhuev, "Tsennosti sovremennosti v kontekste modernizatsii i globalizatsii," *Znanie. Ponimanie. Umenie* internet journal, No. 1, 2009, available at [<http://www.zpu-journal.ru/e-zpu/2009/1/Mezhuev/#>].

ruled by inequality would be the other option. This “world ... will claim to be based on universal values, but in it racism and sexism will continue to dominate..., quite possibly more viciously than in our existing world-system.”¹⁷

Will mankind move toward this “global universality”? There is no clear answer to this question, although the present level of civilizational and religious interaction can hardly instill optimism. According to the U.S. Center for Defense Information, only one of the 14 armed conflicts going on in the world in 2009 was caused by a struggle for power. In all the other cases, religious, ethnic, ideological, or political dimensions were present.¹⁸ Even if mankind pushes away the contradictions and discovers its inner resources based on shared values badly needed to draw closer, the process itself is never likely to be painless.

The Secular and the Religious in Post-Modernity

The crisis of liberal democracy and the end of the epoch of modernity opened a new phase of opposition between secular and religious morals. On the one hand, the content of contemporary education, lifestyle, education of the masses, and their labor activities is pushing aside the spiritual to give way to the rational and sensual. While on the other, religion is playing a much greater role than before in social life. Western societies have exhausted their secular ideologies, which were never able to create social and ethical norms anyway. “Post-modernity interpreted religion not as a religious institution, a church that claimed its right to dominate. By liberating religion and religiosity, post-modernity introduced a post-secular era in ‘European cultural history.’”¹⁹ The conflict between science and religion interpreted as the Church/secular science opposition lost its urgency for at least two reasons.

- First, scientism has exhausted itself in the eyes of a large part of society, while science is no longer regarded as the only source of knowledge and opinions about the world. Religious values, which infringe on human activities to a certain extent, have preserved their attraction mainly because people are unconsciously aware of their eternal relevance. As an ultimate truth filled with specific historical content, they make human lives meaningful in a way that is well beyond the reach of scientific thought.
- Second, in the latter half of the 20th century, Western society became much more exposed than before to Islam and the eastern religious systems; unlike Christianity, they never openly clashed with science. While Islam appeals to the scientific miracles in the Koran (confirmed by contemporary science), the Eastern religions strive to comprehend man’s inner world rather than acquire more knowledge about the outer world and its manifestations (studied by science). As Carl Jung, the founder of analytical psychology, wrote in his *Psychology of Eastern Meditation*, while the European relied on the entire range of external impressions to arrive at a conclusion about the inner world, “Indian thought and Indian art merely appear in the sense-world but do not derive from it.”²⁰

The time when the West met the Eastern religions in their historical areas and Western culture was represented by its active proponents has ended and will never return. Hindu, Muslims, and Bud-

¹⁷ I. Wallerstein, *European Universalism: The Rhetoric of Power*, The New Press, New York, 2006, p. 84.

¹⁸ See: *The Defense Monitor*, Vol. XXXIV, January/February/March 2010, available at [http://www.cdi.org/pdfs/DM_JanFebMarch10.pdf].

¹⁹ A. Kyrlezhev, “Postsekuliarnaia epokha,” *Kontinent*, No. 120, 2004, available at [<http://magazines.russ.ru/continent/2004/120/kyr16.html>].

²⁰ C. Jung, “The Philosophy of Eastern Meditation,” in: C. Jung, *Collected Works*, Vol. 11, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1943.

dhists have integrated into Western society and are playing an ever increasing role in social and political life. "The failure of Western civilization resolved to dominate in the East was accompanied by the triumphal march of the 'Eastern spiritual practices' to the West," wrote Christian Orthodox publicist Alexander Kyrlezhev. "Civilization, which grew up on Christianity and later, during the era of secularization, on its 'internal' rejection is satisfying its requirement for 'religious metaphysics' by drawing on non-Christian religiosity."²¹

In the Third World, cultural globalization (Americanization) coupled with the highly unsatisfactory results of the post-colonial project of a secular state proved to be a strong impetus for religious self-awareness. Under the influence of information means and technology, many people falsely identify themselves with certain groups with which they have nothing in common. Their minds plunge into a system of alien opinions, interests, and behavior patterns, which ends in cultural conflicts and dysfunction of social institutions. Western mentality and morality, expanding amid unresolved economic and political problems, sharpens one's awareness of belonging to one's own nation, culture, and religion. This explains why zealous opponents of globalization are found not only in the Muslim world but also beyond it—in Russia, China, India, and even in Europe.²²

This means that both in the East and the West, religion is playing an increasingly greater role in culture and public consciousness, while being exposed to the fairly strong influence of postmodernism. First, against the background of a firm rejection of totalitarianism, non-traditional beliefs, the occult, and other mystical practices have acquired a new lease on life and a wider social basis. By attracting the youth, the new and highly mobile religious movements undermine the positions of the traditional confessions. Second, fundamentalist feelings are mounting inside the traditional confessions as a response to another wave of secularization raised by the "mass culture" and information and communication technology. In some cases, religious tradition, which is misinterpreted (for sociocultural, economic, and political reasons) and detached from its spiritual roots, serves as the foundation of extremist ideologies. Third, the "compressed" world changes or even abolishes the traditional religious borders, thus provoking religious contradictions, yet bringing us closer to the global culture of a dialog.

This means that religion is returning to its social expanse, in which, however, its traditional claim to exclusiveness and social preferences is challenged. The present confrontation among the traditional religions, new religious movements, and radical religious groups cannot be dismissed as an ideological or religious-political struggle. It is a struggle to possess the "truth" and establish relations with "our own" and "other" people, which will dominate in the future civilization. It is a struggle between totalitarianism and pluralism, between tolerance and intolerance, between barbarity and civility.

Does the above overstate the role of religion in contemporary civilization? In the context of the current geopolitical model, religion is regarded as the cause of clashes of civilizations and a factor of international instability. Back in the mid-1990s, Samuel Huntington pointed out that religion disunited the world and escalated conflicts along civilizational borders. Earlier, American futurologist Alvin Toffler in his *Powershift: Knowledge, Wealth and Violence at the Edge of the 21st Century* described religion as one of the global gladiators that challenged the sovereign state as an entity of international relations.²³ It would be wrong to think that religion is the main factor of disunity; this is confirmed by a 2005 sociological poll which revealed that only 6.8 percent of the Orthodox Russian respondents describe religious contradictions as the main source of ethnic conflicts; this opinion is shared by 2.8 percent of the Buddhists polled, 7.7 percent of the Muslims, 10 percent of the Catholics and Jews, and 12.6 percent of the Protestants. Up to one-third of the polled in all confessional groups pointed to the country's worsening economy as the main cause of ethnic problems. Between one-fifth

²¹ "Religia v sovremennom mire: itogi veka," available at [http://www.religare.ru/2_25412.html].

²² See: A.E. Kulizhanishvili, "Globalizatsia i natsionalnye kultury," in: *Chelovek: sootnoshenie natsional'nogo i obshchechelovecheskogo*. Collection of materials on international symposium, Issue 2, ed. by V.V. Partsvania, Saint-Peterbugskoe filosofskoe obshchestvo, St. Petersburg, 2004, pp. 153-154.

²³ See: A. Toffler, *Powershift: Knowledge, Wealth and Violence at the Edge of the 21st Century*, Bantam Books, New York, 1990.

and one-third of the polled blamed the central government's blunders in ethnic policy; other causes of ethnic tension and disagreements were mentioned by a negligible number of the respondents.²⁴

So far, the peacekeeping potential of any religion remains untapped, however in recent years, religious leaders have widened the scope of the religious dialog and have pooled their forces to preserve spiritual values and oppose moral degradation, international terrorism, and drug trafficking. They are doing a lot to preserve the world's cultural diversity and to protect the environment. "We are ready to exert every effort to prevent religious differences from being used as an instrument of hatred and discord, in order to save mankind from a global conflict of religions and cultures," says the Final Declaration of the First Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in Astana.²⁵ These congresses, which have become traditional, and the world summits of religious leaders (the most recent one was held in Baku in April 2010) may play an important role in strengthening international security and changing the nature of the relations between the state and the church.

Some think that the world today looks very much like Europe on the eve of the Westphalian Peace of 1648; those who think this are proceeding from a myth that says religion breeds intolerance, wars, and coups when it interferes in international relations. Scott M. Thomas has written that the world is willing to abandon the "Westphalian presumption" and that "there is a growing openness in international relations to what different religious perspectives have to offer to the world."²⁶ Political culture is even more receptive to religious influences. S. Lebedev has written that in the conditions of late post-modernity, religious ideology can easily assimilate secular culture, which "can offer nothing to enrich its counter-agent either in the field of knowledge, values or ideals. It is equally prepared to cede its positions to any religion or any ideological system irrespective of their beliefs or social ideas."²⁷ The above is too categorical to be totally accepted, yet we have to admit that the correlation between the secular and the religious is changing with still uncertain results. Jürgen Habermas has written that Western societies transformed into "post-secular" are concerned with preserving religious communities in their secular environments. "Hitherto, the liberal State has only expected the believers among its citizens to split their identity as it were into public and private elements" while today it is required that both sides take up the perspective of the other and listen to the objections of opponents.²⁸

So far, it remains to be seen whether the traditional religions manage to fortify their positions or whether the boundary between the religious and non-religious will be gradually obliterated while religious institutions are replaced with quasi-religious movements and syncretic sects. In the same way, will religious renaissance lead to aggressive secularization and bring liberal democracy to its collapse? Will the ideas of religious tolerance and diversity of religious experience be accepted by the Third World, where modernization and secularization remain pending?

Modernization in Azerbaijan: The Middle Path

Modernization in Azerbaijan coincided with the changing balance between the secular and religious forces in the West and in the East. *Kulturdrift* triggered by the Soviet Union's disintegration

²⁴ See: Iu.A. Gavrilov, E.N. Kofanova, M.P. Mchedlov, A.G. Shevchenko, "Sfera politiki i mezhnatsionalnye ot-noshenia v vospriiatii religioznykh obshchnostey," *Sotsiologicheskie issledovania*, No. 6, 2005, pp. 62-63.

²⁵ [http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/2003/documents/rc_seg_st_20030924_final-dec-astana_en.html].

²⁶ S.M. Thomas, "Taking Religious and Cultural Pluralism Seriously. The Global Resurgence of Religion and the Transformation of International Society," in: *Religion in International Relations: The Return from Exile*, ed. by F. Retito, P. Hatzopoulos, Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2003, pp. 43-44.

²⁷ S.D. Lebedev, "Svetsko-religioznaia sinergia kak problema kulturnoy globalizatsii," available at [<http://spkurdyumov.narod.ru/D49Lebedev.htm>].

²⁸ [http://www.ucc.ie/social_policy/Habermas_Faith_and_knowledge_ev07-4_en.htm].

spread to all spheres of the republic's social life. Different peoples responded to this impact in different ways: some of them are becoming aware of their creative potential; they draw on the progressive experience of other societies to create modern axiological systems. Others prove unable to face the challenges of the times and sink back into the old time-tested values. In Azerbaijan, the tectonic shifts in the very foundations of the ideas about the world cost the state its clear idea of purpose, while the nation, without a national idea and civil consensus, became immersed in an identity crisis. Most of its citizens were not prepared to abandon Marxist ideology even though in the past their acceptance of it was only skin-deep.

The Armenian aggression and upsurge in ethnic separatism re-established, for a while, the traditional values cherished by many as the cornerstone of the Azeri statehood. At that time, the nation was convinced that its culture was unique or even superior to others. The cease-fire and the republic's gradual involvement in large-scale transnational projects pushed society toward ideological divergence. After gaining access to the global beau monde, the republic's political and financial elite lost no time in borrowing cosmopolitan values and moved further away from the masses still pining after the lost empire, on the one hand, and exposed to Westernization and Islamization, on the other. The weak civil society and the crisis in the educational system added to the social disunity and ideological vagueness.

The nation badly needed an idea able to mobilize all the national resources for the sake of stronger state sovereignty, a democratic state ruled by law, economic growth, and overcoming technological backwardness. Once born in the minds of the patriotic intelligentsia, the idea should be accepted by the larger part of the polyethnic and poly-confessional country—an aim which called for consistent and purposeful reform of public consciousness. Occupation of Nagorno-Karabakh and seven adjacent districts, the plummeting living standards and persistent ideological expansion that bred moral nihilism, as well as ethnic separatism and religious extremism left no time for the national idea to develop and become generally accepted. In these conditions, the Azerbaijani reformers had to rely on the West (with Russia's tacit agreement) to guarantee public interests and the principles of democracy and an open society. The inner resources of society, which closed ranks in the struggle for Nagorno-Karabakh, were too weak to speed up the initial stage of democratic reforms.

This explains why the liberal-democratic reforms in Azerbaijan had to be imposed "from above:" first, most of the nation never shared the axiological ideas of the reforms and could not fully understand them. Democracy was identified with social fairness; the much smaller and much better educated part of society had already embraced the ideas of civil solidarity and their own responsibility for the future of their common state. Exposed to social and economic problems which defied prompt solutions, the masses were growing even more suspicious of the liberal economic and democratic changes. Second, the still very weak democratic institutions could not oppose, let alone overcome, nepotism and bureaucratic arbitrariness, which explains why the rich profited much more from the changes than the common people.

Political awareness at the grass-roots level was developing sporadically in many, often opposite, directions. Some of the political forces which posed as democratic were a step short of anarchy. Locked in an uncompromising struggle, the government and the opposition fought frantically during elections. Political culture still remained Oriental despite the proclaimed primacy of Western democratic ideals. There was still a very pronounced desire to smooth out the contradictions between the moral and legal motivations behind the political decisions, as well as a trend toward promoting charismatic leaders, simplified forms of organization of power, etc.²⁹

Democratic culture was the least of the concerns of those who carried out the reforms in Azerbaijan: they had to deal with social, economic, and political tasks. Ramiz Mekhtiev has written on this score that the state dealt first and foremost with ensuring stability and security; it tried to minimize external and domestic threats, build up the country's economic potential, and do away with social and

²⁹ For the distinctions between the Western and Eastern types of political culture see: V.P. Pugachev, A.I. Soloviev, *Vvedenie v politologii*, Moscow, 1995, available at [http://www.i-u.ru/biblio/archive/pugachev_politolog/polit18.aspx].

economic inequality, “while trying to disregard as much as possible the problems of the transition stage.”³⁰ This probably explains the so-called nominal democracy which, the same author asserts, “is the only form of social order that allows the nation to move toward universal democracy,”³¹ if state power is strong enough.

This was inevitable; in the absence of the social prerequisites for democracy and civil culture, society needed a strong state as the guarantor of stability and economic advance. On the whole, the initial period of democratic development was all-important for the country’s future: the outlines of a new political and ideological model became clear. It was based on the ideology of Azerbaijan-ism as a neoconservative system stemming from the principles of secular statehood, political democracy, and self-sufficient national traditions.

Appearing in the mid-1990s, the idea of Azerbaijan-ism rapidly acquired an ideological content. On 9 November, 2001, speaking at the First Congress of Azerbaijani of the World, President Heydar Aliiev described it as “the basic idea of independent Azerbaijan.”³² Ramiz Mekhtiev speaks of Azerbaijan-ism as a national-state ideology which points to the aims and priorities of national development and the “perceptions and assessments of the present and future of the Azeri people.”³³

So far, the conceptual linchpins of the ideology of Azerbaijan-ism (philosophical, geopolitical, etc.) have not been adequately developed. Some think that, so far, the ideology fails to express the hopes and philosophical approaches of all citizens, especially those belonging to the ethnic and religious minorities. Philosopher A. Ismailov has written that its inadequately elaborated functions created two diametrically opposite approaches to this ideology. It is seen either as an attempt to reduce the diversity and richness of national life to subjective descriptions of Azerbaijan-ism, or as an effort to transform it into a cliché of sorts deprived of any content and structure, and divorced from other concepts and phenomena likewise expected to consolidate the nation.³⁴

The idea, however, is popular with the political elite and the intelligentsia because it points to a certain “third road” and offers an alternative to Westernization and Islamization. The national idea should democratize mass consciousness and raise the level of civil culture, otherwise democratic changes will never come. The national idea cannot be divorced from reality; it should be the product of a natural process and reflect the ideas and preferences of a larger part of society.

To succeed, democratic development needs a special type of involved individual and a “contract” form of cooperation in all the key spheres of life, which presupposes that citizens will acquire a clear idea about the meaning and values of freedom and about their responsibility for the state and its future. In his *Private Law Society and the Market Economy*, Franz Böhm wrote that in a democratic society the private law order gives all citizens freedom of action and extensive powers in establishing contacts with other people by guaranteeing fundamental rights and freedoms.³⁵ The state simultaneously and voluntarily abandons its primacy of the individual: from that time on it functions as a space within which an individual with a certain amount of knowledge, independent thinking, and civil consciousness is being formed. An open society is possible only if each and everyone is prepared to acknowledge responsibility for their choice and where moral power is part of their identity. “People sometimes fail to act on their moral beliefs because those beliefs are not really their own. Moral ‘oughts’ may then seem oppressive and refusal to abide by them liberating.”³⁶

³⁰ R. Mekhtiev, *Na puti k demokratii: razmyshliaia o nasledii*, Sherg-gerb, Baku, 2007, p. 549.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 556.

³² *Dünya Azərbaycanlıların I Qurultayı*, 9-10 noyabr 2001, ci il. Bakı, 2002. S. 25.

³³ R. Mekhtiev, *Azerbaidzhan: vyzovy globalizatsii*, XXI-Eni Neshrliar evi, Baku, 2004, p. 138.

³⁴ See: A. Ismailov, “Heydar Aliiev i idei natsionalnogo edinstva,” *Nash vek*, 13-19 May, 2005.

³⁵ See: F. Böhm, “Chastnopravovoe obshchestvo i rynochnaia ekonomika,” in: *Teoria khoziastvennogo poriadka: “Freiburgskaia shkola” i nemetskiy neoliberalizm*. Transl. from the German: Compiled, introduced and edited by V. Gutnik, ZAO Ekonomika Publishing House, Moscow, 2002, p. 201.

³⁶ R. Bergman, “Identity as Motivation: Toward a Theory of the Moral Self,” in: *Moral Development, Self and Identity*, ed. by Daniel K. Lapsley, Darcia Narvaez, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Mahwah, 2004, p. 31.

The future of Azerbaijan largely depends on the extent to which the modernized axiological system is grasped and appropriated by the broad masses, the middle class in particular. G. Nodia has written in this regard that “the modernizing project should be ideologically embedded within the national political tradition. Modernizing elites must be able to present modernization as a continuation and enhancement of a domestic political tradition or, at a minimum, as something that poses threat to it.”³⁷ Modernized values should not be limited to the elites—this possibility should be avoided. Today, when high-quality education and a high level of culture in general are no longer widely accessible—the sine qua non of citizens’ involvement in social and political life—the doubts about modernization’s success are well justified.

This means that the democratic changes should be tuned to Azerbaijan’s historical and cultural heritage and should stem from corresponding social and cultural prerequisites. The world knows different types of democracies not necessarily identical to the Western model, some of them exhibiting much more sustainability and durability thanks to the intrinsic combination of democratic values and moral principles in society. Financier George Soros, likewise, arrived at the conclusion that Western representative democracy is not the only form of governance compatible with an open society. He was of a different opinion before the communist bloc fell apart.³⁸ This means that democracy and an open society are compatible with previous identities: public consciousness should be changed by bringing together traditions and innovations; cultural tradition and liberal values indispensable for the market economy and an open society should form a dynamic whole. “The conflict of values should be resolved through positive shifts in the way we look at cultural and axiological diversity, which does not contradict the basic consensus.”³⁹

Culture and consciousness should concentrate on stirring up all human capabilities responsible for the nation’s spiritual and material wellbeing and its moral and intellectual health. The central role in the process belongs to the carriers of personalized consciousness, of whom S. Lurie has written that they should not move to the side but should, instead, shape the axiological orientations of the rest of society.⁴⁰ Not only that: they should correctly assess the possible consequences of transformations of national identity and identify the elements of traditional thinking which can be described as dominating and indispensable for Azeri society, as well as the measures needed to effectively combine these elements with those of liberal culture.

The intelligentsia should select the least conflict-prone principles and axiological attitudes to be used to deal with urgent social, economic, and other problems. This process should not be limited to the academic and bureaucratic communities: value reassessment should proceed through clashes of values and interests which help to overcome contradictions and misunderstandings. We should critically examine everything that is considered to be correct and should publicly discuss this problem.

Today, the willingness of the larger part of society in Azerbaijan to embrace Western standards in politics, business communication, education, etc. can be regarded as the first step toward modernization. Understood as borrowing the external features of the Western lifestyle, modernization is misinterpreted both by its enthusiastic admirers and by those in whom it breeds conservative or even reactionary feelings. Not infrequently, people cannot but feel concerned: history has taught us that modernization does not necessarily produce economic growth and political stability. Much should be done to avoid negative developments: liberal reforms should not be reduced to price liberalization and privatization of economic facilities, while liberalization of consciousness to shedding moral norms and moral obligations. Individual freedom, which enjoys pride of place among democratic

³⁷ G. Nodia, “Georgia: Dimensions of Insecurity,” in: *Statehood and Security. Georgia after the Rose Revolution*, ed. by B. Coppieters, R. Legvold, MIT-Press, Cambridge, London, 2005, p. 73.

³⁸ See: V.A. Kutyrev, “Dva Sorosa,” *Obshchestvennyye nauki i sovremennost*, No. 3, 2000, p. 189.

³⁹ R. Mekhtiev, *Azerbaidzhan: vyzovy globalizatsii*, p. 70.

⁴⁰ See: S.V. Lurie, *Metamorfozy traditsionnogo soznania (Opyt razrabotki teoreticheskikh osnov etnopsikhologii i ikh primenenie k analizu istoricheskogo i etnograficheskogo materiala)*, St. Petersburg, 1994, p. 74.

freedoms, should not be taken for an invitation to reject the state, society, and laws, but should be embraced as a moral value. Boris Kapustin has written that individual freedom is expressed in the context of social relations as equality in freedom; in the context of relations with the state as equality before the law, which guarantees individual freedom of private and public activities; in the context of attitudes to differences in public life as tolerance for everything that does not reject tolerance; and in the economic context as recognition of private property as a condition of man's free development.⁴¹

In real life, however, liberal values do not merely contradict traditional values—they replace them. In his studies of the mutual influence of a liberal economy and morals, German philosopher Richard Münch describes financiers as “high priests” and economic laws as society's moral code. The gross social product is seen as a measure of prudence and good behavior, while the natural and socio-cultural environment is described as “a resource that must be constantly renewed to remain permanently in use.”⁴² This means that the spiritual and cultural specifics of modernizing nations are seriously endangered by economic imperatives which spread far and wide in all spheres of life.

Liberalism is fraught with another danger—the financial-political elite tends to isolate itself from the rest of the nation; the global beau monde does not associate itself with any country and no longer needs to buy moral justifications of its lifestyle. It is enough to obey the tacit rules of the club to remain its member; not infrequently the global elite betrays its cosmopolitanism by dismissing with disdain the concepts of “nation” and “traditions.” It is no wonder that Richard Münch has written that an unwillingness to detach themselves from the nation has become a hallmark of the “weak social strata and weak regions.”⁴³

The moral and ethical code of Islam is most effective when it comes to averting these dangers within the conception of Azerbaijan-ism. Islamic values are strong enough to establish horizontal ties in society, uproot the penchant toward authoritarianism inherited from the Soviet past, instill genuine patriotism in the younger generation, unite the republic's ethnic groups into a single Azerbaijani nation, and preserve the atmosphere of religious tolerance and confessional conciliation. It still remains to be seen whether the Muslims of Azerbaijan will overcome the limitations of their traditional mentality to completely dedicate themselves to the political and economic reforms in their country.

A traditional mentality, which presents the world as absolutely immutable, deprives man of creative impulses and the desire to change the world. Traditional values keep society together only when shared by its absolute majority—if not, suppressed mavericks are squeezed to the periphery since pluralism is only permitted within a single hierarchy of values. Not infrequently, devotion to the religious traditions turns out to be banal speculations—this happens to those who cannot or are not ready to stand up for their convictions in a transforming society. Traditionalists avoid any involvement in political activities; they may act as guardians of tradition, but devotion to some of them (with no real values in the context of cultural specifics) may cause backwardness in the broadest sense of the word.

As distinct from the traditionalists, the Muslim reformers never avoid contacts with other cultures and religions; they are always prepared to plant Islamic ideas and values in modern social and cultural soil. Former rector of the International Islamic University in Malaysia 'Abd al-Hamid Abu Sulayman has written that this “makes reality and practice a natural outcome of the observance of Muslim norms and remains connected with the sources of the Muslim faith and thought. In the final analysis, that shapes independent scientific Muslim thinking based on its own source of knowledge.”⁴⁴ It is the re-

⁴¹ See: B. Kapustin, “Liberalnoe soznanie v Rossii,” *Obshchestvennye nauki i sovremennost*, No. 3, 1994, p. 74.

⁴² R. Münch, “Vzaimoproniknovenia ekonomiki i morali,” available at [http://www.gumer.info/bogoslov_Buks/Philos/Article/Mynh_VzEk.php].

⁴³ R. Münch, “Trud i obshchestvennaia solidarnost v usloviakh globalnoy ekonomiki,” in: *Globalizatsia i stolknovenie identichnostey. Mezhdunarodnaia internet-konferentsia 24 fevralia-14 marta 2003*, Collection of materials, ed. by A. Zhuravskiy, K. Kostiuk, Moscow, 2003, p. 361.

⁴⁴ 'Abd al-Hamid Ahmad Abu Sulayman, *Azma al-'akl al-muslim* (Crisis of Muslim Consciousness), Dar al-kari' al-'arabi, Kairo, 1412/1991, p. 100.

formist approach to Islam that helps bring together the democratic reforms and traditional morals and spirituality. The process and its results, however, require in-depth examination.

Today, the Azerbaijani intelligentsia has to answer the following questions: Which liberal-democratic values are most important for civil society? How do they combine with national mentality and traditions? Which traditional values are universal and which are relative? What should be done to bring modernization values within the reach of the broad masses? The answers to the above should be sought in public discussions.

This means that civil society rather than the state should become the vehicle of modernizing reforms. Any reform is an act which gives an impetus for further development and which outlines its legal framework; the efficiency of any reform depends, to a great extent, on society's involvement and its capabilities. This should not be taken to mean that state institutions have no important role to play since the state and it alone, its strong social and economic basis, can compensate for the negative consequences of the changed conditions of labor, market relations, etc. According to T. Matsonashvili, "it would be a fatal mistake to shift the responsibility for the social risks onto individuals."⁴⁵ At the same time, political and socioeconomic reforms should be synchronized with the transformations in the social sphere and the growing political significance of civil society and its structures.

This process might be accelerated if and when Azerbaijan becomes part of the European and Euro-Atlantic political and cultural expanse. A. Nazarchuk has pointed out that international democratic standards have contributed to the government's tighter civil control and created conditions in which the political system and culture are transforming much faster than they might have otherwise.⁴⁶ This is only partly true: more often than not outside pressure does not take the interests of the developing countries and the preferences of their populations into account. Today, the West insists, either directly or through international institutions, that Azerbaijan should adhere to principles of liberalism and democracy. The former means that it should open its domestic market to transnational capital and privatize its public sector (including some of the strategic economic facilities). This might deplete the state's resources needed to stabilize the economy and the social sphere. The latter presupposes political and cultural pluralism in a form that promotes Western interests and, being ill-suited to the political, social, and cultural context, undermines state power. This is best illustrated by what the PACE is doing to ensure civil equality for the homosexual, bisexual, and trans-gender communities across the European continent, and in Azerbaijan in particular. On 23 January, 2010, the Azerbaijani PACE delegation refused to discuss two resolutions on the rights of sexual minorities to self-expression and on teaching respect for such communities as part of the school curriculum. Back home, the public rebelled against discussion of these subjects at the PACE level, while politicians, human rights activists, and public and religious leaders were dead set against unisexual marriages.

The political and ideological neo-conservatism of the Azerbaijani leaders rejects imitation of European experience; modernization and reforms in the republic are geared toward the nation's traditional ideas about the world, but never ignore those principles of democracy and open society without which the country would be unable to develop into the leader of the Central Caucasus and the Muslim world (in which all regions grapple with similar problems created by globalization). The middle-of-the-road course (chosen by the republic's leaders) is essentially the only correct one in the current geopolitical context; it is for civil society to identify the relevant mechanisms and the forces responsible for each of the specific tasks. Social reforms are not a one-way street—it is wrong to pile the entire responsibility on the state.

⁴⁵ T. Matsonashvili, "Problemy perestroiki sotsialnogo gosudarstva v Zapadnoy Evrope," *Pro et Contra*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 2001, p. 124.

⁴⁶ See: A.V. Nazarchuk, *op. cit.*, p. 303.

The Secular and the Religious in Azerbaijani Society

Modernization in Azerbaijan is secular; the Constitution of the Azerbaijan Republic describes it as a secular state; this principle is strictly observed in all spheres of public life: civil service and the constitutional-legal status of civil servants, education, etc. The state which remains equidistant from all confessions controls their activities to be prepared to defend their interests, to ensure public security and the rights of its citizens. Despite the fact that according to certain sources up to 96 percent of the republic's population identifies themselves as Muslims (there are no relevant official figures), the Muslim clergy enjoys no privileges denied to other confessions: it carries no weight with the country's leaders, has no special rights in state structures (schools, hospitals, military units, penitentiary system, etc.).

At the same time, modernization should not be identified with secularization: in independent Azerbaijan, religion has gained a lot of public and cultural weight. In two decades, the government has not merely accepted the religious revival—it has created conditions in which the country's citizens could freely realize their right to the freedom of conscience, while religious associations were free to contribute to public life. Secularization presupposes that the religious communities and leaders are removed from state administration, political activities, and secular education.

The official clergy represented by the Administration of the Muslims of the Caucasus is quite satisfied with the situation and its role in public life; some of the independent Muslim leaders, however, can be described as Islamists who want greater political roles for the clergy. Some of them are promoting democratic changes and appealing to the experience of the West where religious-political parties and movements figure prominently on the political scene. Others vehemently oppose secularization and favor political involvement as an instrument for bringing the Shari'a into all spheres of life. The former group consists of highly politicized Shi'a and Nursists, followers of a pro-Turkish religious movement; the latter brings together those who want to create a "worldwide caliphate" and whose ideas are close to those of the Muslim Brotherhood and the Islamic Party of Liberation. The Islamists have not yet knocked together a more or less consistent political platform and socioeconomic program. Their reliance on religious sermons and the contradiction between the Islamic ideals and social reality attracts young protestors rather than Muslim intellectuals. In the future, the Islamist ranks might swell with "sympathizers" from among the moderates (including the Sufi and Salafi), who so far remain loyal to secular power.

On the whole, the religious revival in Azerbaijan is not spearheaded against the secular statehood. Political Islam has no roots in the Central Caucasus; people in Azerbaijan frown at the abuse of religion for secular purposes, although if the economic strategy of the country's leaders fails, it may draw Islamist movements into politics; those harder hit than others by modernization might find their ideas highly attractive. In the latter half of the 20th century, modernization raised a wave of Islamism which extended its social support, moral guidance, material aid, medical services, education, and employment, in short everything the Muslim governments were too often unable to offer⁴⁷ to the growing numbers of urban dwellers in the Muslim countries.

On the other hand, some people discern not only social but also civilizational prerequisites which give rise to Islamism. According to Mansoor Moaddel, Islam's political dimension is a response to its excessive secularization pursued by the enthusiastic intelligentsia and politicians who embraced the Eurocentrist conception of rationalism and its ideas of world history.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ See: S. Huntington, "Vek musul'manskikh vojn" (The Age of Muslim Wars), available at [<http://www.archipelag.ru/geopolitics/stolknovenie/11september/111/>].

⁴⁸ See: M. Moaddel, "The Future of Islam after 9/11," *Futures*, Vol. 36 (9), 2004, available at [<http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=5007552381>].

The correlation between the secular and the religious in the Azerbaijani modernization project, therefore, calls for cautious treatment and balanced approaches. Rash efforts to squeeze religion out of the social expanse or reduce believers “to the status of second-rate citizens”⁴⁹ may cause a landslide in the nation’s religious-political views and end in an open confrontation. The recent history of other Muslim states (Iran, Afghanistan, and Algeria to name a few) has demonstrated that confrontation between secular regimes and Islamist movements may end in disaster.

The leaders of Azerbaijan are working toward a harmonious combination of traditional Islamic values and the principles of democracy and liberalism. The middle-of-the-road course outlines the limits of democracy and religion while preserving democracy and stronger spiritual and cultural traditions as the strategic aim. This conception of state-religion relations presupposes that religion’s potential can be used to deal with social problems and to minimize the negative consequences of economic globalization. A more or less complete idea of the prospects for middle-of-the-road modernization in Azerbaijan requires answers to two purely pragmatic questions: Does the secular principle allow religion to move into certain spheres of social life? Is separation of religion from the state completely legitimate from the point of view of traditional Islam?

Political theory knows no single model of a secular state. A. Ostanin, for example, has identified three types: indifferent, when the state separates itself from religious associations and does not enter into partnership with any them; preferential, when the state establishes dynamic relations with the dominant confession; and classical, when the state enters into partner relations with religious associations, while keeping in mind the interests of the population, without giving preference to any of them.⁵⁰

In practice, however, relations with religious associations and their funding are legally justified even in states with long and firm traditions of political secularism. In France (where the state deliberately demonstrates its equidistance from all religious groups and insists on separation of school from religion), teachers in private religious schools are paid by the state, which also bears some of the educational expenses under the Debré Law of 1959.⁵¹ According to Elizabeth A. Sewell, secular states grant direct and indirect financial and other privileges to religious associations and organizations patronized by various confessions. The state may and should compensate for the property it has confiscated from any religious organization in the past.⁵²

All interpretations of the concept of the secular and its limits aside, most experts agree that it does not necessarily mean theomachy and total rejection of religion. Igor Ponkin, for example, writes that “the secular nature of any state means a system of requirements which ensures independence and sovereignty of the state and religious organizations within their spheres of competence.”⁵³ Their boundaries depend not only on the immanent functions of the state and religion, but also on the interests and requirements of any specific society at any specific stage in its history. Those who extend the current interpretation of the secular to the acceptance of religion as “a *positive* component of social order on a par with science”⁵⁴ are absolutely right.

⁴⁹ American political scientist Peter O’Brien describes this response to the Islamic revival as hard liberalism (see: A. Sharipov, “Postmodernistskiy liberalizm—panatseia ot islamofobii?” available at [<http://www.islam.ru/pressclub/islamofobia/panaceya>]).

⁵⁰ See: A.V. Ostanin, “Svetskoe gosudarstvo i demokratia,” *Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, No. 325, 2009, p. 106.

⁵¹ See: K. Pisenko, “Uroki religii v gosudarstvennoy shkole—norma svetskogo pravovogo gosudarstva,” available at [<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/jurnal/29267.htm>].

⁵² See: E. Sewell, “Sravnitelnaia kharakteristika svetskikh gosudarstv i ravenstvo religioznykh organizatsiy” (A Comparative Perspective on Secular Governments and Equality of Religious Organizations), available at [<http://religion.sova-center.ru/publications/4C5458F/49E984C>].

⁵³ See: I.V. Ponkin, *Svetskost gosudarstva*, Moscow, 2004, p. 22.

⁵⁴ See: S. Naumov, N. Slonov, “Ot ateisticheskogo gosudarstva—k svetskomu,” *Svobodnaia mysl*, No. 9, 2009, p. 50.

Religion and the State in Islamic Religious-Political Thought

Having found an answer to the first of the two questions, let us ask once more: Does traditional Islam accept separation of religion from the state? In other words: Will religious tradition raise an insurmountable obstacle to the democratic reforms in Azerbaijan and in the Muslim world? If Islamic tradition is antagonistic to the fundamental principle of liberal democracy, further development and strengthening of Islam will inevitably end in a clash of two philosophical systems. More than that, the idealistic and egalitarian nature of Islam encourages dissent, which might cause social and political protests.⁵⁵

Today, the thesis that in Islam religion and the state form an indivisible whole dominates Islamic studies to the extent that most researchers never deem it necessary to go to its roots. Islamic political thought is based on the primacy of state/religion interaction; Muslims do not think that one opposes the other. Religion is very important for the state, just as the state is for religion. More than that: the importance of the state, which ensures observance of the Divine commandments, stems from Islam. Does this mean that the spiritual and secular power forms an indivisible whole and that a secular state is unacceptable?

According to Prof. Kerimov, the unity of spiritual and secular power underlies the Muslim doctrine: "People do not write laws but obey the Divine laws, which means that power can be executive but never legislative."⁵⁶ This idealism is best suited to the period of the Prophet because, according to the Muslim traditions, the commands and decisions of the Prophet Muhammad were confirmed by the authority of revelation. Some of the Koranic ayats say, for example: "We sent not an Apostle, but to be obeyed, in accordance with the Will of Allah" and "He who obeys the Apostle, obeys Allah" (Surah 4 "The Women," ayats 64 and 80). The Prophet was a spiritual teacher, ruler, law-giver, commander-in-chief, and judge. The faithful addressed him with all sorts of personal questions and inquiries about social life. The Shari'a is based on the answers.

This form of governance survived under the four righteous caliphs, however their decisions exhibited traits of "human law-giving." This was at the time when Islam spread beyond Arabia; the Muslims had to cope with problems unknown at the time of the Prophet; their lifestyle was changing. This gave rise to the tradition of *ijtihad*, an independent study of the Koranic texts and the Sunna to deal with problems not directly mentioned in the holy texts. Promptly appropriated by the *fakih*s (lawyers), *ijtihad* was used to correlate the new reality and problems with the life of the Prophet Muhammad; this made Muslim law highly flexible and adjustable.

Starting with the Ummayyads, secular and religious power began to gradually split, even if formally both parts remained in the hands of the caliphs. Confrontation between the ruling dynasty and the religious authorities (who tried to contain the arbitrary rule of the caliphs and their vicegerents) was mostly latent with occasional armed flare-ups. Aydyn Ali-zadeh has rightly noted that religious values lost some of their former importance in Muslim societies and that the rulers deemed it expedient to replace them. After a while this brought in secularization, which, in the Muslim world, took the form of a protest "against the shameful theocratic-monarchic methods of state governance,"⁵⁷ rather than a struggle of society's most progressive members against the Divine laws.

The opposition with political power exhausted the religious leaders: they left the political scene and finally accepted the legitimacy of the monarchy as a form of governance. K. Markov offered the following comment about the mechanism of this system: "There was no formal agreement but a latent

⁵⁵ See: M.A. Faksh, *The Future of Islam in the Middle East: Fundamentalism in Egypt, Algeria, and Saudi Arabia*, Praeger Publishers, Westport, 1997, p. 23.

⁵⁶ G.M. Kerimov, *Shariat: zakon zhizni musul'man. Otvety Shariata na problemy sovremennosti*, DILIA Publishers, St. Petersburg, 2007, p. 396.

⁵⁷ A. Ali-zadeh, "Islam i sekuliarnye formy gosudarstvennoy vlasti," available at [<http://www.islam.ru/pressclub/histori/isekfov/>].

deal under which the legislative power of the ulema and their financial and institutional independence from the government were exchanged for the ulema-sanctioned freedom for the monarch to remain a more or less absolute secular ruler. This meant that the ulema had no right to interfere in state administration in order to trim the monarch's arbitrariness. The latter, however, was aware of the limitations imposed on him by the Shari'a, which was due in particular to the ulema's high prestige."⁵⁸

The secular and religious authorities split in the latter half of the 9th century when the Abbasid caliphs turned into puppets of the military leaders of the Guards. For several centuries, real power in the Abbasid state shifted from the top military to the Buwayhid emirs and later to the Seljuk sultans. These real rulers allowed the caliphs to remain in control of the Shari'a and adherence to it and to guarantee the regime's legitimacy. According to Shafi'i jurist Abu al-Hasan al-Mawardi (d. 1058), this form of governance contradicted the principle of absolute subordination to the ruler, but perfectly suited the principles of following the Shari'a and religious commandments. While recognizing the legitimacy of this form of division of powers, the respected theologian explained it by the impermissibility of allowing the anarchy and troubles that might arise under a weak ruler.⁵⁹

Imam Abu Hamed al-Ghazali (d. 1111) likewise pointed to the need to obey the emir, who had the power and qualities indispensable for governing the country and imposing the laws. He deliberately pointed out that if a ruler was able to unite the people and impose the laws, even though he lacked all the qualities necessary for a ruler (knowledge of the Shari'a, fairness, etc.) but was still strong enough to retain power, he should be obeyed by all means: "This is not a voluntary assumption, rather necessity permits what is banned. We all know that eating dead flesh is bad, but dying is much worse. I would like to find anyone today who disagrees with this and outlaws a ruler who fails to meet all the demands: he will never manage to replace him with anyone else willing to fill the post or even anyone meeting all the requirements."⁶⁰

Traditional theology looks at the form of governance as the means used to realize the functions and the aim of the state; Islam regards observance of the principles and laws of the Shari'a as the state's main function. Mikhail Piotrovskiy wrote that "medieval Muslim society demonstrated a certain duality in the correlation between the secular and spiritual authorities. On the one hand, there is the original Islamic principle of indivisibility of the secular and the spiritual as the source of all specifically Islamic political institutions. On the other, theory has admitted, while practice has demonstrated that the two spheres of power are separate; further development is largely going in the same direction."⁶¹

Contemporary Islamic thought has preserved a traditional approach to questions of state structure, which looks at the correlation between the aims and the means and takes into account the social and political processes that swept across the Muslim world when the Ottoman Empire fell apart, the caliphate was abolished, and secular regimes became a fact. 'Abd ar-Rahman ibn Nasir as-Sa'di (d. 1956), a prominent theologian of the 20th century, wrote in his tafsir: "Those Muslims who live in a state ruled by infidels should try to set up a republic in which individuals and the people have the right to practice their religion and organize their secular lives rather than obey a state which interferes with religious practices and pursuance of secular (material) wellbeing and which subjugates people and deprives them of their civil rights. A Muslim state ruled by Muslims is the best option. In its absence, a state which looks after the religious and secular rights of its citizens is the best choice."⁶²

⁵⁸ K.V. Markov, "Sushchnost 'islamskogo vozrozhdenia' v sovremennom mire i protsessy evolutsii obshchestvenno-politicheskoy sistemy Islamskoy Respubliki Iran," in: *Iran: Islam i vlast*, Institute of Oriental Studies, RAS, Kraft + Publishers, Moscow, 2002, p. 116.

⁵⁹ See: Ali ibn Muhammad al-Mawardi, "Kitab al-ahkam as-Sultaniyyah" (The Laws of Islamic Governance), available at [<http://www.alwarraq.com>].

⁶⁰ Abu Hamed al-Ghazali, "Al-iqtisad fil-I'tiqad" (Median in Belief), available at [<http://www.alwarraq.com>].

⁶¹ M.B. Piotrovskiy, "Svetskoe i dukhovnoe v praktike srednevekovogo islama," in: *Islam. Religia. Obshchestvo. Gosudarstvo*, Glavnaia redaktsia vostochnoy literatury izdatelstva "Nauka," Moscow, 1984, p. 185.

⁶² 'Abd ar-Rahman ibn Nasir as-Sa'di, *Taysir al-Karim ar-Rahman fi Tafsir Kalamut Mannan*, Muassasa ar-risala, Beirut, 1417/1997, p. 345.

This vast quote is highly important: it explains the principle of the priority of the aims of the Shari'a, in which human rights, their protection and guarantee, figure prominently. Strictly speaking, the Muslim state is ideally intended to protect fundamental rights and freedoms. In its absence, a democratic state does not object to the Shari'a.

As distinct from Western political thought, classical Islam never developed a political conception of the state. Al-Mawardi, al-Ghazali, Ibn Taymiyyah, and Ibn Haldun touched on the problem of political power, but never developed systematized teaching about the state, its basic descriptions, functions, and institutions. Traditional ideas about the state followed the changing social and political structure of the Caliphate. Despite the fact that Islamic tradition idealizes the epoch of the Prophet and the righteous caliphs, classical Islam contains no categorical rejection of other forms of governance (different from early Islamic) if the basic aims of the Shari'a are observed.

The ideology of political Islam, which appeared in the mid-20th century as a response to European colonization and the abolition of the Islamic Caliphate, stands apart from the traditional context. It is based on borrowed and Muslim revolutionary experience; its methodological foundations are very different from the principles of Muslim law, which explains why the doctrine frequently violates the principle of priority, while means substitute the aims. For example, Indian publicist and public figure Abu al-A'la al-Mawdudi (d. 1979) wrote that "the Islamic state that Muslim political action seeks to build is a panacea for all their [Muslim] problems."⁶³ This was where the main methodological error of his political doctrine was rooted: Islam regards the state as a means which makes it possible to attain high religious aims and ideals. Neither the holy tradition nor the classics of Islam defined a Shari'a state as the final aim of Islam; nor do contemporary thinkers working on Maqâsid Ash Shari'a say this.

Sayyid Qutb (executed in 1966), another ideologist of Islamism and a leader of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood movement, favored a radical divorce from the existing order and called for opposing any power not based on the laws of Allah. He described societies as unfaithful in which the laws were written by people in violation of the principle of one god. Mustafa Shukri (executed in 1978), who founded the Takfir wal-Hijra (Excommunication and Exodus) movement, added his own interpretation to Qutb's ideas. He described everyone outside his organization as unfaithful. Many of the respected ulema, including Sheikh Youssef al-Qaradawi,⁶⁴ one of the leaders of The Muslim Brotherhood moderates, scathingly criticized Sayyid Qutb and the Takfir supporters.

C o n c l u s i o n

The above suggests that the potential of traditional Islamic values can be used to preserve spiritual and moral values and to strengthen national identity during modernization. As the confrontation between spirituality and the power of instinct gains momentum, the need for Islam as a philosophical system, moral and ethical regulator, and cultural factor will also grow stronger. The course of modernization and the nature of religiosity will depend on defining the correct center of gravity between the two pillars—the secular nature of the reforms and the religious nature of the spiritual needs of man and society.

Malaysia, Turkey, and some other Muslim countries have already learned from their own experience that Islamic tradition does not interfere with political and economic progress: correctly interpreted, it helps to create an open society. Islam can and should become part of the national idea of Azerbaijan; this will help the Azerbaijanis to preserve their very specific nature, avoid the destructive

⁶³ G. Kepel, *Jihad: The Trial of Political Islam*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 2002, p. 34.

⁶⁴ See: Islamonline.net, 8 August, 2009, available at [http://islamyoon.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=ArticleA_C&cid=1248187724889&pagename=Islamyoun%2FIYALayout].

impact of the global mass culture, and become a link between the West and the East. The outlines of the future world order are still vague, which means that those able to forecast the geoculture of development sooner than others will gain a place in the global world. If mankind enters the age of “global universalism” predicted by sociologists, those societies that have learned how to enrich their traditions without losing their cultural specifics will have an advantage over others.

Today, the value orientations in Azerbaijan, particularly among young people, are fairly diverse. Public discussions of the nature of the reforms being carried out by the country’s leaders and of the role values play in the nation’s emergence and development look like the best way to overcome social and ideological disunity. The time has come to draw a line between defense of fundamental rights and legal nihilism and between traditionalist Islam and Islamic tradition. We should preserve the traditional values which shape highly moral individuals and the nation’s inner world. Public consciousness should be reformed to embrace values that are conducive to a stronger civil society and which liberate the creative energy of each and everyone.

Modernization in Azerbaijan is continuing; the outcome is still vague, but the aims are clear. We should create a nation, the voice of which will be heard all over the world and which will be able to stand up for itself in the globalization age. It remains to be seen whether society is prepared to move away from all forms of social and cultural mimicry, become aware of its national “Self,” and embark on its own road of development.
