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**“Din wa dawla:  
Egyptian views of American Secularism”**

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It has been agreed that as *din wa dawla*, Islam employs a theology of politics. Thus, the most predominant critique of Secularism raised by many Muslim scholars is that it is a Western concept which has nothing to do with Islam. From the Islamist perspective, Secularism is itself part of an “intellectual invasion” of the Muslim world by the West seeking to undermine the foundations of Islam. However, as several recent studies have noted, there does not seem to be an adequate understanding of the difference between Secularism and Secularization, or of the various forms and functions of religion in a Secular society. Most Muslim analyses of the concept of Secularism have focused upon European concepts, leaving aside the American context and experience.

In this American Presidential election year, many Arab Muslims will take great interest in the political issues involved with the American electoral process. Yet, are Muslim views of the American Secular system an accurate reflection of American Religious Secularism, or are they based more upon preconceived notions of European Jacobite Secularism? In this paper we will review the opinions of three prominent Egyptians scholars whose works are widely read throughout Egypt: Muhammad ‘Amarah, ‘Abd al-Wahab al-Messiri, and Yussuf al-Qaradawi. Each of these thinkers has produced recent publications regarding the issue of Secularism. We will ascertain their views on *‘almāniyya* in an attempt to determine whether or not such views actually reflect the American social-political experience. Highlighting the subtle distinctions between religious *power* and religious *authority*, we will ask the question as to whether this system can provide an acceptable blueprint for an Islamic society that is not contradictory to the principles of *dīn wa dawla*.

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The topic of “Islam and Secularism” has been important in recent years. This issue has been covered in English by scholars such as John Esposito,<sup>1</sup> Tarek Mitri,<sup>2</sup> Bassam Tibi,<sup>3</sup> and Kate Zebiri,<sup>4</sup> and in Arabic by numerous scholars, like Muhammad Arkoun,<sup>5</sup> Muhammad Salim ‘Awa,<sup>6</sup> Aziz al-Azmeh,<sup>7</sup> Hasan Hanafi,<sup>8</sup> Fahmy Huwaidi,<sup>9</sup> and, of course, the late Farag Fohda.<sup>10</sup> In the current atmosphere of globalization, the contemporary debate among Arab scholars makes it clear that the concepts of “Secularism” are vitally important ones facing the Arab World. The 2002 Arab Human Development Report states that out of all of the regions of the world the Arab

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<sup>1</sup>John L. Esposito and Azzam Tamini, eds. *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East* (New York: New York University Press, 2000).

<sup>2</sup>Mitri, T., ed. *Religion, Law and Society: a Christian-Muslim discussion* (Geneva, WCC Publications), 1995. This includes numerous articles in English on various aspects of secularism.

<sup>3</sup>Bassam Tibi, “Major Themes in the Arabic Political Literature of Islamic Revivalism, 1970-1985: The Islamic System of Government (*al-nizām al-islāmī*), *shūrā* Democracy and the Implementation of the Sharī‘a as Opposed to Secularism (*‘ilmāniyya*), *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* Vol. 3, no. 2 (1992); *Islam Between Culture and Politics* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), esp. pp. 110f; as well as *The Challenge of Fundamentalism: Political Islam and the New World Disorder* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), see esp. 82-113.

<sup>4</sup>Kate Zebiri, “Muslim Anti-Secularist Discourse in the Context of Muslim-Christian Relations,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* vol 9, no. 1 (1998):47-64; *Muslims and Christians Face to Face* (Oxford: One World Pub), 1997; and “Muslim Perceptions of Christianity and the West,” in ed. Lloyd Ridgeon, *Islamic Interpretations of Christianity* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2001), 179-203.

<sup>5</sup>Muhammad Arkoun, *al-‘Almānah wa ‘l-dīn: al-Islām, al-Masīḥiyya, al-Gharb* (London: Dar al-Saqi, 1990).

<sup>6</sup>Muhammad Salim ‘Awa, *Fī al-nizām al-siyāsī li ‘l-dawla al-Islāmiyya* 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1989). Translated into English as *On the Political System of the Islamic State* (Indianapolis, Indiana: American Trust Publications, 1980).

<sup>7</sup>Al -Azmeh, Aziz, *Al-‘Ilmāniyya min manz.ūr mukhtalif* (Beirut: Markaz Dirasat al-Wahdat al-‘Arabiyya, 1992).

<sup>8</sup>Hasan Hanafi, *Al-dīn wa ‘l-thaqāfa wa ‘l-siyāsah fī ‘l-wat.an al-‘arabī* (Cairo: Dar Qibai, 1998).

<sup>9</sup>Fahmy Huwaidi, *Al-Islām wa ‘l-dimuqratiyya* (Cairo: Al-Ahram, 1993).

<sup>10</sup>Farag Fohda, *H.iwār hawla al-‘almāniyya* (Cairo: al-Mahrusah Lil-Nashr, 1987).

countries have the lowest value in terms of measuring “civil liberties, political rights and independence of the media.”<sup>11</sup>

From the Arab Muslim perspective, Secularism has generally been frowned upon as an answer to the social-political issues of the 20<sup>th</sup> /21<sup>st</sup> centuries. Arab Muslim scholars have looked at Secularism, at best, as a helpful social-political blueprint for Western society but not able to address the problems and needs of Arab society. At worst, however, they have viewed Secularism as an “intellectual invasion” bent upon the destruction of Islamic society; it is a new Western Crusade wrapped in a new guise.<sup>12</sup>

This paper will attempt to look at three Egyptian Arab scholars who have recently published (or re-released) works on the issue of Secularism (*‘almāniyya*),<sup>13</sup> and whose works are widely read throughout Egypt: Muhammad ‘Amarah, Yussuf al-Qaradawi, and ‘Abd al-Wahab al-Messiri.

Each of these scholars approaches the topic somewhat differently and yet ultimately concludes that Secularism as a blueprint for a political order is not a concept which will meet the requirements for Arab/Islamic society. We find in this review, however, that in each case, the concept of Secularism articulated by each of these authors originates primarily from two main

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<sup>11</sup>United Nations Development Programme, *The Arab Human Development Report 2002* (New York: United Nations Publications, 2002), 27.

<sup>12</sup>See specifically ‘Ali M Jarisha and Muhammad Sheikh Zaibaq, *Asalīb al-ghazū al-fikrī lī al-‘ālam al-Islāmī*<sup>2nd</sup> ed. (Cairo: Dar al-I’tisam, 1978). Tibi reviews their thought in *The Challenge of Islamic Fundamentalism*, 152-157.

<sup>13</sup>Although the initial problem of translating “Secularism” as either *‘almāniyya*, *‘ālamaniyya*, *‘ilmāniyya*, *dunyāwiyya*, *la-dīn*, etc. is very important as to the particular interpretation of the concept, let us leave this linguistic/etymological problem aside for the moment. See Muhammad ‘Amarah, *Al-Sharī’a al-Islāmiyya wa ‘l-‘Almāniyya al-Gharbiyya* (Cairo) Dar al-Shuruq, 2003), 18; ‘Abd al-Wahab al-Messiri, *Al-‘Alamāniyya al-Juz’iyya wa ‘l-‘Almāniyya al-Shāmalah* (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 2001), 97-99, and Azaam Tamimi, “The Origins of Arab Secularism,” in ed. Esposito, 13-14.

points of reference: the French Revolution of 1798, and the Kemalist Revolution of 1922.<sup>14</sup> Both of these historical events rely upon similar assumptions about the role and type of Secularism employed in society, namely that religion - its *power* and its *authority* - should be removed from any public sphere. These authors rarely review the actual effect of “secularization” in other countries (al-Messiri being the exception), neither do they show a significant grasp of the social-political development of Secularism in the United States, and its importance as a possible model for Muslim communities.

In this American presidential election year, many Arab Muslims will take great interest in the political issues involved with the American electoral process for numerous reasons! Most of these motives will be based upon how the election will affect American foreign policy in the Middle East regarding the occupation of Iraq, Israel and Palestine, the concept of the “New Middle East,” and certainly the War on Terror. Yet, are Arab Muslim views of Secular America an accurate reflection of American Religious Secularism,<sup>15</sup> or are they based more upon preconceived notions of European Jacobite Secularism as played out in France and Turkey?

In this review, we find that the interpretations of these three authors on Secularism, although an accurate interpretation of France and Turkey, do not actually reflect the American social-political experience or the relationship between religion and government, *dīn wa dawla*, in

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<sup>14</sup>The Turkish Sultanate was abolished on 1 November 1922, leaving the Caliphate a solely spiritual office. This was abolished on 3 March 1924. See Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (London: Hurst & Company, 1964), esp. 446-460.

<sup>15</sup>William E. Shepherd uses this term to define Indonesia, where in a pluralistic context, although Islam is not made the state religion and the *sharī'a* the state law, its principles are recognized as foundational for the nation. Shepherd uses this term in reference to a predominantly Muslim country, and here I borrow the term to reflect the American experience. There recognition of the Diety has been prominent throughout American political history, while holding firm on the dis-establishment of any one faith/denomination which has been hallmark of the system. See William E. Shepherd, “Islam and Ideology: Towards a Typology,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19 (1987): 307-336, esp. 309-310.

the U.S. We would add, then, that a more accurate review of the “secularization” of *authority* in American society, and the “de-sacrilisation” of *power* in American government, creates an atmosphere in which religious communities can flourish, including the Muslim community. If the hallmark of a Secular system is individual or collective freedom from a government’s imposition of a particular faith, or one particular interpretation of a faith, then the issues of Secularism should be addressed, not from the perspective of East vs. West, but as a positive system which can allow for the flourishing of independent religious piety for the benefit of Arab society as a whole. Furthermore, we would like to suggest that such a system is not contradictory to the Reformist concept of *dīn wa dawla*.

Let us first look at three general arguments among Muslims regarding the fundamental differences between Islam and Secularism as a political system. Then we will proceed to look at the proposed Egyptian scholars. Finally, we will make some concluding remarks.

It was the Syrian reformer Rashid Rida who developed the concept in Modern Islamic thought that Islam is *dīn wa dawla*.<sup>16</sup> Rida pressed the point that Islam, by its very nature, is not an esoteric religion, but rather that it has as a goal to affect the social-political order. Islam is a system in which an ethical religious law is enforced by a particular political authority. The Caliph’s primary role was, according to Rida, to enforce the Holy Law (*sharī‘a*). Thus, Islam deals with “sovereignty and politics and government.”<sup>17</sup> This concept, as developed by Rida, has

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<sup>16</sup>Rashid Ridwa, *Al-khalafa aw al-imām al-‘auz.ma* (n.p.: Cairo, 1923). See Malcolm Kerr, *Islamic Reform: The Political and Legal Theories of Muhammad ‘Abduh and Rashid Rida* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1966).

<sup>17</sup>Rashid Ridwa, *al-Wah.y al-Muh.ammadī*, as cited in Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 239.

been taken up again and again by contemporary Muslim authors in their arguments against Secularism as the basis of a national order. The trend among many Arab Muslim authors has been to argue that, unlike the Western Christian experience, Islam as a religion develops an order (*nizam*) for society. It is argued that Christianity can accept Western Secularism as a social-political system, because its roots are not buried there. However, this is not so with Islam. Therefore, Secularism and Islam are competing ideologies. At the root level they have fundamentally different concepts of the social order; one organized according to religious precepts ordained by God, the other devoid of religious precepts altogether.

Closely related to this is another common criticism by Muslim scholars that Secularism is an European invention developed to respond to its own unique context. According to many Arab scholars, Secularism in France was a response by Enlightenment thinkers to the problem of corruption in the Roman Catholic Church and the Church's intrusion in politics. The philosophical basis of the French Revolution, of the individual's freedom from religious *authority*, was the result of expunging religious *power* from French politics. Christianity - as an esoteric religion<sup>18</sup> - involved itself in the problems of politics because it's priesthood was corrupt. This priesthood, that was intended to deal with spiritual matters, never should have involved itself with worldly affairs in the first place. Islam has no priesthood or special class of individuals granted sacramental powers for spiritual matters. Therefore, there is no reason to prohibit the power of the religious rank and file because they have no special claim to power anyway. Thus, these Arab

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<sup>18</sup>See 5:82. *And nearest among them in love to the Believers wilt thou find those who say, "We are Christians": Because amongst these are men devoted to learning and men who have renounced the world, and they are not arrogant.*

scholars have concluded that Secularism is simply an European Christian problem resulting from the corruption of the priesthood.<sup>19</sup>

A final argument commonly used by Muslim scholars deflecting the proposal of Secularism follows closely on the previous argument. The premise that the Clergy of the Roman Catholic Church submitted to worldly corruption rests upon the interpretation of several New Testament passages which underline Christianity's concern for otherworldliness. Two commonly cited passages by Jesus are:

*My kingdom is not from this world* (John 18:36).

*Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's*" (Mark 12:17; see also Matthew 22:21; Luke 20:26).

Christianity by nature, then, is concerned solely with spiritual matters and is not concerned with the mundane affairs of government or social orders. Islam, on the contrary, has always made claims that such affairs are a significant part of the religious world view.<sup>20</sup> Spiritual and mundane matters are combined as a necessary part of religious belief.

Now that we have reviewed general criticisms of Secularism *vis a vis* its relationship with Christianity, let us look specifically at the work of Muhammad 'Amarah, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, and 'Abd al-Wahab al-Massiri.

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<sup>19</sup>See David D. Grafton, "The 'Religious Secularism' of Lebanon and the United States: A discussion between Lebanon's Secular debate and Madison's principles of Pluralism," *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* (Fall), 2002, esp. 44-46.

<sup>20</sup>Interestingly, in the debate over the status of religious minorities in an Islamic State, it has been argued that because Christianity has not established social laws, that living under the authority of Islam should not be problematic, because the Islamic state does not threaten the pursuit of those spiritual precepts. See especially;

1.) The Egyptian jurist Muhammad ‘Amarah, in his recently republished work, *Al-Sharī‘a al-Islāmiyya wa ‘l-‘Almāniyya al-Gharbiyya* [Islamic Law and Western Secularism],<sup>21</sup> takes the common approach that Secularism is part of European history and civilization. It is part and parcel with Western thought which separates the world into two spheres, the spiritual and the mundane. ‘Amarah calls this the “Theory of the Two Swords” (*al-seif al-rūh.ī* and *al-seif al-zamanī*).<sup>22</sup>

In splitting reality into two spheres, the “earthly” (*dunyawī*) and the “heavenly” (*dīmī*), French Enlightenment philosophers submitted all social, political and religious ideologies to human reason (*aql*). The standard for what was real was to be supplied by human reason alone. The concepts of religion or spirituality were relegated to spheres of “unreasonableness” or even “irrationality.”

‘Amarah states that Secularism, based upon Enlightenment thought, is founded solely upon the Human Intellect. Quoting the contemporary French Philosopher Emile Bula, ‘Amarah accepts Secular thought at face value; “God’s Law becomes subject to conscious human law” in the name of Freedom.<sup>23</sup> Thus, nothing more needs to be said! Secularism as an ideology subverts God’s authority.

In a much earlier work, *Hal al-islām hūwa al-h.all?* [Is Islam the Answer?], ‘Amarah clearly argues that under Enlightenment thought the basis of all social organization is the Human

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<sup>21</sup>Muhammad ‘Amarah, *Al-Sharī‘a al-Islāmiyya wa ‘l-‘Almāniyya al-Gharbiyya* (Cairo: Dar al-Sharouk, 2003). See also *Al-Islām wa ‘l-‘Uruba wa ‘l-‘Almāniyya* (Beirut, 1981).

<sup>22</sup>‘Amarah, 18 and 22. We can only assume that ‘Amarah has misread the Lutheran ethic of the “Two Kingdoms Theory.” For a helpful explanation of the Lutheran doctrine see Carl E. Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), esp. 123-139.

<sup>23</sup>‘Amarah, 20.

Intellect which determines ethics and morality, according to what it has defined as “Natural Law” (*al-qānūn al-t.abīʿa*). In a Secular order therefore, it is the human that holds the *power* to regulate what is right and wrong. In a Democratic Secular order final sovereignty to create laws, then, resides with the people (*al-shaʿb wa ʿl-ummah*). In an Islamic system, however, final sovereignty belongs solely to God to determine laws; and God’s sovereignty is made manifest through the exposition of *sharīʿa*.<sup>24</sup> For ‘Amarah, *sharīʿa* and Secularism are in direct opposition to one another.

2.) Yusuf al-Qaradawi, now residing as the Mufti of Qatar, follows much of ‘Amarah’s thinking here. According to al-Qaradawi, in his latest edition of *Al-Islām wa ʿl-ʿAlmāniyya wajhān li-wajh* [Islam and Secularism face to face],<sup>25</sup> the European legacy of Secularism subverts “absolute legislative truth from God, the Creator, and gives it to humanity, the Created.”<sup>26</sup> In a more precise method than ‘Amarah, al-Qaradawi does look into the Secularization process of European society. The development of Humanism (*al-Bashariyya*), he determines, was a cultural attempt during the Renaissance toward Positivism, thinking about the advancement and development and worldly matters, at the expense of spiritual ones. This initial thrust would continue to move society not only away from, but against religion.<sup>27</sup>

Therefore, al-Qaradawi concludes that the separation of the world into two spheres is, again, a Western Christian experience. Separating the private spiritual life from social life is a

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<sup>24</sup>Muhammad ‘Amarah, *Hal al-Islām hūwa al-h.all?* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cairo: Dar al-Sharouk, 1998), 84.

<sup>25</sup>Yusuf al-Qaradawi, *Al-Islām wa ʿl-ʿAlmāniyya wajhān li-wajh* (Cairo: al-Nashr Maktaba Wahba, 1997).

<sup>26</sup>Al-Qaradawi, 106.

<sup>27</sup>Al-Qaradawi, 43.

Christian concept, and a Western Christian problem.<sup>28</sup> He bases this argument on four important points. First, Jesus himself tells his followers that *My kingdom is not from this world* (John 18:36), and to *Give to the emperor the things that are the emperor's, and to God the things that are God's* (Mark 12:17). Second, because of Jesus' focus upon spiritual matters, Christianity is based not upon social laws but spiritual laws. Third, as we have already heard, Secularism developed in response to the corrupt power of the Priesthood, which Islam does not have. Fourth, the Church's response to Enlightenment thought was to persecute free thinkers through its inquisitions. For al-Qaradawi, Islam has always promoted the ideal of free thought.<sup>29</sup> What is important, for the purposes of this paper, however, is the omission of any reference to the United States as an example of the struggle between Secularism and the Church.<sup>30</sup>

So, the Secular experience is deeply embedded in the European tradition. Therefore, the result of this struggle between the Enlightenment philosophers and the Church has resulted in a Western social organization that is devoid of any public role of religion. It is this foreign system which has been forced upon the Arab Muslim world through the impact of colonialism. After all, says al-Qaradawi, the concept of a secular democracy is rooted in a Greek term, *democratia*

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<sup>28</sup>Al-Qaradawi, 45, 46.

<sup>29</sup>Al-Qaradawi, 46-53.

<sup>30</sup>Certainly a digression into the events of the "witch hunts" of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century New England would be prudent here. There is support to the claim that American Protestants did legally sanction persecution of non-conformists. However, by the ratification of the Constitution these movements were declared illegal. In any case, al-Qaradawi does not mention this, which underlines the scope of the thesis, that these authors do not accurately describe the American religious experience.

[from *demos*], which means “government of the people.”<sup>31</sup> It is up to Muslims, then, to dismantle these “imported solutions,” and develop thoroughly Islamic ones.<sup>32</sup>

3.) Our last Egyptian author, ‘Abd al-Wahab al-Messiri, shows a much more sophisticated view of the basis of Secularism in Western society. His two volume work, *Al-‘Almāniyya al-Juz’iyya wa l-‘Almāniyya al-Shāmaliyya* [Partial Secularism and Comprehensive Secularism] is the most thorough attempt to struggle with the concepts of Secularism and Secularization to date.<sup>33</sup> Al-Messiri charges that most other Arab scholars do not accurately describe Secularism. He says that most Arab authors focus upon the concept of Secularism as the “separation of religion and state,” which is a concept completely alien to Islam, as *dīn wa dawla*.<sup>34</sup> He argues that the manifestation of Secularism in a governmental or social system is only a partial explanation of the totality of the Secular worldview. It is this worldview, this *Weltanschauung*, that is at the root of Western Secularism. For al-Messiri, the Western Nation state system is based upon the Secularization of society. This Secularization is based upon the concept of the individual and his/her freedom and power over everything (i.e., social systems, nature and the material world, values, and especially the Church). Ultimately, he argues, Comprehensive Secularism leads to “the creation of a value-free world,” where everything “is deconstructed and

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<sup>31</sup> Al-Qaradawi, *Al-H.all al-Islāmī wa l-h.alūl al-mustawrada* (Beirut: Mu’assat al-Risalah, 1980), 51, 53, as cited in Basam Tibi, *The Challenge of Fundamentalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 187.

<sup>32</sup>Tibi, 96.

<sup>33</sup>‘Abdal al-Wahab al-Messiri, *Al-‘Almāniyya al-Juz’iyya wa l-‘Almāniyya al-Shāmaliyya*, vols. 1 & 2 (Cairo: Dar al-Sharouk, 2002).

<sup>34</sup>Al-Messiri, vol. 1, 67.

reduced to a meaningless flux” of atoms.<sup>35</sup> Al-Messiri, thus, describes the Post-Modern crisis, the “crisis of meaning” (*'azma al-m'anī*).<sup>36</sup> The development of the Enlightenment thinking of Hobbes, Spinoza, Locke, Leibnitz and others, al-Messiri claims, has led to a complete breakdown of an order of values, what he calls the “democratization of hedonism” (*al-lad.āt al-h.isiyyāt al-jamī'a*).<sup>37</sup> In other words, with each individual being the center of authority, “anything goes.”

Bassam Tibi has already accurately assessed that many Muslim authors fail to note the distinction between Secularism (*'almāniyya*) as a political system, and Secularization (*'alamāna*) as a social experience.<sup>38</sup> Al-Messiri is correct in his assessment that secularization is “a process of separation, not of religion and state but of values and the world.”<sup>39</sup> Yet, al-Messiri fails to note the distinction between the purpose of Secularization in post-Enlightenment Europe and America. Al-Messiri includes the American Founding Fathers; Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, in his list of important Enlightenment thinkers, noting that both the American and French Revolutions have profoundly affected our contemporary world.<sup>40</sup> Unfortunately, nowhere does al-Messiri distinguish between the purpose and result of these Revolutions. The

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<sup>35</sup>Abdal Whahab al-Messiri, “Secularism, Immanence and Deconstruction,” in *Islam and Secularism in the Middle East*, eds. John L. Esposito and Azzam Tamimi (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 68 and 78.

<sup>36</sup>Al-Messiri, *Al-'Almāniyya al-Juz'iyya*, 173.

<sup>37</sup>Al-Messiri, *Al-'Almāniyya al-Juz'iyya*, vol. 2, 30.

<sup>38</sup>Basam Tibi is correct when he asserts: “The Islamists awareness of secularisation is overly polemical and basically based on a misconception of the issue. Islamists do not honour the fact that this process is a by-product of change and related to differentiation within society itself” [Basam Tibi, *Islam Between Culture and Politics* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 113].

<sup>39</sup>Kate Zebiri, “Muslim Anti-Secularist Discourse in the Context of Muslim-Christian Relations,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 1998: 56.

<sup>40</sup>Al-Messiri, *Al-'Almāniyya al-Juz'iyya*, vol. 2, 290.

framers of both the French and American constitutions had different purposes in mind when thinking through the basis of their newly developing secular societies.

A vital point missed by these Arab Muslim scholars is that the West is not a monolithic society. One cannot assume that the relationship between religion, society and the state, in the various nation states of Europe and North America are the same. The American Secular system was set up to de-sacralize the political *power* of religion in 18<sup>th</sup> century America (primarily the Anglican Church). This involved the equal recognition of various Christian communities (i.e., Episcopal, Congregational, Baptist, Methodist, etc.) and their rights to public worship, equal taxation (or tax benefits) and support from the government. The debate was not about removing religious values from the public forum (as in France), but removing a particular religious *power* from government support. The attempt was not to keep religion out of the public sphere. On the contrary, it was to protect religion from being co-opted by political *power*.

Thus, the framers of the Constitution enacted the concept of a competition of values. According to James Madison, society would be made up of different groups all competing for their own best interests.<sup>41</sup> But this was not just a Machiavellian concept of “dog eat dog.” Rather, it was a concept which proposed that in order for religion to be given the freedom to flourish, and for the interest of the “common good”, there must be a tacit agreement that all religions should be given the opportunity to flourish. Thus, the government could not stand in the way of religious communities and their right to worship, providing that those communities were not subversive to society as a whole. The “separation” of religious *authority* and *power* in 18<sup>th</sup> century America gave room and freedom for the development of the dissenting religious minority

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<sup>41</sup>See James Madison’s “The Federalists Papers,” esp. No. 51 written in 1788. Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, James Madison, *The Federalist* (New York: The Modern Library, 1941), 229-240.

communities. The difference between 18<sup>th</sup> century America and 21<sup>st</sup> century American society is that the groups which are struggling to find their own niche within the pluralism of values are no longer the Quakers or Baptists but now non-Christian communities, including the Muslim community. The point being missed by these three authors (and by Arab Muslim scholars in general) is that the American Secular system is not meant to expunge religious *authority* from society, but religious *power*. The distinction is subtle, yet very important. The Jacobite experiences of 18<sup>th</sup> century France and 20<sup>th</sup> century Turkey, which are well known to these authors, are not the same as the Madisonian experience of America. In the North American experience, political *power* is de-sacralized, so that religious *authority* can continue to hold sway on the public conscience. In this system two issues become important for the developing and flourishing of communal religion. First, society at large must come to an agreement that there is an recognized *plurality of values*. Second, the State must wade through those values which are considered acceptable and those that are considered unacceptable for the ultimate quality of life of all its citizens, regardless of the basis of such values.

At its root level, American Secularism provides the individual the element of freedom in making ethical choices for the common good, as opposed to employing the concept of a moral/spiritual good as state law. Now, on the one hand, everyone would agree that if the state could employ the moral good based on a particular value system, then such a moral good should be instituted as law. However, on the other hand, if citizens cannot agree on what the moral good is, then value system will have to be imposed by the force of law. What is important in the American Secular experience, is that individuals (and groups) are not refrained from arguing, even living, out their value system in the public realm.

Most Arab Muslims in the Middle East, given the current geopolitical situation, do not have the opportunity to experience grass-roots American civil society, but only the brunt end of foreign diplomacy, which according to many has undermined traditional social values and traditions. Thus, this experience and the examination of the history of Secular France and Turkey simply confirms their notions about the effect of Secularism upon Islamic society - that it is attempting to undermine Islam. This is certainly understandable, but it is not accurate assessment of the domestic American social-political context.

Yet, we are still left with the Egyptian Muslim critique of Secularism; that it does not speak to an Islamic society and culture, that it undercuts Islam and its *authority*, that it destroys the unity of *dīn wa dawla*. Given that our analysis demonstrates that the American Secular experience is not accurately understood, and that the general arguments about Western Secularism are subsumed under the contemporary economic and political experience in the Middle East, it seems that there is a need for deeper historical and social research into American Religious Secularism and the *authority* of religion in American society by Arab Muslim scholars. This would perhaps help Arab scholars better understand popular American religion and how it functions at the grass roots level of society. Second, it might provide avenues for developing an Islamic system of pluralistic values that is not contrary to the concept of Islam as *dīn wa dawla*. This Secular system, put into an Islamic context would ask the question, “Would Islam have more *authority* in a person’s life if spiritual *values* were chosen instead of enforced by social-political *power*?” We would agree with the Indian Muslim Hasan Askari who, in the words of Kate

Zebiri, argues that “obedience out of fear of the state rather than fear of God leads to religious hypocrisy.”<sup>42</sup>

We certainly do not want to divest religious *values* from their ability to effect the moral and spiritual good of society. Islam, especially, with its focus on communal matters or organization has a need to maintain this role in society. The concept of *dīn wa dawla* assures this. However, based upon this study, another question is warranted: does Islam need to hold political *power* in order to hold social *authority* and affect the moral, spiritual good of society? The American model of religious secularism would, in this case, seek to differentiate between religious *power* and religious *authority*, but this is not the same as separating *dīn* from *dawla*.

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<sup>42</sup>Zebiri, “Muslim Anti-Secularist Discourse,” 60.