THE RISE OF POLITICAL ISLAM

GLOBAL CONNECTIONS 'PASSION FOR MISSION'

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Is it strange that we're addressing the question of political Islam at a meeting where the main focus is on the many movements of Muslims all over the world turning to Christ? Were the organisers of this meeting aware of the dangers of triumphalism, and did they perhaps want us at the same time to face up to the enormous challenges that are raised at the present time by political Islam – especially in the shape of ISIS with its apparent determination to wipe out Christianity in the Middle East?

Are we thinking about two completely different subjects which are not related to each other, or is there some connection between them? Are Muslims coming to faith *in spite of* all the political turmoil? Or are they coming to faith *because of* all the upheavals in the Middle East and other parts of the world? Are these movements evidence of the failure of political Islam, and is disillusionment with political Islam a major factor in Muslims turning to Christ?

I want to address this subject by asking ten questions – all of which demand some kind of answer. I'm very conscious that in what follows I'm trying to cover far too much ground. But I'm doing it because I believe it's important to see the big picture – which includes the many faces of Islam and quite a lot of history - before we focus on something as specific as ISIS.

1. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY 'POLITICAL ISLAM' AND HOW DOES IT DIFFER FROM OTHER KINDS OF ISLAM?

I hope we've all got past the stage of speaking about 'Islamic fundamentalism' and begun to get used to 'Islamism', 'political Islam' or 'radical Islam.' We're talking about Muslims who have a clear political agenda of one kind or another. But it's important to recognise that Islamists are not all the same. Some believe in democracy, pluralism and human rights, while others do not. Some believe that violence is sometimes justified in pursuing an Islamic agenda, while others reject the use of violence. They all want to see Islamic principles applied in the public sphere; but they recognise the huge differences in the political make-up of states all over the world and have different ideas about how a particular state could be more Islamic.

Political Islam is therefore different from what we might call 'Traditionalist' or 'Orthodox Islam', in which Muslims want to conserve Islam as far as possible as it has been practised for centuries and with the minimum of concessions to modernity, and have little desire to change the political status quo in the countries where they are living.

It's very different from the Folk Islam or Popular Islam which is practised all over the world. We're grateful to people like Paul Hiebert and Bill Musk who have explained how Islam is often mixed up with primal religion which includes a great deal of magic and superstition. These Muslims are not so interested in politics, and their main concern is to find a source of power to deal with all the evil forces in spiritual world around us and with all the problems of daily life.

And political Islam is different from Liberal or Modernist Islam. These Muslims believe that Islam *can* and *must* change as society changes. They want to be free in their interpretation of the Qur'an and Islamic tradition and flexible in the way they interpret Islamic law in the modern world.

So when we're talking about political Islam, we're thinking about Muslims who want to change the world by making their communities and their countries more Islamic and by ordering them more consistently in accordance with divinely revealed law.

2. IS ISLAM ESSENTIALY MORE POLITICAL THAN CHRISTIANITY?

This is a difficult question, and before I give my own answer, I want to point out the danger of 'essentialism', the idea that we can easily describe the essence or the essential nature of something. We make generalisations like 'Islam is essentially this or that;' 'Islam is by its very nature like this.' And of course it's tempting for non-Muslims – and especially Christians – looking in from outside and from what we think is a neutral, objective vantage point, to believe that *we* know better than Muslims do what is Islam really is.

I'm hesitant therefore to use words like 'essentially' and become more and more cautious about sweeping generalisations and sentence that begin 'Islam is …'. I find myself speaking more about Muslims in all their variety and diversity than about Islam as something that is monolithic and unchanging.

So if I can answer the question in my own words, I would want to say, 'Yes, I believe there are several reasons why Muslims tend to be more politically-minded than Christians; but even this sentence needs to be qualified by several "buts".'

We would have to begin by pointing out the obvious difference between the lives of Jesus and Muhammad: Jesus died on a cross, while Muhammad in the *Hijra* moved from being the persecuted prophet in Mecca to become (using the title of Montgomery-Watt's classic[i]) both 'prophet and statesman.' When Muhammad received the invitation from the Muslim converts in Medina to become the leader of the whole city, he probably saw it as an opportunity to establish a truly Islamic

community iving under the law of God. This why one Muslim scholar can write. 'The basic emphasis of Islamic salvation lies … in … the establishment of the ideal religio-political order with a worldwide membership of all those who believe in God and His revelation through Muhammad …' (Abdulaziz A. Sachadenia[ii]).

By 732 AD, a hundred years after the death of the Prophet, a vast Islamic empire stretched from Morocco and Spain in the West to the borders of China and India in the East.

Because of the example of the Prophet and centuries of Islamic history, therefore, - in spite of what I've said about the danger of generalisations - I believe Kenneth Cragg summed up a very fundamental conviction in the mind of most well-taught Muslims in this memorable sentence 'Islam must rule'[iii]. A few thousand Muslim Arabs were ruling over a population which for about three centuries was largely Christian. So there's a very obvious contrast between the first 300 years of Islamic history and the first 300 years of Christian history in which the Christians were a persecuted minority in the Roman Empire.

So yes, there are some very strong historical and theological reasons why many Muslims have been concerned about politics. But then we have to add a series of 'buts':

- Firstly, there have been several examples of political Christianity in the past. 300 years before the birth of Muhammad, Constantine made Christianity the official religion of the Roman state. The capital of the empire moved to Byzantium in 324 and Muhammad must have been aware of this powerful Christian empire to the north-west of Arabia. The popes filled the power vacuum after the fall of the Roman Empire in the West, and the crowning of Charlemagne in 800 was a significant date in the development of Christendom. Didn't John Calvin want to make Geneva a thoroughly Christian city? And wasn't Christianity spread partly by the sword in Latin America?

- Secondly, Muslims believe that they can see examples of political Christianity at the present time. Islamists constantly claim that the world of Islam is under attack from 'the Zionist-Crusader alliance' of the West, and while we can challenge this kind of rhetoric, we must recognise that this is how we are perceived. Muslims might have more justification in seeing the alliance between evangelical Christianity and the political right in the USA as an example of political Christianity. And they would have every justification for seeing Christian Zionism as a very obvious kind of political Christianity, because it uses Christians beliefs to support a very clear political agenda related to the state of Israel.

- Thirdly, about a third of Muslims all over the world live in minority situations where they are not in a position of political power. They don't all look back to the first Islamic state in Medina as a Golden Age that they want to recreate. Some of them compare their situation to that of the first group of Muslims in Mecca, while others see themselves as being in a similar situation to the Muslims sent by Muhammad to seek asylum in the Christian kingdom of Abyssinia. So we can never say that *all* Muslims are likely to have a political agenda.

In answer to this question, therefore, we can never get away from the contrast between the lives of Jesus and Muhammad. One of the temptations during the 40 days in the wilderness ('all the kingdoms of the world in their glory … I will give you, if you will only fall down and do me homage.' (Matt 4:8-9 REB) may have been the temptation to seek political power. But if the kingdom of God, the kingly rule of God, means anything, it can't simply be about me and my relationship with God. Jesus said to Pilate 'My kingdom does not belong to this world' (John 18:30). But if his followers are called to be salt and light in the world, how are the values of the kingdom to be expressed in communities and in society as a whole? If we are critical of the political agendas of some Muslims, we dare not abandon the public sphere to secularists and Muslims. Christians must have a clear vision of the kind of just and caring society we want to live in. And this must have something to do with public life and politics.

3. WHY HAS POLITICAL ISLAM BECOME SO SIGNIFICANT IN RECENT YEARS?

Clearly it was the rapid spread of ISIS in Iraq and the capture of Mosul in June last year which made us all sit up and take notice. But we might not have been so surprised if we had known or remembered the history of the last 150 years and the last 40 years in particular, in which there have been so many different expressions of political Islam.

Have we forgotten the 58 tourists who were gunned down at Luxor in Upper Egypt in 1997, and how in Algeria in 1989 the army seized power after FIS, the Islamist party, had won a democratic election? We've had Muhammad Mursi attempting to impose a Muslim Brotherhood agenda on Egypt while he was in power from 2012 to 2013. We've had Ayatollah Khomeini creating the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979. Tayyip Erdogan and his Islamist AKP have turned the tide after decades of secularism imposed by Ataturk and brought Islam back into public life. Hizbullah was created in 1986 as a resistance movement against Israel's occupation of South Lebanon. Similarly Hamas came into existence in 1986 as a response to 40 years of Israel's occupation of Gaza and the West Bank. If we go back further to the creation of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 1928, we find that Hassan al-Banna was driven by two clear goals – the revival of Islam and the ending of the British occupation of Egypt. And if we go back further still we find that in India Muslims played a significant role in the 19th C in opposing the British Raj[iv].

Are there any common factors in all these different expressions of political Islam? In every one there are two main drives – the desire to see the public sphere ordered by Islamic principles and the refusal to be ruled by foreigners. As we shall see shortly, context is all-important. In every case there has been something specific in the context – a perceived injustice – which has driven Muslim to take action and often to resort to violence.

So we could argue, for example, that if Israel in 1967 had complied with UN Security Resolution 242 and withdrawn from the territories it had occupied in the Six Day War, Hamas might never have come into existence. If Israel had not invaded Lebanon

in 1982 and stayed on as a occupying power in the south for 28 years, there might have been no Hizbullah. And if the US and its allies had not invaded Iraq in 2003, there probably would be no ISIS.

In all these expressions of political Islam there is a real zeal for God, a passion to 'strive in the way of God' – to use a common Qur'anic expression. And of course the basic meaning of the word *jihad* is 'to strive', and has little to do with the idea of 'holy war'. But it's not just a passion to fight injustice and to create a just society that has motivated Muslims. I am tempted to relate all this to Kenneth Cragg's simple sentence 'Islam must rule', since this is exactly how Sayyid Qutb, one of the most influential Islamist ideologues who was imprisoned and tortured by Nasser's government, summed up this Islamist conviction in the sentence *la budda li-'l-islam an yahkum* ('Inevitably Islam shall rule'[v]).

In the light of the example of the Prophet and in the context of 1400 years of Islamic history, it probably seemed very natural for Muslims to be ruling over non-Muslims – and especially over Christians and Jews who were treated as *dhimmis*, protected communities living under Islamic rule. But it's not so natural and acceptable for Muslims to be ruled by non-Muslims. I suspect therefore that there is something uniquely Islamic about this, because I doubt if Hindus, Buddhists or Confucianists can find in their scriptures and history the same kind of clear, strong motivation to engage in political activity.

Once again, however, I would point out the danger of generalisation. The vast majority of Muslims in Britain and Europe would probably be shocked if you said to them, 'We know that in your heart of hearts you Muslims want to rule the world.' Islam is a missionary religion just as much as Christianity is, and for some Muslims *jihad* is the sixth pillar of Islam. But it simply isn't true that *all* Muslims all over the world have clear political agenda and want the world to come under Islamic rule.

So why has political Islam become so significant in recent years? It's partly because Muslims have faced so many situations of what they perceive to be injustice and oppression, and so many situations in which they feel that their own Muslim rulers are not running their countries in accordance with Islamic principles.

4. WHERE HAS ISIS COME FROM?

Patrick Cockburn of *The Independent* has been the best British journalist at explaining the origins of ISIS[vi]. And in March of this year *Der Spiegel*[vii] published some highly significant documents that had been captured from ISIS. Writers like these have shown that the 2003 war in Iraq and the civil war in Syria, which began in 2011, together created the vacuum in which ISIS came into existence. After bringing down Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath regime, the Americans disbanded the whole army, leaving 350,000 angry men without work or pay. Many of these soldiers together with officials from the government and the secret services who had been running Hussein's police state joined forces with al-Qa'ida in Iraq and brought with them many skills (including skills in running a state, finance and digital media) that were then used in

creating the new Islamic state. So there was a kind of unholy alliance between Islamists and Ba'athists.

The other important factor is that the Sunnis in Iraq, who are about 20% of the population, were always resentful of the way they had been excluded from power by Hussein, and then marginalised after 2003 in the new government by the Shi'ites who numbered around 60%. The fear and hatred of the Sunnis towards the Shi'ites is so strong that many Iraqi Sunnis would rather be ruled by ISIS than by the Shi'ites.

This then was the political context in which al-Qa'ida in Iraq developed into IS or ISIS. If Iraqi and other Arab Sunnis provided the main leadership and the tactical skills, it was the Wahhabi beliefs of al-Qa'ida that provided the ideological basis for ISIS, which included four important strands:
(a) a desire to copy the beliefs and practices of the *salaf*, the first generation of Muslims, sitting lightly to the teaching of the four main schools of Islamic law;
(b) a close alliance between Islam and the state so that the state must be Islamic and uphold Islamic law;
(c) a strong antipathy towards Shi'ites as heretical Muslims (this would include the Alawite regime of the Assads, the Iraqi Shi'ites and Iran) and towards non-Muslims (which would include the West);
(d) a strong rejection of un-Islamic practices or beliefs.

The context and the ideology are therefore equally important for understanding the origins of ISIS. 'ISIS is the child of war.' Says Patrick Cockburn. 'Its members seek to reshape the world around them by acts of violence. The movement's toxic mix of extreme religious beliefs and military skill is the outcome of the war in Iraq since the US 2003 invasion and the war in Syria since 2011 … It was the US, Europe, and their regional allies in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates that created the conditions for the rise of ISIS.'[viii]

5. IS IT TRUE TO SAY 'ISIS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH ISLAM' OR TO SAY 'ISIS IS NEARER TO REAL ISLAM THAN MODERATE ISLAM'?

We're dealing here with two responses to ISIS that have been very common in recent months. It's easy to understand why so many Muslims – especially in western contexts - dissociate themselves from ISIS. They are thoroughly embarrassed to think that non-Muslims around them might assume that because they are Muslims, they must have some sympathy with ISIS and all that it is doing. They therefore argue that many of the practices of ISIS are completely un-Islamic, even anti-Islamic, and cannot be justified by the legal traditions that have been developed over many centuries. A very thoughtful Muslim leader I know in Cambridge said to me a few weeks ago, 'They're just a bunch of Marxists.' And a recent article in the Times by Ben Macintyre had the heading 'ISIS owes more to the Kremlin than the Koran,' and argued that 'Stalin is the godfather of Islamic State.'[ix] Many politicians have been naively repeating the mantra 'Islam is a religion of peace.' And I still remember hearing an Anglican bishop, a few days after 9/11, saying on Radio 4 'This has nothing to do with Islam.'

But when the ideologues of ISIS spell out in great detail where in their scriptures, tradition and history, they find the *Islamic* justification for what they are doing, it's simply nonsense to go on claiming that ISIS has nothing to do with Islam. It would be more accurate to say that ISIS has a lot to do with Islam, but is an extreme expression of one particular kind of Islamism. The rank and file of ISIS fighters from all over the world have joined the movement for a whole variety of motives – related to idealism and the search for identity, meaning and adventure– and probably have minimal understanding of Islam. But the leadership says so clearly that it is trying to imitate some of the practices of the first generation of Muslims during and immediately after the life of the Prophet. And in interpreting the Qur'an, they use the principle of abrogation, which enables them to say that later verses calling Muslims to wage war on unbelievers abrogate, or cancel out, earlier verses which call for patient endurance of opposition. A document by Abu Bakr Naji that comes out of ISIS called 'The Management of Savagery'[x] explains in some detail how their strategies and tactics are modelled on some of the practices of the first Muslims. So instead of saying that the warriors of ISIS are not real or faithful Muslims, other Muslims need to explain why they believe ISIS is completely wrong in its interpretation and application of Islamic sources.

At the other extreme there are many Christians – and, dare I say, especially evangelical Christians – who believe that ISIS is much nearer to the spirit and practice of early Islam than moderate Muslims of today. They point to particular verses in the Qur'an (e.g. about beheading, crucifixion and slavery) and passages in Hadith literature, the biographies of Muhammad and legal texts to show the connections between the brutalities of ISIS and early Islamic texts.

I believe it's absolutely right to draw attention to the precedents from the early years of Islam which are used to justify what ISIS is doing. But I suggest that there are two serious weaknesses in this general approach. Firstly, it hardly begins to engage with the arguments of mainstream Muslim scholars who believe they can demonstrate why ISIS is a clear departure from Islamic tradition. The main argument of scholars like Tim Winter of Cambridge is that Islamist interpretations generally ignore the consensus in the Islamic legal tradition which developed over many centuries and insist on going directly back to the Qur'an and the example of the Prophet. Winter believes that the legal traditions of the four main schools (the *madhhabs*) are like a telescope that enables us to see the stars clearly; and the Islamists, who ignore the tradition and make their own interpretations of the sources, are like people who refuse to use the telescope and insist on looking at the stars with the naked eye[xi].

Secondly, it seems to assume that we as non-Muslims are in a better position than Muslim themselves to determine what is 'true Islam' or 'real Islam.' We must surely allow Muslims to speak for themselves and define themselves and their faith and not imagine that *we* understand what Islam is better than they do.

I suggest therefore that both these approaches are thoroughly unhelpful and need to be challenged.

6. SOME SAY THAT THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM IS ISLAMIC SCRIPTURE AND DOGMA, WHILE OTHERS SAY IT'S A MATTER OF HISTORY AND POLITICS. IS IT EITHER/OR OR BOTH/AND?

I want to introduce this point by quoting from two well-known Christian scholars of Islam. In the book *Islam in Conflict: Past, Present and Future*, Peter Riddell and Peter Cotterell write:

'In our view it is not the non-Muslim world that stands at the cross-roads, but the Muslim world. Islam has, throughout its history, contained within itself a channel of violence, legitimized by certain passages of the Qur'an, though put in question by other passages … Ultimately it is only the Muslim world that can deal with the roots of the problem, which, in our view, do *not* lie in Western materialism or nineteenth-century colonialism or American imperialism, but in Islam's own history, both distant and recent.'[xii]

There are two main reasons why I feel deeply uneasy about this approach. In the first place it seems to assume that everything that Muslim do can be explained by referring to texts. History and politics have little or no relevance; sociology, economics and psychology are not very important. John Azumah describes this approach as 'textualism.'[xiii]

The second weakness of this approach is that it effectively absolves us westerners of all responsibility for the mess that has been unfolding in the Middle East in the last hundred years. It's as if they are saying: '*We* haven't done anything wrong. What we in the West have been doing to the world of Islam for centuries is hardly relevant. The root of the problem is *their* scriptures and tradition. It's *their* problem; and *they* are the ones who have to change.'

I accept that Muslims and Arabs are far too good at playing the blame game – blaming others for all their problems. But having lived for 18 years in the Middle East and tried to see the West as Arabs and Muslims see it, I believe that they have some good reasons to be angry. And when I think of Israel/Palestine in particular, how can we possible argue that the West is innocent and that the root of the problem is in Islamic scripture and dogma?

I am not for a moment suggesting that Islamic texts are not important. I am simply arguing that history and politics are just as important as texts and dogma in understanding political Islam in general and ISIS in particular. We need to know how to challenge Muslims over their interpretation of their texts. But we also need to understand the historical and political contexts in which political Islam has developed in recent years.

7. IS POLITICAL ISLAM ALWAYS LIKELY TO TEND TOWARDS VIOLENCE?

The answer to this question must be an emphatic NO! There are plenty of situations where Islamists do not resort to violence. But at the same time they face a real

dilemma. They want their society to be more consistently Islamic; but how are they to achieve this goal? Are they to work for a gradual and peaceful Islamisation of the country, or are they justified in using force to win power? And what happens when violence is done to them? These dilemmas can be illustrated from the history of one particular Islamist movement, the Muslim Brotherhood.

The vision of its founder, Hassan al-Banna, from the beginning in 1928 was for a genuine Islamic revival which would transform the social and spiritual life of the nation and bring British rule to an end. At an early stage some of its members formed a secret military organisation, 'the Special Apparatus', which targeted British occupation troops and Egyptians who collaborated with the British. But when they engaged in violence, they were always condemned by the MB leadership. The activities of the Brotherhood led to opposition from the British and the Egyptian government, and Hassan al-Banna was assassinated in 1949.

Nasser had been a member of the Brotherhood since 1941, and the coup that he led in 1952 had the approval of the leadership. Before long, however, friction developed between Nasser and the Brotherhood, and after a year he dissolved the organisation. Many of its leaders were imprisoned and tortured. After Nasser's death in 1971, Sadat release MB members from prison, hoping to enlist their support for his government. His toleration of the movement enabled it to regain power and influence. By the mid 1970s they had split into three groups: the Muslim Brotherhood, which continued to believe in peaceful reform through the Islamisation of the individual, the family and society before the establishment of the Islamic state, and two other groups, the Gamaa Islamiyya of Egypt and al-Jihad, which condoned the use of violence. Sadat's visit to Jerusalem and his signing of the Camp David peace treaty with Israel in 1979 led to his assassination by members of these last two groups. Many were put in prison, while others fled the country; and it was some who went to Afghanistan who later created al-Qaʻida. Members of the MB were regularly put on trial. But others started working with political parties – but because the party itself was still officially banned, they stood as independents.

When Mubarak was brought down in January 2011, after holding back for a short period, the MB seized the opportunity to join in the revolution - and effectively high-jacked it. Then largely as a result of the goodwill they had built up through their networks and social work all over the country, they were able to get their MB candidate Muhammad Mursi elected as President. He lost no time in attempting to impose an Islamist agenda on the country, and this led to a popular revolt in June 2013, when around 33 million people took to the streets to depose him. While some would say that Sisi used this as an opportunity for the army to seize power, others would say that he was forced to step in and take control in order to save the country from chaos. The MB were furious that their democratically elected president had been ousted by a coup, and there were violent clashes with the police and the army and arson attacks on around 70 churches.

While the majority of members of the MB, therefore, have genuinely wanted to bring about the Islamisation of society by peaceful and democratic means, the leadership hasn't always been able to control members who wanted to engage in violence to achieve their political ends. Their activities have provoked strong opposition from successive governments, which have regularly used violence to suppress them. While

the Brotherhood have at times engaged in violence, a great deal of violence has been done to them, and many outside observers have been extremely critical of the way Sisi has set out to destroy the movement and thus to ensure that it can never seize power again.

There has therefore been an ambiguity at the heart of the Brotherhood from the beginning, which is summed up by Alison Pargeter in this way:

'Whilst the Ikhwan (MB) is keen to present itself as a peaceful organisation and has proven itself to be largely pacific, it does have a history of getting involved in violence when the opportunity has presented itself. Right from the outset the concept of violence was enshrined in its famous motto, which remains the maxim today: "Allah is our objective. The Prophet is our leader. Qur'an is our law. Jihad is our way. Dying in the way of Allah is our highest hope.' At its inception, the Ikhwan attached a far greater importance to the concept of jihad in both its violent and non-violent sense than was the tradition of the Islamic circles of the day. This differentiated it from other Islamic societies and organisations…

'… the Brotherhood has a complex ideological relationship to the use of violence. Whilst its members broadly reject the idea of fighting against their own regimes, they do not entirely disown scholars such as Sayyid Qutb who was one of the early proponents of violent struggle against un-Islamic Muslim governments in the contemporary context and whose ideas radicalised a generation and more. They might refute some of Qutb's ideas but there is still a certain pride in him and they consider him as one of their most important martyrs. This gives the impression that here is still an ambiguity in their discourse on violence and that they do not come down on one side or the other.'[xiv]

Has this ambiguity been exposed by the events of the last three years? Since the political forces arrayed against it are so formidable and at times quite violent, is it ever likely to achieve its goals in Egypt without violence? So perhaps the answer to our question 'Is Islamism always likely to tend towards violence?' needs to be 'NO – BUT …'

8. WHAT ARE THE OTHER FACES OF POLITICAL ISLAM TODAY?

During the last year I've had a long email correspondence with a Messianic Jewish leader in Israel who is convinced that Hamas, Hizbullah, ISIS and Iran are all basically the same. In my responses I have tried to explain why I believe that this approach is in danger of breaking the fourth commandment, because it is in danger of bearing false witness against our neighbour.

To develop this point I want to commend a book edited by Asef Bayat whose title explains the basic point: *Post-Islamism: the changing faces of political Islam*[xv]. He defines Islamism as follows: 'I take *Islamism* to refer to those ideologies and movements that strive to establish come kind of an "Islamic order" – a religious state, shari'a law, and moral codes in Muslim societies and communities. Association with the state is a key feature of Islamist politics … The primary concern of Islamism is to

forge an ideological community; concerns such as establishing social justice and improving the lives of the poor are to follow only from this strategic objective.'[xvi]

This is how he define *post-Islamism*: 'It represents an endeavor to fuse religiosity and rights, faith and freedom, Islam and liberty. It is an attempt to turn the underlying principles of Islamism on their head by emphasizing rights instead of duties, plurality in place of a singular authoritative voice, historicity rather than fixed scriptures, and the future instead of the past. It wants to marry Islam with individual choice and freedom …, with democracy and modernity, to achieve what some have termed an "alternative modernity" … Whereas Islamism is defined by the fusion of religion and responsibility, post-Islamism emphasizes religiosity and rights. *Yet, while it favors a civil and nonreligious state, it accords an active role for religion in the public sphere.*'[xvii] Notice especially this last sentence (my italics).

All the contributors to the book describe the unique ways in which Islamist and post-Islamist movements have developed side by side in ten different contexts: Iran, Turkey, Morocco, Indonesia, Egypt, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Sudan and Syria. Bayat concludes:

> 'The narratives … show that the forms, depth, and spread of post-Islamist experiences may vary. Yet they all point to some shift in vision. In each of these cases, post-Islamism denotes a critical discursive departure or pragmatic exit … from an Islamist ideological package characterized broadly by monopoly of religious truth, exclusivism, and emphasis on obligations, towards acknowledging ambiguity, multiplicity, inclusion, and flexibility in principles and practice…

> 'Clearly, then, post-Islamism represents a discursive and/or pragmatic *break,* a break from an Islamist paradigm. But the direction is not "post-Islamic", as some erroneously call it; it is post-Islamist. In other words, I am not speaking about a shift away from Islamic faith toward secularism, even though post-Islamism does denote a process of secularization in the sense of favoring the separation of religious affairs from the affairs of the state. Rather, I am speaking about post-Islamization as a complex process of breaking from an Islamist ideological package by adhering to a different, more inclusive, kind of religious project in which Islam nevertheless continues to remain important both as faith and as a player in the public sphere.'[xviii]

I would also commend another book with a significant title, edited by Khaled Hroub, *Political Islam: context versus ideology*[xix]. In looking at many different situations in the Muslim world, Hroub writes: 'The persistent question … remains whether, in dealing with the world around them Islamist movements are led by their context or their ideology.' This is how he explains his understanding of the tension between context and ideology:

> 'Facing endless specific and pragmatic situations, a process of immediate and ongoing negotiations continues to take place between the contextual pressures and the underpinning ideology, producing particular responses. My argument … is that what appears to be similar movements often show different responses to the immediate, and sometimes similar, practical pressures around them. These responses are shaped mostly, if not completely, by the nature of these pressures, not by a supposedly common theology. The ideology of these movements remains

significant, but mainly at a theoretical level, thinly concealing politics and responses that are formed by the contextual reality.'[xx]

I conclude therefore that there are *huge* differences between Hamas, Hizbullah, ISIS and Iran. If there is a 'battle for the soul of Islam' that is being waged at the present time, it's not only between moderates and Islamists; it's also between Islamists and post-Islamists.

9. WHAT ARE THE MOST APPROPRIATE RESPONSES TO POLITICAL ISLAM?

Instead of attempting to spell out a strategy for defeating ISIS, which according to Leon Panetta, former director of the CIA, is likely to involve a 30-year war[xxi], I want to make some more general points about the way we respond to *all* kinds of political Islam.

1. *We need to have a better understanding of history.* A Syrian Presbyterian pastor said to me in January of this year, 'Syria and the Middle East is suffering from the game of nations.' We cannot begin to understand political Islam without some kind of historical perspective on fourteen hundred years of Islam's history and of Christian-Muslims relations. I can't think of a better survey of this history than Philip Jenkins magisterial book, *The Lost History of Christianity: the thousand-year golden age of the church in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia[xxii]*.

Many of us are also extremely ignorant about recent history. How many of us, for example, are aware that in Iran in1953 the CIA and M16 together engineered a coup which brought down the first democratically elected government under Mosadeq and led to the return of the Shah and then eventually to the return of Khomeini and the creation of the Islamic Republic of Iran? A book about these events by an American journalist, Stephen Kinzer, has the title *All the Shah's Men,* and the sub-title *An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror[xxiii]*. In January this year at the time of the Charlie Hebdou attack, Robert Fisk had an article in *The Independent* entitled 'The post-colonial wound that still bleeds in France', in which he pointed out that in the 6-year Algerian war for independence 'perhaps a million and a half Arab Muslims and many thousands of French men and women died.'[xxiv]

I would love to see more young Christians studying history, politics and international relations!

2. *We shouldn't be in the least surprised that Muslims are looking to their own Islamic roots to find new political solutions.* In some countries in the Middle East when western imperial powers withdrew, we left behind puppet rulers. These were then replaced by dictators who created one-party police states. A wide variety of different ideologies have been adopted: socialism, communism, nationalism, pan-Islamism, pan-Arabism, Ba'athism, and Arab nationalism. Is it surprising, therefore, that when these ideologies (mostly imported from the West) have failed, and when they look at the Golden Ages of Islam in the past, Muslims in the region begin to

wonder if they might find new inspiration and direction within their own history and traditions? Is it surprising that they want the religion of Islam to have a significant place in their public life? And isn't it arrogant for us westerners to assume that Westminster-style democracy is the only system that will work in the Middle East?

3. *We need to accept <u>our</u> share of responsibility for all that has happened.* Let me spell out some of the major mistakes that I believe the West has made:
- After 9/11, instead of trying to understand the anger of Muslims, we put all our energies into the so-called 'war on terror.'
- After 9/11 the US and its allies went to war with the wrong countries. Richard Holbrook, the US Special Representative in Afghanistan and Pakistan said at the time: 'We may be fighting the wrong enemy in the wrong country.'[xxv] And Patrick Cockburn writes: 'The "war on terror" has failed because it did not target the jihadi movement as a whole and, above all, was not aimed at Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, the two countries that fostered jihadism as a creed and a movement. The US did not do so because these countries were important American allies whom it did not want to offend. Saudi Arabia is an enormous market for American arms, and the Saudis have cultivated, and on occasions purchased, influential members of the American political establishment. Pakistan is a nuclear power with a population of 180 million and a military with close links to the Pentagon.'[xxvi]
- The UN sanctions imposed after the First Gulf War in 1991 may have led to the deaths of around 1.7 million Iraqis.
- The Iraq War of 2003 was based on false claims about WMD and did not have the support of the UN.
- After the Iraq war in 2003, the US had little or no plan for the reconstruction of the country.
- And having contributed so much to the creation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict since the beginning of the 20th century, the West has allowed it to go on for so many decades without a peaceful and just resolution.

4. *Muslim-majority countries need to accept <u>their</u> share of responsibility for all that has happened.* I have disagreed with the emphasis that Peter Riddell and Peter Cotterell place on scripture and dogma. But I agree totally with them that the Muslim world stands at a cross-roads – provided we also accept that the western world *also* stands at a cross-roads. So having stressed *our* share of responsibility, I want also to stress the responsibility of Muslim countries.
- Saudi Arabia has been using its billions of oil wealth for many decades to export Wahhabism all over the world, and many Saudis have been supporting ISIS directly or indirectly. It must now be very anxious that this extreme form of Islamism has almost become mainline Sunni Islam in the Middle East and has therefore contributed to the rise of ISIS. And one of ISIS' next targets is likely to be Saudi Arabia.
- Pakistan has been playing a double game – supporting the Taliban on the one hand and at the same time joining with the US in its war or terror.
- The majority of Egyptians at the present time seem to be supporting Sisi, seeing him as the only strong man who can guarantee security and rescue the economy, and many are prepared to accept the return of the powerful police state and the restrictions on freedoms. Instead of trying to engage with Islamists in dialogue, Sisi's government has set out to suppress them completely. Egypt under Sisi, therefore, seems to be

sending the message to the world that the only alternative to the Muslim Brotherhood is dictatorship.
- Turkey has done little to stop jihadis and supplies crossing its 560-mile border with Syria, and has indirectly helped ISIS because it is even more strongly opposed to Assad's regime and the Kurds.
- Sunnis need to address the virulence of the Wahhabi hatred of Shi'ites.
- Tunisia is the only country in the region where Islamists and secularists have been able to work together to produce a workable constitution.

5. *We may need to be far more critical of the foreign policies of our governments.* In two years' time we shall be celebrating the centenary of the Balfour Declaration, and I hope there will be some very public heart-searching over our involvement in the Middle East at that time and since then. I don't find many people in this country who still support the way Tony Blair took our country into the Iraq war in 2003. But I find many American evangelicals are remarkably *un*-critical about American foreign policy in general and the Iraq war in particular. One notable exception is Jim Wallis of Sojourners, who has given the most comprehensive response to these issues that I've recent in recent months. He makes these points:

1. There are no 'holy wars'
2. We must admit that our primarily military response to terrorism since 9/11 has not worked; it has made things worse.
3. Only new political and economic solutions in the Middle East will finally transform the current state of affairs.
4. Fundamentalism, in all our faith traditions, is a politicized use of religion based on fear and power, and it is best defeated from the inside, not the outside.
5. Understanding and addressing the roots of terror to build a strategy to defeat it does not dismiss terror's evil barbaric behavior. Whatever ISIS's beliefs may be, and whatever grievances they might have against the Iraqi and Syrian governments, the West, and others, evil is never justified[xxvii].

10. WHAT ARE THE MOST APPROPRIATE CHRISTIAN RESPONSES TO POLITICAL ISLAM?

Alongside what we've said about general responses, should there be anything distinctive about *Christian* responses?

1. *We ought to have some sympathy with what Islamists are trying to do*. Lesslie Newbigin in the years before his death was alerting Christians to the way Christianity in the West has become a privatised religion. In one of his last books in 1998, *Faith and Power: Christianity and Islam in 'Secular' Britain[xxviii]*, co-authored with Jenny Taylor and Lamin Sanneh, he pointed out that both Christians and secular-minded people in Britain were finding it difficult to face the challenge of Muslims who really believe in the sovereignty of God and want him to be honoured in the public sphere. Perhaps Christians are in a unique position to be bridge-builders: if we think we understand the secular mind-set, we ought at the same time to be able to understand what many Muslims are trying to do, and help to interpret each side to the other.

2. *We need to recognise the weaknesses of some expressions of evangelical Christianity*. If some kinds of pietism have made us think only of ourselves and personal salvation, of course we're going to be shocked when we find Muslims speaking about their vision for a godly society. I wonder how many of us remember how significant it was when, at the first Lausanne Congress in 1974, John Stott and others were willing to listen to people like Rene Padilla and Sam Escobar from Latin America and wrote into the Lausanne Covenant specific points calling on Christians to engage with political and social issues[xxix].

3. *We ought to be able to share with Muslims what we think we have learned from 20 centuries of Christian history*. We agonise, of course, over Constantine's decision to make Christianity the glue to hold the Roman Empire together, and some believe that it was one of the greatest disasters in Christianity history. We all feel a sense of shame over the Crusades, although some Middle Eastern Christians tell us that we shouldn't feel so guilty because the Crusades were simply the delayed reaction of Christendom to the first Islamic conquests. In our own country it shouldn't be hard to point to ways in which Christians at different stages – e.g. in the Evangelical Revival – have helped to build up civil society by fighting for social justice and establishing standards of honesty and trust in business. From our understanding of our history, therefore, we ought at least be able to say that, in our understanding, human nature seems to need more than the imposition of law; that imposing religion by force often leads to nominalism or hypocrisy; and that things often go wrong when there is too close an alliance between religion and the state, between truth and power.

4. *We need to engage with Muslims in personal testimony*. Let's not be afraid to talk about the example of Jesus. Some weeks ago we heard about the two Muslims in the US who were shot by police when they opened fire on people attending a rally to campaign for freedom of speech. It emerged that a pastor had talked to these two men on several occasions in they place where they both worked[xxx]. We've also heard the story of an IS fighter who has actually killed several Christians and who had a vision of a man in white who said to him 'You are killing my people.' Just before he killed a Christian, the man said to him, 'I know you will kill me, but I give you my Bible.' After he killed the Christian he started to read the Bible and had more dreams of Jesus. [xxxi] If Saul, who was 'breathing our murderous threats' against the Christians in Damascus (Acts 9:1), can be converted, so can a brutal IS fighter.

5. *Redouble our efforts in doing good*. I'm sure we're all familiar with 1 Peter 3:15: 'Be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.' But 1 Peter 2:15 is also intensely relevant: 'It is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men.' I love this story told by J. Dudley Woodberry:

'A Christian organisation imported thousands of sandals for children in a very primitive Afghan refugee camp in Peshawar. However, they decided not just to hand out sandals, but first to wash the feel and dress the wounds of the children. Months later, a local grade school teacher asked her class, "Who are the best Muslims?" A girl raised her hand and said, 'the Kafirs." When the shocked teacher asked why, the girl responded, "The mujahidin killed my father, but the Kafirs washed my feet."'[xxxii]

6. *Demonstrate how Christians can contribute to nation-building and the creation of a just society.* When a group of us in the CRIB network (Christian Responses to Islam in Britain) were working a few years ago on the document 'Gracious Christian Responses to Islam in Britain', Tim Green pointed out that if Muslims, and especially Islamists, had a vision for the kind of society they wanted to see in Britain, we Christians ought to have something to say on the subject. He therefore suggested the following point under the heading 'A Vision for Society':

> 'While we no longer live in Christendom and do not seek to build a Christian state, we have a vision for a society in which the values of the kingdom of God are upheld and honoured. We believe that such a society will safeguard expression of faith in the public sphere without its imposition, the exercise of free speech without unreasonable giving or taking of offence, and the uniform rule of public law without this being unnecessarily instrusive on private conscience. In seeking the common good of the whole society, we work together with Muslims within these broad parameters, seeking justice and peaceful co-existence.'[xxxiii]

On the international scene, we could say that Israel-Palestine is near the top of the list of grievances of the Muslims world. I dare to suggest that a peaceful and just resolution of the conflict might go a long way towards reducing the anger of Muslims towards the West, and that Christians have a very significant contribution to make.

7. *While it is true to say that 'the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church', history also teaches us that sometimes churches are wiped out and die.* Jenkins' book gives a really alarming survey of the decline in the numbers of Christians in the Middle East over the centuries. As he shows, some of the reasons for this decline are most definitely related to Islam, while others have little or nothing to do with Islam. Jenkins is quite pessimistic about the survival of Christianity in parts of the Middle East, since in April 2012 he wrote an article with the title 'The Death Warrant of Eastern Christianity.'[xxxiv]

8. *We need to be open to the new things that God is doing through the present turmoil.* Perhaps one day we may see how God has been at work – both in judgement and in redemption – through all the persecution, the movement of peoples and relief work among refugees. A great deal depends on how Christians respond to what's happening. Muslims in Egypt, for example, cannot fail to have noticed the way Christians responded to the burning of their churches in August 2013, and Muslim refugees in Lebanon and Jordan have been deeply moved by the way Christians have ministered to their needs. As David Garrison's research shows, some Muslims have turned to Christ because of the kind of Islam they have witnessed. And even in situations where visible Christianity has ceased to exist, there are probably secret believers who may be the firstfruits of something radically new in the world of Islam. Does Isaiah 43:19 have a message for us all at this point in time? 'See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?' (Is 43:19)

In conclusion, I trust I hardly need to say that I have no sympathy whatsoever for ISIS and hope that its ideology and its brutality will continue to be condemned in the strongest possible terms by people of all faiths and of none. I'm aware, however, that

some of you will accuse me of 'going soft on Islam'. If you do, I hope I have at least convinced you that we need something more nuanced than the approach which says 'ISIS is political Islam and political Islam is ISIS.' I hope also that I have asked at least *some* of the right questions about the rise of political Islam, and I look forward to hearing the answers that *you* would want to give.

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[vi] Patrick Cockburn, *The Jihadis Return: ISIS and the New Sunni Uprising*, OR Books, 2014; *The Rise of Islamic State: ISIS and the New Sunni Revolution*, Verso, 2015

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[xiii] John Azumah, 'The Challenge of Responding to Jihadi Islam', Lapido Media, 29 August, 2014

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[xv] Asef Bayat, *Post-Islamism: the Changing Faces of Political Islam*, Oxford University Press, 2013

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[xvii] Bayat, pp 8-9

[xviii] Bayat, pp 25-26

[xix] Khaled Hroub, ed., *Political Islam: Context Versus Ideology*, Saqi, 2010

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[xxiii] Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: an American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror*, John Wiley, 2003 & 2012

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