

The Islamic conception of international society

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Islam's influence over the course of history as well as contemporary international relations is wide ranging and diverse. Practiced by over one billion people worldwide, it has become an integral part of a multitude of cultures and nations over the span of fourteen centuries. Amid a long history and presence in our society, it is a wonder that Islam is not given more scholastic attention. Conflicts in the recent past such as the Iran-Iraq war, the war in Kuwait, the ongoing conflict in Palestine, the September 11th attacks and the war on terror all involve Islam. Islam's image is projected in a very negative light to the world, due to the Western media's fixation on attributing the majority of terrorist acts to Muslims, to the point where 'Islamaphobia' now has significant meaning.

The dilemma lies in the approach taken in studying Islam and in learning about Muslim nations. The West attempts to reflect its secular self in its study, analyzing the politics of Muslim nations without considering religion and its affects on all parts of life- individuals and the state. This approach refuses to see Islam as not only a religion but a way of life, expanded to the national and international levels, and that to separate the two results in an incomplete picture of Islamic history, present and future. This essay attempts to explore both the Islamic approach to conduct: individual, national and international linking it with Islamic history. The world in which Islam was formed and shaped is studied, and the individual is discussed, as well as the policies and ideals of an Islamic state. The Islamic approach to international relations and society is examined, as well as the course of Islam throughout history to give a snapshot of its influence on world events. While answers are not provided for modern day conflicts currently occurring; this essay simply endeavours to share Islam in its entirety in the hopes of fully understanding the intentions of Islam as a religion, and the influences that history has had on it arriving at its current state.

To ensure consistency and understanding in discussing a topic with negative connotation, misinformation and stereotypes, it is beneficial to define and clarify certain basic terms. Islam is the name of the religion, equal to Christianity and Judaism, and a Muslim is one who practices Islam. (Emerick, 5) *Allah* is the Arabic word for God, which is used synonymously throughout the essay. The Qur'an is the Muslims sacred book, akin to the Bible, and is considered the literal word of God, spoken from the Prophet Muhammad's mouth. (Emerick, 2002, 6)

Islam and its Formation

The birth, the surprisingly quick rise and dominance of Islam is formidable testimony to Islam's philosopher Ibn Khaldun's theory of the dominance of peripheral civilizations over the centre. Khaldun's study of history revealed a cyclical pattern of the rise and fall of Empires, such as China and Mesopotamia. (Watson, 117) The Arabs were also a culture on the periphery before Islam united the tribes which resulted in the dominance of two great Empires. Their success was due to a number of factors including a strong military tradition made necessary by exposure to foreign, and especially in the Arabs case, internal conflict. The internal conflict derived from the dryness of the Arabian Peninsula pushing tribes to attack one another for land and water. Young

men were expected to become warriors to defend their land and family resulting in a wealth of experienced trained fighters. (Cleveland, 6) At the centre of Khaldun's observations was the presence of a unifying belief that created a universal goal and drive within the peripheral state. (Watson, 117) Islam provided the Arabs with that unifying goal of a universal Muslim Empire and succeeded in spreading it from India to Spain.

Muslims believe that Islam was delivered to the world by *Allah* through the mouth of the Prophet Muhammad in the form of the Qur'an. In the year 610 on 'The Night of Power', Muhammad, aged 40, was visited by the angel Gabriel and given the task of teaching God's will and religion to the masses. (Cleveland, 8) Converting first his family and friends, he then branched out, making his teaching more public over the next two years, in direct negative correlation with his welcome in Mecca. His wish to prohibit the worship of idols first threatened a source of income to members of the wealthy dominant tribe. Then his commands to help the poor through dispersing the riches of the wealthy made him enemies, enough to eventually remove himself and his followers from Mecca to Medina. (Rahman, 34)

It was in Medina that the influences of Islam were demonstrated and Muhammad's strength as a leader emerged. Muhammad became the figure of authority in the town, and expected to settle existing internal feuds, a tribute to his personal diplomacy. (Ibid, 36) However, being located in another town did not bring an end to the conflict with Mecca. Muhammad still intended to return to Mecca and restore the Ka'ba, a religious stone dating back to the time of Abraham, to Islam, refusing to leave it to the idol worshippers. (Cleveland, 11) His position in Medina was ideal, as Medina was also conveniently placed to disrupt the commercial caravans that were so important to the economy of Mecca. By this arrangement, Islam and Muhammad won followers by winning a number of battles against Mecca, appealing to the aggressive nature of the tribes. Ten years after their departure, Muhammad and his followers walked peacefully into Mecca, turned the rock of Ka'ba into the House of God and resumed teaching Islam. (Cleveland, 11)

There were also factors within the Arab nations that facilitated the acceptance of Islam. The Arab culture was one of honour and loyalty; the making of a pact was binding. Acceptance of Islam therefore became a matter of switching these already passionate beliefs to new outlets. (Rahman, 33) The loyalty to the tribe was transferred to something greater and grander, namely loyalty to *Allah* and the causes of Islam. The importance of blood kinship to one tribe or another was transferred to the kinship of faith with any other Muslim tribe. Monotheism had already become a generally accepted idea that had been introduced by the infiltration of Christians and Jews into the peninsula. (Cleveland, 2) Lesser gods however, were still worshipped as go-betweens and Muhammad needed to convince the people that they could communicate directly with *Allah*. As Islam was accepted by the Arabs, the steps to beginning their conquest over the Byzantine and Persian Empires was a matter of redirecting the instincts of the tribes and the conflict driven interests of the Arab tradition to the North. (Rahman, 30) Their traditional competence as warriors, and their unity under a single goal, made the spread of Islam inevitable.

The armies of Byzantium and Persia had been at war with each other from 540-629 CE and were worn down and fatigued. The Byzantine people had been heavily taxed for the upkeep of the army, and had a population of non Greek-Orthodox Christians who were being prosecuted.

The East was in a similar state where the rulers separated and distinguished themselves above the common people, resulting in a lack of loyalty to the Empire. Islam was accepted as a more tolerant rule. (Cleveland, 4) Also assisting Islamic acceptance in neighbouring regions was the use of common Semitic languages instead of the Latin, which was not always understood.

Islam through the Ages

The history of Islam can be divided into different sagas of difference leaders, dynasties and military conquests and non-secular rule that spanned from Medina in the 7th century to its collapse in the 14th century. The time after Muhammad, as the Arabic peninsula was united, is known as the orthodox period of Caliphs, when the leaders were undivided and followed the Qur'an. (Simons, 5) At this time the two dominant empires in Europe were the Byzantine Empire to the North West and the Persian Empire to the North East. Under the leadership of the Caliph, Arabic tribes began to attack the southern flanks of these two nations and to spread Islam. During this part of its development the Arabs considered Islam to be an Arab religion, but this waned as the Arabs extended from the Arabia peninsula and the Qur'an was introduced and studied elsewhere. After the death of the fourth Caliph in 661CE, the Umayyad Dynasty was established with the self declared Caliph Mu'awiya. (Cleveland, 16)

In less than 100 years, Islam spread throughout Syria, Mesopotamia, Palestine, Egypt and North Africa, facilitated by a common Semitic language. As early as 711CE it had landed in Spain and quickly defeated the Visigoth rulers. By 751CE, Islam had reached Afghanistan and central Asia, establishing its first colony in India. The Umayyad Dynasty in Damascus started the Islamic tradition of literature and science and began the hereditary tradition of the Caliph. Beginning in 750CE, the Umayyads were replaced by the Abbasids. (Mottahedeh, 64) The Abbasid Dynasty in Baghdad lasted for five centuries during which the first three were responsible for its greatest contributions to science and art. By the end of its term, however, they had allowed semi-independent states to form. The Islamic Empire state still existed, and indeed was symbolically unified, but lacked a strong influential leader.

The Crusades over the 11-13th centuries are another significant feature in the Islamic timeline. Several different wars took place between the Christians and the Muslims. The Europeans captured Jerusalem in the First Crusade, only to lose and win it again, and to extend their reach to the boarders of Egypt, only to be eventually defeated at the end of the 13th century. (Peters, 85) Following the Crusades, and of more dramatic consequence, was the invasion of the Mongols. In the beginning of the 13th century, the Mongol state, led by Genghis Khan, expanded and swept through China, Hindu India, the Middle East (West Asia), the south of Russia and Eastern Europe, bringing an end to the great Abbasid Dynasty. Destruction of agriculture and irrigation, libraries, the murder and deportation of scientists was devastating for the Islamic state. (Rahman, 37)

The 14th century however, saw a turn around as the Mongols embraced Islam, declaring it their official religion. Unfortunately the damage already done was enough to permanently weaken the Islamic nation. In the middle of the 14th century the peripheral Ottoman states began its rise to power. Originally driven from their homeland by the Mongols, the Ottomans finally established in modern-day Turkey a powerful state, strongly united by the Islamic faith and

protected by a formidable military force. (Rahman, 1984, 41) The Ottoman Empire peaked in the 16th century and lasted until the 20th century.

Islam and the Individual

When discussing Islam, it is important to remember that first and foremost it is a religion, and that the religion itself is primarily concerned with the individual. To understand the institutions, it is essential to understand what they stand for, their goals, who they represent and what forms them. In the case of Islam, it is the soul and its eventual return into God's presence. It is then a matter of reciprocity as these institutions guide their respective followers through daily and life decisions. It is the assumption of Islam, and of most religions in general, that when decisions are made in the name of their God, peace and harmony will be achieved. (Emerick, 234) As a religion that does not distinguish between religious and political duty, the influences of Islam on the individual are important to understand when decisions are being made for Islamic nations.

Islam does not classify humans as inherently good or evil; rather it is decisions and actions that make individuals good or evil. (Ibid, 23) There are however, a number of beliefs that would lead to the conclusion that Islam considers humans inherently good. Muslims believe that humans are born without sin and are born with free choice. Whether or not one becomes evil or good is dependent on the choices one makes, and whether or not they are made for, or in agreement with a higher power - God. (Awn, 7) Equal to the story of Genesis in the Christian Bible, Muslims believe that the universe was created by God, and therefore we as humans, every part of ones body, and every particle within the universe is aware of that connection to or belonging to *Allah*. (Rahman, 43) It is this fundamental belief that accepts all of humanity into Islam. Free choice was given to humanity, meaning that the hearts and heads of humans, while aware of God's presence, do not have to acknowledge nor abide by His laws. While it is not required to recognize it, God's presence is known by the body. By accepting this, Muslims acknowledge the presence of a force within them, a type of "moral compass". *Fitrah*, as it is called, is what guides one through life and towards *Allah*. (Emerick, 25) It can then be argued that if man's body is connected and influenced by *Fitrah*, a force for the betterment of man, then man must be inherently good.

Islam and the State

The Qur'an not only guides the individual's spiritual life, but also extends into politics and state law. It is necessary to keep in mind that the Qur'an was written over a number of years, from Muhammad's first encounter with the angel Gabriel until his death. Therefore, it mirrors the development of Islam from its first teachings through to Muhammad's diplomatic and military conquests as leader of Medina. (Cleveland, 10)

In its fundamental beliefs, Islam strives to create a *dar al Islam*, which is essentially an Islamic state. This state is to be guided by an elected leader who will continue to hold power as long as he abides by Islamic laws. (Mottahedeh, 65) The position of Caliph was one of great power; however it was backed by a representative body that would aid the Caliph in his interpretations of the Qur'an and could override him if he overstepped his bounds. Before his

death, Muhammad instructed that his successor should be chosen and elected by his peers. (Cleveland, 12) The Qur'an also stressed the importance of consultation and discussion similar to that of a Parliamentary system of government, a system called *shura*. The ideal state, therefore, would be headed by one elected leader, the Caliph, who would consult and discuss issues of importance and interpretation of the Qur'an among those deemed able, the *ulema*. The *ulema* is composed of men and women chosen according to their merits as scholars and able to contribute in *shura*. (Rahman, 34) This limited form of consultation was justified by the belief that the uneducated would not know what is best for the Islamic community at large. The Islamic state also included a judicial aspect entitled *shari'ah*: a system of Islamic laws that decides what actions are for or against the word of *Allah*. The *shari'ah* incorporates not only a set of laws, but also a system of justice complete with courts, rules of evidence and properly trained officials. (Ibid, 34) The members who studied the Qur'an and decided upon matters of the *shari'ah* were considered part of the *ulema*.

The *ulema*, in the end, contributed in undermining the Caliph's position by successively taking control of many decisions. In addition, the position of Caliph lost authority as the Empire grew larger and older. The Caliph first relinquished power as the Empire grew beyond the direct practical influence of one Caliph, and *emirs* (governors) were appointed to rule. As the Empire weakened, the power to appoint his subjects diminished and the Caliph's office was lowered to accepting self-appointed *emirs* in order to maintain the necessary façade of unity within Islam. (Cleveland, 17)

The Islamic state is a very social one. Not only is it expected that Muslims avoid doing evil deeds, but they must also become involved to try and prevent these deeds from occurring. Within communities families are expected by the Qur'an to pay a tax to their religious centre called a *zakat*. (Cleveland, 27) This money goes to families that are in need of help and to projects of public benefit. Public services such as hospitals, primary schools, colleges and even rest stops on travel routes were some of the social benefits that Muslims enjoyed. Family and community life are of equal importance in developing a stable state and building bonds with community members is encouraged through celebrations at different parts of ones life bring people together. (Emerick, 231) The Muslim community is united through their daily prayers, regular attendance at the mosque, and shared beliefs. The assumption is made that if the family and community are strong, then they, as well as the rest of the other strong united Muslim communities will all act in accordance with the Qur'an and the state will be stable and peaceful to the point where other nations will want to join Islam. (Emerick, 234)

In the Islamic state, commerce and trade was seen as more worthwhile than agriculture. (Schmiechen, 122) This could stem from the fact that the rich Arab tribes of Pre-Islamic times were those involved in trade, while those nomads or agricultural tribes were left fighting for social ranking and wealth. Accordingly, the Empire created a vast trade network running from Asia to Europe with Cairo thriving at its centre. With regards to money and trade the Qur'an forbids the making of money off money, or the collection of interest on loans. This economic approach was originally intended to protect the individual and family, as those who were unable to pay off a debt were often enslaved, leaving the family without anyone to provide for them. In general this type of approach results in a more active economy where money is continually invested, moving and working. (Field, 254) What is more, Muslims are required to put all

business deals and contracts in writing, to be honest in their dealings, and are forbidden to invest in companies that make money off forbidden substances such as alcohol or pork. Nor are they able to make contracts for the future, as only *Allah* knows the future and it is unfair to lock another into such an agreement. (Emerick, 245)

The death of Muhammad two years after Islam's conquest of Mecca brought about the first and possibly the greatest division within the Islamic State. Whilst Muhammad had made it clear that his successor be agreed upon by his peers, at the time of his death he himself never suggested who he felt that successor should be. As a result of different opinions, the Muslim population divided into the two main sects of Islam, the Sunni and the Shi'a. The Sunni decided to simply choose a Caliph from amongst Muhammad's followers, one who had taught closely with him and gained much experience. (Awn, 15) The Shi'a decided that according to Arab tradition, Muhammad's leadership should pass through his blood line to a member of his family and go directly to Ali, who was also a close follower and scholar of Islam. Ultimately, the position of Caliph went first to Abu Bakr, then Umara, Uthman, and finally Ali became the fourth Caliph. With the assassination of Ali, the Shi'ites supported his descendents, the Abbasid faction, while the Sunni's supported the Umayyad faction. Thus, after only four caliphs, the 'Great Schism' occurred and has lasted throughout Islam's history.

Within Islam, there are several schools of legal thought, each slightly differing on the interpretation and application of Islamic law. The four oldest and surviving Sunni schools are the *Hanafi*, *Shafi*, *Maliki*, and *Hanbali Maddhabs*. (Mayer, 233) In general terms, the *Hanafi* School dates to 700CE and is the largest and most open minded. This school emphasizes belief over practice and relies on analogical reasoning to come to solutions. The strictest in terms of social and personal rules is the *Hanbali* School, the earliest and the most literal follower of the Qur'an. The *Maliki* School uses *hadith* (tradition) as a guide and looks to serve the common good. The *Shafi* School is considered the flexible school with characteristics such as consensus of the community and reasoning through analogy. (Ibid, 233)

Schools under the Shi'a sect are faithful to different branches of Muhammad's descendents, the largest being the Twelvers and the Seveners. These different sects diverge on who was the rightful leader to succeed Ali as Caliph, and when, where and how the rightful leader will return. (Awn, 14) Another interesting branch in Islam is Sufi. It is completely acceptable to find Sufis who are either Sunni or Shi'a. Sufism is a spiritual approach within Islam that aims to connect humans with the God. (Vara, 34) The type of union created is a heavily debated theological topic over whether one is completely unified with God or not. Sufi's practice prescribed rituals of types of singing, chanting, meditation and prayer as ways to form a union with *Allah*. (Cleveland, 31)

The different interpretations of the Qur'an result in slightly different conduct, and the development of different rules between and within states. For example those of the *Wahhabi* sect, a branch of the *Hanbali* School, are most firmly established in Saudi Arabia and rigorously follow only the most direct and literal teachings of Muhammad. (Peterson, 33) Some differences seem petty, for example some Muslims will not eat seafood, while other will not eat fish, but will eat shellfish. However the Qur'an specifically states there is only one way to heaven, and each sect firmly believes theirs is that path. (Awn, 14) While beneficial to individuals in their search

of an interpretation that works best with their inner conscious, the disparities stand in the way of Islam's ultimate goal: a unified universal population.

Islam and International Relations

Islam has a unique way of integrating itself into the international community. As a religion it is able to cross borders, cultures and integrate its beliefs little by little into otherwise secular states. States that have accepted Islam as a way of life consider the study of Islam important. Modern times see states such as Iran, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia interpreting the Qur'an differently, resulting in different types of relationships. Whatever the intentions of the State, and those who govern it, the original intention of Muhammad and Islam differs from what is being done today. The ultimate goal being that all the people of the world enter the *dar al Islam* and that there be only one Muslim nation. (Rahman, 28) Islam's efforts to achieve this have thus far demonstrated this to be a very difficult task. From its early conquering strategy, to the unequalled spread of knowledge in its adoption, its continual expansion with the Turks, its eventual downfall as an Empire, to present day conflict, Islam the religion still strives to form a *dar al Islam* through international interactions.

War, in Islam, is considered the last resort regulated by strict laws in the Qur'an. A 'just' war must be proclaimed by the leader of the entire Muslim community through the *Shura*. (Emerick, 172) It is illegal for an individual, or a group, to declare war in the name of Islam. The advisors themselves are guided by the Qur'an, which states that there are only three instances when war can be considered just: in the defence of ones community or nation, to liberate people living under oppressive regimes, and to remove any government that will not allow the free practice of Islam within its borders. War is proclaimed against those who wish to suppress Islam, because that is seen as going directly against God's will. (Ibid, 171) While engaged in war, Muslims are held to a strict code of honour. Women, children and innocents are not to be harmed, and a city, once conquered may be looted, but it must not be completely emptied or destroyed. (Mottehedeh, 67) Conversion by the sword is strictly forbidden. The conquered people are to be won over to Islam by living in the better society it provides, an unrealistic expectation if conquered cities were to be destroyed leaving those conquered resentful of their new leaders and religion (Peters, 75)

During its centuries as an Empire, Islam had certain codes by which Muslims treated non-Muslims. There were two main reasons behind this behaviour: one is that Islam is universal and does not discriminate against race, ethnicity, or social class; the second stems from basic statistics and common sense. The Arab/Muslim population that initially conquered the Byzantine and Persian Empires was much smaller in numbers, therefore to treat the conquered population harshly through discrimination and punishment would be to risk an irrepressible rebellion. (Watson, 113) Tolerance was, therefore, an Islamic necessity that applied to all non-Muslims.

In their relations with other religions, Muslims were instructed to be tolerant, especially with "people of the book", or Jews and Christians. The Jews who lived in Spain under the Visigoth leaders and in the Byzantine Empire, were harshly treated and prosecuted, and ended up welcoming the Muslims as more tolerant leaders. Under Islamic rule Christians were generally better treated than Muslims were treated in the Christian West. (Cleveland, 14) Within Islam,

Christians and Jews were allowed to have their own autonomous communities, while the Christian insisted on conformity. (Watson, 113) These communities were taxed (less than under Byzantine rule), and a few rules applied; for example, a Christian man was not allowed to marry a Muslim woman nor were Christians allowed to convert Muslims, however in general Christians were mostly tolerated and left to themselves. (Lewis, 177) This tolerance was expected since Muslims believed the three monotheistic religions to be related. All three are monotheistic, and each claims to be the only way to heaven. Islam claims that is it a progression ending with Islam, the most perfect of the three. (Lewis, 176) In essence, the fact that all serve the same God means that while the Jews and Christians have yet to accept the final word of God, they deserve to be treated with respect. (Rahman, 26)

Whether inside an Islamic state or not, all Muslims have the duty to fulfil certain religious obligations known as the 'Five Pillars of Islam'. The Five Pillars serve to remind Muslims of God, acknowledge his omnipotence and provide a brief glimpse into Islamic life. (Cleveland, 26) The first of the five is called *Shamahadah* (proclamation of faith) and is simply an affirmation in ones belief in *Allah* and the Prophet Muhammad. The second is *Salat* (prayer) which is called for five times per day at a specific time as to be a continual reminder of God's presence. Abstaining from eating drinking and sexual behaviour from dawn to dusk is *Sawm* (fasting) and is completed in the month of Ramadan. As mentioned Muslims are required to give *Zakat*, or Alms, that are distributed to those in need, and the last is the *Hajj*. Hajj is the Pilgrimage to Mecca that all Muslims are required to make once in their lifetime and is comprised of certain ceremony and ritual once a year. By adhering to these five simple Pillars of Faith, all Muslims throughout the world are bound by simple daily activities and important spiritual rituals. (Emerick, 114)

Islam and its Contributions

By virtue of its universal nature, Islam has a history of easily adopting new ideas, and encouraging innovation. It can also lay claim to the discovery and advancement of a number of scientific and philosophical studies. During its span from the 7th to 14th century as an Empire, Islam's approach to knowledge and literacy had a huge influence on the rest of Europe. (Hitti, 36) Muhammad's instructions to acquire knowledge rested on a few simple concepts; that knowledge enables man to distinguish between right and wrong. It is a required that Muslims learn to read and write in order to read the Qur'an, which provides "armour against the enemy [and]...society in solitude". (Emerick, 235) These concepts lead the Muslims to spread knowledge to people of every ethnicity and social group with a vigour that far surpassed any attempts in Western Europe at the time, which typically restricted education to the rich and the clergy. (Cleveland, 25)

The Muslims first objective was to translate any books, documents and knowledge into Arabic and to spread duplicate copies throughout the nation. In 830 CE, an institution entitled the "House of Wisdom" was established with the sole purpose of making general 'knowledge' available in Arabic. (Emerick, 322) The second step was to organize the accumulated information into bodies of thought, and to begin the testing of theories and ideas. From the 9th century on, the Muslims began to add to their vast source of knowledge with discoveries and innovations in all areas of scholarship.

With this dedication and inspiration, the Islamic Empire enjoyed a time of adopting, gathering, advancing, and conceiving of ideas. Muslim mathematicians, for example, advanced upon Indian and Persian ideas in algebra and trigonometry (Cleveland, 25). Ibn Sina wrote a textbook known as the *Canon* on the practice of medicine that was used for five centuries throughout Europe in 1037, and also determined that the speed of light is constant. (Hitti, 39) Bookstores were opened to make profits as the use of paper, a Chinese invention, was put to work. Translations of the Greek classics were made in Arab and then later Latin, spreading the ideas throughout the whole Empire and that of Western Europe. (Cleveland, 25) Philosophically, Islam produced many great thinkers as well. Of particular note is Ibn Khaldun, mentioned previously, who studied the cyclical rise and fall of Empires. (Watson, 117) Khaldun's literature is still read today by historians, anthropologists, mathematicians, and those studying Islamic culture, literature, and religion.

This devotion to intellect was in sharp contrast to that of Europe. In the 10th century, scholars from Western Europe were travelling to Spain, Cordoba in particular, to attend the Islamic Universities to study volumes that were made available through the Islamic dedication to translating old texts into Arab. By the 12th and 13th centuries, Christian rulers of Northern Spain were encouraging the translation of Arab texts into Latin. (Cleveland, 25) The Muslim population was literate enough to at least read and understand what was being written in the Qur'an, as opposed to the barely literate population of Western Europe, where the majority of literate people were situated in the clergy.

Conclusion

As with other world religions, the nature of Islam's structure and institutions has evolved to fit into today's international society. However, Islamic fundamental beliefs still hold, as the Qur'an continues to be read and the Five Pillars are still practiced. World wide, Muslims are required to obey certain regulations that dictate their daily lives, economic decisions and how they view national and international relations. The historic Islamic state is seen as outdated by the Western democratic views that dominate society today. (Awn, 15) The West may be right in assuming that currently a single Islamic community seems unattainable as demonstrated by the multiple schools of thought within Islam and the present situation in the Arab world. Yet, Islam remains an all encompassing way of life, practiced by millions of people within Muslim as well as democratic nations. (Emerick, IX) If there is to be dialogue between Islam and the West, rather than relying on biased information provided in the media, one should become more informed about each other and find better ways of promoting mutual understanding.

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