I inform the proud Muslim people of the world that the author of the "Satanic Verses" book, which is against Islam, the Prophet and the Koran, and all those involved in its publication who were aware of its content, are sentenced to death. I ask all the Muslims to execute them wherever they find them."

Ayatollah Khomeini's edict, issued on St Valentine's day, certainly seemed no message of love. It shocked audiences world-wide. For most non-Muslims it merely confirmed, if such confirmation were needed, the all-pervasive fanaticism and intolerance of 'fundamentalist' Islam. Khomeini had become one of the many violent witnesses to the bigotry and anti-intellectualism of the Muslim faith. In a long line of totalitarian leaders, he was unwilling to tolerate the diversity of opinion all traditions naturally spans over the centuries.

Many Muslims, however, applauded Khomeini as a hero. Members of both major sects, Shia'h and Sunni, were united in their praise for his stance. In sharp contrast to the deafening silence in the Arab heartland of Islam, at least he had spoken. And spoken clearly. Had he not stood up for the honour of Muhammad—the noble messenger of God? Wasn't this proof of his love for God? Many Muslims privately thought that Khomeini had got the date right after all.

"Publish and be damned" is a Western slogan; 'Publish and be hanged' is Khomeini's version. Rushdie was destined to pay a high price for what was, in Muslim eyes, very obvious literary impudence. In Teheran, the controversy surrounding The Satanic Verses had been monitored by the Ayatollah's advisers since October 1988. But no action had been recommended. Iran's charge d'affaires, Akhundzadeh Basti, was in London throughout the months preceding the delivery of the fatwa and must surely have advised his government on the developments in Britain. But it was the riots in Islamabad that were to supply the last straw. Iranian television reported that half-a-dozen people had been killed in anti-Rushdie demonstrations in the Pakistani capital on 12 February 1989, with one more civilian death a day later in neighbouring Kashmir. Khomeini asked for a full report on The Satanic Verses; a day later he pronounced his famous fatwa according to his interpretation of Islamic law. Within hours there was talk of a price on Rushdie's head. This was indeed, as V.S. Naipaul remarked in an interview in Calcutta, 'an extreme form of literary criticism'.

Western condemnation of Khomeini's fatwa was hasty, loud, clear and unanimous. Commentators in the media saw it as the Muslims' collective regression into the fanatical intolerance of the medieval era—or, I suppose, of the more recent
days of the American Wild West. Many writers speculated that it was difficult even to explain, let alone justify, the ferocity of Khomeini's reaction. Could it be that he had interpreted Rushdie's book as a personal attack on the Imam 'bent on rolling back history itself', setting his face against progress and justice?

At any rate, virtually all Western writers, particularly British, French and American ones, jointly condemned the fatwa as failing to meet Western ethical requirements. It was brutal and unjust. Such 'remote control' assassinations smacked more of the Mafia than of a civilised state.

There were over-reactions too. The normally moderate if passionate Nobel Prize winner, Elie Wiesel said: 'If the death threat succeeds in silencing the Indian born author, it would mean not only the end of literature but the end of civilisation.' An exaggeration surely; civilisation may well survive without Salman Rushdie and his works.

Muslim, particularly Iranian, reaction was no less passionate. Khomeini's fatwa and the price placed on Rushdie's head was, it was argued, no different from the bounty offered for bank robbers in the American Wild West during the nineteenth century. Was the sheriff then a murderer because he offered a reward for the criminal caught dead or alive? Nor will it do to retort, urged the Iranians, that the alleged crime in Rushdie's case was not committed within a territory under the jurisdiction of the Islamic state. There were, the Iranians pointed out somewhat weakly, instances of one nation's authorities sentencing a citizen of another country: the British government once sentenced a future Israeli Prime Minister, Mr Begin, in absentia, for involvement in Palestinian terrorism in the 1940s.

The Western outrage is the result of double standards. For, after all, surreptitious violence in the pursuit of such goals as national and ideological security as well as alleged anti-terrorism is morally acceptable to many European and American critics of Khomeini. Are there no Western heads of state who occasionally condone the taking, albeit secretly, even of innocent life in the pursuit of aims like security and world peace? Perhaps it is Khomeini's candour, with its published flavour of Machiavellianism, that offends the Western conscience. At any rate, it is wise to resist the obvious conclusion that Iranian interpretations of Islam necessarily patronise brutality more than other ideologies do.

It is in general unwise for assassins to publish their intentions to their would-be victims. Given the frankness of Khomeini's orders, it is difficult to believe that Khomeini was interested in having Rushdie assassinated. (Indeed, in a paradoxical way, the fatwa saved Rushdie's life: the tight security surrounding him, in the wake of the Iranian threat, has made it difficult for outraged Muslim individuals even in Britain to harm him.) Khomeini himself probably reasoned that an individual keenly threatened with death suffers far more than one who is killed without warning.

'Be careful with Muhammad', warns the slogan. Rushdie must have known it. Anyone born within the Realm of Islam is bound to know it. Indeed, many outsiders are well aware of the Muslim tendency to take religious conviction seriously. There is ample evidence in Islamic history for the view that Muslims hold their Prophet in great esteem. At any rate, Rushdie's literary terrorism had been answered by Khomeini's threat of physical terrorism.

3

Sir Geoffrey Howe of the United Kingdom was among the first Western leaders to condemn Khomeini's fatwa. Within days of Khomeini's declaration, Howe had elicited the unconditional support of the European and American communities. To show solidarity with the British decision to withdraw British diplomats from Teheran, the EEC (European Economic Community) countries decided on 20 February to withdraw their diplomats too. The newly elected President George Bush also joined in the Western criticism of Iran's leader as a tyrant and murderer.

In Teheran, the initial reaction was one of sincere surprise. Why had Britain over-reacted on the Rushdie issue? After all, Britain had taken the initiative in normalising diplomatic
relations with Iran; indeed the British Embassy had been reopened in November 1988.

Iran immediately responded to the EEC reaction by an equally dramatic move. All Iranian diplomats in Europe were recalled. Muslims in many European cities marched, raising pro-Iranian slogans like 'Khomeini—the honour of Islam'. On 22 February an ageing Ayatollah Khomeini issued a statement. The unprecedented reaction shown against Iran, he declared, was due to the West's alarm at the potential power of Islam. It was this threat to Western hegemony, Khomeini argued, that could alone explain the sheer ferocity of Western indignation. The reaction of European and American governments had little to do with defending the rights of a black individual and more to do with their frustration at having been denied an opportunity to ridicule Islam. Even the presence of one truly Islamic state, Khomeini concluded, could put considerable limits on the power of non-Muslims to insult the Muslims.

One day after Khomeini's reaction to the Western outrage, the Iranian Parliament and Assembly of Experts tabled a motion asking the government to break off diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom. The Iranians suggested that, given Britain's past record of ideological enmity towards Muslims, the British government must publicly condemn The Satanic Verses and apologise to the Muslim community for injury to feelings. Meanwhile, many religious leaders throughout the Islamic world were coming out in favour of Khomeini's edict. On 25 February Indian police shot dead about a dozen more Muslim demonstrators in Rushdie's native Bombay. The Imam of India's Jami'a Mosque in Delhi openly supported Khomeini's fatwa. Another leading Indian Muslim religious leader, Maulana Hasan Ali Nadawi, no friend of Khomeini's and indeed passionately opposed to Shia'h Islam, endorsed the Iranian cleric's judgement as 'just and appropriate'. The Mufti of Jerusalem's al-Aqsa Mosque concurred. In the Lebanon the powerful Sheikh Shaban, leader of the Tawhid Movement, came out in favour of the fatwa, praising Khomeini as a courageous Muslim soldier opposing a 'Zionist plot against Islam'.

At the end of February the Iranian Parliament passed a motion giving the United Kingdom seven days to impose a ban on Rushdie's book and apologise. Iran's chargé d'affaires, Akhundzadeh Basti, left London for Teheran. He supported Khomeini's fatwa as a 'divine order' which no one could change. The whole aim of the Islamic Revolution, he told reporters just before his departure, was to defend Islam throughout the world.

While Western diplomatic pressure against Iran was increasing, there were many more demonstrations in which Muslims condemned Rushdie as well as the British government. Throughout the Muslim world and indeed Europe and the United States, outraged Muslims took to the streets in a rare show of unity. British and American flags were burnt and the embassies stoned. Arab governments, particularly the Saudis, were condemned for their silence over the Anglo-Rushdie scandal; they were passionately accused of being co-conspirators with the West in a plot to destroy Islam. Khomeini, by contrast, emerged as the isolated but celebrated hero who had saved Islam in the hour of trial. Muslims the world over were deeply impressed by the courageous stance of the Iranians given that they had already paid such a high price for their defence of Islamic values.

The one week's notice given to the British government by the Iranians was due to end on 7 March. Iran cancelled a technical exhibition, scheduled for 5 March in Teheran, involving 50 British firms. On 2 March the Labour MP for Bradford West, Max Madden, urged Parliament to act quickly to resolve the Rushdie affair. He warned that unless the British government tried to satisfy the demands of its own Muslim citizens, Khomeini could not be isolated as an outsider agitating the Muslims settled in the United Kingdom. On the same day, Geoffrey Howe and Margaret Thatcher both acknowledged that The Satanic Verses was indeed offensive and sympathised with Muslim outrage. But neither agreed to consider Muslim demands for a state ban on the book. Many parts of The Satanic Verses, argued Geoffrey Howe, also provocatively compared Britain with Hitler's Fascist Germany. And while that offended him and his col-
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leagues, it was not a sufficient reason for banning the book. Freedom of speech was, he continued, a British tradition that had to be defended at all costs. Diplomatic relations between Iran and the United Kingdom were officially severed on 7 March.

4

We shall in due course examine Khomeini’s fatwa in the context of the British Muslim stance and indeed the reactions of other Muslims worldwide. But it is wise at this stage to survey briefly the traditional Islamic beliefs and laws about blasphemy, apostasy and treason.

All sacred literature in the Hebrew-Christian and Islamic traditions makes references to blasphemy, apostasy, and heresy. Let us begin with blasphemy. The Old Testament (Leviticus 24:16) prescribes corporal punishment for blasphemy, while the New Testament (Matthew 12:32) is content to warn that blasphemy is unforgivable in both worlds. Justinian prescribed the death penalty for blasphemy; it became part of the codification of Roman law in AD 535. In later and medieval Christianity, both Protestant and Catholic, blasphemy remained punishable by death. Indeed blasphemy is still a criminal offence in the United Kingdom though it does not figure in the legal systems of many other European countries.

It is fair to add that blasphemy can be a meaningful offence both in a pious and a secular context. For secular nations that were formerly Christian, ‘blasphemy’ would imply the use of grossly outrageous language concerning one’s own nation or some inviolable ideal of that nation. In parts of the United States, there is still a civil penalty on the books for any extreme outrage against the flag.

In the Islamic tradition too it is possible to blaspheme against God, his revealed message and his Prophet. Surprisingly, however, the Koran does not legislate a penalty for such blasphemy. Chapter 4 (verse 151) refers to Jewish blasphemy against Mary, the mother of Christ. But no punishment, other than a spiritual one (in terms of divine wrath) is mentioned.

Similarly, the Koran frequently accuses the Christians of committing blasphemy against God (or, more strictly, one of the names of God since the person of God is too exalted for any indignity to reach him). Once again, no penalty is prescribed. Indeed far from legislating punishment here, the Koran discourages Muslims even from verbally abusing the deities of idolaters and blasphemers: ‘And revile not those whom they call upon God, lest they, out of spite, revile [the true] God in their ignorance’ (6:109).

Things are somewhat different when a believing Muslim is thought to blaspheme against God or his messenger. The Koran itself makes no clear reference to such a scenario. Subsequent learned opinion has always remained divided but there is no shortage of those prescribing imprisonment or even execution for heretics and individuals thought to have committed offences against the dignity of God or his messenger. Such measures have rarely been carried out, official Islam having always been relatively tolerant of heresy. But there are famous exceptions. The tenth-century mystic-saint Mansur al-Hallaj had, in a moment of ecstasy, exclaimed ‘I am the truth’, effectively identifying himself with the Deity. He was executed by an outraged orthodoxy eager to avenge blasphemy against the divine name.

The problems of identifying apostasy and the determination of appropriate punitive measures are both large and controversial. By and large, the Koran prescribes penalties for what may be termed ‘social’ crimes—such as adultery, fornication, theft, highway robbery, causing public disorder—as opposed to purely personal or spiritual offences such as hypocrisy, dishonesty in interpersonal relationships, back-biting, financial malpractice, lapse from strict Islamic piety, and private loss of faith. As I understand it, the sacred scripture of Islam does not prescribe any penalty in this world for apostasy alone. It condemns those who ‘turn their backs on guidance’ as sinning against God; the works of renegades are in vain and Hell is often said to be their destination (2:217). However, apostasy is punishable by death if it is aggravated, variously, by treachery in a military context, a breach of contract or treaty with a Muslim party to an agreement, ideological or
apostasy all the time. By and large, Muslims who privately commit apostasy are not harassed by the Islamic establishment. However, those who publicly insult the Prophet or launch abusive attacks on the contents of the Koran and the derivative Islamic tradition are almost always taken to task for it.

Enlightened Muslim opinion now recognises that, within the modern community of Islamic peoples, there is a significant number of individuals who are members by chance rather than by choice. There is therefore a high price to be paid for keeping the entire community in line with any unduly harsh policy or ruling on apostasy. For it would breed hypocrisy; and disaffected hypocrites have always been a source of treason and sedition even in Muhammad’s own day. Luke-warm and time-serving allegiances, ultimately disruptive of the social fabric, are hardly worth the price.

To be sure, a missionary faith like Islam cannot turn a blind eye on the heretic or the apostate—‘the brother that walketh disorderly’ in St Paul’s idiom (2 Thessalonians 3:6). And Muslims certainly don’t turn a blind eye. The persecution of the Ahmadi sect in Pakistan (which has been expelled from the House of Islam) is a sufficient witness to that. For the ordinary Muslim, meeting an apostate is a far more dramatically disturbing experience than meeting a Jew or a Christian.

These related fears of heresy, apostasy and social dismemberment, however, have to be set in the balance with a due regard for freedom of belief. The potential risks of heresy and apostasy inherent in the offer of religious freedom are, it seems to me, worth taking. For one thing, if there is a God, it can be safely assumed that he wants a voluntary response born of genuine conviction, rooted in reflection and morally responsible choice. Seen in this light, heresy and apostasy are morally more acceptable than any hypocritical attachment to orthodox opinion out of the fear of public sanctions.

Nor is this a position devoid of traditional religious support. Scriptural passages are to hand favouring such a stance: ‘There should be no compulsion in religion’ (2:256). Conscientious disbelief has to be tolerated. A verse, revealed during the early Meccan ministry of the Prophet, addressed to idolaters, may well serve as part of a specifically Islamic manifesto on freedom of conscience and conviction: ‘To you your religion, to me mine’ (109:6).

5

‘The only reward of those who make war upon God and His Messenger and strive to create disorder in the land’, reads chapter 5 (vv.33–4) of the Koran, ‘will be that they will be killed or crucified, or have their hands and feet on alternate sides cut off, or will be exiled from the land. Such will be their humiliation in this world, and in the world yet to come there awaits them an awful doom. This is so except in the case of those who repent before you overpower them. For God is forgiving, merciful.’ Rushdie is charged, under the provisions of the law derived from these verses, with creating fasad (public disorder) in a land under divine sovereignty.

Khomeini’s fatwa, like the varied edicts issued by other jurists in the Islamic world, does not by and large hinge on the fact that Rushdie is an apostate or a blasphemer or indeed even a shaitin – an individual who insults any messenger of God, whether Muhammad or his prophetic predecessors. (The penalty for a shaitin, unlike a blasphemer or an apostate, is irrevocable.) The author of The Satanic Verses is charged with causing fasad or corruption in the world. In Rushdie’s case, his privately committed apostasy is thought to be aggravated by a public declaration of ideological enmity against the Realm of Islam. Given that, in Islamic thought, no distinction obtains between religious and political crimes, Rushdie’s attack on the religion of Islam is interpreted to be an act of high treason against the Islamic state. Now, as it happens, the underlying charge of fasad can be levelled indifferently at Muslims and non-Muslims alike, whether within or outside the House of Islam; hence Khomeini’s decision to include, within the remit of his fatwa, Rushdie’s non-Muslim accomplices, namely, his publishers and related parties.

It is important to understand the exact nature of Rushdie’s crime. He is charged, under the regulations of chapter 5 of the Koran, with a declaration of ‘war upon God and His
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Messenger' and, in doing so, with creating 'corruption (fasad) in the land'. For Rushdie has been an apostate—an atheist in his case—for many years before the publication of The Satanic Verses. Many Muslims have known this and few have even criticised him, let alone threatened his life. Rushdie is in good company. Many other writers, journalists, poets, thinkers and artists from a similar background also repudiated Islam as a false religion. It is a well-known fact that almost all of the Third World socialists resident in the West have, in their eagerness to disown their roots and origins, sought to cauterise Islam from their hearts and 'souls'. Indeed many have, in addition, engaged in a militant campaign against the faith of their forebears—though usually from the safety of a flat in London or Paris.

Rushdie's secular lifestyle, then, has been tolerated by Muslims. No one has denied him the right, as an imaginative writer, to take legitimate liberties with his own sacred heritage. But liberty is not licence: and most of us would think at least twice before defaming the character of a man whose life and work have been, rightly or wrongly, held in esteem for 1500 years by a major constituency of the human race. Nor is the ground for such caution merely fear of the Muslim reaction. One has some obligation to be fair in one's criticisms and reservations even about—especially about—outlooks one conscientiously rejects.

Rushdie is entitled to reject Islam or indeed to reinterpret, in an idiosyncratic way, some of its doctrines and regulations. But this is largely a matter of private option; any public declarations should be made in conscious awareness of the risks. An authorship, no matter how personal in its formation or motivation, can hardly remain private in its consequences. And self-censorship is a meaningful demand in a world of varied and passionately held convictions. What Rushdie publishes about Islam is not just his business. It is everyone's—at least every Muslim's—business.

Rushdie is not a newcomer to controversy and even to book-bannings. Indeed he has in the past, through the medium of fiction, ably criticised influential Muslims. All societies, alive to the pressures of the contemporary world,

must allow such critiques on pain of becoming repressive and outdated. And Rushdie's earlier work Shame caused deep offence to some individuals in the Pakistani government, though it did not arouse the spontaneous anger and universal outrage occasioned by The Satanic Verses.

The reason for the different reactions to the two novels is of central significance. To criticise or even to prostitute the reputations of individuals who profess the Islamic creed is one thing; reviling things sacred is quite another. To accuse and to be the subject of accusation are altogether human; both are a part of the failings of our common humanity. Muslims are no exception here. But while matters of private injury to feeling are within the province of the discretion and forgiveness of individuals, offences against the dignity of God and His Messenger may well seem inexcusable acts of gross immorality. Nor should one dismiss the latter claim as merely a fanatical judgement harboured in a religious enthusiasm that is admittedly alien to the secular West. If we are to understand people, including the Muslims, we cannot begin by ignoring the factors and perceptions that inform their outlook, that are a part of their make-up.

Many writers, including Rushdie in his earlier work, disguise their hatred of Muhammad and Islam by pretending that their only target is the intolerance and fanaticism of the mullahs and clergies. In The Satanic Verses Rushdie courageously takes one step further, realising, quite rightly, that one cannot indefinitely hate Muslims without also hating the faith and the prophetic pattern they love. Accordingly, he makes explicit his reservations about Islam and his animosity towards the Arabian Prophet. Rushdie no longer pretends that he is merely concerned to condemn a few 'fundamentalists' (like Khomeini). He goes to the heart of the matter. He cuts Allah down to size and puts Muhammad in his place. It cannot be expected that Muslims should fail to react to such an ideological challenge.
his assistant—were killed for opposing Khomeini's fatwa. It is widely (and plausibly) believed that Iranians were responsible for the assassinations. Tensions between pro-Iranian and pro-Saudi Muslim organisations have increased world-wide, including those in Europe and the Far East.

The fact is, of course, that any agitation on a large scale could, if unchecked, lead to a serious sense of grievance and eventually pose a threat to the political stability of several Arab régimes. Iranian commentators have repeatedly warned that any politicisation of the Muslim peoples will, in effect, encourage in the long-term a radicalisation that may well inspire Khomeini-style revolutions. The threat of Islamic fundamentalism to some Arab governments, such as Egypt, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, is indeed all too real. It is a clear comment on the popularity and power of militant Islam that, notwithstanding Western pressures to condemn Khomeini, few Muslim leaders or religionists have issued a verdict against Khomeini's judgement.

We need to examine briefly the reaction of several nations with large Muslim populations, and, in doing so, identify the competing internal forces of Islamic militancy as well as militant secularity in the Muslim world.

It is a sign of the times that a project for rewriting Arab history, without any reference to Islam, was being launched in the Iraqi city of Baghdad early in 1989. Meeting under the chairmanship of Dr Mustafa al-Najar, the executive council of the Bureau for Writing Arab History decided that Arabs constitute a distinct racial group whose present and past achievements needed fuller appreciation. Distortions allegedly introduced by Iranian and Western orientalist scholars were to be excised; all authentic writing must refer exclusively to Arab sources. Revealingly, throughout the Council's deliberations, Islam is never mentioned in any context—as if it were not Islam that brought the Arabs to prominence for the first (and indeed only) time in their history.

Apart from Iran and the Lebanon, the only other citadel of Islamic fundamentalism is of course Egypt. The Rushdie affair comes at a time of increased tensions between Egyptian 'moderates' and their Muslim fundamentalist opponents. Although Islam is the official religion of Egypt with the Islamic law (Shari'ah) the main source of Egyptian legislation (Article 2, The Constitution), Islam has in practice virtually no influence on government policy. The fundamentalist Muslims have therefore declared that Egyptian society is infidel (takfir). Significantly, three prominent Muslim scholars at the al-Azhar Islamic seminary in Cairo issued a fatwa declaring that the charge of infidelity was invalid when issued against a whole society as opposed to an individual or group of individuals.

In mid-March, Dr Sayed Tantawi, the Mufti of Cairo and Imam at the al-Azhar seminary issued his fatwa concerning Salman Rushdie. He opted for what the West calls a moderate stance, condemning the book's contents in fairly mild terms while virtually exonerating Rushdie. One could have safely expected such a soft verdict from the Egyptian government's supreme authority on Islamic law. The reaction of the official government-employed Muslim clergy to the Rushdie provocation has been the straw that broke the camel's back for the radical Islamic groups in Egypt. There have been passionate calls for a jehad on a corrupt political order.

In Egypt there are only two kinds of Muslims: those who support the government's policies and those who are in jail. And the fundamentalists are mostly in jail. Only the 'moderates' are free to practise Islam. For their Islam poses no threat to vested Western interests. The 'moderate' Islamic elements in the Middle East are, in official Egyptian as well as Western interpretations, the ones considered harmless to the West.

In Algeria too, Islamic fundamentalism is seen as a major threat to the stability of the state. In recent months, the Algerian authorities have been engaged in several attempts to weaken the forces likely to inspire an Islamic resurgence. In fact, the recent constitutional reforms approved at a national referendum in Algiers are primarily designed to isolate Islamic groups from the left-wing labour groups.

Since the country's independence from France in 1962, the
Islamic factions have often joined forces, for purely pragmatic reasons, with the left-wing groups lobbying for justice and reform. (The pragmatic decision to unite Muslims and Marxists was also an ingredient in Khomeini's revolutionary overthrow of the Shah in Iran.) Islamic and left-wing activists jointly organised the unofficial strikes and riots in October 1987 that challenged Colonel Chadli Benjedid's régime. The government knew that behind the October unrest, in which 500 people died, was a powerful coalition of radical Muslim and militant labour groups.

Article 40 of the new constitution forbids the formation of political associations directed against state interests. Accordingly socialism is abolished as the state ideology; but the new constitution confers upon trade unions in the public sector the right to strike. This measure seems to be part of an attempt to satisfy left-wing demands and thereby isolate the specifically Muslim forces of protest. A major concern of the Algerian rulers, along with their Arab and Western allies, is to preserve the essentially secular nature of the political institutions. And Islamic fundamentalism poses a serious threat to that aspiration since the Islamic groups want to have a constitution based on Islamic law (shari'a).

The Turkish reaction to the Rushdie affair can only be properly assessed against the background of a recent attempt by the masses to reassert their Islamic identity. The imposed secularism of Kemal Ataturk and his followers has long been resented by the ordinary Turks who, by and large, remain loyal to Islam. In March 1989, at the height of the Rushdie affair, there were several demonstrations in Ankara against a supreme court's decision to revoke the law permitting women to wear the veil on university campuses. Turkey's President Kenan Evren, who sees Islamic radicalism as a threat to national security, had insisted on the abrogation of the law permitting female students to wear a headscarf. At the demonstration, male and female marchers called for Evren's resignation and shouted, 'Evren and Rushdie go hand in hand'.

In Bursa, the Ottoman Empire's first capital, there were many displays of popular anger over The Satanic Verses. The Turkish authorities' decision to permit the screening of The Last Temptation of Christ as part of the eighth annual film festival was seen as a further provocation. Muslim critics in Turkey have long been protesting about the sexual permissiveness that secularity has brought—with Turkey being the only Muslim country openly importing pornographic materials and even printing a Turkish edition of Playboy. The Rushdie affair comes at a time of increased official hostility to traditional Islam as Kemalist secularist forces retreat in the face of a new assertion of Islamic values by ordinary Turks. The Turkish government's recent decision to welcome Muslims of Turkish descent expelled from Bulgaria had been its only redeeming action in the eyes of its Muslim fundamentalist opponents until the authorities eventually capitulated and banned The Satanic Verses.

In Pakistan there have been several violent protest rallies over Rushdie's book. The Islamabad riots on 12 February, in which six people were killed, may well have prompted Khomeini to issue his fatwa. The Islamabad riots were followed by riots in Lahore, Peshawar and Karachi. In early March popular anger against Rushdie was caught up in ethnic animosity between various factions, especially in Karachi. A bomb went off at the British Council Library in Peshawar in mid-March.

Pakistan's Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto was in China at the time of the February protests held in front of the American Cultural Centre in Islamabad. She interpreted the anti-Rushdie protests as being a part of the right-wing Islamic lobby's attempt to destabilise her government. After the mysterious death of General Zia-ul-Haq, the pro-Saudi Islamic parties were defeated by Miss Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party in the November 1988 elections. It is probable that the right-wing politicians mounted the demonstrations to embarrass the pro-American factions in Bhutto's party. It is harder to believe that those who died in the demonstrations did so for purely political motives. At any rate, Miss Bhutto banned The Satanic Verses without condemning its author. Indeed, in a BBC radio interview, she accused opponents of Rushdie of being guilty of blasphemy! Unsurprisingly, Britain's
Foreign Secretary, Geoffrey Howe, voiced his approval of Miss Bhutto’s stance on the Rushdie affair and, more generally, welcomed the full ‘restoration of democracy’ by Pakistan’s allegedly new ‘civilian’ government.

In neighbouring India, *The Satanic Verses* was banned as early as October 1988. The secularist Muslim politician Syed Shahabuddin, a member of the opposition Janata Party, alerted the Indian government to Rushdie’s book; Rajiv Gandhi reacted immediately. Apart from the fact that Gandhi was facing a general election—there are 150 million Muslims in India—he no doubt remembered how his mother had successfully brought libel charges against Rushdie’s earlier prize-winning novel *Midnight’s Children*. At any rate, India was among the first countries to ban the sale and distribution of the book. While it is an avowedly secular nation, Indian politicians wisely prohibited publication in order to avoid inter-religious strife.

Rushdie’s loss of faith is not an unusual phenomenon. Countless Muslims have, under the impact of Western thought, repudiated Islamic ideals. The view that Muslim societies are inferior and irrational relics from a bygone age is by no means restricted to Western critics. The intellectual and political élite in Islamic lands—as in the Third World more generally—share the conviction that Islam patronises an outdated system of belief and practice. Most of the nationalist leaders who aspired for independence from European colonial rulers were themselves secular in outlook. After independence the Muslim world was placed in the custody of a secularised élite leadership sympathetic to the West’s political goals.

The ruling élites in most Islamic countries flirt with the ideals and traditions of their former colonial masters. There is therefore a virtually complete rift between an educated leadership, entertaining a Eurocentric world-view, and the illiterate ruled classes, often passionately attached to traditional Islam. Even countries created specifically to be Islamic states, such as Pakistan and Algeria, have sub-

sequently been ruled by a Westernised élite sympathetic to Western capitalism and secularity, and completely opposed to the ideals of the Muslim people they rule.

Many anti-Islamic politicians in the Muslim world none the less enjoy great popularity among the believing masses, because they carefully conceal their loss of faith. There are therefore countless Rushdies in the House of Islam. The Shah of Iran and his supporters were, to a man, atheists blindingly imitating Western patterns of conduct. It is not in vain that Henry Kissinger once referred to the Shah as America’s ‘unconditional’ ally. Indeed, the rulers of almost all contemporary Muslim nation-states are secularists committed to upholding Western interests.

With few exceptions, the nation-states labelled ‘Islamic’ are in reality neo-colonial sovereignties in which Muslim ambitions are severely mutilated. It is noteworthy that the freest Muslims live in the West and in Iran. Everywhere else, Islam is an outlawed political force. It is no exaggeration to call the Arab states proxies of the United States and Britain. Indeed one might even say that the leaders of many so-called Muslim countries are fellow conspirators with the West in their opposition to Islamic forces in their territories. Western critics must not allow their hatred of Khomeini to obscure a recognition of the truth about the realities of power in the Muslim world.

The reaction of Western governments to the Rushdie affair is understandable. For these governments’ defence of Rushdie is itself part of their continuing defence of countless Rushdies all over the Muslim world. In all the client-states, Rushdies abound. And they need to be protected from the wrath of the Muslim masses. Once the peoples of Islam learn the truth about their rulers, Khomeini-style revolutions need not remain confined to Iran or the Lebanon.

It is no coincidence that the most extreme *fatwa* comes from Khomeini. A unique feature of contemporary Iranian society is its radical reversal of the roles of secularity and religion. In the essentially secular order established by the colonial masters of the Muslim world, Islam was to be allowed to survive, even thrive, as a sub-culture. Khomeini’s revol-
ution re-establishes the supremacy of Islamic culture while relegating Western culture to the status of a tolerated aberration. For in major Iranian cities, Western cultural tendencies still co-exist with Islamic ones. This is in sharp contrast to other so-called Islamic states—notably Egypt, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia—where Islam is reduced to an item of piety in the private sector. Khomeini’s Iran is the only country where the Christianising of Islam, so to speak, has been decisively challenged.

The victory of Western colonialism over Islamic states is at root the victory of powerful secularised nations over weak secularised nations. The political potential of Islam has not been drastically reduced by the triumph of Western secularity. For virtually none of the so-called Islamic states, other than Iran, allows Islam any say in its political policies. The Iranian Revolution, even gone wrong, proves that Islam can never be controlled by secular powers, for its religious enthusiasm can never be drastically reduced. It is Islam, as a unified enterprise of faith and power, that inspires the Afghans in their struggle against the Russian aggression; it is Islam that sustains the Palestinians’ intifadah when the secularised leadership has given in to Israel. A preacher such as Sheikh Abdul Karim Obeid is more dangerous than a ‘terrorist’ such as Yasser Arafat or a spectacularly wealthy ruler such as King Fahd. In the Middle East, rich men can be powerless while poor preachers can move mountains. And the Israelis know it.

Fundamentalist Islam as a unified enterprise of private faith and political allegiance deserves to be properly assessed. Western critics fail to appreciate the intellectual and moral credentials of fundamentalist Islamic positions because they short-circuit all critical thought as soon as the term appears. Take, for example, the portrait of Khomeini in the West. The Iranian revolutionary has been branded a complete devil in all the obituaries in the leading papers. Yet that extremism is no different from the extremism of Muslims who exaggerate the depravity and corruption of the West. Both assessments are wildly naïve, stereotyped, and indeed create more puzzles than they solve. The devotion to Khomeini televised in June 1989 at his funeral surely deserves to be placed in perspectives other than those of a cynicism that brands other folks’ passion as mere fanaticism. Yet fanaticism too can be defensible—if it is about great ideals rather than mere trivialities.

Western appraisals of fundamentalist Islam betray bias and often complete ignorance even in their choice of political vocabulary. To argue that Khomeini issued a fatwa to dislodge the ‘moderates’ from any ascendency within the Iranian political order is to misuse language—and to misunderstand the nature of Iranian society. There can be no question about Khomeini’s sincerity in delivering his verdict—though even great jurists can be mistaken. As for the so-called moderates he is supposed to be challenging, one needs to know what is meant by moderation. Moderation is a virtue in Islamic ethics. It implies balance and fairness in judgement; it is not equivalent to opportunism or laxity in conduct. To Western commentators, all individuals harmless to the West, no matter how extremist in other ways, are ‘moderates’. The risk and indeed absurdity in such use of language is obvious. Thus, for example, Iran’s Hashemi Rafsanjani was classed as a moderate by the West. Suddenly he ordered the killing of any five Americans or Europeans for every Palestinian killed by the Israelis; he was referred to more ambiguously after that as a ‘moderate in Iranian terms’. The fact is of course that, for a Westerner, to call such a man moderate in any terms is to misuse language or, perhaps, to indulge a private sense of humour.

Khomeini has been a favourite target of Western resentment for over a decade. Yet few Western biographies of the late Iranian revolutionary do him justice. During the Rushdie affair there were scores of articles about the man and his faith. After all, Khomeini was fascinating: a man in his seventies leading an Islamic revolution, after years of exile, equipped only with the famous nail-clipper—and the will to martyrdom. Yet no biographer could develop the imaginative sympathy with his ideals necessary for any objective assessment of his achievement.

An alternative account is badly needed. On every score, whether one welcomes it or rejects it, the achievements of Khomeini’s Islamic militancy are colossal. He is the only
man—a poet, theologian and jurist in one—to have built a theocracy since the Renaissance. To question the political legitimacy of all contemporary political patterns—whether dynastic, dictatorial or democratic—in the name of religious principles requires not only a great political will but also an exceptional degree of mental independence. The West is alarmed by the militancy and ‘terrorism’ of leaders like Khomeini and Ghadafi; and quite rightly so. But this militancy is primarily mental, not merely military. Khomeini was mentally free enough to refuse to interpret the whole world from a Eurocentric perspective that, rightly or wrongly, sets the mental fashion of virtually all of the world’s contemporary ruling elite. For all his other errors, the Ayatollah did not make the mistake of sending his sons and grandsons to Oxford, Cambridge or Harvard.

Khomeini’s Iran may well be seen as a medieval theocracy by Western observers. Yet one needs to rise above one’s ethnocentrism to see what cultural memories theocracy evokes in the Muslim mind. For theocracy is as precious to Muslims as democracy is to Westerners. The West rightly remembers theocracy with a collective shudder. Muslims may well have the right, for reasons historical as well as contemporaneous, to react differently. Certainly the view that only secular postures of power lead to humility in matters of statecraft is questionable in an age that has witnessed the arrogant brutality of two major wars, Hiroshima, and the increasingly darkening shadow of nuclear holocaust. Virtually all the major tragedies of the twentieth century—possibility our worst century so far—have been caused by secular and nationalist ambitions. Even the much lamented Iran-Iraq war was not a purely religious struggle. There is much to be said, in retrospect, for the view that the socialist nation-state of Iraq, as a vassal of the capitalist West, was the aggressor.

Westerners must be careful with men like Khomeini—but for the right reasons. There is on the ideological level a tremendous psychic tension between the West and fundamentalist Islam. A certain kind of power complex in the Western mind leads to a radical repudiation of Khomeini and all his works. Who was Khomeini to stand up to the West and say whatever he thought was right? In an age of neo-colonial domination of the Muslim word by puppet régimes owing allegiance to Western powers, it is impossible to avoid some admiration for Khomeini.

In the final analysis the issue is to do with two world-views, both aristocratic in outlook, both bent on imperialism and proselytisation. Khomeini was no less passionate about empire-building than the Americans he denounced. Western commentators naturally prefer their own brand of imperialism to that of their opponents, but the instinct for domination is not foreign to either party. ‘One goes “west”,’ writes Fazlun Khalid in a brilliant piece, ‘wherever one goes’. Those who reject or resist the mental imperialism of the West are dubbed fundamentalists. Khomeini was certainly a fundamentalist. For he wanted us to go East—wherever we go.

Should Muslims in the West endorse Khomeini’s *fatwa*? It is noteworthy that the Iranian verdict does not demand the banning of *The Satanic Verses*. Khomeini concentrates on the person of the author (and his publishers) rather than on the offensive publication itself. British and American Muslims, by contrast, have concentrated on the book rather than its author. Rushdie doesn’t matter—to put the point rather arrogantly. For Muslims in the West, the state banning or voluntary withdrawal of *The Satanic Verses* would be a satisfactory resolution. This is why Rushdie’s apology offered immediately after the issuing of the *fatwa* has not been accepted: as long as the book remains in print and on sale Muslims will continue to protest.

If Rushdie could be tried in a court of law, whether in the West or in an Islamic land, then that would be considered a bonus. But the primary aim is to have his book withdrawn. Thus, for example, an influential Muslim community in New Zealand has successfully campaigned for a ban on the import of *The Satanic Verses*; accordingly, Muslims in New Zealand have dropped their enmity towards Rushdie himself. Unfortunately no other Western country has yet followed suit. Some
5 What’s Wrong with Fundamentalism?

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It didn’t take Rushdie to teach Westerners that fundamentalism is a dirty word. There are countless commentators who have for a decade or so condemned fundamentalist options in all three theisms of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. But it is Islamic fundamentalism that remains the favourite target of Western resentment. For fundamentalist Islam increasingly makes the headlines: a sentence of execution is passed on a foreign novelist; leaders of Islamic countries, seen as client-states of the West, are assassinated by members of radical Muslim groups; Europeans travelling in the Lebanon are accused of spying and are kidnapped; American airliners are hijacked, and so on.

Although many writers would condemn fundamentalist versions of all faiths, it is undeniable that Islamic fundamentalism is almost always judged with prejudicial rigour. Take, for example, V. S. Naipaul’s A Turner in the South (published by Viking in 1989) in which he explores Christian fundamentalism in the United States. Naipaul is very generous to born-again Christian fundamentalists who are described as good and sincere. This is in sharp contrast to his earlier propagandist travelogue, Among the Believers: An Islamic Journey, dealing with Muslim fundamentalism in several Islamic lands. Among the Believers is saturated with the predictable prejudices of a Westernised Hindu. Yet the book has been wrapped in praise by Western reviewers. Relying entirely on anecdotal evidence, Naipaul sees Muslim fundamentalists as foolish and insincere, taking false comfort in the oversimplifications of an outdated faith, hoping to reap the benefits of modernity without paying the usual price.

Western students of Islam need to be very careful in their assessments of Islam. A propagandist political vocabulary,