

**ISLAMIC THEOCRACY; PROS AND CONS IN MULTI-RELIGIOUS STATES: A
PHILOSOPHICAL X-RAY**

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**BEING A PAPER TO BE PRESENTED AT THE 2018 CONFERENCE OF ISLAM IN
NIGERIA AT CRESCENT UNIVERSITY, ABEOKUTA.**

DECEMBER, 2018.

Abstract

It is generally known that theocracy is a system of government that accords religious leaders the opportunity to rule and control the affairs of the state. The laws binding on societies practicing this system are majorly being regarded as divine command. It is believed that God rules the affairs of men indirectly. Whichever religion one belongs to can be theocratic; hence, Islamic theocracy becomes inevitable. However, far from the problems facing theocracy in general, we are faced with the issue of how well to cope with Islamic theocracy in this ever changing world and human dynamism. The prospect of Islamic theocracy is such that could foster a better society and humanity if this can be achieved, but the present realities make it more utopia mostly in the multi cultural and religious societies. The paper attempted an historical trajectory of the origin of Islam with the aim of probing into the historiography of Islamic theocracy. The paper did an X-ray of the pros and cons of Islamic theocracy in multi-religious states. The paper concludes with a critical evaluation of existing orders in Islamic theocratic states with the aim to see the extent to which this system has translated into a better society and people in general.

Keywords: Islamic Theocracy, Divine Command, Multi-Religion, Governance, Humanity

Introduction

Theocracy generally is being perceived as a government by God or the divine, however, since no body can boast of having an empirical knowledge of God via sight, we are left to believe that God rules the affairs or intervenes in the affairs of humanity through some people he either call or choose, suffice it to say that, theocracy is a system of government that is controlled by religious leaders and clergy men. It is believed that God communicate with these clergy men and through them one can know the mind of God on every human situation. One of the characteristics of God is that God is all good and all perfect; hence God becomes the standard of morality and every ethical behavior. Theocracy has a system of government can be traced back to antiquity if we hold the believe that God is the creator of man, by implication, theocracy is the first system of Government and it is as old as human existence. Howbeit, if we have contrary opinion on the very fact that God is the creator of the universe, we might need to trace the origin of theocracy to a different lane in history.

It must be noted that this paper is not solely concerned about historical trajectory of theocracy as a system of Government, but this paper will focus on looking at the concept ‘theocracy’ . This paper shall situate theocracy within the Islamic world view with a view of having an x-ray of theocracy both in the holy Quran and also in Islamic societies. It must also be noted that the universe is such a place that has witness so many people who have deceived and misled people in the name of God, hence, we are faced with the problem of knowing what God command or how to know the will of God. The paper attempts to probe into the authenticity of theocracy to examine critically if it is not just a tool to continuously oppress the poor just as Karl Marx has explained in his philosophy that religion is merely an ideology to further oppress the less privilege. Also Nietzsche in the same vein, went against religion because he felt religious fundamentalist are being hypocritical in nature, hence, the work examines to what extent we can trust the theocrat handling and ruling the affairs of the human society. The paper concludes with a critical evaluation of the pros and cons of Islamic theocracy in a multi-religious societies.

Brief Insight into Islamic Historiography

Islam originated with the teachings of Muhammad in the Arab peninsula in the early 600s ce. The Arabic word Islam means ‘submission’ to the will of God. Its adherents are called Muslims. Muhammad is regarded as God’s (Allah in Arabic) final prophet. The will of God was

sent by Allah through the angel Gabriel to his messenger Muhammad over a period of 20 years in a series of revelations and messages. Those revelations, in the form of verses, are considered to be the direct word of God and were compiled as the Holy Koran (Qur'an).¹ Muhammad first preached his revelations in Mecca and gained a small group of followers. Due to a violent reaction against this new faith, Muhammad and his followers fled Mecca and went to practice their faith in Medina. This migration in 622 CE became known as the *Hijra* and marks the beginning of the Muslim calendar. Eight years later, Muhammad was welcomed back to Mecca, which underwent a mass conversion to Islam, marking the beginning of its expansion.²

The spread of Islam continued after Muhammad's death in 632 CE, under the reign of caliphs who succeeded Muhammad as spiritual, political and military leaders of the Muslim community, with all his powers except that of prophecy. Abu Bakr, 'Umar and 'Uthman were the first three caliphs. The controversy over the selection of the fourth caliph, 'Ali, eventually split Islam into the Sunnite and Shi'ite branches in the 7th century. At the end of the 7th century, the Umayyad Dynasty, the first dynasty of the Muslim caliphate, with its capital at Damascus, prevailed for seventy years and Islam expanded to the Maghreb, the Iberian Peninsula (Al-Andalus) and central Asia. In the mid-8th century, Islamic civilisation flourished in poetry, commerce, arts and science under the Abbasid Dynasty, which moved the capital of the caliphate to Baghdad and made the city one of the cultural centers of the world at the time.

Islamic law (shariah), which was extensive but uncoordinated, was systematized during the 8th and 9th centuries. However, in the 9th and 10th centuries, the caliphate showed signs of fracture with the rise of regional dynasties.³ Starting in 1095, alliances of European Christian kingdoms mobilized their resources to initiate the Crusades, with the religious aim (among others) of taking the Holy Land. Numerous Crusades were organized in the following 500 years, in which various Muslim groups and Islamic dynasties fought against the numerous European Christian forces. Historically, the presentation of the European and Arab versions of the Crusades had very little in common, apart from shaping different perceptions and stereotyped images about the other side. After the defeat of the crusaders by Muslim armies, the Arab version of the Crusades became "a heroic story of how the Muslims overcame their rivalries and united long enough to win a holy war."⁴

From the 11th century onwards, Islam continued to be adopted and spread under various dynasties (as *de facto* rulers of the caliphate) such as the Seljuk Turks (12th century), the Mamluk Dynasty (13th century) and the Ottoman Empire (13th century onwards). In 1453,

Constantinople, the capital of Byzantium, was besieged and conquered by the Ottoman Empire. In the 15th and 16th centuries, three major Muslim empires reigned: the Ottoman Empire in much of the Middle East, the Balkans and northern Africa; the Shi'ite Safavid Empire in Iran; and the Mughul Empire in most of present-day India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan. Relations between the Muslim empires were not free from rivalry.⁵ By the end of the 19th century, the Muslim empires had declined significantly and by the early 20th century, with the Ottomans' defeat in World War I, the last one collapsed.⁶ The 20th century witnessed the rise of nationalism in the Arab and Muslim world and the birth of independent, predominantly Muslim states, which adopted many interpretations of Islam and many schools of thought and law from the history of Islam.

Theocracy in Retrospect

Theocracy literally means government by God. Since, however, God is not known to have ruled worldly government directly, the word is usually understood to mean government by a clergy, or a self-appointed group who claim to speak and act on God's behalf. This will be our understanding of the term in this paper: a political arrangement by which the main functions of secular government are discharged by a priesthood who double as secular officials.⁷ It bears noting that theocracy in this strict sense is by no means coterminous with overarching power of religion; to take a current example, Saudi Arabia, which is ruled by a lay royalty, is arguably more tightly dominated by religion in everyday life than Iran, which is ostensibly ruled by clerics. Whether or not they maximize the religious intensity of a society, theocracies in history are noted for their rarity but also, when they do come into being, for their remarkable permanence. This is one of the very few safe generalizations one can make about historical theocracies; otherwise they can be warlike and aggressive as well as peaceful and benign, revolutionary as well as conservative, self-enclosed and defensive as well as expansionary and proselytizing, run by a hierarchical clergy as well as by an egalitarian community of "saints" or a charismatic leader⁸.

A non-exhaustive catalog of prominent examples is sufficient to illustrate all these varieties and combinations thereof: the Israelite theocracy after the return from the Babylonian exile (the first for which we have a written record), the crusaders' kingdoms in Palestine, the Papal state in Italy from the eight century to 1870, the Jesuits' mission system in Paraguay, Savonarola's brief rule in Florence, Calvin's rule in Geneva, the Anabaptist kingdom of

Muenster, the Mormon state of Utah, the Muslim caliphates, the contemporary ayatollahs' Iran, Afghanistan under the Taleban, the Mahdi state of Sudan in the 1880s, the Buddhist regimes of traditional Tibet and Mongolia. Over the long haul of history this is a very small crop, but nearly all of these instances were long-lasting and were in most cases terminated only by outside force. This stylized fact speaks for the existence of particular environments which are fairly uncommon but, if and when they do occur, are singularly conducive to the birth and persistence of this type of political regime. The foregoing list also highlights a perplexing feature of historical theocracies: only *some* religions, not all, seem to be given to theocratic experiments under appropriate circumstances. These are the main branches of Islam, several varieties of Protestantism, and Buddhism. The Catholic church's contribution to the crop is exceptional and that of Orthodox Christianity entirely absent. Other non-European religions do not feature at all in the list. Having examined the Islamic trajectory and the conceptualization of theocracy, it becomes needful to examine what the Holy Quran said about the state and government.

Qur'anic Teachings on Statecraft

The Qur'an gave Muslims a mission to create a just and decent society in which all members are treated equally and with respect. Muslims are not mandated to create a 'Muslim State,' as is being demanded by today's misguided clerics. The Prophet never proclaimed his desire to establish a Muslim state; he only focused on the establishment of a just society based on Qur'anic teachings. The political wellbeing of the Muslim community was, and is, a matter of supreme importance. The basic Qur'anic injunctions for statecraft (government), which formed the basis of governance during the time of Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and his immediate followers, are listed here:

1. ye who believe, obey Allah and obey His Messenger and those who are in authority among you. Then if you differ in anything among yourselves, refer it to Allah and His Messenger if you are believers in Allah and His Messenger and the Last Day. That is the best and most commendable in the end. (Al Quran 4:60).
2. Whatever you have been given is only a temporary provision of this life, but that which is with Allah is better and more lasting for those who believe and put their trust in their Lord; and those who eschew the more grievous sins and indecencies, and when they are wroth they forgive; and those who hearken to their Lord, and observe Prayer and whose affairs are administered by mutual consultation, and who spend out of whatever We have

provided for them; and those who, when a wrong is done them, defend themselves. (Al Quran 42:37-40).

3. Allah commands you to give over the trusts to those entitled to them, and that when you judge between men, you judge with justice. And surely excellent is that with which Allah admonishes you! Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing. (Al Quran 4:59).
4. O ye who believe, be strict in observing justice and bear witness only for the sake of Allah, even if it be against your own selves or against parents or kindred. Whether the person be rich or poor. In either case, Allah is more regardful of him than you could be. Therefore, follow not vain desires so that you may act equitably. And if you conceal the truth or evade it, then remember that Allah is well aware of that which you do. (Al Quran 4:136).
5. There is no compulsion in religion. Surely, right has become distinct from wrong; so whosoever refuses to be led by those who transgress, and believes in Allah, has surely grasped a strong handle which knows no breaking. (Al Quran 2:257).
6. And consult them in matters of administration; and when thou art determined, and then put thy trust wholly in Allah. Surely, Allah loves those who put their trust in Him. (Al Quran 3:160).

Qur'anic teachings succeeded in uniting the war-torn Arabian tribes into a peaceful community, which accepted that a Muslim's first duty was to create a just, egalitarian society, where poor and vulnerable people were treated with respect. This demanded a jihad (a word that should be translated as 'struggle' or 'effort' rather than as 'holy war,' as Westerners often assume. It was and is a struggle on all fronts: spiritual, political, social, personal, military, and economic. By ordering their life so that God was given priority and His plans for humanity were fully implemented. Muslims would achieve a personal and societal integration that would give them intimations of the unity which was God.⁹

The 'Islamic' principles thus created highly efficient systems of governance based on the principles of absolute justice, individual freedom, honesty, piety and responsibility--a responsibility that the person undertook as a matter of faith to express their love for God. First promulgated by Prophet Muhammad. It surpassed all contemporary systems of governance in robustness, fairness, social justice, and freedom of choice and practice in matters of religion. This 'Islamic' system was beneficently established in bitterly tribal Arabia in a short time span and during Prophet Muhammad's prophet hood (610-632 CE). The Prophet never tried to impose

religious orthodoxy; rather his message was very progressive and went against the established pagan and tribal customs. He abolished evil customs like slavery and female infanticide that were prevalent in Arabia. He granted equal rights to women in the seventh century-which Western women had to fight for and did not receive until the twentieth century. His mission was to change people's hearts and minds by treating them kindly and with absolute justice. He called the prevailing spirit of his time *Jahiliyyah*. Muslims usually understand this to mean the 'Time of Ignorance,' that is, the pre-Islamic period in Arabia. But, as recent research shows, Prophet Muhammad used the term *Jahiliyyah* to refer not to an historical era but to a state of mind that caused violence and terror in seventh-century Arabia. *Jahiliyyah*, I would argue, is also much in evidence in the West today as well as in the Muslim world.¹⁰

From the above, it becomes very lucid that neither the Quran nor the Holy Prophet are really after such a state that is strictly governed by Islamic laws, but rather, they quest for a fair and just society in which everyone will leave with equal opportunity and the right to worship will not be denied. Nevertheless, if Islamic theocracy will ever exist, then the Shariah law will take a central place in such administration. Hence, it becomes imperative to examine the development of the Shariah law.

A Trajectory of the Shariah

Muslim law had developed gradually in the centuries after the Prophet Muhammad's death. It was a creative enterprise, since the Qur'an contains very little legislation but prescribes only those details which are essential. It thus leaves considerable room for development and safeguards against restrictive rigidity. Indeed, it warns against seeking every regulation by express Divine command, as that might make the framework rigid and inelastic and, therefore, burdensome. "O' ye who believe, do not keep asking about things which, if they were expounded to you, would become troublesome for you. ... Allah has left them out. Allah is most Forgiving, Forbearing. A people before you made such demands, and when they received the directions they repudiated them."¹¹

That which Allah has 'left out' is meant to be devised, in accordance with prescribed standards and values and in consonance with the framework, through mutual consultation, to meet the need when it should arise, always bearing in mind that the overall standard is that *ma'roof* (equity) is to be fostered and *munkar* (iniquity) is to be eschewed.¹² The Prophet demonstrated this approach when he appointed Mu'azra as *qazi* (judge) of Yemen. He asked him

what rule he would follow when he had to make a decision. Mu'azra said he would look for the rule in the Book of Allah. "And if you do not find the answer in the Book?" queried the Prophet. "I shall seek for it in the example of the Prophet." "And if you still lack an answer?" "I shall exercise my own judgment." "That is the right way," he was assured by the Prophet.¹³ Within a century after the Prophet's demise, the Muslim Empire expanded rapidly and this widening expanse needed a complex legal system for effective administration. In their desire to govern within the framework of Islamic principles, a system to collect and record eyewitness reports about the Prophet's sayings (*Ahadith*) and actions (*Sunnah*) was devised in the ninth century. These were carefully sifted to ensure an authentic record of his *Ahadith* and *Sunnah* which became the foundation of Shariah, the much publicized Islamic Law.

This activity stimulated a lively and diverse intellectual ferment that formed several Schools of Jurisprudence within a short period. Many centuries later, four of them --all very similar and regarded as equally valid--the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafei and Hanbali (all of the 'Sunni' persuasion), still maintain their preeminence and hold their sway in regions where Islamic Law is administered. The great Imams of Jurisprudence, Sunni and Shia alike, and also those of other persuasions, together with their eminent disciples and a host of those who followed after them have, through their unremitting labors sustained through centuries, not only enriched Muslim Jurisprudence, but made an invaluable contribution to the development of the Science of Law and to what the eminent international jurist C. Wilfred Jenks has called the Common Law of Mankind. They have thus laid the juristic world under a heavy debt of gratitude.¹⁴ The study of jurisprudence (*Fiqh*)

did not simply consist in poring over old texts, but also had a challenging dimension. And, at present, there is no real incompatibility between Islam and the West. In their zeal to cover every conceivable situation, some scholars ventured towards resolving theoretical and hypothetical situations, which might never be encountered in practical life. Their attempts to widen the horizon of jurisprudence failed and they only succeeded in restricting it.

Their speculations concerning hypothetical situations served to freeze further development of jurisprudence, which over a long period thereafter became more speculative than constructive. Some even treaded on amusing and curious byways. So much so that some of the so-called works on Jurisprudence of later periods comprise within their scope sections entitled *Bab-el-Hiyal*, i.e. Chapters on Evasion, which work out methods of evading the spirit and defeating the purpose of the law while complying with its letter! It is obvious that the result was

mortifying rather than enlivening, and the development of Muslim Jurisprudence was not only arrested but suffered a severe setback. Sadly, this is the situation today, where Muslim clerics are attempting to impose on the believers a system of rituals devoid of the spirit of Islam. Contrary to the Islamic teaching of acquiring knowledge, these clerics are denying educational access to Muslim women and indoctrinating men with radicalism, fanaticism and terrorism.

Islamic Theocracy: Pros and Cons

Having considered the position of the Q'uran on the state and an overview of the sharia law, it becomes imperative to look at the pros and cons of Islamic theocracy. Of a truth when we look at the tenance of Islamic theocracy and theocracy in general, it becomes imperative to envisage that a theocratic society will be of benefit to the contemporary society, most especially the third world countries who are finding it difficult to sustain their moral existence. One of the goals of every society or governance is the sustenance of life and protection of fundamental human right, since we hold the fact that God is all good and creator of humanity, we will have a great trust in the governance of God through his clergy than in just any how governance.

Also, it becomes impatient to know that we might not be able to separate man's existence totally from his religion, most especially, the African countries; hence, there might not be any system of government that can be best practiced in these societies aside a system that is rooted in the people's religion. So the success of a theocratic government will not be alien to the people.

More so, the notion of God or the divine brings a sort of reference to the heart of an average person, hence a theocratic government is more likely to birth a better society than the normal system of government that has been invoke, however, history has been able to justify that theocratic government have been so successful in the past, both Christian theocracy and Islamic theocracy, History testifies that the Islamic system of government, initiated during the life of Prophet Muhammad (saw) and sincerely adopted by his followers, was highly successful. Till the sixteenth century, Muslims were the greatest global power. Paradoxically, Europe was going through a period of social, moral, spiritual and economic decline--a period generally referred to as the Dark Ages. Three great Islamic empires existed during the early sixteenth century: the Ottoman Empire in Asia Minor, Anatolia, Iraq, Syria, and North Africa; the Safavid Empire in Iran; and the Mughal Empire in the Indian subcontinent. Each reflected a different facet of Islamic spirituality demonstrating diversity and adaptability of Islamic teachings based on the principles described above. The Mughal Empire represented the tolerant, universal philosophical

rationalism known as Falsafah; the Safavid shahs represented Shia Islam, while the Ottoman Turks represented Sunni Islam. Each empire created a system based on Shariah and each one of them was an early modern institution, governed systematically and with bureaucratic and rational precision. In its early years, the Ottoman state was far more efficient and powerful than any kingdom in Europe.¹⁵ It can thus be concluded that the developments and refinements of the very successful Muslim systems of governance were diverse and allowed variations as long as the fundamental principles were incorporated. For over eight centuries, Muslim societies were the cradles of scientific and economic developments and excelled in all forms of arts and sciences. People from around the world were drawn to these societies to live in peace and enjoy economic and intellectual prosperity.

Far from the positives of Islamic theocracy, we are faced with so many challenges that might just make it not an option in this century. The very first challenge we are posed with is that which every religious ethical principles are faced with. How do we actually know what God command? Of a truth, we could want to shy away from the fact that humans cannot be trusted in knowing what God command because of the various deceptive being on earth, but then, if we solely rely on the holy book as our moral yardstick, we are still faced with the problem of interpretation and authenticity. Interpretation in the sense that, if the holy book has a universal interpretation then we should not be having various sect and division in Islam, authenticity in the sense that, when we take religion through the social sphere that is basically governed by reason and logic, can we be able to authenticate some faith based doctrines, to what extent can the holy book passed the judgment of authenticity from the divine. Hence, Islamic theocracy will witness the greatest rebel and revolt ever, not through guns and bullet, but intellectual challenges of moral principles to substitute for the ones in the holy book and shariah.

Also, Karl Marx said, religion is the opium of the people, discarding Marx as a mere atheist without considering what birth his conclusion might be unjust on Marx, for Marx, he believes that the rich people in the society have hijacked religion from the clerics and have made religion a tool in their hand to consciously oppress the less privilege in the society. He tagged religion has a powerful tool in the hands of the bourgeoisies, in this situation and the advent of greedy cleric in the society, how do we have a theocratic society that will not be influenced by corrupt men. More so, how do we decipher between what God command and the opinion of the clerics who put their words to be God's words?

Another issue with Islamic theocracy is the fact that, how will the formation of this system be, the hierarchy of governance, mode of transitions and the likes. If the state is governed by theocrats, do they come in by election or hereditary, if it is hereditary, we are faced with a problem of knowing the stand of God on such leader, if it is through democracy, then we cannot separate politicking from theocracy, so the question of the structure of a theocratic government should be critically looked into.

Furthermore, an Islamic theocracy is faced with the challenge of enacting what is called fundamental human right or freedom, because most secular society of today is believed to be governed by laws that promotes the right and freedom of her citizens, yet people within this state clamors for the shariah law, one is now forced to look at the difference between shariah and the secular constitution, will the shariah be legal or just an indoctrinated code of conducts. Can citizens debate their stand within the constitutionalisation of the shariah law? If so then Islamic theocracy becomes a good prospect but if not, then Islamic theocracy might just be another bondage in disguise for the common man.

Having examined the pros and come of Islamic theocracy, it becomes impatient to look into the possibility of Islamic theocracy in a multi religious and cultural state

Islamic Theocracy in Multi- Religious State: Utopia existence

Islamic theocracy in a multi- religious state looks more utopia than realistic because of the following reasons:

First, religion is base on belief and beliefs are naturally difficult to change, talk less of beliefs that deals with people's faith, with every faith trying to champion her cause as the only true and sacred one, bringing in an idea of Islamic theocracy will naturally be misinterpreted by people of other faith as a way of relegating their own faith, this can lead to inter- religious conflict or war.

Second, if there exist Islamic theocracy, then the laws binding on the people will be rooted in the tenance of Islam, by implication the upholding of the shariah law, we must be conscious of the fact that every faith has her own laws and pattern of life which most times are antithetical to that of others, so trying to bring every one under a single based faith law might be impossible. Aside the very fact that we are still faced with the problem of having unity in

agreeing on the right code of conduct that should be followed both in Islam and other faith, which is the reason we have various sects and denominations of same faith today.

More so, the only thing that distinguishes Islamic theocracy from other system of government is that Islamic theocracy will be firmly rooted in the tenance and practice of Islam, but then, how do we integrate others into this considering faith extremist and fundamentalist in all religions, hence it becomes almost impossible mission.

Needless to say that for we to have Islamic theocracy, we must first have Islamic state, and having an Islamic state in a multi- religious state is either utopia or by war, and if it is by war, it goes against the tenance of Islam, because Islam is a religion of peace that does not enforces her belief on others forcefully, in fact, Allah frowns at it. Hence, Islamic theocracy is utopia.

Conclusion

Theocracy is utopia in multi- religious states because of the nature of religion and people. The intrinsic nature of seeing oneself or religion as superior to others. Religion and faith are private matters and for one to have good and successful religious tolerance in multi-religious states, theocracy must be utopia.

End Notes:

¹Esposito, J. L. 2002. *What everyone needs to know about Islam*. London: Oxford University Press. P. 187.

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³ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Islam. Retrieved 9th November, 2018. 3:22pm. P. 13.

⁴ Maalouf, A. 1989 *The crusades through Arab eyes*. New York: Schocken. P. 58.

⁵ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Islam. Retrieved 9th November, 2018. 3: 23 pm. P. 7.

⁶ *Ibid.* P. 7

⁷ Mario ferrero. 2007. *The Economics of Theocracy*. Italy: Alessandria. P. 2.

⁸ *Ibid.* P. 3.

⁹ Karen Armstrong. 2000. *The Battle for God*. New York: Knopf/ HarperCollins. P 37.

¹⁰ Karen Armstrong. 2006. *Muhammad - A Prophet for Our Times*. New York: HarperCollins. P 20.

¹¹ Al Qur'an Ch 5, Verse 102-3.

¹² Qur'an Ch 3, Verse 100 and Chapter 42 Verse 39.

¹³ Tirmadhi I, Section Judgments, Ch.: Problems facing a Judge.

¹⁴ Zafrullah Khan. 1967. *Islam & Human Rights*. Switzerland: Oriental Publications. P 14.

¹⁵ Karen Armstrong. 2000. *The Battle for God*. P 40.