159

<http://onfaith.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/panelists/willis_e_elliott/2011/03/separating_islam_and_the_state.html>

**Separating Islam and the state**

*Rep. Peter King (R-N.Y.), chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, will begin holding hearings Thursday on "the extent of the radicalization of American Muslims." Ibrahim Hooper, spokesman for the Council on American-Islamic Relations, has characterized the hearings as "a witch hunt." Are they?   
King also has said he believes the "self-radicalization" of American Muslims represents "a very small minority" of the overall community. What are the potential consequences of singling out one religious group?*

I believe, as Peter King does, that his committee will find only "a very small minority" of American Muslims to be pro-violent anti-American radicals. But how many Muslims did it take to collapse the Twin Towers? Only 19. Just one honest and courageous witness will demonstrate what I see as the impossibility of reconciling Islam with what world historians agree is America's unique contribution to the history of government, namely, *the separation of church and state*.

1 In the evolution of the West, the separation of church and state was a late emergent from a series of revolutions leading to the conclusion that all else had failed. When all else fails, try freedom, the freedom of government and religion from each other. But a millennium ago, the Muslim world went stagnant under sharia, and did not experience parallels to the West's revolutions in religion, government, finance, and technology, and trade.

2 In its current multidimensional internal distress, the Muslim world may be playing catch-up on the West. There's a secular democratic push against both autocracy and clericalism, and a contest between less-sharia Islam (the so-called "moderates," who tend to be pro-West) and more-sharia Islam (the "radical" jihadists, who are anti-West). A Muslim version of separation of church and state could emerge.

3 But separation without alienation is difficult. The *downside*of the separation of church & state is their tendency to become aliens, even (as in France) enemies to each other. Currently, aggressive secularism in America misrepresents the Founding Fathers as far less religious than they were, and ACLU strives for the complete removal of religion from the public square. Reaction on the right underplays the importance of the Enlightenment to the originating American mind. The truth is that the separation has been and is legal, but not societal. The current drift, however, is toward an increasing distance and estrangement. Our separation of church and state is an adaptation to realities, not the kingdom of God on earth.

4 Which brings us to a fundamental *distinction* between the Christian and the Muslim visions. Unlike the Qur'an, the Bible sees the kingdom of God coming without human political and military action. The state killed Jesus, and Muhammad formed a state to defend and advance Islam. Not only is it easier for Christians to imagine the separation of church and state; in my opinion it may not be possible for Muslims without a radical re-imagining of their mission - without a reformation far more radical than any which has occurred within Christianity.

5 In a DC area mosque last weekend, Obama's "deputy national security advisor, Denis McDonough," "the president's point-man on countering violent extremism," said, "Being religious is never un-American. Being religious is quintessentially American." He did not add that *some*ways of being religious *are* un-American. America, since 9/11, has been at war with radical Islam. But since *Islam is a civilization* with its own laws and implicit government, is it possible for any nation to be at war only with "radical jihad" Islam without being at war with Islam? I hope so; but I believe that every mosque in America is a beachhead for a competing civilization. And the political-military fact is that the U.S. is at war not with the spiritual side, but with the political side, of Islam. This is a projection of our American church/state distinction, and we should say it even though the distinction of "sides" has, as yet, no significant support within Islam.

6 The German government might have prevented 9/11 by closing the mosque where it was planned while it was being planned, instead of after. Because of America's pride in its diversity and multiculturalism, and its overconfidence in the doctrine of separation of church and state, I fear that the U.S. would close any radical jihadist mosque until after another attack.

7 "The potential consequences of singling out one religious group" are not as grave as those of failing to do so.

**BY WILLIS E. ELLIOTT  |  MARCH 7, 2011; 9:35 PM ET**