



Religion Vs. Religion

By Ali Shariati



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Religion vs Religion consists of two lectures Ali Shariati gave at the Husayniyah Center in Tehran on August 12 and 13, 1970. In them he puts forth a most remarkable thesis, that throughout history, religion has fought against religion and not a non-religion as we have come to believe. That is, monotheism, the religion of the belief that God is One, that religion brought by Prophet Abraham which is called din al-hanif, 'the rightful religion,' has continuously, throughout history, had to struggle against the religion of denying that there is One God or believing that there is no God (kufr, disbelief, infidelity, atheism) or against the religion of believing that there are multiple gods (shirk, polytheism, multitheism), the latter of which has branched into idolatry.

Religion vs Religion, translated here for the first time in English, awakened religious and prophetic-like consciousness, bringing literally thousands of young people back to faith and belief in God. Shariati, in his inimitable way, clearly marks the lines and points out the signs that distinguish a divinely-imitative religion manifested throughout history in a 'priestly-function' of, right or wrong, celebrating a nation and a divinely-originated religion and its 'prophetic-function' of distinguishing between right and wrong and then calling a nation into action.



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Editorial Review

Review

Reflecting on his experience as an engraver, William Blake once remarked that, in art as in life, the decisive factor is how you draw a line. "What is it that distinguishes honesty from knavery, but the hard and wirey line of rectitude and certainty in the actions and intentions? Leave out this line, and you leave out life itself; all is chaos again, and the line of the almighty must be drawn out upon it before man or beast can exist."

It is a long way from Blake, the eighteenth century English artist and poet to Ali Shariati, the twentieth century Iranian sociologist and Islamologist; yet not impossibly far. For, despite their differences, the two share a moral passion leading them to draw lines in their writings calling for religious and social reform. A reader may not like where or how a line cuts, but there it is, bold and uncompromising, leaving one no choice but to stand on one side or the other.

The line Shariati draws in these two speeches is between two religions, a 'religion of revolution' and a 'religion of legitimation.' The difference between them is sharply drawn: the first is a religion working to overcome differences in class and economic status, while the second is a religion legitimating and perpetuating such differences. As opposed to some socialists who draw the line between religion, as supporter of class divisions, and non-religion, which overcomes these divisions, he places the dividing-line within religion itself. From his perspective, it is thus not religion itself that needs to be rejected as the 'opium of the people,' but only one type of religion, the 'religion of legitimation,' while true religion remains unscathed.

The consequences of this impressive analysis are far-reaching. Not for nothing has he been called the ideological leader of Iran's Islamic Revolution. Since World War II the Muslim world has been shaken by two powerful forces, socialist ideology and, more recently, what is now called Islamic fundamentalism. The line Shariati draws binds these two movements together: true Islam, he says, is true socialism and true socialism is true Islam. It is the kind of slogan for which thousands of people have been prepared to die and for which thousands have already died. . . .

In many respects, Shariati's nearest allies are to be found not among the secular European socialists, whom he frequently cites, but among the Latin American Christian liberation theologians, of whom he does not seem to be aware. Some of these liberation theologians, such as Camilo Torres (Columbia), Carlos Alberto (Frei Betto), Libanio Christo (Brazil), and Gustavo Gutierrez (Peru) were beginning to attract world notice by 1970, the year in which Shariati was giving important speeches. . . .

Here is a man under severe political pressure, shortly to face years of prison, house arrest and death. His words, however, are not about himself, but about drawing a line between the false and the true, and for that line he is willing to pledge his life. --*Andrew Burgess, Albuquerque, NM, November 3, 1988*

About the Author

Ali Shariati (1933-1977) is a man who continues the work of Iqbal Lahouri within the Islamic Movement and one of its most important contemporary ideologues.

Users Review

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