

Persian modernist, Hamid Paydar, on the question of compatibility of Islam and democracy. Paydar who advances a purely Western secular view of the role of religion in society contends that by the fact that religion considers itself “the cradle of the truth” and consumes opposing beliefs under the categories of “apostasy, idolatry, and delusion” is incompatible with “democratic government.” Soroush responds by rejecting the dichotomy between democracy and religion as false, since it is possible for someone to “consider an idea absolutely false while judging its bearer blameless, respectable, and even commendable.”³⁵

The question for Soroush and many Muslim intellectuals is not whether Islam is compatible with democracy, but whether values and beliefs that advance intolerance and promote the imposition of faith by the state are Islamic. Any call to impose faith on people is an instance of manifest error because faith and imposition stand in complete contradiction to one another. Faith is a matter of the heart, and no one should be forced to confess a particular faith, let alone be penalized and chastised for not doing so, because using force in this case lead to negating for the very state one intends to achieve.³⁶ Liberty is indeed a precondition for faith and must therefore be a religious duty to obtain and defend. Without liberty faith will be reduce to external mimicking and spiritless and artificial religiosity. Similarly, without freedom religious law loses its authenticity and stagnate social dynamics. This is because religious law is in the first place a matter of internal commitment and personal volition. Freedom is also a precondition for religious law, because religious understanding of both faith and law are not decided in any centralized and closed system, but through and open and free debate of the advocates of various interpretations and commitments.³⁷

**Louay Safi is professor of politics and Islam thought at Hamad Bin Khalifa University (HBKU), Qatar, and senior fellow at the Institute of Social Political and Understanding (ISPU), Washington, DC. He writes and lectures on issues of globalization, human rights, and has published on such issues as Globalization, modernity, human rights, and Islamic and the West. He is the author of 24 books and numerous papers, and his most recent publications include Islam and the Drive to Global Justice (Romane & Littlefield 2024) and Islam and the Trajectory of Globalization (Routledge 2022).*

