

# CHRISTIANITY, ISLAM, AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN ETHIOPIA

Muhammad Al-Hashimi\*

## ***Abstract***

*Despite its tremendous potential in human and natural resources, Ethiopia remains woefully underdeveloped. It continues to be among the poorest nations in the world. This paper attempts to show that an important engine for development lies in harnessing the socio-economic paradigm endemic to the people of Ethiopia. This is the socio-economic model arising from the Abrahamic Belief System (ABS)—Christianity, Islam, and Judaism—to which the vast majority of the Ethiopian people adhere. A delineation is made of some important aspects of the socio-economic landscape of ABS with a view toward discussing its instrumental value in economic policy formation.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Despite its tremendous potential in human and natural resources, Ethiopia remains woefully underdeveloped. It continues to be among the poorest nations in the world. This paper attempts to show that an important engine for development lies in harnessing the socio-economic paradigm endemic to the people of Ethiopia. This is the socio-economic model arising from the Abrahamic Belief System (ABS)—Christianity, Islam, and Judaism—to which the vast majority of the Ethiopian people adhere. A delineation is made of some important aspects of the socio-economic landscape of ABS with a view toward discussing its instrumental value in economic policy formulation.

The historian Immanuel Wallerstein has asserted that the year 1968 marked the beginning of a revolution in the world-system. The focal point of protest, according to Wallerstein, was against the political and economic global hegemony of the United States:

---

\* Berne University, St. Kitts and Nevis, the Caribbean  
E-mail: muhammadalhashimi@yahoo.com

The world revolution of 1968 constituted the world reaction to...[a] double reality: the worldwide hegemony of the United States, and the establishment of its world order, on the one hand; and the worldwide realization by the antisystemic movements of stage one, the coming to power of the various movements often grouped together under the label of the Old Left, on the other. The revolutionaries condemned the first actor, the United States, for its oppressiveness, and they condemned the second actor, the Old Left movements, for their inadequacy as opposition movements to, if not their actual collusion with, the hegemonic project. While the first denunciation was obvious for a radical world movement, the second loud denunciation, that against the traditional antisystemic movements, was to be the more consequential (Wallerstein 1997:5).

For Wallerstein, the world revolution of 1968 was not only an open rebellion against the hegemony of the United States in global affairs, but also an open rebellion against all who colluded with her. Targeted in this way were the leaders and their party organizations worldwide who had managed to get political power on the basis of a leftist platform of one kind or another but who had wound up acquiescing or even colluding with U.S. power in some way. Wallerstein describes further the 1968 revolution and its antisystemic activities:

The world revolution of 1968 was triggered by the discontents of all those who had been left out in the well-organized world order of U.S. hegemony. The details of the 1968 uprisings were different in the various arenas of the world-system, but such uprisings did occur everywhere: in addition to the obvious 1968 events in the Western world and Japan, usually noted, I include...the turn to 'socialism with a human face' in Czechoslovakia in 1968, as well as the diverse happenings in Mexico, Senegal, Tunisia, India, and many other countries of the Third World. In all of them, however different the local situation, there was a recurrent double theme. The first was opposition to U.S. hegemony, *and* to Soviet collusion with that hegemony (the Yalta arrangements between what the Chinese called the superpowers). And the second was disillusionment with the Old Left in all its forms (Communist, Social-Democrat, movements of national liberation). The latter disillusionment was the unpredicted consequence of the very success of these movements. All these movements had constructed in the late nineteenth century an identical two-step strategy of struggle—first conquer state power; then transform society. The fact is that, in the period of U.S. hegemony, paradoxically (or perhaps not so paradoxically) the movements of the Old Left had indeed come to power almost everywhere: as Communist parties in the socialist countries (running from the Elbe to the Yalu); as Social-Democratic parties (or their equivalents) in the pan-European world (western Europe, North America, and Australasia); and as national liberation movements in the Third World (or equivalently as populist movements in

Latin America). They had come to power but they had not been able to achieve the second step they had envisaged, the transformation of society, or so the revolutionaries of 1968 believed. The movements in power were seen as having failed to deliver on their historic promises (Wallerstein 1999:3).

In the wake of the world revolution of 1968, Wallerstein has identified six varieties of antisystemic movements. First of all, there are in the West the remnants of "old left" movements, represented by trade unions, labour parties, social-democratic parties, and fading remnants of Communist parties. Second, in many Western countries, various new social movements advancing the causes of women, minorities, and others have been established. Third, there remain in power in certain countries, remnants of what was formerly known as the socialist bloc, traditional Communist parties. Fourth, new organisations are developing in the Socialist bloc, outside the Communist parties, characterized by the trappings and rhetorics of the new social movements found in the West, emphasizing themes advocating the improvement of human rights and expressing impatience with burdening bureaucracy. Fifth, in some Third World countries there yet remain in power some semblance of the traditional national liberation movements, remnants of movements no longer in power such as Nasserism in some Arab countries, or traditional national liberation movements still in the mobilization phases of their struggles. And sixth, "in these same Third World countries, there are new movements that reject some of the 'universalist' themes of previous movements (seen as 'Western' themes) and put forward '*indigenist*' forms of protest, often in religious clothing (Wallerstein, 1991:75-76; italics mine).

## **2. LIBERATION THEOLOGY**

Liberation theology is that political, antisystemic reality that immediately comes to mind as an example of "indigenist forms of protest...in religious clothing." Liberation theology is largely regarded as a Latin American phenomenon, a movement initiated by a group of South American bishops of the Catholic Church. Interestingly enough, liberation theology was launched as a movement in 1968, the very same year as Wallerstein's world revolution:

In 1968 the Bishops of Latin America met at Medellin in Colombia...[in response to]...[the Catholic Church's] encyclical *Populorum Progressio* of the preceding year with its call for bold transformations to secure a redistribution of the world's wealth....*There they condemned neo-colonialism and called for the education of the masses into an awareness of their exploitation by capitalism and endorsed the need for new and reformed political and economic structure* (Coffey 1999:3; italics mine).

Gustavo Gutierrez, a Peruvian priest, was one of the main architects in formulating and finalizing the documents that came out of the Medellin conference of 1968. Also,

in 1968, Gutierrez published "Notes on a Theology of Liberation" to be followed in 1971 by his book *A Theology of Liberation*. Leo Donnelly, a Colombian priest and liberation theologian who has worked among the Peruvian poor for more than 40 years makes the following observations in a 1999 radio interview about Gutierrez's theoretical position theologically as evidenced through his 1971 publication:

It [Gutierrez's book] just simply set out a big question: What has the [Christian] Gospel got to say in the light of this reality, this social reality. So it was a question rather than indicating a way, at the beginning anyway. He [Gutierrez] himself would [eventually] describe it this way: *It [liberation theology] is reading the Gospel from the point of view of the poor, not from the institutional church point of view but from the level of the poor. In other words it is putting the light of their lives onto the Gospel and it is taking the light of the Gospel and putting it onto their lives* (Coffey 1999:4; italics mine).

Dr. Daniel Levine, a professor of political science at the University of Michigan has closely followed the development of liberation theology. In the same radio interview, his observations clearly set the movement of liberation theology within the context of the world revolution of 1968:

Liberation theology is a part of a general movement in Latin American Catholicism in an effort to rethink the role the church should play in society and politics and to rethink the nature of society and politics in a way which would enable there to be more incorporation of poor people in its structures, religious and political. So on the one hand it is a movement of intellectuals with a theory about society and on the other hand it is a movement that tried hard to inspire intellectuals and activists to work with poor people and to generate a series of movements. It's very different from traditional Catholic movements in that they weren't supposed to be movements controlled by the Church in the way old Catholic Action movements were....

*I think that liberation theology also dovetailed in a historic way with a lot of movements for change which were happening at the time....Liberation Theology drew very heavily on Biblical metaphors and in particular on prophetic metaphors and phrases from the Old Testament prophets, people who denounced injustice and stood outside the established walls of religion in order to criticize religion and to criticize the world as it was....In the late 60s, liberation theology comes together with an immense popular movement of grass roots organizations and trade unions and teachers organisations and neighbourhood groups" (Coffey, 1999, pp. 3, 5; italics mine). Liberation theology ultimately developed into a global phenomenon, with various versions of the paradigm developing in Africa, Asia, and the United States, particularly among African-American Christians (Coffey 1999:2).*

It is most important to note that in the arena of international political economy, liberation theologians adopted dependency theory—a paradigm largely developed in the context of Latin America's subservience to mostly American multinationals within the framework of American capitalist foreign trade and investment policy—because "dependency theorists offered a more socially conscious vision than did the perceived [capitalist] economic orthodoxy" (Johnson 1997:4). In this light, Gustavo Gutierrez made the following assessment with respect to the socio-economic condition:

Development must attack the root causes of the problems and among them the deepest is economic, social, political, and cultural dependence of some countries upon others—an expression of the domination of some social classes over others....Only a radical break from the status quo, that is, a profound transformation of the private property system, access to power of the exploited class, and a social revolution that would break this dependence would allow for a change to a new society (Johnson 1997:4).

### **3. ISLAMIC REVOLUTION**

Religion as a political, antisystemic reality is a manifestation of what theorists call "modernization revisionism." Modernization revisionism, which arose as a theoretical construct in the late 60's and early 70's, is a critique that focuses "on the oversimplified conceptualisation in political development theory of 'tradition', 'modernity' and their interrelationship" (Randall & Theobald 1998:45).

It [modernization revisionism] was part of the broader reaction against underlying assumptions of modernisation theory as a whole: that there are recognizably traditional institutions, that these constitute a barrier to modernisation and that to the extent that modernisation takes place traditional institutions must decline....[The] definitions of the two concepts, tradition and modernity, were always inadequate. The concept of modernity has never been elaborated in such a way as to facilitate meaningful comparisons between societies, especially between developed and underdeveloped societies. In fact in its cruder formulations *modernity is designated virtually in terms of some idealized western man*....As for tradition, this is usually conceived as everything that is not modern....The theories of modernisation ...take a zero-sum view of the relationship between tradition and modernity. That is they assume, either explicitly or implicitly, that to the extent that a society becomes modern it ceases by the same degree to be traditional. Modernisation, according to this view, entails the shedding of 'tradition'. By way of criticism, *a wide range of studies has attempted to show that not only may traditional institutions adapt to and co-exist with modern institutions, specifically the nation-state and its trappings, but, in addition, the process of modernisation may actually revitalize dormant traditional institutions and practices* (Randall & Theobald 1998:45-46; italics mine).

Iran's Islamic revolution represents "one of the best known and most dramatic instances of the resurgence of religion in politics," the resurgence of the traditional institution, religion, into the very midst of the modern institution, the nation-state (Randall & Theobald 1998:63). In fact, during the 1980s Islam was the main instrument of political opposition throughout the Middle East and North Africa. In Iran, the teachings of the Qur'an became a particularly important tool in the hands of one Ayatollah Khomeini, who was opposed to the brutal oppression that the monarch Reza Shah perpetrated on the Iranian people to force them into Western style modernization. Furthermore, Reza Khan, who came to power in 1924 and who was the father of Reza Shah, was highly "impressed by the westernising reforms of Kemal Ataturk in Turkey" that were hostile to Islamic practice and culture (Randall & Theobald 1998:64). Thus, under Reza Khan, "the Islamic code of personal law, the 'sharia', was also partially replaced by a non-religious code, based on the French 'Code Civile'....The ban on wearing the traditional veil was enforced so brutally that it contributed to a subsequent pro-veil backlash" (Randall & Theobald 1998:64). Thus, these two monarchs were perceived as launching a full-scale attack on the Islamic institutions that the masses of the Iranian people held dear. Consequently, in line with the thinking of Randall and Theobald, this push for modernization revitalized interest in and a desire to protect traditional Islamic institutions perceived to be under attack.

The Ayatollah Khomeini was the most outspoken Muslim intellectual and cleric against the destructive efforts of the Pahlavi dynasty, represented by Reza Khan and Resza Shah. Also, Khomeini did not hesitate to condemn the United States for its support of an unpopular, oppressive regime. Indeed, Khomeini launched a devastating protest against what he saw as an American conspiracy in Iran "*to strengthen the bases of despotic government [such as that of Reza Shah] and reinforce the political, cultural, and economic dependence of Iran on world imperialism*" (Algar 1980: 14; italics mine). A particular object of hatred among the Iranian people was the American-trained unit known as SAVAK, the dreaded secret police of Reza Shah. SAVAK was responsible for the torture and execution of thousands of Iranians. In fact, an elder son of Khomeini himself was believed to have been executed by SAVAK in the fall of 1977 (Fischer 1983:161). For his unabashed criticism and condemnation of the Pahlavi rulers, he was exiled in November of 1964 to Turkey and then shortly afterwards to Iraq, and finally, in October of 1978, he was exiled to Paris, France. During his long period outside Iran, he continued to attack Reza Shah and skilfully sow the seeds for Islamic revolution "by sending back missives, tape-recorded speeches, and writings" (Fischer 1983:157). By 1977 the Islamic revolution was in full swing; in February of 1979, "Khomeini returned triumphantly to Iran to preside over the creation of an Islamic republic" (Fischer 1983:160).

The basic characteristic of the Revolution, which distinguishes it from other movements that have taken place in Iran during the past hundred years, is its

ideological and Islamic nature....The Muslim people of Iran learned the valuable lesson that the obvious and fundamental reason for the failure of those [earlier] movements was their lack of an ideological basis....*Thus it was that the awakened conscience of the nation, under the leadership of...Ayatullah al-Uzma Imam Khomeini, came to perceive the necessity of pursuing an authentically Islamic and ideological line in its struggles. The militant religious leaders of the country, who had always been in the forefront of popular movements, together with the committed writers and intellectuals bestirred themselves anew as a result of his leadership*" (Algar 1980:13-14).

#### **4. THE DYNAMIC DIMENSION OF RELIGION**

In recalling the foregoing history of religious activism and revolution against the global capitalist system within the context of Christianity and Islam, the purpose has been to display the ever present potential of religion as a tool for dynamic, purposeful change in society, a means by which to struggle against injustice of all kinds. In the hands of visionaries, religion becomes a viable base from which movements are launched to raise the dignity of the downtrodden or free a people from degradation and oppression. Religion, then, has an important instrumental value in motivating and directing a nation to improve its economic, political, and social conditions. What is needed is the leadership of intellectuals of well-intentioned and rightly guided moral insight to apply an appropriate hermeneutic analysis to the religious texts in order to bring out the latent dynamic content relevant to the societal condition at hand. With the foregoing in mind, it is my intention to uncover the latent dynamic content with respect to the primary texts of the Abraham Belief System (ABS)—the Bible and the Qur'an—that would point to a socio-economic paradigm I believe would be helpful in moving Ethiopian society forward.

##### **The Mediterranean Tradition**

The economist Louis Baeck in a seminal essay entitled "The Economic Thought of Classical Islam" points to a "Mediterranean tradition" that predates Adam Smith, the so-called founding father of "classical" economics. Baeck points out that a renewed interest in economic thought pre-dating Adam Smith arises out of an interest on the part of researchers who are seeking to solve contemporary problems for which conventional mainstream economics has no answers, particularly with respect to those problems involving a relationship between economics and ethics:

In this vein, the Mediterranean tradition in economics offers fruitful inspiration. An important aspect of the Mediterranean tradition is its organicist and teleological perspective on society. In keeping with this focus, the economy is seen as subordinated to...[a] web of social and political relations...[and] ordered by ethical standards and norms. *The Mediterranean tradition in*

*economics started with Aristotle's text, Ethica Nicomachea, book V, chapter 5 and Politica book I, chapters 8-11.*

*In its development the Mediterranean tradition in economics was enriched by biblical thought, by the principles of Roman and Canonical law, and, last but not least, by the Islamic and Christian Scholastics....In the sixteenth and seventh centuries, after more than two thousand years of hegemony in the material as well as in the intellectual field, the Mediterranean civilizations had lost their spell and relinquished their hold on history. The new nations of the North entered the scene and took over the initiative. In the wake of this 'Atlantization' a new, more disentangled conception of the economy blossomed" (Baeck 1991:3-4; italics mine).*

Of course, Baeck characterizes conventional classical and neo-classical strains of economic thought arising from Adam Smith as the "Atlantization [that led to] a new, more disentangled conception of economy." The disentangled aspect of the Atlantic tradition clearly refers to the effort over the past nearly three centuries to divorce economics from ethical, moral, and political considerations, a separation that is viewed by many as rendering conventional economic theory as increasingly irrelevant and untenable. This separation was encouraged by the overwhelming influence historically of the Enlightenment movement. Economics thus secularised was also influenced by Newtonian physics. The effort, then, by the theorists of conventional economic theory from Smith down to the present has been to insist that moral and ethical considerations in economic theory are exogenous and irrelevant, and to persist in maintaining the 'scientific' aura of economic theory engendered along the lines of Newtonian thinking.

### **Aristotle of Greece**

The ethical and moral foundations of economic thought in the context of the Mediterranean tradition can be seen in its position on interest (usury) in financial transactions. Aristotle (384-322 BC), the famous Greek philosopher, was diametrically opposed to interest-taking of any kind on financial transactions:

*'Money exists not by nature but by law....The most hated sort (of wealth getting) and with the greatest reason, is usury, which makes a gain out of money itself and not from the natural object of it. For money was intended to be used in exchange but not to increase at interest. And this term interest (tokos), which means the birth of money from money is applied to the breeding of money because the offspring resembles the parent. Wherefore of all modes of getting wealth, this is the most unnatural' (1258b, POLITICS)...*

*'[Disliked are] those who ply sordid trades, pimps and all such people, and*



*those who lend small sums at high rates. For all these take more than they ought, and from the wrong sources. What is common to them is evidently a sordid love of gain...*' (1122a, ETHICS) (Zarlenga 1999:3; italics mine).

Clearly, Aristotle held interest and those who demanded it in a great deal of contempt. For Aristotle, money was basically a medium of exchange and itself not to be held as an object for generating wealth. Thus, interest and those who demanded it were as morally degrading as pimps and prostitutes.

### **Moses of Egypt and the Sinai**

The most prominent school of political economic thought within the Mediterranean tradition is the school arising from the Abrahamic Belief System (ABS). The primary texts of the ABS school of political economy are the Bible and the Qur'an. There are several places, for example, in the Bible—passages from the books of Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Nehemiah, etc.—that reveal an hostility to usury (interest). In the divine laws given to the Prophet Moses, peace be upon him, as recorded in Deuteronomy 23: 19-20 (New International Version), the taking of interest was prohibited among the Hebrews (the Bani Israil of the Qur'an): "Do not charge your brother interest, whether on money or food or anything else that may earn interest....You may [not] charge...interest...[to] a brother Israelite, so that the Lord your God may bless you in everything you put your hand to in the land you are entering to possess."

### **Nehemiah, Governor of Jerusalem**

The story of Nehemiah as recorded in the Bible is a most beautiful and instructive story of a pious Hebrew who lived more than 2300 years ago. He became inspired to rebuild the city of Jerusalem and restore the socio-economic well-being of his people in Palestine. As a consequence, he got permission to take a leave of absence from his position as cupbearer to the Persian King Artaxerxes I (465-424 BC). Upon arrival in Jerusalem, he was appointed governor over his people. Nehemiah was faced with a crisis of significant proportions as revealed in the following verses from Nehemiah 5: 9-12:

So I [Nehemiah] continued, 'What you [nobles and officials] are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. *But let the exacting of usury stop! Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards olive groves and houses, and also the usury you are charging them—the hundredth part of the money, grain, new wine and oil.*' 'We will give it back,' they [the nobles and officials] said. 'And we will not demand anything more from them. We will do as you say.' Then I [Nehemiah] summoned the priests and made the nobles and officials take an oath to do what they had promised (italics mine).

To establish socio-economic justice in the land, Nehemiah prohibited the taking of usury that was contributing to the impoverishment of the people even though it was only one percent interest. Secondly, he prohibited the accumulation and concentration of wealth in the hands of the nobles and officials, which wealth was being accumulated in the form of fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses. Thirdly, Nehemiah made these nobles and officials give back what they had accumulated, that is, redistribute the wealth they had concentrated in their hands. Finally, he made them take a sacred oath to refrain from such capitalistic practices in the future. Consequently, during the time of Nehemiah, socio-economic justice was restored in Jerusalem and the rest of Palestine; free enterprise flourished without resorting to the capitalistic practices of interest-taking and the accumulation and concentration of wealth in the hands of the nobles and officials.

### **Jesus in the Temple of Jerusalem**

About 500 years after the time of Nehemiah, Jesus of Nazareth appeared among the Hebrews. Jesus found the same deplorable conditions of socio-economic exploitation practiced by the privileged classes against the poor that Nehemiah had to deal with in his time. In order to demonstrate his hostility to the abominations that the wealthy were practicing to increase their wealth and impoverish the poor, Jesus performed a major act of civil disobedience as recorded in the Bible, Matthew 21:12-13:

Jesus entered the temple area and drove out all who were buying and selling there. He overturned the tables of the moneychangers and the benches of those selling doves. 'It is written,' he said to them, "My house will be called a house of prayer", but you are making it a 'den of robbers.'"

The foregoing passage shows that the righteous indignation of Jesus was expressed for two reasons. First of all, the sanctity of the Temple as a house for the worship of God was violated in having been converted into a veritable bazaar. Secondly, the very business transactions themselves were dishonest, for the temple had been turned into a "den of robbers." And what types of theft were taking place? No doubt, the very same forms of theft that took place in Nehemiah's day: the charging of interest in all types of monetary and agricultural transactions; lending transactions that involved collateral where the terms of such collateral involved the confiscation of all one's property in the case of default in repayment; and dishonest weight and measures used in the sale of various commodities and merchandise. Once again, the wealth of the people was being concentrated in the hands of a few wealthy merchants and officials; a socio-economic climate existed where a relatively small number of "haves" kept perpetually impoverished the masses of the "have-nots." The overturning of the tables of the avaricious moneychangers and the other dishonest merchants and businessmen by Jesus must be seen as a bold, fearless, God-directed act directed against the evils of the capitalistic practices that had so defiled the Temple of Jerusalem.

## **Muhammad in Medina**

In the early 7<sup>th</sup> century C.E., the Prophet Muhammad was faced with a similar socio-economic crisis as both Nehemiah and Jesus in their respective eras. In Medina, the Prophet had to deal with recalcitrant Jewish tribes—many of whom were descendents of the Biblical Hebrews—who constantly attempted to undermine his authority, even after these tribes gave their oath of allegiance to follow the rule of governance based on the Qur'an that the Prophet Muhammad had established. The Jews of Medina so loved the taking of usury that they paid no attention to the Prophet's decree based on Qur'anic revelation that usury—all forms of interest-taking on financial and commercial transactions—was to be forever abolished. The Jews in Medina were completely merciless, charging huge rates of interest on loans to the people and confiscating their properties in case of default. Indeed, the high rates of interest helped to ensure the probability of default. Thus, a handful of Jews, with the help of exorbitant rates of interest, were concentrating the wealth of Medina into their hands and impoverishing the community.

The people of Medina saw the Prophet's decree against usury as an extension of his mercy and his unrelenting endeavours to help those in need. The prohibition against usury became a pillar of the political economy of Medina and was strictly enforced under the Islamic governance the Prophet Muhammad had established. On the other hand, the Jews became more and more outspoken against the Prophet Muhammad. They saw him as an ever-growing threat to their control and manipulation of the socio-economic welfare of the people. Because of their greed in financial matters, because of a bold conspiracy hatched by the Jews that included secret meetings with those recalcitrant Meccan Quraysh—the blood relatives of the Prophet Muhammad who had not joined him yet in the practice of Islam—to attack the Muslims of Medina, and because of an assassination attempt on the Prophet Muhammad's life by the leader of the conspiracy, a Jewish poet by the name of Qa'ab, the Jews were eventually banished from Medina to an area which is now part of present day Syria.

In the Qur'an—the text from which the Prophet Muhammad developed the Islamic political economy that governed the allocation and distribution of resources in the city-state of Medina—there are several verses that reveal an emphatic prohibition against usury (interest-taking of all kinds). One such verse is taken from Surat-ul-Baqara, verse 275 (Yusuf Ali Translation):

Those who devour usury (interest) will not stand except as stands one whom Satan by his touch has driven to madness. That is because they say: 'Trade is like usury.' But *Allah has permitted trade and forbidden usury*. Those who, after receiving direction from their Lord, desist shall be pardoned for the past; their case is for Allah to judge, but those who repeat the offense of dealing in interest are the Companions of the Fire: they will abide therein" (italics mine).

The foregoing divine scripture has three outstanding features. First of all, those who take usury are said to be touched with the madness of Satan. Secondly, trade and commerce are clearly distinguished from interest-taking; trade can flourish without resorting to the institution of interest, contrary to those who say that interest-taking is a necessary part of commerce and enterprise. Thirdly, those who repeat the offence of dealing with interest-based transactions after being warned not to do so will be among those who will be condemned to the hellfire.

In the foregoing verse as well as other verses of the Qur'an that deal with the subject of usury, it is generally understood that the prohibition against usury is categorical, that is, neither must Muslims participate in interest-based transactions nor must they involve themselves in interest-based transactions with non-Muslims. Thus, the authentic Islamic marketplace is one characterized by commerce and enterprise devoid of the capitalistic evil of interest.

The prohibition of interest is a fundamental ethical and moral pillar in Islam with respect to economic justice. Closely allied with this prohibition is the emphasis that Islam places on distributive justice, encouraging the redistribution of wealth in contradistinction to the accumulation and concentration of wealth. In Surat-ul-Hadid, verse 17, of the Qur'an, the following is recorded: "For those who give in charity, men and women, and loan to Allah, a beautiful loan, it shall be increased manifold to their credit, and they shall have a noble reward."

Two levels of wealth redistribution are spoken of here: (1) regular charity—the *zakat* payment that Muslims are required to pay once a year—is a fundamental institution for redistribution of wealth to the poor and needy, and (2) the beautiful loan to Allah, a beautiful spiritual metaphor for the redistribution of wealth beyond charity, a redistribution to maintain socio-economic justice which is an aspect of doing Allah's work on earth. For example, this additional redistribution often takes the form of giving money or property as endowments—in Arabic, known as the institution of *waqf*—to support educational institutions. The one who willingly redistributes his wealth in Allah's way receives "a noble reward," a reward that comes both in this life and the hereafter.

It is to be noted that very early on under Islamic governance and law, an institution was established to monitor economic and commercial flows and distribution. This institution was known as *Al-Hisba*. *Al-Hisba* had wide ranging responsibilities to maintain distributive justice in Islamic society. For example, the office of *Al-Hisba* had the authority to compel hoarders in the time of agricultural shortages to bring out their stocks to the market and sell them at the fair market price. The office could restrict the flow of resources for the production and distribution of goods that contravened Islamic law. It could prohibit traders from colluding to bid up prices artificially in the marketplace. With these and other responsibilities, the *Al-Hisba* institution was able to maintain a high level of distributive justice in Islamic society and thus significantly

reduce the kind of wealth concentration that characterizes capitalistic society today.

## **5. THE ASCENDANCY OF SECULARISM AND THE ATLANTIC TRADITION**

The Bible and the Qur'an, together forming the two fundamental scriptures of ABS—Christianity, Islam, and Judaism—are opposed to interest-taking and the accumulation and concentration of wealth in the hands of a few, the two fundamental pillars of capitalism. ABS has clearly distinguished free enterprise from capitalism; it is possible according to ABS to have flourishing trade and enterprise in the world without resorting to interest-taking and concentrated wealth accumulation among a few, for interest-taking and concentrated wealth accumulation tend to impoverish the masses of society

In spite of the solid moral and ethical teachings of the Bible that denounced usury in all forms and encouraged distributive justice, the Christian nations of western Europe—those close to the Atlantic Ocean—began to pull away from the teachings of the Bible as a result of the Renaissance movement encompassing roughly the period of the 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and generally regarded as the transition period from the medieval age to the modern age. It would be the intellectual ferment of the Renaissance that would give rise later on to the Age of Enlightenment, secular humanism, and social Darwinism, all intellectual movements hostile to the teachings of religion in general and the Bible in particular.

Now, during the Renaissance there arose the concept of economic individualism. Economic individualism, an intellectual concept opposed to the socio-economic teachings of the Bible, basically says that individual entrepreneurs and corporately organized individuals have the right to accumulate as much capital as they see fit and to charge usury—or interest—in financial and commercial transactions. Martin Luther (1483-1546), a 16<sup>th</sup> century German theologian and founder of the Lutheran movement in Christianity, and other intellectuals had advanced arguments that the Biblical teachings were opposed to the capital formation and concentration in the hands of a few and that these same teachings opposed usury in all forms. In short, Martin Luther and those who agreed with him were diametrically opposed to the two fundamental pillars of capitalism—capital concentration in the hands of a few and interest-taking. Paul S. Chung, a lecturer in theology and Asian spirituality, has clearly delineated Martin Luther's hostility to self-aggrandizing capitalism:

What is at the heart of [Martin Luther] is... a just social economic order and system....*Luther...denounce[s] the issue of usury and the economic practices of early capitalism.* From Brief Sermon on Usury (1519) through Trade and Usury (1524) to Admonition to the clergy to preach against Usury (1540) Luther opposes the expanding money system and credit economy.

Anyone who manipulates prices in his own interest 'springs from sheer wantonness and greed,' contrary to God's word, reason and every sense of justice. 'All such fellows are manifest thieves, robbers, and usurers'...

Luther's struggle for economic justice may give an impetus for church and initiative groups to stand on behalf of resistance against violence and injustice and carrying out a new constructive way for the rights of the poor. What Luther criticizes concerning the economic development of his time is based on his radical understanding of God, Christ and the gospel from the perspective of the poor. The gospel is preached to the poor. *Luther's theology in face of early capitalism can remain a valid lesson for Asian Christians who struggle with the inequality of world trade in recent global capitalism. We may see that justice for the oppressed is an integral part of Luther's teaching of justification* (Chung 2003:4-6; italics mine).

Although Luther and others fought a valiant intellectual battle against the proponents of economic individualism, these proponents ultimately prevailed. Ironically, it would be the rise of another Christian school of thought—the teachings of John Calvin (1509-1564), a 16<sup>th</sup> century French theologian, and founder of the Puritan movement—that would undermine the work of the anti-capitalist Christians.

Basically, Calvin insisted that men should be allowed to behave in business as they wished and that all usury was not extortion so long as it was reasonable. Thus, Calvin made a distinction between excessive interest, which he called usury, and moderate interest, which he simply called interest. This distinction persists today in conventional thinking of the Atlantic tradition, the classical-neoclassical tradition in economics. It was Max Weber (1864-1920), the great socio-economist of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, who articulated that it was Calvinism and the English Puritan movement that developed the intellectual arguments favourable to the rise of capitalism.

Thus the rule of the Bible and its economic laws were pushed into the background. The anti-religious sentiment beginning during the Renaissance and continuing into the modern age was ultimately solidified politically and economically by the concept of separation between church and state. That is why today the Christians have their Bibles but they have accepted as normal the anti-Biblical economic paradigm of capitalism. Important exceptions to this rule are the liberation theologians discussed earlier and those anti-globalisation activists and organizations who use Biblical economic themes to protest against the economic injustice practiced and perpetrated on a global scale by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the World Trade Organization, just to name the more prominent ones.

On the other hand, though the Muslims in their lands have been chafed for a time under the yoke of western European colonialism and imperialism, cruel and demeaning forms of capitalism, and are today governed by Western educated elite who wish to perpetuate the hegemony of capitalism in the lands they rule, *the masse of Muslims never accepted the socio-economic injustice of capitalism*. More and more, particularly with the advent of the Islamic bank that prohibits interest-taking in all its financial transactions, the Muslims are showing that they prefer the rule of the Qur'an and the socio-economic justice that it demands rather than the distributive injustice of capitalism.

### **Communitarianism and ABS**

In the foregoing glimpses into the lives of Moses, Nehemiah, Jesus, and Muhammad, it has been shown that these illustrious leaders put the welfare of the communities over which they had responsibility above the selfish individualism of those greedy, avaricious few. These leaders saw interest-taking, wealth concentration in a few hands, and unreasonable demands for collateral as inimical to healthy socio-economic development. These leaders were far more interested in developing communities that were tightly knit, where all were considered brothers and sisters to one another, and where there was a propensity to work together for the common good. Thus, ABS encourages the development of societies that are organic, that encourage communitarianism. The communitarian idea is defined as follows:

The community is more than the sum of the individuals in it; it is organic, not atomistic. The community as a whole has special and urgent needs that go beyond the needs of its individual members. The values of survival, justice, self-respect, and so forth, depend on the recognition of those needs.

Individual fulfilment, therefore, depends on a place in a community, an identity with a whole, participation in an organic social process. If the community—the factory, the neighbourhood, or the country—is well designed, its members will have a strong sense of identity with it. They will be able to make maximum use of their capacities. If the community or its components are poorly designed, people will be correspondingly alienated and frustrated" (Lodge 1987:17-18).

In a communitarian society, "relationships between individuals are governed not so much by *contract* as by *consensus*, which may be ...arrived at through democratic and participative means" (Lodge 1987:17). Community need comes before individual need; the state is an active partner in making sure that the needs of the national society—the community—are implemented. Finally, the concept of holism is an integral part of the communitarian ideology. Under communitarianism, "the idea of scientific specialization is replaced ...by a consciousness of the interrelatedness of all things....To understand any particular aspect of a community, for example, its

economic performance, it is necessary to view the community as a system, perceiving the critical roles and relationships of institutions, such as government, business, labour union, and school. For the holist there is no separation between what economists refer to as 'macro' and 'micro'" (Lodge 1987:21-22).

As has been shown, ABS is fundamentally communitarian. *The significance of this fact is that communitarism, based on national culture that often has at its centre a unifying religious ideology, is central to national competitiveness in the international marketplace.* This is the important finding advanced by George C. Lodge and Ezra F. Vogel in a study commissioned by the Harvard Business School and published as Ideology and National Competitiveness: An Analysis of Nine Countries. For Lodge and Vogel, the phenomenal economic rise of such Asian nations as Japan, South Korea, Taiwan have been due in no small measure to the communitarian nature of their cultures which arises out of their religious ideologies. I will take a glimpse at Japan eventually to highlight the influence of its national religion on its economic success.

### **National Competitiveness and Religion**

The theory of comparative advantage is still taught in college and university classes on international trade theory as the undisputed truth. Consequently, it is taught that a nation must seek its comparative advantage if it wants to achieve a higher level of economic development. The theory of comparative advantage assumes a two-nation, two commodity situation. Dominick Salvatore, author of International Economics, a standard collegiate textbook on international economics, says the following about the theory of comparative advantage:

The law of comparative advantage...postulates that even if one nation is less efficient than the other nation in the production of [two commodities], there is still a basis for mutually beneficial trade (as long as the absolute disadvantage that the first nation has with respect to the second is not in the same proportion in both commodities). The less efficient nation should specialize in the production and export of the commodity in which its absolute disadvantage is less (this is the commodity of its comparative advantage). Likewise, the more efficient nation, the nation that has absolute advantage in both commodities, would, nevertheless, specialize in the commodity in which its absolute advantage is greater. This would become the commodity of comparative advantage for the more efficient nation. The two nations would thus enter into an agreement to import each other's commodity of comparative advantage and severely curtail, if not completely discontinue, each other commodity of comparative disadvantage because of the reallocation of resources required to accommodate the production of the commodities of comparative advantage in the two countries. According to the law of comparative advantage, both nations can gain [from trade with



each other]" (Salvatore 1998:31, 46).

The theory of comparative advantage, which has become a pillar of conventional international economic thought, was developed by David Ricardo, a 19<sup>th</sup> century economist. Ricardo based his theory of comparative advantage on several other simplifying assumptions in addition to the two nations, two commodities concept. They include free trade, perfect mobility of labor within each nation but immobility between the nations, constant costs of production, no transportation costs, no technical change, and the labor theory of value. Salvatore states: "the law of comparative advantage is one of the most important laws of economics...and [remains one of the] unchallenged laws of economics" (Salvatore 1998:25, 30).

It is difficult to understand how Salvatore can make such a completely uninformed statement, for volumes have been written challenging the validity of the theory of comparative advantage. All of Ricardo's assumptions have been shown to be unrealistic and untenable. The theory has been brilliantly challenged by some of the greatest minds in economics including Samir Amin, Joseph Schumpeter, and Gunnar Myrdal. The problem with comparative advantage and its refinement, the Heckscher-Ohlin Model, is not any lack of theoretical efficacy or rigor, but increasingly, its failure as an economic model in the real world. Consequently, there has been a move away from the theory of comparative advantage. Economists are advancing a new theory that approaches reality more closely. *This is the theory of competitive advantage.* Renowned international political economist, Robert Gilpin (2000) offers the following insight:

*The theory of comparative advantage...greatly oversimplifies the real world. The problem with this theory is that actual trading patterns differ considerably from those it predicts....[An] important intellectual development that has undermined the conventional theory of international trade has been the shift from 'comparative' to what can be called 'competitive advantage.'* Trade is frequently due to arbitrary specialization, historical accident, and technological developments. This new thinking recognizes that technological change has grown in importance in determining trade patterns. And it is also important to realize that the technology underlying competitive advantage and determining trade patterns is frequently deliberately created through corporate and government policies.

An important study that demonstrates the shift from comparative to competitive advantage was done by Michael Porter of Harvard University's Business School. His central finding was that *the characteristics of national economy* affect the environment of domestic firms in ways that either facilitate or obstruct the development of competitive advantage in certain industries. According to Porter, *several aspects of a national economy are of particular significance: the national cultural and its effect on the purpose of*

*economic activities, the status of capital and labour, existence of sufficient demand, the health of supporting industries, and the industrial structure of the economy. Porter has demonstrated that these factors determine domestic competitive conditions that, in turn, influence the international competitiveness of particular sectors of the economy” (Gilpin 2000:94-96; italics mine).*

The main points of the foregoing are as follows. First of all, the increasingly irrelevant concept of comparative advantage is being replaced by the more relevant concept of competitive advantage in international trade theory. Secondly, international competitiveness is determined by the national economy. Thirdly, the national economy has several important defining aspects, one of which is the national culture. Fourthly, as will be shown, *a vibrant national culture that facilitates national competitiveness often has a strong communitarian core arising from religious values.*

### **Japan, ational Competitiveness, and eo-Confucianism**

The rise of Japan as an economic powerhouse after its humiliating defeat at the hands of the Allied Powers in World War II is nothing short of remarkable. Japan, an island nation nearly the size of California, has very few natural resources. Yet, Japan has risen to become the second most powerful nation economically, second only after the United States. The Japanese miracle is based on a spirit of national competitiveness emerging from national ideology forged to a great extent by the religion of Confucianism:

In 1600, after decades of war between clans, one clan leader, Ieyasu Tokugawa, emerged victorious....[He] realized early that the land could not be governed from a horse....[He] respected and believed in the way of the sages. He wisely decided that in order to govern the land and follow the path proper to man, he must pursue the path of learning. Therefore, from the beginning he encouraged learning.

“Ideology was at the heart of this study. Tokugawa [and] leaders [who succeeded him] believed that loyalty and service, a sense of responsibility, and a respect for discipline, training, and craftsmanship were necessary to provide a stable basis for political order. Many of these elements could be found in previous Japanese teachings, but Tokugawa made them more systematic and arranged for their thorough dissemination. *Ieyasu and his successors drew most heavily on a form of neo-Confucianism previously borrowed from China’s great scholar, Chu Hsi, whose philosophy provided an excellent basis for a central state. The most fundamental virtue was loyalty: of friend to friend, of wife to husband, of child to parent, of brother to brother, but, above all, of subject to lord.* The ideology had as its core belief the importance of maintaining a social order that would benefit society as a

whole...The system of political rule and its underlying ideology provided impressive stability for 268 years" (Vogel 1987:142-143; italics mine).

Thus, the Japanese, beginning with the vision and leadership of Ieyasu Tokugawa, deliberately developed an organic, communitarian national ideology around the religious teachings of neo-Confucianism. Today, the neo-Confucian-centred communitarianism of the Japanese features a society where "all groups and individuals in the society acknowledge—even take for granted—the desirability of working together for a national purpose" (Vogel, 1987, p. 155). Ever since their defeat in World War II, the Japanese have been more concerned about the development of their nation as the first priority:

Since World War II, the pre-eminent concern has been reviving the country, bringing the fruits of a high standard of living to all citizens and giving the Japanese a place of honour in the world. *The Japanese work well together because they were trained as children to enjoy the benefits of cooperation,...because there are rewards for those who cooperate and benefits are withheld from those who do not, and because they believe that the fate of everyone living on the Japanese islands is closely bound together....Like people elsewhere, they have personal interests that they pursue, but social norms give greater rewards for cooperation* (Vogel 1987:155-156; italics mine).

In the arena of industry and commerce, the communitarian attitude arising from the neo-Confucian religious belief system is realized through the practice of consensus. This engenders a completely different attitude in the workplace, an attitude different from the predatory, oppressive practices of company managers found in the industrial and commercial practices in nations having a societal ideology based on individualism:

[In Japan,] employees at all levels in the bureaucracy and in a company are encouraged to find ways to assist their organization performing its job better and to inform others of these ideas. Employees are expected to work hard and to make some sacrifices when it is in the company's interest. In turn, management will look after the interests of employees, help them grow and develop, and give them a substantial share of the benefits of the company's success....In a very important sense, the purpose of the company is to serve the interests of its employees rather than those of its stockholders (Vogel 1987: 157).

The organic, holistic aspects of Japanese society are also important in understanding its communitarian ideology. There is a high level of interactive cooperation between private and public sectors:

*Labour and management, government and business leaders, and leaders of competing companies in the same sector work together for common purposes much more than in most Western countries. Great efforts are made to cultivate strong informal ties and to create a climate of human warmth and understanding that will make it easy to find new flexible ways to solve problems. In the Japanese view, many Westerners are excessively rigid, conservative, unimaginative, legalistic, and egotistic when they deal with common problems” (Vogel 1987:162).*

## **6. CHRISTIANITY, ISLAM, AND ETHIOPIA**

Christianity came to Ethiopia nearly 2000 years ago, absorbing ancient Hebraic elements and practices present in the country since 1000 B.C., and thus creating the very unique Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Islam came to Ethiopia nearly 1,400 years ago. Clearly, these great spans of time should indicate that Christianity and Islam have been in Ethiopia long enough to become fully indigenous.

Over this span of time, however indigenous they may have become to the land, there yet remained a cleavage between the two, manifesting at best a tangential interaction. The Christians dominated the central highlands; the Muslims occupied the far eastern fringes of the highlands and the lowland areas up to the Red Sea and the straits of Bab el Mandeb. During the medieval period, there was intermittent raiding and armed conflict between the two communities as both struggled to achieve some level of political and economic hegemony in the region. Finally in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, this cleavage widened into open hostility, when a great Muslim army under the generalship of one Ahmad ibn Ibrahim—known to the Christians of the highlands as Ahmad Gragh—launched a jihad to end what he saw as the never ending incursions of the highland Christians into Muslim territories. The Christians saw it as a time of Muslim brutality, as they tell a horrific story of forced conversions to Islam as well as wanton destruction of life and property at the hands of the Muslims.

Moving forward to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Muslims tell a horrific story of suffering at the hands of Emperor Yohannes with his issuing of the edict of Boru Meda in Wollo in 1878. In Wollo, an important region in the heart of the traditional Christian homeland, had developed a rather highly organized Islamic infrastructure. In order to break up this infrastructure and establish Christianity as the means by which to achieve national unity, the edict basically said that the Muslims had to convert to Christianity within a specified period of time or leave Wollo altogether. By 1879, Yohannes began to ravage Wollo, killing many Muslim scholars, burning Islamic books, performing mass baptisms, and massacring thousands of men and women who refused to convert.

Thus, both the Christians and the Muslims of Ethiopia have their historic horror

stories to tell. Today, there remains some concern as tensions break out into open hostility from time to time. For example, in March of 2002, it was reported that two churches in or near Wollo were allegedly destroyed by a militant Muslim mob; in the same week, a Muslim who had recently converted from Christianity was attacked and hospitalized (International Christian Concern 2002:2). In January of 2001, a riot reportedly broke out in Harar between Muslims and Christians when several members of a Christian procession allegedly entered a mosque and disrupted the prayer service. Unable to control the riot, the local police called in the army that reportedly shot and killed five people (U.S. Department of State 2001:3).

No doubt, there are other instances of hostility, reported and unreported. It may be that demagogues of narrow mindedness and intolerance are the shadowy figures on both sides engendering confrontation and conflict. But this situation does not have to be. Indeed Christians and Muslims in Ethiopia are not always at each other's throats; in fact, Ethiopia's socio-cultural history points to a propensity toward tolerance between these two branches of the Abrahamic Belief System. This fact in itself points to a mandate to minimize Christian-Muslim tensions by working toward the communitarian aspects of ABS. By so doing, the basis of a new Ethiopian national ideology would be established that would form the foundation for an organic approach to national competitiveness. If the Japanese experience offers relevant and valid guidance, a sustained drive forward for Ethiopia would begin, bringing the country into sustainable growth and socio-economic development. Unfortunately, Ethiopia has yet to find its Ieyasu Tokugawa!

## **7. TOWARD A NEW NATIONAL IDEOLOGY FOR ETHIOPIA**

Not long after the Tigrean Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) came to power in the form of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), the new government sent an entourage of officials to the United States. Ostensibly, their mission was to hold meetings in major population areas of the Ethiopian expatriate community such as Washington, D.C., New York, Los Angeles, etc., to present themselves and their plans for a new Ethiopia. For the Washington, D.C., area, the meeting was held in an auditorium on the campus of the University of Maryland located in College Park, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, D.C.

When I arrived, the auditorium was packed to capacity. Two microphones stood at either side of the auditorium, apparently to take questions and comments after the members of the EPRDF finished giving their statements. When the time came for questions and comments, I got in one of the lines formed behind one of the microphones. The Amharas spoke in Amharic. A lot of heated exchanges took place. The Oromos—particularly those who had some kind of affiliation with the Oromo Liberation Front—refused to speak in Amharic. They spoke in English. Many of them were angry and in their anger they spoke about the betrayal they felt because

they had not been included in the new government although they had made some contributions in the field to help topple the Mengistu regime. And so it went.

When I finally got my chance to speak, a kind of hush fell over the auditorium. When I opened my mouth, not only did I speak in English but I also spoke with an American accent, the first one to do so that day. I first apologized to the panel of officials for not being able to speak in one of the major indigenous languages of Ethiopia even though I claim paternal descent from the Warra Sheik and Warra Himano of Yeju and Wollo respectively. I went on to say that in my two trips to Ethiopia in 1980 and 1982, I had been positively impressed by Ethiopia in spite of its grinding poverty. I told the panel that one thing that left an indelible impression on my mind was the energy I saw the people put into their work, particularly the street vendors hustling to make a *bir*, an Ethiopian dollar. No matter what he or she called himself—Adere, Amhara, Gurage, Oromo—I saw lots of hard working people working for very little against tremendous odds. Also, I told the panel, I often saw Christians and Muslims working together and socializing together, getting along just fine. I concluded from these observations that the peoples of Ethiopia had the potential amongst themselves to become one of the great nations, not only in Africa but also in the world. But the peoples of Ethiopia had one historical problem going from the 17 years of the tyrannical rule of the Mengistu regime backwards as far as anyone would care to remember. That historical problem was bad leadership. No regime had ever genuinely had the interests of the people first and foremost in their hearts. It was historically bad leadership that had been the major impediment to the peoples of Ethiopia in achieving their greatness. If the peoples of Ethiopia could somehow push aside those power mongers who are after their personal aggrandizement and personal enrichment, then the peoples of Ethiopia might be able to accomplish something great. I thanked the panel for listening to me and I turned and walked away from the microphone.

To my complete surprise, I got a thunderous applause. Apparently, I had touched a deep level of frustration in a lot of those present. One gentleman even pulled me aside and told me that what I said before the panel was the most meaningful thing that had been said that day. For some time after this gathering at the University of Maryland, I would get stopped on the street or I would meet someone in a restaurant who remembered me and what I said and congratulate me for it. Well, I meant every word I said that day. And I still do. The only difference between then and now is that I think I have finally found a way that the people at the grassroots level can begin to move forward. We may not have an Ethiopian Iyasu Takugawa. But what I am sure that we do have among ourselves—Christians and Muslims—are many with something of the spirit and something of the vision of Iyasu Takugawa wherein we can come together and work together to do what has to be done. I am, therefore, proposing the establishment of the Ethiopian Institute for the Development of Abrahamic Belief System Ideology (EIDABSI).

## **8. THE ETHIOPIAN INSTITUTE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF ABRAHAMIC BELIEF SYSTEM IDEOLOGY (EIDABSI)**

*National Ideology.* The primary goal of EIDABSI would be to develop a national ideology that would bring the peoples of Ethiopia together in a communitarian fashion to be better prepared to work toward the growth and socio-economic development of Ethiopia. EIDABSI should bring *together* the best Biblical and Qur'anic scholars—credentialed and non-credentialed—to work on this important effort. Additionally, experts in all areas of socio-economic development sensitive to ABS should be assembled as well.

*Educational Development.* One of the primary goals of EIDABSI would be to determine the best way to incorporate the ABS concept in the educational curriculum. Every country that has achieved anything worthwhile has prepared the young minds of their country in such a way as to carry the nation forward according to its chosen ideological framework.

*Financial Intermediation Development.* EIDABSI should propose the establishment of microfinance institutions that would advance the ABS philosophy of interest-free financial intermediation. Worldwide, microfinance institutions have produced microenterprise projects that have had a significant impact on the socio-economic development of the rural and urban poor. A growing body of evidence shows that interest free microfinance withstands the ravages of inflation better than those microfinance institutions which operate on the basis interest.

*Policy Development.* EIDABSI should be about the business of making concrete policy proposals to the government. Of course, these would be proposals to improve growth and socio-economic development in the country by making the best and proper use of the instrumental value of moral and ethical concepts inherent in ABS.

*Constitutional and State Policy Reform.* EIDABSI would take a close look at the Ethiopian constitution and current policies of the national government to determine those aspects that are impediments to establishing a strong, viable national ideology based on ABS. EIDABSI would then make proposals for constitutional and/or policy changes accordingly.

Of course, EIDABSI would involve itself in other areas of research and recommendation as it deemed appropriate. Such additional activities would be determined by circumstances existing in Ethiopian society.

## **9. CONCLUDING REMARKS**

I have attempted to shed light on the dynamic nature of the two Abrahamic texts—the Bible and the Qur'an—with respect to social change directed for the establishment of social justice. I looked at liberation theologians and their use of Biblical teachings to help bring about social change in Latin America and other parts of the world, and I discussed Muslim activists in Iran and their use of Qur'anic teachings to bring about revolutionary change in their country. Furthermore, I have attempted to show that there is a common thread within these texts that offer up teachings encouraging socio-economic justice in particular.

An all important historical perspective was presented, the main purpose being to show that the very similar teachings in the Bible and the Qur'an with respect to socio-economic justice and organization actually belonged to a school of economic thought preceding that of Adam Smith. This is the Mediterranean tradition of economic thought, a tradition of economic thought primarily characterized by moral and ethical considerations as being fundamental to the proper functioning of political economy. The Mediterranean tradition was contrasted with the Atlantic tradition, the tradition of Adam Smith, that ultimately became known as the classical-neoclassical paradigm in economics, a paradigm where moral and ethical considerations are no longer held as fundamentally relevant due to the secularising influences of the Enlightenment movement.

By using the case of Japan, I shed some light on the influence of religion and its instrumental value in leading toward the development of a national ideology conducive to competitiveness in the arena of national growth and socio-economic development. The religion, neo-Confucianism, that the Japanese developed, beginning with the intellectual efforts of the 17<sup>th</sup> century leader Ieyasu Tokugawa, had a communitarian element that was fundamental to the formation and the development of Japan's national ideology. Finally, I proposed that the teachings of the Bible and the Qur'an engendered communitarian values that could lead to the formation of a national ideology conducive to competitiveness in the arena of national growth and socio-economic development among the Christians and Muslims of Ethiopia. To this end, I proposed the establishment of EIDABSI, the Ethiopian Institute for the Development of Abrahamic Belief System Ideology.



## **References**

- Algar, H. (1980). *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*. Berkely CA: Mizan Press.
- Baeck, L. (1991) 'The Economic Thought of Classical Islam,' n W. Barber (ed.) *Perspectives on the History of Economic Thought: Themes in Pre-Classical, Classical and Marxian Economics*. (pp. 3-19). Brookfield: VT: Edward Elgar Publishing Company.
- Coffey, M. (1999), Liberation theology [On-line]. Available: <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/relig/enc/stories/s37423.htm>
- Chung, P. (2003). The Future of Martin Luther in Asian Context [On-line], Available: <http://www.plts.edu/articles/various/ChungLuther.doc>
- Fischer, M. (1983) 'Imam Khomeini: Four Levels of Understanding', in J. L. Esposito (ed.) *Voices of Resurgent islam*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Gilpin, R. (2000). *The challenge of Global Capitalism: The World Economy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- International Christian Concern (2002), Ethiopia: Christian Persecution in Ethiopia [On-line]. Available: <http://persecution.org/humanrights/ethiopia.html>
- Johnson, M. S. (1997), Liberation Theology and Economics: Like Oil and Water? [Online]. Available: <http://ntserver.shc.edu/www/Scholar/johnson/johnson.html>
- Lodge, G. (1987) 'Introduction: Ideology and Country Analysis,' in G. C. Lodge and E. F. Vogel (eds.) *Ideology and national competitiveness: An analysis of nine countries*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Randall, V. and Theobald, R. (1998). *Political change and Underdevelopment: A Critical Introduction to Third World Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Salvatore, D. (1998). *International Economics*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- U.S. Department of State. (2001), Ethiopia: International Religious Freedom Report [On-line]. Available: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2001/5643.htm>
- Vogel, E. (1987) 'Japan: Adaptive Communitarianism,' in G. C. Lodge and E. F. Vogel (eds.) *Ideology and national competitiveness: An analysis of Nine Countries*. (pp. 141-171). Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Wallerstein, I. (1991). *Geopolitics and Geoculture: Essays on the Changing World System*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Wallerstein, I. (1997), Islam, the West, and the World [On-line]. Available: <http://fbc.binghamton.edu/iwislam.htm>
- Wallerstein, I. (1999). Globalisation or the Age of Transition? A Long-term View of the Trajectory of the World System [On-line]. Available: <http://fbc.binghamtondon.edu/iwtrajws.htm>
- Zarlenga, S. (1999). A Brief History of Interest [On-line]. Available: <http://www.monetary.org/interest.htm>