

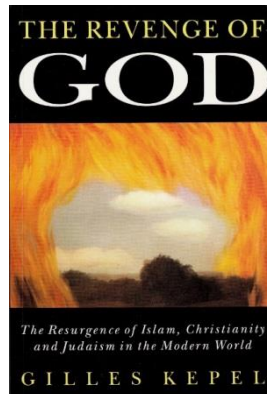
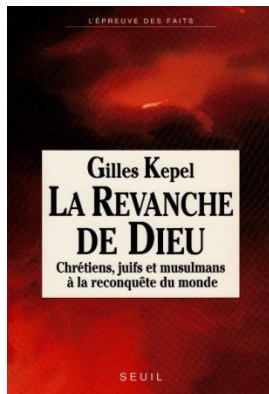
Reinhard Kirste: Der Einfluss religiöser Fundamentalismen auf die moderne Welt

Gilles Kepel: The Revenge of God.

The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World.

Translation: Alan Braley. University: Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press 1994, 215 pp

- *French original:*
La revanche de Dieu. Chrétiens, juifs et musulmans à la reconquête du monde.
Paris: Seuil 1991
- *German translation:*
Die Rache Gottes. Radikale Moslems, Christen und Juden auf dem Vormarsch.
München: Piper 1991 als Taschenbuch 1994, 2. Aufl. 2001, 315 S.



Gilles Kepel, director of research at the National Scientific Research Centre (CRNS) and researcher of CERI (International Study and Research-Centre) in Paris and often with lectures at universities has observed since long the resurgence of Islam not only in the classical Arabic countries or in the Islamic world but also in France where immigrants from North Africa have changed the sociopolitical situation since the end of the Algerian war in the sixties. To understand the concise consequences laid down in the above mentioned book, it is necessary to know that Kepel has published a lot of articles and books before.

What he has there analyzed that he concentrates here in *The Revenge of God*.

Publications 1984 to 1996 (most of the titles only in French)

- 1984: Le Prophète et le Pharaon. Les mouvements islamistes dans l'Égypte contemporaine. Enlarged new edition 1993 with the subtitle: Aux sources des mouvements islamistes (= to the sources of the Islamic movements)
- 1986 English edition: The prophet and Pharaoh. The islamistic movements in Egypt of today.
- 1987: Les banlieues de l'islam. Naissance d'une religion en France (= the boundaries of Islam. Birth of a religion in France)
- 1990: Gilles Kepel/ Richard Yann (eds.): Intellectuels et militants de l'islam contemporain (= intellectuals and militants of the today's Islam)
- 1993: Gilles Kepel (ed.): Les politiques de Dieu (= God's policies).
- 1993: Entre société et communauté (= between: society and community - the muslims in the United Kingdom and in France today); in: François Dubet / Michel Wievorka (eds.): Penser le sujet. Autour d'Alain Touraine. Paris 1995
- 1994: À l'Ouest d'Allah (= Allah goes West /German edition 1996)
- 1995: The Swedish Institute Stockholm (ed.): European and Islamic culture and on the position of Muslims in Europe. Documentation. Therein the lecture of G. Kepel: Les islams d'Europe entre affirmation communautaire et crise de société (= The Islams of Europe between community affirmation and the crisis of society; ibd. pp.95-97)
- 1996: Interview in a German newspaper on Islamism and communitarism. Deutsches Sonntagsblatt, No.19 (May 10, 1996)

Back to the „The Revenge of God“: Very interesting is already the translation of the French subtitle from (exactly translated): *Christians, Jews and Muslims reconquering the world* to the English edition: „*The resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World*“. There will we find some more divergences from the French original, sometimes caused by the impossibility to translate French terms as „laïcité“ (secularism) or intégrisme (fundamentalism).

But now an overview of the contents:

The **introduction** clears up that the three monotheistic religions play a new role in a world of tradition gaps and changing values. Many people are no longer sure what they shall believe and which moral issues are elementary. This social uncertainty leads to the resurgence of movements which promise a clear and helpful frame of life conditions in the modern world. This is the signpost of the new-old fundamentalisms in Judaism (as seen in Israel), in Christianity (as seen in Eastern and Western Europe and North America and in the Islamic countries around the hunger-belt of the so-called Third World but especially in the Middle East and North Africa and also among the immigrant minorities in the West with their African or Asian roots. The clue of understanding is the French word „intégrisme“, which he discusses in the sociological context of fundamentalistic movements. The religious variations find a political base in the extreme right. Under special conditions of the post-colonial era they grow up to an ideological danger in the contexts of „Mediterranean Islam, Catholicism in Europe, North American Protestantism, and Judaism, both in Israel and among the Jews in the diaspora“ (p.12).

1. The first chapter „*The sword and the Koran*“ follows the historical lines and the changing ethical values since the 70ies: Marxism, resurgence of Islamic ideas, Islamic agitation. Kepel points out that the political scene of the Middle East between the counterparts of Soviet imperialism and Western capitalism or Sovietic socialism and Western influence (European and American) has created an explosive mixture of economic difficulties and religious power. The examples go from Morocco to the Middle East, especially to the Muslim Brothers in Egypt with its crisis evoked by the assassination of Anwar al-Sadat in 1981. Islamization means therefore a revolutionary Islam in the slums of the megatowns as well as in the universities. Kepel shows then the „special features“ of the Chomeini-revolution (pp.27ss.) and the tensions between Shiite and Sunni Islam and the „Islamic break“ which stands at the end of forms of Muslim assimilation since World War I.

Further signals are set by the Muslim immigration to Europe, the Rushdie affair, the Intifada and the re-Islamization in Palestine and in the Maghreb.

2. In the second chapter: „*Mission field Europe*“

Gilles Kepel describes nearly parallel developments in Europe though not awaited by the markstone of Vaticanum II and its limitations of the Catholic absolutistic claims. The developments are not directly compatible but also with an revolutionary impetus (in the theology of liberation in Latin America) and a socialistic messianism. But the disillusion encountering world-wide secularism lead to the „Catholic break“, the way back to traditionalism and forms of re-Christianization, as if the Cross could defend the true humanity built upon Christian values. Classical example are the political way of Italy as type of a Western democracy and Eastern Europe after the break-down of Sovietic socialism. A concise summary of the thirty years after Vaticanum II we find on page 98:

„In the mid-1970s the Church began a process of reaffirming Catholic identity, trying to put an end to the uncertainties of the post-conciliar period. But this new theological reflection coincides with a decade of fundamental change in the world, an economic and social crisis which had repercussions in the intellectual and moral sphere“ (p.98).

3. In the third chapter „*Saving America*“

Kepel analyzes the Protestant wing of this re-Christianisation, as it has been established in North America. This means a response of the mythologisation of technology and the secularism and individualization of the American society. Using the mass-medias, especially TV tele-mission became a popular possibility of rooting a new religious conservatism into the American society, so that there was seen a gap between religious and political fundamentalist on the one side and social Evangelicals on the other. The example Oral Roberts shows better than Billy Graham:

„Each year the crusade set itself the aim of 'winning a million souls for Christ', a formula that conjoins the traditional concern of the pastor with the quantitative obsession of American-style marketing; while he was saving souls by the million, Mc Donalds Fast Foods boastewd of selling hamburgers by the million“ (p.113).

In this long chapter Gilles Kepel shows how this „mission crusade“: „*Saving America*“ has many ideas and practice common to the re-catholization in Europe and the re-Islamization in the Middle East.

Kepel is not afraid to pick up also the partial taboo-theme of Jewish fundamentalism which became a political power as well in Israel as in the USA. So in the **fourth chapter** he examines the theological and ideological roots and energies of the term: „*The redemption of Israel*“. Political-religious movements on the extreme right have underwent the Jewish society of Israel and claimed the legacy of „the Holy Land“ since the first immigration about 1000 B.C. against all other Palestinian inhabitants. The detailed knowledge and careful research of the author lead the reader often to facts, to which, and persons, to whom have been paid not enough attention (e.g. Mayer Schiller and Herman Branover, pp.143s., 145ss.). Kepel succeeds in showing the roots of these fundamentalisms in the 19th century brought in to Israel often by immigrants of Eastern Europe and Russia. But the re-Judaization was also an indirect effect of the left-wing political movements in Europe, especially in France of the 68ies: Many of the Jewish-rooted leaders returned after this social and economic break-up back to an Jewish identity which was taken from the Ashkenasim or Sephardim history. This coincides with the effects of the wars in 1967 and 1973 which enabled Israel to live nearly in the borderlines of the Biblical Israel: that means a religiously legitimated geography. The way from fanaticism to terrorism broke the fragile equilibrium in which the State of Israel tried to live since 1948. Zionism and Jewish Orthodoxy delivered different interpretations of the Holocaust and the State of Israel. This began to culminate in the fact that the Orthodox sect grew up to a political power, accusing Zionism as having caused the Holocaust, because Zionists have moved away from the true Jewish roots. Also Hasidism plays a doubtful role, combined with new-old forms of political Messianism (see p. 189f).

4. Finally in the conclusion

as pointed out already in the introduction Kepel is enabled to order the abundance of facts: The fundamentalistic streams of all three religion intend to reconquer the world and to establish a new world order based on principles of God's revelation as it was given to Moses, to Jesus and to Mohammed. The religio-political extremism, who tries to gain power in the political administrations and organisations, is bound in a world-wide-network and indicates a serious danger to pluralism of opinions, human rights and Western democracy. Though we have to differentiate the various tendencies in the three monotheistic religions they have in their fundamentalistic forms a common aim, to install their ideal of religious authority in the political scene and to change ethical values to the interpretations they take as verbal inspiration from the Bible and the Koran as God's direct revelation.

Kepel's newest book *À l'Ouest d'Allah* (Paris: Seuil, is not yet published in English, but there exists already a German version 1996: *Allah im Westen*) continues and concentrates the mentioned thesis that I would like to translate from the French somewhat laxly: *Allah goes West*. That means that democracy is strongly challenged by the re-Islamization, which shows Kepel by analyzing the religio-political and geo-religious situation in England, USA and France. I miss that Germany is not mentioned.

Questions

Though „*The revenge of God*“ is written in a very lucid and clear manner, though the facts and development lines often are stupifying there rest some questions:

- Why is Kepel not interested in the various other religious groups, with other words: Why does he not examine liberal tendencies in the three religions (for instance the not so well-known Koran-interpretations, as Abu Zaid or Mohamed Arkoun does?)
- Why does he concentrate the multicultural and multireligious situation in Great Britain on the Rushdie affair omitting the models of interfaith encounters even between conservative and „fundamentalistic“ believers of the monotheistic religions? And what is with Hinduistic fundamentalism, not only in India? In his newest book he removes this lack by discussing the geo-religious situation in England.
- Why do we not read anything of the movements on religion and peace, in which many representatives of the religions work closely together, e.g. the *World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP)* and the *Parliament of World Religions* (with its impressive conference at Chicago 1993, remembering the 100st anniversary of the first Parliament)?
- Why do we hear nothing on the religious situation in Germany, the Netherlands and in Switzerland, because here we see also a *Protestant* tradition in encountering the other world religions?
- Why does Kepel dim down the Bosnian conflict and the complicated situation on the Balkan, where the three monotheistic religions are instrumentalized to expand Serbish or Croatian power?

Summary

When I overlook „*The Revenge of God*“ I see a clear structure in the four chapters, so clear that there rises a doubt in me, that in spite of all differentiations Kepel is aware of, that he has built up an ingenious construction supported by many facts and ensured by a qualified display that does not only astonish the normal reader, but also reveal that the idea of a secular democratic state is the icon and the criterium to evaluate the so-called fundamentalistic movements in the three monotheistic religions.

It makes somewhat trembling, if Kepel would be right that the idea of monotheism dismisses all forms of absolutism not only in reason but also in political practice. The problem seems to me that by this ideological view of religion all other more positive religious issues for democracy and human rights are neglected. Important is the indirect call to the Western countries to revitalize their energies of reason, responsibility of human dignity, as it has come out for the first time in the French Revolution.

The fundamentalistic revival in all three religions is an eminent challenge but not a threat - that is the result of Kepel's book; but solutions of the world wide problems depending on religious revivalism are not in sight and therefore the religio-fundamentalistic powers will rest a factor which will not make the together-living easier looking forward to the next ten or twenty years.

As a sociologist Gilles Kepel asks how people can themselves identify, especially people who are uprooted economically, geographically and religiously. The new identifications and solidarity come „from below“, from the grass-roots, but often mingled with frustration and fanaticism: Being Jewish, being Muslim, being a true Christian in a world of broken values and traditions, in a world of growing materialism and among the destruction of families, authorities and hierarchies. Many social groups emigrate from the surrounding society and flee in the so-called communitarism (as Kepel points out). That means the wider society will be forgotten and neglected in favour of the own community, where common values are shared. So we see again „the return of the ghetto“ (p.199): the jobless, the unintegrated people, the „beurs“ (North African Arabs), the immigrants etc.

Though I do not agree with all consequences Kepel strengthens I laid the book pensively aside and repeated his sentence in behalf of our Christian situation:

„ ... in the medium term, it is the logic of conflict which underlies the parallel development of different religious movements setting out to reconquer the world. Such conflict is ultimately a war between 'believers' who make the reaffirmation of their religious identity into the criterion of truths that are both exclusive of others and peculiar to themselves“ (p.203).

Nevertheless I think that Kepel has only seen one side, the other side is, that religious pluralism (also in the context of western secularism) - though not so impressive as the fundamentalisms - is still growing - some sparks of hope against the „clash of civilizations“ (Samuel Huntington).

Bibliography of some important books and essays of Gilles Kepel until 1996 with updates

- 1984 Le Prophète et le Pharaon. Les mouvements islamistes dans l'Égypte contemporaine. Paris: La Découverte 1984. Erweiterte Neuauflage mit dem Untertitel: Aux sources des mouvements islamistes. Paris: Seuil 1993, 2ème édition, 318 pp.
- 1986 Muslim extremism in Egypt: The Prophet and Pharaon. California 1986. Englische Übersetzung von: Le Prophète et le Pharaon
- 1987 Les banlieues de l'islam. Naisance d'une religion en France. Paris: Seuil 1987, 429 pp.
- 1990 Gilles KEPEL / Richard YANN (Hg.): Intellectuels et militants de l'islam contemporain. Seuil
- 1991 Französisches Original: La revanche de Dieu. Chrétiens, juifs et musulmans à la reconquête du monde. Paris: Seuil 1991 (German edition already 1991).
- 1993 Sous la direction de Gilles Kepel: Les poitiques de Dieu. Paris: Seuil 1993, 401 pp.
- 1993 DUBET, François/ WIEVIORKA, Michel (Hg.): Penser le sujet. Autour d'Alain Tonraine. Paris: Fayard 1995. Darin: KEPEL, Gilles: Entre société et communauté: les musulmans au Royaume Uni et en France aujourd'hui, p. 273-288
- 1994 The revenge of God. The resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the modern world. By Gilles Kepel. Translation: Alan Braley. University: Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press 1994, 215 pp.
- 1994 À L'Ouest d'Allah. Paris: Seuil 1994
- 1995 The Swedish Institute. A conference on relations between. European and Islamic cultures and on the position of Muslims in Europe. Documentation 15. - 17.06. 1995.
Darin – Gilles Kepel: Les islams d'Europe entre affirmation communautaire et crise de société. p. 95-97
- 1996 Allah im Westen. Die Demokratie und die islamische Herausforderung. Aus dem Französischen von Inge Leipold. München / Zürich: Piper 1996, 400 S.
- 1996 Interview mit Gilles Kepel: „Die sind in der Falle“. Der französische Islamforscher über den wachsenden Einfluss fundamentalistischer Gemeinden in Europa und in den USA. DS Nr. 19 (10.05.96), S. 13

Selected Updates

- **Islam, Islamismus, arabische Welt, Frankreich im Angesicht des Terrorismus** - [Aktuelle Titel bei Gallimard](#)
- Vgl. auch [Sachbücher zu den Humanwissenschaften und zur Religion](#) (Oktober 2017)
- [Die Salafisten und die Deutungshoheit über den Islam](#)
(Interview, NZZ, 15.05.2016)
- [Interview mit Gilles Kepel](#) (WELT online, 11.01.2016)
anlässlich der Erscheinung seines Buches:
[Terreur sur l'Hexagone. 2005-2015. Genèse du djihad français.](#)
Paris: Gallimard 2015, 352 p.
--- [Rezension in: Chrétiens de la Méditerranée](#) (27.07.2016)
- [Porträt mit Auswahlbibliografie \(France Inter\)](#)
- [Veröffentlichungen von Gilles Kepel \(französisch, englisch deutsch\)](#)
- [Frankreich muss sich neu erfinden](#) (Interview, FAZ online, 12.04.2013)

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